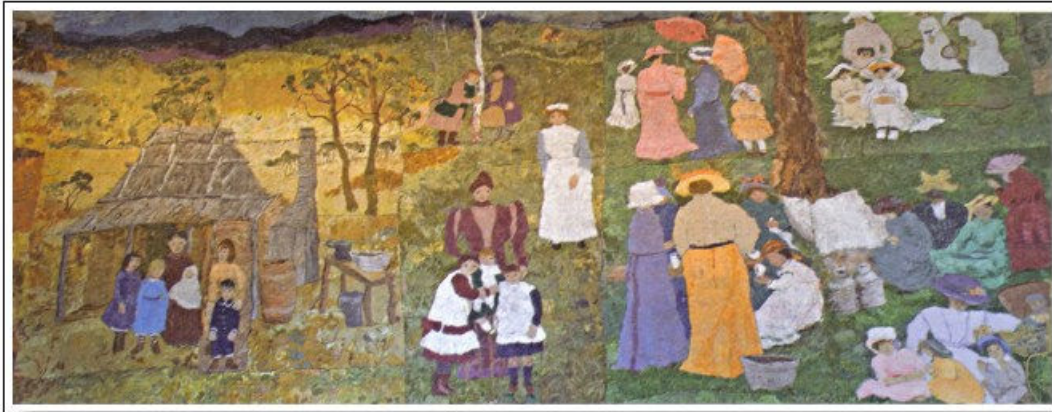


The Mansfield Women's Felt Mural

During a recent visit to Mansfield I called in to the Mansfield Tourist Information Office and noticed this large felt mural on display. If you are in the area, make a point of dropping in to have a look; it's a very large and impressive piece of work. In the meantime I've transcribed the text from the display and, in particular, the panel on how the felt was made is very informative. – Webmaster



“The Mansfield Women's felt is a celebration of courage and creativity, diversity and determination. It was created by the women of Mansfield working with artist Jean Atkins in 1985 as part of Victoria's 150th celebrations.

Jean described the inspiration behind the work as *‘... the courage of Mansfield women ... rearing their families, helping build homesteads and working through relentless hot summers under blue skies which showed no sign of rain for weeks and months ... then on through the gentle autumn and into the bitter cold winter:’*



More than 100 local women worked on this community masterpiece which is defined by the seasons and suggestions of the loneliness of the pioneering days. It includes references to the time before white settlement, the picnic races, Halley's Comet and a tennis party in the early 19th century, among many, many other wonderful snippets of the life and history of Mansfield.

The panels of the mural were drawn from a number of sources, including photographs, written records and oral history.

One such source is a 1929 photo of the family of Philip and Catherine Cummins sitting on the running board of their Buick Tourer on a family picnic. The photo was taken by one of their daughters, Frances, who over 50 years later, wove it into the fabric of the mural after replacing the images of her father, and her husband (Eddie McConnack) with women, to suit the mural's theme.

Other aspects of the scene are remarkably faithful to the original, typifying the attention to detail that was brought to the work by the women of the Mansfield District.”



“The felt mural was made from wool donated by local farmers and was created through the following process:

- Greasy wool was taken straight from the sheep
- Wool was then washed and cleaned
- Clean wool was carded (teased and combed into strips, same as spinning)
- Strips were then layered in a criss-cross or herringbone pattern on top of a nylon fly-screen
- This pattern was continued for a depth of approximately 2 to 3 inches (this with a base colour of white or brown)
- The main background colour was then placed over the top (i.e. green in panel 8 for the forest)
- For the details such as trees, bikes and people, the wool was pre-dyed to the desired colours, and also layered into the panels
- Once a picture or panel was completed in its pre-felt stage, another nylon fly-screen was placed at the top of the work — this held all the wool in place
- Fly-screens on top and bottom were stitched together to hold the work in place for the felting process
- Using warm water, the prepared screen was then placed in a bath, hand flattened and beaten (as the washing machine would not achieve an even shrinkage and absorption)
- Once beaten and dried, the fly-screen was removed, and the panel was ready for assembling
- All the pieces were stitched together to make the full size work
- A calico backing was then placed on the back of the Mural, providing stability to the Mural and strength for hanging
- Velcro fasteners were then attached for convenience of hanging
- The Mural was raised up by 6 men, in unison working 6 pulleys”



in situ at Mansfield Tourist Information Office