

# Tri-State gathering for Easter 2019

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The locality of present-day Hillston was a stock-crossing on the Lachlan River, eventually named 'Redbank' from its aboriginal name. In 1863 a stockman from nearby Roto station established the Redbank Hotel at the location on land owned by John McGee who sold lots by auction. In 1869, when the first post office was opened, the township was renamed Hillston, after its founding publican. The Government also surveyed a township just nearby and auctioned sixty-four lots at Hillston North, thus two townships developed side-by-side.

Hillston developed as a service centre, so the pace of development of the township was closely linked to prevailing conditions as they affected the district pastoral enterprises. Drought during the 1850's saw the town stagnate but favourable seasons by the end of the 1860's, with the return of more reliable rainfall, led to a revitalization of Hillston's prospects. A store and the Post Office were opened in 1869, the first Police Court was held in 1873, by the 1880's the town had two churches, the first Agricultural show was held in 1881, a hospital was erected in 1882 and a new Post Office and Courthouse were built in 1883. Hillston became a municipality in 1888. The store that became known as 'Nall, Jackson & Co. Ltd.' via a number of name changes went on to open branches at Merriwagga and Goolgowi, becoming a mainstay of the Hillston district.

Following WW 1, the Hillston area was divided into relatively small rural properties where returning soldiers were repatriated. The railway to Griffith was completed in 1923 and Crown land along the route was made available. By the late 1920s, population growth and the prevailing optimistic mood led to progress and growth. A lighting system was installed in 1929, the Club House Hotel was replaced by a two-storey building, the Royal Mail Hotel was extended and rows of shops were built in the township. In early 1931 the railway to Roto was completed. In the wake of this boom, the reality of the marginal nature of the land became manifest and the soldier settlement blocks were found to be too small to be economically viable. The personal and financial hardships experienced during the inter-war decades resulted in many of these families walking off their blocks, and Hillston began to experience a decline. The wool boom of the 1950s led to reconstruction of the town, and gave new optimism, only to enter a decline again in the 1960s and 1970s. The census on 2011 put the Hillston population at 1430.



Until the bitumen sealing of the Kidman Way from Griffith was completed in the early 1970s, the rough dirt road was an effective barrier to communications with other communities. A train service existed until the mid-1970s, but since then there has been no public transport service to Hillston. In the late 1990s, the introduction of cotton saw a boom period once again which, after a severe drought 2002-07, was re-establishing itself until the current drought conditions have resulted in failing crops, drastic water shortages and a diminishing supply of fodder to sustain livestock.

# Pictures: Top: Lachlan river at Willandra National Park. Bottom: At Merriwagga.

History is a summary of the Hillston Wiki page and excerpts from the Hillston-Ivanhoe Spectator.