

# MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol 15 No1

January 1998

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## *Welcome to the January Newsletter*

And welcome to the beginning of another year, in which we hope to present many items of interest in the field of local history.

👍 **Congratulations to Patrick Morgan** on receiving the 1998 Victorian Community and Local History Award. This is an annual prize awarded to an Australian resident or organisation for recent work which contributes significantly to the appreciation and development of Victorian Community and Local History. Patrick, who was guest speaker at our 1997 end-of-year dinner, won the Award for his recently published book *The Settling of Gippsland*.

We are fortunate to have the services of **Michael Farrell** who has volunteered to enter onto the *Imagic* computer program the information recorded so far by our hard-working catalogue group. This will make it much easier for us to locate and cross-reference information, and for those of you who are saying to yourselves "I can't use a computer - it won't help *me!*" - we will be having small group sessions for anyone interested to learn how. (And, if your Secretary can learn to use it, *anyone* can!) Michael will be working in our rooms on Mondays and Tuesdays, between 10 am and 4pm and on Wednesdays between 10am and 1 pm and we have decided to open our Information Centre to the public at those times, until Easter. A roster of members willing to "centre sit" (for three hours at a time) has been drawn up. If you are not on the roster but would like to help, please contact Elsie McMaster.

Most members are aware of the two palm trees which stand side by side on a ridge between the highway and the railway line just to the east of Morwell - they were planted at the gateway of the original residence of the manager of the Morwell butter factory and are probably over 100 years old. Sadly, one of them has been vandalised - the work of someone with an axe, it appears. LaTrobe Shire workers are keeping an eye on the tree and are hopeful that it will recover.

We have received a reply from *Yallourn Energy* addressing our concerns over the fate of the original Morwell Bridge crossing over the Morwell River. As expected, the old crossing will be part of the soon-to-be-developed Maryvale Coalfield, but Yallourn Energy has indicated its willingness to erect a marker commemorating the historic significance of the crossing, at a suitable site. This will be done in consultation with local historical societies.

The **LaTrobe Shire Combined History Group** will hold its first meeting for the year in our rooms on Sunday February 8 at 2pm. The Combined History Group, consisting of representatives from Boolarra, Moe, Morwell, Traralgon and Yinnar Historical Societies and Mid Gippsland Family History Group, meets quarterly at the 'homes' of the various member Societies. Mid Gippsland Family History Group will host the February meeting at Morwell and guest speaker will be Ms Angela Stitt, Community Liaison/Promotions Co-ordinator for the Shire of LaTrobe.

👉 **NEXT MEETING - TUESDAY FEBRUARY 17 - 7.30PM**  
**- MORWELL TOWN HALL FOYER**

## *Aeroplane Visits Morwell*

We frequently receive requests for information, and one such recent request, from a gentleman in Portland, led us to the following article, from the *Morwell Advertiser*, 19 March, 1920:

'In July of last year, Messrs Officer, McKenzie, Brearly, and Kilburn, all returned soldiers, and members of *Aeroflight Coy* set out with a Dehavilland-G two-seater aeroplane to carry out aerial survey work in various parts of the State, with a view to regular aerial transport service being established in the near future. Opportunities were also given to persons who desired to have a fly of going up in the plane. After being in the Northern and Western Districts for some months, the machine flew from Melbourne to Sale, one day last week, where several passengers were taken up. The machine afterwards came on to Traralgon and on Tuesday afternoon last arrived in Morwell, landing in Mr C. Davey's paddock, fronting Toner's Lane. A number of passengers were taken on board, the first up being Mr J.H. Buckley, who, during his 'fly', hovered over the Brown Coal Mine. Others to ascend on high were Mr R. Barry, Miss Neve and Master A. Corcoran, Mr W. Davey, Mrs J.H. Buckley and Ella Corbett, Miss Marion Davey, Mr P. Corcoran and Ruby Miller. Each 'fly' lasted from ten to twelve minutes and on numerous occasions the aeroplane soared over the town and was watched with keen interest by quite a crowd, to whom the passenger on board frequently waved. The ascents and landings were beautifully made, and no hitch of any kind, beyond the breaking of a spring, occurred. The weather was very favourable and all who went up were delighted with their fly. None, however, enjoyed the 'sensation' more than Mrs Buckley, who stated that she would just love to fly from Morwell to Queensland and land suddenly on one of her sons' farms there. It was intended to fly the machine on Wednesday but in consequence of the unfavourable weather that prevailed, no ascents were made. Yesterday morning the machine 'set sail' for Heyfield and flew away like a great bird.'

\* \* \* \* \*

There were a number of visits by aeroplanes in the early 1920s, most apparently on the 'joy flight' circuit. However, The *Morwell Advertiser* of 23 July, 1920 reported:

### *Papers By Aeroplane*

'On Friday next, the "Herald" newspapers will be delivered in Morwell to local newsagent (Mr Evans) by aeroplane.

It is also intended, in order to demonstrate its usefulness, to arrange for a 'Herald' aerial mail delivery of letters. Each letter left at the 'Herald' office will have stamped on its envelope "By 'Herald' Air Mail Express" and will be duly delivered with the newspapers at Mr Evans' newsagency. Residents who will be receiving letters in the town will be able to receive them from Mr Evans, while regarding those people residing outside the town, it will be necessary for the senders in Melbourne to add the ordinary postage to the envelope when leaving them at the 'Herald' office.'

\* \* \* \* \*

By 1928, joy flights were still a novelty. The '*Advertiser*' reporting on 10 August of that year said:

'Major Shaw's earoplane which arrived in Morwell on Wednesday last week proved a source of great attraction to local residents.... Some who were a bit "windy" about venturing up gained confidence when they saw others go up and come down again safe and sound after a novel, interesting experience. As a result, many who were prepared to go up provided they were allowed to drag one foot on the ground, withdrew the condition, and in due time rose hundreds of feet in the air, and whilst on the 'wing', obtained a magnificent 'birds eye' panoramic view of the countryside extending for many miles.

On Sunday afternoon there was a great gathering at the landing ground in Mr Jim O'Gorman's paddock. People came from all directions and for a considerable distance Latrobe Road was lined with motor cars. More seats in the plane were booked up than could be accommodated, although flights were made until it was almost dark. Those who were unable to have a fly were interested in the taking off and landing of the machine as well as the flying stunts and evolutions performed by the mechanical bird.

On Monday morning, Mr Dick Galloway was taken in the 'plane to work at Trafalgar, whilst on Tuesday morning, Mr Donald McKay "flew" to Melbourne (whither the plane returned) and had a glorious trip'.

## GIPPSLAND SCHOOLDAYS

The publication of a new book, *'The Oxford Book of Australian Schooldays'*, together with the commencement of another school year and the forthcoming celebration of 120 Years of Primary School Education in Morwell, led some of our members to reminisce about their own schooldays, as teachers and as students.

Muriel Feehan (nee Williams) began her teaching career as a student teacher at Yallourn Primary School in 1940. At that time, young people who had finished school but were not old enough to attend Teachers' College often filled in their waiting time by assisting teachers at nearby schools. They were supposed to be under the supervision of a trained teacher at all times but it often happened, if the school was short staffed, that the student teacher was placed in sole charge of a class. Muriel recalls being left in charge of a class of Infants (Preps), with the Infant Mistress taking another class in the next room. The two rooms were separated by a glass door. One day the Infant Mistress (who was a real Tartar according to Muriel), stormed through the door and up to the back of the room to administer a resounding slap to a little who was sucking her pencil! Muriel was a student teacher for two years, then she went to Melbourne Teachers' College for a year's formal training, after which, in 1943, she was posted to Callignee State School.

At Callignee she boarded with a young couple who were leasing a farm quite a distance from the school. This necessitated a long walk in all weathers, along a bush track, to and from school. Being a 'city' girl, she was terrified of cows and she had to run the gauntlet of the herd of curious bovines which followed her to the farm gate each day.

There were 18 - 20 children at the one-teacher school and Muriel was responsible for the cleaning and gardening as well as preparation of lessons for all levels. Having decided to upgrade the school's garden, Muriel and her charges planted a nice lot of seedlings, only to find on their arrival at school the next day that the whole lot had been eaten by rabbits.

To get home to Yallourn for a weekend, Muriel would ride her brother's bike to Traralgon South, where the teacher (who owned a car and lived in Yallourn) would pick her up and give her a ride home. On Monday morning she would return to Traralgon South with the teacher, collect the bike and, with any luck, cadge a ride back to Callignee on the cream wagon, with the bike tied on behind.

Muriel's grandmother Zenna Rintoull (nee McCrory) was appointed to Maryvale Ridge School, the first school in the Morwell area, in 1877 when she was just seventeen. Muriel's cousin, Mary Ireland describes the school, in her article on Zenna, published in *'Women of the Valley'*:

*'A small hut with perpendicular slabs, it had a thatched roof, bark ridging, earth floor and gable ends of white canvas. Rain poured through the gaps in winter, leaving the floor awash and she had to use planks to find her way through the puddles on the floor. The parents carted a load of soil to build up the level, but in dry weather it became choking dust. The children had to walk half a mile to get a drink of water. Attendance, which had never reached the estimated maximum of thirty pupils, dropped sharply after a snake was found in the classroom in February 1879.'*

Shortly after this, in 1879, a school was erected in the township of Morwell. That school, Commercial Road State School, will be holding a Back To Commercial Road School celebration in March and we hope to have some more reminiscences from several of our members, who attended and/or taught at the school, in our March newsletter.

Bruce McMaster's mother May (now in her 100th year) went to school at Boolarong in 1906. The district (just south of Gunyah) had just been thrown open for selection and school was a room in a private house on one of the farms. She had a walk of almost three miles, through thick bush and up the steep slopes of the Strzelecki Ranges, constantly wet and at risk from limbs that fell from the dead trees in the sudden violent wind storms that swept the hills in winter, and in fear of snakes and bushfires in summer. Despite all this, May has mostly fond memories of her first year at school, though one vivid and not-so-happy memory is of having to dodge the large turkey gobbler which terrorized the young students on their way to and from the toilet in the back yard of the farm house.

In 1909 local families got together to build a hall which was also used as a school. May and her younger brother continued their schooling there.

Alan York, a pupil at the new school, describes it in his book *'Journey to the Eighties in Gippsland'*:

*'The school had a pine floor, and pine lining on the walls, but no ceiling. The outside was of split palings with a corrugated iron roof and an iron chimney for an open fire'.*

Teacher Theodore Cory had something to say about the chimney. In 1908 he wrote to the Education Department:

*'The chimney is of tin and very small. Every time we light the fire, and that is every day in the present season, the room becomes filled with smoke and we have to suffer with sore eyes as a result. There is an alternative and that is to open the windows but it is obvious that this course is unwise, as the fire is of no use to us with a bitterly cold wind driving through the place. The chimney is a source of real danger. Only last Wednesday the school became suddenly full of smoke and we heard a crackling noise. On rushing outside I found that the side of the building was all in flame and it required prompt treatment to get it under in time.'*

The eastern parts of the Strzeleckis were notorious for their harsh winter climate and the steepness of the country. Theodore Cory left Boolarong in 1909 because of ill health. In a letter to the Department he wrote: *'I would state that a teacher of robust health ought to be sent here as it is a place requiring a very strong constitution to be able to stand the physical exertion in coming and going on schooldays.'* Ironically, he had come to Boolarong because he was suffering from TB and hoped the mountain air would improve his health.

His successor, Stanley Porteous, arrived at Boolarong on June 11, 1909 and left on June 12! In a letter of explanation to the Education Department he stated that the previous teacher had a horse and lived three miles away with a local family, the Williams, at Woorarra West. This accommodation was still available but he would need a horse and as he was only a relief teacher he did not want to go to that expense. He wrote: *'The track between the house and school is through the roughest of mountain country and in winter is impassable on foot owing to the depth of mud and in winter it is at all times impassable to vehicle traffic. Sledges are chiefly used for transport in winter and that it took me three hours with a buggy and pair of horses to reach Woorarra West, a distance of 8 miles.'*

The Education Department's Board of Advice, based in Leongatha, where the slopes were gentler and the climate kinder, when asked for its opinion of Mr Porteous's complaints said: *'The Board do not think he was justified in leaving the school...we think he is very thin-skinned.'* They suggested the Department supply another teacher, *'one with just a little more backbone.'*

However, Inspector Gates, who obviously knew the area from his duties there, stood up for Mr Porteous, describing *'roads fit only in winter for a sturdy mountain pony, track to Mr Williams quite unfit for foot.'* He also stated that he did not know of any other accommodation.

If the teachers found the conditions too harsh, we can only wonder at the stamina of the little children who received their education in such areas.

\* \* \* \* \*

Off to School. Violet, Arthur and Annie Coleman, Jumbuk, c. 1910.



# Program

## Friday 27th March

7.30pm Meet at Morwell Football Club rooms - Reminiscing  
Visitors' register. Informal Photos.  
Supper \$10.00 per person (drinks at bar prices)

## Saturday 28th March

10.30am Ringing of school bell.  
Items by school children: Folk dancing, choir and band.  
Historical display in chapel.  
Devonshire teas in chapel.  
School tours hosted by senior students.

11.30am Roll call and official welcome,  
Photographs (in decades).  
Tree planting.

12.30pm BBQ lunch - Everything supplied  
(A cost will be incurred)

1.00pm Entertainment provided by Boola Boola Bush Band.

2-4.00pm Colonial Sports afternoon

## Accommodation

If you require overnight accommodation for Friday 27<sup>th</sup> March we can assist with further details (tick box on registration form). Recommended accommodation will be donating 10% of your tariff to our school.

# Registration

**BACK TO  
COMMERCIAL ROAD  
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Yes, I would like to attend  
the Back To  
Commercial Road Primary School

Commercial Road Primary School

My name: .....

Address: .....

Telephone: .....

I attended Commercial Rd P.S  
during the Year(s) 19 .....

*Please provide more details overleaf*

I am a Past/Current

Student  Teacher  Principal

I have memorabilia I would be willing to display

*Please give details overleaf.*

I/we will be attending

Friday night only  
 Saturday only  
 Friday and Saturday

Number attending: ..... Adults ..... Children  
ages .....

I would like information about accommodation

Please return this slip to:

Back To Commercial Road

Primary School,

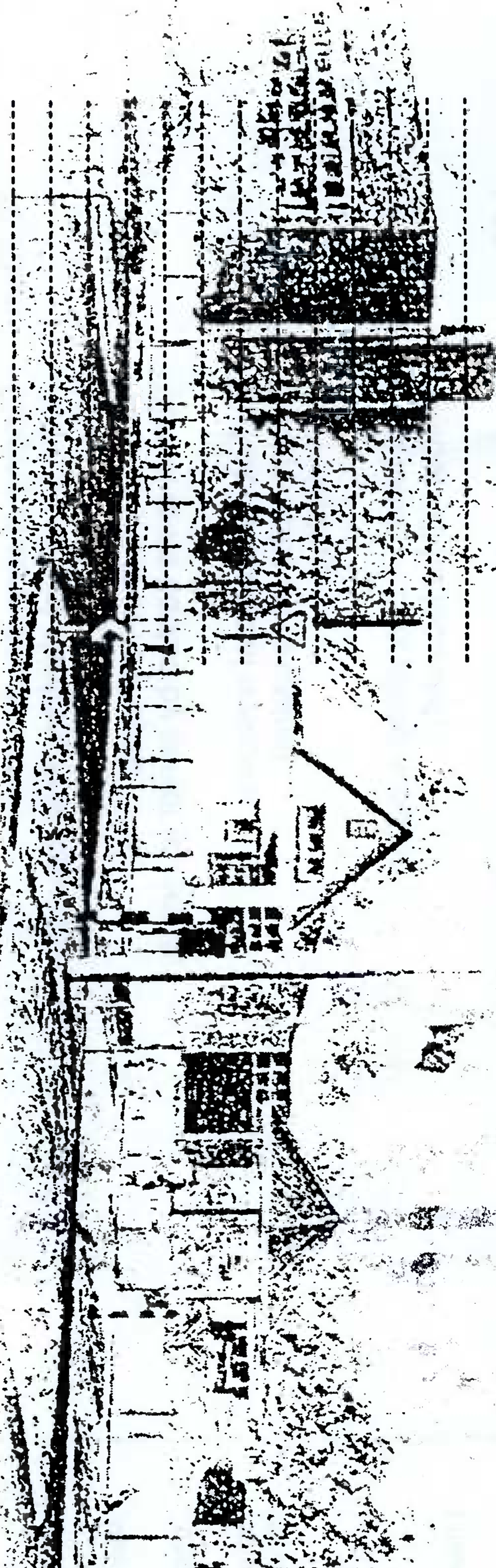
PO Box 952, Morwell, 3840. Victoria

Scissors icon

# Comments

Are most welcome

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**COMMERCIAL ROAD  
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

*Inviting you to*

# CELEBRATE 120 YEARS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

*In Morwell*

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PO Box 952, Morwell, 3840, Victoria.  
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27th & 28th MARCH 1998