

ROYCE NICHOLLS TRUST - HISTORY

South Taranaki farmer Claude Nicholls left a legacy for learning in his will.

The original 1951 document stated: "I direct my trustee upon the death of my said wife to hold my said farm for the purpose of establishing and carrying on a home or training farm for boys."

All profits from the 33-hectare Otakeho farm were to go towards running the boys' home, which would be set up for agricultural education.

But Mr Nicholls might have had an inkling the plan for his land was too ambitious, because a clause in his will offered an alternative.

It said that if the trustees had any trouble establishing the boys' home, the land should continue to be farmed, with the net income used for "the education maintenance or benefit of such particular boys born or living in the Provincial District of Taranaki". The will said that offer could be extended to boys living anywhere in New Zealand. That's exactly what happened – and more.

Not only was Mr Nicholls a farmer with a vision; he was also an innovator. He built a caravan out of plywood, crafted moving parrots powered by perpetual motion and built a hedgecutter on a Fordson tractor to deal with boxthorn. He also had a dam, race and waterwheel providing power to the cowshed.

On a cliff at the back of the farm he had a fishing shed. This was so he could keep out of the weather and stay the night if the fishing was good.

Mr Nicholls perfected the No. 8 wire method of fishing. This involved anchoring a coil of wire to a suitable rock just out beyond the spring low-tide mark and attaching the other end to a post on the cliff.

The wire had a trolley that carried the fishing line down to the sea. This line was wound up and down via a wheel rim that was housed in the shed, so he could fish in relative comfort. There was even a long-drop in the shed.

While this paints an idyllic picture, Mr Nicholls and his wife, Eleanor, also faced tragedy. In 1920, their son Royce died at the age of 14.

The Royce Nicholls Scholarship is named after him.

It came about in 1961, when the advisory trustees for the Anglican Boys Home Society, which managed the trust, determined there wasn't enough money or land to set up a training farm for boys.

The purpose of the scholarship was to help Kiwi lads, aged under-21, attend an agricultural or veterinary school.

In 2003, conditions of the scholarship were legally changed to allow females and people up to the age of 30 apply for scholarships.

These bursaries continue to be funded by farm profits.

In 1970, the advisory trustees bought the adjoining farm – another 33 hectares. Then, in 1996, they sold the 66-hectare South Rd property and bought an 86-hectare farm nearby on Taikatu Rd.

From 1998 to 2003, the trust recorded a cash surplus of \$668,891 from farm profits, while the total grants for the same period were \$174,950.

In 2008, scholarship funds totalling \$92,500 were given out.

That same year, the Bishop's Action Foundation took over the scholarship trust.

Despite changes to land and management, Mr Nicholls' original wishes are being upheld. His long-lasting generosity continues to help young New Zealanders follow their agricultural and veterinary dreams.