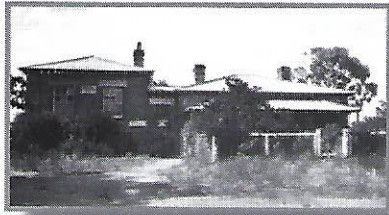


The postal wars: Ginninderra vs Hall

William Davis Junior's request in 1859 for a Ginninderra post office ('owing to the large population around here') was readily acceded to – the first post office in what is now the Australian Capital Territory. It was to endure for 103 years. The brand new (and uninhabited) village of Hall was granted a post office for a six month trial in 1888, and has been operating ever since. For a generation around the turn of the century it seemed only one could survive – and the contest for survival got quite willing.



↑ Ginninderra Post Office and Schoolhouse

Contestants warmed up with an amusing barney over the name of the new Government village on Halls Creek, thoughtlessly proclaimed 'Ginninderra' on 20 March 1882. With Edward Crace leading the charge, the Ginninderrans repudiated this identity theft, which would have created two 'Ginninderras', two miles apart. This educed a backflip – an edict advising that henceforth 'Ginninderra' was to be known as 'Hall' (29 August 1882). Sadly, the Lands Department did not consult with the PMG, who renamed their established Ginninderra office 'Hall', meaning there was then two 'Halls' and no Ginninderra. Crace declaimed '[we] will never submit to have the old name of 'Ginninderra' taken from us and the meaningless and ugly "Hall" substituted'. (Fortunately, Henry Hall of 'Charnwood', whose name was being commemorated, had departed to Yass by this time).

Order was restored by year's end.

The main battle was fought through petitions and the press. An opening salvo from Hall followed a public meeting at 'One Tree Hill' on 19 March 1888, which called for a proposed new Post and Telegraph Office to be built at Hall instead of Ginninderra. James McCarthy JP of 'Glenwood' topped the list of 59 names. Nothing determined, Hall fired again in April 1892, when lease of the Ginninderra post office premises was soon to expire, pointing out that in Hall 'Government land has been set apart for public buildings'. This time McCarthy headed a list of ninety-one petitioners.

Ginninderra postmistress Louisa Tobin was stirred by this to advise her superiors in Sydney via telegram, 'am informed Southwell family & connections are principal agitators for transfer to Hall' and 'it is asserted that bogus names have been attached to Hall petition' (!) [Telegram 27 April 1892]

This covert action was swiftly followed by a horde of Ginninderra petitioners, who pointed out that 'there are located within a radius of one mile of the Ginninderra Office, 10 families, also Public School, Police Station, Church, General Store and Blacksmiths Shop, whereas at Hall within the same radius, there are no Public Buildings and only four families residing, one of whom signs this petition'. Edward Crace's and George Harcourt's were followed by 101 more names. A serious salvo.



↑ Hall Post Office

Goulburn Penny Post correspondent The Wizard weighed in, bravely accusing the Hall petitioners of a 'selfish and unjust proceeding'. (GEPP, 23.4.92). This drew a sharp riposte in a letter to the editor from 'Hall-marked': 'It is not to the public interest that a post and telegraph office, which would undoubtedly enhance the value of private property at Ginninderra, should be erected simply to benefit two squatters, a storekeeper, and their understrappers'. (GEPP 2.5.92). The Wizard observes in the same edition that the matter has 'assumed a rather lively aspect' – 'it is war to the knife between the residents of Ginninderra and Hall ...'. To prove the point, 'Hall-marked' is assailed by 'Pro bono publico', another anonymous letter-writer, for his charge that Ginninderrans are boycotting some of the Hall petitioners: '...this must be either a myth in the imagination of a diminutive brain or the idle tattle of some skulking tale-bearer intent on making mischief'. More to the point perhaps he claims that just four residents of Ginninderra 'send and receive more telegrams twice over in the year' than all the Hall petitioners together. A cricket match could have been interesting at this point, but the season had ended.



TERRITORY ENERGY

ELECTRICAL DIVISION

Your Local Electrician

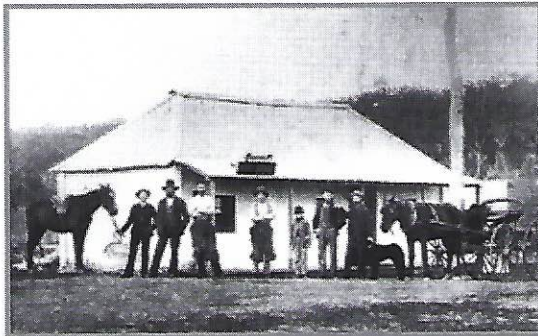
- Available 24 hours/seven days a week for electrical emergency repairs
- Licensed/insured professionals
- Residential/rural/commercial and industrial
- Split system Air-conditioning supply and install
- Level 2 Accredited Service Providers – metering, overhead and underground connections
- Energy efficiency advice
- Friendly customer service
- Will compete with any other written quotation the 2618 area

ABN 17 103 874 620
Licence 153006C (NSW) 200313230 (ACT) ASP AP30672 (NSW)
Accredited Master Electrician 803

0427 363 747 or 0428 288 466

Ten years later the battle of petitions was joined once more, again triggered by expiry of the lease of premises from the Gungahleen estate. Reprising Ginninderra's earlier claims, the Hall petition observed that:

'Hall now supports two general stores, one hotel, one coach-building establishment, one butcher, one blacksmith, one shoemaker, one saddler and harness-maker, one registered dairy and several private residences. This is within the village of Hall. The outlying neighbourhood to the north, east and west consists chiefly of small holdings such as farmers, graziers, dairymen etc who have been put to great inconvenience by being compelled to go to Ginninderra to transact any official postal, telegraphic or money order business' [Petition from Hall residents to Postmaster General requesting removal of Ginninderra PO to Hall. 1901(?)]



Ginninderra Post Office and store

George Harcourt organised the reply and 130 signed up for the status quo. The PO should stay in Ginninderra for various reasons, including that: '... its present position is more central to the people of Canberra, Weetangera, Mulligans Flat, Tallaganderra, etc' [Petition from Ginninderra residents requesting that the PO not be removed to Hall. 24.2.02]. At that time post offices east of Ginninderra could be found only at Ainslie, Lanyon, and Majura. Weetangera opened in 1896.

By 1905 the balance of power was shifting decisively towards Hall. The year began with more petitions, for (33) and against (61) removal of the PO to Hall. A 'stocktake' of those 'householders' getting mail at Hall (52) and at Ginninderra (34) followed. John Southwell was emboldened to advise the Post Master General of certain facts: '... that all commercial business is done at Hall, that at Ginninderra the old established store has had to close some few years ago for want of patronage, that Ginninderra now is obsolete, and that under present conditions can never be a centre'. At Hall, in contrast, '... there is one hotel, two general stores, one wheelwright and blacksmiths establishment, (which employs from five to seven hands constantly), also one saddle and harness maker, etc' [J Southwell letter to PMG, 26 Feb 1905].

The breach came in May 1905 when the Department decided to convert Ginninderra from an official post office to a 'contract office', with tenders for the conduct of postal business being invited in the Government Gazette. Rosanna Blewitt was eventually successful. When the contract expired in 1910 it was decided to further reduce the status of the service to an 'Allowance Office',

with salary reduced from £110 to £43. Mrs Blewitt was asked if she had any other income? 'No, other than a couple of cows, a horse, poultry, etc'. She was reappointed at £51 p.a. and added a news agency and stationery business to the livestock. When an opening came up at Bulyeroi (Moree) in 1912 however, she was quick to take the opportunity to move.



Ginninderra Store

Charles W Thompson, the Hall teacher, had written to MHR Andrew Chapman in October 1912, promoting his 18 year old daughter, Bertha, for the position of post mistress at Ginninderra 'in the event of that office becoming vacant in the near future'. His prescience was rewarded just two months later. For the modest rate of £51 p.a. and subject to the approval of the Department of Public Instruction, Thompson proposed 'conducting the post office at the school residence' – thereby solving the problem of suitable accommodation for the Ginninderra post and telegraph which had dragged on for a quarter of a century.

First Thompson (for 20 years) and then his teacher successors at Hall ran the Ginninderra post office for half a century until it closed in 1962.



Hall Premier Store

Sources:

National Archives of Australia. Series SP32/1. Ginninderra Post Office and Hall Post Office

Dale, R C M (1958), *Postal history of the Australian Capital Territory*. A paper delivered to the Canberra District Historical Society.

Curtis, T. *Australian Capital Territory (ACT) – the post offices and postmarks*. <http://actpostmarks.blogspot.com.au/search/label/1909>

Gillespie, L. L. 1992. *Ginninderra: Forerunner to Canberra*. The Wizard (Canberra local history series): Campbell