

Acceptance that the Shire Council might give a lead in concern for the history of the district might not have been provided for in the Local Government Acts and, in any case, was slow in coming. The earliest major historical writings of the district are those of individuals such as R.H. Stainthorpe, William Candy and in the combined Agricultural Society and Warracknabeal Herald Jubilee of 1935.⁵¹⁴

A request for help by The Women's Centenary Council (q.v.) on 3 November 1933, with their *Centenary Gift Book* project, failed to gain Shire Council support when Crs. R. Smith and T.R. Hewitt moved that a public meeting of interested women be called. On 21 July 1939, in response to a request from the Warracknabeal Agricultural and Pastoral Society, Crs. J.H. Fletcher and F.D. King moved that the Shire President convene a public meeting to discuss a suitable memorial for the pioneers of the district. The date proposed was 8 September but, on 3 September, the Second World War began and it seems the meeting was not held. The subject was raised again, this time by Crs. F.D. King and R. Reaper, in August 1947 and by Crs. W. Woodward and A.G. Couzner, in October 1949, but apparently, the public meetings called for were not held. In 1954, the Wimmera Regional Committee proposed that all shires should set up and preserve historic monuments and records throughout the State and a motion from Crs. F. Symes and L.R. Rodda gained ready affirmation from the Council to advertise in the local newspapers for historical records.

At some time during these years a Pioneers Memorial Committee was established and when, in 1957, the National Trust sought details of local people who could help in a National Survey, Crs. L.R. Rodda and G. Lyle moved that the Back to Warracknabeal Committee and Mr Keith Hofmaier of Beulah be suggested.

It was not until 1962 that some positive direction was given to the cause of history in the Shire when the Warracknabeal Apex Club asked the Shire president to convene a public meeting to gauge interest in the formation of a Warracknabeal and District Historical Society. This time the public meeting was held and on Friday 5 October 1962 the Society held its first meeting, thus establishing a body which would foster sustained interest in the history of the district.

In October 1963, the editor of the *Warracknabeal Herald*, Mr L.J. Hicks, asked the Shire Council to produce a History of Warracknabeal and offered a manuscript of his own as a basis. Council (Rodda/Bourke) referred the proposal to the newly formed Historical Society which in return, supported the proposal and recommended that the year 1967 be the year of publication but did not agree that the Hicks manuscript be used as a basis.⁵¹⁵

The Warracknabeal and District Historical Society at once formed

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its own committee of Messrs M. Palmer,⁵¹⁶ D. McColl,⁵¹⁷ K. Hofmaier,⁵¹⁸ B. Kennedy⁵¹⁹ and E.L. Graetz, to which the Council added Crs. L.R. Rodda and M. Bourke to be its own representatives. In 1965, the Historical Society went further and recommended that the author of the town's history should be Mrs S. McCarthy⁵²⁰ and that Jacaranda Press might be approached for a printing arrangement.

On 23 April 1965, a 'Publications Committee', which the Council had created, gained Council approval (Lang/Graetz) to publish a book, pay Mrs McCarthy £1,700 and seek Government approval for the Council to spend £2,000 on the project. For its part, Jacaranda Press agreed to produce the book without cost to the Council provided that of the 2,000 copies printed, the Council would take 250 copies at seventeen shillings and sixpence each and guarantee 600 prepublication copies at £1-5-0 each,⁵²¹ to which Council agreed on the motion of Crs. Fisher and J.Q. King.

In due course the book, *Warracknabeal, A Wimmera Centenary*, was launched in 1967 during a 'Back to Warracknabeal' celebration arranged by the Warracknabeal Centenary Committee with Cr. L.R. Rodda as chairman and Mr Rodney Ashfield as secretary.⁵²²

Meanwhile, on 23 October 1964, a Warracknabeal and District Historical Society deputation, led by Messrs Max Smale⁵²³ (president) and Doug McColl (secretary), advocated that an Agricultural and Historical Museum be established in Warracknabeal. Financial help was sought from the Shire Council and it was pointed out that

Warracknabeal was ideally situated for an agricultural museum which, they said, would attract visitors to the district. The Historical Society had also learned that a Government 2:1 grant up to \$5,000 would be available but the Government would not provide costs of maintenance, a responsibility which the Council accepted.⁵²⁴ Following this was a period when the concept took shape and rapidly grew in size, well beyond the vision of those who began it.

In February 1965 The Council agreed to a proposal that the museum be named, 'Northwest Applied Science Museum and Archives' and that it be erected on land bounded by the Henty Highway, Thomas, Arnold and Franklin Streets.⁵²⁵ The Council established a North Western Agricultural Museum Investigation Committee which in July 1968 asked the Council to act as 'trustee' for the project. After considerable deliberation, Crs. McFarlane⁵²⁶ and J.Q. King induced the Council to become 'the construction authority to meet treasury requirements'.⁵²⁷ At the same meeting Council agreed (W.G. Armstrong⁵²⁸/H.H. Woods) that control should be vested in a [museum] committee of management in conjunction with the National Trust of Victoria⁵²⁹ and also agreed (Woods/Kent) that the 'Council should finance and purchase'.

The Historical Society then established a body known as the 'Northwest Agricultural Museum Regional Committee' with Mr Howard Rodda (son of Cr. Len Rodda) as chairman. The purpose of the new body was to marshal regional support from neighbouring shires such as Donald, Karkaroc and Dimboola, but only moral support was forthcoming when hard financial support was needed, so the Regional Committee ceased to operate as soon as Warracknabeal decided to buy land locally and 'go it alone'.

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Further investigation revealed that a larger site was available and again, with commendable support for its undertaking, the Council decided (W.G. Armstrong/Lang) on 7 March 1968, to buy 18 acres of land between the Henty Highway and Minyip Road for \$5,000 from the Otto Vince Estate and an additional 22 acres from the adjacent Gowers Estate.⁵³⁰ The next question was, how much support could be expected from the Government?

In March 1970, the Council appointed a 'museum planning committee'⁵³¹ and the Historical Society set about raising funds. The latter effort was very energetic and donations were gained locally which (including \$5,000 from the H.V. McKay Trust) amounted to \$17,000.

In May 1970 the Premier of Victoria, Hon. H.E. Bolte,⁵³² agreed 'in principle' to a \$300,000 project with an initial grant of \$40,000 on a 2:1 basis.

It was realized that the museum would be built in stages and in anticipation of the first grant, on 19 March 1970 the Council recommended that an architect be engaged.⁵³³ In April 1970, with the assurance of \$40,000 from the Government and \$20,000 from local funds, the architect, Graeme M. McDonald of Melbourne, presented a new concept in design and which the Council approved. Of the builders who registered interest, Messrs J.G. Shaw & Sons of Warracknabeal won the contract for the first stage, to be in the shape of an octagon. The first tenders were too high but by placing a central support column in the octagon, the cost was reduced and by September 1971 the building was well advanced.

On 18 May 1972 the first display machinery was moved into the first octagon. Meanwhile, with the assurance of further annual grants of \$40,000, the planning committee moved to add three more octagons (stage 2) and the tender of J.G. Shaw & Sons of \$120,374 was accepted.⁵³⁴ At Easter 1973 all four octagons were officially

opened by the Minister for State Development, Hon Murray Byrne⁵³⁵ and Mr Keith Lewis⁵³⁶ was appointed first manager. The Planning Committee was then replaced by a Committee of Management.

Despite the huge amount of work and the worthwhileness of such a thing, the museum did not pay well. Attendances were below expectations and the Council accepted that an approach be made to Corporate Marketing Advisers for ideas on promotion.⁵³⁷ It is doubtful if any useful advice resulted and in June 1975⁵³⁸ a disappointed council decided to 'offer' the museum to the Government (Woods/McFarlane) and cut their losses. The Minister of State Development offered to subsidize the museum loss by up to \$10,000 a year on a 2:1 basis but Council reaffirmed its offer of handing the museum over to the Government. It transpired that the building and grounds could be given to the Government but the museum display would be given to other museums such as Swan Hill. This, of course, was unthinkable.

In July 1981, the Shire Council disbanded the museum committee of management and in August the Warracknabeal & District Historical Society accepted the Council's terms for transfer of museum management. The Society then inherited members of former committee of management, changed its title to 'North Western Agricultural Museum Committee' and added Historical Society personnel and Shire Council representatives.

In September 1981 the Shire Council accepted that the name 'Wheatlands Warracknabeal' would apply to the site (grounds) of the museum which is registered as the 'North Western Agricultural Machinery Museum'.

The museum now operates on the basis of small and sporadic Government grants for certain maintenance and a huge input of voluntary time and effort organized by the Historical Society. It has diversified and is used as a venue for rallies, displays and even musical performances.⁵³⁹

512. Apparently the Government disbanded Regional Committees because some (not Wimmera) were no longer working effectively. Today it seems remarkable, but the shires were not required to pay any subscription for the Regional committees and all expenses of committee members were defrayed by the Government.
513. Warracknabeal Shire Council Minutes, 16 August 1974.
514. *Early Reminiscences of the Wimmera and Mallee*, Robert H. Stainthorpe, reprinted by Warracknabeal & District Historical Society 1967. *Reminiscences of the*
514. *continued*
Early Mallee and Wimmera, William Candy, Warracknabeal Herald, 1927. The combined Agricultural Society and Warracknabeal Herald jubilee was marked by a special supplement to the Warracknabeal Herald on 15 October 1935.
515. The Historical Society suggested that Mr Hicks might make a gift of his manuscript but, apparently, this was not done.
516. Mr T.M. 'Murray' Palmer, was Principal of Warracknabeal High School from 1961 to 1976.
517. Douglas Lyall McColl, pharmacist, Warracknabeal, b. 27 September 1928, Warracknabeal; md. Evelyn Frances Allison; very active as member/officebearer of Warracknabeal & District Historical Society, Anzac Park and Warracknabeal High School; an active sportsman and much interested in town promotion.
518. Keith C. Hofmaier, farmer, Beulah; is a well-known local historian and is responsible for bringing several books into print covering the Brim to Hopetoun area. He now lives in retirement at Beulah.
519. Bruce McDonald Kennedy, farmer, Lah; b. February 1925 at Warracknabeal; md. Margaret Ellen Sleeman; 1s; secretary and active member of Committee of Management of Warracknabeal & District Agricultural Machinery Museum; Margaret Kennedy is an active member/office bearer of the Warracknabeal & District Historical Society.
520. Mrs Susan McCarthy nee Priestley had written a history of Echuca which was published by Jacaranda Press in 1965 and although she was married before the Warracknabeal centenary history was published, she continued to write under her maiden name.
521. The normal retail price of the book was \$4.00 but over succeeding years copies were sold at higher prices.
522. In effect, Jacaranda Press financed the whole cost of the printing of the book itself, without any cost to the Warracknabeal Shire Council.
523. Max Smale was a humanities teacher on the staff of Warracknabeal High School.
524. The Council proposed to sell its property at 33 Molyneux Street to raise some of the finance.
525. Neither the title nor the site eventuated. Other sites were proposed for the museum such as along the Yarriambiack Creek where the Lions Fauna Park is situated.
526. Leo James McFarlane, J.P., farmer, Brim; b. 16 February 1912 at Warracknabeal; md. Lillian Magee of Beulah; 1s 1d; Warracknabeal Shire Councillor 1966-1987, Pres. 1973, 1981; many years associated with Brim Football Club; Pres. Southern Mallee F/Ball League 6 yrs; Warracknabeal Hospital Committee 17 yrs. including President.
527. Borung Shire Council Minutes, 15 May 1970. The Premier desired some statutory authority such as a Council if Government money were to be used.
528. William George Armstrong, J.P., farmer Kellalac; b. 5 November 1932, Horsham; md. Kay Oldman of Sydney; 3s 3d; Warracknabeal Shire Council 1965-1977, Pres. 1975; now Coun'r in Wimmera Shire; many years active in Warracknabeal High School Council; Sporting Complex Committee and Library Committee; Synod and Vestry of Anglican Church.
529. This had later unexpected repercussions when the question of who 'owned' the museum exhibits was raised.
530. The 18 acres of Vince land was bought by the Council in September 1969 and 22 acres was bought from Messrs Sleep & McMullin (formerly Gowers) in September 1970. Warracknabeal Shire Council Minutes, 25 June 1976.
531. The first members were Crs. J.T. Lang, E.L. Graetz and M. Bourke. Other non-council members were H. Rodda, R. McCullough and S. Schubert.
532. Henry Edward Bolte, (Sir); farmer at Meredith, Vic; b. Ballarat, 20 May 1908; served WWII 1940-45; became Premier of Victoria 7 June 1955 and continued in office until 1972, the longest serving Premier in Victoria; d. 1990.
533. The first architect engaged was Mr John Tipping who died early in the planning and his place was taken by his associate, Mr Graeme M. McDonald.
534. A report to the Shire Council at its meeting of 16 May 1975 stated that the museum had received \$126,000 from the Government and the Shire was committed to spend another \$63,000 as its share. When building the second stage was decided the Council took out Loan No. 31 for \$40,000 maturing in 1986. There were, of course, some grumbling ratepayers but the actual cost to them was .2 cents in \$1 for the repayment period.
535. Murray Lewis Byrne, The. Hon., solicitor; b. 29 Aug. 1928 at Ballarat; md. 1951 to Adele Honora Coutts; 2s 6d; MLC Ballarat 1958-1976; Minister for State Development and Decentralisation, Tourism and Immigration 1972-1976.
536. Keith Elston Lewis, law clerk, accountant, administrator, Castlemaine and Warracknabeal; b. 19 August 1922 Boort; was assistant administrator of Alexander Home for Aged, Castlemaine; 15 years a Castlemaine city councillor and twice Mayor; md. Betty Isobel Matthews; 2d; WWII anti-tank Darwin, Pte.; d. 15 October 1986, Warracknabeal; bd Warracknabeal.
537. The Corporate Marketing Adviser apparently planned to promote the museum and proposed that the Council allow them 25% of the increase in revenue.
538. Warracknabeal Council Minutes, 13 June 1975.
539. The business side of the museum is controlled by one sub committee and the display section is controlled by a second sub committee. Both committees combine to organize, raffles, machinery sales, concerts and rallies, the proceeds of which enable the museum not only to function but to develop and expand.