THE CHRONICLE

Newsletter of The Coach House Museum
In association with Feilding & Districts Community Archive

December 2025

Joy McKean Display now on for a limited time. This is a fabulous display about a very interesting midwife from Rangiwahia. Joy was the first woman to ride around the world on a motorcycle.

Pictured above are the BSA members who have put this display together.

Some damage to the diary, possibly from the weather, has made some of Charlotte's writing unreadable.

DIARY OF CHARLOTTE COUCHMAN Voyage of the 'Arethusa' 9—23 1879

Sunday, Nov 9th .....cold – hail and.....no service for .....stand on deck.....we have passed.....ice -bergs in safe.....tell me they are.....ous things to the .....Good night. God bless you all once more. Wednesday. We have had hail and snow three days running. The cold is very severe. Everybody is complaining of chilblains. We have not seen a ship nor any sign of land for some time. Since I wrote last night we have been tossed about and some of our sails carried away again and the bulwarks have given way on one side.

,,,,,,,,,,,we expected.....to go down.....laid on her side.....water rushed.....to and fro.....-under fearfully.

November 15th. Still stormy.....and blown and.....are clapping like.....the sight of the sea.....something awful.

Sunday Nov. 16th. My birthday (50). Who would ever think I should spend it on the Australian Ocean. I am sure if ever there was danger on the sea, we are in it now for the sails keep being carried away and the poor sailors rush up the rigging to replace them with fresh ones at the risk of their lives.

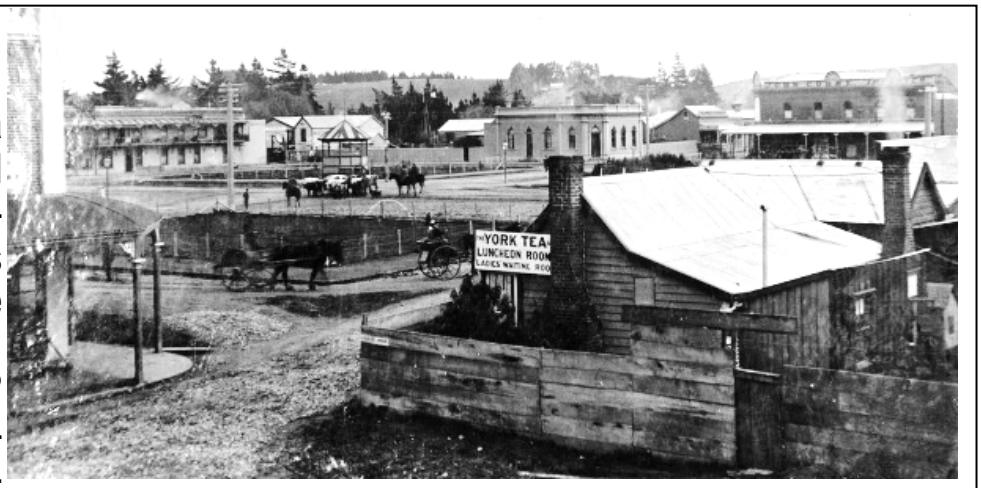
Monday 17th. We have still very rough weather – hail and snow but not so cold as it has been. Our constables are very busy catching albatrosses for their skins. They have caught 16 today. The rocking of the ship has quite upset me. I feel ill I can neither eat nor sleep. We dare not go on the deck for fear of being washed over and the carpenter has cut a hole through the partition into the single men's quarters to give us air for we are all shut down and have a lamp burning to see with. There is two men lashed to the wheel for fear of being washed overboard. That will tell you what a sea we are in. Father is on watch from 12 to 2 – Good night.

Wednesday, Still wet and rough weather. The sea comes over the deck and rushes down every opening it can get in – it is not safe for men to walk about let alone women and we cannot sit still without holding by something firm. We have been 11 weeks on the sea. Surely, we shall not be much longer. I made a cake today which was very nice. I ground some rice and sea biscuits with some sugar and currants and dripping or butter and get our black cook to bake it for us. It is very nice for a change, but we still have new bread everyday. We roll about so much I must say good night.

Friday, Quite a change for it is fine and the wind in our favour. We cut along 300 miles a day at this rate; our hatchways are opened and we are taking a walk on deck – now the rain comes on again with the evening. I often wish I had a little brandy for I have got so weak and thin, but no nothing can we have here. Out Doctor has such a good look out for number One that he cannot spare any – though there is plenty on board for everybody of everything, you could name, but he is so afraid he should have to go short at the last, but the steward says that when we are landed the Doctor will sell what is left and pocket the coin. He is an older sinner. There is nobody likes him. He is always ashamed to hold the service on Sundays now because we have seen him the worse for drink so we may go for what he cares.

This is Sunday again. Quite a calm day until 3 o'clock and then is pours with rain again and the sea very rough. We have seen three large whales and a quantity of porpoises today all round the ship. The heads of them as they come up out of the water are just like pigs heads – all black.

Spending a penny wasn't always easy!



In early Feilding there was a dilemma when you came to town. Where could you go the toilet? For men the answer was simple, the hotels always had the necessary facility as did the gentlemen and working men's clubs. But what of the women and children? Some of the handed-down stories related to the angst of coming to Feilding, usually on a sales day, and where was there a place to 'spend a penny'?

The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) actually made money out of this problem. They charged a penny for the privilege at the Feilding IA&P Show where they had a rest and refreshment booth. It proved a good fundraiser for the group. They were a worthy advocate for many social issues and no doubt used these 'donations' wisely.

The Feilding Railway Station was probably the first building to have a woman's restroom and toilet facility for public use in the town. While the first railway station was little more than a tin shed by the time the main trunk line was finished there was a more substantial building. Such a facility became a socially recognized necessity for most railway stations throughout the country. And in Feilding the station restroom had to serve as the only respite from 'the call of nature' for women up until 1920. In this year the Salvation Army Church in Manchester Street (where it has always been) offered a room to be converted to a women's restroom. It was only open on Fridays – sale day.

The WCTU had been active all along in petitioning the council for a purpose built public toilet for women where they could also take their children. Their efforts were rewarded. In 1923 Feilding Borough Council designed and planned a women's restroom. This council maintained public toilet for women was to occupy the ground corner of the Jubilee Building. It was a much needed public facility and was in operation right up until the 1980s when it moved to the new public toilets built in the square. Women's Restrooms were not just a polite term for a toilet block. Farmer's wives and travellers would need to stay the whole day in Feilding when they came to town. The restrooms provided a place to sit and relax; change the baby's nappy and chat with other women. They provided a welcome place for 'time out'.

The school house was transformed and the gallery shrouded in darkness creating a Halloween destination for the young and younger. We had a lot of fun scaring our visitors. Screams were heard for miles and I look forward to do-

Last Wednesday we celebrated our Volunteers and all the hard work they do with our annual Pot Luck Dinner. Our team also nominated each other for our Star Volunteer award. Gold—Neil Craigie, Silver—Brian Schnell and Bronze—Tom Fitzsimons. All very deserving recipients. Our Volunteers are the heart and soul of the Museum and Archive, no amount of certificates could possible show how much they are appreciated.