

Foreword

'Geraldton', formerly known as 'Belmore House', is one of the oldest continuously occupied private residences in Scone. Original owner/builder Mathew Miller was an immigrant free settler in 1840 from Newton Stewart, County Tyrone, Northern Ireland and brought with him special skills as stonemason and brick maker. These traits he was able to put to very good use as one of the foremost builders in the emerging municipality of Scone to where he relocated soon after arriving in the colony. Mr Miller purchased 230 acres (some accounts say 320) of land from Mr William Dumaresq of the St Aubins Estate on 14 July 1856. It had formed part of the original land grant formerly owned by Captain Richard Kelly.

The initial four room cottage with a separate kitchen was constructed by Mathew Miller on its present site starting in about 1857. He named the residence 'Belmore House' in honour of the Governor of NSW the Earl of Belmore who would officiate at the arrival of the railway on 17 April 1871. The house cost £460 to build and was at first outside the town limits. Mr Miller and his family occupied 'Belmore House' until his demise on 13 March 1902 at age 85. The home then passed to his widow Mary Ellen Miller who Mathew Miller married for his second time in 1893. It was Mary Ellen's third marriage. His unmarried daughter Sarah received some family goods and chattels.

Respected Solicitor James Abbott Kingsmill Shaw purchased 'Belmore House' in 1909 taking up residence in 1910. He renamed it 'Geraldton' in honour of his wife Isabel Geraldine Shaw the daughter of Hon. R. G. D. Fitzgerald MLC of Muswellbrook who served for 16 years in the Australian Upper House. Following J. A. K. Shaw's death on 11 April 1920 Dr Oswald Barton, a son of the first Prime Minister Sir Edmund Barton, purchased 'Geraldton' in 1923 and practiced from consulting rooms he established in the house. There may have been an interim temporary resident Robert Stanley Elwin. In 1957 his son Dr David 'Toby' Barton and wife Janet moved to 'Geraldton' following a brief sojourn during which the historic homestead was with a caretaker. Toby also initially practiced medicine from home. On 8 October 'Geraldton' was included in the National Trust of Australia (New South Wales) Register of Historic Buildings "classified by the Trust as a building of considerable interest and its preservation is recommended". Toby and Janet Barton sold 'Geraldton' to Muswellbrook solicitor John Connors and his spouse Di in 1987. Current owners Sarah and Bill Howey purchased 'Geraldton' from the Connors in 1993.

This booklet is not only about the history of the house and its progress but the special people who have occupied it. Every successor's successor is custodian of the historic estate. Beautiful gardens surround the homestead and pervade the precinct. In 1856 Mathew Miller bought a hard dry paddock and built his first house there very quickly. The gardens have taken rather longer to develop. Both home and surrounds are perennial 'works in progress' and an internecine challenge. They are testament to the lasting legacy of the devoted spouses who accompanied their husbands on life's journey. In Mathew Miller's case there were two and one de facto. Included are anecdotal vignettes of the relatively few owner/occupiers during Geraldton's time span exceeding 150 years. Many have made enduring contributions to the local community and bequeathed substantial impact on society in Scone and its surrounding district.