



info@boilerblock.com.au - 0407 471 565 - POB 248, Mount Molloy 4871 QLD - www.boilerblock.com.au



## Boiler Block launched!

A project decades in the making finds a fresh start

*Saturday 2 Oct 2021* - The ceremonial launch of the Boiler Block project marks a significant milestone for the community. Representatives of the region's pioneering families were on hand to join Mayor Angela Toppin in giving their well-wishes to the project.



(back, L-R) George Chapman, Freddie Vains, Jeff Crowley, Cyril Vains, Cr Angela Toppin, Lorne Cubit, John Brisbin  
(front, L-R) Joan Crothers, Mick Pashen, Betty Lawford, Bill McKean

The project is being undertaken by a non-profit community group called the Mount Molloy Boiler Block Benefit Committee, Inc. The Committee formed in mid 2020 with support of a handful of local people. Thanks to assistance from George Chapman, the Committee purchased the boiler block in Dec 2020. Since purchase, the Committee has been meeting regularly on the first Saturday of each month, after Mount Molloy CWA Markets.

The Committee follows on from efforts over the past 4 decades by people who have been keen to see something done to improve the situation of the old JM Johnston sawmill.



Cover from Feb 2011 Mareeba Express. Joan Crothers, Allan Vains, Freddie Vains celebrate heritage listing.

The sawmill's history is outlined in two new interpretive signs that were funded as part of a grant from Mareeba Shire Council's RADF (Regional Arts Development Fund) programme.

Committee President, John Brisbin, expressed thanks to Council for their support through the RADF funding as well as through the Community Partnerships Programme, which provides reduced rates for qualifying initiatives.

The sawmill was established at this location in 1914 and provided the mainstay for the local economy for nearly half a century. After a colourful history and surviving three previous fires, the sawmill burned down for the last time in 1963 and the site was abandoned in favour of the electric sawmill which was set up shortly after the fire.



*Betty Lawford*

Betty Lawford offered a heartfelt tribute on behalf of the extended Pashen family who were amongst the area's earliest pioneers.

The Pashens were renowned for their skill in harvesting timber and transporting sawlogs to the mill across the most difficult terrain and rudimentary tracks.

Betty stirred the gathering with stories of the special bond between teamsters and their bullocks, a reminder of how things used to be.

Mick Pashen was in attendance with wife Elaine.

Joan Crothers, who traces her heritage back to Molloy's earliest days, offered her thanks to the Committee for taking the project on. Joan, together with Rohan Lamb, was instrumental in helping get the site heritage listed.

Her husband Jack was an industrious man who ran trucks and hauled timber to the sawmill for many years as well as serving on the Shire council.

Joan has many memories of life in those days and still prefers to call Mr Chapman "Georgie".

*Mrs Crothers brings a smile to Betty Lawford and George Chapman.*



George Chapman presented the Committee with two prints of an historical photo showing his father, George Chapman on one of the famous International trucks hauling an enormous Kauri Pine log to the mill, in 1942.

George's grandfather ran a blacksmith shop under the Queenslander that still stands at the bottom of Little Street. George says he has fond memories of Mount Molloy when he was growing up and still considers this to be his ancestral home.



BIG KAURI PINE LOG BEING HAULED  
TO MT. MOLLOY SAWMILL BY  
GEORGE D. CHAPMAN  
in March 1942. Photo taken at  
Wetkerby Station homestead

Jeff Crowley and his wife Jan attended, travelling with the Chapmans for the occasion. Jeff's father was the boiler engineer for the sawmill for many years. Jeff and Jan have returned to the north after many years of professional work in Tasmania.

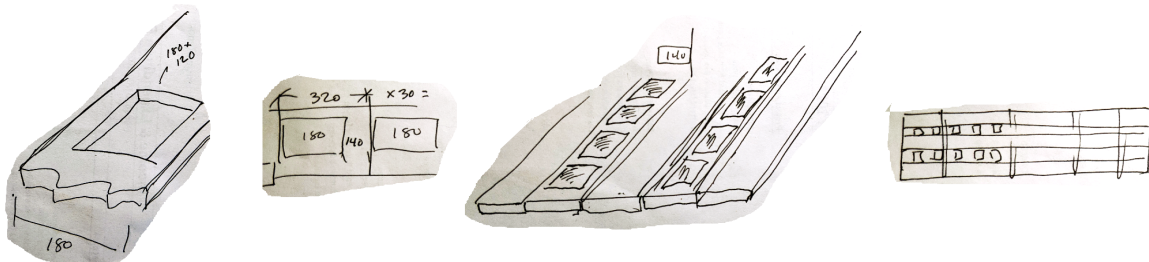
Freddie Vains, who worked at the sawmill as a young man, was interested to hear what was said and remembered by the gathering. Freddie has vivid memories of the day he was assisting the sawmill's blacksmith and accidentally picked up a piece of iron that had just gone from red-hot to black. His severely burned hand was treated promptly by the matrons at the old Molloy hospital.

Cyril Vains offered a few memories of playing in the mill yards as a child, although he declined to specify what sort of mischief they got up to.

Cyril has been a stalwart of the Committee. He came up with the idea

of offering commemorative plaques as a fundraiser. The Committee needs to raise about \$60,000 to retire the mortgage on the property, so the idea is to offer 60 plaques to people who wish to be "pioneering supporters."

The idea is to provide a permanent place to recognise the contribution of the sawmill to our region's prosperity, and to leave a permanent commemoration or message to posterity. The design concept of the plaques is still being developed. One idea is to craft the plaques in ceramics and inset them into a beautiful hardwood tabletop. The "long table" would give people a place to gather, share ideas, food, and stories in a communal setting.



Champion yarn-spinner Bill McKean gallantly saved the best of his stories for the social session following the close of formalities. For example:

In one memorable incident, Old George Chapman directed young Bill to bring a load of logs down a steep hill in the International truck, despite Bill's objections. The track was slicker than Old George had reckoned and sure enough the entire load swept down the hill. Bill had good reason to vacate the driver's seat without delay as the big logs started smashing through the cab. Old George remarked that perhaps Bill had been right about that hill and apologised, in a roundabout way, for trying to kill him!



Lorne Cubit, one of Molloy's most ardent promoters, was on hand to share in the story-telling and memories, as well as contributing to a future vision of the region he has worked so hard for over so many years. Lorne was in the fire-fighting crew that tried to put out the 1963 fire that finished off the sawmill, and still recalls sharing a cup of tea as the sun came up and they could see the extent of the damage.

The Committee has been greatly assisted by the Cairns Historical Society, the Eacham Historical Society, and the Mareeba Historical Society. Special thanks to the Committee members who have made this progress possible: Cyril Vains, John Brisbin, Sue Northey, Simon Hawse, Bruno Martin, Pam Finch, Caroline Lieber, Juliana Russell, Dan Jones, Lorne Cubit, Gerda Domen, Glenn Cambage, and Bruce Ferguson. Thanks to the *Centre for Australasian Theatre* for the loan of their fabulous tent, to *PeaceBus / Graeme Dunstan* for the flags, and Lindsay Fisher for the great photos.



for the flags, and Lindsay Fisher for the great photos.

The community is invited to participate in how this project progresses toward the future and a new era of village scale self-sufficiency.

**Contact:**

info@boilerblock.com.au  
0407 471 565  
www.boilerblock.com.au