

Building the Future by Understanding the Past

The Australian Education Heritage Museum

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The future tends to be unpredictable. Of course we can (and should) make educated plans, and we can set goals and deadlines. But unless we are open to responding to unanticipated opportunities, we are at risk of staying static and rigid in everything we do.

The birth of the Australian Education
Heritage Museum will serve to
illustrate what I mean.

It all began when I was looking for an old building to add on to our home as a study . . . then I saw a very small advertisement that said “School for sale”!

As a child, I was a pupil in one-teacher schools taught by my father. So the thought of owning an old school building was very appealing. Little did I know the journey that would unfold.

Our 114-year-old home is set on half an acre not far from the centre of town, opposite Toowoomba Grammar School.



When I first saw the 1889 school, demolishers had already moved in, so quick decisions were needed.



A new vision started to emerge. Rather than add a small study, we would establish a museum!

Some of the Challenges . . .

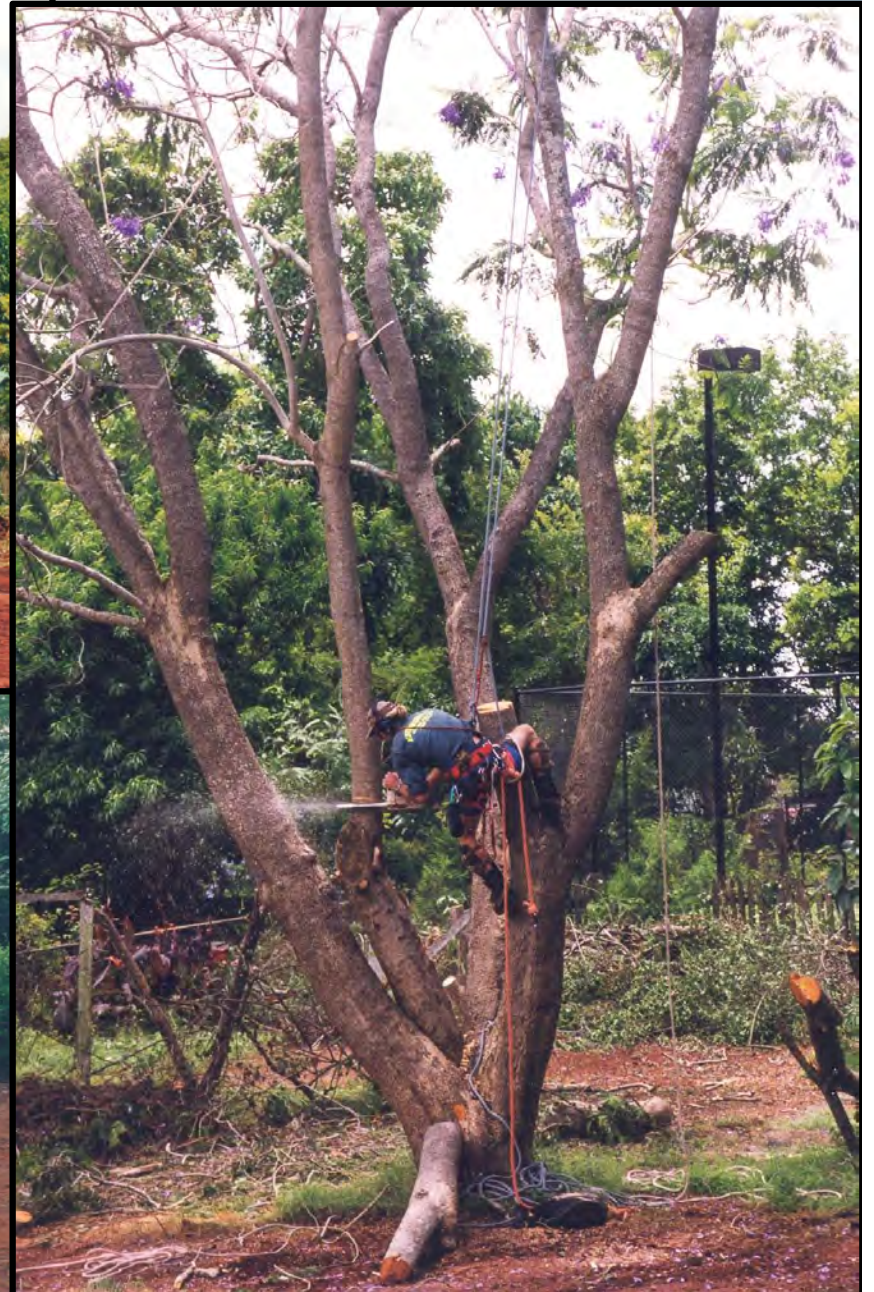
- Seeking approval from the City Council;
- Submitting plans for the Museum;
- Preparing the land to receive the buildings;
- Demolishing the swimming pool;
- Removing some of the trees (and seeking advice and approval for their removal);
- Storing the school safely for about 9 months;
- Finding a “teacher’s residence” for the library;
- Working with the building removalist to transport the school 60 km from Laidley to Toowoomba;
- Finding old timber that could be used in all of the extra construction work.

Progress was made . . .

Toowoomba City Council gave its blessing for us to establish the Australian Education Heritage Museum, and work began. The swimming pool was demolished.



The land needed for the school was cleared.



Eventually, about nine months after purchasing the 1889 school building, preparation for the move up the mountain began.

First, the roof was lifted off in two sections.



Then the main building was separated into 3 sections.

The Principal's Office was separated as well.

Each section of the old school was loaded onto a truck and transported, with police escort, 60 km up the range to Toowoomba.

All six sections of the school were safely transported and installed on the property, one at a time, over a period of several months.

It was quite surreal to see the truck coming up our street carry one of the six sections of the school.

We had to ensure that the truck, with its load, would be off the street before 7:00 am.



The truck, with each precious load, was reversed carefully along the driveway to the rear of the property





Once the first two sections of the school itself were in place, the first half of the roof was lowered carefully. I was amazed how the crew hand-manipulated these huge sections!









With two sections of the main school building, and the first half of the roof in place, the third section of the school could be brought in.









A teacher's residence was originally located alongside the school. We found a suitable cottage in Toowoomba and had the same building relocation specialists move it to the property. We designed suitable shelving (and had the floor reinforced) so that the cottage forms the library for the museum. It houses about 80,000 books.



OVERSIZE

890 DEK

DO NOT OVERTAKE

TURNING VEHICLE

TRUCKLINE

TRUCKLINE



Fast forward to 2018 . . .

The Australian Education Heritage Museum now includes four major buildings:

- the original two-storey home;
- the 1889 one-room school building;
- the library (formerly the 3-bedroom cottage); and
- a 24-square building for storing museum artefacts, and for preparing exhibits.













The Seven Sections of the Museum

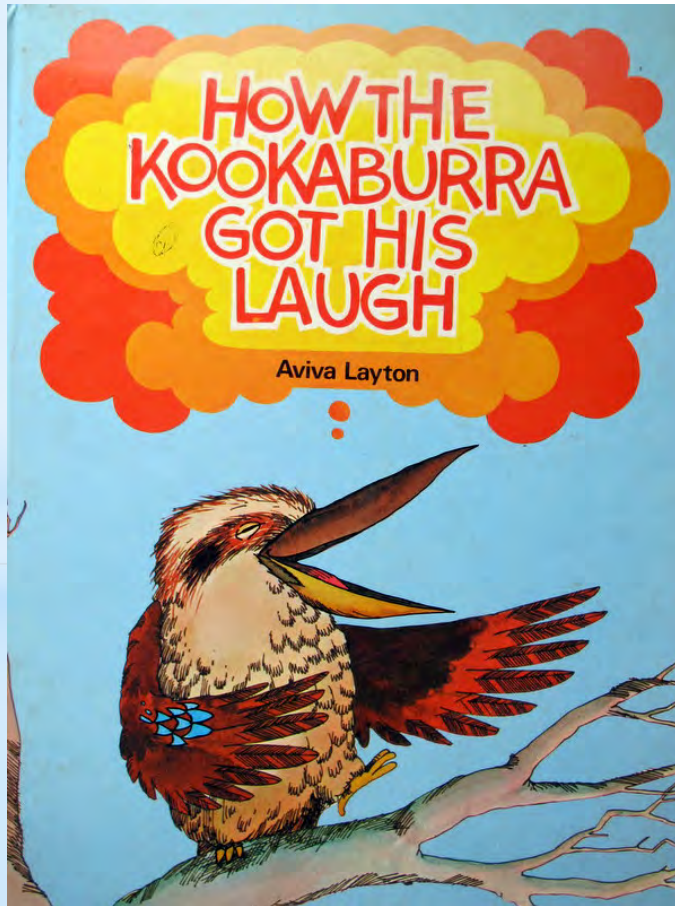
An interactive classroom with school desks and experiences consistent with early teaching.



A section displaying changing local home and school contexts from 1889 to today.



These displays will focus on different themes each month. Local schools will be encouraged to have their students portray the history of their school.





MacRobertson's
"OLD GOLD"
CHOCOLATES
A GREAT ASSORTMENT
OF CENTRES

An illustration of a chocolate box, a bowl of chocolates, and a small building with a blue and gold dome, set against a red background.

VICTORIA SLADEN
OPERATIC STAR
OF COVENT GARDEN

2/-

CARDIGANS
Sizes - 36" to 44"

A black and white photograph of a woman wearing a cardigan, with a yellow background and a price tag.

A research area in which historic documents and books related to education can be studied.



An extensive library, housed in the worker's cottage.



A French Ladies' College in the Queenslander—a school for educating “young ladies”. This recalls a tradition that is all but forgotten in Australia.



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“French Ladies’ Colleges” were “finishing schools for young ladies”. The Oberwyl Ladies’ School in Melbourne was typical.



LADIES' SCHOOL, OBERWYL,
Burnett-street, St. Kilda.

Madame Mouchette, having purchased the residence known as Oberwyl, wishes to inform her friends that she will carry on the school (hitherto conducted by Madame Pfund) on the same principle, and assisted by the same masters, as has been done so successfully since 1867.

Madame Mouchette will be assisted by a large and efficient staff of teachers.

The direction of English studies and religious instruction will be under the control and management of Miss Hatchell Brown, who has been connected with the school for eight years, and who will be assisted by Miss Hayward, lately arrived from England, holding the best testimonials, and by the Misses Hooper and Piggott.

The French classes, literature, conversation, will be conducted by Mdlle. Lion, who holds the highest diplomas of Paris Academy for the instruction in French, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Physics, Chemistry, Mineralogy, Botany, Zoology, Hygiene, and Bookkeeping.

Principal, Madame MOUCHETTE.

Music—Mr. Otto Linden	Singing—Mrs. Boema
Mrs. Bunny	Miss Christian
Mrs. Willet	Mr. Hy. Jerrard
Miss Coster	Drawing—Mme. Mouchette
Mr. Gordon Gooch	Painting—Do.
Modelling—Mdlle. Lion.	
German—Mme. Jeske.	
Do. Mrs. Bunny	
Italian—Signor Binda	
Dancing—Mr. J. E. Lowe	
Do. Miss Lowe	
Gymnastics—Miss Dick.	

Madame Mouchette, wishing to pay the best attention to the moral and religious teaching, a clergyman of the Church of England will give occasional lectures in the school.

The picture shows Spreydon College, a Ladies' College opened by the Thomson sisters in Toowoomba, in February, 1908.

In 1915 Spreydon College was taken over by the Presbyterian Church. In 1917 and 1918, pupils moved from Spreydon to "Fairholme", a larger property in Toowoomba. Fairholme College thrives to this day.



A large room under the Queenslander which includes exhibits from local schools as well as topical themes.



A small section with artefacts damaged in the 2011 floods, preserved to help record and document that event.





Perhaps we have been ambitious with what the Museum has to offer. But unless we had been willing to be excited about unexpected ideas, opportunities, and suggestions made by volunteers, the Museum could not be what it is today. We had to make quick decisions and take risks—but throughout we tried to stay true to our vision for the Museum—to help those visiting the Museum build the future by understanding the past.