Bathurst celebrates the 150th anniversary of the Municipality of Bathurst in 2012. Gazetted on 13 November 1862, Bathurst could now elect its first Council and Mayor.

Bathurst was Australia’s first inland European settlement, established by Governor Lachlan Macquarie in 1815. Following the discovery of gold in nearby villages in the 1850s, Bathurst began to boom.

As a penal colony, all laws for NSW were made in England and overseen by the Governor in Sydney. As the colony’s population increased however, so did the need to form local organisations to manage issues such as road maintenance and bridge building.

The NSW Legislative Council was established on 18 July 1843 and a compulsory system of District Councils introduced. Each District Council was appointed by the government and authorised to impose local taxes to build bridges, make and repair roads and public buildings, and finance the local police.

The Bathurst-Carcoar Council was invoked in August 1843 and formally established in April 1844. However, problems plagued the unpopular and inefficient District Council system and it finally folded in 1858. In its place, the Municipalities Act of 1858 was introduced, which allowed any City, Town, Rural District or Hamlet to petition the Colonial Secretary to become a Municipality and elect their own Council.

Community leaders in Bathurst were committed to forming a local council of elected representatives to improve town facilities and services. At a public meeting at Bathurst Court House on 18 December 1861, attendees resolved to take the necessary steps to turn the town of Bathurst into a Municipality.

Charles William Croaker was appointed by the NSW Government as the Returning Officer for Bathurst on 30 December 1862, to prepare for local elections.

At a public meeting of voters at the Court House in Russell Street in February 1863, 23 candidates nominated to become the Municipality’s first nine Aldermen. The first local municipal council elections were held several days later, under the guidance of Mr Croaker.

Members of the first Bathurst Municipal Council were Edmund Webb, John McKay, Joseph Cary Stanger, Richard Young Cousins, John De Clouet, John Wadsworth Ashworth, Dr Richard Machattie, Alexander Crilly and Henry Dale.

At their first meeting in March 1863 these same Aldermen elected Richard Young Cousins from Kelso as the first Mayor of Bathurst. The vote for Mayor would occur every 12 months, with new council elections every four years. John McKay did not complete his term as Alderman and was replaced by Samuel Robinson.

With no building of their own, Council meetings were initially held in a rented room at the Prince Albert Inn in Russell Street, between George and Rankin Streets, near Jordon Creek.

With an estimated population of 4,090 residents, the new Council was faced with a mammoth task. Roadways were in poor condition and most were unformed. There were no garbage or sanitary services, no reticulated water service or gasworks. Most areas within the boundaries were unkempt and, with little fencing, livestock could roam the streets.

William Brown was hired as the first Town Clerk and Edward Gell became the first Town Surveyor. He also oversaw construction and building work in the Municipality.
The first Bathurst Council by-laws were approved by assent of the NSW Governor on 26 June 1863.

Work began principally on Russell, William, Howick, Durham, Keppel and George Streets. Road gravel was spread and repair work carried out on four bridges.

In 1864, six large kerosene lamps suitable for street use were ordered. Councillors moved that they be lit between sunset and sunrise but only for 240 days of the year.

Three Wards were proclaimed for Bathurst by the Council in 1865 - Central, Macquarie and Western. Each was to be represented by three elected Aldermen.

The Municipalities Act 1867 was passed, superseding the original 1858 Act. The Municipalities Act 1867 allowed the formation of a Municipal District and local council areas were now called Boroughs.

It also allowed land owners with large properties more than one vote.

In mid-1868, Council meetings moved to the Victoria Hotel where they stayed until the Market Building was constructed in 1871.

On 25 June 1873, Alderman D Jones and Alderman F Halliday moved that a Town Hall be planned, despite Council not having the finance to build. Councillors felt a Town Hall could be built in stages, supervised by a management committee.

The structure was to cost under £4,000 and plans were sought locally as well as from Sydney. A plan from an architect named Thorne was accepted on 3 December.

It was to be 1876 before their Town Hall and Council Chambers were built on an acre of land reserved for this purpose on the corner of William and Russell Streets. The building proved to be too small within a couple of decades and most large meetings were held at the School of Arts or other halls. On several occasions Councillors authorised additions and repairs to the building.

Despite its problems, the building continued to be used until it was demolished to make way for the current Civic Centre in 1966.