

# **MANILDRA RAILWAY STATION**

## **THE ORIGIN OF THE DESIGN OF THE FIRST STATION BUILDING**

Ever since the start of railway operations in New South Wales in 1855, the same style of building that was provided at Manildra in 1893 had been in use, although in a slightly different form.

The simplest form of building to protect people from adverse weather was the use of three enclosed walls and one open wall facing the platform. The roof was formed by a single-pitched covering that sloped to the rear of the structure in order to drain rain away from the open wall. That style of building was used from 1855 until 1889. With the arrival of Chief Commissioner Eddy, a comprehensive review was undertaken of the different designs of platform buildings then in use. Eddy realised that, with a single change in design, he could enhance the appearance and improve the usefulness of the structure. This single change was the reversal of the direction of the roof pitch. While these simple sheds before 1889 were cheap and useful, they lacked one major benefit – the absence of an awning over the platform to keep the sun and rain from entering the open wall at the front. Eddy initiated the change in direction of the roof pitch towards the rails and extended the roof rafters three feet to provide a modest platform awning that would at least keep the occupants of the waiting shed dry or drier than the pre-1889 arrangement. At some stations, an awning was added to the pre-1889 building, the structure at Narara being an example.

Eddy's innovation resulted in the widespread use of this simple timber structure with a single-pitched roof sloping to the rails and this family of buildings became the most prolific type of platform building on the New South Wales Railways. The only difference to the building style related to the length of the structures, which depended on the number of rooms required. Over 400 examples existed. Sadly, in 2017 less than ten survive. The original building at Manildra was one of those examples that have been demolished.

## **THE DESIGN FEATURES OF THE FIRST BUILDING**

The section of line between Molong and Forbes and the opening of Manildra station occurred on 18<sup>th</sup> December, 1893. Apart from large stations at Parkes and Forbes, there were eight small, intermediate stations all of timber construction. Of those eight timber buildings of similar style, there was one major difference. Three of the structures – those at Gregra, Manildra and Bumberry – were 15 feet longer and contained three rooms while the five others also contained three rooms or size but were shorter in length at 36 feet. The three larger examples provided an office for the staff officer.

The dominant design feature of the eight timber structures was the complete omission of any form of decoration. Their cheap construction was reflected in their

utilitarian ugliness. The buildings looked completely unattractive from the rear, which was the side from which travellers approached.

Listed below are the features of the first Manildra station building.

1. 51 feet 4 ½ inches by 10 feet internal,
2. timber framed with horizontally set weatherboards on all external walls,
3. Rooms are ticket office, general waiting room, ladies' waiting room & toilet,
4. Open-fronted general waiting room with ten feet wide opening – no heating,
5. Internal wall of general waiting room unlined,
6. skillion roof, sheeted with No. 26 gauge, galvanised iron sloping to the rails,
7. Circa three-feet wide platform awning without the use of timber struts for support,
8. Absence of penetrations through roof, except for the ventilation pipe for ladies' toilet,
9. Heating provided in the ticket office and ladies' waiting room by stoves with flues through side walls,
10. inside all rooms, ten feet ceiling height at rear, dropping to circa eight feet at the front,
11. floor level of building six inches above platform level,
12. entry to the platform via one set of double gates six feet wide set on an angle adjacent to the water tank,
13. Four-panel doors with lower panels smaller,
14. No externally fitted window shades at rear,
15. A single water tank four feet six inches diameter without covers on the top and sides,
16. Single ticket office window for the sale of tickets 18 inches high facing into the general waiting room,
17. positioned on nine-inch diameter timber stumps,
18. three-rail fence at the rear of the platform,
19. detached male toilet at the Parkes end of the platform with five urinal stalls and two earth closets with skillion roof only over closets,
20. single "air closet" in female toilet, with rear door for exchange of night soil pan.

The structure was built basically as planned with the one notable difference. The male toilet was constructed at the Molong end of the platform rather than the Parkes end.

It was policy to have the toilet for ladies within the main building. The equivalent male facility for stations like Manildra outside major urban areas was located in a separate building towards one end of the platform. In the first half of the 1890s, the male toilets were located on the platform and this was the case at Manildra in 1893. By 1895, male toilets in rural locations were moved off and behind platforms and placed at ground level. Women were usually allocated more space in the toilet

cubicles than men but this was not the case at Manildra, where the men and women possessed about the same amount of floor space. The men also had the use of a slate urinal, with an allocation of two feet for each of five stalls and full-height stall dividers made of one inch thick slate sheet.

Often, the shape of the roof of the male toilet was different to the roof style for the main platform building and this was based on the whim of the architect or engineer in charge of the drawing. In the case of Manildra station, there was a difference in the roof shape and this was expressed by the total omission of a roof over the male toilet. Strangely, the usual double-pitched or gabled roof was applied in the early 1890s to male toilets but this was not the case at Manildra. The use of gabled roofs for male toilets had been in use since 1886 but, in 1896, they would no longer be used, having been replaced by a semi-circular roof shape. The only reasons for the omission of an overall roof on the male toilet would have been either to save money or the desire to provide the maximum ventilation of any adverse bodily odours emanating from the toilet users. Perhaps the male railway travellers of Manildra emitted some form of particularly strong fragrance?

The 1893 building at Manildra reeked of an absence of large sums of capital money. This was evident in the following building elements:

1. The use of one plan for three different stations,
2. Use of a single-pitched roof,
3. Minimal platform awning width,
4. Unlined walls in general waiting room,
5. Opened-fronted general waiting room,
6. Absence of heating in the general waiting room,
7. Elimination of a brick fireplace in the ticket office,
8. The elimination of pedestrian access directly into the building from the rear,
9. Use of a three-rail rather than a picket fence at the platform rear,
10. The use of only one, rather than two, six feet wide gates for access to the platform, &
11. Absence of covers over the rainwater tank.

In review, Manildra got a cheapish platform building but at least it accorded with what the NSW Railways was building elsewhere for smaller places void of substantial political clout. The town of Manildra was in the middle of the status of local communities. The towns of Parkes and Forbes did get elegant, attractive brick structures which reflected their larger size and political importance. While Manildra was nowhere near the size of Parkes and Forbes, it was larger than some of the other intermediate stations and this higher degree of importance was reflected by the Railway Department in an official Circular in 1893.

The Railway Department Circular for the line opening between Molong and Forbes, No. A341 dated 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1893, had an interesting comment about the type of platform buildings provided for five of the intermediate stations serving smaller communities. These were the shorter, timber structures where no staff were appointed to the stations and were officially classified as "unattended". For the first time, a Circular for a line opening made a comment about the type of buildings that had just been erected. In the case of the line through Manildra, the Circular stated that five stations – Meranburn, Mandagery, Cookamidgera, Tichborne and Daroobalgie – possessed a "combined waiting shed and store measuring 16 feet by 10 feet". This was a reference to the omission of a separate good shed at these stations. Never before had a Circular stated the type of building on the platform and the measurements. Only at Gregra, Manildra and Bumberry were there separate platform buildings and goods sheds.

The use of a single plan for intermediate stations on new lines was the norm in 1892 and continued in 1893. On the western line to Forbes, Henry Deane approved on 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1893, a single plan for timber buildings with skillion roofs at Gregra and Manildra and Bumberry. The buildings were very similar to those approved for the Illawarra line in 1892 and the Corowa branch but there were a couple of changes. The buildings measured 51 feet 4 ½ inches by 10 feet internal. This time, there were no brick chimneys, heating being provided in the ticket office and the ladies' waiting room by stoves with metal flues attached to the exterior of the walls. Also, the ceiling was set at the 8 feet mark, not at the 10 feet level.

On the same date that Henry Deane approved the plan for Gregra, Manildra and Bumberry, he also approved, again using a single plan, the same building style and size for Meranburn, Mandagery, Cookamidgera, Tichborne and Daroobalgie. The structure was a shorter, three-room timber building with a skillion roof measuring 36 feet by 10 feet wide, the buildings being called "combined waiting sheds and stores". There was no staff accommodation but there was a stove in one corner of the "waiting room". Now that was strange! Never before nor since that time was heating provided in an open-fronted waiting room. The concept of unattended stations was not new but what was new was the use of buildings larger than one room for use at unattended stations. This had not occurred before 1893. The elimination of the staff accommodation was a sign of financial restraint. The rooms were designated store, waiting room and ladies' "A.C". There was no ladies' waiting room and the term "general waiting room" was not used. These measures were also evidence of a capital funding shortage. At Meranburn, wire netting was placed on the opening facing the platform, suggesting that there was some type of local problem with stock or wildlife.<sup>1</sup> The buildings were 11 feet high at the rear and 8 feet 9 inches at the front. This was the third height variation for the design. There was a three feet wide awning without supporting struts.

---

<sup>1</sup> The wire netting may have been a post-construction change.

## CONSTRUCTION AND OPENING

Tenders closed on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1893, for the platform buildings at Gregra, Manildra, Meranburn, Bumberry, Mandagery, Cookamidgera, Parkes, Tichborne, Daroolbalgie and Forbes.<sup>2</sup> In essence, there were ten buildings in two designs with small timber waiting sheds at eight intermediate stations and two moderate-sized brick structures at Parkes and Forbes. There is conflicting information about the name of the contractor for the construction of the building at Manildra. It was announced on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1893, that the successful tenderer for Manildra station and all other buildings to Parkes inclusive was F. Lemm, Junior.<sup>3</sup> In September, 1893, one newspaper announced that the firm of Temm Spencer had won the contract for all station buildings between Molong and Tichborne and Fetherston and Barbat had won the tender for Daroolbalgie and Forbes.<sup>4</sup> The Government Gazette provided a third contradiction stating that F. Lemm, junior, was the successful tenderer for the buildings at Gregra, Manildra, Meranburn, Bumberry, Moura, Bindogandri, and Parkes while Fetherston & Barbat won the contract for the construction of station buildings at Tichbourne, Daroolbalgie, and Forbes.<sup>5</sup> Does it really matter? Probably not.

The Manildra railway station opened on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1893. The local history of Manildra states that the arrival of the railway was the “most significant event for the development of Manildra”.<sup>6</sup> It was the location of the railway station that prompted the relocation of the town from the eastern bank of the Mandagery Creek to the western side of the waterway, where town is located today.

## THE UNOFFICIAL REFRESHMENT ROOM

Local history commentator, Jim O'Donnell, tells of the story of the unofficial refreshment room at Manildra station that opened not long after the station opening in 1893. He tells the story of Mrs Price, wife of a bush carpenter. She paid a rental of one shilling per week for the privilege to carry her basket of goodies morning and evening down to the station for sale to train travellers, including tea and coffee. She had established in the waiting room a small store and table of the sale of her items.<sup>7</sup> It is known that the Manildra refreshment facility was operating in 1898 as town residents requested the Commissioners to increase the time the train stayed at

---

<sup>2</sup> *NSW Government Gazette*, 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1893, Issue No. 231, p. 2791.

<sup>3</sup> *NSW Government Gazette*, 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1893, Issue No. 1327, p. 3805.

<sup>4</sup> *The National Advocate*, 21st September, 1893, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1893, No. 327, p. 3805.

<sup>6</sup> <http://manildramemories.cwl.nsw.gov.au/services/manildra-railway-station>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Manildra so that passengers could obtain refreshments.<sup>8</sup> The Commissioners declined the request. The date when the Manildra refreshment facility ceased is yet to be determined.

## **BUILDING ALTERATIONS**

In 1906, a telephone cabinet three feet square and seven feet high was built in one corner of the waiting room. In order to install the telephone cabinet, it was necessary to reduce by almost half the length the single, fixed seat in the waiting room. That was not the only reduction in the facilities used by the public. By that time, the length of the waiting room had been truncated from 20 to 10 feet long to increase the amount of space in the staff office. As far as is known, this was the first installation of a public telephone in a small, rural railway station.

Also in 1906, an “out of goods shed”, measuring 15 feet by 10 feet, was constructed adjacent to the detached male toilet at the Molong end of the platform. While the small size, oblong shape, skillion roof design and corrugated iron wall material were consistent with the norm, the placement of the entry door was not. Usually, the entry door faced the platform but, in the case of the Manildra structure, the set of two hinged doors four feet wide were located in the end of the structure facing the main building. The work was completed on 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1907.

Two further alterations were planned and approved in 1912. The first was the insertion of a public counter into the booking office to facilitate the exchange of parcels between staff and the public. The second change was the elimination of the cast iron stove and metal flue and the provision of a brick fireplace in the rear wall with a standard-sized hearth two feet nine inches wide. The work necessitated the relocation of the electric staff columns in the office. It would appear that the work was delayed as there is a press report in June, 1912, in which the Commissioners stated that “in view of the number of more urgent works requiring attention to provide for traffic requirements, it is regretted that the Chief Commissioner cannot see his way to entertain the proposal at the present time”.<sup>9</sup> The work was eventually done.

In 1962 a septic tank installed to serve station and Station Master’s residence. It is a fair bet to speculate that it was at the time of the installation of the septic tank that the Railway Department built a new male timber toilet block at the Molong end of the station. Another undated alteration to the 1893 building was the provision of a pedestrian entry in the rear wall to obviate the need for people to walk around the building to enter the platform. The door was placed in the position where the 1906 telephone cabinet was located. While this was a simple and possibly unnecessary change from a functional point of view, rear pedestrian access to a platform through the platform building was regarded as a status sign for the town served by the station. Lastly, again at an unknown time, fixed sunhoods were placed over the four

---

<sup>8</sup> *Molong Argus*, 28th October, 1898, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Molong Express and Western District Advertiser*, 15th June, 1912, p. 18.

windows in the rear wall. These sunhoods were post-construction additions at many rural railway stations.

The last change made the Manildra station building was the provision of an electrical heater in the booking office in 1975.

## **THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE RELOCATION OF THE MOLONG REFRESHMENT ROOM TO MANILDRA**

The campaign started in 1908 to have the refreshment room at Molong relocated to Manildra.<sup>10</sup>

In 1910, commercial travellers express their desire to have a refreshment room established at Manildra railway station, and the Manildra Progress Committee was reported to assist them. Many passengers thought that the refreshment stop at Molong was too early for breakfast and too late for tea.<sup>11</sup>

A deputation in 1911 from the Manildra Progress Association waited upon the Railway Commissioners during their stay at Manildra. Again, the relocation of the refreshment room from Molong to Manildra was requested as the times at Manildra for both the morning and evening trains would be “more suitable”. The deputation was disturbed by the terseness of the reply from Chief Commissioner Johnson, who was reported as giving “his usual blunt and non-committal reply”.<sup>12</sup> The same request was met the same fate.

After 1911, there were no further press reports about requesting the transfer of the refreshment room from Molong to Manildra.

## **THE REPLACEMENT PLATFORM BUILDING**

In July, 1983, the State Rail Authority announced it would replace the existing 1893 timber building with a new structure. This work was one of a long list of improvements to station facilities throughout New South Wales with other country centres to receive new buildings including Binnaway, Curlewis, Kootingal and Wingham.

One month later in August, 1983, the Authority announced it had prepared plans and provided finance for the project but commencement date had not been determined. In December, 1985, the Authority revised plan for the building. The features of the new structure were:

- “transportable construction” (to allow for the lifting of the building if the low-level platform were ever raised),
- building measurements 7.650 metres by 3.000 metres,

---

<sup>10</sup> *Molong Argus*, 17th April, 1900 May, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Molong Argus*, 4th November, 1910, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Molong Argus*, 16th June, 1911, p. 4.

- steel sub-frame on concrete pad footings,
- Plywood flooring to Station Master's office and parcels room,
- toilet floor to be covered with waterproof, compressed Fibrolite cement sheeting,
- gabled roof covered with Custom Orb sheeting with Colorbond finish,
- wall material to be 50 mm thick Fibrolite cement sheeting or polyurethane,
- three rooms – a Station Master's office, a parcels and storage room and a toilet,
- provision of a concrete slab floor,
- provision of a low-pitched, platform awning 1.700 metres wide supported by four 100 mm<sup>2</sup> timber posts,

Tenders for the work closed on 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1986. The advertisement described the building as a “demountable single-story building of approximately 35 square metres gross building area, consisting of a reinforced concrete footing and slab, a modular composite (sandwich) panel wall system and a prefabricated timber trusses roof structure supporting plasterboard ceilings and insulated metal roofing.”<sup>13</sup> The external walls gave the appearance of horizontally set weatherboards.

In May, 1986, the State Rail Authority announced that construction would be given in July and would be completed by December, 1986. It also said that the building would be air-conditioned. When completed, the structure looked like a building similar to that surviving at Borenore. Why would the State Rail Authority build a structure in the 1980s to look like something that would have been built in the 1880s? If it was to replicate the original design of the timber building at Manildra, it failed to do that as the 1893 structure was of a completely different style. The 1986 building did achieve one record and that was the provision of the first platform building with a posted verandah erected after 1892. Why? Why? Why?

## **WHAT'S ON THE PLATFORM IN 2017**

The first thing to note is that the original side platform has now been converted into a sort of island platform.<sup>14</sup> There are three buildings on the platform. All are constructed with the same external wall sheeting, i.e. a fake composite product to look like horizontally-set weatherboards.

At the Parkes end, there is a signal/electrical room with a mono-pitched roof sloping mildly to the rear. In the centre, there is the 1986 built structure that once housed the Station Master. It still retains its gabled roof and posted verandah. The third building at the Orange end previously housed the electrical staff instruments (large staff to Bumberry and small staff to Molong). It also contained a battery room for the

<sup>13</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2nd April, 1986, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> Graham Harper points out that, west of Lithgow, the only island platform with main running lines each side of the platform is Raglan. The situation at Manildra is a hybrid island platform with the main line on one side and a siding on the other side.



staff instruments. It is identified by the three ventilator cowls through the ridge of the roof.

## **THE STATION MASTER'S RESIDENCE**

This residence dating from the opening of the line in 1893 is the only original building from that period. Its brick construction, gabled roof and posted verandah would in 1898 become the features of the standard J2 style. Why would the New South Wales Railways build a brick residence while providing a timber structure for the platform building? The answer is that the then Chief Commissioner, E.M.G. Eddy, was a former Traffic employee and spent a lot of public money in providing accommodation for Traffic Branch staff members. John Whitton also viewed staff in the same manner and would often provide brick residences while the platform building was in timber. The distinction was provided as a way of acknowledging that staff were valuable – and perhaps more valuable than passengers.

Stuart Sharp

10<sup>th</sup> June, 2017