

MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to the September Newsletter

Mirboo North - Morwell Railway Display:

September 7 was the 30th anniversary of the cessation of passenger rail services to Mirboo North. To mark the occasion, we are presenting a display of photographs and memorabilia in our Information Centre (Morwell Town Hall). President Stephen Hellings has put a great deal of time and energy into the display and, if you haven't already seen it, it's well worth a visit. The Centre is open on Mondays and Tuesdays, from 10 am to 4pm and on Wednesdays 10 am - 12 noon.

We propose to open the Centre on the two weekends of the State Enduro Championships, as well as during that week, and we will add to the railway display a presentation on various forms of transport which have been used in the district over the years.

Cataloguing Progress:

Mick Farrell, with his bevy of beautiful ladies (and a couple of not-so-beautiful blokes!), is making great progress with the recording of our photographic collection on the *Inmagic* program. Already we are seeing the benefits of being able to simply call up a subject on the computer and receive a list of all the photographs available on that subject.

We are also making sure that we have copies of each original photo. Bruce McMaster is re-photographing any that are not already duplicated. This provides a negative from which to make further copies and ensures that the originals are preserved from further deterioration.

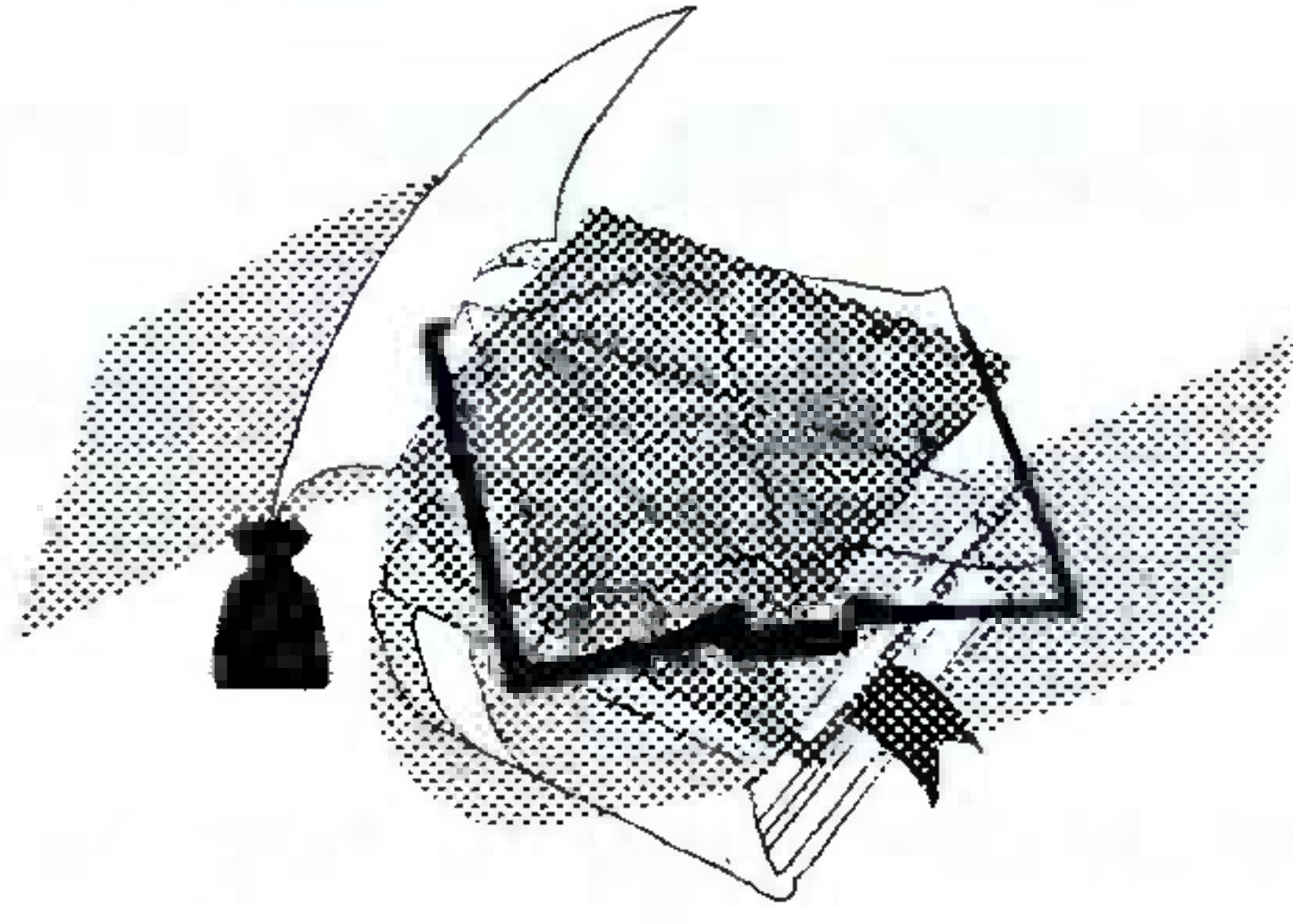
We recently had the original 'Rintoull Certificates' copied on a laser copier and members were most impressed with the duplicates, which are framed and hanging in our Centre. The four certificates are invitations received by John Rintoull, well known Morwell pioneer, to attend various festivities celebrating the opening of Federal Parliament in 1901. The originals have now been properly archived for their preservation.

End of Year Dinner:

Don't forget to keep **Tuesday, November 17** free for our final 1998 meeting and dinner. Faye and Boyd Thompson will be our guests for the evening. Time and venue will be decided at our next meeting and advertised in the November Newsletter (which will be issued a little earlier than usual for that reason).

**NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 15 - 7.30PM -
MORWELL TOWN HALL. Guest Speaker: Mr Tom Lawless**

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S FACT FILE:



MECHANIC'S INSTITUTE HALL.

The Mechanics Institute building was located on the south-west corner of Tarwin and George streets, it was erected circa 1880. The building housed a library and a hall suitable for concerts and meetings. By 1905 the building had fallen into disrepair and moves were afoot to demolish and rebuild in Commercial Road. However it was decided to retain and renovate the existing structure, the revamped building was opened on 19th. December 1907.

In the early hours of 10th. January 1935 a spectacular fire totally destroyed the main hall. Two marble tablets erected to the memory of Privates G. BOLDING and T. ROSE who lost their lives serving in the Boer War were destroyed. The public library lost its entire stock of 2,000 books, the Clerk of Courts room and all its documents were lost, lost too were the honour boards and regalia housed in the Lodge Room.

After much argument and haggling it was decided to incorporate all the lost facilities into one new building. This building was the new Town Hall which was officially opened in October 1936.



Above: The Mechanics Institute Morwell. Built about 1880 on the S.W. corner of Tarwin Street and George Street. Revamped in 1907. Burnt down in 1935.

MEMORIES OF THE MIRBOO LINE

In the 1870s, selectors began taking up land in the South Gippsland forests. The roads in the area were in an appalling condition. A correspondent to the Melbourne 'Argus' on February 21, 1873 wrote of the road to the Turtons Creek goldfield: '*At present (the track) is only about a yard wide with a like depth of mud from end to end and so densely shrouded with vegetation that it cannot get a chance of drying*' - and that was in summer!

Agitation soon began for railway access to the Gippsland area. In 1874 work was begun on the railway line between Sale and Melbourne amid much bickering in Parliament about the route it would take through the Melbourne suburbs. Eventually it was agreed to begin construction at Oakleigh and worry about the metropolitan end later. Construction then began at Oakleigh and Sale simultaneously! The Oakleigh to Sale stage was officially opened on March 7, 1878. A special train with 300 dignitaries aboard made the trip from Oakleigh in five hours (compared with thirty to thirty-six hours in 1877 over the incomplete sections of the line) and was greeted at Sale by the firing of salutes, cheering crowds and a lavish banquet. The opening of the final stage, from Oakleigh to Princes Bridge was similarly celebrated, on April 2, 1879, with His Excellency the Governor, the Marquis of Normanby, and 600 dignitaries conveyed by two special trains to Oakleigh for the festivities. The first train to run right through from Melbourne to Sale on April 2 also brought Morwell's first teacher, John Irving.

Naturally the settlers to the north and south of the railway line were anxious for a share in the transport revolution and railway leagues sprang up all over the place. A deputation of South East Gippsland residents, in May 1880, petitioned Duncan Gillies, Minister for Railways, to agree to the construction of a rail link from the Main Gippsland Railway through to Welshpool and in 1880 the construction of a line from Morwell to Mirboo was authorised.

Mr John White won the tender to build 20 miles 15 chains of railway from Morwell to Mirboo. Warwick Eunson, in "The Unfolding Hills" writes of the Morwell-Mirboo line:
"Construction began in February 1883, and difficulties not initially appreciated by the contractor emerged. There were a number of substantial cuttings through clay; the clearing of timber, from heavy to very dense, and the absence of rock deposits suitable for ballast. A further requirement was twenty-eight bridges in twenty miles. To these difficulties were yet to be added winters of flood-producing rains, collapsed embankments and the deterioration in industrial relations. John White refused to raise the wage of 7/6d. per day. Argument ended in strike, and a walk-off became general as winter bit into the miserable tent town accommodation. The work force dropped from 350 men to 40. White's contract was cancelled on June 1, 1883. Mr Duncan Gillies made a special visit and ordered that free railway passes should be issued to men stranded on the site, to seek work elsewhere."

A new contractor, John Robb, took over construction in January 1884, a source of rock for ballast was found just west of Yinnar and a spur line of about two miles was constructed to this quarry from the main line at the eight-mile peg. Townships grew up at the seven-mile and twelve-mile pegs on the line and these later became known as Yinnar and Boolarra respectively. These two sections were opened for traffic on April 10, 1885 and the folk of Boolarra put on an 'entertainment' for locals and workers on the line, which commenced on Easter Monday and continued all through Monday night and most of Tuesday as well.

There were numerous unlicensed 'booths' and grog-shanties along the length of the railway during its construction. A correspondent to the Gippsland Mercury wrote, on April 16, 1885:

'When I was passing through the 16 Mile (Darlimurla) I saw two of the rough fraternity sitting down very uncomfortable looking, and I asked a vendor of ginger beer what was the matter with them, and he said they were having a glass of ginger beer at his booth when they quarrelled and grasped each other and rolled into the fire and capsized a fountain of boiling water on themselves.'

A number of complaints about these 'ginger beer vendors' resulted in 'a raid on the transgressors with the result that 5 of them have received letters of invitation to the next Court of Petty Sessions at Morwell.'

On December 3, 1885, the contractor's engine rolled into the township of North Mirboo (originally known as The Terminus, then as North Mirboo and later as Mirboo North) for the first time and the local publican rolled out a barrel of beer to the railway reserve in celebration. The official opening of the final stage of the line was scheduled for Thursday, January 7, 1886. A few days before the event torrential rain started and continued for the following week. However, the celebrations went ahead with a special train from Melbourne bringing Railway Commissioner A.J. Agg, four parliamentarians and numerous other dignitaries whom it picked up on the way.

A marquee was erected on the railway reserve, caterers and a dance band from Melbourne were hired and a ball was held in the new state school which was nearing completion.

Over the years the Morwell-Mirboo Railway proved a lifeline to the residents of the country to the south of Morwell, carrying livestock, produce, fuel and passengers.

However, the advent of motor transport and better roads gradually made the line uneconomical. The last passenger train ran on Saturday September 7, 1968 and the line was finally closed on June 30, 1974.

Some Bits and Pieces:

* In the 1930s, Doctor Mitchell of Morwell made a regular Thursday train trip to Boolarra. He would alight at Yinnar and conduct consultations and minor surgery at the Yinnar Hotel while shunting was in progress, then continue his journey to Boolarra where he again offered his services until it was time for the return trip to Morwell.

* Natalie Roy, of Budgeree, came to the area as a Land Army girl towards the end of the Second World War. She says: *'I arrived in Boolarra aboard "the Flea" - the rail motor from Morwell - so called because of its uneven "hopping" motion. (The locals declared it had square wheels). Travelling out from Morwell, I was intrigued to see, as we neared Yinnar, a dog racing across the paddocks towards the train. As he approached, the driver threw out a rolled up paper. The dog caught it and turned towards home. I found out later that the dog belonged to the Firmin family and that he collected the paper for them daily in the same way.'*

* The late Vi Leviston recalled going to school in the early years of this century at Hazelwood Ridge School close to the railway. Each morning the driver of the daily goods train would blow his whistle as he left Hazelwood Station and again at the next road crossing (McNabb's Road). The rule for start of school each day was that, when the second whistle sounded, the children had to go into class. On mornings with a heavy frost, the train always had difficulty gaining traction on the icy rails as it left Hazelwood to travel up the slight rise to the next crossing and on these mornings the second whistle was often a long time coming - a 'win' for the kids, though one wonders what fun it was to play outside in the frost!

Vi and her four sisters were all excellent horsewomen and competed in picnic races, gymkhanas and agricultural shows from Trafalgar to Sale and Mirboo North to Heyfield. Their horses were transported by rail from Hazelwood Station to these events.

* Lou Bond recalls playing football for Yinnar in the late 'twenties. Teams from Morwell and Yinnar would travel by train to play against Mirboo. Umpires came up from Melbourne to Morwell on the Saturday morning train and returned on Saturday evening. The length of the game was often determined by the turn-around time of the Morwell-Mirboo train. If it was late leaving Morwell, umpires and players would change into their playing gear en route and the game commenced immediately they arrived. The train would sometimes wait for the match to finish, even though this would mean that the Sale-Melbourne train would have to wait in Morwell for its arrival so that the umpires could return on it to Melbourne!

* During the 1930s and 1940s caterpillar plagues came through Gippsland several times. Caterpillars on the rails would destroy the traction and the fireman would have to sprinkle ballast on the rails, particularly between Hazelwood and McNabb's, to enable the train to negotiate the hill.

* From the 'Morwell Advertiser' 14 January 1898:

'The Mirboo train on Wednesday between Boolarra and Darlimurla travelled through the dense, blinding, suffocating smoke, and occasionally through the actual flames (of one of the worst bushfires in the area).'

MORWELL'S CLUB HOTEL

In the early 1880s, there were four hotels in Commercial Road. On the corner of Commercial Road and Hazelwood Road was the *Railway Hotel* (later known as *Collyer's*, then as the *Cricketer's Arms*). Further east, on the site now occupied by Manny's Market, was *Fitzpatrick's Hotel*, later taken over by William Murdoch. A few doors further east again was *Kelleher's Hotel*, which became the *Club Hotel* and, on the site of the present Commonwealth Bank, was the *Morwell Hotel*, run by Christy Walsh.

The last of these to remain in operation, the *Club Hotel*, closed recently.

Edmond Kelleher was born in Ireland in 1850. He arrived in Melbourne in 1871 and worked as a farmer and as an overseer on several railway building projects, including the Gippsland line. With his brother John, he opened a store in Morwell in 1876 and about this time he built the *Club Hotel*, then known simply as *Kelleher's*. Edmond Kelleher was a Justice of the Peace and was a member of the first Shire Council of Morwell.

In 1886-87, Kelleher replaced the original timber structure with a two-storey brick building, with thirty rooms. The architect was Mr Campbell and the builder William Tulloch of Morwell.

Edmond Kelleher died in 1911 and it is probably around this time that the hotel became known as *Conlan's Club Hotel*. Member Lou Bond recalls that it was *Conlan's* when the Bond family came to Morwell in 1916. Lou's father was offered the chance to buy the hotel at that time for £4,500.

Don McKay, who had earlier been licensee of the *Cricketer's Arms*, bought the *Club Hotel* and had it extensively renovated in 1931. After Don died, his sister, Ruby McKay, ran the hotel until the 1960s, when it was bought by the local syndicate which owned it until its closure.

The balcony, seen in the photograph on page 6, is unsupported by posts but later photos show the addition of verandah posts which came right to the outer edge of the footpath. In the mid sixties, Council concern over the possibility of cars hitting verandah posts led to the removal of these posts from buildings in the Central Business District. The balcony was also removed around this time and the facade modernised to its present appearance.

So, the last of Commercial Road's hotels has closed after approximately 120 years, but the building will continue to provide hospitality. New owners, Mr and Mrs Carlo Villani, will shortly open a branch of the popular *La Porchetta* chain of Pizza restaurants in the ground floor of the premises.

ABATTOIR CLOSES

Another Morwell landmark is likely to disappear soon. The owners of Evenden's abattoir, on Latrobe Road, will hold a clearing sale shortly and the building is likely to be demolished.

Original owners of the abattoir, Budes, had a house, and a small slaughterhouse, in the area now occupied by the Morwell Open Cut. When the site was taken over by the S.E.C. the house was moved to Latrobe Road, to the site of the former Morwell Flax Mill and the abattoir was built on the concrete floor which was all that was left of the mill when it was destroyed by a bushfire in 1944.

Don Evenden bought the abattoir about 15 years ago, operating it until recently. The site has now been acquired by Yallourn Energy and will become part of the new Maryvale Coalfield.

MORWELL'S CLUB HOTEL

THEN



Photo: Morwell Historical Society Collection

AND NOW



The Express, Thursday, 25 June, 1998