18 | 1980s NATURE

The decade saw a rise in the conservation movement in Port Macquarie. Recognition of the need to preserve natural environments led to the creation of Kooloonbung Creek Nature Reserve while the former Sea Acres Flora Reserve and Wildlife Refuge was brought under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. There was also an expansion of the Koala Hospital's facilities.

19 | 1990s HEALTH

As the district's popularity as a retirement destination grew, so did the provision of health services. In 1992 the NSW Government contracted a private hospital corporation to construct a new, privately owned, public hospital which would contract with the Government to supply public hospital services. The public/private partnership did not work out well and the hospital was subsequently returned to public ownership.

20 | 2000s EVENTS

By the turn of the century most of the theme parks had disappeared and Port Macquarie welcomed a new generation of tourists. Big sporting events were mounted - the Touch Football State Championships in 2005 and Ironman Oceania in 2006 - adding to the well-established surfing, golfing and bodyboarding competitions.

21 | 2010s CLIMATE

Growing awareness of climate change drew attention to the importance of managing forests sustainably. Forestry Corporation NSW celebrated its centenary by gifting The Forest Courtyard at the Port Macquarie Museum to tell the renewable forestry story. The impact of climate change was felt dramatically in the long drought which culminated in devastating fires at the end of the decade.

The bicentenary of European settlement in April 1821 marks the beginning of a new era and an opportunity to reflect on and learn from the past.

HISTORY

Aboriginal people have inhabited the Australian continent for more than 60,000 years. The First Peoples created over 500 separate nations each with its own language, cultural traditions and time-honoured laws.

The country lying between the Macleay River and the Manning River, and westward to the mountains is the traditional land of the Birpai Nation. It was first visited by European colonists in 1818 when a party led by Surveyor General John Oxley reached the upper Hastings River and followed it to the place known to the Birpai as Guruk but which Oxley chose to call Port Macquarie in honour of the then governor of NSW, Lachlan Macquarie.

Oxley was impressed by the richness of the district, its ample food resources and the people whom he described as 'handsome, well-made men, stout in their persons, and showing evident signs of good living.'

However, the Birpai were not destined to be left alone in their country. Following further examination of the area in 1819 and 1820 Governor Macquarie decided to establish a penal settlement at Port Macquarie and in April 1821 the newly appointed commandant, Captain Francis Allman, arrived with 40 troops and 60 convict tradesmen and labourers to prepare the settlement for the receipt of other prisoners. Over the next nine years hundreds of convicts were sent here and as the Birpai were slowly displaced some fatal conflicts took place.

Skirmishes continued after 1830 when the district was opened to free settlers who took up large swaths of land along the rivers, clearing the land for agriculture and grazing. Prisoners continued to be sent to the settlement but in 1847 the convict establishment was disbanded. By then the new settlers and original inhabitants had reached an uneasy peace under colonial laws.

Over the next ten decades, including two world wars, Port Macquarie shed its 'convict stain' but remained a relatively small coastal town. There were periods during which it flourished, others in which it slumped, driven by the social and economic circumstances of the time. It was only after World War 2 that the population began to grow, slowly at first and then rapidly to create the regional centre of today - a popular destination for retirees, tourists and students with supporting industries and facilities for everyone.

PORT MACQUARIE MUSEUM
Our Place, Our Stories

portmuseum.org.au | 02 6583 1108

Port Macquarie-Hastings
Bicentenary 2021

Supported by
PORT MACQUARIE
HASTINGS
COUNCIL

20 DECADES 21 STORIES

BICENTENARY EXHIBITION TRAIL

Follow our trail of featured objects and stories to discover how life has changed for the people of Port Macquarie over the past two hundred years.

Exhibits featured as part of the bicentenary trail are marked and display a corresponding number to the decade indicated in this brochure.

20 DECADES | 21 STORIES

PORT MACQUARIE MUSEUM
Our Place, Our Stories

1 — FIRST PEOPLES

The Birpai People are the traditional owners and custodians of this land with a connection to Country going back thousands of years. The lives and lands of the Birpai changed dramatically from 1818 when Surveyor General John Oxley arrived at the place he named Port Macquarie. Birpai People were displaced but despite this, they and their culture have survived and prospered. It is because of their thoughtful custodianship that Port Macquarie exists today.

2 — 1820s PENAL ESTABLISHMENT

At its peak Port Macquarie accommodated more than 1500 prisoners. Conditions were harsh and floggings common. Many roads and buildings were constructed. All convicts were required to work and attendance at religious services on Sundays was obligatory.

3 — 1830s LAW & ORDER

In 1832 a Court of Petty Sessions was established and several unpaid magistrates were appointed to assist the paid Police Magistrate. Although convicts were still sent here Port Macquarie began to take on the appearance of a small colonial town.

4 — 1840s FREE SETTLEMENT

A decade after the first free settlers arrived society had matured with country estates, town houses and community events. Major Archibald Innes was the leading citizen and many enjoyed the hospitality of Lake Innes House and its luxury fittings including a flush toilet bowl.

5 — 1850s EDUCATION

Until the mid-19th century basic education for children was conducted only in schools run by the churches. In 1848 the National System of public education was created and in 1852 a public school was established at Port Macquarie.

6 — 1860s TRADE & TRANSPORT

As land along the rivers was cleared and put to agricultural use the supply of produce rose quickly, stimulating an increase in trade. To reach the outlying areas by road was difficult but river transport thrived and there was an irregular steamship service to and from Sydney.
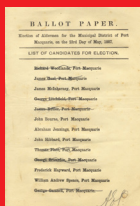
7 — 1870s SUGAR

Port Macquarie was the place that sugar was first grown in Australia. By the 1870s there were a number of plantations and several mills along the Hastings and Wilson Rivers. However, the climate proved marginal for sugar growing and the industry moved to northern NSW and Queensland.

8 — 1880s MUNICIPALITY & MEDIA

In 1887 Port Macquarie was incorporated as a municipality and a local municipal council was formed, raising the town's status in the region. The Port Macquarie News, established five years earlier, drily observed that the newly elected Mayor had been the most strenuous opponent to incorporation.

9 — 1890s TIMBER

Logging was important from the earliest days of settlement, both for building and clearing land for agriculture. Trees were felled with axes and saws, bullock teams dragged the logs on drays to steam-driven sawmills, and the sawn timber then despatched by sea and later by road.

10 — 1900s FEDERATION

For a short time prior to the federation of the Australian colonies in 1901, Edmund Barton, later the first Prime Minister, was the elected representative for the Hastings-Macleay District in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. Although residing in Sydney, Barton was enthusiastically received in Port Macquarie on the few occasions he visited the district.

11 — 1910s WORLD WAR 1

The Great War took its toll on the Port Macquarie community. Recruitment drives along the North Coast swept young men into the military. More than 400 men with local associations joined the forces. At least 56 were killed in action while others died of wounds or were left permanently disabled.

12 — 1920s COMMERCE & BANKING

Commercial activity, suppressed during the war years, picked up strongly during the decade. The front page of the News was devoted to advertisements for a wide range of businesses - banks, farm and dairy produce, furniture, insurance, building contractors, car repairs, carriers, and others.

13 — 1930s TOURISM

In 1912 a Government Minister predicted that Port Macquarie would become the Manly of the North Coast, but then the Great War and the Great Depression intervened. However, by the mid-1930s the beaches, rivers and hinterland were attracting fishers, golfers, boating enthusiasts and other pleasure-seekers to the district.

14 — 1940s WORLD WAR 2

The advent of a second World War only two decades after the end of the first again threw the district into confusion. A second generation of young men and women signed up for military and community service in Australia and overseas. At home, women made an immense contribution through organisations such as the Women's Agricultural Security Production Service (WASPS).

15 — 1950s CLUBS & CARNIVALS

Post-war recovery was slow but community spirit was strong. A Rotary Club was formed in 1948, an Apex Club in 1955, and a Lions Club in 1959. In July 1955 the first Carnival of the Pines was held. It was a huge success and became the town's premier annual event, complementing the racing, surfing and other sports carnivals held throughout the year.

16 — 1960s URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Land rezoning paved the way for new residential estates in areas previously occupied by orchards, vineyards and market gardens. Among the many estates were Clifton, the North Shore, Transit Hill, Bellevue Hill, Macquarie Heights and Riviera at Lighthouse Beach.

17 — 1970s THEME PARKS

Port Macquarie's natural attractions for holiday makers were complemented by several theme parks with entertaining activities for children and families. Fantasy Glades, King Neptune's Park, Kingfisher Park, Marbuk Park and Timbertown all offered different experiences.