

MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Published bi-monthly

Meetings: Third Tuesday of the month at 7.30 pm

Old Morwell Town Hall

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Welcome to the July Newsletter

Now that winter is upon us we have decided not to open the Museum on a regular basis, as we have been doing over the summer and autumn months. After discussion at the June meeting, it was decided that numbers of visitors did not warrant opening during the winter. We will review the situation towards the end of the year, but it has been suggested that, rather than opening on one day a week, as we have been doing, it may be better to open for a longer period (say every day for a week) at certain well advertised times and with a particular display - for example during Heritage Week. Any other suggestions?

At the meeting of the LaTrobe Council on July 3, an allocation of \$4,000.00 was made for the historical societies in our area. Our share of this is to be \$500.00. The purpose of this allocation is "to assist with the general ongoing costs connected to the running of the societies, and the worthwhile information that they provide to the residents of our community" (from a letter of notification signed by Mr Jeff Marjoram, Group Manager, Community Services). This is presumably a one-off grant as "it must be noted that Council is not able to guarantee that funds will be available for this purpose in future years."

We have received, from the Department of Infrastructure, (no, we'd never heard of it either), a copy of '*East Coast Shipwrecks - a thematic historical survey*' by D.J.Jordan of the Maritime Heritage Unit, Heritage Victoria. This is an impressive volume which deals in great detail with 135 of the 234 shipwrecks known to have occurred on the east coast of Victoria in the area from 10 nautical miles east of Port Phillip Heads to Port Albert. Of these 135, 119 are designated as historic shipwrecks.

Also received from the above mentioned department is a prospectus for the proposed **Gippsland Heritage Project** which aims to:

- * extract essential data from a number of quality heritage studies
- * enhance and build upon the heritage trails and experiences already developed
- * forecast possible infrastructure development for the project needs
- * link Gippsland's wealth of heritage assets with its tourism strengths - natural beauty and local gourmet foods
- * co-ordinate state and regional heritage, tourism and economic expertise
- * identify opportunities to facilitate presentation and enjoyment of Gippsland heritage

NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY JULY 16 - 7.30 PM - AT THE MUSEUM

Joyce Cleary Remembers Sharpe's

When Joyce Cleary left school at the end of 1940, she went to the manager of Sharpe's Emporium, in Commercial Road, Morwell and asked for a job.

"Right, my girl," said the manager, Mr Rudin, "you can start tomorrow".

Sharpe's was the clothing store in Morwell at that time. It had men's and women's clothes, shoes, manchester, dress and furnishing fabrics and haberdashery, and the ladies' boutique at the far end of the shop stocked a wide range of very good quality clothes and hats. Sharpe's sales brought people from far and wide in search of bargains and customers would be lined up on the footpath well before opening time. On cattle sale days ("cow cocky days") farmers and their wives would arrive in town, all dressed up for a day out, and the trip always included a visit to Sharpe's.

Joyce started in the haberdashery department, selling buttons, hooks and eyes, elastic etc and later worked in various other departments including baby wear and shoes. She also worked as cashier, sitting at her station in the centre of the store, sending the cash carrier whizzing along its wire with change for the various departments, and she later also worked in the accounts department.

The shop assistants were not allowed to be seen 'doing nothing' - they would continually be tidying the display tables after customers had been looking over the merchandise or checking that the clothes were hanging neatly, dust-free, on their racks. Smaller items of clothing such as underwear were stored neatly folded in big manila boxes, two to a shelf, behind the counter. If, by any chance, there was really nothing that needed doing, Miss Coffey, the manageress, would empty the contents of one of these boxes onto the counter, saying apologetically, "Sorry girls, but you can't be seen just standing around!", and the girls would have to re-fold all the items! Later during the war, though, it was allowable for them to knit socks and scarves for the troops in their 'spare' time at work.

The two Sharpe brothers, Norman and Jack, who ran the Morwell store, also operated Norman's Corner Store in Melbourne (on the corner of Russell and Bourke Streets) and they would drive up to Morwell once a week with their car loaded to the roof with stock. Jack, the older, was known as Mr Sharpe but Norman was always "Mr Norman" to the staff in Morwell. Another brother, Cecil, had a shop in Sale and used to call in occasionally.

The Sharpes girls wore black dresses, shoes and stockings although later in the war when stockings were impossible to get, they were allowed to wear golf shoes and socks. The war years brought shortages of all sorts of materials but Mr Norman was always on the lookout for anything which could alleviate these shortages. Joyce's friend Peggy Brooker also worked at Sharpes and Peggy's mother owned a sewing machine. If Mr Norman was able to get hold of a few rolls of flannellette, Joyce and Peggy would be despatched to the Brooker house to cut and hem dozens of nappies for sale in the shop. One time, Mr Norman obtained some rolls of water damaged mattress ticking and the girls made pillowslips, and mattress covers, which they stuffed with flock. (One can imagine what that did to the black dresses!).

Joyce Cleary Remembers Sharpe's

The shop in Commercial Road had, except for the ladies' boutique, uncovered wooden floors. Each afternoon, the shop assistants would sprinkle water, then sawdust, on the floor, to lay the dust. This would then be carefully swept up, and those who remember the size of Sharpe's will appreciate what a job that was. (Sharpe's took up the whole of the present Spotlight Store and its associated plaza shops). The dresses and men's suits etc on their racks were covered with dust sheets each night and during the day the workers would check during the day to see that no dust had accumulated on the shoulders.

The girls who worked in Sharpe's considered themselves fortunate, especially during the war years, because they had the chance to lay by some of the lovely materials and clothing which came into the shop. They were also lucky in that some people who had more clothing ration tickets than they needed would give them to their favourite shop assistant and this enabled the girls to put together a few things for their trousseaus and glory boxes. (Though most people needed all the ration tickets they could get, some had not enough money to be able to use them all.)

While working at Sharpe's, Joyce and her friend Glenda Billingsley took evening jobs as usherettes at the local picture theatre (in the old Town Hall, which was then quite new!). They worked Monday, Wednesday and Saturday nights and a matinee on Saturday afternoons, being paid 2/6 a night. (This later increased to 7/6 after some action by the unions.) Joyce worked upstairs, on the balcony, and it was her job to signal to the projectionist, by way of a small buzzer, if the sound was too loud or too soft. It was fashionable at that time to go to the cinema and the balcony was considered 'upper class'. A number of Morwell's business people had permanent bookings on the balcony.

Joyce left Sharpe's in 1946 by which time she was on senior's wages of £3 per week. At that time a pair of shoes cost 30/- (ie half a week's wages) and a good coat cost 10 guineas (more than three weeks pay).



TURTONS CREEK SCHOOL MARKER AND BOOK LAUNCH

The South Gippsland Historical Society, based in Foster, has instituted a program of marking the sites of former schools in the district. On **Sunday, July 21**, a marker on the site of the former Turtons Creek school will be unveiled. At the same time, a short history of the Turtons Creek district, written by May McMaster, will be launched. Turtons Creek, on the southern side of the Strzelecki Ranges, about 10 miles from Foster, first became known in 1872 when a rich gold strike brought diggers flocking to the area. The rush lasted only a few months and the area was soon almost deserted again, but in the early years of the twentieth century the land was thrown open for selection. May Youl came with her parents from Outtrim to a selection at Turtons Creek in 1903. She grew up there, married, and after a few years in Korumburra, returned with her husband Carl McMaster to farm on nearby McCartins Road.

May's story - *Turtons Creek- Valley of Treasure and Charm* - covers the period from the rush in 1872 until approximately the end of the Second World War. Now aged ninety-seven, May is almost certainly the oldest resident of that district still living and her story covers the hectic days of the gold rush, and the struggles of the selectors to carve farms from the forest and to gain facilities such as schools and better roads. It is a story that will be familiar to those who lived on this side of the Strzeleckis in the Boolarra, Gunyah, Jeeralang and Jumbuck areas.

Anyone wishing to attend the book launch and unveiling should be at Turtons Creek by **12 noon on Sunday July 21. B.Y.O everything** (food, chairs, wet weather gear etc) for a picnic lunch.

VIOLET LEVISTON

On June 5, the district said farewell to one of its best-known residents, Violet Leviston. The following notes are taken from the eulogy given at her funeral service.

Violet was born on 26 October 1905, the daughter of James and Louisa Matthews of Hazelwood. Violet's mother was formerly a Morrell from Morrell's Hill, near Boolarra. Violet was the youngest of ten Matthews children, three of whom died in infancy, and she was the only one born in hospital - the Morwell Hospital, at that time situated on the corner of Elgin St and Hazelwood Road.

The Matthews family farmed at Hazelwood and the farm on which Violet spent her childhood is now under the waters of the Hazelwood Pondage. The farm house was originally at the Eel Hole Creek end of the farm but was moved up to the western end of the property to what is now the island in the Pondage. It was moved on skids by bullock team over several days and the family slept in the house each night during the move.

Violet's school years, which commenced in about 1910, were spent at the Hazelwood Ridge School, about a kilometre from the farm. During this time the railways ran a daily goods train from Melbourne to Mirboo North return. Each morning the train driver would sound his whistle when leaving the Hazelwood Station about 8.45 am and again a few minutes later at the next road crossing. The rule for start of school was that the children had to go into class when the second whistle sounded. On mornings with a heavy frost, the train always had difficulty gaining traction on the icy rails as it left Hazelwood Station to travel up the slight rise to the next crossing, so on these mornings the second whistle was often a long time coming and the children would have a 'win' over the teacher and gain themselves a little extra play time - though one wonders what fun it was to stay outside in the frost!

During the statewide influenza epidemic in 1918 the school was closed for several months. A number of local people, including the teacher, died. When the school reopened after some months, Violet, who was in Grade 8, was working on her parents' farm and did not return to school.

One of Violet's great loves was horses and the family often claimed that she could ride before she could walk. Certainly, as the youngest in the family, she was taken riding in front of her parents when she was only a few months old. All of the Matthews children, particularly the five girls, were excellent horse riders and competed in picnic races, gymkhanas and agricultural shows from Trafalgar to Sale and Mirboo North to Heyfield. The horses were transported by train from Hazelwood Station to these events.

VIOLET LEVISTON

Violet married Bob Leviston in the Anglican Church at Yinnar on 28 July 1925. She was 19 and Bob was 23. The wedding was on a Tuesday and when asked in later years why Tuesday, she always said that Friday was cattle sale day in Yinnar, Saturday was football, Monday was pig sale day so it had to be Tuesday! Actually it was because that was the only day that a visiting minister was available to perform the ceremony.

Violet and Bob commenced their married life farming at Jeeralang Junction from 1925 to 1932, when they moved to the Hazelwood Flats. The farm at Hazelwood was burnt out in the 1944 fires which claimed the lives of thirteen people. The house on the Leviston's farm was destroyed and Violet survived the fire in a 1000 gallon concrete water trough with wet bags over her. They lost all their personal possessions in the fire except Violet's wedding and engagement rings, and, in the days following the fire she was very touched by the kindness and thoughtfulness of friends and neighbours who gave her replacement photographs of her wedding, her parents and her earlier horse riding days - items that she thought she had lost forever.

After Bob died in 1972 Violet remained on the farm where she maintained her interest in gardening and handcrafts and, in the evenings was usually to be found in front of the fire with a piece of crochet work in her hands and one of her beloved cats on her knee. In 1983 she moved into Morwell where she spent 12 happy years until overtaken by ill health. She died at St Lawrence Nursing Home, aged 90, in June this year.



Bracelet Stakes Day, 1908. Morwell District Coursing Club members and competitors at the greyhound course on J. H. Matthews' property, Hazelwood, (now under the waters of Hazelwood Pondage). Winning dog, belonging to W. O'Hara, is fifth from left, wearing a white collar.

THE BETTER FARMING TRAIN

During the 1930s, the Victorian Government sponsored 'Better Farming Trains' which visited rural areas with displays and information for farmers. The following poem was written in 1935 by Nettie Cranwell.

The Better Farming Train

**The Better Farming Train has gone and Morwell feels the slight
For it gives Mirboo one whole day but Morwell scarce a night.**

**It was a dark and stormy night, the farmers braved the rain
And came in jinkers, cars and carts to see the farmers' train.**

**It really was a novel sight to see a farm on tour
The people clambered up the steps - they were all keen to view her.**

**The experts told them many things - of how to test a cow
And how to build a pig sty and the way to feed a sow.**

**They showed them photos of topdressed land and some that were not
dressed
And little plots of noxious weeds - told how to kill them best.**

**They said if men laid tons of straw on top, 'twould kill one weed
Another kind must be cut down and never left to seed.**

**They had some bones of horses there, some rusty cans, some new,
Glass jars which held some horrid things, and mangels, just a few.**

**As for the slogans on the walls, they had them by the score
I don't think even Mr Clapp could think of any more.**

**The farmers left, their heads were stuffed with farming hints galore
They hastened home to work their farms - on the same lines as before!**

