

Official Opening of Douglas-Daly Community Hall
SPEECH by His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC
Administrator of the Northern Territory
22 August 2009

The colourful brochure on The Douglas Daly, entitled “Our Life Our Community”, has a conspicuous number of children featured in the photographs. As all positive progress is for the sake of the next generations, it is excellent to see that a great deal is being achieved in this region to ensure a productive, environmentally sustainable and healthy land for the future of our young families.

This area’s namesake, the original Captain William Bloomfield Douglas, second Government Resident in the Northern Territory, would no doubt be well pleased with the enterprise demonstrated here. He was an adventurous gentleman. Born in Aberystwyth, Wales, Douglas served with the Royal Navy and was later a clipper skipper in the China Sea and a member of expeditions off Borneo.

He arrived in the Northern Territory in June 1870 with his wife Ellen, and in common with our friends Ian and Kay McBean here, Captain Douglas had seven children - two sons and five daughters. The girls wore dresses of unbleached calico and the local saddler had to make them shoes from bolts of canvas and sheets of saddle leather as the shoes and dresses they had brought with them from down south began rotting in the Wet Season humidity.

Two log huts on the Port Darwin harbour foreshore were their first home, as his eldest daughter, Harriet, described: *The huts were very rough, sleeping apartments divided by partitions. The spaces between the poles were plugged with ‘paper’ bark. The floor was made of mud, pressed flat, and mixed with gravel, sand and limestone. Our windows were frames filled with unbleached calico, and they swung on a pivot, propped open by a stick.*

The floor was a great trial of patience, for every clean dress we put on became soiled round the edges immediately. We had only one sitting room, a galvanised iron hut about 20 feet long, possessing the luxury of a wooden floor; a door at each end, and we habitually sat in a draught for the sake of air.

The iron roof was shaded by bark but it was a very hot room at any time. We arranged our furniture here to the best advantage, but owing to the incongruous medley, the room reminded me of nothing so forcibly as a broker's shop – chests of drawers, sideboards, chiffoniers, tables of every description and shape elbowed each other, seeming as lost as we were at the strange and novel associations in which they found themselves”.

Every long-term Territorian will have similar stories of “how it used to be”. The Fleming brothers, Woodrow and Doris Wilson, Bob and Pam Rixon, the Doyles, McBeans and Muldoons, pioneers of pastoral properties and, more recently, those who have worked at the research farm and founded tourism ventures. All have fought their own battles of adjustment but I am sure that all have also valued the great Northern Territory sense of community.

As this region develops a modern-day identity, the Douglas Daly Community Hall will no doubt thrive. I congratulate all those whose endeavours have made today possible and I am very pleased to now declare the Douglas Daly Community Hall officially open.