



# STEP BACK IN TIME

## Show stands the test of time

Narrandera's 'squatocracy' of the 1890's were men of leisure who built mansions, entertained royally, sent their sons to school in Sydney or England and went 'home' (to England) often.

In 1883 Angus Robertson added a ballroom and 26 guests rooms to his Yarrabee Station homestead.

He also had four hectares of gardens, a tennis court, an orange orchard and vineyards.

This 'squatocracy' gave impetus to the development of leisure interests in Narrandera, which had an enduring influence with many specific interest clubs established by community leaders such as J F Williams, (1863-1904), a local solicitor, and Stuart Donaldson, police magistrate.

These groups included the Volunteer Corp in 1885, Cricket Club 1886, sporting Gun Club in 1889 and a Polo Club 1885.

Even more important to the feelings of community and progress in the town were the annual 'days' which included the annual races, picnics, dances, Chinese New Year, sports days, flowers shows and of course the time honoured agricultural show.

The first Narrandera Agricultural and Pastoral Show was held in 1882, when the foundation president of the Narrandera Pastoral and Agricultural Society was Angus Robertson.

The land was dedicated as a 'showground', and gazetted on March 18 1883, with a small section added on October 27 1972.

Most buildings on the site were built with voluntary labour using donated materials.

The exceptions were the first grandstand, erected by Schuller for 700 pounds, which was destroyed by fire

on May 22 1907.

It was replaced by a larger timber stand on the north west perimeter of the arena.

This second grandstand housed a show society office and luncheon room underneath the raked seating.

Termite infestation resulted in its demolition during 1970's.

The domed Industrial Hall, a rare example of its type, was built by Charles Bundoock under the supervision of Percy Higgins, Narrandera's first Town Clerk, in 1899-1900. Wind damage to the central louvered air vent and the flagpole resulted in the building not being used for many years.

The building was repaired and partially restored in 1994 and re-opened for the 1996 show. The only other dome pavilion of its kind located on a showground in NSW at that time was at Inverell.

The famous showman Jimmy Sharnan began his boxing career in Narrandera in 1908 while courting his future wife and working on the irrigation canals.

After winning a fight in Wagga in 1910 that resulted in the blindness of his opponent, he gave up professional fighting to establish the Jimmy Sharnan Boxing Troupe.

The troupe operated from 1911-1971, making the annual trek around the show circuits in Victoria, NSW and Queensland, including a regular stint at the Narrandera Show.

The troupe gave young fighters, many of them Aboriginal, a start and spawned several Australian champion boxers.

Jimmy Sharnan the second, who eventually took over the troupe, spent school holidays with his grandmother and extended family in Narrandera while his parents kept the troupe on the road.

The Narrandera Show has been held every year since with the exception of 1956 and 1974 due to wet weather or the flooding of the Murrumbidgee River.

The exhibits once reflected all the local industries of wheat and sheep, with a large horse competition and handicraft section.

However, this has changed to reflect changing times and the organisers have had to abandon the cattle shows and extensive ring event program as well as other sections over the years.

The show remains a celebration of the town's vibrancy on a smaller scale with more emphasis on family entertainment.

The showground and its Pioneer Hall (c1960) are used for numerous other community activities, including balls, family reunions, specialist shows, community events and in recent years Blaze Aid volunteers set up their base camp at the showground to repair fences and generally help out flood stricken farmers in the area.

Some uses of the showground have caused controversy in the town, as was reported in the *Narrandera Argus* in 1925.

Churches at the time were waging a war on secularism and objected to the horse races in the main street, the dozens of hotels and the "ungodly" battle between the

squatters and the selectors (or cockies) that had flooded in from central Victoria.

Protestant churches especially attacked the vices of drinking and gambling and defended the Sabbath. Football was being played at the showground on Sundays.

The churches found the football not so very wrong, but were incensed by "the 2000 barrackers let loose on the community with their flaming advertisements, their drinking, their betting, and their shouting, desecrating the sanctity of the Lord's Day".

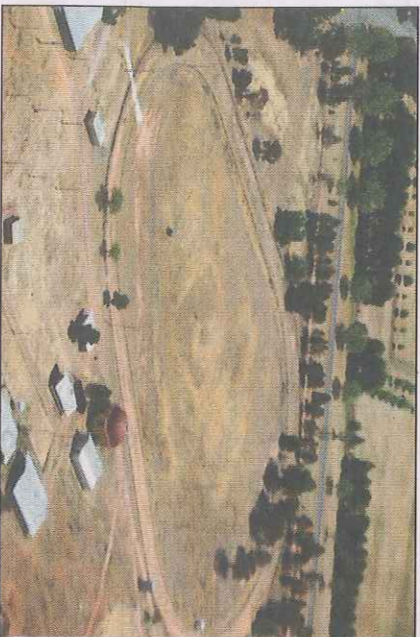
Although this war continued up until the 1960's, it proved to be sand before a secular tide.

From its inception the showground proved to be an integral part in the social and recreational activities in Narrandera.

It is a valuable community facility run by a series of enthusiastic committees, many of whose members gave years of voluntary service.

The association's name was changed to the Narrandera Show society in March 1983.

The Narrandera Showground and the Show Society remain historically significant in Narrandera's sesquicentenary year for their continuous use as a venue for the celebration of rural activities by both the local and wider community since 1882.



An aerial view of the Narrandera Showground.

## CORRECTION

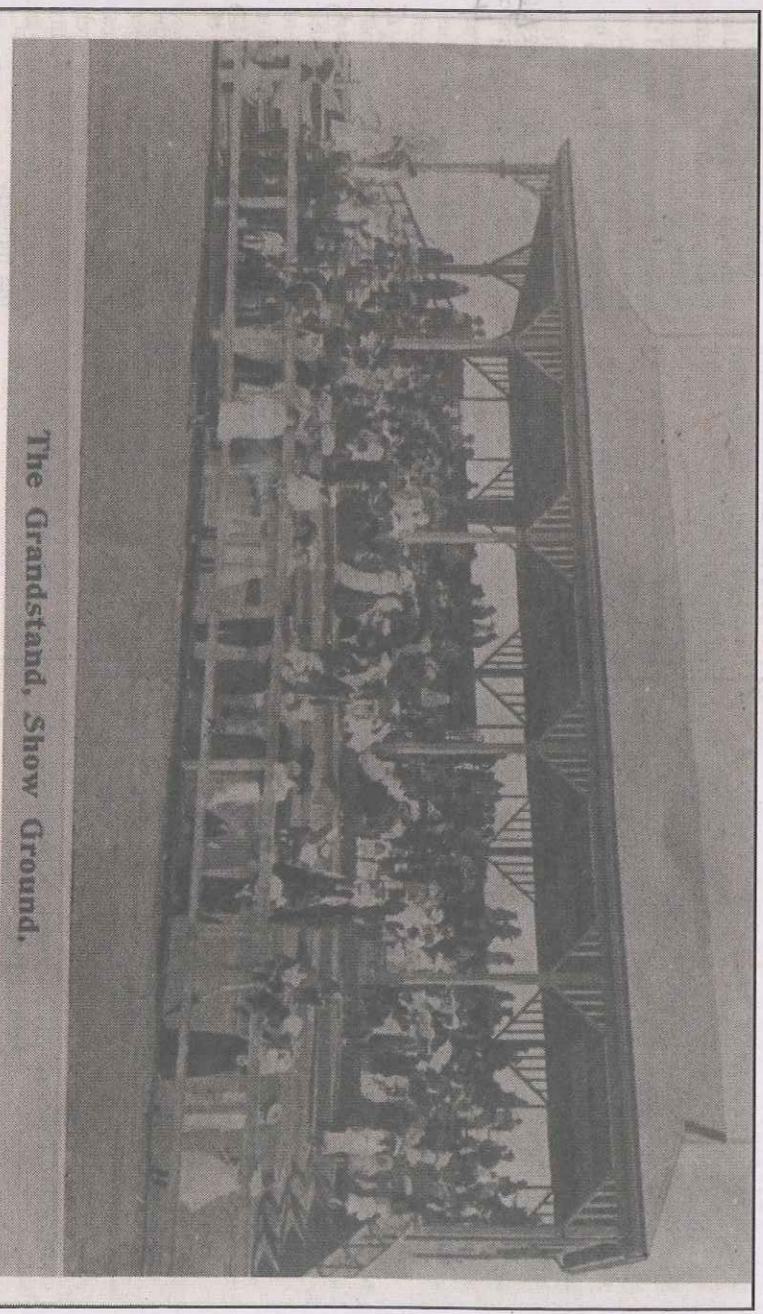
A photograph on the Step Back in Time page last Tuesday contained an incorrect caption.

The bank in the photograph was actually the Government Savings Bank which later became the Commonwealth Bank. The photograph was incorrectly identified in a photo album supplied to the Argus.

*Narrandera Argus*



The historic dome industrial hall at the Narrandera Showground and (below) the old grandstand which was destroyed by fire in 1907.



The Grandstand, Show Ground.