

THE HISTORY

of the

KIAMA INDEPENDENT

from 1863 to 1949

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THE KIAMA INDEPENDENT.

The Kiama Independent has a rather unique history in that it was commenced as a result of a public meeting and that during its 86 years of existence it has remained in the control of the Weston family.

The first newspaper in Kiama was the "Examiner" which first saw the light of day in ¹⁸⁵⁸ 1859. However due to being involved in a libel action became insolvent and was purchased by and incorporated with the Wollongong "Illawarra Mercury".

However the people of Kiama were not satisfied with the arrangement and at a public meeting a committee of 20 was formed which issued a prospectus of a weekly Journal to be called the "Kiama Independent" which read:

"The Committee by public meeting appointed to conserve the interests of Kiama by the publication of this new serial are of opinion that the residence of the proprietor, and the printing of the Examiner in Wollongong (x) and the consequent loss in the circulating medium together with the fact that one whose residence and interests are at a distance, cannot be expected to represent the rights and interests of Kiama satisfactorily, and that these with several other disadvantages will be entirely removed by the printing on the spot of the Kiama Independent. The committee also felt, that in a district like Kiama, having such large resources and so public

(x) This was the old spelling of Wollongong.

spirited a population a local newspaper must be a kind of social necessity. The people of this prosperous Community are well able and the committee believe, right willing to support a newspaper of their own. And that although an effort to establish a local newspaper has, after a struggle for several years, proved a failure, this fact should not deter them from entering the literary, political, scientific, and moral progress arena. The committee feel that the people of the whole district now fully realise the loss they sustain in not having a paper of their own, a paper printed on the spot and containing copious reports of district news up to the moment of going to press. And are sure that a little energy on the part of proprietors, and a little public spirit on the part of the public, will be the means of founding in Kiama a local paper which shall be inferior to no provincial journal in the whole Colong. The proprietors of the Kiama Independent will, in political matters, maintain a liberal and independent policy, while they will readily and unreservedly open their columns to a candid and temperate discussion of all public questions of interest. The committee in laying this prospectus before the public deem it right to state that capital to the amount of nearly £300 is required to purchase the necessary plant for carrying out their undertaking. And also to inform them that the members of said committee will personally canvass the entire district to obtain subscribers to the Kiama Independent and the subscription in advance from those who wish its success and are able. Secondly, to collect as a loan the £300 capital

In the early Eighties the farmers of the district were

required to be paid back in full."

Mr. Joseph Weston who had arrived in Australia from England in 1856 undertook the proprietorship of the venture. Being a carpenter by trade he took into partnership with him a Robert Barr who was a printer.

The first issue was made on ^{7th} 1st July, 1863 priced at 6d per copy and comprised 4 pages 18" x 24". Publication day was ^{TUESDAY} Thursday

The paper was printed on a "Columbian" hand press, very little different in design from the first printing press used by Caxton when Printing was introduced to England. This press was purchased for £28.10.0 and is still in use as a proof press.

In March 1869 Robert Barr commenced an opposition paper the Kiama Pilot which had a brief existence of about 5 years.

To meet the threat of a possibility of the establishment of another opposition the Independent was issued twice a week as from 23rd March 1876 and the price reduced from 6d to 3d per copy. Publication day was altered to Tuesday and Friday Mornings.

However this did not prevent the establishment of the Kiama Reporter by Mr. C. Watson the following year.

~~About this time~~ an Ulverstonian Cylinder press replaced the hand press. ^{from 1868} At first this was driven by two men turning a handle which in turn drove the press. On Friday 26th May 1877 the first issue was printed with a newly installed steam engine.

In a leading article on 1st June 1877 it was stated that the circulation had increased following the adoption of 3 issues a week and that all the loan raised for the establishment of the paper had been repaid.

In the early Eighties the farmers of the district were

experiencing very poor returns for their butter which was being marketed by Commission Agents in Sussex St. Sydney. All these Commission Agents advertised in the Independent, but, to quote Mr. Arthur Cousins in his "Garden of N.S.W." "Joseph Weston put himself in the forefront of a crusade to take the trade away from these agents and put it in the hands of an agency controlled by the framers themselves. He published a series of articles in the "Independent" giving an account of the success of the Co-operative Movement in England. With Messrs D.L. Dynock and G. Porter he visited Illawarra, Shoalhaven and Camden urging the farmers to co-operate and control the marketing of their own dairy products."

The adoption of this principle in the Illawarra District led through various stages to the establishment of the Producers Distributing Society and the Dairy Farmers Milk Co. which in Sydney today handle dairy produce worth £20,000,000 per annum.

Joseph Weston was also one of the first directors of the Kiama Pioneer Co-operative Produce Co. which built the first co-operative butter factory in Australia at Kiama.

In 1883 the office premises became too small and the present building 60 feet x 20 feet and of two storeys was built, and was opened on 21st August with a social evening.

In 1893 the "Independent" was issued three times a week on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, but this was not a success and in 1900 reverted to twice a week on Tuesdays & Fridays.

A second opposition paper the "South Coast Chronicle" appeared in 1893 but only lasted 3 months.

On 1st July 1907 the publication days were again changed this

time to Wednesday and Saturday and a few years later a vertical gas engine replaced the steam engine which had given good service for more than 30 years.

After the death of Joseph Weston in February 1913 the business reverted to his family, John and Joseph, Mary and Eleanor.

This year also saw the introduction of a typesetting machine. A German Typograph was installed in October at a cost of £400. This machine cast a line similar to the present linotype, but the operation was much slower as the matrices were distributed before another line could be commenced.

Joseph Weston Jnr. sold his share to the remaining partners in 1915 and after a few difficult years during World War 1 they purchased the Kiama Reporter in 1920. During the War the "Independent" had been fortunate in having good stocks of Newsprint and did not have to pay more than £40 a ton for it. On the other hand the proprietors of the "Reporter", Messrs A.H. Gale and Son had paid up to £110 a ton and this largely contributed to their decision to sell.

The "Reporter" was not incorporated in the "Independent", but continued as a separate paper published on Wednesday, whilst the "Independent" was published on Saturdays. This arrangement continued until 1947, when the "Reporter" was incorporated in the "Independent", the latter being published on Wednesday and Saturday.

When the electricity was extended to Kiama in 1925 an electric motor replaced the gas engine for motive power, whilst in more recent years a petrol engine has been installed as an auxiliary plant in case of power failures.

The year 1929 saw a big change. A model 14 Linotype with

four sizes of type replaced the typograph and a few weeks later a Payne Double Royal Cylinder Press replaced the Ulverstonian Press which was accepted by the Sydney Technical Museum as one of the oldest of its type in Australia.

In 1940, due to the newsprint shortage caused by World War II the paper was reduced to a 6 page tabloid of a page size of 12" x 18"

Since 1929 more equipment has been added to the Linotype so that the whole of the newspaper is now machine set, and only very occasionally is a hand set line used.

Miss Mary Weston died in 1936 and her brother John 10 years later. The paper is now conducted by their surviving sister Miss Eleanor Weston and John Weston's only son Albert John Weston.

It is interesting to note that the objects of the paper as enumerated in the prospectus has been carried out right throughout its history, and the present policy (in 1949) is still non-sectarian and unbiased politically.

THE KIAMA EXAMINER

The Kiama Examiner was started with a second hand plant by Robert Barr. The first issue appeared on 24th April, 1868 and was issued each Saturday, the price being 6d per copy. It consisted of 4 pages 18"x24" and was printed in premises in Shoalhaven Street.

On 3rd July, the proprietor announced that "at considerable expense he had imported some of the most beautiful machinery ever introduced into printing business in N.S.W., which for speed and execution of work stands unrivalled."

On 18th December, 1868 the Examiner printed an article attacking Alexander Berry M.L.C. for threatening to denounce the Rev. M. Garven to the Presbyterian Synod if he allowed Rev. John Dunmore Lang, who was at that time under suspension by the Synod, to preach in the Church at Shoalhaven. Dr. Lang who was a strong advocate of land reform would be bitterly opposed to Berry who had acquired an estate of 80 square miles.

The article appears to have been inspired, if not written by Dr. Lang, who wrote a letter in similar terms to the Illawarra Mercury the same week. This letter was also reprinted in the Examiner. Both articles were of a very personal nature suggesting that Berry was "approaching second childhood" and stating that he was "a heartless and determined oppressor of his fellow men" and was "a wicked and cruel landlord".

As could be expected Berry sued Dr. Lang, Thomas Garrett proprietor of the Mercury and the Examiner for libel.

All three were found guilty and Berry was awarded damages of £150 against the Mercury and £200 against the Examiner.

The latter case was heard before Mr. Justice Dickinson and a jury of 12 in the Supreme Court, Sydney on 16th August 1859

The next day Robert Barr sold the Examiner by public auction presumably to meet the costs of the case and Mr. W. Vance became the owner.

Due to this upset the Saturday's issue was of only 2 pages and continued as such until 22nd October. Barr continued as printer of the paper.

On 8th October William Irving became the proprietor and on 24th December it was announced that from the beginning of 1860 the paper would be issued twice a week.

Files of the Examiner, now in the Mitchell Library are incomplete and the next issue preserved is that of 8th January 1861 when David L. Waugh of Jamberoo and William D Meares Junior of Kiama were the proprietors and the paper had reverted to a weekly published on Tuesday.

During the early part of 1863 the proprietor of the Illawarra Mercury purchased the Examiner and in-corporated it with the Mercury.

KIAMA PILOT.

The Kiama Pilot was established in March 1867 by Robert Barr and W.C. Logan. It was published each Thursday and was priced at 4d. It consisted of 4 pages 18" x 24"

In 1869 Robert Barr became the sole proprietor.

References to the Pilot can be traced in the Independent files until 19th October 1871 and in an old bank book is a record that Barr paid his last wages on 30th December 1871 and then had only 17/9 in his account. Other transactions continued for several months before the account was closed.

Presumably the Pilot ceased publication on 30th December 1871 due to financial difficulties.

Robert Barr. was born 1814. at Londonderry, Ireland. and came to N.S.W. about 1847. He was a son of Robert Barr a blacksmith and Ann Mrs Barr. nee Ann. Diver.

In 1840 he married Mary McLaughlin at Derry Ireland. He died on 9th November, 1879. and then had three daughters and was buried at Kiama and one son living.

This son. Robert James Barr, who as a lad set type for the Independent in 18 Dec. 1863. lived in Kyamba in 1879.

KIAMA REPORTER.

The Kiama Reporter was commenced in 1877 by Charles Isaac Watson.

Only fragments of the files remain, but apparently Watson sold the paper about 1881 or 1882 to S. Major, a local storekeeper, who in turn sold it to C.D. Young on 12th August. 1887.

However, Young disposed of the paper to George Dinning and James A. McDermott on 2nd November of the same year.

On 19th March Alfred Weston Bullen, nephew of the proprietor and foreman on the Independent staff left the Independent to purchase McDermott's share.

Later A.W. Bullen became the sole proprietor and about 1914 sold the Reporter to A.H. Gale & son who in 1920 sold the title and stock to the Kiama Independent for £60.

A. H. Gale was a son of John Gale of Junee. (Verbal information not verified.)

SOUTH COAST CHRONICLE.

The South Coast Chronicle was founded by Joseph Findlay and James E Gollan, both of whom had previously worked on the Kiama Independent.

The first issue appeared on 5th October 1895 and consisted of 8 pages 12" x 18" and sold for 1d per copy.

The paper had only a short existence, so far as can be ascertained ceased publication in January or February 1896

Kiama Observer.

March & May
In 1886. there is a mention in the files of a Mr. Wilson
being proprietor of a paper called the Observer, but other than that
I have no I know nothing about it. at that time the both
the Reporter and Independent would make competition keen and
it did probably did not last very long.

KIAMA SENTINEL

In 1930 the Kiama Sentinel was published by J. Atcher proprietor of the South Coast Register at Berry and was circulated free at Kiama.

Leo O'Dwyer was the editor and it consisted of 4 pages 12" x 18".

The publication lasted only 15 months.

The files were destroyed in a fire at the Register Office.