

SHOP - RETAIL

NARALING HALL - 100 YEARS

Overview

Retail trade at Naraling centred on a single, continuously evolving general store that operated for close to a century, passing through at least a dozen owners between 1909 and 1979 before the building itself deteriorated and was demolished in 2003. Alongside the store, Naraling also had a separate post office, telephone exchange and, in its earliest years, a blacksmith's shop, making the small collection of retail and service buildings the practical heart of the townsite for the district's farming families. Today only concrete foundations and a few aloe plants mark the site, but detailed local records preserve an unusually rich picture of how the store changed hands and adapted to the community's needs over nearly a century of operation.

Origins: The Ridley Store (1909–1912)

The Naraling Store was first established in 1909 by Bob and Margaret Ridley (née Siewright), operating for three to four years until the railway line to Naraling was completed in 1910–11. The Ridleys bought farm produce directly from local settlers — vegetables, fruit, poultry and fresh meat — helping supply both the resident farming families and the railway construction workers in the area. Electricity, refrigeration and the presentation of packaged goods and mail were novel features the store introduced at the time, and it reportedly sold large quantities of cool drinks to workers and residents alike, before the Ridleys eventually moved on from the district.



A Rapid Succession of Owners (1928–1951)

Records held by the local community, drawn from minute books, receipts and expenditure statements, show the store changing hands frequently through the interwar and wartime periods. Horace S. and Florence Penny operated the store from February 1928 to April 1934, with surviving receipts confirming transactions for tea and petrol

through to a final recorded entry on 25 January 1934. Widow Edith M. "Eddie" Gray then ran the store from 28 April 1934; her son Maitland was reportedly only twelve years old when his father died.

Lawrence Gordon and Lorna Criddle took over from 12 January 1939 and held the store through the difficult years of the Second World War until September 1947, a period during which they were also living at Naraling and witnessed key community milestones, including standing as witnesses at the 1937 wedding of Jack and Joyce Gray and the 1940 birth of Mabel Gray. William F. "Bill" Cardingly, originally from Northampton, ran the store from September 1947 to March 1950; Cardingly had played football for both Nabawa and Yuna clubs, tying the store's ownership history directly to the district's sporting network. During his tenure the store also functioned as an informal emergency communications post — Cardingly reportedly shut off the local telephones at night, requiring the Gray family to travel to the store to wake him and place emergency calls through to a doctor or on to Geraldton, as occurred when young Lyall Gray fell seriously ill in 1948. Mr and Mrs Mick and E. Lynch briefly held the store from March 1950 to March 1951.



The Bell Family Era and a Community Clinic (1951–1979)

Daniel Norman "Mick" Bell (Snr) and his wife Winifred took over the store on 1 March 1951 and ran it for two decades, the longest single ownership tenure in the store's recorded history. Mick applied through the courts for a gallon liquor licence and obtained it in 1953, adding fuel and alcohol sales to the store's offerings. Winifred went on to set up a dedicated clinic room at the store where visiting clinic sisters from Geraldton could examine local children, a service used by families in the district including in 1968 and 1971. Mick Bell (Snr) died of a heart attack at the Naraling store itself on 20 July 1971 at the age of 58, after which Winifred continued running the business with her son Mick (Jnr)

and his wife Anne Bell (née Williamson) until July 1979; a store employee, Heather Farrell, ran the premises for the family from March 1973, before the Bell family relocated to Yuna at Easter 1974. Winifred passed away in 1999.



Final Ownership and Closure (1979–2003)

George and Sandra Russell purchased the Naraling Store in July or August 1979, retaining its gallon liquor licence. The store was subsequently bought by John Percy, who was specifically interested in acquiring the valuable gallon licence; Percy closed the store permanently and relocated to Karratha, ending nearly seventy years of continuous retail trade at Naraling. The building was left vacant and gradually deteriorated over the following two decades until the remaining structure was pulled down in 2003, and today the site survives only as a historical memory rather than a physical place.

Table: Ownership Timeline of the Naraling Store

Period	Owner(s)	Notes
1909–1912	Bob & Margaret Ridley	Founding owners; sold farm produce, introduced electricity and refrigeration
Feb 1928–Apr 1934	Horace S. & Florence Penny	Documented via surviving receipts for tea and petrol
From 28 Apr 1934	Edith M. "Eddie" Gray	Widow; ran store after husband's death
12 Jan 1939–Sept 1947	Lawrence Gordon & Lorna Criddle	Operated through WWII years
12 Sept 1947–Mar 1950	W.F. "Bill" Cardingly	Former Nabawa/Yuna footballer; store doubled as night emergency phone post

Period	Owner(s)	Notes
Mar 1950–1 Mar 1951	Mr & Mrs Mick & E. Lynch	Brief tenure
1 Mar 1951–July 1971	Daniel "Mick" (Snr) & Winifred Bell	Longest tenure; gallon liquor licence obtained 1953; Mick died at store 1971
July 1971–July 1979	Winifred, Mick (Jnr) & Anne Bell	Winifred added community clinic service; family moved to Yuna in 1974
July/Aug 1979	George & Sandra Russell	Retained gallon licence
After 1979	John Percy	Bought store for its licence; closed it and moved to Karratha
2003	—	Remaining structure demolished; site now only foundations and aloe plants

The Naraling Post Office, Telephone Exchange and Store Building

Separate from the general store's retail trade, Naraling also had a dedicated post office, telephone exchange and shop building, constructed from around 1930 as a simple timber-framed, corrugated-iron-clad residence. This building was severely damaged by a storm and subsequently demolished, leaving only concrete foundations and some aloe plants marking the site today, which the Shire of Chapman Valley's heritage inventory records as being of local historic significance for the essential services it provided to the community. Naraling's retail precinct sat within the broader Naraling Reserve, alongside the school, hall, railway station and the residence of the Walter Criddle family, forming the commercial and civic core of the townsite.

Retail in the Wider Upper Chapman District

Naraling's store operated within a network of similar small general stores serving the scattered rail-siding communities of the Upper Chapman district. Nabawa's own store was built by Samuel Jupp and opened in 1911, later passing through the Box, Hayward, Branch and Gray families before closing in 1968, with the surviving postmistress continuing to offer telephone, mail, bread, fuel and hardware services from the site. Nanson likewise had its own general store — known locally as Agnew's — built in 1926, while William Stansfield, the district's Roads Board secretary, ran a general store from his own home in Nanson from 1910 before a dedicated Roads Board office was built in 1913. Other settlements, including Yuna, supported their own general stores from 1926–27, alongside a butchery and bakery, reflecting how each small rail community across the Upper Chapman district maintained its own basic retail infrastructure until road transport and population decline drove consolidation into fewer, larger centres such as Nabawa and Geraldton.

Heritage Recognition Today

The Naraling Post Office-Exchange & Store site is formally listed in the Shire of Chapman Valley's Municipal Inventory of Heritage Places, recorded as Place Number 48, with a

management category reflecting its status as a ruin of local historic significance. Alongside the surviving Naraling Church Hall, the former post office and store ruins are among the few heritage-recognised remnants of the retail and commercial life that once anchored the Naraling community, and the Shire has actively sought photographs, stories and memorabilia relating to the town's shops and businesses as part of its ongoing heritage preservation efforts tied to the Naraling Hall's centenary celebrations.



Note: All information sourced from available records, anecdotal information and may be subject to minor change.