

# MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

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**November 2001**

President; Stephen Hellings

## Welcome to the November Newsletter

The past couple of months have been busy ones for the Society and thanks go to all those members who have put in much time and effort at the various events.

\* In October, the Society erected a sign marking the site of the former *Collins Street State School*. We decided that, as this year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the school, we would combine the unveiling with a reunion. An estimated 300 people turned up and, after the sign was unveiled by Cheryl Clarke (one of the first Collins St students) and Miranda Hellings (one of the last), they adjourned to the Karma Hall for afternoon tea and a chance to meet old school friends and reminisce.

\* Also in October, Latrobe City Council sponsored a *Collection Management Workshop* for historical societies, museums and anyone with heritage collections. Four members from our Society attended and they were most impressed with the information presented. To add to their generosity, the Council has donated the attendance fees, collected from the workshop, to the Latrobe Combined History Group, to be used as we see fit – perhaps for another workshop next year.

\* Society members were pleased to welcome a group of visitors from the *Koo-wee-rup Swamp Historical Society* on a day trip to Morwell to visit *Powerworks* and the *Airlie Bank Gallery*. After a look around our rooms and a brief outline of the history of the Morwell area, the visitors, guided by our members, travelled into the hills near Yallourn North for a view over the Valley, before heading off for lunch at *Airlie Bank*.

\* The *Latrobe Combined History Group* met in our rooms in November, hosted by the *Mid Gippsland Genealogical Society*. The combined group, consisting of seven historical societies in Latrobe City, meets quarterly to discuss matters of mutual interest.

\* Our Society has approached Latrobe Council with a request that Council acquire *the former National Bank in Commercial Road* as a Historical Centre. Council has stated its intention to provide a dedicated meeting and display area and archive for our Society in the new municipal precinct to be built in Morwell and we feel that the old bank would be eminently suitable for this purpose.

**NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 20 – 7.30pm – 21 CHURCH ST.**

**NOTE: There will be no meetings in December or January.**

**\*\* A decision on opening times of the rooms over the holiday period will be made at the next meeting.**

## ***A BRIEF OUTLINE OF HOSPITAL FACILITIES IN MORWELL – to 1980*** (Condensed from Morwell & District Community Hospital Report 1980-81)

In 1910, the only hospital in Morwell was St Hilary's Private Hospital, situated in Hazelwood Road. It was a private house with three bedrooms for patients. Sister Mathers was the midwife and Dr Mitchell Snr the only doctor.

A request was lodged with the Shire Council in 1916 by Sisters Mathers and Smith for approval to build a hospital in Elgin St, and when built it catered for twelve patients. The hospital proved too demanding for Sister Mathers, who sold it to Sister Danaher, who, in turn decided in 1941 to sell the hospital. At that time Morwell had a population of 2000, and on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1942, a public meeting was held to consider the establishment of a Community Bush Nursing Hospital in the Shire. A Committee of thirty people was appointed – President was Cr A.W. Ronald, Vice Presidents G. Auchterlonie and A. Hare, Hon. Secretary and Treasurer Mr L. Trigg.

It was decided at a subsequent meeting to negotiate with Sister Danaher for the purchase of the assets of St Hilary's and on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1943, the furniture, equipment and chattels of St Hilary's were bought for the sum of 886 pounds, nine shillings and sixpence. A further agreement to transfer the lease of the hospital was also completed.

To raise money to cover the cost of the new hospital the Shire was zoned and collectors appointed, yielding the sum of 4042 pounds, seven shillings in donations and memberships. The hospital commenced operations on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1943, with Sister E. Phelan as Temporary Sister in Charge.

The hospital was affiliated with the Victorian Bush Nursing Association until 1952. Sister Mitchell was the first Matron. In 1946 the first major alterations and additions were made to the hospital, and included two new labour wards, theatre, sterilising room, casualty and ambulance entrance. This enabled accommodation for patients to be increased to 18.

A proposal by the Charities Board for a multi-storeyed, octagon-shaped building on the site of Norman Brookes Park incorporating various specialist services but with only 5 – 6 beds, was unenthusiastically received by the Hospital Committee and in 1948 considerable discussion took place on the merits or otherwise of the construction of new hospitals at Moe and Traralgon. The Committee did not dispute the need for these but urged the necessity of retaining Morwell hospital as either a unit of the Bush Nursing Association, or as a Community Hospital.

In 1953 the Shire of Morwell had bought 7 acres of land in McMillan St as a hospital site but despite numerous submissions, promises of large donations and the generous support of Council, the policy of the Hospitals and Charities Commission was not to build new hospitals in close proximity to existing ones. In the period 1948 – 1951 Morwell's population rose from 2,000 to 10,000 and the need for more hospital facilities became obvious. In 1952 the Committee severed its affiliation with the Bush Nursing Association and the hospital was re-registered as the "Shire of Morwell Hospital" under the classification "Institutions, Class 2". The status and name of the hospital was changed when Morwell and District Community Hospital was incorporated on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1958.

In 1973 a patients' day room was added and isolation and premature nurseries were provided. A modernisation program was instituted in the seventies and a number of alterations carried out to kitchen and birth room areas.

Over the years the Ladies' Auxilliary and hospital Younger Set did magnificent work in fundraising and made significant contributions to the purchase of furnishings and equipment. In 1980 an application was made for funding to provide a nursing home unit in the hospital's grounds. At the time of writing this report, that application is still under consideration.

**NOTE:** The Morwell Community Hospital became St Hilary's Nursing Home in 1988.

## MEMORIES OF COLLINS STREET

At the recent reunion of members of the Collins Street School community, ex-students were asked what they remembered about their schooldays at Collins Street. Here are some of their answers:

- *School milk, warm with a layer of cream on top. Urrgh!!*
- *Iodine tablets with the school milk. - Mrs Frood & softball & netball.*
- *Raising the flag every Monday morning. - Miss Dixon's strap (ruler).*
- *Folk dancing on cold, frosty mornings. - Really bad clothes!*
- *Who let off the detonator behind Grade 6 in 1951? I did (Neil Lester) and yes, the police came! - Friday Pie Day in the '60s. - Being locked in the toilet. - Miss Lee took my marbles (1955) - Collecting our dog from the cage every morning as he followed us to school. - First day, with the old wooden lunch box with the dog collar catch, which Dad made for me.*
- *Trying to save the school (from closure) in 1991-2.*

**Collins Street School** commenced operation in 1951. Students started the year in rooms at Commercial Road School, in the Band Hall and in St Mary's Church Hall (cnr of Princes Highway and Latrobe Road). In April, the first of the Collins St School buildings were ready for occupation and the students moved in on April 20<sup>23</sup> **Betty Woolley (nee Winchester)** was one of the first students. Here are some extracts from her memories of Collins Street:

“Prep days at that stage were conducted at the Community Hall on the corner of Princes Highway and Latrobe Road and children were enrolled twice a year. I started school under the guidance of Mrs Kelly, wife of the Headmaster at Collins Street. We had a slide, swings and a see-saw in our play area, (probably they would be considered unsafe by today's standards), and enjoyed our playtimes very much.

I remember the day Dr Crooks came to give us our vaccinations. He had a small methylated spirit burner and in between each inoculation he would wave the needle through the flame to sterilise it for the next child. Multiple dose syringes being used thus today would be taboo!

The following year I commenced school at Collins Street and I have many happy memories: Anzac Day and Armistice Day when Mr Harry Lazarus would come and talk to the assembled children about The War; Education Day displays; Mothers Club stalls; School Doctors examining us (so embarrassing to children unused to standing in their undies with others, waiting their turn); the end of year picnic on the lawns at the side of the classrooms, all in our class circles waiting for Father Christmas ( Bert Lester, I think) to distribute bags of sweets.

I remember the 'honour', in Grade 6, attached to doing teachers' dishes in the staffroom, swishing the *Velvet* soap in its wire holder through the water, making lots of business-like bubbles. We were sent in pairs to do the job on a roster basis. Boys got to empty the rubbish bins and tidy the school yard.

I remember the milk each morning recess, that could be drunk through clear cellophane straws that unravelled sometimes. I always tried to drink the milk first, leaving the cream layer until last. Sometimes in summer the milk was warm from sitting in the sun. Children who didn't like milk would pretend to take a bottle then tip it out or hide the bottle in the grass where it would go "off", smelling disgusting!

## COLLINS STREET MEMORIES (continued)

Other privileges were being ink, flower, library and board monitors. Most of us took these tasks very seriously and carried out the job with a certain pride. I recall my teachers happily and enjoyed learning and the discipline.

I remember sports days each week and other schools coming to our school to compete in football and basketball (the game now known as netball) - the 'Tobruk St kids' in black and gold and the 'Commercial Rd kids' in white and purple sports uniforms. Our school colours were bottle green with a gold stripe around the hem of the girls' dresses. The boys used to train for weeks at potato races and tunnel ball - those potatoes developed a nasty odour after being thrown around for a few weeks! - and the girls practised crossball.

When migrant children began to come to school they seemed quite a novelty to us Aussies with their different speech and funny-smelling food.

Once a week I was allowed to buy my lunch which meant walking to Church St to buy a pie, pastie or sausage roll from Hendriksen's Bakery on the corner, or fish and chips from the Post Office Café. Some of the girls would pool their money and buy cakes and 'exotic' fruit (like coconuts).

The shelter sheds were important places for playing games such as "Puss in the Corner" and "Simon Says", and for eating lunch, sharing secrets, forming groups of friends and generally showing off with "Acrobats". Standing on your head with your back against the wall was a really 'cool' way to spend recess!

Punishments at school mostly consisted of a ruler struck on the palm of the hand or a visit to the Headmaster's office for the boys, and perhaps having to sit out the front of the class or outside the door for the girls. One teacher used to put sticking plaster over the mouths of children who talked too much, which wouldn't go down too well now!"

### **Betty also recalls the 'Karma' and Church St in the 'fifties:**

"The present Karma was a Nissan hut at that time, which was converted and used as a picture theatre called the 'Paramount'. Charlie Debono was the projectionist. My sister and I went to the Saturday 'arvo' sessions regularly. Vary's saleyards were between the theatre and Bolgers' property on the corner of Church and Buckley Streets. Jack Bolger was the undertaker. We lived in No 19 Church St which was owned by his daughter, Mary. My father (Stan Winchester) had built the house for Mary and he rented the house and a large shed next to Bolgers' for his building needs until we moved to our own home at 6 June Street in 1953.

I remember hearing the cattle noises on sale days, the big peppercorn trees that grew there for shade, and hanging on the railings round the yards, playing, on our way to or from 'the pictures'. After we moved to June St, Jack Smith and his wife used the shed in Church St as an auction room, then moved to a building behind the Paramount for their sales. Menezdorfers took on the auction rooms at a later time. Jack Smith's mother lived in a very old house on the corner of Church and Buckley Streets, opposite Bolgers'. We called her Granny Smith behind her back. I don't think we ever spoke to her. I am rambling on here, thinking about how Church St looked then with houses where the arcade is now, and Charlie Payne's Dairy, where we would go and buy milk, which was put into an enamel billy with a lid. The subway didn't exist and when you were close to the rail track and a steam train went through, the driver would wave to you."