

William Beebe Sr.

Recently, members of the Bendigo Historical Society visited the former home of William Beebe Sr. - 'Rocky Vale' - at Maiden Gully, as the guest of property manager, David Fisher. Beebe Sr. is not as well known as his architect son, William Beebe Jr., but his role in the history of Bendigo deserves to be better known.

The following material was researched by Kay MacGregor, Vice president of the Bendigo Historical Society.

William Beebe Sr. was a native of Rutlandshire, England, who migrated to Australia during the early gold rush. However, the life of a digger had little appeal to him and he quickly started work at his trade – that of a stonemason on the site of the Bank of Australasia.

He spent some time in Dunkeld in the Western District and later established a dairy at Myers Flat. Beebe acquired land at Maiden Gully and by 1875 the family lived on the property while the house was under construction. Stonemason, Beebe Sr. took twenty years to build the sandstone and granite house, 'Rocky Vale', which was completed in 1891 and he died soon afterwards. His obituary noted that he was a man of great persistence of character and a hard worker. After a day in the stone yard, he would work on his farm, building dams, barns, stables and planting an orchard. In later years, he commenced the erection of a fine stone mansion, using sandstone he quarried from his own property. Harcourt granite was used for the lintels and quoins.

Beebe took a great interest in political and social movements and he had very pronounced opinions, being anti-royalty and anti-religion. He opposed the selling of public land, preferring the idea of leasing and on this subject he published a pamphlet on the nationalization of land. Beebe convened the first meeting on Bendigo in connection with the masons' trade to establish the eight hour day and the masons were the first trade in Victoria to adopt this system.

The house has not been used as a residence for several decades, but there are current efforts being made to maintain and restore the house. Of the remaining outbuildings, only a two story barn is from the original property. The timber

frame is original, but not the roof. The original floor brickwork is present, with the bricks trapezoid in shape and the work benches are also still present.

William Beebe Sr. died at 'Rocky Vale', the home he built.

