

CORAMBA VILLAGE HERITAGE WALK



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NOTE: the Coramba Village Heritage Walk is 4 km long and takes approximately 1 ½ hours to complete. The walk involves some hilly terrain. Those not able to negotiate hills are advised not to attempt the walk.

Meaning of 'Coramba': Sight of the sea

Coramba is 15 km from Coffs Harbour and one of the earliest settlements on the Coffs Coast. The original Aboriginal inhabitants were the Bagawa people whose territory covered the Orara Valley, Moonee and Coffs Harbour.

Timber-getters arrived in the 1850s looking for cedar or 'red gold' of which the area had a plentiful supply. The cut logs were rafted down the Orara and Nymboida Rivers to Coutts Crossing to be then shipped to Sydney from Grafton. Later they were carted overland to Coffs Creek and floated out to sea.

In the 1870s regulations on the harvesting of cedar were imposed to preserve the remaining timber, leading to the first forest reserves being proclaimed and the demise of an industry already in decline. However, the timber-getters had been instrumental in building roads, clearing land and opening up the dense forests (and fertile farming districts) to settlers.





In 1883 government surveyors arrived in the Orara and in 1886 the area was made available for selection in parcels of 50–60 acres (20–25 ha). The first selector was Eugene Rudder followed by a group of settlers from Wollombi in the Hunter Valley. William Gale was another early settler whose selection included the site of Coramba township (the main street bears his name).



The rich soils were ideal for dairy farming and, in addition, in 1881 gold was discovered, prompting the creation of Coramba as the permanent location for a police constable and a mining warden's office. Following the end of cedar-gathering, the area became known for its large reserves of native hardwoods.

In 1906 a new local government area was formed called the Dorrigo Shire. As the geographical centre, Coramba became its headquarters for a time, with council chambers built in 1914.



The next major boost to the local economy came with the arrival of the railway in 1922. Following WWII, however, the timber and dairying industries declined along with the growth of the town.

Today Coramba remains a quiet, residential village surrounded by small farms and has retained much of its historic charm and character.

Start at the car park of the Hampden Hotel, 17–21 Gale Street.

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Hampden Hotel, 17–21 Gale Street (1940)

This is the third hotel building on this site. The first, single-storey hotel was built by Joseph Murphy in 1895. In 1900 he sold to Thomas Martin who added to it several times to create a sprawling two-storey hotel. After selling to E C Brooks in 1909, Martin re-acquired the hotel in 1912 after Brooks' sudden death. In 1923 it was sold to W T Johnson who also owned the Fitzroy Hotel in Coffs. During 1938–1940 the hotel was leased to a brewery. In 1940 the weatherboard hotel was destroyed by fire and the current brick-rendered hotel was built. The current building is a striking example of Moderne architecture in a township notable for its timber buildings. It features rendered walls,

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curved corners, a stepped asymmetrical facade with Art Deco styling, and a suspended awning over the footpath. The facade is intact and one of the most prominent buildings in the town.

***Cross at the pedestrian crossing and
proceed along Gale Street.***

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Cattle brand bollards

Along Gale Street you will see several sets of timber bollards. Installed by Coffs Harbour City Council, they display the cattle brands of Coramba's early pioneering families.

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3 Mr Martin's five houses (c1900)

Thomas Martin, the publican, owned the land east of the hotel, on which he built five houses and rented out. The sole survivor at 7 Gale Street retains its original appearance visible in early photos.

4 St Therese of the Little Flower church, 6–10 Gale Street (1927)

This picturesque 'Carpenter's Gothic' Roman Catholic church was built in 1927 on land where the first Coramba Butter Factory stood until 1925. The distinctive braced posts underneath the church rest on the concrete slab floor of the former butter factory.

Work on a new church began well before the sale of the site to the Catholic Church in 1925. In May 1921 an energetic local church building committee was formed to oversee the construction and

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furnishing of the church. The church was designed by Lismore architect, Mr Board and built by D J Ross of Bonville. Messrs Mulhearn donated the timber valued at 70 pounds and free transport was provided by the O'Hanlon Bros.

The foundation stone was laid by Bishop Carroll on 28 November 1926 and the finished church was opened by Bishop Carroll on 13 March 1927. At this time, many Roman Catholic churches were dedicated to St Therese of Lisieux, who had been sainted in 1925.

The church cost 1152 pounds and while this exceeded the estimate for furnishings, the excess expenditure was justified by the committee on the grounds they 'thought it would be best to have furniture in keeping with the building'.

A local newspaper provided the following description on its opening: 'The new church is undoubtedly a fine little edifice with a beautiful situation. It is lofty and well ventilated, with a well-pitched roof. Its construction is of hardwood, with windows of stained glass. The furnishings and fittings are in keeping with the building, which is lined with Dorrigo plum. The interior is roomy

and comfortable and sound carries well in it. In the front is an entrance porch, and at the back the sacristy on one side and priest's room on the other.'

The original interior survives with its dark varnished timber-lined walls, pews and stained glass and the church, dramatically situated at the start of Gale Street with views across the Orara Valley, is a local landmark and one of Coffs Harbour's prettiest churches.

This is the first of the many churches, public buildings and houses on this walk, made out of local hardwood by local tradesmen. The Coffs area has a large number of small, picturesque, timber churches, built within a short period of time following permanent settlement of the Coffs Coast.

Cross Gale Street and proceed to the intersection of Duncans Bridge Road.

5 Former Methodist Church, 2 Duncans Bridge Road (1907–1908)

Services were originally held in the home of A E Pryor. On 3 July 1907 parishioners sought approval to build churches in the Upper Orara and Coramba. Both Coramba and the Upper

Orara churches were completed in mid-1908 and are very similar to each other. In 1977 it became a Uniting Church and later closed on 9 June 1988. The church now forms part of a private residence.

Proceed across Coramba Bridge, pausing mid-way.

6 Site of the timber Allan truss bridge (1922, demolished 2010)

Alongside the current bridge once stood a timber Allan truss bridge. In the 1920s the NSW Dept of Public Works built a bridge across the Orara River at the same time as the North Coast Railway Line was under construction. Made from local timbers, it was designed by PWD engineer, Percy Allan whose name is now synonymous with a series of over 100 timber truss bridges built in the 1920s. The current bridge was built in 2003.

7 Coramba 'beach'

From the bridge you can see a pretty section of the Orara River which is a popular swimming place for locals. In 1910 the Town and Country Journal described it as 'this cool and inviting stream winds its way through shaded

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places, its dark pools, in which the heavy shadows riot in strange designs, lending a placid beauty to the scene’.

Continue to the other side of the bridge.

8 Plaque and pine tree (2003)

Commemorates the opening of the new Coramba Bridge on 3 May 2003.

Proceed to the former butter factory, taking the right-hand road.

9 Former butter factory and house (1925)

By the turn of the twentieth century, dairying was Coramba’s major industry. The Orara Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society was formed in 1897 and in 1901 a butter factory was built where St Therese Roman Catholic Church now stands. By 1908 the factory was averaging 6 tons of butter per week. As dairying grew, a new factory was built across the river, on this site, in 1925. 140 farms supplied cream. The new butter factory coincided with the arrival of the North Coast train line in 1922 and

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the opening of the Dorrigo–Glenreagh branch line in 1924 which meant farmers could quickly transport their butter to the Sydney and Brisbane markets.

In 1938 the factory amalgamated with the butter factory in Coffs Harbour and with one at Raleigh in 1950. It was sold in 1950 to the Fawcett Bros and used to make ‘Aristocrat’ pickles. In the 1960s it was used as a St Peters Ice Cream milk receiving depot and bulk ice cream store. At one time it was a candle factory and for many years occupied by Coramba Timbers. There are only a few dairies still operating in the Orara Valley.

Return over the bridge and cross to the other side of Gale Street.

10 CWA Park, corner of Gale and Martin Street (1957)

The Coramba branch of the Country Women’s Association (CWA) was formed in February 1953 comprising 17 local women. An idea to provide a children’s playground led to the purchase of this corner site for 168 pounds in October 1955 and the new park was officially opened on 6 July 1957. The shelter shed was added in 1962. After 29 years of successful fundraising and community

achievements, this branch of the CWA reluctantly closed in 1982 owing to lack of interest. The park was handed over to the Coffs Harbour Shire Council in 1986.

Re-cross the pedestrian crossing and proceed along Gale Street.

Coramba was given a big economic boost in the 1920s with the building of the North Coast Railway. Work began in July 1915, and Coramba housed the many railway workers. Coramba Station opened in July 1922 with the Coramba platform located near the former butter factory. At roughly the same time, the Dorrigo–Glenreagh branch line was begun. Work started in 1917 and the line opened on 23 December 1924. Coramba station is no longer used, and the Dorrigo–Glenreagh branch line ceased services in 1972 and officially closed in December 1993. Walking along Gale Street, you will notice several houses and early shop buildings. Like many of Coramba's buildings, they are weatherboard cottages built out of local



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hardwoods and date from the early years of the twentieth century during Coramba's heyday as a timber-getting outpost and a centre for local dairying.

**11 Former CBA building,
23–25 Gale Street (1934)**

This was the second CBA bank building built in 1934, following the fire that destroyed the first. It became a private residence, following the bank's closure in 1956 and has been returned to business use with its current occupant Nesting Needles, a fabric and patchwork retail store with classes and workshops.

**12 Site of the original post
office, 27 Gale Street**

The original Coramba Post Office was established on 22 April 1880 as a telegraph receiving station with



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Mrs Annie Rudder of Rudder Grange, Eastbank Road, in charge at 5 pounds per annum.

Various requests which had been by the Orara Farmers and Miners Progress Association for the office to be upgraded were eventually granted when its status was raised to Post Office on 8 April 1913. It also served as a branch of the Commonwealth Savings Bank and the local telephone exchange, which opened in July 1912 with four subscribers.

The current post office building replaced the earlier one in the 1980s.

The difficulty in communicating in Coramba's early days is best captured by what was possibly an unique postal service: a private pigeon post set up in the Mulhearn Bros Mills.

Between 1915 and 1940, pigeons were used to pass messages between Mulhearn's remotely located timber mills, due to the inaccessibility of timber stands and irregular postal services. Pigeons could pass messages between mills in less than an hour whereas the same journey overland could take three or more hours.

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13 Shops, 31 Gale Street currently Coramba Store and Providore (c1920s)

Another of Coramba's early shops, this one continues its commercial life as Coramba's general store, bakery and pie shop. Previously two shops that have been joined together, the building features original timber shopfronts, posted verandah, and high pressed metal ceilings inside.

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14 View down Thrower Avenue

If you look down Thrower Avenue, to the green paddocks at the end of the street, you might catch a glimpse of several herds of dairy cattle, the last of the numerous dairy farms that contributed so much to the development of Coramba and the Orara Valley, and a reminder that this small village is still an active farming community, despite its proximity to Coffs Harbour.

15 Service Station, 33-35 Gale Street (c1950s)

According to recollections of early residents, this was the site of the first Commercial Banking Company (CBA) building. In 1906 William Gale set up a branch of the CBA. While a new bank

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building and residence were being built on this site, the bank operated out of a room rented from Thomas Martin of the Hampden Hotel for 10 shillings a week. The bank was destroyed by fire in October 1934, and a new bank was built next door to the Hampden Hotel.

The service station was built following the creation of Thrower Avenue some time in the 1950s.



17 Former shop and bakery, 39–41 Gale Street (c1900)

This former pair of co-joined shops, with their distinctive posted verandahs, dates from the turn of the twentieth century when Coramba was developing as a small village. It is currently used as a private residence.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Coramba had become the administrative centre of the newly-formed Dorriggo Shire and the surrounding land was being taken up by dairy farmers following the decline of timber harvesting.

This building differs from the other early shops along Gale Street in being from an earlier phase in Coramba's history and for its pleasing symmetry and detailed joinery.

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16 40 Gale Street – Laurel Bank – former butcher's shop

Local lore has it that this house used to be a butcher's shop. The front room on the left with its own door may well have been used as a shop. The house originally sat further to the right but was moved to allow the site to be subdivided into two house blocks.

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18 48–50 Gale Street – site of the former Dorriggo Shire Council Chambers (1914)

The original Dorriggo Shire was created in 1906 following the Local Government Act, but it was very large and unwieldy. On 6 August 1913, it was split into the Nymboida and Dorriggo Shires, and the first meeting of the new Dorriggo Shire was held in the courthouse at Coramba. Coramba was chosen as the township for the new council chambers because it was the geographical centre of the new shire and Coffs Harbour was still primarily a port servicing a rural hinterland. It was on this site that a wonderfully decorative timber council chambers was built in 1914, costing 1052 pounds. Dorriggo Shire gained a reputation for having the worst roads in the state, due to the timber traffic and the high rainfall. By the 1930s, however, the building was too small and moves where being made to relocate the shire headquarters to Coffs Harbour. This was done in 1952 when the new Coffs Harbour Shire was proclaimed.

19 45 Gale Street (early 1920s)

An early shop and attached residence from c1920s which includes both a residence and a shopfront, as was common in rural villages.

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20 Site of Martin's Coffee Palace, 49–51 Gale Street (1950s)

This fibro cottage is a rare example in Coramba of a post-WWII house, incorporating the then-fashionable modern features of hopper windows, a low-line roof, steel poles supporting the verandah and an attached garage under the house.

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Prior to this, stood Martin's Coffee Palace built in the late nineteenth century. The concept of coffee palaces arrived in Australia from America in the 1880s as part of the Temperance Movement.

Alternatives to hotels and licensed premises, coffee palaces served 'no wine, ale or spiritous or intoxicating liquors'. Instead, they provided safe and quiet accommodation for travellers, including women and children, and

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served coffee, tea, chocolate and other non-alcoholic drinks. Run by the Martin family (no connection to the Martins who ran the hotel), the Coffee Palace was also one of the first four telephone subscribers in Coramba – from July 1912 Directory. The need for a coffee palace can be understood with this recollection of the lawlessness of the railway workers after payday: 'There would be fights and drunks everywhere. The sergeant used to bring several pairs of handcuffs ... He would handcuff them to a wire fence along side of the school until he could transport them back to the Coramba Police Station.'

21 62 Gale Street, 'Attunga' (1925)

This spacious weatherboard house was built by George Edward Dahl, a carpenter who had come from Taree to Coramba in 1907. He married local girl, Myra Martin in 1911, and became

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a prominent member of the community, building many of Coramba's houses, and was one of the founders of the School of Arts Committee.

Continue along Gale Street until you reach the intersection with Dorrigo Street. Turn left into Dorrigo Street.

22 Coramba Community Hall (former School of Arts), (1914)

The School of Arts was built in 1914 on land donated by William Gale and built by George Dahl of 'Attunga'. It quickly became the social centre of the town, hosting balls, dances, plays, concerts, benefit nights and Coramba's own band. It is claimed Dame Nellie Melba sang here once, along with Dame Clara Butt and Ada Crossly at other times. A more recent celebrity visitor was Slim Dusty.

Inside is a painted memorial arch to the local men who died in both world wars. It was also used as a cinema and still retains its projection room.

The building includes high-quality joinery, elegant fanlights above the doors and windows where the lower sashes pivot rather than slide up and down, allowing more air to circulate.

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The hall continues to be a popular venue for classes, dances and wedding receptions, and is a well-loved local landmark.

Proceed to the vacant block of land next to the Police Station.

23 Police horse paddock

Historic photos show that this vacant block was used for keeping the police horses. Currently, it used for garaging a police car.

Walk down through the horse paddock to Orara Street.

24 Police Station and Courthouse, 71–73 Gale Street (1898 and 1899)

The first police station was established in 1896, using an old relocated building from the-then almost deserted Nana

Glen settlement. It was originally two cells, and the first sergeant was Sgt Pritzler who commenced duties in December 1896 and stayed for over 20 years. Sergeant Pritzler's wife, Matilda died in child birth in 1897 and is buried on private property on Eastbank Road where her headstone still stands.

The present police station was purpose built in 1898 and designed by the NSW Government Architect, W L. Vernon. It came with lock-up cells and stables. In June 1899 the *Ralegh Sun* announced that the new courthouse would 'be ready for opening in a week'.

Two mounted police served at a time with a police paddock where the horses rested at the base of Ulong Road. The station also served as a mining warden's office to process applications for gold mining leases following the earlier discovery of alluvial gold in 1881.

Coramba's mounted police went on patrols to the Orara Valley and Eastern Dorrigo. The patrol would go to Moleton, Camp Creek to Brooklana, then along to Ulong and Lowanna. They would camp in the bush, resting the horses after riding over 30 miles

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a day. In the 1930s, the patrol took in Timmsville, Eve's Creek, Secombe's Mill at Brooklana, then over the mountain range to the Orara River. Locals recollect that when the wood pile at the station got low, local drunks were careful as the fine for drunkenness was a day or two chopping wood for the sergeant.

25 77 Gale Street 'Frogmouth Hollow' (c1920s)

Another of Coramba's large timber Federation and post-WW1 houses, built during the boom time created by the coming of the railway in the 1920s.

Walk back up through the police paddock and proceed to the intersection of Dorrigo and Short Streets.

26 St Pauls Anglican Church, 15 Dorrigo Street (1899)

In 1898 William Gale gave land to build the church. The foundation stone was laid on 28 April 1898 by Archbishop Moxon and dedicated by him on 14 April 1899. The foundations and timber were supplied by Andrew Morton and the iron by Dan Baker. Other community members supplied the labour. Another of Coffs Harbour's pretty timber churches, this is the oldest church still in use in the local government area.



Walk up Short Street.

27 Coramba Public School (1898) and Preschool Cottage (1910), Short Street

In 1887 Coramba consisted of less than ten families but changes to the Public Instruction Act made it easier for small communities to apply for schools. In Coramba's case, Eugene Rudder applied for a public school on behalf of the Forbes, Van, Nicholson, Morton and Walters families. Permission was granted for a Provisional School for between 12 and 20 children and 60 pounds towards the cost of a building.

The original site was 2.5 km (1½ miles) north-east of the present site and the building was finished in early May 1888. It sat on an eight-acre reserve used as a horse paddock for children who rode to school.





With the growth of Coramba following the discovery of gold, a new school was required and the current, more central site was purchased from William Gale for 40 pounds. Local builders, Boulwood and McGuigan erected the new building for 92 pounds and the new school opened in March 1898.

In September 1910 a second school building was built, and plans drawn up for a teacher's residence which was completed in April 1912. The first school building was then moved to Gundar at a cost of 50 pounds. The second school building survives as does the teacher's residence, and Coramba Public School shares the distinction, along with many other local public schools, of including some of the earliest surviving buildings on the Coffs Coast, and built out of local, north-coast hardwoods.

If the school gates are open, walk across school grounds to the far fence line.

28 Pioneer graves (1902)

On the other side of the school fence, on the private land are two pioneer graves surrounded by a timber fence. One headstone is still standing and belongs to Mary Ann Carey who died on 27 March 1902, aged 77 years.



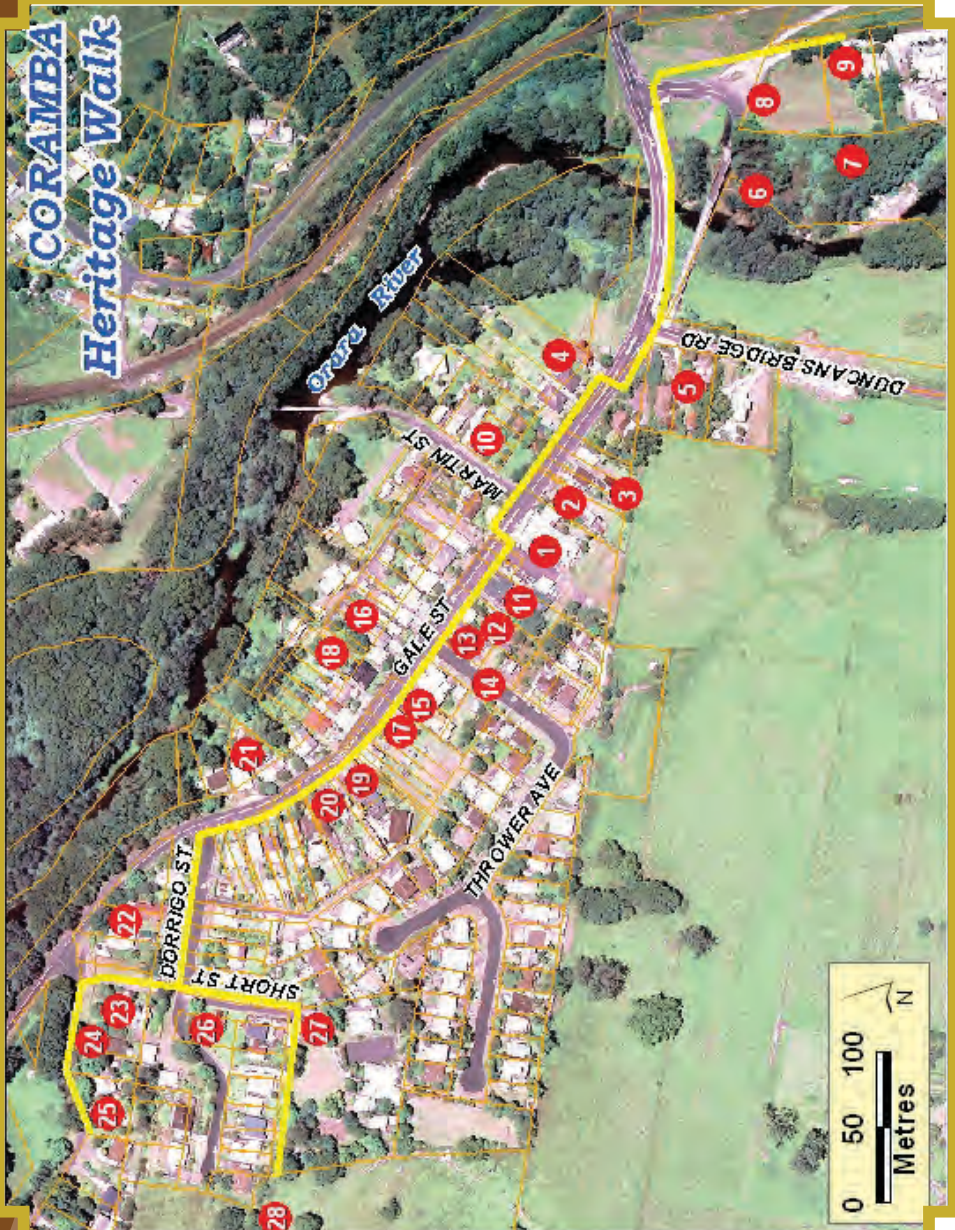
The Coffs Harbour area includes many lone graves and small cemeteries. They are a poignant reminder of the lives of the early white settlers and sometimes the only surviving physical evidence of small abandoned communities.

This concludes the Coramba Village Heritage Walk. We hope you enjoyed it.

Note on William Gale - William Gale was one of Coramba's earliest settlers, arriving in the 1880s and taking up the selection that became Coramba township. His contemporaries described him as 'the most enterprising businessman at Coramba, if not on the North Coast'. Gale clearly saw a promising future in the town. He was generous in donating land and tireless in promoting local business and groups. He built the first general store where the School of Arts now stands, owned a bakery and later a two-storey shop and tea rooms, opened the town's first bank, and gave land to the Anglican Church and the School of Arts, and provided the land for the public school.

Gale Street, continues to honour his name.

CORAMBA Heritage Walk



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