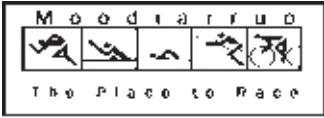


HERITAGE CONSERVATION

MOODIARRUP HALL RESTORATION PROJECT

Laura Colman, *Natural Heritage*



Moodiarrup Hall was once the heart of the Moodiarrup community; it was a place for celebrations, meetings and sporting events, including the famous

Moodiarrup Marathon. Unfortunately, over recent years, the hall has fallen into disrepair and now cannot be used for safety reasons. The community have expressed a strong desire to see the hall restored to its former status so that it can once again provide a venue for community activities and events. The National Trust has been working closely with the Moodiarrup Hall Committee and the Shire of West Arthur to access information and funds to develop the restoration project.

The hall is set on a 31-hectare reserve, next to the Arthur River. Constructed in 1925 by Ted Nordstom and TV Williams, it is an excellent example of a local hall from the period. The site's unique combination of built, natural and cultural heritage values has resulted in its listing on the Shire of West Arthur Municipal Inventory and recognition as an Aboriginal Heritage site. It has also been nominated for classification by the National Trust. Now more than 80 years old, the timber-framed hall is in urgent need of repair. The roof, guttering and external walls in particular require prompt attention in order to maintain the integrity of the structure and conserve the internal features.

With the assistance of the National Trust and community members, the Shire of West Arthur submitted an application to the Lotterywest Conservation of Cultural Heritage Grants Program. The application was successful, resulting in a \$14 444 grant, which will fund the development of a conservation plan for the site. The conservation plan represents an important first step in the restoration project, providing a basis for planning future works. The plan will also document the values of the place, with a strong focus on its social significance to the local community.



The hall is located on the banks of the Arthur River. National Trust. Moodiarrup Hall is an excellent example of a local hall from the 1920s.

National Trust.

A COMMUNITY ASSET

By Donald Cochrane, *Moodiarrup Hall Committee*

The Moodiarrup Hall is one of the many examples of country halls built from timber and iron during the last century. Sadly, it is also one of the few still in a state worthy of restoration. It is also unique in its geographic location, set snugly off the main road on the banks of the Arthur River and 'guarded' by majestic Red Gums: a truly romantic setting.

Adjoining the hall were sporting facilities, starting initially with a football oval incorporating a cricket pitch, a bush 'picnic' race track and later a bowling green and tennis courts were added. However, the most important use for the hall, or indeed similar halls, was the social and cultural life which such a facility provided to an isolated rural community. Many generations of local families were christened, had 21st birthdays, engagements and marriages in the hall. Not to mention the courtships and romances that developed within and outside of the hall.

Not having the luxury of electricity when the hall was built in 1925, lanterns and an outside log fire provided the necessary lights and warmth and local hands, voices and the old piano provided the music. One former local resident, Mr. Peter Boothey, recalls school Christmas concerts as a child, the dances and later becoming President of the Hall Committee.

Soon after the Second World War, a motor and a generator were installed on the bank of the river. This caused much excitement and romantic opportunities for dance lovers both within and outside of the hall. It was not uncommon for the motor to run out of fuel half way through a Waltz, Oxford or Barn Dance, leaving dancers to entertain themselves. It was always a later talking point as to who was found where and with whom when power was restored. Needless to say, many romances and happy marriages developed within the hall or outside under the wise old 'guardian' Red Gums.

During the Depression years (early 1930's), the hall was the only social point for the stricken locals. There are many stories handed down of the antics that the less-than-sober revellers performed. Most travelled on horseback or in carts in those days. It was as if the last dance, usually the Medley, was the signal for the impatient horses to chomp at the bit and race for home. On many occasions wagon wheels swiped stumps, grass trees and even entangled each other in the scramble to travel down the narrow track connecting the hall to the main road.

It has been said by the faint-hearted that the hall has seen better days. This might be true in the eyes of the economic rationalists; however, those looking into the future can see that the local community has an increasing need for a hall of this calibre. Recently, it has become common for local farmers to sell off small parcels of land to city residents who have a desire to enjoy the same peace and tranquillity that their ancestors did. The Moodiarrup Hall can fulfil the future needs of our community and also complements other sites and buildings which have social, environmental and Indigenous significance. Examples include the historic Duranillin State School and Kylie Railway Reserve.

Sadly many of the great stories of the social history of the Moodiarrup Hall have never been told and never will, mainly for fear of the embarrassment of youth. Only the old weather boards and the Red Gums keep the secrets alive.

The local community is very grateful to Lotterywest and the National Trust of Australia (WA) for their support in preparing a Conservation Plan.