

The Bega Pioneer

Voice of the Bega Valley Historical Society Inc.

March 2018 Edition



Bega Valley Historical Society Inc.

Incorporating

Bega Pioneers' Museum

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Monday, Wednesday and Friday 10am to 4pm

Saturday 10am to 2pm

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- Bega floods 1851 - 1978
- A selection of Photos taken by Kevin Tetley

Front cover: An early Bega Football team



Museum News

NEW VOLUNTEERS

A big welcome to new volunteers -
Regina Huntington and Chris Pullen

NEW MEMBERS

Also welcome to new member
Jennine Childs

TATHRA FIRES

The devastation that occurred at Tathra with the recent fires on Sunday the 18th of March has affected us all in the wider community.

We are conscious of the long and painful journey ahead for the Tathra community.

Our thoughts and concerns are with them.

How grateful we are for all the support of the essential services and amazing volunteers.



KEVIN TETLEY PHOTOGRAPHS

Kevin Tetley has left the Museum a large archive, including sports, weddings, portraits and much more. Many of his collection of photos require identification. Below are two photos, more are shown at the back of the newsletter.



GARAGE SALE

Don't forget the
Garage Sale

Saturday 31st March 9am

History of Bega Floods

1851 – 1978

By Bernice E. Smith

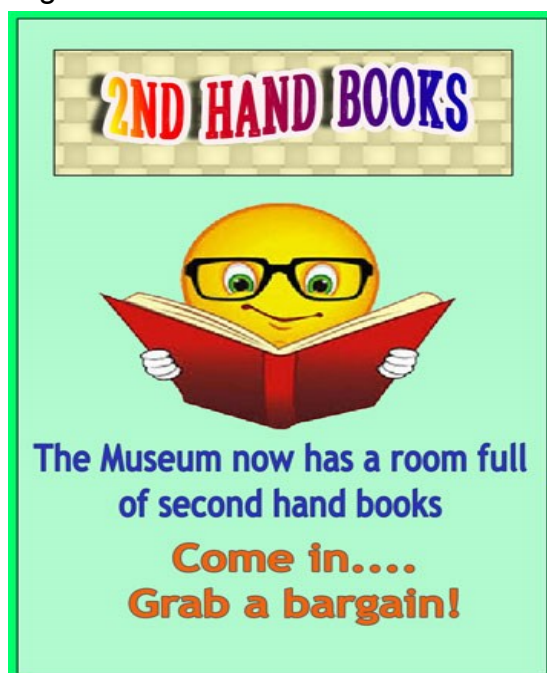
When Captain William Campbell built his slab and bark hut on a slight rise, beside the Brogo River, one mile above the junction of the Brogo and Bega Rivers, in the year 1841, he little thought that within ten years the whole of the area would be covered by flood waters many feet deep. Rises had occurred in the river in that time, but no great damage had been done, and when Surveyor Parkinson laid out the township in January, 1851, crops of wheat and barley were flourishing between the settlers' huts, all of which were built close to the river, where water was readily available. The stacks of hay indicated a good season, with plenty of food for stock in the coming winter. However in May of that year, gale-force winds blew up, bringing heavy rain. As the water rose rapidly, the few settlers climbed to the roofs of their houses and onto haystacks, but within a few hours the haystacks were washed away and houses collapsed, throwing all into the water. In this flood seventeen lives were lost. Many more would have died but for the aborigines in their bark canoes who saved many in the settlement by bringing them to higher ground. Those who died afterwards from the effects of exposure were buried at Corridgeree, where Bega's first Doctor, Dr. Wardell, already had been buried.

The flood left many deep holes in the cultivation ground, so many farmers dug deep drains to run the water back into the river. Again in 1852 two more floods occurred, the land once more being covered with deep water. The residents had by now learned to go to higher ground, so no lives were lost. Deep water stayed on the flats, covering the crops, and great efforts were made to open drains to the river. In many places, however, the wash of the river deepened these drains, forming

permanent lagoons and dams. Popes Hole, now known as Coopers Creek, and the Donkeys Hole, behind the Butter Factory, are examples of this. Both are very deep and full of platypus.

It was following the floods of 1851 and 1852 that it was decided to move the township to a site on high ground, south of the Bega River, a crossing being found suitable at a spot a little above the junction of the two rivers. There a wooden footbridge was erected, well out of flood reach. The first substantial building was the Victoria Inn, and the street then being formed was named Auckland Street, after the Imperial Colonial Secretary.

A store, the National School, the newspaper office, a bank and other buildings were erected, and soon only farmlands, Underhill's Smithy and a Creamery were left at North Bega. The farmers' homes, most of which also had small cheese factories, were all built well away from the river. In the new settlement crops were planted, the main ones being wheat, barley and maize. Most farmers cured bacon, and wheat was ground into flour at Kirkland's Mill at the south-east of the township, and also at Mrs. Spence's Corridgeree Mill, both sites being well above any flood damage.



History of Bega Floods *continued*

1857

In 1857 the first flood of any dimension to affect the township established south of the Bega River occurred in September. It did not reach the new settlement, but did destroy a considerable amount of fencing, and washed out newly-completed roadworks on either side of the Auckland Street crossing.

1860

In February, 1860 when a severe flood occurred, there was a great loss of crops, as well as many head of cattle – a blow to struggling farmers.

1870

Some dry years followed, and it was not until 1870 that good rains fell. A flood in June again destroyed fences and roadworks. The water in the Auckland Street swamps rose sharply, extending as far as the site of the Presbyterian Church. Mr. and Mrs. Archie Spence of Stoney Creek, the first couple to be married in the church, were unable to return to their home for a considerable time until the waters subsided. Tarraganda farmers were hard-hit. Mr. Hayden lost a number of pigs, but aboriginal boys swam in to save young calves. In this flood 18 inches fell, the water being well up to the lower end of Gipps Street, to the back of the Australian Joint Stock Bank (now the Bank of New South Wales).

1873

In the early part of 1873 another flood followed, with heavy rains in February and March. Water was twenty feet deep over low-lying paddocks, so crops of maize were destroyed, as well as barns of hay and other grain. This was a severe blow to the farmers, as the better seasons had enabled them to build up supplies of fodder. As so often happens after heavy flooding, another flood came that winter. Tarraganda Crossing was impassable, so a punt was brought into service until the bridge was finally completed, after being partly destroyed on three occasions.

1874

In 1874 river crossings were extremely dangerous, as there was another big flood when a leading townsman and auctioneer, Mr. Fred Berne, was drowned. He had conducted a sale at Dundini, and on his return tried to swim his horse over the river at Kanoona, but both were swept away. Mr. Berne was carrying a considerable amount of money, the proceeds of the sale, but his body was never recovered, although one of his boots was found some months later. Mr. Berne was the father of Mr. Dagmar Berne, Australia's first woman graduate in medicine, in whose honour her mother founded a scholarship, awarded each year to a woman student of medicine at Sydney University. Two farmers, Messrs. Harkness and McGuire, were also drowned in this flood while trying to get cattle to higher ground.

1878

In February, 1878 floods caused damage estimated at £30,000, while later that year another flood left a considerable amount of water and sand on the flats, so it was many months before they could be made productive again, although drainage work was carried out with scoops and horses.

1893

1893 was another flood year. Although rainfall registrations were not high in Bega, rain back in the mountains caused steep rises in all rivers, the Bega and Brogo Rivers meeting in one great sheet of water, covering the North Bega flats almost as high as in the flood of 1851. Many of the district's bridges were damaged, some under construction losing timbers and other materials.



History of Bega Floods *continued*

1898

One of the highest floods ever recorded was in February, 1898, when, after six days of almost continuous rain, amounting to 28 inches in all, the whole district was covered with flood waters. The water extended from Kirkland's Flour Mill, (now part of the Bega Showground), to Tarraganda Lane, covering both bridges many barns and some homes. Telegraph lines were covered in some parts of the town and on the Jellat Flats. The force of the water at the mouth of the Bega River caused the punt to sink, and it was three weeks before it could be refloated, causing great inconvenience to residents and shippers.

Reports of horses and cattle with legs severely swollen came in from all parts of the district. This was caused by the almost continuous rain. The soft nature of the ground resulted in a series of landslides on the Brown Mountain, trees blocking the road as they have done in recent floods. This flood goes down in history, being recorded by photographers of the day, Messrs' Muller, Morton and Watson on the wet-plate system of photography. There was no flood recorded in 1899, although there was 36 inches of rain, which, however, was not continuous, and good crops were harvested, especially on the hill land.

1900

In 1900, a flood caused damage to roads and bridges, a severe loss being the destruction of Double Creek Bridge and many culverts on the Numeralla Road. Good seasons followed over the next few years, with an average rainfall of 33 inches. As the district prospered, better roads and bridges were established. Motor cars began to appear on the roads, but most people still had horse-drawn vehicles and used the river crossings. Coaches plied to Tathra and the mail still went to Cooma by coach, which would leave Bega at 3 am in order to arrive at

Cooma in time for the mail train.

1908

It was during the next flood – that of 1908 – that the mail coach from Cobargo was washed down at the Auckland Street crossing, one of the horses being drowned.

1913

In 1913 a very big flood followed heavy rain, eleven inches of rain falling in 35 hours. Many low-lying homes were flooded out, residents being housed with neighbours. As the weather was hot, a bad stench hung over the town for weeks, the ground in cow-yards and pig-pens taking a long time to dry out.

1914

In 1914 the river rose again, this time to 23 feet, after 25 inches of rain had fallen in a few days. The bridge at North Bega, Bega's only traffic bridge to the Butter Factory and the Sydney Road beyond was damaged when the piles were undermined, the roadway of the bridge sagging at the northern end. However, traffic continued to use it, with the exception of heavy trucks. The piles were gradually raised by filling the base with concrete. It was with some relief that those having to use the bridge saw the roadway lifted back into position after two months of work.

1919

Then the long to be remembered 1919 flood occurred, again in February. The river rose to 27 feet 9 inches, but the new work on the North Bega Bridge stood firm. Many smaller bridges went, including the wooden bridge over Gowings Creek at Jellat Jellat. Many head of stock were lost and much damage done to roadways, some holes being eleven feet deep. Haystacks were carried away and fences destroyed. Amongst bridges completely or partly destroyed were those at Kanoona, Hanscombes at Numbugga, and others near Bermagui.



History of Bega Floods *continued*

A swagman camped at Bega Racecourse was rescued by the Municipal flood boat, manned by Joe Roberts and Joe Ziegler. The whole of Mr. W.W. Wren's dairy herd of pedigreed Jersey cows was swept away after being accidentally left in a paddock near the river. All were drowned – a sad loss.



1922

Fortunately 1920 and 1921 were free of floods, but in 1922 a big flood was recorded in June, after 12 inches of rain fell in one week. Tathra and other outlying centres were cut off.

1925

The next very wet year was 1925, when floods occurred in May and June. In all, 32 inches of rain fell in two months. Two Yarranung farmers, Messrs. Walker and Duncan, were washed out of their wagonette and drowned while trying to get cream to the Butter Factory. The water rose very quickly and remained high for a considerable time.

1928

Another tragedy occurred in 1928, when Mr. Robinson of Dr. George Mountain was drowned when attempting to cross Jellat Jellat Flats. The punt at the mouth of the river was carried downstream when 10 inches of rain fell in 48 hours.

1934

There were no big floods from 1928 until 1934, but the flood of that year caused more destruction to roads and bridges than that of 1919. The district was flooded six times. Morans Crossing Bridge being washed away in June after hasty repairs had been made following the February flood. In February 12 inches of rain fell in two days. The Brogo Bridge was also washed away, so a flying-fox had to be constructed to transport passengers, mail and foodstuffs across the river. This was the year

that campers on the Bega River had many narrow escapes. Cars that could not be towed out were chained to trees, some being pulled into the paddock at the Bega Racecourse. A lot of damage was done there, especially to the building which housed the newly-installed Totalizator. The Judge's Box was washed away, being found some weeks later on Tathra Beach, and was returned intact to the course.

Jellat Jellat Flats suffered badly, as fences were all gone and sand and rubbish covered the paddocks. The piles on the upstream of Cuttagee Bridge were undermined, tipping the bridge sideways so that it could be used only by light traffic, using extreme caution. Two of the Charlie Cam fleet of trawlers from Eden were washed ashore in heavy seas near Penders Beach and were a total loss. Included in the damage done at Bega was the flooding of the pump house at the river pumping station, and also the pit at the Power House in Auckland Street.

The year 1934 brought a total of 72 inches 19 points, one of Bega's wettest years. The work of restoration was hampered by almost continuous wet weather. Bridge repairs were difficult, so the flying-fox continued to be used at Brogo and Morans Crossing. Fortunately the weather remained fine for three months, allowing the paddocks to dry out and the cattle to recover from the effects of the long, wet winter. Many had lost all the hair from their legs, which were swollen and sore. From records kept by Mr. McVeigh, Manager of the Bega Butter Factory, this was an all-time record year for floods. Records kept over the previous 62 years showed that the average rainfall was 33.32 inches.



History of Bega Floods *continued*

1935

In 1935 a river gauge was installed, but river heights were still marked by stakes driven into the ground near the bridge. No major floods were recorded in 1935, but the river remained high most of the year, as many drains had been opened in the paddocks. The first sod for Bega's sewerage scheme was turned in Tarraganda Lane in May, 1935, and it was fortunate that the heavy rain did not fall as in 1934. Much gravel and sand washed down in 1934 and blocked drains, and a lot of work had to be done on the King's Theatre site when the new building was being erected. Work was also proceeding at the Commercial Hotel, where it was necessary to put in new brick foundations, as well as a new brick cellar for storing casks.

A small flood occurred in 1935 when in November 251 points fell. The mouth of the river had closed, only to be opened by the local farmers and puntsmen. The roads were a quagmire, but no-one complained, as seasonable conditions were the best for years, with the rainfall at 34 inches.

1937

June 8 inches fell, causing a small flood. Rainfall for the year was 33 inches.

The good seasons of 1936 and 1937 were followed by a low rainfall year in 1938. There were, however, good crops of maize on the flats and hay was still plentiful.

1939

1939 brought heavy rain in January, February and March, with considerable damage to roads and bridges. The winter was fairly dry, and by October it was very dry. It did not rain until December, when a welcome change brought 8 inches of rain.

1948.

The New Year of 1948 came in wet, the Bega Races being held in heavy rain. An old hand remarked that the rain was the heaviest experienced at a Cup Meeting for over 50 years. The weather continued wet in Bega and Candelo, where shows were disrupted. Later on in April, heavy gales blew up, causing a lot of damage. Trees were blown onto roadways, power failures occurred and buildings were damaged. At Candelo the "Royal Hotel" lost part of its balcony, while at Eden, boats were blown onto the rocks. During the worst of the

storm 142 points of rain fell in one day. The rest of the year had average rainfall, and in 1949 no serious flooding occurred.



1950

1950 was a wet year, with a flood in February. Poplar Avenue and Bega Street were covered with flood waters and the flood boat had to be used again on Jellat. However as many fences were washed into the channel the boat usually followed, it was decided by Imlay Shire that only those on urgent business, or cases of sickness, could be transported over the flats by boat.

1952

When January 1952 came, the grass had ripened, being dry and long. Everyone grew anxious about bush-fires with the excessive heat being experienced. On the 25th a hot westerly wind blew up, and fires which had been burning in the mountains spread through the district.

**Have you changed
your email address?**



Please let us know

call 64921453 or email museum25@tpg.com.au

History of Bega Floods *continued*

These were the worst fires ever known in Bega, and rain did not fall for four months, except for a light drizzle from time to time. Good rain fell in May, and in June there was a flood, with heavy gales and rough seas. At Tathra the heavy seas broke over the road to the wharf, carrying great boulders with it and damaging the road, which was undermined in several places. A young man, Barry Fleming, was washed off his motor cycle near the wharf and drowned. Many others had narrow escapes. Jellat Flats were again covered with flood waters, which receded slowly. The rest of the year was dry, the factory output suffering as a result.

1953

It was not until August 1953 that good rains again fell. Good weather followed for the rest of 1953. Tathra residents, who had to cart water, were delighted with the better weather, and storage tanks at the beach were full. It did not rain over the holiday period, the weather being very hot, but, with floods in mind, Imlay Shire Council and the Department of Main Roads proceeded with the work of raising the road at the eastern end of Jellat Flats. The flood-gate had been raised in 1947, being built up with concrete, and it served to keep salt water back from the Penuca farmlands. Other works carried out were the removal of boulders from the Breakaway at the Bega River, where

severe erosion was affecting nearby property. It was considered that a free flow of water would result with boulders being removed.

1954 – 1955 - 1956

1954 had below-average rainfall, so maize crops suffered. 1955 was another year without floods, but 1956 brought welcome rain in January and a flood in February. Maize paddocks were covered, and farmers had hard work getting their exhibits dry enough to show in March. It was following that, that flood lines were put on the bridges, and measuring posts on the roadside in flood areas. May brought another flood, when Bega and Tathra had very heavy rain. Poplar Avenue was soon covered, and a car being driven through stalled, the occupants having a very narrow escape. A tow-truck rescued them after they had climbed onto the roof of their vehicle. Bega had 13 inches of rain in two days, and town business premises were swamped with water. These included the Grand Hotel, Leonard's Pharmacy, McIlvenie's Silk Store and several other low-lying shops.

Damage to outlying centres was also severe. Bridges affected were at Kiah, Palestine, Dignams Creek and Greendale. The Princes Highway at Frogs Hollow collapsed, leaving a huge gap in the road.

GARAGE SALE

BOOKS

OLD KITCHEN ITEMS

Sausage Sizzle

BRIG A BRAG

Saturday 31st March

Old Machinery Club in attendance

Gates open 9am

History of Bega Floods *continued*

This was the worst hold-up on the road for years, and it took a big team of men and heavy machinery to get the road in working order again.

Bega had 63 inches of rain up until the end of May, and Tathra 65 inches. Rain was fairly general again until July, when it cleared up for a time. However, the Monaro had record snowfalls at that time, the snow melt keeping the rivers high. The mouth of the river kept banking up with sand washed in by the rough seas, the causeway being frequently covered by water. Then to make matters worse, the ferry broke down and all traffic had to go to Bega by the Dr. George Mountain route. Although 1956 was such a wet year, by December conditions were again dry, with a drop in the factory intake.



1957

1957 brought dry weather again, so some farmers were having bores put down, those at Angledale being the most successful. A little rain fell in February, then none until June. In August there was a flood again, with severe damage being done at the Georges Creek Dam on Brown Mountain and also landslides on the mountain road. October rain was low, but did help the pastures, but then dry hot weather continued for the next three months and stock had to be hand-fed.

1959

Then came 1959 with a flood in February and one in October. This was a very heavy flood, the river rising rapidly. The Tathra bus, with three people on board, was caught in the flood-waters on Jellat Jellat. Fortunately the three occupants were able to swim to a willow tree, from which they were rescued some hours later by heavy vehicles from the Department of Main Roads and two outboard-motor boat crews. This was the big rescue of 30th

October, with some brave people participating.

1964

The years that followed had average rainfall. 1964, however, had only 28 inches, although there was a small flood in April. The Greendale Bridge was damaged by heavy timber banking up against the piles, but it was still usable, much to the relief of the local people.

1969

1969 rain in February and April, so the Bega River ran again. It had been dry for many weeks – both in 1968 and 1969. Good rain fell again in April, and district prospects were favourable for the winter months. August, 1969 was wet and the rest of the year had frequent rainfalls.

1970

When 1970 came in wet, the Bega Cup had to be postponed, and wet conditions continued for some time. December, 1970 saw the first flood recorded for some years. This was not a big flood, so there was not much damage to crops.

1971

Then in 1971 the February flood broke all previous records in the Bega area. The water was four, and in many places, five feet, higher than any flood known in the valley. Rain commenced on February 4th, continuing on 5th and 6th, with a recording for the three days of 1850 points. It was soon realised that people would have to be rescued from their homes, so Police, Civil Defence and Service Clubs went into action. Halls were thrown open to house the homeless, and two-way radios sent messages to the parents of school children stranded in Bega and others who could not return to their homes.



Great destruction to roads and bridges was evident. The Hancock Bridge at the Mouth of the Bega River, a concrete structure erected only five years previously, had lost five spans. The Candelo and Bimbaya Bridges also went, as well as those at Buckajo and Coopers Creek and a number in Mumbulla Shire. A Navy helicopter was sent down to give aid and to report on damage. Tathra was without power for almost a week. Milk had to be thrown out, as milk tankers could not get through to the farms, most of which were without power.

One of the worst features was the destruction of cultivation land by the piling up of many feet of sand and debris. Homes, too, were in a bad way, but volunteers went to work with scrubbing brushes and paint, after the Bega Fire Brigade had hosed away most of the rubbish. So many helped it would be impossible to name them all, but the 1971 flood can go down in history as not only the highest recorded in Bega, but also one that brought members of the community together in a spirit of Christian charity.

Grants for flood relief were made available to farmers and householders and also to the Shires for the restoration of roads and bridges. A team of Army engineers came down to erect a Bailey Bridge over the river at Bimbaya, but many bridges in the district are still unusable. Household goods and carpets were piled up in the Bega Show Pavilion, where they were dried out and cleaned. Many hands helped to get them back to the homes and to re-lay the carpets.

The Bega Racecourse was very badly damaged, so it was many months before it could be used again. Working bees were held when possible.

As the Bega Bowling Club's greens were badly washed out, a boat was taken in to collect record books and other valuable equipment.

As the Bega Bowling Club's greens were badly washed out, a boat was taken in to collect record books and other valuable equipment.

Many bridges could not be repaired for months, owing to the serious washouts around them and the huge amount of work that had to be done on the roads by the Shires and Bega Municipal Council. Temporary crossings were first put in to get the milk tankers running again. However it will be a long time before Bega will recover from all the damage done to farmlands, roads and bridges.

1973

1973 again brought heavy rain, resulting in some flooding in March and April. 32 inches fell and the winter was a good one.

1974

1974 saw the rainfall measured for the first time in millimetres. The early months of the year were dry, but by April heavy rain fell, causing flooding on Jellat Jellat Flats. Mr. George Preo of Tathra, who attempted to cross the flooded road, was washed away and drowned. This was in spite of the efforts of four young men with surfboards to rescue him.

1978

Early April came in wet, bringing floods to the Bega Valley. In all, we had three floods during the next ten weeks, rain falling right through June, with a very mild temperature reading and no frosts. However, pastures, although green, did not show much growth. However, sown crops responded, with the exception of those which had been covered with floodwaters and sand.




KEVIN TETLEY PHOTOS





Publications for Sale



Bayleys History of Bega	\$25
Bega High Celebrating 50 years	\$5
Bemboka Show 1 & 2	\$10
Bismark House	\$20
Courthouse Death Registers - Bega	\$5
Courthouse Death Registers - Eden	\$5
Howards Way	\$5
Imlay Shire Ratepayers Index	\$5
Monumental Inscriptions No 1	\$90 (1 copy in stock)
Ratepayers Indexes to 1953	\$5
They Called This Valley Home	\$25
Bushfires of 52	\$20

Military Books

ANZACs Long Shadow	\$19.95
ANZAC to Amiens	\$9.95
An ANZACs Story	\$9.95
The ANZACs	\$26.95
The Last ANZACs	\$26.95
The Last ANZACs (hard cover)	\$35
An ANZAC Tale	\$30
Battle for Lone Pine	\$29.95
From the Trenches	\$40
Young Digger	\$19.99
The ANZACs - Gallipoli to the Western Front	\$35
World War 1	\$35
The Secrets of the ANZACs	\$30

