

FOSTER COOPER

Chris McQuellin, 2017

Foster Cooper was born in Brighton, Sussex, England in May of 1839. His family were well off, his early years being spent at a private boarding school, then some years at Public School, followed by some time at University. He immigrated to Australia seeking the fortune that the gold fields presented. He arrived in Melbourne in 1858 as a nineteen year old.

His early years in Australia were not that easy as the lure of the goldfields was to prove enticing and Cooper followed the various rushes in Victoria, New South Wales and even to New Zealand. He was however to drift into journalism after getting some articles accepted by *The Argus*, *The Australasian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

In the 1860s he visited the Ovens goldfields and remained in Beechworth for some time, being associated with the *Ovens & Murray Advertiser*. It was not until 1872 that he came to live in Albury after an association with George Adams (the founder of the *Albury Banner* newspaper). It was in Albury that he accepted the position as editor of this paper.

The *Banner* had been running for about twelve years and Cooper was in a fine position to see expansion in the content of the paper to become the newspaper that researchers will know about.

Foster Cooper eventually became a partner in this newspaper. He was editor for almost fifty years prior to his death. He was also the Albury and district reporter for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* for over thirty years. In his early days at the paper he was the only journalist doing all the literary work necessary.



The *Albury Banner* staff in 1890, Foster Cooper seated centre front with white handkerchief in his breast pocket (photo from State Library of NSW)

His involvement was not just journalism for he was to become a leader in the establishment of the Albury Volunteer infantry in 1885. England was at war in the Sudan and NSW had sent a military contingent. The Government was keen to have a defence capability and Cooper was the catalyst locally. He was the secretary, publicist and formation Captain (elected) of one of the two companies of the First Regiment NSW Volunteer Infantry located in Albury. Of note, there was to be a 115 year association with Albury and the Army from 1885 until the year 2000. It was then that the Reserve unit and museum moved to new quarters in the Bandiana Military precinct.

Cooper in his post as editor of the *Banner* always reported on local military matters. Significant was the publishing to Albury and districts, articles relating to the Boer War and WW I stories covering local soldiers.

His editorial authority offered to Albury and district readers had some significant influence over the period 1872-1922. We still know today that editorials can affect political and social outcomes. An editorial can invoke public debate and align thinking amongst readers and can influence voting patterns. Cooper's impact on Albury society for those fifty years cannot ever be underestimated.

He retired from the *Albury Banner* in 1922 after nearly fifty years at the paper. He had been a long term Justice of the Peace and had taken a keen interest in the Agricultural Society in Albury. Unfortunately he died just one year later aged 84, but had been unwell for about fifteen months with a heart condition.

The *Albury Banner* reported in its obituary of February 23, 1923, that Cooper was "a cultured gentleman, a man of generous and kindly impulses, a journalist who carried out his important work guided by the loftiest purposes, and withal a loyal and progressive townsman. He played an important part during his fifty years' residence in Albury in the rearing of the town to its present position of importance."

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/102153362>

He died at his home *Bonegilla* in Kiewa Street in 1923 (the house still stands at the north-west corner of Kiewa and Wyse Street).

He left a wife and seven children – three boys and four girls.

His funeral service was entrusted to Messrs Trappold and Lester and he is buried in the Catholic section of the Albury Pioneer Cemetery.