

KOORLONG - "One Tree Hill" to 2010

By Jenny Lloyd



Hot dipping Grapes in 1931 – Museums Victoria

Early maps indicate that a residential section was to be situated at the far end of Deakin Avenue, at a place called "Irymple" between 21st and 22nd streets. This planned development did not eventuate, largely due to the depression. The area between the planned development and Dow Avenue became known as Koorlong. In 1892 the Victorian Government Gazette of May 6th announced that Mildura Shire was now divided into four ridings, which were named Mildura, Sandalong, Lake and Koorlong. Koorlong was part of the original "Chaffey Brothers' Irrigation Plan."

In 1896 a great financial depression and the financial collapse of the Chaffey Brothers forced a lot of settlers off their land. The early 1930's and onwards saw many Italian Immigrants taking up the opportunity to purchase fruit blocks in the Koorlong district.

Koorlong developed early because it was able to produce lime from several limekilns, which was used for a type of concrete utilised for the building of houses and many of the early concrete channels through the FMIT area. The burnt lime was also used as lime sulphur for spraying the vines against disease. Large areas of limestone were also quarried for crushed stone.

A Community Hall was constructed using limestone walls, iron roof, and pressed metal (Wunderlich) ceiling with timber floor - a day's work ensuring a share in it. This building was used for everything - meetings, dances, church and school. This building was obviously an important focal point for the Koorlong Community.

The present hall was built in 1927 uniquely clad with corrugated iron. The ceiling and lining completed in 1948. Hall interior was relined in 1962. The original limestone building was demolished in 1945 and some of the materials used to add a supper room (kitchen) to the new hall. These materials (Wunderlich etc.) still remain in the present kitchen

Dances, for which Koorlong was renowned, were held regularly from 1950's - 1980, organised jointly by The Hall Trustees and Koorlong Primary School Mothers Club. Timber floor was polished with a mixture of kerosene and sawdust. New septic abluion blocks were built in 1969. Backyard yard securely fenced in 1987 to cater for recently formed Play Group.

In March, 1903 concern was raised regarding the need for a school in Koorlong. Approval was given by the department for the establishment of a school in the Public Hall. Lease agreement was signed on 29th December, 1903 and State School No 3470 Koorlong opened in the leased premises on the 15th February, 1904 with an enrolment of 12 pupils. On 3rd August, 1918 the leased hall was deemed "building unsatisfactory" by District Inspector. 5 acres next to the Koorlong Hall was surveyed and reserved for school purposes on 25th April, 1919. The new State owned timber building was erected in June 1920.

A regular bus service between Mildura and Koorlong was introduced about 1937. During the war years few people owned cars so motor bikes were a popular form of transport. Petrol was rationed and alternative fuels were used. The Hall was used to store rubber goods for recycling. An Honour Board hangs in the Koorlong Public Hall acknowledging local soldiers who went to war. A photo of VC recipient Samuel Pearse, once a resident of Koorlong also adorns the wall of Koorlong Public Hall.

The first Post Office and Telephone Exchange was started in 1912 at a private home in Benetook Avenue. This service was moved on the 1st March, 1918 to the newly established Koorlong Store. In 1922 the post and telegraph office with adjoining store were burnt to the ground. Telephone communication was temporarily cut off and 20 telephone subscribers were isolated. Electricity was connected to the Primary School and Public Hall in 1950.

Tennis courts and cricket ground were originally situated on Benetook Avenue, approximately 1 mile north-east of the Koorlong Post Office. Tennis Courts were formed in 1920, originally crusher dust and later bitumen. In the late 50's interest lapsed but in 1983 the club was rejuvenated. With the growth of the Tennis Club, money was raised to build 2 crusher dust courts behind the Koorlong Public Hall. These courts were named the Max Cooke Memorial Courts in 1991. The cricket pitch was a concrete slab with a malthoid covering. The cricket club went into recess during the war years but reformed after the war and eventually wound up about 1956. The grounds were sold to private buyers.

The late 1970's through the 1980's saw a trend of "Hobby Farmers" purchasing vacant 10 acre blocks. Applications to subdivide $\frac{3}{4}$ acre residential blocks from these blocks were granted. Roads were extended and sealed. In the latter years Mildura City Council and Mildura Shire amalgamated to become the present local governing body of Mildura Rural City Council. Permits for these $\frac{3}{4}$ acre subdivisions were abolished.

Due to Community issues arising in 1981 the Koorlong Progress Association was formed and later disbanded in 2003.

In 2004 Koorlong residents on Benetook Avenue were invited to tap into potable water available through the pipeline extending to the newly established Titanium Plant on the corner of Benetook Avenue and the Werrimull - Red Cliffs Road. In 2003 - 2004 an application to subdivide the area from 22nd Street to behind the Koorlong Primary School into 1 acre residential lots was approved by Council. "Bushland Rise" was developed, markedly increasing street lighting and the population of the Koorlong township.

2004 - 2005 saw the beginning of a depressed horticultural industry, later the takeover of FMIT by the Government body Lower Murray Water and drastic changes to the availability of irrigation and domestic water supplies. Many former vibrant horticultural holdings in the Koorlong district have been cleared and no

longer are primary producers. Private buyers employed in Mildura and surrounding districts have sought these blocks to take up residence out of the densely populated town areas of Mildura. In 2007 Koorlong Social Club was formed as a sub committee of the Koorlong Public Hall Committee Inc.