

Albury's Time Ball

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Time waits for no man! 1860 Albury folk had spring wound clocks and watches but only arguments as to the correct time. So perverse was the problem, half an hour's grace was given for meetings, appointments, gatherings etc. The *Border Post* was only weeks old in November 1856 when they first bemoaned the difficulties of this issue.

On February 19, 1859, *Border Post* continued to press with the following: "Our neighbours in Beechworth purchased a town clock long ago, the denizens of the little town of Gundagai have provided themselves with a time gun, and it is high time the Alburyites took a similar step. We prefer a gun to a clock or sun dial as the discharge can be heard all over town."

Mercifully, a hi-tech solution was at hand. *Border Post*, April 6, 1861: "Time Ball – a public subscription has been opened for the construction of Albury's Time Ball, to be placed at the Telegraph Office."

In 1858, a telegraph line between Melbourne and Sydney was being installed but no connection to Albury was considered. John Nichols, civic minded publican of the Rose Hotel, offered to provide a room and assistant free of charge for the office if the townsfolk subscribed the cost of bringing the wires into town. Albury's 642 residents of the day responded admirably. On April 9, 1858 the office opened – cost was 4 shillings per 10 words.

In 1859, the government took over, leased the room at the Rose, appointed Mr H Lay as Master and allocated the block on Kiewa and Dean Street corner (now the Post Office), for a two-storey Telegraph Office. Upstairs were living quarters for both NSW and Victorian operators. It opened in mid-1861.

Border Post, July 20, 1861: "Time Ball – This affair is now in working order. It dropped on Thursday for the first time, and will continue to do so now regularly every day. It will be hoisted at five minutes before one, and fall precisely at that hour. The ball is between three and four feet in diameter, formed of canvas stretched on a wooden frame,



Albury Post Office and Time Ball, circa 1865.
Some of the granite blocks remain in the present Post Office.

and painted in alternate stripes of black and white. It is a conspicuous object, and can be seen from all parts of the town, except where some specially tall buildings obstruct the view.”

The building became the Post Office in 1870, being remodeled in 1874 with Albury’s first public clock added in 1879.