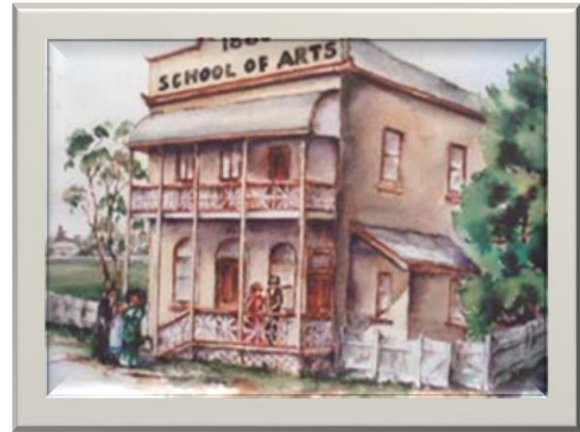
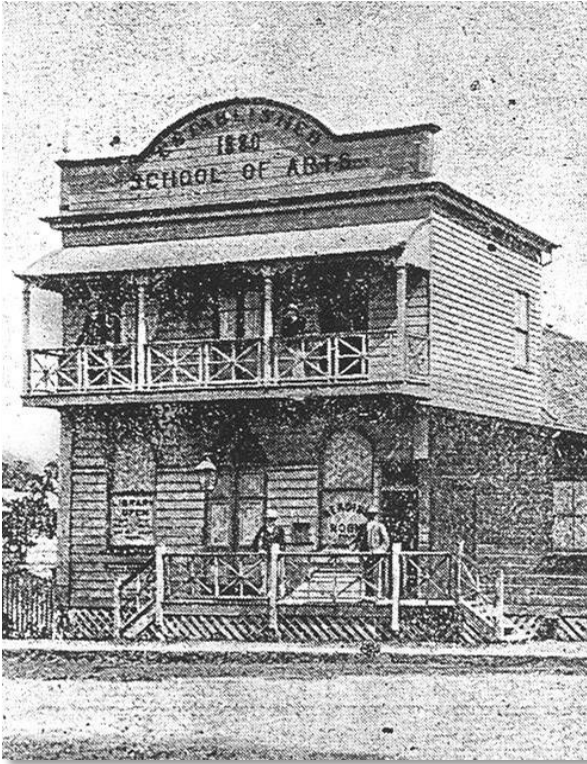




SOUTHPORT QLD



▲ Painting by Gladys Fedrick

From a collection of paintings of Southport completed in 2008. ²

It hangs in the Gold Coast Historical Society Bundall Road Gold Coast.

◀ Southport School of Arts circa 1900

Photographer unknown. ¹

Name: Southport School of Arts

Address: Cnr Lawson and Scarborough Streets, Southport, Queensland. 4215

The Town:

Southport lies 65 kilometres southeast of the State capital, Brisbane. The population is 28,315 (2011 census). Formerly a small seaside town, it is now a suburb of the City of the Gold Coast, the popular tourist area in South East Queensland.

Aboriginal tribes from as far away as Grafton and Maryborough met for large corroborees proximate to the Nerang River and Surfers Paradise around the present day suburb of Bundall. Traces of Aboriginal camps and intact bora rings are still visible in the Gold Coast region today. Europeans settled there in the 19th Century and began farming and timber-gathering. They are thought to have driven the local Aboriginal tribe, the Yugambeh, from their traditional hunting, gathering and fishing grounds. They retreated into the hinterland and some went to Aboriginal Missions and reserves. Anthropological records, however, suggest many of the Yugambeh remained to continue their cultural practices and later found employment with the colonists in their production of sugar and arrowroot, and in fishing and timber cutting. ³

There is some debate as to how Southport was named. One version tells that the Hon. Thomas Blacket Stephens, MLA and Minister for Lands, named it after the English town of Southport as he came from Lancashire. This followed the surveying of Nerang Creek Heads in 1874 by Mr G L Pratten who then sent his survey to the Lands Minister. The other version is that



Mr Pratten, while conducting his survey, had a conversation with Mr Thomas Hanlon who built the first Pacific Hotel, where Australia Fair shopping centre is now situated.

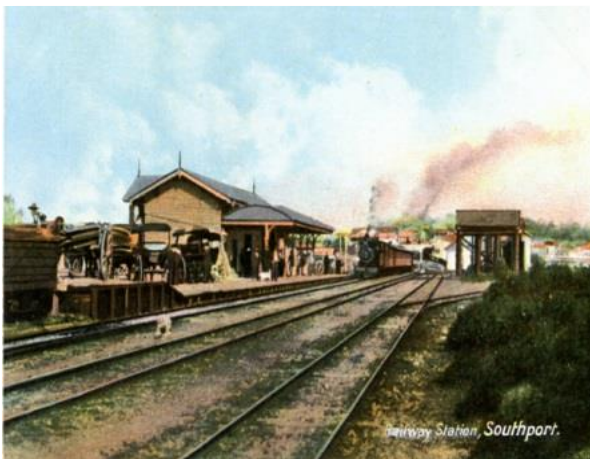
Mr Pratten suggested to Mr Hanlon that the town be called Moondarewa but with so many potential Aboriginal names, Mr Hanlon preferred Southport and so it was. This was either because it was the most southerly possible port or because of his associations with the English seaside resort. The fact that it was cheaper to write one word in a telegram may be why it became Southport, and not South Port.^{4,5}



Mr Thomas Hanlon

Following Mr Pratten's survey of the township of Southport, a regular steamer service brought visitors from Brisbane in four hours and in 1879 Cobb & Co commenced a service via Coombabah. The Queensland Governor, Sir Anthony Musgrave built a vice regal residence in 1885, known as "Summer Place", on the Nerang River (now part of The Southport School), bringing Brisbane's wealthy and influential to the area. The Grand Hotel was opened in 1886 at Deepwater Point on the Broadwater. This was a large two storey timber building, designed by architects John Hall and Sons and was described as the ultimate statement of Southport's prosperity. It was purported to be equal to anything in Australia and larger than many great hotels in America.

It was difficult to reach Southport from Brisbane other than by steamer due to the rough bush tracks and many creek crossings so in 1889 a railway line was extended to Southport resulting in many guesthouses and hotels being established along the coastline. Access via the railway brought people from all walks of life resulting in the town being described as *one of the most popular watering places* in the colony.



Southport Railway Station, circa 1900.

Photographer unknown

City of Gold Coast, Southport History



Because the climate was considered beneficial to children from the bush, Southport began to develop as an educational centre in the late 19th Century with some of the early schools of the south coast established at Southport, perhaps reflecting the community interest in, and support for the educational aspects of the School of Arts. Goy-te-lea, Miss Davenport's Private School for Girls was established in 1883-4. The school buildings were later sold and in 1912 became St Hilda's Girls School. The Southport School, a boarding school for boys, was opened in 1901. Both of these schools still exist as independent private schools having developed as highly regarded centres of learning with excellent facilities.

The Town of Southport was declared in 1918. A new coastal road was built linking Brisbane with Southport in 1927, prompted by the steady increase in the permanent population. Improved automobile technology saw many more holiday makers travelling down this coast road in the 1930s and by 1935 housing estates and hotels were developed all along the coastal strip from Southport to the New South Wales border. Southport remained the administrative and commercial centre of the coast for many years despite this extended strip development.

People who resided permanently on the coast generally lived in Southport, which was well laid out with wide streets and shady trees. The majority of the 'permanents' were engaged in catering to the 'casuals'. There were no extensive industries. Fishing was an uncertain livelihood. The Moreton Bay Oyster Company had a station at Currigee, on Stradbroke Island; there was a saw mill; and some settlers were involved in agriculture and dairying behind Southport. The town, however, relied almost solely upon its magnificent scenery, unrivalled boating, fishing and shooting activities for its survival.

Small reserves were set aside by the Queensland Government in the late 1870s and early 1880s for various uses including supporting a School of Arts. These were provided around Nerang, Davenport and Scarborough Streets. The Southport School of Arts building was erected in Scarborough Street in 1882.⁶

Establishment:

The Southport School of Arts was initially established in 1880-81 as a library in a small room adjoining Andrews' store. The very beginnings of the Southport School of Arts was said to have apparently occurred with a conversation with a Mr Hudson who was keen to donate books and illustrated papers as a modest nucleus of a public library along with *a little pecuniary help*. Others, such as John Cameron, E J Stevens, R T Johnson, Walter Taylor, and E Young contributed books they thought were worth preserving, but finding a room at a reasonable rent was the next hurdle.

Mr G Andrews was approached for the use of half of his skillion roofed shed behind his store, which he used at times to house his cart, on condition that it would be improved by the addition of a floor, walls, door, window etc. This would be for one year's use as a library and reading room to be opened three nights a week. A working committee was set up for this purpose.⁷



Pictured above is George Andrews' store which he built in Scarborough Street, Southport in 1879.



Painting by Gladys Fedrick

From a collection of paintings of Southport completed in 2008.⁸

After two years of good solvency they began to think about *a more pretentious and commodious building*. The Chief Secretary was approached for a land grant from the recreational reserve for the proposed School of Arts building and public hall. A life trust was granted to R.T. Johnston and J.R. Sabine and tenders were called for a building to be erected 50ft by 26ft by 13ft high to the eaves with principaled roofing. Ralph Johnston won the tender at £190. After its completion the committee remained solvent. It was a great success and with further additions the building was able to seat 250 people. It was well furnished and well ventilated, and had a good library and reading room offering papers and magazines of the day. A large dance floor and a good stage with scenery and dressing rooms for lady and



gentleman actors were included. Mining towns excepted, Southport had as good a public building, debt free, as any town of its time.⁷

The building was extensively altered in 1933-34, the contractor being E. Foreman. (see photograph in 'The Building' section)

In 1938 control of the building was handed to the Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) which erected a modern brick building on the site in 1957.

The Brisbane Courier reported - on Tuesday 5 July 1887, page 6:

*SOUTHPORT SCHOOL OF ARTS
(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT)*

A meeting of the members of the School of Arts was held in that institution on 1st July. Mr E J Stevens, MLA, the president, in the chair. The report, which was read by Mr Macnamara, touched on the satisfactory state of the finances and the efficiency of the institution. During the year a considerable addition had been made to the library, and more books were about to be ordered. Miss McIntosh, the librarian, had discharged her duties in an able and painstaking manner. The committee had had under consideration the desirableness of extending the building, and some preliminary steps had been taken towards achieving that result.

The following officers were then appointed for the ensuing year: President, Mr E J Stevens, MLA; vice-president, Mr H P Brett; treasurer, Mr W C Welsh; committee, Mesdames Sabine and Young, Messrs. Andrews, T Hanlon, W R Wood, and Macnamara; auditors, Messrs. J Mooney and W Lather.

The treasurers statement, read by Mr Welsh showed a balance of £39 8s. 7d. from the previous year; subscriptions and entertainments, £58 13s. 6d.; Government endowment, £82 16s.; rents received £37; total, £217 18s. 1d. The expenditure had been for books and papers, £25 5s. 5d.; for improvements, £8 3d.; sundries, £80 14s. 1d.; leaving a balance in National bank, £103 15s. 7d. The report and balance sheet were adopted by the meeting.

The president congratulated the supporters of the institution on its prosperous condition financially. He alluded to the increase in the number of books to nearly 900 volumes, and pointed out the desirableness of extending the number of members, which at present only amounted to thirty-three. He hoped that the members would do all they could to get others to join, remembering that for every pound of revenue thus obtained the Government would advance a similar sum. He suggested that some concerts should be given for the purpose of increasing their finances.

It was very desirable, he thought, to increase the size of the hall, which at present was not large enough to hold a paying audience in the event of an entertainment being given by a dramatic or musical combination visiting the township.

A vote of thanks to the chairman closed the proceedings.⁹

- on Friday 5 August 1932, page 4:

SCHOOL OF ARTS, SOUTHPORT

The Committee of the Southport School of Arts have approved of tentative plans for the remodelling of the building. They propose to approach the Government for funds for the work under the new advances scheme for repairs to buildings.¹⁰



- on Tuesday 30 May 1933, page 19:

*SOUTHPORT
SCHOOL OF ARTS*

It was decided at a meeting of the committee of the School of Arts last night to renew the application for a loan of £300, under the Government building scheme, for remodelling the building, plans for which have already been prepared.¹¹

- on Wednesday 5 July 1933, page 7:

*SOUTHPORT
SCHOOL OF ARTS*

The plan to remodel the Southport School of Arts building was advanced a further stage at the annual meeting on July 3, when the State Advances Corporation advised that it was prepared to consider an application from the committee for the loan of £300. It was decided to have plans and specifications of the proposed work prepared for consideration by the trustees and the committee on July 17, after which formal application will be made for the loan. The election of officers resulted:- President, Mr N S Woodroffe; vice-presidents, Mr J Shepherd and the Rev A Fisher-Webster; secretary, Mrs J Shaw; treasurer, Mr S A Bell; committee, Alderman E H Foreman, and Messrs C A Dalton, J R Ritchie, H Hayden, and G H Booker.¹²

On 31st July 1933 plans for the remodelling of the Southport School of Arts building were adopted at a special meeting.¹³

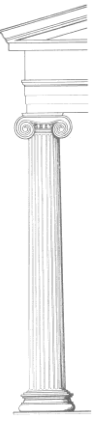
The great depression affected Southport as it did the whole of Australia. The difficult times took their toll and despite extensive renovations to the building, it became clear that the School of Arts could not continue. So by 1938, after lengthy negotiations with the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia, it was decided to hand the School of Arts over to them.

The South Coast Bulletin reported - on Friday 23 December, 1938, page 1:

*SCHOOL OF ARTS
Transferred to Returned Soldiers*

At a public meeting held on Wednesday evening of subscribers to the School of Arts it was unanimously approved to hand over the assets and liabilities of the Southport School of Arts to the Southport Sub-branch of the R.S.S.I.L.A. (Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia). Negotiations have been in progress for the past 12 months and government approval having been obtained the transfer has now been finalised. The Southport Returned Soldiers will carry on the hall and library, renovating the building and improving the seating accommodation.

There were present at the meeting Messrs N S Woodroffe (president of the School of Arts), Messrs A G McGill, F Callow, W Pedwell, S H Price, Mesdames H E Gilmore and E Shaw (hon sec). The president explained that some time ago the committee, due to lack of funds and support, decided to offer the School of Arts to the R.S.S.I.L.A. and after a good deal of negotiations with the Land Administration Board and other State Departments all formalities had now been completed and approval given.



On the motion of Messrs Callow and Price the action of the School of Arts Committee was approved and it was decided to hand over to the Southport Sub-branch of the League the School of Arts its liabilities and assets.

Mr Woodroffe, in handing over the keys to the representatives of the League, wished them every success and added that the School of Arts would be an ideal place for the returned men for meetings and social activities. Messrs Gilmore (president) and Morgan (secretary) both complimented Messrs Woodroffe, Holden, Ritchie and Mrs E Shaw for having carried on the School of Arts during past years under very adverse conditions.

Mr Gilmore mentioned that the liabilities of the School of Arts would be liquidated almost immediately.¹⁴

- on 3 March, 1939, page 10:

DIGGERS MEMORIAL HALL

Officially opened by Mayor

The Southport Sub-Branch of the R.S.S.I.L.A. (Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia) took over the School of Arts last January, since when a good deal of work has been done in renovating the building and making preparations for alterations which will materially add to the School of Arts which is to be carried on with the addition of a reading room while it is proposed to bring the library up to date by addition of new books.¹⁵

The Hall became known as the Diggers Memorial Hall.

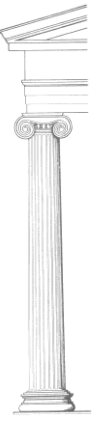
The Building:

Extensions and renovations were made over the years to the building that appears in the photograph at the beginning of this article. These were made possible by the hard work of the members of the Southport School of Arts by fund raising, social events, general charges including fees for usage, and grants obtained from government bodies. The following photographs show the progression of those changes.



School of Arts, Scarborough Street, Southport, Queensland, showing initial extensions. 1919

Photographer unknown.¹⁶



Stump capping ceremony for the commencement of the construction of the Methodist church on Short Street, Southport, circa 1925.
Photographer unknown.¹⁷

Note the Southport School of Arts building in the background.



Southport School of Arts showing the next phase of extensions: circa 1930
Photographer unknown¹⁸



Southport School of Arts after extensive renovations, circa 1935.
E H Foreman, photographer¹⁸

Uses:

The Southport School of Arts was a venue for many and varied events and was put to good use by the whole community.

Library facilities within the School of Arts enabled access on Mondays and Wednesdays in the late 19th century, from 4-5pm, and Saturdays 4-5pm and 7-9pm, Subscription 5s. per quarter or 1s. per fortnight. The Reading Room was free and open from 10am.



Monthly committee meetings for the School of Arts took place in the early 20th century with accounts and bookings reported. Decision was made to purchase 12 dozen cups and saucers and those hiring the building for socials were required to pay a fee for its use. The sum of £3 was to be expended on the purchase of new books and *arrangements made to carry on Technical classes: subjects to be ambulance, short hand and wood carving*.¹⁹ The matter regarding Master A. Kramm was raised. Since he declined to make restitution for the broken front window of the School of Arts he was given until November 1 to *reconsider the matter*.²⁰

The Southport Show was held in the School of Arts prior to being established at Owen Park.

Decorated tables in the School of Arts at the Southport Show, Queensland, circa 1903
Photographer unknown.²¹



This photo also gives a view of the interior, looking towards the front door with fanlight above and the windows at each side; exposed timber trusses ('principaled' roofing) and timber-lined walls are also clearly shown.

The annual Southport Show and the Harvest Festival and Fair held functions and displays in the School of Arts building over the years until it was taken over by the Returned Servicemen in 1938.

A meeting was held in the School of Arts on a Tuesday night in July 1922 to discuss detailed arrangements for the visit of their Excellencies the Governor General and Lady Forster. This was presided over by the Mayor, Alderman E. Fass.²²

During the Back to Southport Carnival in August 1937 a Monster Boxing Tournament was held in the School of Arts building with £20 in prizes. The Programme included:

Six rounds: W. Eacott (Brisbane) v. E. Napper (Southport)
W. Potter (Brisbane) v. A. Gibson (Southport)



Four rounds: F.Davies (Brisbane) v. W Boyd (Southport)
D. Yoe (Brisbane) v. E. Kendrick (Southport)
C. Gardner (Brisbane) v. E. Fielder (Southport)
L. Schluter Brisbane) v. K. Medland (Southport)
Bob Law (Brisbane) v. W. Bekue (Ormeau)
L. Law (Brisbane) v. T. Reedman (Ormeau)
G. Wilson Southport) v. R. Lane (Tallebudgera)
A. Haincs (Brisbane) v. J. Frohm (Tallebudgera)
*J. Gibson (Southport) v. F. Morris (Southport).*²³

Social History:

Performances by world renowned entertainers as well as local artists were held at the Southport School of Arts and delightful social events from movie nights to grand balls brought great pleasure to the community.

The Logan Witness of 2nd August 1884, reported, under Country News, that a Saturday night concert took place where several ladies sang. Also there was a *mirth producing piece* 'Box and Cox', in which Messrs. Bradbury and Agnew took the leading part.²⁴

On Tuesday, September 1, 1896 an evening was planned for vocal and dramatic entertainment to raise revenue for the School of Arts with ballads, duets and the comic farce 'Revenge is Sweet' together with the popular comedy 'Exchange is no Robbery'. It concluded with a dance accompanied by the Southport Brass Band.

Tickets: Front Seats 1s 6d, Back seats 1s.²⁵

The School of Arts Ball for *adults and juveniles* on Thursday 27 April 1899 was claimed as being one of the *most successful that ever took place in Southport*. The hall was *artistically decorated with flags, Chinese lanterns and evergreens, and with all the bright fancy dresses it made a most pleasing effect*. Thirty couples took to the floor for the *Grand March* and all proceedings were *under the supervision of MC, Mr C. Lather*.²⁶

Mr T Cowderoy hand wrote a letter recalling his memories of Southport. He noted that the School of Arts was built on the corner of Lawson and Scarborough streets where many happy evenings were spent by Southport folk. Singers of world renown such as Madame Melba (Dame Nellie Melba) and Marie Narelle as well as world famous bands including Besses o' th' Barn Band performed there.

Weekly screenings of films by West's pictures such as 'The Kelly Gang' ran while a man on stage described the picture. The early picture shows brought great joy and excitement far beyond that of modern television.

The School of Arts housed the exhibits for the Annual Show which was held at the recreation grounds next door.²⁷



Believed to be the Great Eastern Ball in the School of Arts, Southport, Queensland, circa 1920s
Robert Miethke, photographer.²⁸

Currently (2015):

The Returned Services League (RSL) continues to operate on the site providing support to service veterans and their families as well as impressive entertainment and function facilities. The organisation has not forgotten the history of the site and the successive buildings that have stood there, including an entry on their website that refers proudly to the School of Arts which first occupied the land under the reference ‘Our History’ -----

120 Years of History

Past, Present & Future

RSL Club Southport has a proud heritage and parallels the ever developing district. It has come a long way since The School of Arts was first erected on the site in 1882 and provided a stage, dressing rooms, splendid library and seating for 200 people.

In 1938 Control of the building was handed to the RSL with the erection of a then modern brick building on the site in 1957. Having undergone a series of refurbishments and face lifts with the major renovation taking place in 1996, RSL Club Southport stands proud today and into the future.....



RSL Club today, cnr Lawson and Scarborough Streets, Southport.

A painting by J Borthwick of the original Southport School of Arts building hangs on the wall of the Southport RSL Sub-Branch office on the right as one enters the vibrant RSL Club.



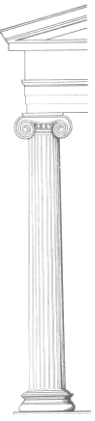
Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Carole Byron (ADFAS Gold Coast) for her support and advice.

Library staff at the Gold Coast Local Studies Library, Southport

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Photographs: Naomi Wright



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