

# **Engineers Australia Queensland Division and Engineering Heritage Australia**

## **Heritage Recognition Program**

### **National Engineering Heritage Landmark Award to the Barcaldine Water Tower**

#### **Unveiling of Engineering Heritage Marker and Interpretive Panel**

**by Her Excellency Ms Penelope Wensley AC, Governor of  
Queensland**

**Barcaldine**

**23 June, 2012**

Barcaldine Regional Council Mayor, Councillor Rob Chandler; Councillor Andrew Cowper and BRC staff members;

President, Engineers Australia Queensland Division, Mr Steven Goh;

Chairman, Engineering Heritage Queensland and member, Engineering Heritage Australia Panel, Mr Andrew Barnes;

Chairman, Central West Local Group, EA Queensland, Mr Stuart Bourne;

Executive Director, EA Queensland, Mr Ian McEwan;

Principal Engineers, Department of Transport and Main Roads, Mr Bob Grabovickic and Mr John Pfingst;

President, Barcaldine Museum, Mr Mick Hansen,

EA members and members of the engineering fraternity;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

As has become customary at public events and ceremonies in our State, in support of the goal of national reconciliation, I acknowledge Australia's indigenous peoples and in particular, the Iningai peoples who lived in this Central Western region before European settlement, whose descendants are recognised today as the custodians of Iningai culture and history.

The role of custodians is a vital one in any culture. They are the defenders, protectors and guardians; the ones who safeguard the things that are important or precious to us - including our history. Doing so, they secure our heritage.

Engineers Australia - through its national Engineering Heritage Recognition Program - has established itself as an energetic protector of history - and not only of engineering history, but of the history of our nation, of its States and Territories.

My involvement with this program - and its recognition of significant engineering feats and sites across Queensland - over the past four years, has convinced me of that.

Every ceremony I have attended - at Somerset Dam, at the Burdekin Bridge, in Bundaberg, Redcliffe and Brisbane - has been "an eye-opener" - increasing my already healthy appreciation of the work of engineers and their contribution to society - but also bringing new insights into the way our State was settled, of the way individual communities were established, have grown and developed, creating their own distinctive personalities and identities.

And I trust that the growing number of National Engineering Heritage Landmark Awards - of Plaques and Interpretative Panels appearing in Queensland, such as these we are unveiling here in Barcaldine today - will encourage the same response in others - locals and visitors alike - and will draw more people to travel to these locations and to want to know more, to find out more, about their history.

In the case of Barcaldine, of course, there are many lures already. 'The Garden City of the West' has always been attractive to travellers, but for most modern-day tourists, (apart from the famous goat-races and pubs), it is history and heritage more than anything else that draws them here: to this place of the great shearer's strike; the place where the Australian Labour Party and the National Party (first called the Graziers Party) were born; the place that is home to the Tree of Knowledge Memorial, the Folk Museum and the Australian Workers Heritage Centre... and now, they can add a visit to this tower to their circuit - to look at this heritage marker, read the interpretive panel - and see this tower for the true landmark that it is.

Locals may say it has ever been thus. They know it as a striking structure, straddled over the town - visible from afar - daring the bold or the foolish to try to climb it (and I'm looking at you, Mr Mayor, as I say that!) It's been here for almost a century - a familiar presence, part of the town's identity.

But that very familiarity - that accustomed presence - may mean they don't really know - or haven't thought about - its history and significance - either in engineering or social terms - or even, Mr Mayor, in relation to the Town Council and local government.

The nomination process for the National Engineering Heritage Recognition program is very demanding. It's not easy to secure recognition. The selection criteria are exacting. A thorough assessment must be made in relation to significant technical achievement, to historic, aesthetic, scientific and social factors, to rarity and integrity; and those preparing the detailed nomination document have to do a lot of digging-

through old newspapers, account books, Government and sometimes, Council records. In this particular case, they all came into play and as Governor, I was interested to see that what I do today, in weekly Executive Council meetings - of the Governor-in-Council - is little different in some respects from almost 100 years ago.

According to The Brisbane Courier of Friday 7th February, 1913 - which we tracked down in the National Library of Australia:

*"the Governor -In Council (has) approved a loan of five thousand pounds being granted to the Barcaldine shire council for the erection of a steel tower and tank and for extending the reticulation in connection with the water supply at Barcaldine".*

What that quiet little report did not reveal was the controversy in the Council and the town that preceded the decision to build. The debate and indecision (and of course, nothing like that happens nowadays!) went on for years - in fact for well over a decade. The idea of having a tower and a water tank was first suggested in 1902 - but rejected - first by the Council ('beyond Divisional Board means'), then, by a poll of ratepayers - in fact, I think there may have been several of these, with the last one held in 1910.

Once that government loan was secured, however, ( a very large sum at the time) things began to move. The tender was let 3 months later - and then - the following year, in April, 1914 - there appeared another press report, again in The Brisbane Courier, headlined 'Barcaldine Water Supply' (so they obviously considered it newsworthy!) - that read as follows:

*"At the Shire Council meeting yesterday, a letter from the Hydraulic Engineer's Department was read. It stated that the contract for the water tower, tank and machinery would be completed by October 7 next. Much satisfaction was expressed that something definite had been done at last. Several persons are prepared to build on the allotments recently sold by auction as soon as the water supply is assured."*

What an interesting indication of the economic value of the tower to the town... and of the critical importance of having an assured supply of water... AND what an understatement - 'much satisfaction was expressed that something had been done at last' ...you can almost hear those sighs of relief in the Council chamber - no doubt, by then, echoed around the town, whether the business community, local firefighters or the householders.

So the completion of the tower - with its 100 ft steel frame, its legs set 7.6 into the ground - and its 45,000 gallon tank - was not only a monument to engineering - but also to persistence and perseverance.

I pay tribute to all those persons in the past, known and unknown, the town councillors, the citizens, the builders, the Government members and officials who lobbied and worked to see the tower funded and built. In this Year of Regional Engineering, I pay tribute to those engineers who designed and built it so well and those who have maintained since, so that it stands today in such good condition, able to serve a new, modern purpose as a communications tower - or, to use the modern jargon, able to operate still as 'a serviceable live system'. I thank the Council

for supporting the nomination and I thank and pay tribute to Engineers Australia and Engineering Heritage Australia - especially Andrew Barnes - who is such a champion of this program - and to local Barcaldine engineer, Stuart Bourne, for presenting the nomination. We may all say to you, also that 'much satisfaction' is expressed, for what you have done - not 'at last', but for always, in securing for the Barcaldine Water Tower this enduring recognition as a heritage landmark for engineering and for the town and people of Barcaldine.

Thank you.