

The Town of Narrogin – 100 years of Municipal Government

In April 1906, the Governor of Western Australia, Admiral Sir Frederick Bedford, signed the proclamation that created the Municipality of Narrogin. 2006 marks the centenary of the Municipality, or Town, of Narrogin and one hundred years of local government.

When Narrogin was first settled in the 1880's it was part of the Williams Road Board. In 1892 the Narrogin Road Board was created as a response to the growing population and the coming of the railway line. But as Narrogin continued to grow and prosper, there was a growing feeling that the town deserved its own local government, separate from the agricultural interests of the surrounding area. In 1905 a public meeting was held to discuss the proposal to form a municipal council, with George Lavater, Lucius Cullen and William Moss sponsoring the meeting. Public support was strong and in February 1906 a petition from ratepayers was sent to the Colonial Secretary's Office asking for the declaration of a Municipality. This was granted and proclaimed in April.

The first elections for Councillors was held on 6 June 1906. There were 13 candidates for 6 positions. The ballot paper listed them as:

- Nicholas Bushalla
- John Chipper
- John Clayton
- William Cornwall Jnr
- Lucius Cullen
- Stanley Kealley
- George Lavater
- Hugh Marsh
- Frederick Northwood
- Thomas O'Connor
- Arthur Prince
- Ebenezer Watts
- Peter Wedd

Cullen, Kealley, Marsh, Chipper, Lavater and O'Connor were elected as Councillors and William Moss became the first Mayor of Narrogin.

The first meeting of Council was held on 11 June 1906 in the Road Board office, the new council having no premises of its own at that point. The meeting was largely taken up with the election of committees for finance, works, lighting, health and bylaws. It was decided to meet every fortnight on a Monday at 7.30pm.

Money was an early concern, as the council had none of its own at that point because of the difficulty of separating the correct amount from the Road Board's rates. The Council wrote to the Colonial Treasurer asking for a special subsidy to cover the first 12 months until rates could be levied. The matter of an office and meeting rooms also occupied the Councillors' attention and a Hall Committee was formed in 1906. After much discussion

and a public meeting, a loan referendum was carried and tenders called for a loan to build a Town Hall. George Lavater drew up the plans and Hugh Marsh won the tender to build the Hall for a cost of just over £3000. The Hall was built in 1908 with the Mayoress, Mrs Moss, laying the foundation stone. A Municipal Ball was held on 8 December to celebrate the official opening of the Hall. In 1928 the Lesser Town Hall (now the Reception Centre) was built. The hall complex included the Council offices, 2 banks, the public library, tea rooms and a ladies' rest room.

The need for administrative staff for the new Council was apparent very early and an advertisement for a combined Town Clerk, Secretary and Inspector of the Board of Health was placed in the *West Australian, Herald and Observer*. The salary was £175 per annum. 43 applications were received and Mr W L Johns was chosen. The first works foreman was Mr AV Kemp. One of the priorities of the new Council was roads and the first piece of machinery purchased was a road roller for £45. Trees were planted in 1906 along many of the roads and in 1914 electric lighting was installed in the town.

Council's jurisdiction extended over a wide range of issues, including animal control. Animals were often a vexation to the Council, with goats eating the early street trees, pigs impounded, cows roaming the streets and the purchase of a town bull causing some mirth to the newspapers. Council also regulated cart and dog licenses, sanitary services, electricity and the municipal shower baths. A heated debate on the propriety of Sunday sport resulted in a referendum on the subject in 1912, with 166 people voting against it and only 121 in favour.

By 1914 the population served by the Council had almost doubled from its original size of around 750 to just under 1400. Regular ratepayers' meetings were held, even if attendance was low. The *Great Southern Leader* noted in June 1914 that the half-yearly meeting had only an attendance of 2 or 3 ratepayers and one of the few unpoisoned dogs in the town. Loans were being raised for roads and footpaths and legal action undertaken to recover unpaid rates.

Mr Moss was succeeded as Mayor over the next 20 years by a number of able and energetic men, including Michael Brown and Dr Mackie. Narrogin's growth and potential were recognised all over the state and glowing reports in state newspapers referred to Narrogin as "The Ballarat of the West".

Appeals for the Belgian Relief Fund were managed by Council during World War I and celebrations for the end of the war were held in Mackie Park. An evening of entertainment for the ratepayers was organized in 1919 in aid of the War Patriotic Fund, featuring Councillors reciting and singing. The agenda included an "Adjournment to Inspect the Village Pump" and concluded with "God Save the King! (and help us when we get home)". The influenza epidemic of 1919 was rife in Narrogin and Dr Mackie, Mayor at that time, broke down under the strain of dealing with it. In 1920 the Town advertised for a Bandmaster and organizer for the proposed Narrogin Brass Band. In 1921 owners and drivers of stock were sternly reminded that driving stock through Federal, Fathom, Fortune and Egerton Streets was prohibited and offenders would be prosecuted.

In 1926 the Municipality celebrated its 20th anniversary with a formal dinner, dining on giblet soup, roast turkey, ham, lamb and sirloin, mashed potato, salad and beetroot, with lemon jelly, wine trifle and angels' food for dessert.

The First Mayor – William Moss

William Edward Carew Moss was born in New Zealand in 1864, son of Frederick Joseph Moss and his wife Emily Ann Carew. He was educated in New Zealand and joined the Lands and Survey Department in 1880 as a Cadet and qualified as an Authorised Surveyor in 1884. He then went to Tasmania and Victoria, working in the field of railway location and construction. He then came to WA and spent most of his active career as a surveyor here, becoming a foundation member of the West Australian Institute of Surveyors. In 1892 he returned to New Zealand and in 1898 he married Norah Alicia Hull. When the Coolgardie goldfields opened up, he returned to WA and joined the Public Works Department in the survey and construction of the railway and pipeline. Later he went into private practice and undertook contract surveys for the Lands Department. During this time, he became involved in Narrogin civic affairs and became the first Mayor, serving from 1906 to 1909. He later left Narrogin and went to New Zealand for a period, before returning to WA and living in Perth. He died in 1931 and was buried at Karrakatta. Moss Park and Moss Street are named in his honour.