SITE 2
1955 flood marker
30 James Street

Floods have thrown the Maitland community into poverty dozens of times since the 1800s. In 1955, Maitland was devastated by one of the worst floods in Australia's recorded history. Eleven people died and 7,000 lost their homes and businesses in the flood, with damages topping over $2 billion in today's money. This was also the first Australian natural disaster to be broadcast around the world.

Look up at the telegraph pole to see the flood marker. This shows how high the floodwaters rose here in the 1955 flood. The blue line below the sign indicates the water level during the 1949 flood.

After the 1955 flood, some people moved their houses to higher ground, while others left Maitland, causing the city to decline. Today, Maitland is protected by a flood mitigation scheme, but flooding may always be part of life here. However, investment in Central Maitland is changing the area's fortunes and creating a vibrant city centre once again.

SITE 3
Maitland Town Hall
281 High Street

Maitland Town Hall was built in 1888, a time of optimism and ambition in Maitland. Designed by local architects Arthur Lee and James Warren Scobie, it has been a much loved place for civic events and community celebrations ever since it opened in 1890. The Town Hall has hosted balls, concerts, movies and even wrestling matches.

But its walls have also seen bleaker times: struggling Maitland residents have also come here for help in times of poverty and disaster. This included a delegation in 1895 of Maitland's unemployed, who visited the Town Hall to ask the Mayor of West Maitland for temporary jobs in public works projects. Many of these men had been out of work for over a year and could not afford to feed their families. Forty years later, the Town Hall witnessed similar desperation when it hosted deputations of men seeking employment during the Great Depression.

SITE 4
Coffin Lane

Coffin Lane got its name from one of Maitland's best selling products in the 19th century. From the 1830s onwards, nearby High Street was a booming business district that boasted stores, draperies, soap factories, flour mills, chemists, wheelwrights, saddleries, banks and inns. Cabinet-makers and joiners were among these High Street traders, with their workshops facing this laneway. It was here that they left their furniture and other goods, including coffins, to dry after varnishing.

The quality of Maitland's coffins was known far and wide. Many were sent to northern and western New South Wales and 5,000 coffins were even exported to California at the end of the gold rush in 1849.

SITE 5
Bank of Australasia
437 High Street

The Bank of Australasia building opened in 1870 and is a testament to Maitland's rapid growth in the 19th century. The third bank to open in Maitland, it was designed in the 'Italian Renaissance' style to inspire awe in its customers. Inside, the bank was ornamental and grand, with excellent ventilation to suit Maitland's warm climate.

By 1870, four banks lined High Street—proof of Maitland's status as the second most important town in New South Wales. The 1890s depression and 1930s Great Depression ruined many banks, but the Bank of Australasia was conservatively run and survived these difficult times. The Bank of Australasia lives on today as the ANZ Bank.

SITE 6
The Alma Hotel
541 High Street

This is the former Alma Hotel, one of Maitland's earliest hotels. But this part of Maitland was also notorious for a practice known as 'baby farming', which exploited poor women.

In the days before childcare, single mothers had few opportunities to earn an income. Some had no option but to pay a nurse to adopt their young children while they went out to work. Unscrupulous baby farmers often failed to care for the children properly and brought great suffering to both mother and child.

One of these cases made the local paper. In 1888, Georgina Armstrong left her baby, Reginald, in the care of Mary Willis, so that she could go into domestic service. Georgina visited her son every week and became concerned about his health, but had nowhere else to take him. She eventually went to a doctor, but Reginald died the very next day. An inquiry into his death found that Reginald had been starved over a long period of time. He was just five months old.

SITE 7
Maitland Benevolent Society, East end of the Long Bridge, 555 High Street

The Maitland Benevolent Society building on Regent Street beyond the trees to the south west. This is where Maitland's poor found refuge and shelter from 1886 onwards, but the society's origins date back to the town's earliest days.

Social reformer Caroline Chisolm started the first benevolent asylum to protect immigrant girls and families in East Maitland in 1831. Nine years later, the asylum's managers created the Maitland Benevolent Society and moved their premises first to Northumberland Street and later to Hannan Street in West Maitland. The Society gave housing and medical care to 'the helpless, the outcast and the wretched'.

The former Benevolent Society building is now the Benhome Aged Care Facility and is still run by the Maitland Benevolent Society.

SITE 8
The Mighty Hunter
St Andrews Street, river end

The Hunter River was once the lifeblood of Maitland. It was a rich source of food and water for the Wonnarua people for many thousands of years before they were forced from their land after European settlement.

For Europeans, the Hunter River has also brought both prosperity and disaster. The river was the main trade route for sending food and supplies to and from Sydney Town in Maitland's early years. The Hunter's rich, fertile soils also provided perfect conditions for fruit and vegetables. Convict farmers had great success and sold their produce to markets in Newcastle and Sydney.

But the Hunter River is also famous for floods that have ravaged the land and brought death, injury and financial ruin to many. Even William Arnott, of Arnott's Biscuits Company, went bankrupt after three big floods in the 1850s and 1860s and was forced to move his bakery to Newcastle. Today the river is once again a place of fun, used by the community for swimming, boating and fishing.

SITE 9
The original grant to Mary 'Molly' Morgan'
Preschool Lane, river end

Walk up Preschool Lane and take the stairs to your left to step onto the Riverside Walk for Stop 9. Born Mary Jones in 1762, Molly Morgan was one of the first European settlers in Maitland. Hers is a 'rags to riches' story. Molly was transported to NSW for stealing yarn and arrived in the colony in 1790. She was one of the well-behaved convicts given a ticket of leave by Governor Macquarie to establish a new settlement at Wallis Plains, now Maitland.

In 1819, Molly was granted a lease of 159 acres in the centre of Maitland, which stretched along High Street, from Bulwer to Hunter Street. She was one of only a few convict women to hold a land grant and, by 1828, was also one of the largest landholders on the Hunter River. Molly was a generous woman who helped the poor and sick and donated money to build a local school.

SITE 10
Former Temple of Concord
Cathedral Street, river end

Continue along the riverside walk to reach stop 10. The 'lost' Temple of Concord stood somewhere between St John's Cathedral and the Hunter River from 1844 to 1857, but its exact location is a mystery. It gained fame as the home of Maitland's Total Abstinence Society, which was led by the local Catholic priest, Father Lynch.

Maitland was a frontier town in the 1840s, plagued by drinking, lawlessness and violence. The society believed that alcohol was the leading cause of poverty, which in turn spawned vice, domestic violence, child neglect and prostitution. Lynch and the society's members worked hard to teach people about the dangers of drinking, but their campaign and methods were controversial and failed in the end.

The Temple of Concord was destroyed by flooding in 1857 and had to be demolished. The Women's Christian Temperance Union of Australasia revived Maitland's temperance activities in the mid-1890s, and the WCTU, as it is known, is still active today.

SITE 11
Former Maitland Mercury Offices
258 High Street

Established here in 1843, The Maitland Mercury newspaper was a symbol of Maitland's immense 19th century importance. The Mercury began as a humble local newspaper, but demand for news was so great that the paper was eventually circulated throughout northern New South Wales and parts of Queensland. The Mercury in the 19th century shows the town's fluctuating fortunes at a glance. When Maitland has boomed, job advertisements filled the newspaper's columns but, in times of poverty, records of bankruptcies littered its pages.

For much of its history, The Maitland Mercury was the first media outlet to break the town's largest and smallest stories. It also played an important role in giving a voice to people who did not traditionally have one, such as women, the poor and Aboriginal people.

The Maitland Mercury is still published today. It is the third oldest regional newspaper in all of Australia and has witnessed every event that makes up Maitland's long and fascinating history.

Poverty and Prosperity Heritage Walk

maitland walks
city council

Maitland Visitor Information Centre
Cnr New England Hwy and High St, Maitland
mymaitland.com.au or **02 4931 2800**
or download the **Maitland Walks App**

For further information on this walk or other Maitland Walks visit:

The Poverty and Prosperity Heritage Walk is an initiative of Maitland City Council.

Introduction

Hidden throughout Maitland lie stories of the town's rise and fall, of boom and bust, and of its rich and poor. Once the second biggest town in all of New South Wales, Maitland attracted many enterprising men and women who made their fortunes here. Their stories of success are inspiring and sometimes surprising. Lesser known are the fortunes of the poor and neglected. How did single mothers make ends meet? How did the community help the needy?

High Street, West Maitland.

Bo'un – or place of the Bittern – is the traditional Aboriginal name for this area. These are the traditional lands of the Wonnarua people, who lived here for many thousands of years before European settlement and continue to live here today.
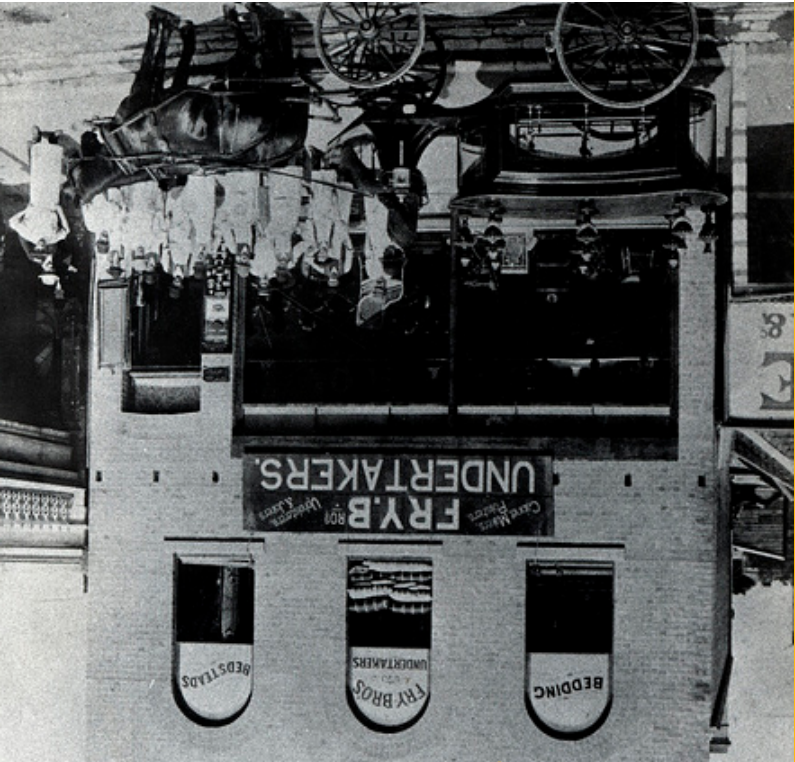
This Poverty and Prosperity Heritage Walk takes you to some of the places in Maitland that tell these intriguing stories.

Maitland, 1955 flood.

Heritage Sites

1. **Former David Cohen & Co. Building**
2. **1955 flood marker**
3. **Maitland Town Hall**
4. **Coffin Lane**
5. **Bank of Australasia**
6. **The Alma Hotel**
7. **Maitland Benevolent Society**
8. **The Mighty Hunter**
9. **The original grant to Mary 'Molly' Morgan**
10. **Former Temple of Concord**
11. **Former Maitland Mercury Offices**

SITE 1
Former David Cohen
& Co. building
226 High Street

1 Former David Cohen
& Co. building

David Cohen & Co. was once a household name in northern NSW. As one of Maitland's leading wholesalers, the company supplied clothing, stationery, fish, oils, wine and spirits to squatters, station owners and storekeepers. The company also exported wool, gold and other commodities.

Brothers David and Samuel Cohen and their cousin Levy Lewis Wolfe began trading in Maitland in 1836 and opened their family store 18 years later. The eponymous David Cohen & Co. was the jewel in the crown of the flourishing High Street, with the store described by one newspaper as the 'finest building yet erected in Maitland at private cost'. David Cohen & Co. boomed, expanding from Maitland to Newcastle, Sydney and London in the 19th century before moving most of its business to Newcastle in the early 20th century. While it is a symbol of Maitland's prosperity, the company was also well known for helping the poor and giving to charities.

The company survived many travails. A major fire destroyed the building in 1865, but the family rebuilt it again. Fire destroyed the later building almost completely in 1970 and only the façade stands as testament to David Cohen & Co.'s influential role in Maitland's history.

Instructions

This walk will take you on an interpretive journey of the highs and lows of Maitland in the 19th and 20th centuries. Use this brochure to guide you around the city and keep your eyes open for the site markers or download the Maitland Walks app to find out more about each stop through additional images and audio.

HUNTER RIVER