

A History of A Country Practice

Compiled by Bob Elliott from Darcy Kennedy, Dubbo

In these days of information technology, regular seminars and an ever-changing business environment, it's difficult to even remember how things were for a country accountant only ten or so years ago.

Professional development opportunities, even in major regional centres, were almost non-existent. Institute and Society Country Congresses were either scaled down or ceased. Professional development involved a monthly discussion group (at the club on Friday afternoon) and maybe an annual trip to Sydney for a conference. At the time, accountants either accepted the status quo or complained amongst themselves, but nothing was done to improve matters.

Neil Robertson was a young enthusiastic accountant in Wagga Wagga who had just commenced his own practice. He was the type of person who preferred to stay in the background and gather together the right people to get his ideas off the ground. One of those ideas was the formation of a finance company, (which still operates successfully today). Another idea was the opening of an office in Hong Kong (not sure why!!)

Neil's great attribute was his ability to follow through his ideas for example, the market for stamps and coins boomed in the late eighties. He would place an ad in *The Age* to buy a particular stamp for say \$50.00 and have another ad in the *Sydney Morning Herald* to sell the stamp for say \$60.00. He even got the buyer to send him the money and the seller to send the stamps direct to the buyer (saved postage!). In a little under six months he paid cash for a new car!

I stayed at Neil's place quite often on regular trips from Dubbo to Wagga. (Neil lived with his parents). It was standard procedure to go out for a meal then come home and attack Neil's father's port. Many a great idea is to be found at the bottom of a bottle of port!

One such idea was to gather together a progressive firm from each geographical region in country NSW and meet annually. Although guest speakers would be brought in for technical sessions, the primary aim was to promote sharing of 'trade secrets' between accountants who were outside each other's sphere of influence.

The name *A Country Practice* came about a month or so later, when a TV ad came on around midnight for one of the popular TV programs of the day – *A Country Practice* (also towards the bottom of a bottle of port!)

A copy of the first *A Country Practice* correspondence follows. The early days were dominated by Neil's enthusiasm to get it running. He explained to anyone who would listen, the benefits of networking (even before 'networking' was a word). He predicted the alliances and camaraderie we enjoy today. It's a tragedy Neil is not around today to see the realisation of his foresight and plans. His untimely death came about due to illness contracted on an overseas trip. Neil died in London on 20 April 1990, aged 29.

Our tradition of naming the conference 'A Neil Robertson Memorial' and each committee sending our best wishes each year to Neil's parents is a source of comfort and pride for the Robertson family.

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