

MEDIA RELEASE

BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE ROYAL QUEENSLAND SHOW

The Royal Queensland Show is 127 years old, born from the need to co-ordinate the region's rural and business activities and to profile the growth of the young colony.

Its parent body, The National Agricultural and Industrial Association came into being in 1875 following the demise and re-organisation of a number of earlier societies, all of whom had tried to promote the interests of the fledgling Queensland with various degrees of success.

One of the organizations in existence at that time was the Acclimatisation Society, formed to examine the introduction into Queensland of various animals, birds, fish, insects and vegetables. The Society's headquarters were at Bowen Park.

The new group, with Governor William Wellington Cairns as President, approached the Acclimatisation Society for the lease of its grounds to stage an exhibition. However, the organisation did not intend to confine itself with preparing for an exhibition.

Research into a disease affecting the sugar cane yield, assistance to Messrs Mort and Nicolles in getting a cargo of preserved meat to London and the establishment of a "Queensland Herd and Stud Book" were the measures on the agenda of almost the first meeting. In short, the Association was anxious to represent and work for a wide spread of industrial and agricultural projects.

To a very large extent, the same philosophy and purpose exist today.

The first exhibition staged in 1876 – entrance fee 2/6 for non members, up and including the opening ceremony and one shilling for the remainder of the show – was an instant success with the Queensland public, an estimated 17,000 people attended the public holiday opening day; the largest gathering in Queensland to that date.

In spite of initial doubts expressed by the colony's newspaper, "The Queenslander", the Association went on to continued success in the years that followed.

Particular stress was laid, then and now, on the participation of youth, and as early as 1883 a Juvenile Exhibition was staged as part of the show.

School children and apprentices were encouraged to enter classes from map drawing to metalwork and woodwork and agricultural produce.

Skill in manual arts was also supported: "In order to encourage excellent workmanship, prizes may be awarded to colonial workmen for special excellence of work in wood, metal, textiles, fibres, leather or other materials."

Farmers were encouraged to exchange ideas through conferences held under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture and even "grand pyrotechnic displays" were staged for receptive audiences.

An early highlight in the Show's history was the staging of the exhibition to mark Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887. With 3,600 exhibits, 45,000 patrons and fervour of patriotism, the resultant enthusiasm exceeded all expectations.

As the years passed, more societies aligned themselves to the Association and others helped to spread the message of the Association's aims and to support the extension of its activities.

In spite of the financial crisis experienced on the colony towards the end of the last century, by 1889 the Association grounds were recorded as bordered by the railway line, part of O'Connell Terrace, Brookes Street, Gregory Terrace and Bowen Bridge Road.

A memorandum of tenancy at Bowen Park and the Exhibition Building was agreed to in July 1899 but it was not until 1920 through the Brisbane Exhibition Lands Leases Act that the Association was legally entitled to lease all negotiated grounds in perpetuity. More importantly, the Brisbane Exhibition Grounds Trust Bill of 1965 confined all 34 freehold titles and other acquired allotments into one Trust. This in turn was followed in 1971 by the Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland, which secured the future for all time.

The history of the showgrounds helps chart the history of Queensland. This area has been the focus for so many of the milestones that have marked the community's progress.

Daredevil American aviator, Arthur Burr Stone, took off from the main oval to make the first ever flight over Brisbane in 1912; the Queensland Ambulance Service was formed here; the entertainment of early Brisbane was centered in the Exhibition Building that later became the Queensland Museum; Don Bradman made his first Test appearance on this oval; the grounds were the staging camps for troop movements in both World Wars; the isolation hospital to cope with the dreaded influenza epidemic of 1919 was set up here; Queen Elizabeth greeted Queenslanders here during the 1954 Australian Royal Tour.

As the list stretches from past, to present, to future, so too, does the contribution made to Queensland's rural and manufacturing industries and to the profile and growth of this State.

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