

Sydney Mechanics' School Of Arts (1833–2016): Re-invention at 150 years of age

Dr Roger K Morris AM, Patron, Association of Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts of NSW (AMISA) (website: amisa.org.au), Roger.Morris@uts.edu.au

Ms. Melanie Ryan, Program and Communications Manager, Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts (website smsa.org.au), Melanie.Ryan@smsa.org.au

ABSTRACT

In 2016, the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts (SMSA) celebrated its 183rd birthday. Why has it survived? This paper will outline the School's early history and highlight the responses it has made to the challenges it has faced. In 1987, the SMSA sold its original building premises, built in 1836, and moved into rented accommodation until it found a new permanent home. Since the 1980s the School has been involved in an ongoing process of reinvention, repositioning, and realignment in order to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of its members and the wider community.

The Immediate Origins of the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts

The first hero in the story of Australian adult education must be Henry Carmichael, who came to Australia in 1831. He had been educated as a Presbyterian Minister but had pursued a career in education. His opportunity to come to the British colony of New South Wales (NSW) resulted from his appointment by Dr. John Dunmore Lang (Australia's first Presbyterian Minister) to a senior position in the new Australian College, which Lang planned to establish in Sydney. Carmichael travelled to Sydney on the *Stirling Castle*, together with some 50 Scottish 'mechanics', and their families, whom Lang had recruited to build his new college (Crew, 1970, 20).

During the long ocean voyage, Carmichael was able to organize a small class for the mechanics, to whom he taught mathematics and geometry five days each week. He also formed a class that met twice a week to study political economy. These shipboard classes must rank among the very first organized Australian adult education classes. As an

indication of Carmichael's success, a decision was taken by the mechanics to form a Mechanic's Institute on their arrival in Sydney. Five or six of the mechanics had attended classes offered by the Edinburgh School of Arts. However, little interest came directly from this original proposal (Crew, 1970, 21).

However, in early 1833, the idea of establishing an institute was revived by the NSW Governor, General Sir Richard Bourke, a lifelong liberal and an enthusiastic supporter of education. He sought the advice and assistance of Carmichael, who organized a series of meetings. Much interest was aroused and more than 200 people attended the public meeting, held to formally establish the institute. Carmichael was elected Vice-President and he soon made this the key operating position in the SMI. During the next five years he spent much of his time administering the affairs of the institute and acting as its leading lecturer (Crew, 1970, 21).

The Objective of the SMSA

The objective of the institute was the dissemination of scientific and other useful knowledge throughout the colony of NSW. The means to be used for the attainment of this object were:

- the formation of an institute under the title of the Sydney Mechanic's School of Arts (SMSA)
- the establishment of a library containing books of scientific and useful knowledge for the use of members
- the purchase of apparatus and models for illustrating the principles of physical and mechanical philosophy
- the delivery of lectures upon the various branches of science and art
- the formation of classes for mutual instruction (*The Sydney Herald*, Thursday 21 March 1833).

Rapid Growth

With Governor Bourke as its patron, the Surveyor-General Major Thomas Mitchell as its President, and Carmichael as its guiding spirit, the SMSA soon achieved a considerable

measure of success. More than 40 public lectures were delivered each year (see Table 1), membership increased from 91 in 1833 to 609 by 1838. In 1836, the SMSA moved to its own purpose-built home at 275 Pitt Street, Sydney. In 1838, £405 was received in subscriptions and the library contained 1700 volumes. However, despite the rule, which required 10 of the 20 members of SMSA Committee to be mechanics, very few of the continuing members of the SMSA were drawn from this group. Instead there was an increasing proportion of middle-class professionals, merchants, shopkeepers, clerks and other white-collar workers (Crew, 1970, 22). This was to be largely to be expected as the Sydney of those days was clearly not a industrial town; it was an administrative, financial and trading center.

Table 1: Lectures given in 1840

One on the advantages of improving the mind

Two on ideology

Four on memory

Five on phrenology

Four on the principles of taste

Four on astronomy

Three on chemistry

Two on the choice of a horse

Four on the principles of drawing

Two on electricity

Four on the study of history

Two on vulgarities in conversation

One on printing

Two on the powers of steam

Two on human physiology

One on Byron the poet

One on geography and geology

(From: *SMSA (1981) Diary 1833-45*, p. 83.)

Sudden Decline

Unfortunately a rapid decline soon followed. The 1840s were difficult times for SMSA because a severe economic depression hit the colony. Moreover, the management of the School had declined into almost complete ineffectiveness. Because of difficulties in his day job, Carmichael had had to move on. In 1841 the School had more than 800 members but by 1851 this number had slumped to 296. Things were so bad that there was established an official Committee of Inquiry, the report of which revealed a very sorry state of affairs. The main term of reference of the Committee had been “to ascertain the full extent of the defalcations of the former Secretary-Librarian” (unfortunately a recurring theme in the story of SMSA). The Committee’s Report referred to many other matters of concern: the library collection was in a state of great neglect and contained many inferior works; classes were poorly run, with their offerings small enrollees minimal; and the current public lecture program was only a shadow of earlier programs (Warburton, 1963, 74).

The 1850s and John Woolley

If SMSA’s first hero was Henry Carmichael, then its second hero was the Reverend Dr. John Woolley, the foundation Principal and Professor of Classics at the University of Sydney. He was the leader of a small group that came to the colony after the University was established in 1850 and whose ‘business’ was education. It was largely through Woolley’s efforts that the SMSA becoming once again became a very useful educational institution. He saw the SMSA “as an auxiliary (to the University) in the diffusion of scientific knowledge and as an instrument of political and social advancement”. He conducted classes in Greek. Additionally, there were classes in Latin, German, French, drama, vocal and orchestral music and drawing. In 1853 the SMSA acquired the adjoining Congregationalist Chapel, which was converted in 1856 to a large lecture hall. The two buildings were later integrated behind a new common facade. Woolley showed a ready appreciation of the practical needs of his time when he proposed the formation of a Workingmen’s College. A full program of technical education did not develop in his day but the foundations were firmly laid (Warburton, 1963, 26). Unfortunately, Woolley

drowned in 1866 when the ship *London*, on which he was returning to Sydney from leave in England, was wrecked in the Bay of Biscay (Whitelock, 1974, 107).

Technical Education: An idea whose time had come

During the 19th century, educational opinion generally had come to accept the proposition that organized technical education was linked directly to national industrial progress.

These newer educational arguments for technical education joined earlier more moral arguments for the public instruction of the working class (Murray Smith, 1966, 351).

Locally, there were other immediate and practical demands for technical education. There was a growing shortage of skilled workers. The colonial government was becoming more involved with the provision of public infrastructure, and local industry, particularly engineering, was developing rapidly. This was a period of great prosperity and development; there was an air of confidence and bold optimism. The population grew at an unprecedented rate, and with it an increasing demand for practical vocational and technical education. To meet these demands, the SMSA established classes in mechanical drawing (1856), mineralogy and geology (1869) and chemistry (1871) (Murray Smith, 1966, 344).

Associations of employers and employees were also being established. In 1870, the Engineering Association of NSW was formed, and this soon became the major grouping of industrial employers. In 1871, the NSW Trades and Labor Council was set up to represent the largely craft-based trade unions of the colony. Both these organizations sought the introduction of an appropriate system of technical education. Now enters a third hero, Norman Selfe, who had taught the SMSA's 1865 class in mechanical drawing and was both a prominent member of the Engineering Association and a Vice-President of the SMSA (Mandelson, 1972, 107). Later, in 1879, the first Inter-Colonial Congress of Australian Trade Unions was held in the lecture hall of the SMSA, which was “kindly lent free of charge” (First Inter-Colonial Trades' Union Congress 1879, 9).

Finally, this was the age of the great industrial exhibitions – local, metropolitan; inter-colonial, and international. These exhibitions played a key role in popularizing the idea of

the modern and the importance of technology. Clearly, technical education was an idea whose time had come (Murray Smith, 1966, 350).

The Establishment of the Working Men's College

By 1873, after 40 years of life, the SMSA was financially sound, its membership was substantial and there were 10 functioning class programs with a total annual enrolment in the hundreds. The time was considered right to finally address the establishment of a Working Men's College. The government was approached and £2500 was promised to assist with this task. Building works were completed in 1878. The SMSA now had six new classrooms, an art studio, a chemistry laboratory, a lecture hall, and administrative offices available for the Working Men's College. Additionally, the Library had been improved and the reading room expanded. The total cost had been somewhere between £8000 and £9500, much of which had been raised from the public (Mandelson, 1972, 110). By 1878, the Working Men's College was ready to commence operation (Murray Smith, 1966, 368).

The new college was soon very popular. There was an initial enrolment of 595, the next year this number grew to 1000 (at least 400 of whom could be described as manual workers) and nearly doubled again the next year. (Warburton, 1963, 77) Though as can be seen from Table 2, the initial class offerings were not solely technical.

Table 2: Courses and enrolments at the Workingmen's College (SMSA) 1878

French (Ladies)	74
Grammar	15
Elocution	17
Writing & Arithmetic	206
Architectural Drawing	23
Mathematics	26
Chemistry	51
Shorthand	33
Civil Service Exam	23

Ladies Drawing	40
Surveying	15
Mechanical Drawing	<u>62</u>
	585

(From the SMSA (1881) *Report of the Committee of the Technical College*, p. 8)

While the college may have been very popular with its student body, the SMSA faced a number of practical and immediate difficulties in its management of the college. There was no effective management structure and there were disputes over salaries. Initially it had intended to group subjects into courses of study leading to qualifications, but this had not proved possible. Enrolments continued to be much higher in commercial and more general subjects than in the more technical and scientific subjects. Class fees remained too high, many believed, for working-class students.

The question of government funding and the attitude of the colony's chief educational bureaucrat were also soon to become crucial problems for the School (Mandelson, 1972, 112). William Wilkins, Under Secretary to the Department of Public Instruction, opposed the control of technical education by what he called a non-responsible body. He believed there should be a unified control of all education in NSW, responsible to the Parliament through his Department and its Minister. In the end, the Government decided to set up a Board of Technical Education to manage technical education throughout the Colony and to take control of the Working Men's College, or Technical College as it was now more commonly called (Mandelson, 1972, 117).

A New Golden Age

Though the loss of the Working Men's College (Technical College) was a great setback, its full effect was not felt immediately. The Board of Technical Education may have taken control of the College but it was still using the SMSA's classrooms and paying some £2000 a year in rent. The money so received funded the SMSA's operations, which included an extensive and popular program of commercial subjects and modern foreign languages, which nicely complemented the technical offerings of the Board of Technical

Education. These proved to be much more appropriate to the School's largely middle-class and clerical membership. The library and reading room continued to be popular as the rental income had allowed a major expansion of the collection. The Games room provided a popular venue for cards and chess: there was even some talk of illicit gambling taking place.

Moreover, in those days of rapid social and political change, the SMSA's Debating Club became an important forum where the issues of economic growth and depression, nascent nationalism and, possible federation, the rights of women, and the role and growth of the labor movement were fiercely disputed. Many important politicians, including Edmund Barton (later Prime Minister of Australia) and William Holman (later Premier of NSW) were blooded in the Debating Club. Now there emerges a fourth hero, Louisa Lawson, a suffragette and founder of the feminist journal *New Dawn*s. In 1891 she was the first woman admitted to the Debating Club and in 1893 the first woman elected to the SMSA Board. She was also the mother of Henry Lawson, the great Australian poet and writer (Wotherspoon, 2013, 53). For a time the SMSA went from strength to strength, until the early 1890s when the new Sydney Technical College building in the Ultimo area of Sydney was opened and the rental income from the Board of Technical Education ceased.

A Second Decline

The world economic depression of the 1890s, the loss of the Technical College rent, and mismanagement (legal action was taken against another Secretary-Librarian over missing money) speeded the decline of the SMSA. By the turn of the 20th century, the SMSA operated a reading room and a lending library with a decaying collection, offered a few commercial and language classes, and provided facilities for chess and cards. The membership was maintained by the popularity of the Library with city workers, who regularly borrowed books to read on their daily rail commute. In the 1930s, as the Great Depression worsened, things became more difficult. In 1932, the SMSA lost its library subsidy when all state government grants to schools of arts and mechanics institutes were withdrawn. Finally, in 1935, Vice-Regal patronage was withdrawn (Whitelock, 1974, 174).

Survival and Stability

So after its first one hundred years of life, the future of the SMSA looked very bleak indeed. But a devoted group of members stepped up and worked long and hard to keep the School alive, regardless of its reduced circumstances. It is to these members as much as to the School's great heroes that the members of today owe a great debt. The SMSA continued to function principally as a lending library. The bulk of its income was derived from shop fronts cut into the building's façade, rents from a number of small tenancies, and from the casual hiring of meeting rooms. In the early 1980s the School's income was about \$80,000 per year. The library had been recently renovated and modernized. It then consisted of about 12,000 volumes, largely popular fiction, with a strong emphasis on mysteries and romantic novels. There was a full-time staff of three: the Secretary and two Library Assistants. At this time, the Library was described by Snell (1982, 45) as meeting the reading needs of its users and one of the friendliest libraries that he had ever visited. So after 150 years of operation, the then SMSA could be regarded as successful in that it had survived and that it was still meeting the recreational reading needs of its members.

A Rebirth

From about its 150th birthday in 1983, the Board of the SMSA actively pursued plans to redevelop the School's now valuable but vastly underdeveloped city site. However, these plans were largely frustrated by the School's lack of funds and the limitation placed on any plans for change by the building's age and its possible heritage status.

In 1987, after a continuous occupancy of more than 150 years, the SMSA sold its property to Bondcorp. Alan Bond, winner of the 1983 America's Cup for Australia and a then highflying entrepreneur, was putting together the parcels of land that adjoined the SMSA in order to redevelop the total site. He planned that his corporate head quarters, to be housed in Australia's tallest building, would occupy part of the site. Bond was generous in his offer to the School. He wanted to take advantage of the "transfer of historic air space" legislation, which allowed the "foregone space" above a low-rise historic building (that must be retained and restored) to be transferred to a proposed adjacent new building,

which would now be permitted to be taller than the current zoning regulations would normally permit.

Bond was renowned for his reckless offers to get what he wanted. As Kerry Packer, the Australian media mogul, noted, after he had sold his TV channels to Bond in 1987 for one billion dollars and then had been able to buy them back, following the Bond Empire's collapse, for \$250 million in 1990: "You only get one Alan Bond in your lifetime ..."

(Wotherspoon, 2013, 123). After a difficult period for the School, the Japanese consortium, which had purchased the remnants of Bond's property holdings, finally paid out the SMSA in 1996. Thanks to Mr. Bond, its fifth and unintentional "hero", the School at last had money to spend. Incidentally, Alan Bond was eventually jailed for his financial misdeeds.

In 1997, SMSA purchased a ten-storey building plus basement, Lincoln House, at 280 Pitt Street Sydney, which was to be the School's new permanent home and to provide an ongoing income stream. Lincoln House, an early 20th Century, heritage-listed building is centrally located and a stone's throw from the SMSA's former home of 150 years. Over the next three years, the building was completely refurbished. The School occupied its new home in 2000 and has retained three floors for its own use, thus allowing seven full floors to be rented at essentially commercial rates, while basement suites are rented at special community rates to not-for-profit organizations.

Reinvention

Broadly speaking, there have been two stages in the SMSA's reinvention process:

- An initial or transitional phase that lasted from about 1987 until the late 1990s. During this phase the SMSA had not as yet purchased or relocated to its new permanent home.
- A later and more settled phase that has dated from 2000 until the present. Now much more significant and permanent initiatives could be implemented.

SMSA's reinvention began during an opportune period in the history of Sydney. Throughout the 1980s there had been strong feeling of optimism among the population of Sydney. Factors feeding this feeling included the extensive and expensive preparations for the celebration of the bicentennial of the arrival of the 'First Fleet' of European settlers in 1788; a real estate boom; and exceptionally high interest rates. Thus the contract for the purchase of the SMSA's original building involved a substantial upfront deposit; a very good interest rate on the balance (which was secured by a mortgage over the property); plus the provision of rent free alternate accommodation until the deal was finalized. These conditions were binding and unaffected by the economic downturn that soon followed at the end of the 1980s. This downturn at first greatly confused matters and slowed the settlement process and hence the permanent relocation of the SMSA. But, on the other hand, the depressed state of the real estate market, especially for Central Business District office buildings, which had been grossly overbuilt during the boom, eventually allowed the SMSA to acquire its new home at a most reasonable price.

Within the School there were changes too. Over the transitional period there were a number of largely generational personnel changes unrelated to these external events. There was a new Secretary (i.e. CEO), the first woman appointed to hold this position. Additionally, a number of long-serving Board members (including the President of some 25 years) retired. These outgoing Board members, largely males in their late 70s and early 80s, and typically retired mid-level civil servants, bankers, and small businessmen, had served the school well in the lean years and had negotiated the very favorable sale contract with Bondcorp. The newer members of the Board were generally younger and increasingly female, and they represented a wider cross section of the community, including trade union officers, actors, university professors, lawyers, and librarians. The stage was set for change.

The Initiatives of the Transitional Stage

While the School may not have had a permanent home at that time, it now had a substantial amount of money invested and a healthy interest income. Hence most of SMSA's attempts at reinvention in the early days had to do with spending this money.

This period also marked the beginnings of a very important relationship with the NSW State Library. At first this relationship revolved around the SMSA providing financial assistance when requested by the library, usually in order to purchase materials for its extensive collection of Australian historical documents, for example, the George Bass papers. Similar grants were given to the Australian Museum to assist it in obtaining various artifacts, including an opalized small dinosaur skeleton. Later, the SMSA fully or partially sponsored various State Library exhibitions, including “*Dare to Know*” which featured the original maps, made by both early English and French explorers of the Pacific in the 17th and 18th centuries. Of course not all of the SMSA's early attempts at philanthropy were successful, and in retrospect some relatively large grants made in those early days do not look appropriate. A Board sub-committee, the Grants Committee, was established to consider and to recommend to the Board all applications for financial assistance.

More successful were the endowments given to local universities to establish perpetual student prizes. These prizes were established at those universities with which the SMSA had enjoyed a longstanding relationship: the University of Sydney, the University of New South Wales (UNSW), and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). Moreover, the endowments were located in those faculties or areas of study that were traditionally less well regarded and funded by universities. Hence rather than in Medicine or Law, they were in Nursing, Education (including Adult Education), Social Work, Contemporary Music and Australian Literature.

Of course, this new money also enabled the SMSA to better serve its members. Even though the annual subscription was maintained at \$6.00, the Library budget was increased and the collection greatly expanded both in terms of books and magazine subscriptions (from about 12,000 volumes in 1983 to about 30,000 in 2013). The tone of the collection also gradually changed; there was less emphasis on Mills and Boon romances and more emphasis on mysteries and contemporary novels, particularly by the newer European, Asian and South American authors. In 1994 a members' newsletter was established and in

1995 there was the rebirth of the School's public lecture program. A regular program of talks on a variety of topics of historical, literary and current social concern were offered in the lunch hour. These were popular with the members and became the mainstay of many city workers' lunch hour. For a time there also was a competitive scheme that provided assistance for member's children and grandchildren to assist with the costs of their university education. This scheme was later abandoned as largely ineffective and perhaps even counterproductive.

The Developments in the Second Stage

In 2000, after more than a decade in rented premises, the SMSA finally moved into its new permanent home, the newly updated and largely rebuilt Lincoln House.

In 1999, for the International Year of the Older Person the SMSA had co-sponsored with ALA (Adult Learning Australia) and UTS a very successful free community event a Conference called "Growing Older; Learning More". This led, for a number of years in the early 2000s, to the SMSA co-hosting with the NSW Board of Adult Education and ALA a reception and special public lecture by a distinguished speaker to launch Adult Learners' Week each September. In 2002, the SMSA conceived, funded and ran a very well attended and most successful National Conference called "Schools of Arts and Mechanics' Institutes: From and for the Community". This conference featured a number of important papers presented by participants from across Australia.

The SMSA's 175th Birthday celebrations in 2008 provided a great opportunity to highlight both the contribution to the social and cultural lives of Australians of SMSA specifically and the Schools and Institutes movement generally. The SMSA members' Morning Tea at Government House hosted by the NSW State Governor, Professor The Honorable Marie Bashir AO CVO was a grand occasion. A full-day conference attended by representatives from Schools and Institutes from across NSW celebrated the SMSA's history and the contribution of the Schools and Institutes movement to Australian cultural and social life. The Board Dinner held at the Apprentice Restaurant (Sydney Technical College's training restaurant) focused on SMSA's long relationship with technical education. The SMSA is

rightly regarded as the parent of the state's technical education system and the grandparent of NSW's two technological universities (UNSW and UTS). The Dinner also introduced the newer partnership with the then projected Tom Keneally Centre. And, of course, the 180th birthday, which was celebrated in 2013, was marked by the publication of Garry Wotherspoon's book, *The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts: A History*.

In 2007 the SMSA had been approached by a Foundation to house the private library of the well-known Australian author Tom Keneally; best known in the US for his book *Schindler's Ark*, which was made into the film *Schindler's List*. Keneally was downsizing from his longtime family home to a much smaller retirement home but wished to keep his library intact. In August 2011, Professor Marie Bashir, the Governor of NSW, opened the SMSA's Tom Keneally Centre. Now five years on, the Centre has become a cultural hub and is available as a venue for members' own private functions. The Centre has been privileged to host some of the best and most well known Australian writers of both fiction and non-fiction for talks and other events. Keneally has himself conducted his popular Writing Master Classes there. As well, various literary groups use the Centre to conduct seminars and workshops.

While all the books on the Centre's shelves have been owned and read by Tom for research or pleasure, it is far from a collection of random books. Tom has taken on the formidable – but highly valuable – task of making notes on the significance of each book and why it is in his personal library. It is very much a living library and SMSA members are welcome to visit and browse, read, access its computers, or just relax. In 2016, to celebrate the Centre's fifth birthday, there was a special public event with Tom Keneally and his wife Meg. Additionally, for members there were guided tours of the Centre with Meg or Tom followed by a morning tea/luncheon prior to the public event.

Perhaps most noticeable has been the School's wholehearted adoption of electronic means of communicating with its members and the broader community, although, of course, SMSA retains more traditional means of communicating with the smaller and ever-diminishing number of its non-computer literate membership. The SMSA has also developed a very comprehensive website that is easy to access and navigate There is

excellent new library circulation management software which automatically contacts borrowers to inform them of approaching due dates. The same software allows the generation of multiple reports on various aspects of current library borrowings and trends. In addition to its more traditional hard-copy books, the library now offers a range of books and magazines in electronic and audio formats. For many years the SMSA members have used the Library as a convenient and safe place in the city to meet up with friends before going on to the theatre or cinema, or during lunch to take break from shopping or business. Now this role has been enhanced by the provision of a members' lounge adjacent to the library with facilities for making coffee and tea.

One of the most popular of the services provided for members has been a series of occasional all-day bus tours to visit Schools of Arts in Sydney's urban area and nearby rural environs. These tours include the Southern suburbs and the near South Coast; the Northwestern suburbs and the Richmond area; the Western suburbs and Blue Mountains; the Hunter Valley; an inner-city tour of five working men's institutes established in the early 1900s; and a special tour for US visitors to see a cross-section of Sydney's suburban schools of arts. On each of these tours the participants have the opportunity to visit approximately eight Schools or Institutes.

Being the oldest and now the wealthiest School of Arts in NSW, SMSA has in more recent times began to accept a leadership role across the movement. In the 1990s it funded a significant study that documented the Schools and Institutes of the New England and Northwest region of the state. The Association of Mechanics' Institutes and Schools of Arts (AMISA) Inc. was founded in 2003 largely on the initiative of the SMSA, which provided the initial operating funds and in-kind organizational support. AMISA's principal goal is to provide a forum/meeting place for those interested in the preservation of the social, cultural and physical heritage of Schools of Arts and Mechanics' Institutes across the state. Membership is open to all individuals and groups sharing this interest. Since its formation, AMISA has attempted to draw the attention of the wider community to the significant role that the Schools and Institutes have played in Australia's cultural and social history. SMSA has worked closely with AMISA and funded a project to develop an

up-to-date database of NSW Schools of Arts and Mechanics' Institutes. This study has identified some 800 Schools and Institutes across NSW. The availability of such a database is an essential first step to further sophisticated research into the Schools/Institutes movement in NSW.

SMSA has continued to provide support to educational and cultural organizations that meet the criteria of SMSA's Grants program. However, over the years those grants have become more community rather than institutional focused. To take a recent example, in 2016 the SMSA has awarded grants to three worthy organizations: **Moorambilla Voices**, the **Goulburn Strings Project**, and the **Workers' Education Association (WEA)**.

Moorambilla Voices connects school children in rural and remote areas with some of Australia's finest composers, musicians, choreographers and regional artists. The SMSA grant will help support their **Moorambilla Arts Pathways (MAP)** initiative. The **Goulburn Strings Project** is an initiative of the Goulburn Regional Conservatorium, and its aim is to deliver musical education to students at the Goulburn Public School, many of who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Though this is a music program, it has resulted in increased literacy and numeracy outcomes for the students involved. In recognition of the long and close relationship that has existed between the SMSA and the WEA, the School awarded the Sydney WEA a grant to assist with the relocation of some of its classes.

Although many SMSA members of the 1980s were quite upset by the sale of the 1836 building, the sale contract and the state's historic air space legislation have proved to be effective in maintaining the building's physical fabric. The new owners of the total site developed a high-rise office building and a galleria-style shopping mall, but they also restored the SMSA building to the apex of its 1870's elegance, at a very substantial cost to themselves. The restored building, now known as **The Art House Hotel**, operates as a suite of restaurants and bars, and a cigar lounge to serve the younger members of the city's business elite.

True to Purpose

So all in all, and given the many difficulties it has faced, the SMSA has long been involved in an ongoing process of reinvention, repositioning, and realignment in order to survive. But in pursuing this vital process, the SMSA has never moved far from its founding purpose of serving its members and its wider community.

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