



## TOWONG TURF CLUB - 150 YEARS OF RACING

Tom Mitchell recalled the significance of racing in the Upper Murray when he wrote:

*'Local race day for the Towong Cup was always a tremendous event, in fact it was the event of the year, and its importance dwarfed even such days as New Year and Christmas.'*

The Towong Turf Club has a rich record of fine horses, local winners and Melbourne and Sydney Cup winners, and its history is peopled with many colourful, determined and resourceful characters. Thus, 150 years after the races were first held, race goers still come from far and wide to attend the Towong Cup at the 'Flemington of the Bush'.

Through its history, the Towong Turf Club has survived challenges to its continued operation, but there have been only a few years when the Cup meeting has not been held: 1939, when bushfires razed much of the district, and the WW2 years. Then in 2020 when Mother Nature dumped 80 mm of rain on the course two days before the scheduled Cup meeting and the track was deemed unsafe for racing. A huge crowd still attended the "Phantom" meeting. Old timers recall that during the Depression years a meeting attracted only eight runners but still the Club fought on. In 2020 the New Year arrived with deadly bushfires which caused widespread devastation. The historic grandstand, which had undergone costly restoration in 2014-15, was itself under threat. Now this iconic, heritage listed building is symbolic of the determination of successive hard working committees to preserve their race club.

In 1971 the Towong Turf Club celebrated 100 years of racing with a Centenary Gold Cup, a crowd of 3000 people (including many dignitaries from Melbourne) near capacity fields and an "Aftermath" Ball. This year, the sesquicentenary is celebrated under COVID conditions, but with no less enthusiasm.

The Towong Turf Club commemorates its 150 year history on display boards outside the dining room under the grandstand, and plans to develop a website and a richly illustrated book to tell the stories. We invite you to enhance your racing experience at Towong by viewing the display and soaking up the atmosphere.

