

Information Sheet No. 6



City of
Greater Geraldton
Regional Library



Heritage Services

Geraldton Regional Library

THE RESIDENCY

Many of Geraldton's historic buildings are still in use and although many may be no longer used for the original purpose for which they were built, they still provide appropriate places for organisations, offices, dwellings or community centres. Most buildings have had several different uses throughout their lifespan. For example, the Residency Building in Marine Terrace is today used as a Community Centre, managed by the Geraldton Cultural Trust. However, when it was first built, as the name suggests, the building was the official dwelling for the Town of Geraldton's Resident Magistrate.

Construction began on the building in 1861. S.E. Masters of Fremantle was granted the contract to construct the building, employing both convict labour and tradesmen from Fremantle. The first Magistrate to take up residency in the new building was Charles Symmonds. Other Resident Magistrates who have stayed at the Residency include Alfred Durlacher, whom Durlacher Street was named after, also Maitland Brown, who was from the pastoral family who founded Glengarry and Newmarracarra Stations. Brown was Magistrate in Geraldton for 18 years (1886 – 1904) and was the son of Thomas Brown, a man who had been putting pressure on the Colonial Secretary in Perth in order to get an appropriate abode for the Resident Magistrate built in Geraldton for some years. As the Magistrate was the town's chief public servant, and an important member of the town and its social life, it was fitting that he be housed in a building capable of hosting lavish balls and other social events. In the late 1800s, the Residency became an important venue in the town's social circle.



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The Residency c1923, photo sourced from PWD Maternity Hospital Plan, P 932.

By the early 1900s the Resident Magistrate's role in the community had become diminished. The building was eventually vacated and remained so for several years until it was officially reopened on 26th July 1925 as Geraldton's new Maternity Home. A high level of community support for the Home resulted in most of the funds for the conversion of the building coming largely from local and regional fundraising. The Home was run by a Public Committee, although it was later taken over by the State Government Health Department. The first Nurse in charge of the home was Sister M.C. Hansen. Patients had actually already been admitted to the new Maternity Home since April 1925, and by the official opening, eleven children had already been born there. The first child was born in June to the Perejuan family, a girl that they named Agnes Ann. She was presented with a silver cup at the opening ceremony and silver spoons were given to the first set of twins. In 1957 a "solarium", or sun room, was added to the maternity home with the help of the Rotary Club of Geraldton.



The Residency after it became a Community Centre, c1967. Photo donated by Steve Douglas, P 5043

When the Geraldton Regional Hospital was completed in 1967, the Maternity Home was no longer needed. The Residency Building became Geraldton's Community Centre, from which such services as Meals-on-Wheels were made available. In 1972 the Geraldton Cultural Trust requested the use of the Residency Building as an arts and crafts centre, and permission for this was granted by the then WA Premier, John Tonkin. However, the Residency was not handed over to the Cultural Trust until ten years later, in 1982. Today the Residency, managed by the Trust, is home to many different cultural organisations and also has a library available for public use.

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

References

1. Local Studies Vertical Files: The Residency & Cultural Trust
2. Considine & Griffiths Architects, *The Residency Geraldton: Heritage Assessment*, January 1997.
3. Heritage Services Photograph Collection.
4. *Geraldton Heritage Trail Booklet*