

Nimbin's Aquarius Archives marks first year



Photo: Peter Chaplin 1981

by Greg Bork

Aquarius Archives, a community initiative of the Nimbin Aquarius Foundation Inc to preserve the history of the 1973 Nimbin Aquarius Festival and the region's counterculture movement, has closed out its first full financial year with a string of milestones, alongside a funding gap it is now working to close.

Over the past year, the Archives received Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status from the Australian Taxation Office, officially launched under a new logo designed by Franca Wolfe, and secured a temperature-controlled storage space in partnership with Rainbow Power Company.

A permanent exhibition was installed in the hallway of the Nimbin Community Centre, giving visitors and locals a first look at the collection.

Around half of an expected 100-plus boxes of the former 'Aquarian Archives' material has now been transferred from Lismore Library into the Foundation's care, with the remainder still to come.

The Archives also received original documents from festival organiser Johnny Allen's personal collection and historical

displays from the former Nimbin Visitors Information Centre. Volunteers have begun work on specific parts of the collection, including fashion and textiles, alternative energy and intentional communities.

A video presentation was recorded with the Northern Rivers Community Foundation, and the newly reformed Pan-Community Council was given access to its historical records. Recently, Aquarius Archives ran an oral history workshop with historian Jo Kijas and has since acquired dedicated recording equipment.

Volunteer Nuro recently recorded the Archives' first oral history interview, with pre-Aquarius Nimbin community member Verlie Troughton. Look out for her stories in the September *Nimbin GoodTimes*.

This work is carried almost entirely by volunteers – a core group of three to five people on site every Friday, supported by around 20 others who help more occasionally.

Funding

That volunteer effort now needs to be matched by secure funding. The Archives' establishing grant from the Northern Rivers Community Foundation ended in January 2026, and there is currently no funding

in place to cover our office workspace rent beyond 2026.

So how do other regional historical societies pay the rent? Largely, they don't. Brunswick Valley Historical Society's Mullumbimby Museum sits on land provided by the state government. Richmond River Historical Society occupied council-owned premises in Lismore rent-free for decades, until the building closed for repair after the 2022 floods.

Across the Nightcap Range, Tweed Shire Council consolidated three local historical societies into the award-winning Tweed Regional Museum. We're grateful for the collegial support of each of these organisations. Aquarius Archives has no comparable council backing to fall back on in Nimbin.

Looking ahead

There is good news on the grants front. Two Museums and Galleries NSW grants have been secured for the coming year. A Volunteer

Placement grant will give Greg insight into professional best practice at Museums of History NSW in Sydney in October.

We are also thrilled to share the news that we were successful on our second application for a Volunteer Museum grant, with funding secured for a strategic plan to be developed with Kate Gahan, a community-based historian with over 25 years' experience across regional NSW.

We look forward to working with the community to develop this plan, including a proposed Museum for Nimbin in the long term. Neither grant covers core operating costs.

In the year ahead, Aquarius Archives plans to test and launch its digital catalogue, opening the collection to wider community access, and continue working through its cataloguing backlog.

The Archives is calling on the community for continued donations of material, volunteer time and financial support to keep it running.

The Aquarius Archives office is open Fridays at the Community Centre, 81 Cullen Street, Nimbin. Website: aquariusarchives.org.au



Allsopp Park circa 1973