

*Bega
District
Hospital*



**THE
DEVELOPING YEARS**

1910-1956



The hospital in its heyday showing completed extensions.

From its opening the Bega Hospital received considerable community support, dances, sports days, concerts and even a circus provided funds for the Hospital's charitable work.

Mr. C. T. Stiles of "Kanoona" continued his tradition of providing milking cows and Sir Robert Lucas Tooth continued to provide monetary gifts providing £50 in 1912 for the King Georges cot. Local residents also continued to provide gifts of linen, vegetables, fruit, cakes, cordials, wines and literature.

A new fever ward was built in 1912 to replace the structure destroyed by white ants. This building was 58' x 22' (17.4 x 6.6) and comprised two wards each of 15' x 12' (4.5 x 3.60), nurses room 13' x 12' (3.90 x 3.60), bathroom and verandah almost all round the structure. The cost of the new structure was £270.10.0.

Big improvements occurred in 1914 with the installation of a new fuel kitchen store boiler to provide hot water. A rotary pump was also installed to bring water from the two 80 feet deep wells to the kitchen. In addition a pulley clothes line was installed, and the gardens much improved with shrubs and roses.

One big financial supporter of the hospital was the Walter and Elija Hall Fund. The total donations from this trust amounted by 1916 to £280. Another long time supporter, Mr. C. T. Stiles of "Kanoona", who provided milking cows, died in 1916 but his widow decided to continue the tradition.

The original cause for moving to erect a public hospital was a smallpox epidemic in the 1870's. It is therefore interesting to note that there was in 1917 a 40% increase in patients due to an outbreak of diphtheria and scarlet fever.

The municipal gas service was extended to the hospital in 1918 for lighting to replace the existing carbide lighting system. This was on the grounds of economy as carbide which pre-war had cost £14.10.0 per ton was in 1918 £65 per ton.

The estimated cost of this and other improvement works was £234 to which the Government assisted by a grant of £125 - a generous amount having regard to the Government's strained post war financial resources. The gas was installed but cost £148.3.10 so other works were held in abeyance.

The hospital, having reached the requisite number of patients, was gazetted a training school in 1918. This was a considerable advantage to the hospital but especially to the nurses working there, and gave an employment boost to the area.

In October 1920 an X-ray unit and electric lighting plant was installed. Consideration was also given to installing a septic system but this was deferred pending the difficulty of obtaining a permanent and sufficient supply of water. The community was also still faithfully supporting the hospital and Mrs. Stiles was still providing milking cows. The Town Band also gave a number of recitals for patients and these were reportedly enjoyed by the patients and staff.

Progress had been made on a septic system by January 1923 with the solution to the water supply

problem. The solution was to pump spring water to the overhead tank at the hospital to provide flushing water and the installation of the effluent system was then awaiting the Sydney contractors. The new nurses' quarters were still under consideration with plans and specifications being referred to the Health Department for approval.

In 1923 the district experienced a diphtheria epidemic and the hospital came to the fore in patient treatment. The staff cheerfully handled the extra work despite being overtaxed by the sudden influx of patients and the nurses even gave up their accommodation to live in a tent during the outbreak.

A new sterilizing plant was installed in 1924 and a Ford car purchased to replace the horse and buggy. One of the hospital's horses had been called Day and Night because it worked for the hospital during the day and was used by the nurses to visit their boyfriends at night!

One unique way of saving costs was an annual wood day. This was a day when local residents brought along loads of firewood and this greatly assisted the hospital's finances. Similar efforts were subsequently made with eggs. Notwithstanding this assistance, the hospital committee had to increase fees from 30/- to £2 2/-, but patients would be treated for whatever they could afford.

Community support was still very evident in 1924 in linen, fruit, vegetables, flowers, jams, cakes, etc., and Mrs. E. Stiles and Mr. A. C. Wren were still providing milking cows. These cows were allowed to be grazed on the common free of charge by the common's trustees.

The system of financing the bulk of the hospital's running costs was based on voluntary contributions up to this time (1927) with district collectors calling on contributors. The hospital committee believed that there should be a more equitable system of forcing all to accept a fair share in the running costs. However, while two N.S.W Governments had promised to amend the hospital's legislation to this effect, nothing had been done. The district residents still faithfully supported the institution in kind.

The hospital's financial position deteriorated in 1928 because of the trying district conditions and the year ended with a deficit of £233. Voluntary collectors were having a hard time collecting and the hospital committee was finding it difficult to obtain collectors even on a commission basis.

The new nurses' quarters were completed following a liberal response for funds in 1928 at last freeing the isolation ward for its proper function and a suitable children's ward was by then also available. The C.W.A. equipped the children's ward and cot and the R.S.L. provided a surgical bed.

It was in 1928 that the difficulty in obtaining nursing staff first became acute, and as a result the hospital had to rely on a permanent relieving staff. This was at a cost as salaries for temporary staff were higher than permanent staff.

In 1929 the Hospital Board adopted the Community Hospital and Systematic Contribution Scheme. This



Nursing staff of early years.

meant that for 6d. single and 1/- family per week paid quarterly, half yearly or yearly entitled contributors to free hospital treatment. The fees then applicable were £3. 10/- ordinary and £5. 5/- private with extra fees for X-ray and operating theatre. The Systematic Contribution Scheme proved most successful after the first twelve months operation.

In 1930, because of grave doubts as to the Government subsidy, the board reduced staff salaries by 10%. The lighting plant broke down, and faced with expenditure of £120 to rectify, the board decided to connect to the mains of the Electric Supply Co., at a cost of approximately £210.

This had been facilitated by the Bega Municipal Council having extended the electric mains to Newtown. As general funds could not support this cost, an appeal was made to the Hospital Commission and to the public.

The year 1931-32 saw the hospital financially sound in spite of the capital cost of connecting the electricity of £233. The board was happy with the second year of the Systematic Contributions Scheme having by then 1,486 contributors and the scheme had been expanded to enable contributors to receive free treatment at other hospitals. The hospital was also painted inside and out, and the board was attempting to raise £500 for a new X-ray plant.

Major permanent improvements were undertaken in 1934-35 consisting of new buildings and additions costing £5,034 and X-ray £973. The work in detail

comprised new wards, verandah assembly, annexes in isolation block, two new bedrooms, sitting room alterations in domestic quarters, old operating theatre converted to two-bed intermediate ward, new theatre, new store and bathroom, new laundry, boiler room and wardsman quarters, nurses' quarters, two new bedrooms and bathroom plus hot water and steam services to most buildings.

It might be noted that in 1935 Mrs. C. T. Stiles of "Kanoona" was still continuing the tradition of providing milking cows started by her husband so long before (about 1900) also Mr. J. B. D'Arcy was providing cows, having started in about 1925.

A further diphtheria epidemic occurred in 1936 placing a strain on the hospital with a 25% increase in patients. The new X-ray unit which had earlier been installed had saved many patients the long trip to Sydney, 259 being treated in the first full year of operation.

By 1937 the hospital was treating three times the number of patients it did in 1927.

The main front verandahs of the hospital were glassed in during 1937 providing extra permanent accommodation. The advent of a new nurses' ward necessitated further enlargement of the main nurses' home and separate night nurse quarters. The Minister for Health, the Hon. H. P. Fitzsimmons, on visiting the hospital, promised the installation of a new septic system and connecting town water to the hospital. He also recognised the need for additional patient accommodation.



Staff ready to transfer patients to the new hospital.

The year 1937 also saw the formation of the Bega, Cobargo, Central Tilba and Tilba Tilba branches of the Hospital Auxiliaries of New South Wales. This followed a visit to the area by Mrs. Catherine Grant, organiser of the Hospital Auxiliaries of New South Wales.

1938 saw the recommended up-grading of the X-ray equipment following a visit by Dr. Edwards of Macquarie Street, Sydney. The Hospital Commission subsequently agreed to find half the cost of the work of a new full wave X-ray plant at a cost of £1,766.

An iron, being used in the treatment of polio victims, was given by Lord Nuffield in 1940. The board also was impressing on Mr. Primrose, the Minister for Health, the need for new nurses' quarters and increased accommodation for patients. The town water supply was finally connected during 1940, and being softer than the well water previously used, was expected to save money in water softening treatment costs.

1941 saw the acceptance of a tender of £2,035 for the new full wave X-ray plant, and this was to be funded from the £2,500 raised at a hospital carnival. The plans for the new nurses' home had been approved and an early start was hoped for.

1942 saw the X-ray in place at a cost of £1,963 plus £195 for alteration and additions. The nurses' home was still in abeyance but £12,500 had been included in the Hospitals Commission's draft estimates for this work.

The year 1944 saw approval given to tenders being

called for the erection of the new nurses' home on the site of the existing hospital. The board objected strongly to this, seeing the need for a hospital closer to the town (Bega), feeling that if the nurses' home was built on the present site it would determine the hospital's location for the next 50 years. As a result of the board's representations, the Minister for Health directed enquiries to be made, and these resulted in the recommendation of a new site for the erection of the nurses' home and subsequently a new hospital.

The construction of the new nurses' home commenced in 1945 and was completed and occupied in 1946. However, the shortage of staff necessitated their frequent conveyance by taxi to and from the hospital many times each day and at some considerable expense. This was seen as justified "because the staff could not be allowed to live a moment longer than was absolutely necessary under the deplorable conditions at the old home with three nurses using one bedroom and staying on verandahs."

The board also sought advice from the Health Commission in 1945 as to the best and cheapest method to convert some public wards into intermediate wards to assist hospital finances by additional patient fees.

The hospital fund, so successfully operated since 1930, was closed on 30th June, 1946 by Act of Parliament. The act of terminating the scheme was seen as a retrograde step by the Bega hospital board, as the scheme had stabilised its finances.

Moves having been made for the erection of a new

hospital, the only major development to take place was the conversion in 1949 of the old nurses' home to a maternity unit and painting inside and out in 1955.

With a new hospital well under way, suggestions were made for use of the old hospital as a home for those aged persons, not sick enough for hospital, yet having no one at home to care for them. Councillor R. M. Hart, of Imlay Shire, supported this idea. The Mayor of Bega, Ald. D. B. Goldberg, decided to call a public meeting and allow the matter to be discussed by the community. Alderman Roy Howard at the Council meeting at which the idea of a public meeting was discussed remarked "it would be better for the people of the area to decide what it might be used for and influence the Hospital Commission rather than have something thrust upon us".

The meeting was subsequently held and it was decided against using the buildings for a home for the aged. However, on 12th June, 1956, the Honourable W. F. Sheehan, Minister for Health, advised a gathering at Candelo that the old hospital could be used as a home for the aged, and handed over to a local authority to administer, provided one was established.

It is recorded that this advice was greeted with pleasure and both Councillors Clare and Hart of Imlay Shire (old hospital was in Imlay Shire) greeted the news as "a most humane decision". These Councillors had, at the recent meeting of Imlay Shire, criticised the Bega people for what they saw as the

heartless and selfish attitude adopted at the meeting.

History should note that the board of the hospital did not share the community's view as expressed at the public meeting, for the minutes of the board's meeting on 23rd February, 1954 reveal that the board shared the Imlay Shire's view that the hospital should be used as an aged persons' hospital and had advised the Hospitals Commission accordingly.

Following transfer of patients to the new hospital on 2nd July, 1956 the old hospital closed. The board, on 30th October, 1956, recommended to the Health Commission that the buildings be used for:

- (a) Boys Hostel
- (b) Agricultural Farm
- (c) Old Peoples Home

However, because of comments by the Commission, unavailable to the author, the concept of the boys' hostel seems to have been dropped. The board advised the Health Commission in September, 1959, that it favoured the project by the Bega District Council of Junior Farmers leasing the buildings and grounds.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: History might also note that the uses to which the old hospital — a fine structure — even if not functional as a hospital, did not last long and the buildings have remained essentially unused for many many years until in 1987 when community uses were proposed, and grants to restore the structures sought. This interest is currently very active.

Receipts and Expenditure From 1st January, 1927 to 31st December, 1927

RECEIPTS			EXPENDITURE		
	£	s d		£	s d
Contributions and donations ...	573	11 6	Salaries and wages	1889	12 9
Proceeds of entertainments ...	444	15 3	Groceries	384	2 1
Contributions on account of patients	1037	0 7	Bread	80	15 8
Government subsidy	1055	5 2	Meat	167	8 1
Sundries	80	11 8	Vegetables and fruit	48	14 4
X Ray fees	3	9 0	Other provisions	6	19 5
			Wine, etc	7	14 0
			Drugs, dressings & instruments	327	18 1
By Balance 31/12/1926	3193	7 2	Fuel, light and power.....	123	6 7
	346	7 8	Bedding, bedclothing etc	100	15 3
			Furniture, ironmongery, etc...	51	4 5
			Printing, advertising, etc	46	17 7
			Repairs and alterations	27	14 8
			Sundries	372	5 10
			Additions	2	19 6
				3192	8 3
			To Balance 31/12/1927	457	6 7
	£3539	14 10		£3539	14 10

Invested and Endowment Funds as at 31/12/1927

Australian Bank of Commerce (Ltd)—Bega Branch—		
Emily Liliias Haslingden Endowment Fund—Fixed Deposit	£ 25	0 0
Hospital Funds—Fixed Deposit	£500	0 0
Bank of New South Wales—Bega Branch—		
Coronation Cot Fund—Fixed Deposit.....	£ 38	0 0
Trustees late Sir R. Lucas Tooth Bequest—Fixed Deposit	£100	0 0
Government Savings Bank of N.S.W.—Bega Branch—		
General Fund	£ 15	0 9
Nurses' Quarters Fund	£ 95	17 5
Total seven hundred and seventy-three pounds 18/2 stg		£773 18 2
I. A. PERKINS, Hon Treasurer.		

We certify that we have examined the books, vouchers and accounts exhibited to us, and found the same to be correct and in accordance therewith

Bega, 5th January, 1928

PERCY S. J. CROWE, C.L.G.C.
C. K. HEFFERNAN

Statistical Information.

Year	Patients treated indoor	Patients outdoor	Deaths	Days in Residence	Average daily attendance	Total Revenue			Ordinary Expenditure			Expenditure, permanent additions and outdoor relief			Average annual cost per patient, apart from expenditure permanent works and outdoor relief			Average daily cost of treatment per patient		
						£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d
1900	68	—	5	2117	5.8	526	7	2	482	4	10	—	83	3	11	0	4	6		
1901	97	10	4	1904	5.2	760	3	10	541	18	11	69	10	0	104	4	5			
1902	93	9	6	2416	6.3	868	11	3	592	5	1	22	0	0	94	0	2			
1903	96	11	8	2357	5.417	593	3	9	598	10	9	8	16	9	93	5	4			
1904	143	15	9	3151	6.632	1246	3	10	680	6	10	94	7	6	78	16	2			
1905	167	31	13	3526	9.660	919	7	7	780	9	8	59	0	6	80	15	10			
1906	185	37	13	3641	10.550	919	6	11	741	6	0	10	0	0	70	5	3			
1907	187	25	9	4271	11.700	1104	13	11	811	8	7	12	10	0	70	0	5			
1908	191	5	13	4018	10.734	1084	7	2	817	18	1	335	0	0	76	3	0			
1909	187	78	10	4008	11.51	1182	7	7	1080	13	2	1219	17	10	93	19	2			
1910	136	125	7	3253	8.830	1031	15	2	938	10	10	33	14	9	112	12	5			
1911	109	22	17	2524	6.91	827	1	10	853	10	2	310	8	1	123	10	4			
1912	111	22	12	2493	6.17	825	13	2	920	16	1	26	10	6	112	14	1			
1913	110	15	14	2954	7.3	1217	3	1	841	5	5	7	13	0	115	4	10			
1914	114	25	12	2602	7.13	1190	14	11	943	8	2	92	6	7	132	6	3			
1915	171	8	11	3540	9.7	1189	15	0	1049	8	3	52	13	9	108	9	9			
1916	62	23	16	4168	11.42	1209	9	1	1210	14	10	17	18	5	106	9	7			
1917	225	18	11	4674	12.545	915	14	2	1284	16	8	—	—	—	102	8	7			
1918	254	68	18	5827	15.964	1702	2	5	1620	10	1	—	—	—	101	10	0			
1919	181	130	14	589	9.868	2694	12	6	2011	11	9	—	—	—	203	15	9			
1920	220	60	8	547	13.84	2049	7	1	2075	2	3	—	—	—	150	1	3			
1921	275	207	18	5540	15.16	3222	19	9	2197	13	7	582	17	3	144	19	9			
1922	244	270	15	5612	15.6	3080	6	10	2474	17	0	201	4	8	161	2	6			
1923	305	177	8	6658	18.04	2582	16	7	2695	17	8	533	6	5	149	8	9			
1924	254	261	21	5610	15.32	2716	6	8	2579	10	2	92	15	10	167	16	7			
1925	249	174	21	4484	12.31	3037	0	4	2736	10	10	29	13	9	222	5	3			
1926	264	176	25	4552	12.47	2320	12	9	1585	12	2	158	5	6	126	16	11			
1927	294	248	21	6070	16.63	3195	7	2	3071	14	1	30	14	2	184	0	5			