

Theme: Education – CB Alexander Campus of Tocal College

Note: Tocal's thematic history has been prepared as part of the assessment of the site's heritage significance in the 2012 (draft) conservation management plan.

Australian heritage theme: 6. Educating

NSW heritage theme: Education

Tocal's last private owner, Charles Boyd Alexander, died in 1947 leaving a complex will that intended his estate be used to assist destitute, homeless and orphan children by training them for agricultural careers. Alexander's will was over-prescriptive and initially proved impossible to enact. It was not until 1963 that the Alexander Trustees and the NSW Equity Court accepted a proposal, championed by the Law Agent for the Presbyterian Church, EA Hunt, for the Trustees of the Church to use Alexander's bequest to establish an agricultural college for boys on the Tocal estate (Brouwer, 2007; Hunt, 1972).

In 1963 architects Philip Cox and Ian McKay designed the College, and construction began in early 1964. The CB Alexander Presbyterian Agricultural College commenced operation in 1965 with an initial intake of 15 male students. The College was formally opened in that year by the then Prime Minister of Australia, Sir Robert Menzies.

In terms of education history the College is a remarkable example of a 1960s residential facility of private/benevolent origins, purpose-built to provide hands-on, practical farm-based training in agriculture. With its farms, 92 student rooms, dining room and teaching facilities, it is an archetypal residential agricultural college of the post-war period. The social and cultural context of its establishment is reflected in the College motto '*Bonus agricola vir bonus*' which means a good farmer is a good citizen. These cultural underpinnings are based on the notion of the yeoman farmer and the inherent respectability and worth of working on the land.

Faced with financial difficulties, in 1970 the operation of the College was transferred to the New South Government and the College was renamed the CB Alexander Agricultural College. The transfer occurred during a period in which the New South Wales was establishing new agricultural colleges. It had recently established a college near Leeton in 1963— named Yanco Agricultural College in 1965 and later renamed Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture—and Orange Agricultural College in 1973. These were in addition to Hawkesbury Agricultural College established in 1891 and Wagga Wagga Agricultural College established in 1949 (Black, 1976).

Since 1970 the NSW Government has operated the College at Tocal through its agency responsible for agriculture (then the Department of Agriculture and now NSW Industry and Investment). The College became the CB Alexander Campus of Tocal College in 2006. At the same time Murrumbidgee College of Agriculture became a campus of Tocal College known as Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre.

As part of the change in 1970, ownership of the Tocal lands were transferred to be held in trust by the CB Alexander Foundation, a not-for-profit statutory authority established under a NSW Act of Parliament, the *CB Alexander Foundation Act*, 1969.

Since 1970 the campus has undergone many significant changes although its fundamental aim to provide practical, residential farm training has never waived. The changes fall into two broad categories—those associated with increasing social inclusion and those associated with the adoption of Australia's national training reform agenda.

In terms of increasing social inclusion, and the expansion associated with its implementation, female students were admitted to the College for the first time in 1972 and now constitute a majority of enrolments in the full-time courses. Modifications and additions to campus buildings occurred in 1974, 1987, 1994, 1996, 1997 and 2010, all of which were in keeping with the original architectural style and site master plan. In 1980 the College began its current suite of part-time courses with the inaugural intake of Dairy Apprentices, followed in 1994 by Rural Traineeships. In 1981 the College added distance education to its operations when it became the base for NSW Agriculture's home study program.

At various times the College has provided training to overseas students in full-time and short courses. These students were drawn from countries such as the Seychelles, Bhutan,

Pakistan and the Falkland Islands. They included members of the African National Congress who were political refugees from southern Africa. The campus continues to provide short courses to visiting overseas groups.

Tocal further broadened the scope of its operation when it launched Australia's first Certificate in Landcare in 1995, the National Rural Business Management Program in 1996, a specialised Certificate III in Agriculture (Horse Breeding) in 1999 and the Diploma of Landcare and Natural Resources in 2000. The College also provides a comprehensive range of short courses for farmers and those interested in the land.

A cornerstone of Tocal's education philosophy is to service learners living in rural areas who are disadvantaged by lack of access to training due to their remoteness. The College continues to meet this challenge through flexible delivery modes, maintenance and enhancement of its residential facilities and by providing a range of scholarships. It is notable that since the mid 2000s College staff have travelled to many parts of Australia to provide skills recognition services to Aboriginal communities in remote areas.

Since 1984 the College campus has hosted the Tocal Field Days, a three-day annual event that provides a mix of education activities, craft demonstrations and commercial displays, targeted at farmers, people living in rural areas, and the wider community (Hathway, 2007).

The College adopted Australia's national training reform agenda which began in the 1990s and continues to drive change, particularly in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector in which the College operates. In 1994 Tocal's courses were accredited and the College became a nationally Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Tocal quickly moved to competency-based training as industry agreed on national competency standards. The College adopted the new national agricultural Training Packages⁴ in 1998, the first agricultural training provider to do so in Australia. Tocal continues to adopt and comply with the national provisions of the Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF) as they evolve.

In 1996 the College received a Demonstrating Best Practice award and grant for its implementation of competency-based training using problem-based learning. In 1997 the College was awarded the Rivercare Gold Medal for General Education and the Landcare Bronze Medal for Education. In 2000 it received the Rivercare Award for Excellence in Landcare Education. In 2003 the College and the associated Tocal Agricultural Centre were designated as the New South Wales Centre for Excellence in Agricultural Education.

The Tocal campus has produced thousands of graduates since its commencement in 1965, many of whom have proceeded to distinguished careers in the private and public sectors.

Chronology

- 1947 CB Alexander died, the last of the Alexander family at Tocal;
- 1963 Ownership of Tocal passed to the Presbyterian Church Trust;
- 1963 College designed by Philip Cox and Ian McKay;
- 1964 Construction of the College commenced;
- 1965 The CB Alexander Presbyterian Agricultural College, Tocal, opened by Sir Robert Menzies, then Prime Minister of Australia;
- 1970 CB Alexander Foundation established and College operated by NSW Government;
- 1972 First female students enrolled;
- 1980 Inaugural intake of Dairy Apprentices;
- 1981 Distance education commenced;
- 1984 Tocal Field Days began;
- 1985 Problem-based learning introduced;
- 1994 College courses accredited and Rural traineeships commenced;

⁴ 'Training Package' in this context means a set of national competency standards and a specified list of qualifications that can be delivered.

- 1995 Certificate in Landcare commenced;
- 1996 National Rural Business Management Program delivered by the College;
- 1998 The College adopted the national agricultural Training Packages;
- 1999 The specialised Certificate III in Agriculture (Horse Breeding) commenced;
- 2000 Diploma in Landcare and Natural Resources commenced;
- 2003 Tocal Agricultural Centre designated as a Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education;
- 2006 The education facility at Tocal became the CB Alexander Campus of Tocal College.

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