

Comet Tales & Walking Trails



COMET COMMUNITY HALL c1929

SITE 8

The Capricornian newspaper dated 29th August 1929

Local architect J Hamilton Park presented his plan for the construction of a hall in the town at a meeting convened by members of the newly formed hall committee. Reginald Rodgers presided and explained the progress made. Treasurer Oswald Carrington said “that the committee had £61.0.0 (\$122.00) in hand. This with Government endowment and other sums promised, would make the amount over £100.0.0 (\$200.00)”. W. Wyer said, “His company, Wyer and Carlson, would offer very reasonable terms to supply timber for the building”. The Comet hall was constructed by building contractor Wally Mercer with the help of local volunteers. It became known as the Comet School of Arts.

COMET CWA

An extract from a letter written by Mrs Rosalynd Jeppesen on 26th May 1975 tells us that Mrs Fitzpatrick, Central Vice President of the Queensland Country Women's Association, (QCWA) travelled from Rolleston to Comet, 74 miles (118.5km) by horse and sulky to form a branch of that organisation in Comet in 1929.

The first president was Mrs F. Parker, secretary, Mrs M. Carpenter and first treasurer was thought to be Mrs Quirk but this is not certain.

The Comet branch of the QCWA took out a lease on the hall for 21 years. They were responsible for its successful management, maintenance and improvements. The lease was renewed in 1966. The hall was used for dances, an annual flower show, meetings and church services.

FIERCE STORM HALL DAMAGED

The Mercury newspaper dated 15th October 1929 reads:

“Extensive damage was caused in the township of Comet yesterday evening by a severe storm, accompanied by a cyclonic wind. Practically every building in town suffered. A new hall in the course of erection was demolished, only the floor being left. A piano in the hall was blown several yards by the wind and a horse was killed by a falling tree”.

THE HALL UPGRADE

Dances were then held to raise money to pay for rebuilding the hall. The hall was originally rebuilt of corrugated iron, unlined and unsealed with push-out type corrugated iron windows. A small porch at the front completed the building. In subsequent years a supper room and kitchen were added. Later, new metal louvre windows were installed. The ceiling was covered with peg board to reduce the sound and a new Besser Block and wood-floored porch which doubled as a bus shelter was added by local builder Laurie Harvey.

Mrs Jean Carrington, an old-time resident of the community, tells of carbide lamps used to illuminate the hall and of children being chased off the dance floor at 9pm, no doubt to be bedded down on the floor under the long seats around the interior of the hall. In the 1950's, the Comet Hotel which was owned by Victor and Alice Eyles, supplied generated lighting to the hall. Comet was connected to the electricity grid in 1970.

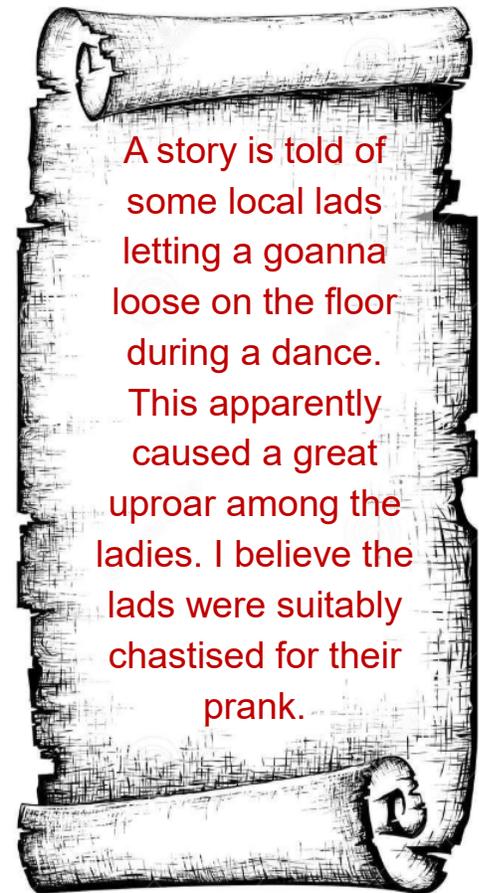
THE CLOCK IN THE HALL

In 1971, a silky oak seedling tree was planted in the Hall grounds by Mrs D. Sommerlad and Miss Kerry Watson - the oldest and youngest members of the Comet Branch of QCWA. The oak was felled in 2005 as it had grown to a great height and was considered dangerous to the adjacent buildings. A clock was constructed by Rudi Drent from a portion of this lovely tree and now hangs on the wall in the hall.

CWA DISBANDED

In a letter dated 19th June 1982, from Mrs Doris Binstead of Glenidol, Rolleston, to Hall Trustee J. W. McKenzie, she advised that the Comet branch of QCWA had disbanded and had relinquished its lease on the hall.

The Comet Progress Association committee took over the maintenance of the building and was followed some years later by a Comet School of Arts committee.



A story is told of some local lads letting a goanna loose on the floor during a dance. This apparently caused a great uproar among the ladies. I believe the lads were suitably chastised for their prank.

Some of the Trustees for the building over the years were O. C. Carrington, A .W. Sommerlad, R. C. Nixon, W. J. McKenzie and D. Jeppesen. The years pass and most of the former trustees for the hall had either passed away or moved on.

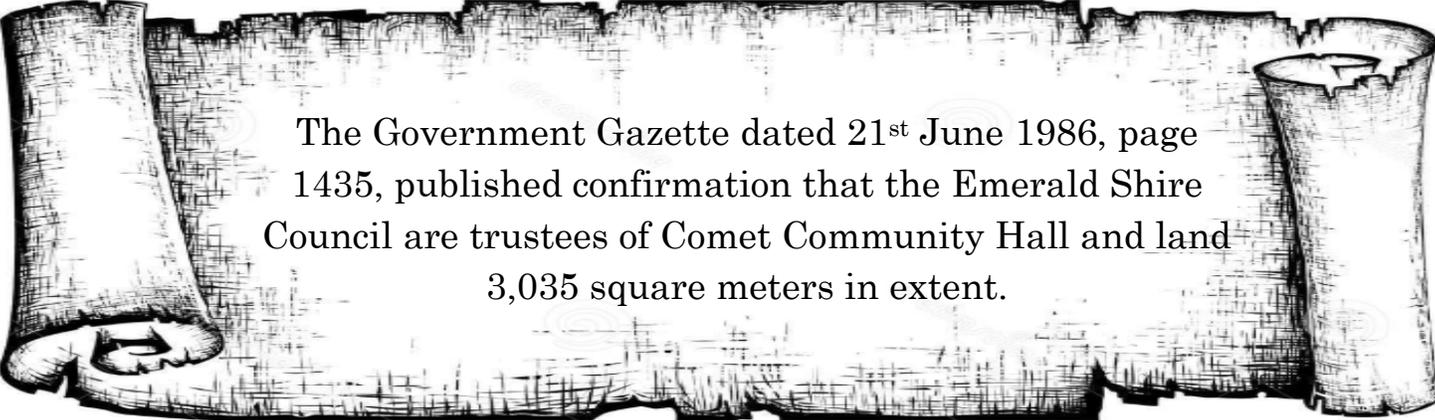
On the 23rd October 1982, Mrs E. A .O'Brien, Secretary of the Comet School of Arts Management Committee wrote to Mr K. Purdie, Shire Clerk of the Emerald Shire Council, stating that "at a recent meeting held in Comet, it was decided that the Emerald Shire Council take over the trusteeship of the Comet School of Arts". At the same meeting, a Committee was elected for the management of the Hall.

A further letter from the School of Arts Management Committee dated 23rd October of that year was sent to Mrs L. M. Kluver, State Secretary, QCWA, informing her of this decision.

A letter to Mrs O'Brien, Comet School of Arts, from the Emerald Shire Council, informing her that the Council expects to be appointed trustee of Reserve 60, School of Arts Reserve, Township of Comet on which the Comet Hall stands and that the land is at present vested in private trustees. It also requests Mrs O'Brien to arrange fire, storm and tempest and malicious damage insurance cover on the hall with the policy to be in council's name – extent of cover to be \$30,000. The Comet branch of QCWA had previously insured the building and contents for \$26,000.



COMET HALL 1939



The Government Gazette dated 21st June 1986, page 1435, published confirmation that the Emerald Shire Council are trustees of Comet Community Hall and land 3,035 square meters in extent.

EMERALD SHIRE COUNCIL HALL TRUSTEES

A letter dated 13th September 1988, from Mrs A. T. Boddy, Secretary of the Comet Hall Committee advised that a new committee had been formed and that a general inspection of the hall and grounds had been carried out.

Mrs Boddy wrote that a lot of general maintenance was required. The wooden toilet floors were in poor condition and that there was no lighting in the toilets. The dance floor needed urgent attention and that some white ant treatment was required. The committee had obtained quotes for louvre window repairs. The letter asked for Council assistance and that the committee would be pleased to meet with a council member at their convenience.

A reply from Council on the 5th October 1998 to Mrs Boddy said they would assist to the value of \$2,120.00 to carry out work for which quotes had been secured.

For some reason, the School of Arts Committee must have disbanded, as a letter from the Emerald Shire Council dated May 31, 1990 to Mrs E. Davies, of the Comet and District Progress Association, appointed their association as manager of the hall on a three-year contract. We know that this committee was still in effect in August 1991, but this committee must have lapsed sometime after that date as the poor old hall was suffering from neglect.

RESCUEING THE HALL FROM DEMOLITION

With very little interest in the hall, it was left to sit looking rather sad, barely used and quite uncared for, apart from the very few townsfolk who occasionally decided to mow the lawn, when it was turning into a hazard.

Something had to be done. So, in 1999, a long-time resident, Rosemary McLeod put a meeting note out in the local Post Office.

“Are you interested in keeping this hall?” Rosemary asked. “If so come along to a meeting to be held on 6th April 1999”.

12 people turned up and there were as many apologies that night. Yes, there was a million memories in this hall.

A new School of Arts Committee was formed to rejuvenate the old building which was facing demolition. The power bill was paid and again the hall could see the light. The hall grounds and interior were tidied with several working bees.

This committee was unaware that the Emerald Shire Council were the trustees of the hall, so much fundraising was done to secure the necessary funds to pay for the exorbitant cost of insurance. It was then that the committee decided to become incorporated for its member's protection.

JUPITERS CASINO GRANT APPLICATION

Comet School of Art Secretary, Robyn Morawitz applied for a Jupiter's Casino Grant in 2001, asking for funding to:

- Replace the roof, batons and storm water outlets.
- Removal of the louvres in the storeroom and refurbish with Hebel Block.
- Louvre windows in the hall removed and replaced with aluminium sliding clear glass windows fitted with security screens.
- Replacement of external wall cladding.
- New floor covering in the kitchen and dining room.
- New kitchen including plumbing and a new refrigerator.
- Repair of the back door, stairs and other general maintenance.
- Painting the front exterior wall ready for the sign writer.

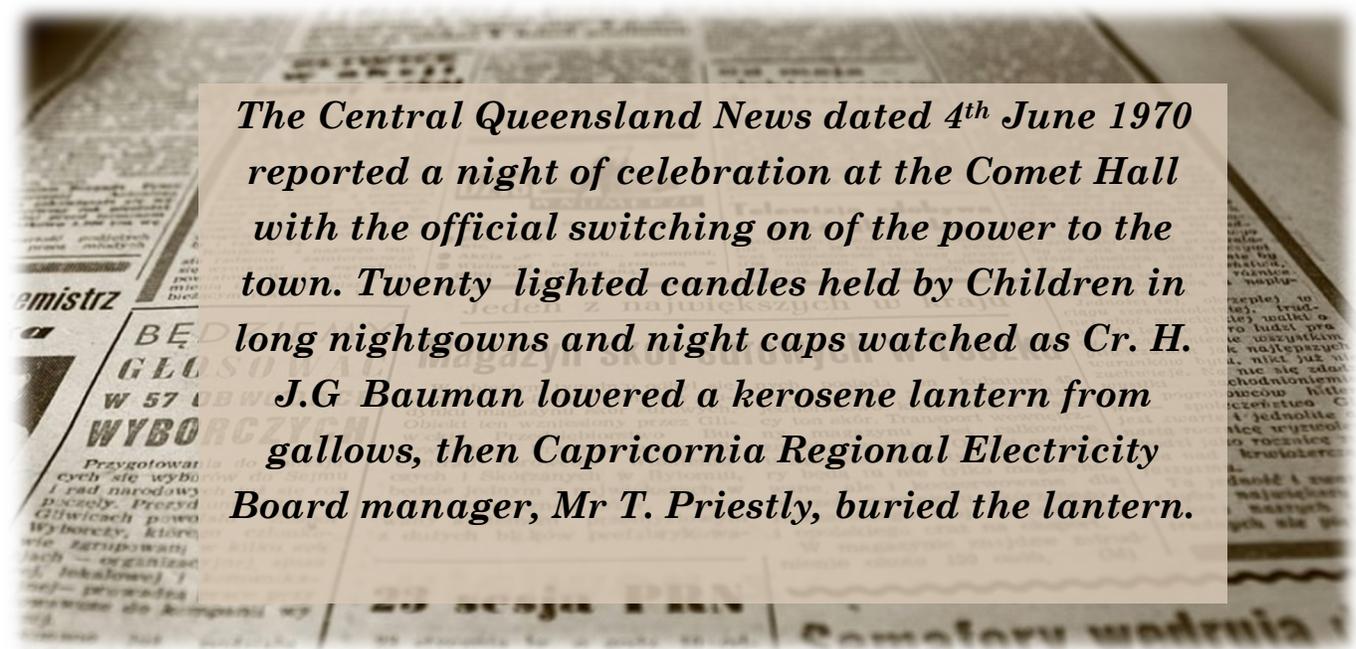
On the 30th March 2001, a letter was received from Jupiter's Casino Community Benefits Fund advising that \$35,000 had been granted for repair and maintenance to the hall. What a wonderful difference this made to the old building.

During 2005, a Marion Dragline was assembled at Ensham Mine, with the construction crew camping in Comet. With Central Highlands Regional Council's approval, the crew working on this project generously donated sufficient funds for contactor Lew Brooks to paint the interior of the hall and resurface the dance floor. Please find below before and after photos.

THE HALL HAS BEEN USED FOR

- CWA flower shows
- Meetings
- Church services
- Play group
- Trivia nights
- School holiday activity days
- School concerts
- Theatre restaurant
- A shelter for people stranded by flooded roads
- A morning tea with the townspeople and the Queensland Premier, Sir Joh Bjelke Peterson, when he officially opened the new Railway Station building on the 8th March 1980.

ELECTRICITY COMES TO COMET



The Bright Lights of Comet . . .

Comet was an absolute blaze of lights on Saturday - perhaps the brightest it will ever be in its history.

With big flood lights to light up the outdoors site where the ceremony was held, fairy lights all over the place, and a roaring fire, it cast a glow in the sky which could be seen by travellers for miles.

Some thought there was a new city in the Central Highlands.

The transformation of the tiny town of Comet from the moment Mrs. Sommerlad turned the switch was fantastic - and a full realisation of the meaning of the tremendous convenience of electricity.

As Cr. Braun said - "it was the greatest thing to happen to Comet since the railway line came through on May 26, 1878.

AIR CONDITIONING

Six new air conditioners were installed ready for the school concert in 2011, replacing the second-hand units. The committee is very grateful to the Comet Hotel and Friends for the enormous amount of fundraising they did to finance these.

NEW TOILETS AND WHEELCHAIR ACCESS

Between April and June 2014, the Central Highlands Regional Council did a huge upgrade to the hall costing \$70,000 with improvements such as new toilets, including a disabled toilet, a shower and change room for concerts. Previously the change room had been a cattle truck parked at the rear door when required. The committee had put in grant applications with Jupiter's Community Benefit fund and later BMA Community Partnerships Program for new toilets, however both applications were unsuccessful. A grant application for a wheelchair access had also been unsuccessful but now is a reality.

In 2009, framed photos of Comet's past were placed in the hall, as is an oil painting of Leichhardt's Dig Tree, generously donated by artist Margaret Dixon. The committee sought and gained a grant in 2012 for new chairs through the Central Highlands Regional Council and in 2017, Emerald Mitre 10 generously donated ten new tables for use in the hall.

Our Comet community can be justly proud of their hall.





UPGRADE 2001





UPGRADE 2014

Compiled by Rosemary McLeod. 2017

Photos:

Rosemary McLeod collection, Robyn Morawitz collection.