

An introduction to the Nethercote NSW Community.

Nethercote is a small rural community of about 350 people, located in the south-east corner of NSW..

Its origins date back to the mid 19th century, to the early days of exploring for gold along the eastern ranges. A number of disused gold mines can be found in the area and also a not yet fully de-commissioned talc mine.

Back then Nethercote was pretty much isolated. The Imlay Magnet, February 6, 1932, reported how, as a youth, Mr Maurice Egan Snr, bought sawn timber from Rayner's Mill in Nethercote "fair up the steepest ridges and over the mountain top ran the rocky road to Eden".

The forest surrounding the Nethercote locality contains a number of native plant preservation sites, added to the National Estate Register in 1992, and the Nethercote Falls and associated Rhyolite outcrops were added to the Register in 1990.

Very early in its history Nethercote was typically a bark & timber milling and sleeper cutting community.

Later on, in the early 20th century, as the bush was progressively cleared, it became a dairy and cattle farming community. As reported in the Imlay Magnet, July 17, 1990, "In '39 there were 26 dairy farms around here. In '66 there were 14. Now there's just one".

In the heydays of dairying, whole milk was sold to the nearby Pambula butter factory, which also provided employment for a number of Nethercote residents. The Pambula Co-operative Creamery Dairy Co Ltd. was included in the Register of the National Estate 2002. When the Pambula butter factory closed in 1972, the milk was transported to the Bemboka factory. Not long after that however, demand for milk from outlying areas such as Nethercote dried up. Unfortunately, the cheese and butter co-op at Bega had no need for milk from Nethercote, and so, within a relatively short period, dairy farming virtually ceased in Nethercote. Dairy and cattle farmers started to sub-divide their land and sell it off in smaller parcels. As a result, the size of the community eventually grew and a non-farming community developed.

It was reported in the Imlay Magnet, March 23, 1993, that at the end of the 2nd World War, there were about 20 houses in the locality, compared to around 90 in 1993. Nowadays, the postal courier says that there are approx 120 houses in the area.

Back in those good old days, Nethercote had its own school, post office and telephone exchange. The school was opened as a provisional school in 1887 and its first teacher arrived on January 14, 1887. On 1st October 1894, the school was upgraded to public status.

Much of the earliest community activity centred on the school. A popular event associated with the Nethercote School was the annual picnic. The Pambula Voice in February 1889 reported the picnic that year had been held at the sawmill. Goldberg Brothers & Co, and Thomas Bros gave lollies and dates, and T. J. Ramsey donated some prizes for competitions (The Magnet, June 3, 1997). Nowadays, the Nethercote Residents' Association holds an annual Christmas Party to which the entire community is invited. The tradition of Santa giving presents and lollies to the children continues.

Activity associated with the school led to the formation of the Nethercote Progress Association. "By August 1899 the Nethercote Progress Association was in existence with Mr Swinnerton as President and Mr O'Halloran, honorary secretary. They agitated for the erection of a weather shed at the Nethercote School, as one of their many projects. Until the construction of the Nethercote Hall in 1911, the school

was the site of much of the general public entertainment held in the district, including concerts and dances.”. (The Magnet, June 3, 1997)

In the early '50s there were about 40 children attending Nethercote Public School. By the early '60s numbers had diminished. A '72 Holden FC station wagon was big enough to serve as the school bus. In 1963 the school closed. Children were, and still are, bussed to primary and secondary schools in Eden and Pambula. The school, Headmaster's residence, and weather shed still exist but are now privately owned.

It is not known when the post office opened in Nethercote. However, It is known that the floods of 1921 washed away Yankee Creek Bridge and a number of buildings down stream from the bridge, including the Post Office. A new post office and telephone exchange were erected on higher ground (where it still exists, though in poor repair). The last Postmistress at Nethercote, Mrs Lorna Dwyer, operated the P. O. and exchange from 1st May 1953 until 31st May 1973, when it was officially closed. The manual exchange had some years earlier been replaced by an automatic exchange, located in the adjoining paddock. Mrs Dwyer had taken over the operation from her parents, who had run the Nethercote service for even longer than her.

With the closure of the school and the winding down of the dairy farming, community activity in Nethercote gradually diminished. At the 8th August 1969 Annual General Meeting of the Progress Association it was agreed that its license not be renewed. An attempt was made to sell the Nethercote Hall by public tender. Fortunately, for today's community, the attempt failed.

During the '70s and the 80's, the population grew as people moved into the locality. Workers from a diverse range of professions, retirees and young families gradually replaced the dairy farmers and timber workers.

In 1996, a general meeting of the Nethercote community agreed to set up the Nethercote Residents' Association. The Magnet, January 7, 1997, reported the outstanding success of that year's community Christmas Party, held in the Nethercote Bush Fire Brigade shed on 21st December. "It was the biggest thing to happen in the village for 30 years". Over 100 residents attended. "Events like this bring back old thoughts of a community". The article went on to say that "Unfortunately the Nethercote Hall could not be utilised for the event, due to its state of disrepair. Restoration of the hall is top of the agenda, with fund-raising events planned."

Today our beautifully restored Hall is the focal point for many Community events.

The Hall was rescued from oblivion by the Community and restored as a Community project.

All told, about \$110,000 has been spent over the last 10 years on structural repairs, improvements and refurbishing. Of the total of \$110,000 spent rebuilding the Hall, almost \$38,000 was provided by the Commonwealth on a \$1 for \$1 basis. The remaining funds were raised by the community, almost entirely from fundraising events, although the Bega Valley Shire Council made significant contributions to the restoration. All told the community contributed almost 3,000 hours voluntary labour to the restoration.

The community is justifiably proud of its achievement.