

# Wee (pop. 65) Jasper gets a community hall

By JOHN WARWICK HAY

**You can see it as soon as the valley comes into view, this valley with its rich, deep spring greens and scarped ranges so photographically reminiscent of land-locked valleys in the New Guinea Highlands.**

The invitation to the hall opening was headed:

The people of Wee Jasper.

Then, in smaller print "request the pleasure of the company of \_\_\_\_\_ to attend the Official Opening of the Wee Jasper Memorial Hall and Recreation Centre."

The cameraman with me came from Kings Cross. He kept asking about the hall and the people of Wee Jasper with professional interest. Everything I said about them seemed cliched and unconvincing. I mentioned the people of the Ozarks and I noticed he looked startled because it undoubtedly conjured up a picture of barefoot tobacco chewers. I knew as soon as I said it that it wasn't right.

## Larger than life

There were ex-English farmers like Bill Cathles, of Cookmundoon, who has been a legend since he settled there with his family after the war. There were men like Dudley Barber, president of the Hall Committee whose family has been in the area for generations. The Careys, the Mitchells, the stories, the

tions. The Careys, the Mitchells; the stories, the characters. It was impossible to define them.

But one thing was certain. As strong individualists they were quickly becoming a unique group in the Australian scene. It was inevitable that if they built a Community Centre like the Hall, it should be done quickly, without fuss, and larger than life.

Down in the River valley itself, we drove past the Wee Jasper single store "Anthony Horderns" as the locals call it and on to the newly-opened Hall with its rows of visitors' cars parked with all the individual contrariness of the drivers. No neat, departmental order-

liness of the Canberra parker, for this was the bush — even though it was only 40-odd miles from the capital city.

This Community Centre, opened by Colonel Charles Anderson V.C., M.C. ex-Member for the electorate of Hume, had been a long-felt need of the Wee Jasper people in their semi-isolation. Although the population of the valley is a diminutive 65 (15 families in all), they have managed over a period of five years

to raise £5,000 towards the cost of it.

This has been done by tremendous community drive; by holding Woolshed Dances, Street Stalls — and an Annual Rodeo which many Canberra visitors are aware of.

The actual construction cost of the Hall was £8,101 and it is estimated that the furnishing and equipment will bring the cost to well over £9,000.

## Property of Banjo Paterson

Coodradigbee Shire Council, Hall trustees, have donated £1,000 towards construction costs, and it is expected that a further grant of £1,000 will be shared equally by the Department of Public Works and the Shire towards liquidating the Hall debt. Wee Jasper residents have a further loan of £2,000 to pay off within 10 years, but on their record so far, its quick repayment is a foregone conclusion.

The land for the 70' x 45' Hall was given to the people of Wee Jasper by Mr and Mrs G. Hewson, now of Canberra. This was part of their former property of "Coodravale" and belonged at one stage to the poet Banjo Paterson and also to a member of the well-known Lindeman family.



The new Wee Jasper Memorial Hall, which was opened on Saturday.



The unveiling of the plaque on the new memorial hall. From left, the president of Goodradigbee Shire, Mr J. L. Hodgkinson, Lieutenant-Colonel C. Anderson VC, and the mayor of Yass, Mr S. Dobbin.