



**“preserving the past for the future”**

Highfields Pioneer Village, Museum & Park Inc.  
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Take a stroll through history at **the Highfields Pioneer Village**, and explore this living salutation to our colonial forebears. Without the ingenuity and resilience of these magnificent pioneers the region would not exist as we know it today. The generous community of the Village would like to invite you to share in the recognition of those endeavours, that spirit of progress upon which our modern society was built. Ever fancied learning a lost craft, to try your hand at blacksmithing or tinsmithing, or to spin and weave your own creation? Open daily, with something for everyone, there’s no need to look any farther afield than your own backyard.

Open to the public since 1994, this historical wonderland was first dreamt of by its founder, Ray Ashford, while travelling America in '74. An ardent vintage car enthusiast, upon returning home Ray built an old-style barn to house his ever-growing collection, reminiscent of the barn made famous by the 70s American TV hit, *The Waltons*. This simple action initiated the collection of historical items on Ray’s 20-acre property, and over the years attracted a tight-knit community of active members who donate their time, experience, and collections to this ever-growing passion project.

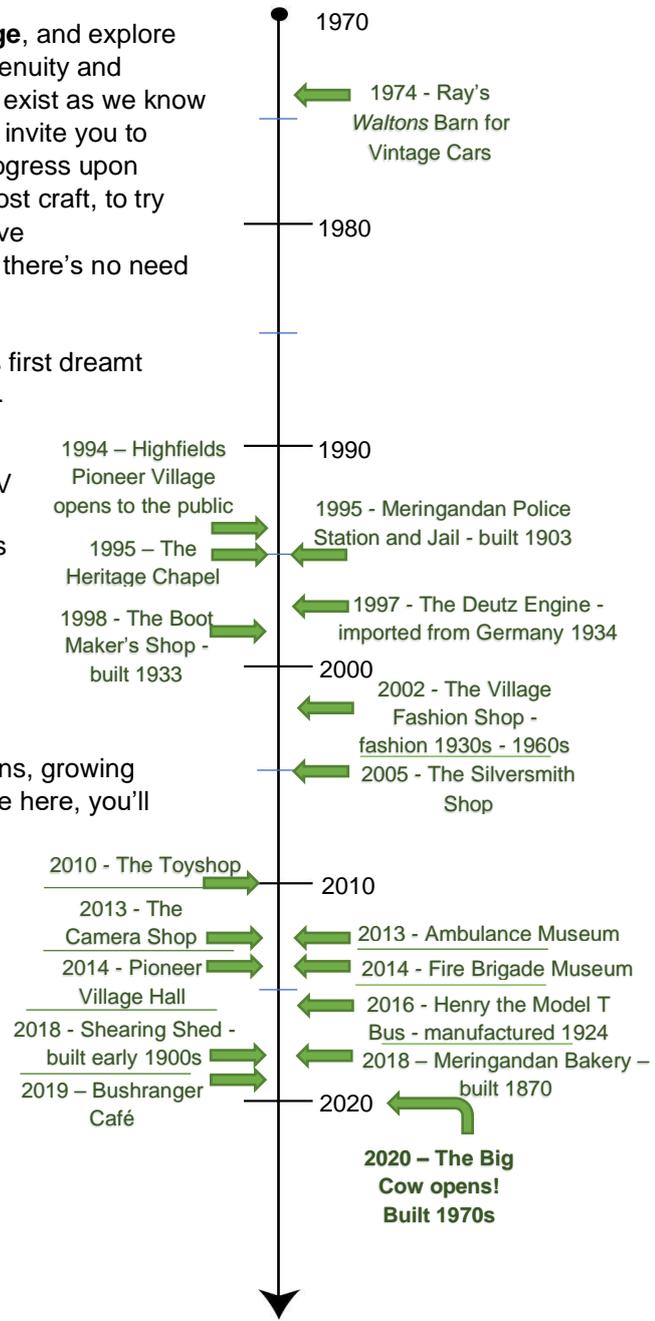
**“A relic of the past”**

Today the Village boasts 70 original historic buildings, full of museums, artifacts, demonstrations, workshops and attractions, growing in number with each year that passes. Too numerous to name here, you’ll have to visit the Village yourself to see them in all their lovingly-restored glory. While there catch a sheep shearing or blacksmithing demonstration, visit an original Slab Cottage, or grab a cuppa at the Bushranger Café.

The triple treat of the Toowoomba Fire Brigade Museum, Ambulance Museum, Queensland Energy Museum housed within these authentic buildings each document and celebrate over 100 years of local history.



Photo by Jody Dodds



**The Big Cow** – The latest arrival to the Highfields Pioneer Village, the Big Cow is the perfect addition to any Queensland’s Big Things road trip. Added to the collection in September 2020, The Big Cow was sculpted by Hugh Anderson to be seven times the size of an Ayrshire cow! It was originally built by in the 70s to attract tourists to a dairy farm on Ayrshire Rd. The cow is made of concrete and so massive and heavy that it had to be cut in half to transport it to the Village!

The Southern Cross Museum exhibits artefacts collected by Toowoomba Foundry employees between 1876 and 2010, carefully gathered for display over many a weekend by Ray and “Puggy” Griffiths, son of the Foundry founder. This is a true community collection of rare and historically authentic machinery, windmills, water pumps and tools, and has received global renown for both the variety and quality of its pieces.

Faithful to its origins, the Village houses many vintage vehicles, including *Henry* the 1924 Model T bus and *Myrtle May* the Miniature Steam train. Named after the wife of her creator, Nelson Hoey,



Photo by Willy Wood

**Henry the 1924 Model T bus** - Originally a school bus in Kilcoy, this stylish ride is now available for private charter. Today *Henry* gives rides to not only school groups, but also parties, corporate functions, and of course, weddings! Many choose to celebrate their big day amongst the rustic surrounds of the Village, conveyed by *Henry* to the Heritage Chapel, which celebrated its centenary in 2009.

*Myrtle May* was designed as a smaller-scale model of a 1915 C16 steam locomotive. Many of her full-scale relatives were built locally at the aforementioned Toowoomba Foundry, the last of which was withdrawn from service in 1964.

The last Sunday of every month sees a long queue lining up to tour the Village aboard *Henry* – such a popular ride that another T-bus is currently being restored to share the load. When not in action *Henry* is housed in the Transport Museum, which also contains the historical vehicular trifecta! The first bicycle (1818 “Hobby Horse”), first motor bike (1885 Daimler), and first motor car (1885 Benz Patent Motor Wagen) are all on display. Visit Australia’s most comprehensive collection of bicycles and view a unique collection of Edwardian cars that includes the first three Benz Models ever created!

**“a truly magical place”**

Festival days are when the Village truly brings history to life. Workshops are held for tin- and blacksmithing, spinning and weaving, whip cracking, and beekeeping - you can even learn how to milk a cow! *Henry* and *Myrtle May* have all pistons blazing and ready to ride, and live music and an animal nursery ensure that the whole family will be thoroughly entertained. Annual events include Australia Day celebrations, The Easter Vintage Festival (sadly postponed due to current events), the Highfields Big Cuppa (tea & damper on May 27<sup>th</sup>, proceeds donated to cancer patients), the Festival at the Big Cow (Sept), and the Poets Breakfast (17<sup>th</sup> Oct). For those more supernaturally inclined, Paranormal Investigations have recently found two new ghostly presences while exploring the Village at night! Bookings are essential for all events and activities, tickets available through the Village website.

The Highfields Pioneer Village community is strongly dedicated to preserving the history of the Darling Downs and wider Queensland. According to the man himself, slowing down their acquisition of new exhibits is like “trying to grab a tiger by the tail”. In the works are attractions that will feature the 11<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Brigade and a Fire Engine Museum. This passionate community would like to invite you to share in their love of history, take a step back in time, and live a day in the life of a pioneer.



Photo by Willy Wood

**Griinke Slab Cottage** – Built by the Griinke brothers, later reconstructed at the Village. Mrs Griinke was known to ride by horseback to visit neighbours and pinch cuttings for her impressive garden. To commemorate her efforts the garden surrounding the Cottage is maintained with traditional plants and entered annually into the Carnival of Flowers cottage garden competition.

Householders’ Options to Protect the Environment (HOPE) Inc. (Australia) and the Highfields Pioneer Village would like to acknowledge the Jagera, Giabal and Jarowair people, the Traditional Custodians of this region, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

My thanks to Ray Ashford, Jody Dodds, and the good folks of the Highfields Pioneer Village for their time, quotes, photos, and provision of source material for this article.