

# TOWONG SOLDIERS MEMORIAL HALL AND DISTRICT HISTORY

The history of European settlement in the Upper Murray region is marked by various developments including township establishment, pastoral and agricultural expansion, as well as gold and tin mining.

The Towong area was frequently referred to as a 'wet paddock' due to persistent waterlogged soil and recurring flooding that often submerged local roads. Initial land use by squatters began in the **early 1850s**, with notable settlers such as E. Alleyne (no date), M. Hervey (1853), Eliza Jones (1862), and James Findlay (1867).

On **26 July 1848** the area was first gazetted encompassing approximately 25,000 acres. Township development advanced gradually as many early settlers preferred Corryong (located 12 kilometres south) due to its fertile, well-drained soils and abundant watercourses. During the alluvial gold discoveries of the **1890s**, Corryong experienced significant growth in contrast to Towong despite its proximity to the New South Wales border.

**Towong Township was officially established in 1861** with the initial land sale occurring in 1867. That year marked substantial growth highlighted by the construction of a school, post office, and hotel. **By 1877** additional amenities such as the Towong Racecourse and grandstand had been constructed.

Following World War I and II, Australian communities widely constructed war memorial buildings, notably memorial halls featuring honour rolls dedicated to local servicemen and women.

Records show that the Towong Soldiers Memorial Hall was **built in 1916** by A. Hawkins, a builder from Corryong. The building included weatherboard cladding and decorative Wunderlich pressed metal lining on both walls and ceiling. Documentation regarding hall usage between 1916 and 1926 is limited; fundraising efforts likely commenced after the war, around 1920.

A report from the Corryong Courier dated **26 August 1920** states:

*On Saturday evening last a public meeting was held at Towong for the purpose of considering the erection of a memorial to the soldiers. After discussion, it was decided to erect a Hall and, in the hall, an Honor Board with the names of all the soldiers who were presented with medals at Towong. Mr P. Daly was appointed secretary and will be pleased to receive donations in aid of the above object.*

The Towong Soldiers Memorial Hall was formally opened on **18 August 1926** and dedicated by Cr George Jephcott in memory of those who served in World War I.

Another excerpt from the Corryong Courier **dated 2 September 1926** describes the opening ceremony:

*On the 18th inst. between 150 and 200 people assembled to witness the opening of the Towong Soldiers' Hall. At about 8 o'clock Cr C. H Waters delivered an address, touching on the war and other matters which led to the erection of the hall. He then introduced Cr Jephcott who spoke for a considerable time in his usual entertaining manner. Mrs W. H. Whitehead, formerly of "Lighthouse," performed the ribbon-cutting ceremony, officially opening the hall. Following this, addresses were made by several officials, after which the hall was cleared for dancing, which continued until late into the night. Mr Crawford provided the piano and music for the occasion.*

The Whitehead family has maintained a long-standing association with the hall, serving continuously on its committees according to available records.

**In 1933**, the hall underwent substantial renovations including a rear extension to accommodate a stage and a supper room. Earlier records prior to 1939 were lost in bush fires, resulting in gaps in historical documentation.

Since its dedication, the hall has fulfilled numerous roles, hosting dances, flower shows, games nights, community entertainment, farewells and receptions for soldiers, resident send-offs, church services, balls, movie nights, fairs, circus performances, sports days, CWA meetings, weddings, funerals, birthday parties, regular community gatherings, Christmas events, and polling during elections.

During wartime periods, farewell ceremonies for local servicemen featured official proceedings with speeches, national anthem renditions, and fundraising activities, where departing individuals were presented with money belts or wallets. These occasions were accompanied by substantial suppers prepared by Towong residents. Fundraising initiatives in support of soldiers and local causes were regularly organised throughout both world wars. Celebrations for returning servicemen similarly included dances, fundraising activities, and communal meals.

**In the 1940s**, the hall was utilised for home defence training, involving male community members of varying ages in rifle drills and other defensive practices. Infrastructure upgrades included the installation of an electric lighting plant in 1954–1955 (subsequently removed), establishment of mains electricity in 1964, and removal of gas installations.

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