

Mullewa – A Brief History

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Declared a Municipality 03 April 1895.

The name “Mullewa” or “Mullewah” (or ‘Moola-wa’) is believed to have originated from a spring named by the local Aboriginal people, meaning Swan; a bird species historically prolific in the area. Aboriginal people lived in the area for over 60,000 years prior to the arrival of the first European Shepherds. Initially traditional owners were quite receptive to sharing the area with the newcomers. However, they soon realised that their resources were being depleted and that they would not be able to maintain the way of life they were accustomed to. A combination of factors led to much conflict and deaths on both sides, most notably the Butteraby executions of 12 native persons in 1865 which resulted from the murder of new settler; Thomas Bott. Between 1863 and 1864, 21 warriors from the small Widi tribe were convicted of crimes and removed from the area, leading to such diminished strength that these proud and self-sufficient people were forced to realise that they had lost their independence.



P 11439 First Station Master's House c1890's with Frederick August Renner and family.

The 1850's saw the expansion of shepherding into the Mullewa area from early settlers; Michael Morrissey of Mt. Erin Estate and John S. Davies of Tibraden and by the late 1850's the industry was already expanding with more land holdings becoming available. From this time, Mullewa became the base for a Shepherd's camp due to its natural permanent spring. As such, Mullewa was included on the De Grey Mullewa Stock Route which was formally accepted by the Government in 1895. Initial access to the Eastward pastures was via settlements on the Irwin River and later via Kockatea Gully.



P 11362 Camel team carting c1920.

The area close to Mullewa was first explored by Augustus Gregory's party who reported unflattering portraits of the country that they encountered. However, later the Wittenoom Bros saw agricultural potential in the land. From mid-1884 Frank Wittenoom and Lenny Darlot obtained good stock water at Mullewa, from which time steady progress was made in relation to making available further agricultural land in the area. The first building was established shortly afterwards in 1885 which was a warehouse shed made from galvanised iron. The purpose of this shed for the storage and transference of wool became redundant with the implementation of the Mingenew to Geraldton railway line.

Early access to the Mullewa area was via pack horse only, this slowly improved with the implementation of rough roads to accommodate wool wagons. Goldfields in the Yilgarn and Murchison boosted the economy from 1890 which allowed for the commencement of the Mullewa-Geraldton Railway Line. The first line through to Mullewa occurred on 12 November 1894 with the *Victoria Express* newspaper reporting that the opening of the line would be celebrated with an athletics day. The social fabric of the town was set and sports have continued to play an important role within the community. Weekend dances at the local hall were also



P 11448 Mullewa Railway Yards 1890's.

Images courtesy of the Mullewa Collection, Mullewa Agricultural Society.

popular as was the ever successful Mullewa Agricultural Society Show following its commencement in 1929, reporting 2500 attendees. Keeffe, B. (pg. 163) attributes sport to helping weld together people from all over the world into a viable community.



P 11325 Opening of the Mullewa Town Hall c1935.

The new railway line also prompted much construction in the town including hotels and railway houses. By 1894 Mullewa was home to the Mullewa Hotel owned by Mr. Sorenson and the Royal Hotel owned by Mr. John Judge. These were supported by railway workers, farmers and also additional residents following the release of town lots in July 1894. Shortly following this announcement the first meeting of the Mullewa Progress Association took place on the 14 August 1894 with the view of addressing some local matters. A natural progression from this point was the opening of the first school, of which the first Head Teacher; Mr. J. E. Jones was appointed in September 1895. The

school consisted of one classroom with approximately 50 students enrolled in the first year. Medical facilities were not so forthcoming. The extension of the railway line through to Cue in 1896 resulted in the closure of the first hospital in that same year. It took until 1922 for a permanent doctor to be employed in the town and until 1934 for the public hospital to be opened with the support of community fundraising efforts.

Initial take up of agricultural land was slow due to much of the population focussing on gold prosperity. Farming at Mullewa, similar to the rest of the colony remained a minor part of the economy until approximately 1904 as the gold mining industry began to decline. By 1909 a flour mill had been established at Geraldton followed by a government focus to foster agriculture in the region which led to a very well established agricultural region by 1911. Further land was released by the Midland Railway Co. in 1926, purchased by the Government and allocated to settlers, boosting the industry.



P 11371 Bags of Grain in Paddock c1930.

Priest Architect John Cyril Hawes arrived in the district in 1915 and made a significant contribution to the community. He worked closely with local Aboriginal people and Mass Rock (or *Mission Dolores*), a place where Hawes would hold Mass for local Aboriginal people still exists, a short distance from where the old Mullewa Camp was located. Mullewa boasts two buildings designed by Monsignor John Hawes; Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church and the Mullewa Priest House. In 1926, Miss Millie Comeagain and Mr Bill Flanagan were the first couple to be wed in the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church.



P 11336 Jose Street looking northwards, with Mullewa in foreground c1956.

The Mullewa community, like many others around the country did not escape the loss of many fine young men during WWI. This impacted greatly on the availability of manual labour to keep the town progressing. Following armistice, the Commonwealth Government's grant scheme saw an influx of returned servicemen allocated to the Mullewa area. During WWII there was another wave of newcomers with increased army activity including the establishment of a military medical facility. The population increase assisted local businesses greatly and allowed the return of some prosperity. However, following WWII the population began to

decline as the area was no longer required for military activities. Farming, however, continued to remain a viable industry and does so until present day.

In recent years tourism has been a focus of the town with a nationally recognised annual Rodeo, Monsignor John Hawes architectural designed buildings and a splendid winter-spring wildflower trail. In 2011 the Shire of Mullewa amalgamated with the City of Geraldton-Greenough to become the City of Greater Geraldton. Throughout the years, one element in particular has remained consistent and that is the fog that gathers and meanders about in the valley. This year, 2020 marks 125 years since Mullewa; the “Place of Fog” was declared a Municipality.

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