



The Deans Marsh Curtains

During World War II, the women of the Deans Marsh community constructed the Deans Marsh Curtains. Sugar bags were sewn and embroidered over a period of nine years and used as curtain panels in the community hall. See [Making the Original Curtains](#) for more detail.

In 1991, due to the inevitable deterioration of the work, the community approached The National Wool Museum for assistance in preserving it. The Wool Museum stored the curtain and it was exhibited in 1994. It has since been relinquished to the Museum of Victoria and is displayed in the new facility.

Local resident, Margaret Stewart, was keen for the new and original residents of Deans Marsh to be united and learn of the history of the area. Through her tenacity, a project to create new curtains for the hall was initiated in 2000 with the help of a grant from Arts Victoria and textile artist Jan Preston.

The brief for the new curtain was: it should reflect the history of the area, focus on the present and look forward to the new millennium. It should immortalise the potato and pea growing along with agriforestry; the indigenous floral and fauna; the eagle and the snake to represent the first people, the Wathaurong; the panther that roams the local forest; the original town buildings; a reference to Marjorie Lawrence, an internationally famous opera singer who grew up in the area; Ron Millard, puppet maker and puppeteer; and the Ash Wednesday fires.

On 25th November 2000, the new Deans Marsh Curtains were hung. In all, 7200 hours of voluntary community input had been recorded. Open Days for public viewing of the curtains are held.

The making of the Curtains

Perhaps the nucleus of the idea to make the original stage curtains for the Deans Marsh Hall came as early as August 1938, when there was a competition for the best article made from a sugar bag.

(Sugar bags were often mentioned in the CWA magazines, Country Crafts – ‘Everyone knows the rag rugs made with a foundation of sugar bags, and what things of beauty some of them are. I have seen table cloths and cushion covers made from dyed sugar bags, and the hessian really takes the most beautiful colours. Lots of uses about the house to be made of this lovely material – used as valises, tucker kept in sugar bags when camping).

March 1939 the CWA members agreed to commence working on Hall curtains, members to work on squares cut from sugar bags which must be washed and pressed well before starting to work.

Money from the curtain fund was used in June 1942 to purchase two war savings certificates. Project went into abeyance during the war – no further mention until February 1946 when Mrs Walter Clissold suggested that ‘we make an attempt to finish our curtain.’ Members of the Younger Set were asked to help in the making of the curtain, and Mrs Ramsay visited to encourage the completion of the work and to show off the Birregurra curtains

July 1946 Ms W Clissold won a competition for a curtain piece (Mrs R Clissold and Mrs A Schram were other prize winners). Then there were negotiations with the Hall Committee to get permission to put the steel rod up for the curtain – this seemed to take some years. In December 1948 the curtains were fully pieced and lined – Mrs Walter Clissold was given a handbag in appreciation of the work she had done in piecing and lining the curtains. (Mrs Clissold unfortunately died in April 1949, before the curtains were hung). It appears that the curtains were finally presented to the Hall Committee and the community at a concert on November 10th 1950 – the minutes are unfortunately silent about the form the concert took.

Notes by Elizabeth Willis, Museum of Victoria.