

THE FEDERAL HOTEL BOURKE

The Federal Hotel, a landmark in Bourke's history, was built in 1892 and became a centrepiece of the town's social life for over nine decades. Its journey, marked by both prosperity and tragedy, reflects the ups and downs of Bourke's past, from boom times to economic hardships, experiencing two devastating fires, and a series of remarkable personalities who kept the place vibrant.

Edward Mann Luscombe, who arrived in Australia from England in 1874, was the mastermind behind the Federal Hotel. After initially leasing and running the Royal Hotel on the Culgoa River with his brother Louis, Edward moved to Bourke in 1888 and built the Post Office Hotel on Oxley Street. He sold that establishment in 1892 and set about constructing the Federal Hotel on the corner of Mitchell and Warraweena Streets, a location that would serve the community for the next 91 years.

The Luscombe family managed the hotel for 35 years, with Edward holding the license until he died in 1915, followed by his wife Helen and later their sons Richard and Walter, who sold the hotel in 1927. The Federal Hotel quickly became a hub for travellers, locals, and workers, who flocked to its bar and rooms. Yet, the hotel also witnessed its share of dark moments—such as the tragic suicide of a boarder found near the cemetery in 1897 and a ferocious “Darling Shower” storm in 1902 that unroofed the hotel's stables.

In 1900, the hotel found itself at the centre of a local scandal when a man was convicted of assault and robbery in the hotel's backyard, receiving a two-year prison sentence. Despite such incidents, the Federal thrived, weathering challenges like the implementation of the 6 o'clock closing law during World War I, which impacted hotels across New South Wales. The Luscombe family continued to run the hotel until 1927, just after a fatal car accident involving Richard Luscombe and the death of his two passengers underscored the dangers of the era's rudimentary roads and automobiles.

After 1927, a series of licensees took over the Federal Hotel, each leaving their mark on its storied history. In 1929, major renovations improved the premises, and in 1934 Garnet Martin took over the license, steering the hotel through the Great Depression and the start of World War II. Bourke's population swelled in the late 1930s with the opening of Tancred's Abattoirs, and the Federal Hotel became a popular watering hole for meatworkers who lived nearby.

Licensees from 1927 to 1954 were Peter Nee (1927), Garn Martin (1934), Dan Ryan (1948), and Leonard Samuel (1954).

A colourful chapter in the hotel's history unfolded when Ivor Sheridan, an internationally renowned operatic tenor, took over management in 1954 with his brother Len. Sheridan had performed in some of the world's greatest opera houses and even had a royal encounter with King George at a performance in London. His presence added a touch of glamour to the Federal, but the brothers sold the establishment two years later to Clarrie Freeman who lifted the popularity of the establishment to another level with his support of most Bourke Sporting organisations. He also introduced a social club with popular pool and darts competitions.

In 1960, a fire destroyed the stables and garage of the Federal Hotel, but worse was yet to come. On January 4, 1963, the hotel itself was ravaged by flames in a catastrophic fire that reduced the weatherboard building to ashes. The blaze left only the cool room and an adjoining bedroom standing. Despite this, the Federal rose from the ashes. A temporary bar was erected, and by January 1964, a modern new hotel had been built on the same site under the management of Clarence Usher.

The Federal Hotel continued to thrive into the 1970s, with publicans like Raymond Monley (1965), Edward Kissner (1968), and Kevin Chuck (1974) keeping the traditions alive. However, in 1983, under the ownership of Robert Egan, a second fire dealt the final blow, and the Federal Hotel was once again destroyed. This

time, the damage was irreparable, and the hotel's long history as a gathering place for Bourke's residents came to a close.

Throughout its history, the Federal Hotel attracted a colourful mix of patrons. Some of Bourke's most notorious jokers made the bar their home. Kenneth Brian "Boxer" Collins, a local undertaker, loved to tease drinkers by measuring them for their coffins, warning them that their habits would soon see them in his care. Legendary horse trainer Bobby Jackson once threw a live snake onto the bar, causing a panicked stampede. Another memorable moment saw a disgruntled wife storm into the hotel and throw her husband's clothes all over the floor, declaring to the cheering patrons that he might as well live there if he spent so much time at the bar.

Today, the site where the Federal Hotel once stood operates as the Darling River Motel, but the stories of the Federal live on. From its early days under Edward Luscombe's watchful eye to the glamorous era of the "singing publican" Ivor Sheridan, the hotel was a place where history was made—sometimes in the headlines, sometimes in the quiet moments of everyday life. Its legacy endures as part of the rich tapestry of Bourke's past.



The Federal Hotel 1909 – Edward Mann Luscombe

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The Federal Hotel before the 1963 Fire



The Federal Hotel rebuilt after the 1963 Fire