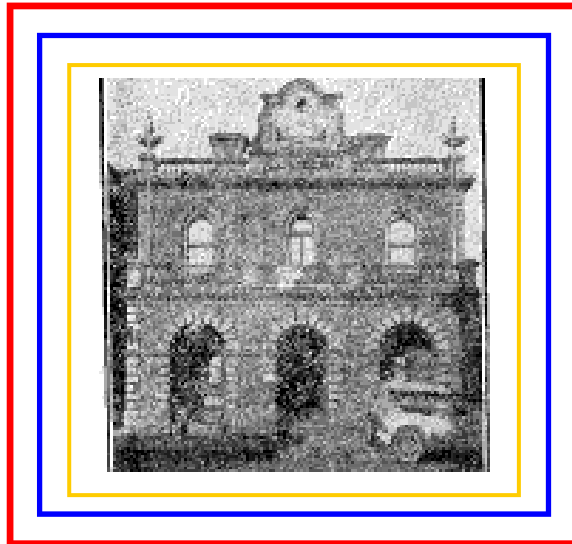




TOWN OF GAWLER

Gawler Town Hall



Gawler Town Hall, c 1927
(Town of Gawler, Gawler Heritage Collection)

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During 1868, the first discussions were held in Council about the need to build a town hall but it was not until 1878, after years of controversy, that a site was chosen and the building constructed.

An offer of land came from Mr John McEwin, licensee of the Prince Albert Hotel, in August 1868. He was prepared to donate land worth £1000 situated next to the Prince Albert Hotel in Murray Street on which to build an Institute, Town Hall, Council Chamber and Corporation Offices. However, the condition under which the offer was made (a building to the value of £5000 to be erected within three years) was not acceptable to Council and it was rejected. This action resulted in a no-confidence motion in the Council and calls for resignations, which the councillors ignored. A number of meetings were held and polls were taken but still the councillors refused to resign and still they stood by their decision to reject John McEwin's offer. He eventually withdrew his offer 'as the ratepayers had signified their want of confidence in the Council and had called on them to resign, therefore he did not recognise them as representing the town'.
(*The Bunyip*, 3 October 1868, p. 3)

Four years passed before the matter of the Town Hall was again considered. The mayor at the time, Mr T. O. Jones, suggested a site on Lyndoch Road but the plan was rejected. In June 1873, Councillor Bradley was keen to build a Council Chamber in North Market Square. Apparently no-one else was keen as nothing came of his suggestion. Not to be deterred, in 1875, Councillor Bradley moved a motion that

Council borrow £1500 to build a Council Chamber, dwelling house and shed on a site on Lyndoch Road. This was carried unanimously but there was doubt about the suggested amount. Once again, disagreement arose over the site and a meeting of ratepayers called for another poll to be held. The majority voted for use of the Northern Market Allotment but when a legal opinion was sought it was discovered that the Trust Deed conveyed to the Council in 1864 prevented anything other than a market being built on the land as that was its allocated purpose in the original town plan of 1839.



Gawler Town Hall, date unknown
(Town of Gawler, Gawler Heritage Collection)

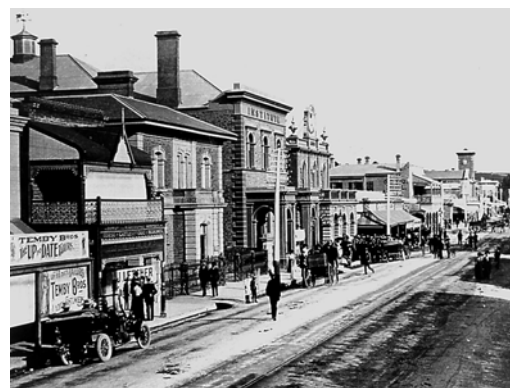
Once again, the matter dropped until February 1877 when Councillor Malcolm proposed that a site be chosen to build a Council Chamber. On this occasion, the Southern Market Allotment was considered as Council already owned the land. This was rejected and a counter proposal was considered and accepted by Council to use a portion of the Park Lands, opposite Walker Place. More disagreement followed, another poll of ratepayers was taken and again the matter was reconsidered with the majority voting for the purchase of land in Murray Street. The site next to the Institute (now Gawler Public Library) was finally chosen and a competition, won by Mr W. Abbott, was held for the design of the building. Mr James Peek of Gawler South was the successful tenderer for the construction of the building; he entered into a contract to complete the work within seven months commencing on 1 January 1878.

The foundation stone was laid by the Mayor of Gawler, James Martin, on 16 April 1878. He was presented with an engraved silver trowel and an ebony mallet (on display in the Gawler Public Library Reading Room) to commemorate the occasion. The grand opening on 20 November 1878 created much excitement in the town and houses and businesses along Murray Street were decorated for the occasion. Schools and shops were closed for a half-holiday and dignitaries including the Governor, Sir William Jervis (accompanied by his wife and family), travelled from Adelaide on a special train to perform the official opening.

The first Council meeting held in the new building was on 25 November 1878. James Martin gave a summary of the works carried out by Council in the preceding two years and then resigned from the office of mayor. Three Councillors (Malcolm, Ferguson and Bright) also resigned but Bright was persuaded to stay on and run for mayor, which he won in the elections of 1878.



Horse-drawn tram at Town Hall, ca. 1915.
(Town of Gawler, Gawler Heritage Collection)



Murray Street, Gawler with
Town Hall in centre of photograph, ca. 1920.
(Town of Gawler, Gawler Heritage Collection)

Some interesting and notable people have visited the Gawler Town Hall since it was opened in 1878:



(Town of Gawler, Gawler Heritage Collection)

On 22 July 1918 Gawler welcomed a party of 100 French Soldiers who were returning to New Caledonia on furlough from France. They were collected from the railway station in private cars, treated to a civic reception at the Town Hall, given afternoon tea in the Institute and then taken for a short drive to view the countryside.

His Excellency the Governor Sir Henry Lionel Galway, KCMG, DSO visited Gawler on 3 November 1917 to attend Gawler's Great Gala Day which was organised by the Red Cross Society to aid the War effort. One of the events of the day was a luncheon held in the Town Hall in honour of the Governor, to which 60 prominent gentlemen were invited.



(Town of Gawler, Gawler Heritage Collection)



(National Library of Australia, nla.pic-vn3600221)

John Curtin MHR and Federal Leader of the Opposition (centre), Mr Thompson (left) and Mr R S Richards, SA Leader of the Opposition (right) at Gawler Town Hall, 21 November 1938. John Curtin visited Gawler to launch the Labor campaign for the by-election in the seat of Wakefield for which the Labor nominee was Sydney McHugh.

References:

Coombe, E. H. *History of Gawler 1837-1908*.

Treloar, Wendy *Corporation of the Town of Gawler: the first fifty years*.

The Bunyip.

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