

THE MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Published every month except December.

The Society meets every 3rd Tuesday of the Month 7-30pm Collins St. State School Library

NOTICES

NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY APRIL 14 - note earlier date.

This will be the Annual Meeting. Election of office-bearers will take place and all members are urged to attend.

PRELIMINARY NOTICE: The Annual Regional Meeting of Gippsland Historical Societies will be held at Traralgon on Saturday May 2, 1987. Any topics for discussion at that meeting must be notified well before this date. Any matters our Society would like raised at the Regional meeting can be discussed at our April 14 meeting.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS - NOW DUE: \$5.00 single \$7.50 double or family
Please forward your payments to Treasurer, Mrs. D. Taylor,
17 Denise St. Morwell, or pay at the meeting.

EXCURSIONS: Our Society has had three enjoyable and worthwhile excursions this year, to Driffield, Yinnar and Gunyah. It has been suggested that another very interesting trip would be to JUMBUCK where there are several long-time residents willing to share their knowledge of the area with us. Further suggestions for excursions would be most welcome. Let Elsie McMaster know your ideas.

LOCAL ORAL HISTORY: Many people living in Morwell Shire have a tremendous store of knowledge, anecdotes and reminiscences about the history of this area. If you know someone who fits this category and who would be willing either to be interviewed at home or to give an informal talk at one of our meetings, please let us know. Too much valuable history is lost because we fail to listen to and record the information these folk have accumulated over the years.

REMINDER: Suggestions for listing of UNUSUAL MONUMENTS (see March Newsletter) and requests for BACK NUMBERS OF THE NEWSLETTER - get 'em in right now - PLEASE!

by MRS LOIS STARKEY

Because of Father being a shift worker, Mother had to quite often be Mother and Father to us. How well I remember the cold winter nights with the wind howling around the house and the rain pelting down on the iron roof. We would all gather around the big open fire where the galvanised tub would be drawn up in front and we would have our baths. Firstly the girls would be scrubbed until our faces were all pink and shiny and then it was the boys' turn. After the tub was pulled away Father would then entertain us, he would sit up on the old settee with a daughter on each knee and a son either side of him and tell us one of his famous yarns, no fairy stories for us, it was usually his reminiscences of his own childhood. How we loved to watch the flames flickering up the chimney and to watch the sparks fly as a log rolled, only to be lost in the bowels of the chimney. These were our fairy stories. We were also allowed to roam fairly freely through the bush and this became our playground. There was nothing to be frightened of, not in those days, only our own imaginations. The bush was a childrens' paradise; we didn't need television to keep us occuppied, all we needed was a very good imagination and this we were taught to have at a very early age.

By the time I was 5 years old, I was ready to start my formal education which began at the Morwell Bridge State School. This was where I received my M.B.E. (Morwell Bridge Education). We had to walk 2 kilometres over a gravel road, down a steep hill and over an old wooden bridge over the Morwell River. This bridge, for many years had no side rails and many a child and even an adult came to grief on it. I can remember when a car went across, how the planks would rattle, and how the little Blue Wren and his mate used to build their nest in the trees that grew along side. We then had to pass the very first house that was built at Morwell Bridge, at this stage it was the home Of Mr Goderidge and his family, but was built by one William Jeremiah Smith in 1858 and was used as changing place for the stagecoaches that travelled the Melbourne to Sale road. It also served as a Post Office come hotel. How our little imaginat-ions used to run riot as by this time stagecoaches no longer existed. The motor car and steam train had arrived. The school was along a drift road and consisted of two weatherboard rooms with a foyer in the centre. This was where we spent the first year at school and learnt our A.B.C. The headmaster was a Mr Watson; from what I remember of him, he was rather a bully and many the headache my older brother along with others suffered at his expense. We all feared his wrath and although we used to dawdle to school, no one was game to be late!!!! I think we must have had a built-in timer, as we would dawdle along the way looking for something to show and tell, kicking the gravel with our shoes, splashing in puddles after rain and breaking the ice in these same puddles after a frost. Maybe we would find a leaf or a stone or even an unusual stick that reminded of something but probably didn't mean much to the teacher. Then all of a sudden we would realise that it must be getting late and we would run all the way to reach the gate just as the bell went, all out of breath, but on time.

By the time I reached third grade Mr Watson left the school and was replaced by the most wonderful man, apart from my father, I had ever met. He was Mr Godfrey, he didn't have to bully any of us, he just seemed to bring out the best in the worst of us. This must have been a difficult task at times as we weren't the best of pupils or the easiest to teach. Our nature studies were no longer learnt sitting at a desk and reading out of a musty old textbook, but we were taken on nature walks and shown where a grub lives under the bark of a tree or under a leaf. We were taught to use our eyes to find caterpillars and other insects, we were taught the difference between a deciduous tree and a evergreen, our art lessons were also held mostly in the school yard and we learnt draw from the real thing instead of copying something out of a picture book. Our History and Geography lessons were also made more interesting to us, so much so that I acquired at a very early age, a yen to travel and to learn more.

It was not an easy time for our parents to be rearing children, as there was war raging on the other side of the world, a war to end all wars we were told. It didn't concern us children all that much, although there was the threat of our father being conscripted and well I remember Mother's anxiety if a plane flew over at night and was off course. She was like a cat on a hot bricks as the air-raid siren would sound out a warning, and the searchlights would light up the sky. If this warning, went unheeded, the Ack Ack guns would open fire. This was rather frightening, but once the danger was over, we would all settle back in our warm little beds and go back to sleep.

in 1944, towards the end of this great war, another disaster struck- the big bush fires that started on the hill at the back of Yallourn and burnt a path of destruction to the coast. One of the older pupils came into the schoolroom and told Mr Godfrey of the pending doom and on investigating, we were all sent home. I remember reaching Parkhills and Margaret and I thought we were out of danger, so we commenced to watch the fire's progress. It wasn't long before the place was a raging inferno and I thought I had better get on home. On my arrival, Mother was most annoyed with me as I was the only member of her little brood not to have reached home; she shuttled us all down the empty well and put wet blankets over the top of the well. She thought at the time that it was the safest spot?? My elder brother, Jim, was the only one to refuse as he was going to fight the fire and if he hadn't insisted, our house would surely have burnt down, also he was responsible for saving the life of an old lady who had gone berserk thinking her husband, who was blind, was in a burning house. This was not so, as Arthur Webb and David Blomquist had rescued him and taken him across to Mrs Fields. This is what I meant when I said everyone helped out in a time of emergency.

On climbing out of the well after the danger had passed, we found that our very dear neighbours had lost their home and all their possessions. We had lost most of our fowls and ducks and we had to destroy the rest. Strangely enough, our friends who lived in a house on the very edge of the bush were safe and well and so was their house. I can remember going into the house where Mother had had the bread, butter and blackberry jam on the table in readiness for us when we came home from school and there were cinders from the burning trees in everything and the smell of smoke everywhere. To this day I can't bring myself to eat blackberry jam or stand the smell of burning rubbish. Our school was burnt to the ground and as a result we were to have a week off school and then we were to resume our lessons at the church hall at Morwell Bridge. This is where we did learn, with great difficulty, our three R's, "Reading, Riting and Rithmetic". For the junior members of my family who don't know that Arithmetic is, it is what you all know as Mathematics (Maths).

We missed our old school and playgrounds, although it was a bit of an adventure finding something to play on. The old school-ground had lovely big pine trees for the boys and some of the more daring girls to climb on and they left lovely piles of pine needles to dry on the ground, we would make play houses out of them by heaping them into squares and dividing them into rooms. There was also the Post and rail fence that boarded the school-ground - that was out of bounds, but we used to climb on and walk or try to walk the circumference. I always managed to fall off and can remember getting into trouble for disobeying the teacher. Mr Godfrey also introduced dress and head inspection and woe betide the children who were found to have dirty heads. I can remember how proud I felt when my turn came and I was sent on my way with a gentle pat on the head and was told "Clean as a whistle". In grade 3 we had a spelling B, with a pencil as a prize. This being my favourite subject, I was always the recipient-so much so, that Mr Godfrey told Mother that he would have to start giving pens, as he had run out of pencils.

When Easter arrived at the old school, we would have to find where the "Easter Bunny" had hidden the Easter eggs, this would sometimes take us a long time, as there were so many places he could hide them. At Christmas, it was the same thing, the Mothers Club would decorate an old pine tree as a Christmas tree, (I still have some of Mother's decorations that she used, some 40 years later), we each received a present and the children who came 1st, 2nd and 3rd in their grades, received a prize as well.

Even though these were known as the "Dim Dark Days Of The War", there was still alot to be happy about, for instance, if it was a hot day, instead of walking the 2 kilometers along the gravel road, we used to walk along the river bank to a little pool that was and is still, spoken of as "Shepherds Pool", where we would be met by Mother, who would spent the whole day by the river with other members of the community, doing the family wash, owing to the lack of water in the rain tank at home. After a while we would be joined by Father, who had ridden his bike home from work at Yallourn.

(to be continued...)

GUNYAH AND DISTRICT.

Well - those who missed our Gonyah night and excursion, eat your hearts out! We had a great time.

On Tuesday, March 17, Caroline Hamilton was guest speaker, assisted by Tom Smith, an ex-resident of the area, and Val Plant, who spoke of her recollections of Lil Rogers, daughter of the pioneer Rogers family of Gonyah. The audience contained a number of ex-residents of the hills, and the meeting was a lively and interesting one. Caroline brought along some axes and a wedge used by the early timber workers, and photographs loaned by Traralgon Historical Society created a lot of interest.

On Saturday, March 21, a group of 40 adults and 5 children assembled at the Boolarra Historical Society's Museum, which was kindly opened for our inspection. Here, excursion leader, Ray Waack, took charge and we sallied forth into the hills.

In the group were a number of people with strong ties to Gonyah and surrounding districts. There were Tom Smith, Jack English and Norman Roy, all in their eighties, whose families pioneered the Gonyah and Ryton areas. Clarrie and Amy Billington, Ray Waack, Mavis Lynch and Ted Austin were all brought up in the hills. There was Jack Rennie, who held the mail contract from Christies to Boolarra from 1943 to 1952, and Lou Bond who carted cream and timber from the area for a number of years. Ian Rogers and Hazel Witham, grandchildren of the Rogers family who first ran the Gonyah hotel and store were there and so were Tom, Jack and Frank Lawless, nephews of the last licensee; their mother taught at the Budgeree South East school and is remembered by Norman Roy as a fine teacher but a strict disciplinarian! * See Footnote.

First stop was at Budgeree, where the little school, still in use, was opened for our inspection; then, on to the Budgeree South East school, which brought back memories to some of the party. Only the brick steps remain. We noticed the almost impossibly steep slope at the back of the playground and wondered how many children, chasing a ball, had disappeared down it, never to return!

Next stop was Budgeree Hotel (Scanlon's) which closed in 1936. Pieces of concrete, reinforced with broken bottles (recycling was in fashion then, too) and a few old wire-cut bricks were reminders of the once-busy establishment. A pine plantation has almost taken over the site now.

On then to English's Corner, where Jack English was able to recount the settlement of the area. Jack recalled the death of Mr. Scanlon, of Budgeree Hotel, who had land at English's Corner. He was sowing grass seed from a bag hung around his neck. As he passed a big log the bag caught on a protruding branch and the log rolled, carrying him down the steep hillside and trapping him. His son ran to English's for help. Jack and his father, unable to move the log, used axes to try to free Mr. Scanlon, while Jack's sister rode to a neighbour's farm. The neighbour, Mr. Cranny, rode the 10 miles to Boolarra in 26 minutes to get help. Men came, Mr. Scanlon was carried up the steep slope on a stretcher, with five or six men coming behind the stretcher party to prevent them slipping back. He was transferred to a mattress on a horse-drawn sledge and taken home to the hotel. Dr. Sutcliffe, from Morwell, came out in his car but Mr. Scanlon died on the way to hospital, a victim of the steep country in which he lived.

Near English's Corner is Johnson's Hill where Tom Smith and Ray Waack went to school 28 years or so apart. Tom and Ray, on their first meeting, disagreed about the location of the school. Neither would give in until they realised that there were two school sites. The original hall (housing the school) burnt down mysteriously one night, after a committee meeting heard the hall's finances were in bad shape! This was after Tom left the area. The new school was built a few miles down the road and it was here that Ray went to school some years later.

The party moved on then to Ryton Hall - the Excelsior Mechanic's Institute to give it its full title - which housed a school and lending library in its heyday, but is now derelict. Remains of an attractive garden surround it and the once-popular tennis court is still there but overgrown.

We stopped for lunch at Ryton Junction, then pressed on to the site of the Gonyah Central Hall, stopping on the way to look at the spot where an R.A.A.F. plane crashed in 1943, killing the three crew. Tom Lawless and Jack Rennie discovered that they had both been involved in the location and retrieval of the wreckage. ** (See letter, reprinted in this Newsletter, which refers to this incident).

From Gonyah Hall we moved to the site of the Gonyah Hotel. The Rogers family selected land here in 1901 and Mr. Rogers set up a store to supply settlers walking to their newly-selected blocks in surrounding districts. He held the mail contract between Boolarra and Gonyah so the Post Office was a natural addition, then in 1907, rooms were added to form the hotel. Photographs of the area enabled us to picture the buildings and surroundings as they were.

After the hotel, we stopped at Pattinson's Tree, still standing and with the board holes still clearly visible, which Jack Pattinson climbed in 1927, (for "devilment"), putting springboards in to a height of approx. 165 feet. On the other side of the road is a large mountain ash stump with springboard holes, showing fiddleback markings. Fiddleback ash is much prized for furniture.

Last stop was the former fish hatchery on the Morwell River, just past the Morwell River Prison Farm: there are supposedly several graves along the roadside here but we were unable to find them.

All in all it was a great day. Its success was due mainly to leader, Ray Waack, who kept the party moving without giving anyone the feeling of being rushed, and to the "old-timers" (and the "not-so-old timers") whose reminiscences and yarns at each stopping place added life and colour to the history of the hills.

The story of the Strzeleckis is a sad one. It's the story of the destruction of a magnificent forest in the mistaken belief that the country would be good for dairying. It's the story of pioneer settlers who cleared the land with tremendous effort, fighting against steep slopes, mud, isolation and bad roads, low returns for their work, and pests such as rabbits, blackberries, and ragwort.

In the beginning there was optimism - the land produced well due to the potash put into the soil by extensive burning. Townships were surveyed (though none was ever developed) and small close-knit communities sprang up in areas such as Budgeree, Ryton, Gonyah, Boolarong, Wonyip and Livingstone. The centre of these communities was usually a public hall, housing a school and providing a meeting place for the residents in their scant leisure time.

Sadly, the optimism was misplaced. After a few years the land proved not to be really suitable for dairy farms. Mud and poor roads made marketing of produce and collection of supplies difficult. Many young men went off to the war in 1914 and, on their return, elected to move to more hospitable farming areas. The steepness of the country made use of tractors difficult if not impossible and the drift away from the hills began. Finally the rabbits and blackberries reduced carrying capacities so much that many farmers were forced to walk off their properties. Thus the Strzeleckis earned the name of The Heartbreak Hills.

But it wasn't all heartbreak. The ex-hillfolk on our trip all agreed that the times they spent in the Strzeleckis were good times - their memories are happy ones. There were dances, sports days and picnics. Children brought up in that environment learned the value of hard work, frugality, resourcefulness and community spirit and the experience gained farming the hills stood them in good stead in later ventures. Those settlers who stayed on their land made a reasonable living and some farming continues in the area today. Better roads, motor transport, the telephone and C.B. radio have made life a little easier. Rabbits have been virtually eliminated by myxomatosis and sprays make blackberry control simpler.

Most of the area, cleared with such hard physical labour 70-80 years ago, is covered with a regrowth of mountain ash, blackwood and ferns. The Forests Commission is re-planting large areas with stands of mountain ash and radiata pine.

Reminders of the early settlers remain - an apple tree still bearing, a blue hydrangea blooming at site of the Gonyah hall (after how many years?), a marble from the top of a lemonade bottle where the hotel stood. Was it all worthwhile? The hill folk in our party said: "Emphatically YES!"

* FOOTNOTE: Pre-publication notice -

"BROWNIE - THE DIARY OF ANNE LAWLESS" Edited by ANN DETTRICK

When Anne Lawless (nee Brown) was a young teacher, she lived for a time with the Pennicuick family at Kelvin Grove and taught at Budgeree South East State School. Soon to be published, this book contains Anne Brown's diary, written in 1915, as well as letters written to her by Jim Lawless (whom she later married), Will Pennicuick, and other young men from the district serving overseas during World War 1.

** Don't miss this fascinating and valuable historical work - out soon!

A REMINISCENCE OF THE WAR YEARS - 1939 - 45

By Mrs. Mavis Coleman.

"Would you bring up the cows to be milked, Peter, and tell Frank he can assemble the machines." These were the twice-daily orders given to two Italian prisoners-of-war employed by our family on our farm at Yinnar during the Second World War.

These men were provided with accommodation and meals in a hut in the yard and, once a fortnight, a Government "bus" driven by two officers, would call to check on the men and supply any clothes they may need. A maroon uniform was their regulation clothing as prisoners.

A small wage was paid to each prisoner through the officer and out of this the P.O.s bought any personal needs such as toothpaste, cigarettes, etc.

On Sundays they were expected to attend a local church service and this was the only time they could meet other P.O.s in the district.

Approximately a thousand P.O.s were employed on agricultural farms in Victoria. This was a scheme provided by the Government to support production in Victoria during wartime while so many of our sons from farms were at the war front.

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SHARE YOUR MEMORIES WITH US!

In this edition of our Newsletter, Mavis Coleman writes of the P.O.s employed by her family during World War 11 and Lois Starkey recalls her years at Morwell West, a township which no longer exists.

Have you a reminiscence to share with us? Did your family employ Land Girls during the War? Do you remember the Indian hawkers who travelled through the country areas earlier this century? Do you have memories of bushfires, floods, the struggles of the depression years? What was school like 50 years ago? What did you do for entertainment before "the box"?

Put your memories down on paper for our Newsletter, or, if you prefer, our Secretary will do the writing for you. Give it some thought!

The entry to the cemetery is flanked by a gatepost doubling as a memorial gate, erected by district residents, to the memory of those who lost their lives in a tragic bushfire on February 14th 1944.

BUSH FIRE

14 Feb. 1944

In memory of

T. Cook
 Mrs E. Dyer
 J. Flitton
 Miss C. Hare
 P. & Mrs. P. Jones
 W. McNair
 R. Thomas
 A. Thompson
 J. Robinson
 C. Tanner
 F. Walker
 Mrs A. Woolacott

Erected by
 District Residents.

190 COMMERCIAL RD., MORWELL, 3840

Bought of

Sharpe's

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DO YOU REMEMBER THESE ?? →

M

[Signature]

1711	<i>[Signature]</i>	179
1501	<i>[Signature]</i>	

Amount Tendered

Thank You!

PROGRAMME ARRANGEMENTS.

WEDNESDAY.

Arr. Morwell, 8.50 p.m.—Reception on arrival by President and Councillors of Shire of Morwell.

Arr. Mechanics' Institute, 9.5 p.m.—Presentation of Address of Welcome to Their Excellencies by D. T. Latter, Esq., J.P., Shire President.

Address by His Excellency the Governor.

Adjournment for Supper.

THURSDAY.

Dept. Morwell, 9 a.m.

Arr. Yinnar, 9.15 a.m.—Reception by President, Cr. Edney and School Children.

National Anthem. Address to School Children by His Excellency.

Dept. Yinnar, 9.25.

Arr. Boolarra, 9.35.—Reception by President and School Children. National Anthem. Address to School Children by His Excellency.

Dept. Boolarra per motors, 9.50.

Arr. Boolarra South, 10.10.—Reception by School Children. National Anthem. Address to School Children by His Excellency.

Dept. Boolarra South, 10.20.

Arr. Gungah Central Hall, 11.25.—Reception by Bush Nursing Association.

Lunch, 12.15. Inspection of tree felling, log chopping, and "dug out" at 1.30.

2.30.—Installation of Bush Nurse by Her Excellency Lady Stanley

Dept. Gungah, 4 p.m.—Inspection of Reserve.

Arr. Boolarra, 6.35 p.m.

Program for the visit of Sir Arthur Stanley and Lady Stanley to Gungah for the Installation of Nurse Hughes to the Gungah Bush Nursing Centre 1914

• TAKE NOTE OF JUST HOW MUCH TIME SIR ARTHUR DIDN'T HAVE. WE TRAVELLED VERY QUICKLY.!!

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

TELEPHONE:
IN REPLY PLEASE QUOTE
NO.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE.
VOLUNTEER AIR OBSERVERS CORPS.
YALLOURN CONTROL POST.

15th Sept. 1947

Messrs J. & R. Rennie
RYTON.
via BOOLARRA.

Dear Sirs,

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking you for your assistance in locating the crashed aircraft near GUNYAH on AUG. 24. - 25th.

This headquarters greatly appreciate your splendid efforts on that occasion which involved complete sacrifice of your own interests over a period of many hours.

The parents of these unfortunate boys would, I feel sure, express in no uncertain manner, their deep appreciation of the work done by you. On their behalf I thank you again.

Application has been made for petrol ration tickets to cover fuel used by you on the night of the search. Same will be promptly forwarded on receipt from R.A.A.F. Headquarters.

Please convey to Miss A. Rennie my thanks for the assistance she gave on the above occasion.

Yours faithfully,

R. A. Rennie
Flying Officer.
O/I/C. YALLOURN CONTROL POST.