



Ian Willis

Camden Cottage Hospital, the early days of a New South Wales rural hospital, 1899-1902.

The Camden Cottage Hospital was one of many small rural hospitals established in the 19th century across New South Wales. They played a critical role in developing the state's rural health infrastructure and improving rural health. The hospital played a groundbreaking role in the improvement of community health and well-being. Its history provides a mirror to the hardships of rural life and its vagaries when disease, accidents, and death were unwelcome visitors in many households.

The cottage hospital was established after an outbreak of scarlet fever by a local committee of notable men, including doctors, businessmen, and farmers and modelled on the English cottage hospital movement. Funding was based on subscriptions, donations and government subsidies, and, at times, could be precarious. Its ultimate success relied on community support. There are few surviving hospital records for the early years and no patient records. This paper uses Trove's online resources and local archives to construct a meaningful analysis of the hospital's early years. As the research project moved forward, it became apparent how the hospital played a critical role in the community and provided a different, often overlooked, entry point into the study of small communities. The hospital's foundation demonstrated how community resilience and cohesion function in a small community, giving a window into the town's social networks and hierarchies.

This paper provides a model for those interested in community history and health.

These topics are often quite nuanced, and unravelling their complexities takes patience

and determination. The history of the Camden Cottage Hospital provides a valuable lens through which to examine the characteristics of a small community at the end of the 19th century.