

History of MANILLA DISTRICT RURAL MUSEUM

Manilla Historical Society was granted tenancy of Royce's house in 1975 to set up Manilla's museum. At the same time, it was also allowed access to the old Mackenzies machinery workshop (c.1912), for display of the many farm implements being added to the collection.

For close to 20 years the machinery shed remained static, open only during special events with general maintenance taking the form of working bees. Whilst the majority of the machinery collection was well protected within the building - excess dust being the main nuisance resulting from draughty doors - many large pieces of farm machinery were of necessity left exposed to the elements in the yard for long periods.

In 2005, along with participation in the National Trust Heritage Festival held annually across New South Wales, an opportunity to showcase working methods of the past arose. The event led to a reappraisal of both shed and collection and an acknowledgement of the Society's obligation to not just hold, but to consciously preserve the items in its care. Manilla historical Society's tenancy of Mackenzie's Machinery workshop during the 1970s, reflects the community's burgeoning respect for local

Heritage at the outset and the importance of the pastoral and grain industries to the early prosperity of Manilla & district.

By 2008 - after 5 years of showing restored working items from the rural collection at the annual Manilla Vintage Machinery Rally (Est.1989), there was a developing public enthusiasm for saving the community's rural heritage. A VIM grant was secured to assist those volunteers called upon to collect donated items of machinery, most of which required lifting, towing and ultimately transportation from properties to the machinery shed, situated conveniently in the centre of town. First consideration for the Society as custodian, was in protection and preservation of those things entrusted to it. The need to approach best practice in conservation of ageing farming implements such as 19th c. timber harvesters; engines and trucks both working and awaiting restoration; accommodating the broken down significant item and evaluating significance to local heritage. were all determining factors in the plan to expand.

The main focus was on the roofing of the yard to protect the many large machinery pieces being handed over to the Museum. This had become a matter of necessity to allow for less crowding in the main shed, and better display of smaller machines, tools, implements and static displays.

Construction of the roof over the 500Sqm. yard on the southern side of the shed was undertaken by M.H.S. volunteers contributing in excess of 280 hours. Contractors provided assistance with heavy or dangerous work. The upgrade of Manilla District Rural Museum, like most other improvements across the Manilla Museum complex, has generated a strong spirit of recollection and generosity in the community, at a time when retiring farmers are coming to approach the issue of property clearance. What to do with those idle bits of machinery from a bygone era, superseded and left forgotten. The alternative to public donation might be a healthy windfall for scrapping all that old metal. However, second thoughts of the benefit of preservation and the significance of a particular item in the former prosperity of Manilla & District, in early days a rich rural centre, are seeing our community rural collection expand as never before.

The Cooperative partnership which has seen this project come to fruition, is seen as Tamworth Regional Council's acknowledgement of the efforts of this society over many years to endeavour to improve conditions for the preservation of public items in the Manilla Community Collection, with a long-held desire to bring new life to Mackenzies Workshop. The cultural value of this significant building has been enhanced. The facility was Officially opened by former Mayor James Treloar in April 2012, in response to our invitation in appreciation of his interest and his input to securing funds to undertake the Rural Museum upgrade.

Following on from the work carried out in 2012, Tamworth Regional Council purchased the vacant ground on the northern side of the machinery shed, expanding the Rural Museum's potential to preserve more of the district's farming heritage. Fencing, gravelling and upkeep of the new block as well as maintenance of the entire complex has been undertaken with the allocation of Community Service workers through an official arrangement with NSW Corrective Services, which sees Manilla Heritage Museum as an Agency of that Department.

©Di Nichol June 2012-Updated Feb 2014