Wagga Wagga Borough Town Hall

This building was originally built as the Wagga Wagga Borough Town Hall between 1881 and 1882. During the middle of the 20th Century it became affectionately known as the Old Council Chamber. Today it forms one of the sites of the Museum of the Riverina.

Wagga Wagga becomes a Municipality

Once Wagga Wagga was proclaimed a Municipal Borough on 15th March 1870, which effectively gave the people of the village the right to administer their own local civic affairs, there was a need for a seat of local government.

Initially the Council met in the Wagga Wagga Court House, the first meeting being held on the 20th June 1870, and later on the property of Mr. F A Tompson in Sturt Street. Tompson was an important local citizen who influenced the life of Wagga Wagga for nearly fifty years. An early squatter (1832), the town's first clerk of petty sessions (1848), postmaster (1849), businessmen (1850/60s) and the first Council Clerk (1870-1882). Tompson was today's equivalent of the City Manager.

Architect and Style

In 1880 the Council resolved to build a Town Hall offering 100 pounds to the best competitive design. The winning architect was Mr. William Salway from Melbourne. The Town Hall was built in a period known in Australia as the "High Victorian" era (1879-1892). The building has a grand portico entrance with Gothic pillars and pediment housing the Royal Coat of Arms of Queen Victoria. These features, together with the arches over the windows, moulded parapet, hiding the corrugated iron roof, and double cedar doors, create a formal and dignified impression befitting the city's primary public space.

The Builder – Charles Hardy

Charles Hardy who built the Wagga Wagga Borough Town Hall was responsible for most of the major buildings in Wagga Wagga after 1875. These included private homes, churches, school buildings, railway stations, banks and flourmills.

Born in Dorset, England, he served his apprenticeship in London before arriving in Melbourne in 1854 as a twenty-one year old. He married Ellen Downey. He established his joinery works in 1862. Charles served as a Councillor for Wagga Wagga during the following periods, 1874-77,1883-89, 1899-1908 and was Mayor of the town in 1902-03.

In addition to building the Town Hall (1881/82) some of his other buildings include:

Gurwood Street Public School and Residence (1872)

David Copland's Hall of Commerce (1872)

Bank of New South Wales (1874)

Wagga Wagga Railway Station (1879/80)

Changes to the Building

Since it was built in 1881/82 for 2 435 pounds the building has undergone the following changes:

- 1925/26 Two new rooms were added to the Morrow Street frontage. The extensions were built by G. Broadford for 459 pounds.

- 1927/28 Two new rooms were added to the Baylis Street frontage at a cost of 3 378 pounds. Hardy & Co. were the builders.

- 1938/39 Extra offices, constructed by Council and local contractors, were added to the east of the 1927/28 extensions. These were demolished in 1966.

- 1966/67 Council Chamber renovated and new Civic Administration Centre built. The latter was demolished in 1997 to make way for the current Civic Centre.

- 1998/9 Building adapted for museum use in association with the brand new $22 million Civic Centre adjacent to it.