

Information Sheet No. 5



City of
Greater Geraldton
Regional Library



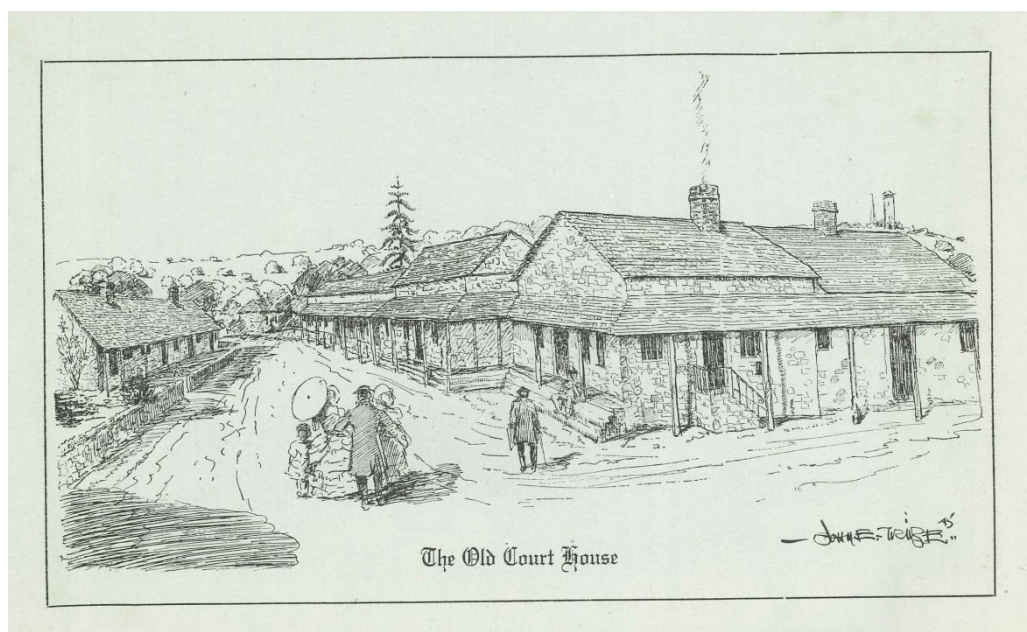
Heritage Services

Geraldton Regional Library

THE OLD AND THE NEW COURTHOUSES IN GERALDTON

It was not long after Geraldton's settlement that it was decided that the town needed a seat of justice, and a place from which to administrate the people and concerns of the region. It was important to have a Courthouse to deal with criminal offenders, and to uphold the law within the Geraldton area and the colony. Thus Geraldton's first Courthouse was opened in 1867 on the corner of Marine Terrace and Gregory Street. The second, which is still in use today, was opened in 1898. Each building has played an important part in the history of Geraldton.

The Old Courthouse and Bond Store



The Old Courthouse, drawing from Halley, E.M., *The Old Courthouse Geraldton*, 1945.

Work began on Geraldton's first Courthouse in 1863, when tenders were called for materials with which to build it. A notice was placed in the *Government Gazette* in February, 1863, for "mahogany (jarrah) timber of the best quality of the length and scantling specified, perfectly



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sound, straight grained and cut die square, subject to approval on delivery on the jetty at Champion Bay; 21000 she-oak shingles.” J. and W. Bateman of Fremantle provided the mahogany and H. Yelverton and Co provided the she-oak shingles.

The Courthouse was finished and ready for use by 1867. The Bond Store was built at a right angle to the Courthouse and ran along Gregory Street. In the 1880s and 1890s there were many complaints about the Courthouse. It was argued that it was an uncomfortable, inappropriate building, and that its location often made it hard to hear proceedings, being close to both the wharf and the street. An article in the *Geraldton Express* in 1896 stated that “The... building is about as unsuitable as a boiler factory, a stamper mill, or a women’s rights meeting hall. The site is in the wrong place... (because of) the noise of the traffic in Marine Terrace or Gregory Street... and the bad acoustic properties of the building may, perhaps, account for certain eccentricities of decision by the Court.”

Soon after, the new Public Buildings were built. From the 1920s the old Courthouse came to be used as CWA rest rooms and a meeting place for Cubs and Scouts. It was also used during World War II as a base for the Volunteer Air Observer Corps.

The Geraldton Public Buildings (Geraldton Courthouse)

The foundation stone for the new Geraldton Public Buildings was laid by the Acting Premier, E.H. Wittenoom, in October 1897. An article in the *Geraldton Express* states that “beneath the stone were placed plans of the building, maps of the colony and the principal towns, copies of the year book, official handbooks and bluebooks, copies of the Perth and Geraldton newspapers and the Government Gazette, a list of members of the West Australian legislature, a complete set of coins of the realm, and a complete set of Western Australian postage stamps and postcards.”



Government Buildings (Geraldton Courthouse), Marine Terrace, Geraldton, c1900.
Image donated by A.C. Burns, P 1571

The Acting Premier said that “Geraldton had long deserved the (new buildings), but prior claims of the rapidly developing Goldfields towns had delayed the work.” There had also been some calls for the secession of Northern Australia, with Geraldton as its capital, and it has been said that the buildings were offered by the Premier, Sir John Forrest, to appease this idea. Public offices, such as customs, the treasury, lands and police, along with courtrooms, were now consolidated in the one building, providing much more practicality and convenience. However, as always, there was some criticism of the new buildings, with a commentator in the *Geraldton Express* of August 5th 1898 declaring the “hideous fence of jarrah and chains in front of the building... neither useful nor ornamental... the present unsightly fence is an eyesore.”

Today, the Public Buildings have become Geraldton’s present courthouse, after the government agencies left in 1987. Renovations and extensions were carried out on the building in 1988/89.

Compiled from sources in Geraldton Regional Library’s Heritage Services Collection.

References

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9. Article from the *Geraldton Guardian*: Sep 20, 1989.

