



MANILLA COMMUNITY ARCHIVE FACILITY

During its 40+ year history, Manilla Historical Society has contributed significantly to the preservation of community history. However, occupying a former residence as it does, MANILLA HERITAGE MUSEUM presents a challenge for an organisation attempting to follow best practice in the proper handling and storage of public items held in trust. Accommodation of both artifacts and documents together was from the first, limited to the 4 internal household rooms and foyer. For decades, storage of papers and photos was divided between a small rear room - 'the library' - and another used for public reading, containing district maps and the general history collection. In recent years professional practice has come to the fore with the need for volunteer keepers to do professional development in the area of proper collection care techniques. However, few small community museums are able to allocate 40 percent of their space for collection storage as recommended by the museum profession. Environmental conditions in the Mr. Royce's House were also, as in many other cases, far less than ideal and the risk of disaster was high.



A significant risk of fire in such an old building was always uppermost in our minds and the reality was brought home to all on January 24 2010, when Inverell Family History Group lost its collection in the inferno that destroyed the Byron Arcade in the town centre. This event was a call to action and Manilla Historical Society determined to find a solution to the inadequacy of existing storage space and to create a protective facility whereby the security of the archive would be assured. There followed much debate about the limitations of the museum complex and several alternatives were considered. It was determined that just one option was viable. Two rooms were originally constructed at the rear of Royce's House, the larger of which served for the years between 1908 and c.1962 as a bakery. Although outside the main house, the chosen room shared a common roof structure with the internal space. Our task would be to create a fireproof shield between the 2 sections and to fire-proof the ceiling. Work had already been completed on upgrading the external passageway between the Museum's back door and the Staff amenities room. This preliminary project was carried out by active volunteers utilising materials reclaimed from the previous enclosure, so restoring the space and extending the area to create a secure environment for both VIC volunteer staff and museum workers to move between areas. This would also provide increased security for the community collection. Consultation with a local builder took place and a quote for the work was submitted to the organisation.



In early 2011, MHS President, acting on behalf of the Committee, approached both the Lions Club of Manilla and the Manilla Rotarians, for assistance in carrying out the work on the chosen space. Both organisations responded with donations of \$1,000 each and we acknowledge their support. Overall expenses for completion of the project were approximately \$7000. \$5,000 of this cost was sourced from Historical Society savings.

Trist Constructions undertook the fireproof barrier and ceiling construction and the building of floor to ceiling shelving systems to accommodate, in addition to the existing collection, 113 years of editions of the local newspaper, which had been pledged to the Historical Society by the Martin Family, owners of the Manilla Express, first published in January 1899 and still going to print today.



Duplication of the collected Manilla Histories has been an ongoing process carried out over the years to date and this vast public resource remains in the general history room located at the museum entrance; along with the publication, 'Manilla's Lost Folks' and its supporting volumes of death notices and news articles from 1883 to today. This section is open for public access between 9am & 4pm seven days a week with the assistance of Manilla Visitor Centre Volunteers.

Museum maintenance volunteers contributed around 300 hours to prepare, finish and furnish the archive space. Volunteer historians concerned with managing the archive itself, were then left to move ahead with cataloguing, labelling and storage of original family & community document and image holdings. The archive facility is regularly staffed on Thursday of each week with historians in attendance.

