

HISTORY OF  
THE MILDURA ROWING CLUB

1909 – 2008

Researched and Written by Leonie Murphy

## THE MILDURA ROWING CLUB 1909 – 2008

### *Introduction*

I believe that the strength of a sports club is linked to its history. A club that is proud of its heritage has a strong foundation to progress with confidence into the future.

This publication has enabled the Mildura Rowing Club to officially document its story from the earliest beginnings to the present day. It has provided conclusive proof of when the club first began, its re-inception after World War I, its survival of natural disasters such as the 1956 flood and records the stories of so many members who have contributed to the club's success over the years. It clearly demonstrates our long and proud association with the Murray River in Mildura.

The creation of this publication has provided an opportunity for members to get together and relive past memories and experiences. It describes the many challenges that have been faced in the past and how the resilience and dedication of members have enabled the club to overcome all obstacles. I believe with this heritage, the club will continue to meet all challenges in the future both positively and with determination.

I hope that past, present and future members will get much enjoyment reading about the history of the Mildura Rowing Club.

*Warren Lloyd  
President*

### *From the Author*

The Mildura Rowing Club holds a significant place in local history. Researching for and writing this abridged history has given me a very satisfying challenge. Anecdotal stories have been gathered from highly valued members representing various decades of the club's history, all who generously shared their time and their stories. Many hours of searching both *The Mildura Cultivator* and *Sunraysia Daily* archives have uncovered fascinating details long forgotten. Over almost a century, members have worked tirelessly for the sport and the club and great achievements have been made. Regretfully, budget and space constraints have made it impossible to tell all of the triumphant stories. I congratulate Mildura Rowing Club members, past and present on each and every achievement and for the inspiration they provide for our region.

*Leonie Murphy*

### *The Mildura Rowing Club 1909 -1918*

The Mildura Rowing Club (MRC) was first formed on August 23, 1909. A *Mildura Cultivator* report headed *Mildura Rowing Club, Successful Inaugural Meeting* dated August 25, 1909 listed the newly elected office bearers as President, Dr Parker; Vice Presidents: Rev W. Richards, Mr W. Bowring senior and Mr C A Sutton. Committee members were H. T. Stevens, E. S. Oswin, E. L. R. Emmett, J. H. Baylee and C. H. Blyth. Stuart Tough was the Treasurer and H. W. Bowring was the Secretary. The article listed 38 patrons including W.B. Chaffey, Cr. A. L. McDonald, Dr. Cameron, J.H. Shilliday, S. Risbey, H.A. Pegler, J.P. Crozier, Geo Nash, Rev J.H. Dewhurst, Rev J.A. Burns and Father Murphy.

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At the first meeting it was decided to start the club with 2 four-oared, 2 pair-oared and 1 pleasure boat. Subscription was set at £1 1s. There were enthusiastic addresses presented that night from Dr. Parker, Rev. W. Richards, Mr. Sutton and Hugh Bowring.

The newspaper reported that Dr Parker “hoped that rowing would be well supported in Mildura, as it was an excellent recreation, and if properly indulged in was a splendid form of exercise. Not only did it build up the muscle, but it developed the character, as perseverance and self denial had to be exercised by those who undertook training and desired to achieve success.”

When war broke out in 1914, thirty-seven out of forty MRC members enlisted forcing the club into recess. Four years later in 1918 flood washed the boatsheds away but - and with some difficulty - the fleet of boats was saved. In a *Mildura Cultivator* 1923 article, Hugh Bowring stated that “the loss of the boatsheds of the old club had crippled it, and therefore nothing had been done to revive it.”

Of the thirty-seven members enlisting in the war, one member, A. J. Robinson was killed; MRC’s first racing boat was named after him.

The first rowing club fleet was sold to Wentworth Rowing Club after the war.

### *Mildura Rowing Club ‘resuscitated’*

On December 12, 1923 a meeting was held at Risbey’s Chambers to gauge interest in “resuscitating” the Mildura Rowing Club. According to *Mildura Cultivator* articles in 1923 and 1925, Dr Bill Godby was voted to the chair. He explained that the motivation for reforming came from the success of the Merbein Rowing Club at the Melbourne regattas. Godby said, “They should take the opportunity to congratulate Merbein on their success and see that Merbein did not get all the plums of the sporting world in Mildura.”

Godby commended Mr W. Adair who had canvassed the town for members, securing 100 names. Seventy-five prospective members attended that meeting with fifty joining at the time.

The old Mildura Rowing Club wrote expressing their pleasure in the club being “resuscitated” and offered to hand over their club balance of about £50 to the new club, once a boatshed was built.

The elected committee was made up of President, Dr. W. Godby; Vice presidents, H. Bowring and Mr. Sutherland; joint Secretaries, W. Adair and H. Clarke; Treasurer, H.H. Quick: committee, R.J. Egge, C. Bowring, J. Higgins, F. Shilliday, R. Chaffey, J. Pollock and Father Ryan.

A 1975 *Sunraysia Daily* article *Golden Henley*, sub-titled *Mildura Rowing History* reported that “Syd Nash was Captain” and that “Bob Wolfe, an ex-oarsman from Melbourne and Ballarat, took over the coaching and met with immediate success when the Mildura maiden eight won the double at the Henley and Victorian Rowing Association in 1925, while a maiden four won their section at Henley the same year.

The winning eight comprised, Col Bowring, Syd Nash, Cyril Henderson, Eric Burrows, Bob Tracey, Johnny Walker, Bill Adair and Tom McKeon, with W. Astbury as cox.

The winning four was Fred Shilliday, Jack Keating, Mick Lowden and S. Mansell, with Les Biesse as cox.

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### *Permissive Occupancy and the New Boatshed (No 2)*

On the January 19, 1924, the MRC secretary, W. Adair wrote to The Surveyor General of the Lands Department explaining the reasons leading to the 1918 winding down of the club and requesting the previously granted permissive occupancy be renewed. On October 6, 1924, the Department of Lands and Survey sent a letter granting the same.

MRC approached Mr Risbey asking him to loan the club £80 to build the second boathouse. Leading citizens of Mildura underwrote the debt. These men were William Washington, Alexander Jenkins, Newey Nicholas, Murray Bowring, Francis Henry Hudson, James Edwin Fraser, Mr Wilson, E. Jackson and Venn Waugh.

A weatherboard building which comprised boatshed and clubrooms was erected downstream from the present clubhouse. The cost of the building was £250.

### Photo B

#### *Henley on the Murray*

MRC staged its first Henley on the Murray - an unregistered regatta – on Easter Monday 1925. *The Mildura Cultivator* reported on the upcoming event. “Henley Day itself promises to be a red-letter day in the history of Mildura. Forty crews containing one hundred and one rowers, representing South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria, will compete for the various events, and the programme is so arranged that there will be no tiresome waiting between events. Novelty events and a grand parade of decorated boats will also occupy the attention of onlookers. Large marquees and awnings have been erected. Afternoon tea and soft drinks will be procurable and Mildura Brass Band will render selections in the afternoon.” The first Henley recorded £100 profit.

Up until the 1940's, MRC held their regatta on Easter Monday while Wentworth Rowing Club held theirs on Easter Saturday. Once Mildura became the biggest club – and after much debate - the clubs agreed to swap days giving MRC Saturday, the premium day.

By the time the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Henley on the Murray was staged, it was a gala event with a “monstrous procession” preceding it and offering further attractions including highland dancing, side shows galore and Queen of the Murray Parade.

In 1946 MRC wrote to Mildura Chamber of Commerce requesting shops be closed on Easter Saturday Morning, thus was the status of Henley on the Murray.

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“During the 1950’s and 1960’s it was still a monumental task to put the event on,” Dan Richards explained. “The huge crowds required controlled management, so members fenced the entire area from the old power house pumps to the wharf using ex-army barbed wire entanglements. At both ends of the area, ticket boxes were placed. A dais was set up for the Henley girls and a booth was erected. Starting lines and toggles were set up and buoys were placed at the wharf, which was the corner of the race. The finish line and the judge’s boat were placed. Administration of the event included the organisation of trophies, prizes and programs. Accommodation had to be arranged for visiting rowers.

Herb Hassell regaled the success of the event. “After the parade, the crowd would swarm down over the top of the railway bank to our gate where they would pay to get in. We had 10,000 people paying to go to it one year.”

During 1975 the *Sunraysia Daily*, *Golden Henley* article gave great credit to the rowing club. “With the 50<sup>th</sup> Henley on the Murray just two days away, Mildura Rowing Club can look back over half a century of rowing with satisfaction. Hundreds of youths and young men have benefited – both physically and mentally – from its activities, and the foundation formed in its early stages gives a guarantee of fellowship which should continue to maintain a standard in keeping with club’s great tradition.”

### *Henley on the Yarra*

Graham Gugger joined the club in 1946 and started rowing again for the first time since his schoolboy rowing days. That very year he went to the Henley on the Yarra, winning Maiden Eights with Des Augustine, Bob Batchelor, Don Harrison, Keith Wilson, Stacey Lees, W. Henderson, Noel Berry and J. Hutchinson was cox. Their coach was Bert Scheutze.

“We had to race three heats and we won the last one. It was a great thing for the club, because they had not long re-opened after the war and it was a feather in the cap for MRC to get a crew in the premium regatta,” Graham explained.

In 1983 an MRC Maiden Fours team won the Henley on the Yarra for the first time in over twenty years. Geoff Talbot coached the winning crew which consisted of David Talbot, Andrew Talbot, John Grant, and Kevin Tankard with Daniel Tankard as cox.

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### *Committee Presentations 1925*

A 1925 *Mildura Cultivator* article headed *President Sanguine of Future Progress* tells of a Mildura Rowing Club smoke social held in the Memorial Hall. The article highlighted the enormous success of the club by reporting on various speeches. Dr Godby said "...the club had passed its 100 membership which put it in the lead of any club outside Melbourne, as far as numbers are concerned."

Dr Godby made a presentation of a shaving outfit to club coach, R. Wolfe. Of Wolfe, Godby said, "By his personality and touch he had done more for the club than any other member except one". The man he referred to as the exception was secretary, W. V. Adair, saying, "Although a busy man he had always found time to do the work thoroughly and well." The article went on to report, "Mr Adair was presented with a handsome copper plaque, framed in black, representing a river scene with sculler in high relief."

Mr C. Henderson proposed a toast to the president, declaring him one of the best presidents the club ever had. When he rose to speak, Dr Godby was greeted with cheers, which lasted some minutes."

### *World War Two*

In 1939, according to *Sunraysia Daily's* 1975 *Golden Henley* article, "the club members almost to a man, enlisted in the services. Six members remained behind to look after the club's assets and care for the fleet. During this period, the RAAF which was stationed outside of Mildura was given full use of the fleet and club facilities."

"Although the club was closed," Graham Gugger explained, "Mildura High School was allowed access for a few boys who took up the sport. Graham was one of those school boys. "It was a courtesy that we were allowed into it," he said. "Some of the older members like Bill Adair, and 'Choc' Harrison were the caretaker's of the club. It re-opened in 1944." Post war, MRC members returned to Mildura and the clubhouse, keen to regain their sporting and social life. Graham recalled the resurgence, "There was quite a bit of interest from the ex-serviceman; the Mills boys, Jack Clift, Pud Meredith, Bill McGraw and others."

Keith "Knuckles" Gilbert - who received his nickname after attending the Dimboola regatta and having his first ever fight in the visiting boxing tent - was among the returned servicemen joining the rowing club for the first time in the late forties.

"When I came out of the army I had to change my attitude to everything." Keith Gilbert said, "I had to reset my life."

The 1975 *Golden Henley* article in the *Sunraysia Daily*, recorded post WW2, MRC information; information that not only celebrated the resurgence but gave due respect to club members who had paid the ultimate sacrifice.

"Mildura Rowing Club broke into full stride again in 1947, with a membership of 80 – and the first peace time regatta was held for a profit of \$850. The reunion of old members at this function was one that will go down in history as the best ever held. Tribute was paid to three members who had given their lives in the war – Jack Weir, Jack Davey and Bill Scott. Each Christmas morning during the war, the small handful of members present would gather with a good muster of town citizens at the clubhouse and a list of the members in service was read. After the war, club membership remained about the 100 mark..."

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### *First Seniors*

During the late 1940's many Melbourne clubs would compete at Mildura with some sections short of competitors representing MRC. When a visiting club brought up a couple of King's Cup Oarsman Billy Wallace and Herb Shields, MRC asked Bob Watson and Herb Hassell to row pairs. Herb regaled, "We never expected to do any good of course, but their boat broke down. Peter Mills was our cox and he was urging us on. He said, 'Keep going. Keep going.' We won it and that made us the first two seniors in the Mildura Rowing Club!"

### *Towing the Boats to Wentworth*

Boat trailers being non-existent, MRC rowers found ingenious ways to get their boats to regattas. "Every year from at least 1946 we towed boats behind a motor boat down to Wentworth on Easter Sunday after our regatta." Geoff Talbot recalled. "First of all you would put the first boat in then you'd tie the riggers, then you'd start stacking. We tied up to 24 boats together that way," Geoff explained. This was unique in rowing circles as it was more usual for visiting crews to borrow boats from the host club. "One of the conditions for the men to get on the boat was that they had to have a slab of beer and a cold chicken." Pat Barnes recalled.

### [Photo D](#)

#### *Mildura Rowing Club – 1950's and 1960's*

As well as competing, competition planning and raising funds, MRC ran popular social outings and celebrations for its members; events that recognised upcoming nuptials or gave 'proper' farewells when a member left the district.

#### *Mildura's Case for Olympic Rowing 1956*

With success on so many levels, MRC along with 26 large and small local organisations and institutions established the Mildura Olympic Rowing Project Committee applying for the 1956 Olympic Rowing. Alas, Mildura's submission was unsuccessful as Ballarat staged the 1956 Olympic Rowing.

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### *1956 Floods*

With flood taking the first club house in 1918, and members periodically spending back-breaking days and months trying to save the new (1923 built) boathouse from flood, it was clear the club had an on-going battle with the Murray River. The fight between the club and the 1956 flood was hard fought but eventually the river won.

“In 1955 the river came down fairly big and we built up some sandbags and held back about a metre of water,” Geoff Talbot said, “Then we started to pull it down, because it was around the front of the shed and we couldn’t get boats out. Anderson, an old river man, from the nearby sawmills, said, “Don’t take it away because there will be a bigger one next year.” The boys cut some sections out of the levy to get the boats out and left most of the wall up. Sure enough ‘old Anderson’ was right. ‘Fifty-six’ came down and we built on the existing levy. We were holding back two metres of water or more! Max Barnes would have been there every night and Clem Sauer, Danny Richards, Herb Hassel and Keith Gilbert and I were part of a hard core of about a dozen and on weekends, maybe twenty volunteers who would be trying to save the club.”

“We had three electric pumps running” added Herb Hassell, “and some of us would be on duty all night with gallon jars of wine - this was winter mind you - we had a big fire going all the time. The next night it would just be lapping again, so we would fill wheat bags with dirt and build the wall up another foot or so”.

Herb remembers the exact day the flood beat them. “It was the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 1956,” he said, “I can tell you that because it was my birthday. We could see it coming. We took everything out of the club, even the plywood walls, anything that we could get out. Some of the men were doing that while others were trying to patrol the bank and shore it up. The levy had got that high and it was unstable...plus the fact, that the water was tracking under the gravel works on the roadway... We were frightened if it got too damp and if the levy bank broke it would have flattened the club. Way round the back - where the depth of water was not so high - we pulled a bag out and let the water run in.”

“It had started to come in everywhere and we knew it would break all the walls so we had to let it go.” Keith Gilbert said.

“We started in May and it beat us in July”, Geoff explained, “Max Anderson told us it would beat us and it did.”

### *Fundraising for new clubhouse*

After some time and once it had dried out, the clubhouse was usable but worse-for-wear. MRC wanted to raise funds for a new boathouse. The social committee was in its peak and ran dances, Crown & Anchor, 2 up and raffles. Then MRC hit on an idea to sell Life Membership for £10. “The committee envisaged lots of citizens would subscribe to this but would be unlikely to use the club,” “Dan Richards recalled, “However a number of current members took up the offer, myself included. At the time it cost me near four weeks pay to rake up the £10.”

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Photo E

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### *'Rowers' Marching Girls*

Around 1957, marching girls had become a fashionable pursuit in Mildura. "Not long after that Mildura Rowing Club established its own marching team," Pat Barnes remembered, "Through the Marching Girls, a few of the girls met rowing club guys and they started going out with them. There were quite a few marriages between rowing club members and marching girls. The Rowing Club girls did very well. They were all seniors but one by one they got married and drifted away from marching."

### *The Mildura Rowing Club Baseball team*

Bernie Currow and other MRC members started the MRC Baseball team which was a foundation club of Sunraysia Baseball League.

### *Winning Champion Pair 1965/6 at Lake Moodemere.*

After competing in fours for a while, Barry Kilpatrick and John Cleary teamed up to row pairs. "We actually had a fair bit of success," Barry recalled "We were looking at improving in the order of an eighth of an inch - that doesn't sound very much - but if you take 200 strokes, 200 by 1 eighth of an inch is a lot of feet. If you can do that and never make a mistake you are doing well. We were fortunate enough to win champion pair in 1965/6 at Lake Moodemere up at Rutherglen."

### *The 1964 Agreement with Mildura Rural City Council.*

As outlined earlier, the club had held permissive occupancy of the river bank site since from around 1909 and 1924 respectively. Once the 1956 floods receded, the Mildura Rural City Council established a policy to move all buildings above flood level. This led to the club and the Council signing an agreement which saw the club surrender its permissive occupancy and build the new (current) boatshed and clubrooms on the higher site. In consideration of the surrender of land, the club received £4000 pounds from the council. There was also a £4000 pound loan from council. This document was to become very important in 1996 when council attempted to alter the lease so that developers could build a restaurant above the current boathouse.

### *Rhythm Rockets and Sunday Night Dances.*

Some enterprising MRC members started the Sunday night dances as a way to raise funds. These included Max Barnes, Terry Maas and Barry Kilpatrick. Max thought the social arm of the club was very important, Pat Barnes explained. "He thought that if he kept everybody together and if they have something to do the club would be strong and he always involved wives and families..."

Geoff Evans played guitar at those dances. It was the very first time he ever played for the public. Once the dance was over, many club members partied through till sunrise. When Geoff and his friends established the Rhythm Rockets, Barry Kilpatrick outlined the arrangement, "I think we payed them £25 per night which was a fraction of what they earned elsewhere - but because we gave them a venue and gave them a start - they were happy to honour that all the way through. The entry charge was five bob. The dances were held in the old hall which could hold sixty patrons. It was 10 o'clock closing in Wentworth and there was no alcohol sold in Victoria on Sundays. They'd come in pay their dues, find a girl and out they'd go and that left room for another two.

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We were dictatorial about anyone who mucked up; they were out for a month or out forever. They'd come back from over the river full of 'grog' and they'd go for a swim, and then try to get in to our dances. We didn't let them in. We didn't have security; we were the security."

Pat Barnes described the dress at the dances, "We had our skirts and our starched petticoats with our belts around our waist and we wore the black shoes. It was the start of the Bodgie and Widgie business and the guys had slicked back hair and we were very cool."

"There was a reward for the volunteers," Barry Kilpatrick recalled, "If we cleared £100 then the half-dozen of us who were running it and sweeping floors after it, we'd go and get half a dozen rounds of toasted sandwiches. That was the big deal! We'd buy our own can of drink and have our toasted sandwiches for supper.

Eventually, the dance dropped off to other entertainment and Sunday opening in Victoria made it difficult to handle."

### *Rowing Personalities - Coaches*

"Don Mackay was a pretty good coach and mentor," recalled Barry Kilpatrick. In fact when Don was at Geelong College he was in a crew that won 'Head of the River'. Don was desperate to get a really successful light weight crew going and coached a lot of fellows over a 25 year period from the early 50's through until the eighties."

"Going to regattas, it was evident that unless you had a strong skill program the opportunity for young kids to row competitively was pretty difficult," Terry Hill remembered. "Having said that, we've had some good juniors go through and row and enjoy it, through a lot of hard work and dedication by a small group of coaches we've had over the years; Col Thompson, Geoff Talbot, David Talbot, Bernie Currow.

Barry Kilpatrick recalls Bill Asprey as another memorable coach. "He'd go out night after night and say nothing. He sent us up to Gol Gol which was fairly hard going and then we'd have to come back. On one occasion, things just weren't going right and he said, 'Barry, when you go forward just lift your head.' To my surprise, that made all the difference!

"As well as coach, Bert Scheutze lived on the river very near the club and acted as caretaker," Graham Gugger recalled. "Bert was a crafty old bloke. Whenever we were rowing against a couple of other teams, whenever he wanted us to up the rating, instead of yelling out to the boys, 'give us a dozen' he would tap the rudder strings on a boat. We could hear it but nobody else could. So we would get the spring on them. He was a terrific bloke. He had confidence in the boys and could talk to them and we all had confidence in him."

### *Rowing Personalities – Rowers and Committee*

Sunraysia Daily 1975 reports, "Some great personalities have passed through Mildura Rowing Club ranks. Perhaps the greatest rowing family of all was the Mills group – six brothers who have been associated with the sport at various times. The club has had at least one Mills in an official capacity since 1925. The family consisting of Bert, Syd, Cliff, Laurie, Les and Alex has been one of the mainstays of rowing in the district."

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### *George Xouris*

According to many life members, George Xouris is the most famous rower to come out of the club. Barry Kilpatrick is sure about that.

“Georgie is probably one of the most successful rowers in Australia ‘pound for pound’ and he is still rowing! He was working at George Winton Motors and one of the coaches, Don Mackay brought his Kombi in for some work. George Xouris asked Don, ‘How do I learn to row?’ Don was quick to answer. ‘Oh it is not very hard, when you knock off tonight, come on down.’

### [Photo F](#)

#### *Shane Munro*

Shane Munro came to prominence as a junior sculler through the schools program in the mid-eighties. Shane won the captains trophy in 1988 winning the South Australian, Victorian Country and the National School Boy sculling Championships.

“There are many other stories of his feats, “ Warren Lloyd explained, “ such as breaking wooden oars with pure strength and falling out of his boat at the start of a State championship then climbing back in catching up to the field only to finish fourth. The commentator was amazed at his efforts and maintained that an extra 100m and he would have won the race!”

#### *First Women Members*

The first women were admitted as members in 1974. These were Bobbie Watson and Chris Chambers

#### *First Female President*

Cynthia Toose led the way for women on the MRC Committee, becoming the first elected female president of the organisation from 2005-2006.

#### *Lou Wilson*

Lou Wilson rowed with the MRC from 1991 to 2002. She had a fantastic record of committee and sporting participation and has a string of gold medals to her name.

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### *Brodie Ralli*

Bernie Currow remembered the potential of a particular talented rower, Brodie Ralli. “We went over to the SA titles when she was under 15,” Bernie said. “Brodie rowed under-fifteens and under-sixteens and came second in both. She rowed in a big old heavy boat. Despite that handicap, she only got beaten by a length and a half over 1500 metres and by half a length over 2,000 metres.”

### *The Third Boathouse 1963*

The third and current boathouse was opened by Mayor of Mildura, Mr. N.J. Noyce in December 1963 with newly elected President Bert Mills officiating. Keith Gilbert remembers designing the new boat shed. “The old one had been flooded out a couple of times. There had been plenty of talk about the new building for five years, but it didn’t seem to get anywhere. One day I picked up a sheet of plaster and started to draw up a plan. I drew a rough square and divided it up and said, that’ll be the dance floor, and this’ll be the shed down there and that’ll be the office and this’ll be the toilets. I did that in my dinner hour actually and then I went around and I showed blokes and that is how it finished up. Everybody went crook because it was all built the wrong way - but we built it that way because - if another flood came we would have been flooded out, like the old shed was.” Herb Hassell recalled that an engineer named Harold Mackenzie drew up plans from Keith’s design. The dance moved from the old club house up to the new one. Barry Kilpatrick, Max Barnes and a few others continued to run it for other two or three years.

### *Fundraising Changes*

The coke machine at the front of the club provided good income but was regularly vandalised and had to be scrapped.

When Bernie Currow took on the roll of treasurer in 1981, he raised a great deal of sponsorship, which saved the members from all the work of setting up the fences etc and charging for admittance to see the Henley.

### *Masters’ Rowing*

“The Veterans started in the ‘80s,” explained Joe Watson. “On the water we were pretty active; particularly with Master’s rowing. There would have been about sixteen of us and we had a lot of fun. We went to regular regattas including Dimboola, Renmark, down to Adelaide in addition to the Wentworth Masters. We also went down to the ‘Head of the Yarra’ and Penrith and even went to Queensland for the Australian Titles and the World Titles in Adelaide in 1997. We were very successful. During the 1990’s we travelled to compete a lot and also had a very strong Master’s rowing section then. In 1991 or so, we went to Penrith and cleaned up. We were the best Masters’ club in the land at that stage. We just about won everything, all over the place.”

### *Marathon Rowing*

“Nowadays we struggle to get a lot of competitors up here for the regattas,” Terry Hill noted, “but it has spawned another style of rowing; marathon rowing.”

Our marathon was started off by Ian Law from Avoca Homestead. Ian started that as a fundraiser for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.” Terry said.

MRC members Lou Wilson, Barry Kilpatrick and Donna Johns were participants in the first Royal Flying Doctor Marathon which was held in 1992.

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“We made up a team of six rowers who rowed for the SES on the 90 kilometre row from Barmera to Robinvale. Lou explained, “The other rowers were Hawthorn men.” The event was described in the Sunraysia Daily as a world first. Lou recalled many rowers having to be helped out of the boat; the arduous event had sapped all energy and turned their legs to jelly.

### *1992 Ladies Veterans Marathon*

This marathon event was 54 kilometres on the Murray between Barmah and Echuca. MC Ladies, Marlene Currow, Lou Wilson, Sarah Trumble, Donna Johns and Helena Smith won their class in the race which took place in flood conditions and included kayaks, canoes and dragon boats. “Ten kilometres from the finish a storm erupted with rain so heavy that we couldn’t see the banks of the river,” Lou Wilson recalled.

### *World Masters, Wivenhoe Dam, Queensland, 1994.*

MRC rowers, Lou Wilson and Lauris Hicks along with MRC Cox, Steven Greenham, who was only eleven years-of-age, teamed up with a New Zealand and Melbourne rower to become the triumphant maiden-four team which won six gold medals at the World Masters that day.

“We even beat Canada who had never been beaten,” Lou regaled. “The social committee put on a memorable celebratory barbecue to congratulate the Master’s entrants.”

### **Photo G**

#### *FISA Masters, the 24<sup>th</sup> Master Regatta. 1997.*

Lou Wilson, a single sculls competitor once again took gold for Mildura Rowing Club. Then she lined up with Barry Kilpatrick in the double scull event to take gold yet again.

### *2002 World Masters*

A successful MRC crew reaching the finals in the 2002 World Masters was made up of Heather Crawley, Kath Salem, Patsy Sandell and Helen Healy with cox Sam Biggs.

#### *The Row Past*

Around 20 years ago, Bernie Currow arranged to put every row-able boat in the clubrooms on the water to perform a row past. Sculls and pairs, followed by racing fours and then the eights proudly passed the clubhouse.

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### *School's Program*

With assistance from local schools MRC ran a large schools program during the 1980's and 1990's. Bernie Currow and David Wah, an ex rower from Dimboola and Principal at Mildura High School hatched the idea.

“Each of the schools taking part; Tech School, High School, Red Cliffs and Irymple gave us \$2000 each for 5 years.” Following on, St Joseph's, Wentworth and Robinvale joined in. In Bernie Currow's last year as President, there were forty-six school students rowing for Mildura Rowing Club and around a hundred all up from all the schools.

“The schools program had its problems,” Terry Hill remembered, “The difficulty was, once again, that kids had other sports. The schools were challenged too. Despite an enormous amount of effort from both the schools and the club, in the end it fizzled out.”

### *Boathouse Improvements*

With fifty people generally attending the Friday night barbecues in the 1990's, it was noted the clubrooms were not big enough. Members started looking around and talking about possibilities, thus evolved the new glass fronted clubrooms.

“It's been a good focus for the club.” Joe Watson said.

### *Developers take an interest in the club and land occupancy is challenged.*

In 1996 developers Peter Kedmenec and Associates were seeking to establish a large restaurant, convention/entertainment area on the Rowing Club site”. That year the AGM minutes provide a warning from Joe Watson, club member and lawyer.

“These plans if they are carried out, have the potential to radically and irrevocably change the nature of your club. It is therefore important that every member take an interest in the issue of the development proposals. Unless this club continues in a dynamic and vigorous association, there can be no doubt that there are many in our community who would wish to take these facilities from us.”

Linked to the developers' proposals, the club found itself under pressure from the Mildura Rural City Council to change the 1964 agreement putting the boathouse on a lease. Joe Watson explained why this was not a good idea, “Once they had us on a lease they could say ‘the lease is up’ or ‘we are the landlord and we will tell you what to do’. We objected to that saying, “No...The council does not own that land. That is crown land. It is administered by the council through the Lands Department.”

Thankfully, The Lands Department objected to any further development of the Rowing Club site in letters to the Mildura Rural City Council during 1996. The Minister for the Department of Natural Resources had visited the site and said there would be no consent to commercial development to the south side of the Murray River.

In May 1997, when MRC required a permit to incorporate windows into a boathouse upgrade, Council did not want to approve the changes until the issue of the lease was resolved to their satisfaction.

Joe Watson, Peter Sandell, Secretary and Bernie Currow, President battled to maintain the status quo for the club with the full support of the members. By now Joe Watson had taken on the legal investigation on a pro bono basis. “It was really touch and go and we had to fight hard to keep it.” Joe said.

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Council did eventually allow the building permit; however it is still not a closed issue as the minutes of 8<sup>th</sup> May 1997 outlined, “The issue of a restaurant above the boathouse seems to be off the agenda. However, the question of ongoing occupancy of the premises by MRC still remains to be resolved.”

### *Upgrading Equipment*

MRC purchased their last wooden boat during the 1980’s. Since then boats have become are very light, as have the oars. This development brought about by composite materials; fibreglass, Kevlar and carbon fibre. MRC recognised the need to update equipment. The club had to carefully consider how to afford it,” explained Joe Watson, “It was a concern but we were pretty conservative.”

### *Boat Burning*

“After the club bought new boats, to make more room, all the fittings were taken off the wooden boats that were never used and we held a big ceremony where we burnt all the boats,” Pat Barnes recalled. “The men wore the rowing club blazers and carried the boat out as a big symbol and they put it on the fire.”

The tradition of boat burning does not sit well with contemporary conventions so these events are now a thing of the past, a memory to be enjoyed by those who took part, but in recent times the club has agreed to forgo this tradition.

### *A Remarkable Boat – Manfred*

The “Manfred” is a much loved boat which is still in use today. The boat was donated to the club by Mr Ben Chaffey. Ben Chaffey was the owner of race horse named Manfred. Manfred was the winner of the AJC Derby, the Cox Plate and came second in the Melbourne Cup in 1925. Both the Chaffey name and the great success of the boat’s namesake make Manfred an important part of Mildura Rowing Club History.

Photo H

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### *Boat Naming*

“Having a boat named after a rower or committee person is a great honour,” Paul Hodgson said, “perhaps it is even higher than life member. You can die and your life membership is non-existent but the boat will always be there.”

When the boat is decommissioned, the bow - with the name - is cut from the boat prior to the ceremonial boat burning. The bow can then be cut in half and fixed to the wall for ever. Many proud members have received the high distinction of having a boat named after them.

### *Mildura Rowing Club*

#### *The Tradition Continues*

Paul Hodgson explained what it takes to be a rower, “Rowing is a sport of perfection. That is what you try to achieve. It is not necessarily brute strength. Some say rowing is 90 per cent concentration, 10 per cent perspiration but ‘Guts and Determination’ was Coach, Don Mackay’s favourite phrase.”

Whatever rowing takes, Mildura Rowing Club members continue to give, as they have for almost a century. With seventy-eight members at last count; forty-six men, twenty-two women, four boys and six girls, continue the tradition. Keith Gilbert turns eighty five this year and holds the distinction of MRC’s oldest member. Margeaux Thompson at almost fifteen years of-age is the club’s current youngest competitor, while even younger members watch on in readiness.

Harking back to Dr. Parker’s speech, at that very first MRC meeting, rowing has been well supported in Mildura. It is an excellent recreation and since August 23, 1909, many hundreds of men, women and youngsters have enhanced their life through the sport and their involvement with the Mildura Rowing Club. May it long continue.