

“Let us never suffer again the tragedy of 1956”: Memories from Renmark residents of the 1956 Flood

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Renmark Irrigation Trust has been actively documenting the lives of Renmark residents via oral history recordings and collecting artefacts which have a strong connection to the operation of the Trust. In the previous issue of Word of Mouth (no. 82, Autumn 2023), I outlined the impact of the 2022 Flood on Renmark. This flood, which was second only to the 1956 flood, brought the experience of the 1956 flood to the fore. Many ‘old timers’ who had lived through that flood wished to share their experiences.

We decided to capitalise on the mood of the time and chose a theme which highlighted the reconstruction of Renmark after the flood had receded. We had a group of residents who wished to contribute, so we organised a panel event. It was hosted by the Renmark Paringa Library on May 3, as part of the SA History Festival. The library created event posters and coordinated bookings. Trust staff sourced information from the Trust archives, photographs, oral histories, and newspaper articles to compile a background display which supported the panel event.

We had a wonderful panel of locals—Max Burr, Clack John, and Ian Tolley—who shared their different perspectives. Max spoke about the sudden collapse of the High School bank at the peak of the 1956 flood, Clack described how the hospital functioned during and after the flood, and Ian covered a wide array of topics on the flood and its aftermath.

Comparisons between the recent 2022 Flood and the 1956 Flood were also covered. Almost 80 people attended this informative and inspiring talk. It was wonderful to see how many of the older residents came along and connected with old friends over a cup of tea and wonderful cakes supplied by the library staff.

The numbers of people interested in coming to the event far outweighed the room size, so we engaged a local company to film and photograph the event. Photos and other information can be found on the RIT website: <https://rit.org.au/history-events/>

The talk was also recorded and can be found here:
<https://youtu.be/mLI48Ji7ip0>

The panel event, 3 May 2023
Photo supplied