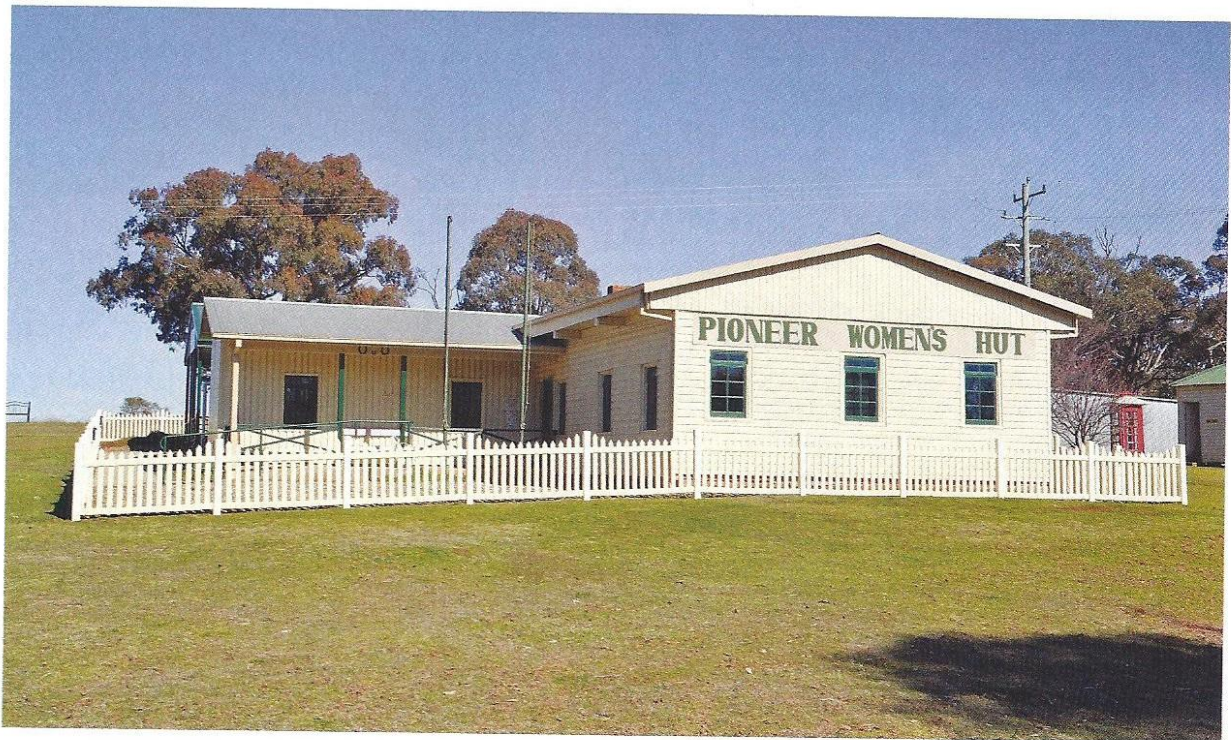


# The Pioneer Women's Hut

At the foothills of the Snowy Mountains there is a small group of buildings at the Glenroy Heritage Reserve. Among them is the Pioneer Women's Hut, a museum that showcases the history of everyday life of ordinary rural women in Australia.

Words by Hayley Penrose



The Pioneer Women's Hut is home to many artifacts from life in rural Australia.

**D**escribed by Professor Donald Horne as the most innovative small museum in the country, the Pioneer Women's Hut lives up to his assessment in providing a unique look into the lives of Australian women.

"We focused on women, especially those in the rural areas, because it was felt that these women were a)

underestimated in history and b) they took on such a huge role against unbelievable odds in early Australia," committee secretary Anne Thoroughgood explains.

From an idea in 1982, it took just three years for the museum to become a reality, opening in 1985. Embracing history from the beginning, the building itself is made from old prison huts from

the local Mannus Correctional Centre.

Inside the walls, moments of history are captured by the artefacts and stories on display. "In our museum, the 'story' is just as important as the artefact itself," Anne says. The displays are separated into categories based on their role in society including 'Never Done,' 'Time for Fancywork,' and 'Coping With Flies,' among others. The items on



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display range from aprons and patched clothing, right through to kitchen utensils. They are all accessible to visitors and, if you put on a pair of the white cotton gloves on site, you can hold the objects, something that you don't find in many museums.

"The artefacts came from all over Australia and with the help of articles in rural newspapers, radio, magazines and talks at gatherings and meetings, we tried to realise our dream of paying tribute to rural families," Anne recalls. "Word spread and articles began to arrive, sometimes several a week, to gather with the story, memories and sometimes photos."

"We particularly focused on the articles and furniture improvised from tin, wire and boxes and the use of old clothing and bags to make warm and functional quilts and clothing," she continues.

As well as displaying and maintaining Australian artefacts, the Pioneer Women's Hut has been actively involved in State and Federal advocacy on behalf of country museums. The committee also actively encourages women to care and take responsibility for their own history. As part of this program, four booklets and a leaflet have been published - *Memories of My Mother*, *Midwives of Tumberumba*, *Midwives of Rosewood*, *Never Too Old to Learn* and *My Life with Aprons 1937-1997*.



The 'Time for Fancy Work' display.

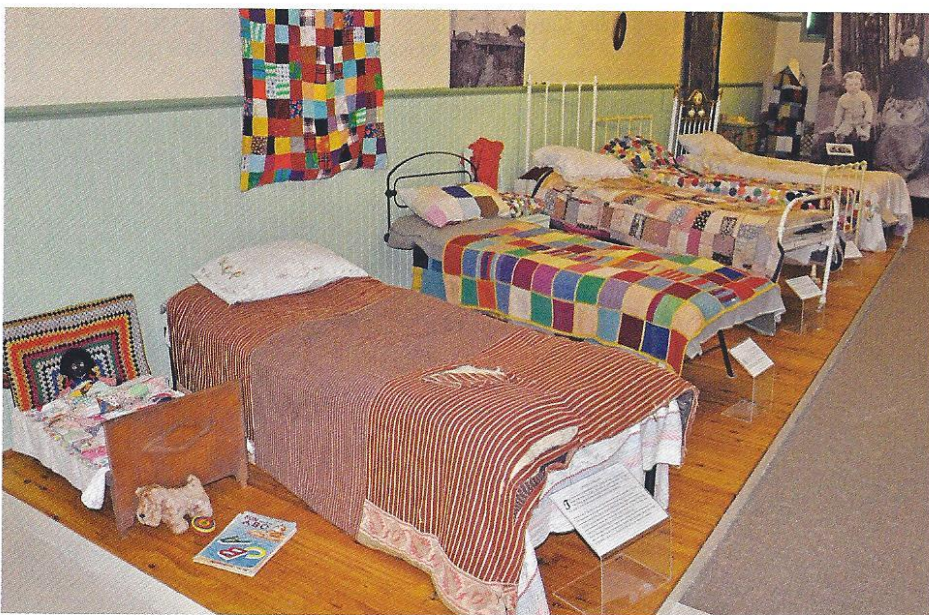
There are several things that make the Pioneer Women's Hut so special according to Anne. "Our vision and our working plan came from volunteers with no museum background. Common sense ruled and as we moved forward, wonderful mentoring from personnel from leading museums made sure our care of the articles complied so far as possible with best museum practice."

They also have firm guidelines on what they collect and are strongly

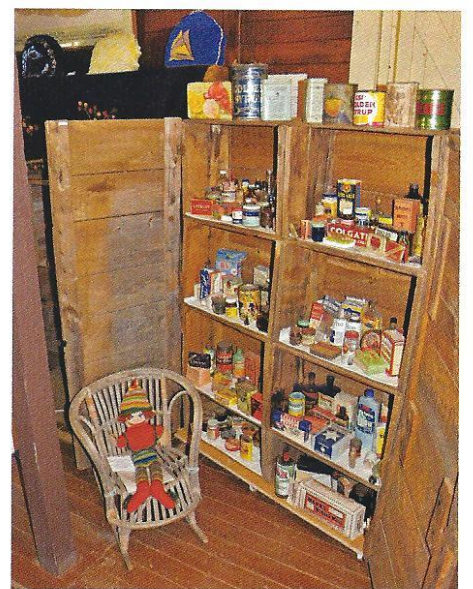
opposed to just taking items for the sake of it. On top of that, they are a free museum, only charging entrance to specific exhibitions.

With its unique approach to history, it is no surprise that the domestic history museum was recognised as being of National Significance soon after opening.

Those who make the trip to the Glenroy Heritage Reserve are not disappointed. "Visitors express amazement – such a gem out in the



Displays at the museum are accompanied by real stories about women's experiences.



A pantry full of many recognisable products, although the packaging is a little different.



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country – seemingly nestled into the landscape,” Anne says. There is a lot for them to do at the picturesque site with shady picnic areas, swings and plenty of room for children to play.

“We have a delightful country Craft Shop, brimful of contributions from our members – about 40 – meaning we don’t have to resort to ‘buying in’ commercial goods,” Anne states. “There are other historical displays – old machinery, local history, a purpose built Heritage Quilt Museum, interesting metal sculptures, including the now famous ‘George and his dogs’ – a life size silhouette of our founder set on a hillside overlooking the Reserve.”

In 1995 The Pioneer Women’s Hut took on a new project – the National Quilt Register. “Quilts played a very important role in the lives of women,” Anne explains. “They needed their warmth, so the functional aspect was so important, but also women put together quilts to satisfy their creative instincts – even if they were made from old clothing.” The Register, which lists quilts made in, or brought to, Australia before 1970 and their stories, was first published online by the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney so that the information could be easily accessed. Following a change in circumstances it closed briefly but is now running again thanks to the National Wool Museum in Geelong.

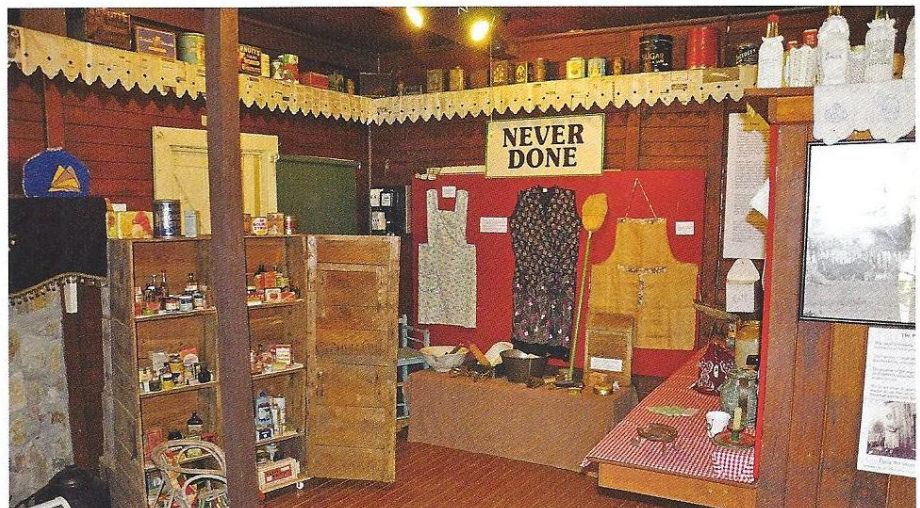
“The Pioneer Women’s Hut felt that by focusing on quilts and their stories much could be added to Australia’s social history,” Anne says.

*The Pioneer Women’s Hut is located at the Glenroy Heritage Reserve on the Wagga Road, 8kms from Tumbarumba.*

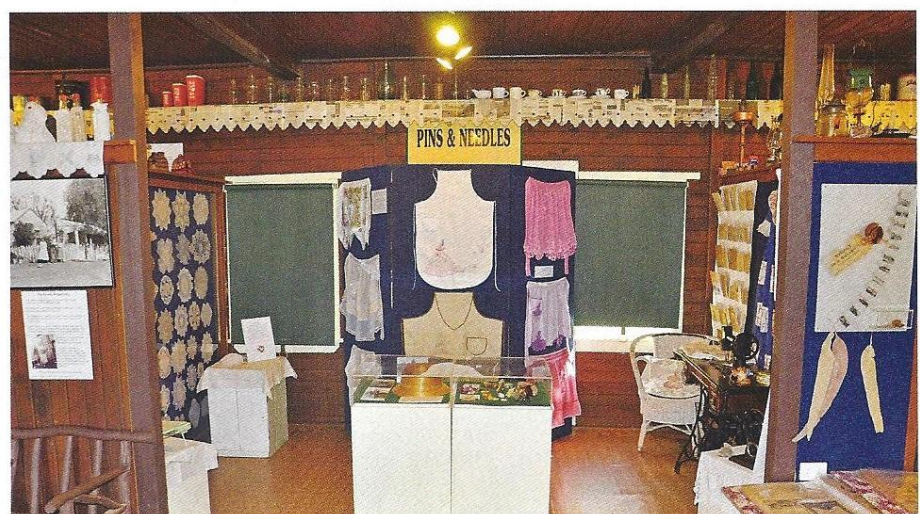
*The museum is open 10am-4pm Saturday and Sunday, and 11am-4pm Wednesday. They open seven days a week for booked group and tours. To make a booking, or for more information, call the Tumbarumba Visitor Information Centre on 02 6948 3333.*



An antique sewing machine and supplies show what an early Australian sewing space might have looked like.



The ‘Never Done’ display shows all the jobs that women had to complete.



The ‘Pins and Needles’ display.