

7/11/2009

125th ANNIVERSARY of THE ROYCE FAMILY HOME

Tamworth Region's Mayor, James Treloar, was present last Saturday, 7th November in Manilla to unveil the latest T.R.C. funded historical information panel in the front garden of Manilla Heritage Museum. Designed and researched by M.H.S. Newsletter Editor Michael Gategood, the panel is the 5th to be erected in Manilla town.

Construction engineer George Royce came to Manilla 125 years ago in 1884, to undertake the building of the iron bridge over the Namoi River. He was joined by T.J. Bowen, who was very likely the builder of the Royce family home. T.J. Bowen, later to become an elected alderman on the first Manilla Municipal Council in 1901, went on to construct many of Manilla's major buildings, including the Court House, Hotels, Mackenzies Store and many others.

During the early 1970s, Manilla Historical Society members were busily raising funds to restore the old Manilla Shire Council Chambers (built 1918 in Strafford Street), with a view to establishing a permanent Museum. To house their growing collection of Manilla memorabilia, they opened a temporary museum in the former Simpson's Pharmacy next to the Court House Hotel in the main street.

However future plans were suspended in September 1975, when the Manilla Scout Hall, built in the 1940s in east Strafford St, burnt down. Lacking an alternative, Manilla Council saw the need to hand over the old Shire property to the Scouts for a new hall.



Some years earlier, Council had come into possession of the Royce property, having taken it over for long-term non-payment of rates. It was then occupied by residential tenants for some years.

Realising that the local historians had been "left in the lurch", when the old Shire office was suddenly turned over to the Scout Assn., Council contacted them with the generous offer of accommodation of their historic building for setting up as the town's permanent museum. Manilla Shire Council undertook to restore the property with the assistance of a volunteer work program known as 'The Red Scheme', with Shire staff contributing many hours to the restoration of the shop and former reception room and construction of a centre display fixture. Upon completion in late 1975, "Royce Cottage" – Manilla's permanent museum - was opened by Charles Cutler, Minister for Local Govt. & Tourism.

Manilla Historical Society paid regular rent on the property for the first 2 years, after which Manilla Shire Council reduced payment to an annual peppercorn rental and so it remains to this day. 'Royce Cottage', with its expanding collection of local rural and community heritage was renamed 'Manilla Heritage Museum' in the year 2000. The building itself is now known by its original title of 'Royce's House'. It houses the Manilla Community Collection, comprising both the district archives and the physical collection cared for by the MHS volunteers. Visitor Information Centre staff maintain public access to the Museum 7 days a week between 9 & 4.

In the picture: Museum Committee members, Ian Bignall, Jim Maxwell and Betty Stewart with Cdr. James Treloar at the Museum on Saturday.