

SPEAKERS:
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CR. GEO. RICKARD
PRESIDENT, BIRCHIP SHIRE COUNCIL
Subject — "Welcome to Visitors."

MR. T. A. DARCY, M.L.A.
MINISTER FOR WATER SUPPLY
Subject — "Reply on behalf of Visitors"

MR. H. L. CREDLIN
ASSISTANT CHIEF DIVISIONAL
ENGINEER, STATE RIVERS AND
WATER SUPPLY COMMISSION
Subject — "Water Supply"

CR. A. D. HILLGROVE
BIRCHIP SHIRE COUNCIL
Subject — "The Pioneers"



CR. A. D. HILLGROVE WILL OFFICIALLY
UNVEIL & DEDICATE THE FOUNTAIN

SOUVENIR
PROGRAMME

UNVEILING
and
DEDICATION

of

*Pioneer Memorial
Fountain*

SHIRE OFFICE
BIRCHIP

Wednesday, August 12, 1964

The Fountain

DESCRIPTION:

This bronze and tiled concrete fountain, built as a memorial to the pioneers of this district, was designed to display — through the medium of sculpture — Water, which is the life-blood of the Mallee and Wimmera.

The central bronze family group and basins stand about six feet high, and symbolise the effort of the pioneers to rise above their environment. The family figures are ones of aspiration as they climp upwards on the bronze shaft, aided by jets of water. The topmost free-form basins are modelled with struggling figures, whilst the large basin is an activator, with water spilling over, to make a pleasant sight and sound in the heat of summer. From an abstract Mallee fowl, which symbolises the attraction of water for all forms of life, spurts the water at the Western end of the pool.

TECHNICAL DETAILS:

As a matter of technical interest, the figures are modelled in clay, over which investment moulds are cast. The moulds being oven-dried, the bronze is poured, after which the moulds are chipped away. The exposed bronze is then patinated and chemically colored a permanent green. The bowls are modelled in fibre glass and clay before casting by the sculptor. All water is pump reticulated so that there is no waste of the precious liquid.

The sculptor selected the site in front of the Shire Office because the contemporary sculpture could be integrated with a modern building. From the practical viewpoint, this site put the installation of the electric motor and pump, the pump housing, plumbing and lighting, at the most economical level.

FINANCE:

The entire project was financed by voluntary subscriptions from the public. These generous donors wished to erect a memorial to the pioneers who developed the district, and also to symbolise the essential part that water played in this development.

All local donations were acknowledged in "The Guardian" whilst those from outside the district were acknowledged by letter through the courtesy of Miss E. Sanders, Shire Office, Birchip.

TABLET:

On the wall by the fountain, the sculptor, Ian Bow, has created a cast-bronze plaque, with small reliefs of pioneer and windmill. With a clear lay out of good, modern type, the tablet contains the words of dedication.

Within the next few weeks, a list containing the names of all donors will be sealed into the wall behind the tablet. In this way, a record of these generous donors will be preserved for future generations, and one day, will undoubtedly provide an interesting relic for posterity as yet unborn and unknown.

SCULPTOR:

Ian Bow, who studied in Melbourne and in Europe, has carried out many commissioned works, including recent sculptured fountains in Melbourne for the Altona Shire, and the new Penguin Books Building. He is represented by Sculpture in the Art Galleries of Mildura and Hamilton, and the National Galleries of Victoria and Western Australia.

Thanks are extended to Mr. Eric Westbrook, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, for his assistance in initially introducing Ian Bow to Councillor A. W. McClelland, and also for his continued interest throughout the project.

ASSISTANCE:

Persons capably assisting the sculptor were:—

MR. MARIO BRECELY — Supervisor.

MR. GEOFFREY VAUGHAN — Plumber.

MR. RHU NEGRI — Concrete Contractor.

MR. NOEL HARRIS — Electrician.

Thanks are extended to the Birchip Arts, Drama and Cultural Group, for organising the articles of historical interest displayed in the Council Chamber.

DEDICATION:

The dedication and unveiling were performed by Councillor A. D. Hillgrove, himself a descendant of our pioneers, with these words inscribed on the bronze plaque:—

**"THIS FOUNTAIN WAS DEDICATED ON THE 12th AUGUST
1964, TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO EXPLORED,
PICNEERED AND DEVELOPED THE BIRCHIP DISTRICT,
AND TO SYMBOLISE THE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION
THAT WATER AND POWER MADE TO THIS DEVELOPMENT"**

Technical information by
courtesy of Mr. Ian Bow.

W. J. McQUILLEN,
Shire Secretary.

Water Supply

There is no doubt in anyone's mind that the hardships, frustrations and endless toil endured by our Pioneers, could not have culminated in the bountiful conditions enjoyed by this district to-day, had it not been for WATER.

By 1890, the Mallee fringe had been settled, and in 1892 settlement of the Mallee beyond the fringe was made possible by the Mallee Land Act.

From 1895 to 1902, Mallee settlers particularly, had a very bad time through poor crops and shortage of water, and the position was such that in 1902, the Government decided to construct Lake Lonsdale Reservoir as a National work, in order to relieve the situation. Long channel extensions were built by Shire Councils and privately, thus the position improved.

In the severe drought of 1902, practically all stock in the area was transported, owing to shortage of feed and water, to the Western District and Gippsland. In this movement of stock, the farmer was allowed a free pass with each consignment of stock, and a half fare ticket each month to inspect the stock.

The 1905 Water Act provided for the nationalisation of all natural streams and waters, and also for the constitution of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission. It was in 1907, a very dry year in the Mallee, that a start on the channel system was really made in lieu of use of watercourses. After 1910, the extension of the channel system was pushed rapidly ahead, as it was realised that the method of distribution by natural water causes was too wasteful.

Although 1902 finished the worst dry period known, in the almost equally bad drought of 1914, but when the channels were running, it was possible to hold most of the stock in the district. (When the drought broke in 1902, conditions had been so bad that the Government had to provide the seed wheat to sow the crops, and the value was re-imbursed by the farmers to the Government after the harvest.)

The storage areas of the Grampians-catchments feed the network of channels, and serve an area of about 11,000 square miles through 6,000 miles of Commission channels and more than 3,000 miles of farmers' connecting channels. Water is also supplied to 49 towns, which means about 46,000 people in these towns and 27,000 people on farms, are dependent on the effective running of this system.

It can be readily appreciated that this area could not have developed into the important pastoral and agricultural region, which it is now, without the supply of water. Without this assured water supply, made possible by this system of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, the Wimmera and Mallee region would present a different picture to-day. The holdings for stock would have to be large in order to conserve water from the small rainfall, whilst for wheat production, it could be similarly expected the holdings would have been larger.

Just what the value of the water distributed through this scheme represents is difficult to express in monetary terms, but it would be safe to say that without water, this region could only support a fraction of the 73,000 persons now within its boundaries.

So by conservation and distribution of the most valuable of all our natural resources — WATER — it can be said that this area of insecure natural water supply, is prospering.

(Statistics obtained from papers of Mr. R. F. McNab and Mr. C. A. R. Evans, supplied by courtesy of Mr. W. E. Bromfield, State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, Melbourne. Local information by courtesy of Cr. F. J. T. King, Birchip.)

W. J. McQUILLEN,

Shire Secretary.

The Pioneers

It was in 1846, five years before the discovery of gold in Bendigo and Ballarat, that William Morton and Joseph Raleigh arrived with their flock in this district.

They selected a run of 620,000 acres (975 square miles) of open, lightly timbered country, which became known as Morton Plains Station.

However, in the following year, the Wirmbirchip Station (380,000 acres) was taken from Morton Plains. This second selection was followed by those of Narraport Station (55,680 acres) and Marlbed Station (30,900 acres), in 1859 and Karyrie Station in 1846; all from the original Morton Plains run.

In 1866, a combined Post Office, hotel and store was opened at Morton Plains, the mails from Ballarat being brought overland once a fortnight.

1880 saw the land in this area opened up for closer settlement. The first of the new settlers arrived in this and the following year.

The problems and hardships these settlers faced were tremendous. This was a dry area, and the few natural waterholes and lakes in the district could not be relied on in a bad season. All the supplies had to be brought overland from, and produce carted to, St. Arnaud, the nearest railhead, 60 miles to the south.

First attempts at cultivation were disastrous; due in part to inexperience, but mainly to rabbits in plague proportions, which ravaged the crops.

In 1882, the Glowery Brothers opened a store at what was then known as the "junction of the three main roads." This was the beginning of Birchip, although no township was anticipated at the time. In the next few years, a wine shanty, blacksmith and church were built around the store, and the town of Wirmbirchip had been established.

The land to the west and northwest of this tiny hamlet had been avoided by the settlers, as it was covered with Mallee-scrub. Clearing this land was impractical, as no method of ridding the bulbous Mallee roots from the soil had been devised.

In 1885, this waste land had been closed off by a section of the vermin-proof fence that the Government had erected around the fringe of the Mallee to protect the settlers from the ravages of the dingoes and rabbits that harboured there.

Two inventions from South Australia, the Mallee roller, which tore the Mallee-gums, roots and all, from the soil, and the multi-furrow stump-jump plough, each made the development of this and other land around Wirmbirchip possible.

More cleared land meant more effective control of rabbits. Crops could now be grown with greater success.

The railroad, which had been brought to Donald in 1882, was extended to Wirmbirchip in 1893. The land over which it ran was donated free to the Government, to speed this extension.

By 1894, the steadily growing town of Wirmbirchip, now with a population of more than 1,000, had two hotels, two stores, two blacksmiths, a coffee lounge, a butcher, a baker, a public hall and library, a school, a flour mill, several churches, local paper, saleyards and auctioneers.

In 1895, the Shire of Wirmbirchip was created. The name Wirmbirchip was soon after abbreviated to Birchip.

From approximately 1890 to 1903, a series of disastrous droughts made it apparent that Birchip would need to have a reliable water supply to maintain itself. Work was started on an open channel from the Richardson River at Donald, and a 10,000,000 gallon reservoir was excavated at Birchip.

This supply was completed in 1908; and with it, the future of Birchip was assured.

— J. E. JENNINGS,
State School,
Birchip.