

THE TELEGRAPH HOTEL - MITCHELL STREET BOURKE

The Telegraph Hotel, a venerable relic of Bourke's bustling past, is about to celebrate its 150th year, existing as one of the oldest buildings still standing in the town. Its story is a reflection of the rise, fall and recovery of Bourke, a town that once thrived as a commercial hub along the Darling River.

Built in 1875 by Matthew Good, the Telegraph Hotel was strategically placed in the heart of Mitchell Street, which was then the town's main thoroughfare. The hotel was next to Mr. Adolph's large store, creating a focal point for commerce and social life in a town that was booming with activity. During this period, the block between Sturt and Charles Streets developed rapidly, with shops of all sorts on either side, complemented by the Tattersall's Hotel at one end and the Red Lion Brewery at the other. The Telegraph Hotel located in the middle of the block was an integral part of this vibrant landscape. Matthew Good owned most of the shops located on the opposite side of his hotel.

However, from 1890 Bourke's fortunes began to shift, and with time, the town experienced a series of downturns. Fires, floods, and the slow march of time claimed many of the businesses and buildings that once lined Mitchell Street. Mr. Adolph's store, which had been a prominent neighbour of the Telegraph Hotel, collapsed in the devastating 1890 flood, an event that also tested the resilience of the Telegraph itself. Arthur Meadows, who held the hotel's license from 1886 to 1891, faced the full brunt of this natural disaster, which inundated much of the town and led to the destruction of numerous houses and shops.

In 1891, Charles Drew took over the license, operating the hotel with Miss Nellie Drew. The hotel served not only as a place of rest and refreshment but also as a venue for more sombre occasions, with two coroner's inquests into Darling River drowning deaths being held there during Drew's tenure. By 1895, Charles Drew had moved on to the Great Western Hotel in Richard Street, and Matthew Good's son, Francis (Frank) Good, took over the Telegraph. Frank's time as licensee was marked by the challenges of the great Federation drought, which led to a severe economic downturn in Bourke. Many residents left town, and businesses shuttered their doors.

Despite the hardships, the Telegraph Hotel persisted. In 1900, Charles Campbell assumed the lease and license, steering the hotel through the tail end of the drought. Three years later, Francis (Frank) Tidmarsh became the licensee, attracting a loyal clientele through his involvement in various sporting organizations.

The hotel changed hands again in 1906, with L.S. Donohoe briefly holding the license before it was taken over by Joseph Stanton Donohoe, a well-known businessman and former mayor of Bourke. Joseph had previously run the Family Hotel and the Gladstone Hotel, and he brought his experience to the Telegraph. Sadly, his tenure was cut short when he died in 1908, leaving the hotel in the hands of his wife, Rebecca. Rebecca, overcome by grief, passed away just fourteen months later, in 1910.

Thomas Rice took up the reins after Rebecca's death, giving the aging hotel a much-needed renovation. However, his time as licensee was marred by a legal issue in 1911, when he was fined for selling brandy that was deemed unfit for consumption. Rice's story ended tragically as well, as he succumbed to typhoid in 1914, while still holding the hotel's license.

The Good family, which had been so closely tied to the hotel's early history, also faced tragedy. Matthew Good, the hotel's original builder, had long retired and battled illness and blindness before passing away in 1909. His son, Frank, who had also run the hotel, tragically ended his life in 1914, overwhelmed by business difficulties and eye problems similar to those that had plagued his father.

The Telegraph Hotel continued to operate under the management of Joseph Barry, who took over in 1915. However, the winds of change were blowing through New South Wales, and in 1924, the hotel was delicensed under government legislation aimed at reducing the number of hotel licenses. The Telegraph

was one of seven hotels in Bourke to lose its license, alongside the Australian Hotel at North Bourke, the Union Hotel in Sturt Street, Tattersall's Hotel, the Gladstone Hotel, the Jolly Waggoner's Hotel, and the Caledonian Hotel, all in Mitchell Street. During Barry's tenure, the hotel also experienced the restrictions of the six o'clock closing time, leading to the notorious "six o'clock swill."

Following its delicensing, the Telegraph Hotel was repurposed as an accommodation facility. Today, it continues to serve that function, known now as the Riverside Motel, a testament to the resilience and enduring legacy of one of Bourke's oldest and most storied buildings.



The Old Telegraph Hotel – photo taken about 1925

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The Tattersall's Hotel



The Riverview Motel



Adolph's Shop before the Telegraph was built
It was located on the eastern side of the hotel



The row of old shops opposite the Telegraph Hotel
Most were owned by Matthew Good in the 1800s



Lindsay's Red Lion Brewery