

**MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**

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**Vol 16 No 5****September 1999**Sec/Editor: Elsie McMaster- Tel: 03 51341149  
2 Harold St Morwell 3840***Welcome to the September Newsletter******THANKS!***

We have received a number of donations, in cash and in kind, over the past few weeks and our warm thanks go to:

\* ***Gippsland Water*** for the donation of 52 volumes of rate records relating to the old *Morwell Waterworks Trust* and *Morwell Sewerage Authority*. Under amalgamation, *Gippsland Water* was not required to keep the records of the former water bodies but, instead of shredding them (which would no doubt have saved a lot of time and trouble) they decided to sort them and offer them to the appropriate local historical societies. These records are a real treasure trove containing a wealth of information for genealogists and local historians and we appreciate *Gippsland Water's* gesture in preserving them.

\* ***Marion Holding***, of Lakes Entrance, formerly of Morwell, for photographs and information about St Mary's Anglican Church, Morwell, and a number of newspaper cuttings relating to local events.

\* ***Flo Lamb*** of Morwell, for some great photos of Morwell township and of farming in the Driffield area.

\* ***Sheila Moody*** of Morwell who, hearing that we had very little information and few photographs of sporting clubs has put a great deal of time and energy over the past few weeks into locating information about athletics, little athletics, basketball, tennis and dancing.

\* ***LaTrobe Shire*** for a donation of \$200 in recognition of members' manning the *Municipal Memorabilia Exhibition* earlier this year and also a grant of \$500 to assist with our general expenses in collecting and preserving historical material.

\* ***The Members who manned the Morwell Home & Lifestyle Expo***  
Our stand at the Expo last month drew quite a lot of interest and several members of the public were able to contribute to our information on LaMode, Purvis Stores and Morwell in the '50s.

***MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL DINNER*** will be held on ***Tuesday, November 16*** at a venue yet to be decided. (further information from Elsie McMaster). Guest speaker at the dinner will be ***Mr Greg Hansford*** of the ***Walhalla Heritage League***.

***NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, September 21 - 7.30 pm -  
Morwell Town Hall***

Guest for the evening will be ***Mrs Margaret Donovan (nee Bridle)*** who will speak about the Bridle family and will bring with her a 150-year-old quilt made by her great-grandmother.

## **GRANT APPLICATION**

*The LaTrobe Shire Combined History Group* consisting of the Boolarra, Moe, Morwell, Traralgon, Yallourn North and Yinnar Historical Societies and the Mid Gippsland Family History Society, has applied for a grant, under the *Arts Victoria* Local History Grants Program, to have the minute books and rate books of the former municipalities which now make up the LaTrobe Shire converted to multi image CCITT G4 TIFF files and written to CD. (In other words, to have them put on computer!). This is quite an expensive exercise but the records are at present not easily accessible to the public and some are in a fragile condition and in need of conservation. If our application is successful, those records most in need of attention will be dealt with first. The Australian Securities and Investments Commission in Traralgon is willing to undertake the project. The result of the application should be known at the end of November.

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## **TRARALGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY COACH TRIP to the Lilydale Historical Museum - Sunday, October 24.**

The museum features Dame Nellie Melba and a local history display of Lilydale. Cost per person is \$20 and participants should take their own lunch - tea and coffee will be available. The coach leaves Traralgon at 9.30 am. Those interested should contact Mrs Dawn Hustler - Tel: 51744540 or Mrs Valma Plant - Tel: 51742096

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## **POWERWORKS NIGHT TOUR OF YALLOURN MINE & POWER STATION - November 1st - to celebrate Mining Week.**

**Cost: \$42.50 per head all-inclusive.** The evening will start at *Powerworks*, Morwell with drinks, savouries and an overview of the mining industry as it was and is. Then a tour of the area in the double-decker bus, then return to *Powerworks* for a three-course meal and drinks, with cheese and port to finish off the evening.

Bookings: *Powerworks* - 03 51353415

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**\*\*For the electronically inclined** Traralgon Historical Society has an excellent web site at <http://www.gardencentre.com.au/traralgonhistory/>

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## ***A Hundred Years Ago - 1899***

- The Rosella Preserving Co made its first tomato sauce in Melbourne
- The first wireless message to be transmitted in Australia - sent over a distance of 600 yards!
- Fitzroy defeated South Melbourne to win their second VFL Premiership
- Sept. 3 - Sir Frank Macfarlane Burnett was born
- Sept. 24 Sir William Dobell was born
- October 28 Victoria's first contingent of volunteers for the Boer War left Melbourne aboard the *Medic*- local men Privates Bolding, Bruton, Cook, Cooper, Holmes, Nadenbousch and Rose were in the first contingent. Other Locals to volunteer were Michael McDonald, J. McInnes, Frank Walker, Charles Shaw and Alex McMillan. Bolding, Rose, McDonald and Walker died in South Africa.

## ***MY WORKING YEARS IN MORWELL***

***Jean Mooney***

During the war we had air raid shelters, blackouts at all the windows, and all the cars had to have hoods over their headlights so they could not be seen from the air. There was a fear that the S.E.C would be a main target for the enemy.

I used to ride my pushbike from Yallourn and from Morwell to and fro most Sundays to have dinner with my family. I used to ride through the Hazelwood Flats, a much shorter distance but a gravel road. That road was where the Hazelwood Pondage is now.

We were always kept busy at the Cafe. Every few weeks the Light Horse Brigade from South Gippsland would come in for a meal before they caught the evening train to Melbourne, going back from leave - almost 50 men to be served with meals quickly.

Working in jobs those days, conditions were very different to now. You had to get down on your knees to clean the floors - no mod cons such as vacuum cleaners, no carpets unless you were rich. Also, the Government didn't help people like they do today. You knew nearly everyone living in the town. It was like that until the S.E.C. came to the Morwell. Both Morwell and Yallourn were very friendly towns.

After some time I left the Cafe to work at the Flax Mill situated down Latrobe Road where the Sunday Market is today. Flax was very important to the war effort. It produced linen thread for sewing uniforms and making parachute harness, webbing belts rope, canvas. Flax was stripped of its seeds for linseed oil.

The mill operated until the bad fires of February 14, 1944. Flax was spread on the ground to dry, and on that day the wind was so strong it blew burning flax all over the place, lighting fires ahead as it went. Quite a few homes burnt down in Papyrus and Margaret Streets. When my brother Eric came home from the war he bought one of these blocks and built his house on it - he had to have a plan which suited the pipes and gutters which were already there.

I only worked about six or seven weeks at the Flax Mill, spreading and turning the flax in the paddocks. If it rained we sat in a tent playing cards until it stopped. That job didn't suit me. I rented a room, with the use of a kitchen, with Mr & Mrs R. Butters in Collins Street. My people were still living out on their farm.

I read in the local paper of a vacancy for a female Grocer's Assistant at *W.A. Purvis Stores* in Commercial Road. I applied for the job and luckily was successful in getting the position. The Manager, Mr Bill Panther, was a very nice man and great to work for. He worked side by side with us all day. Everyone respected him but he was also good fun. I always wanted to work behind a grocery counter. There were only two or three men left behind the counter - the others had joined the Forces and girls were doing their jobs. I and two other girls worked there.

When I first started I couldn't add up the dockets whilst customers were talking to me. I would move down further to add up behind a stack of Weeties or large tins of jam on the counter. Very soon I could add and talk at the same time.

### ***MY WORKING YEARS IN MORWELL (cont)***

Mr Panther would help us weigh up sugar, rice, sago, icing sugar, castor sugar, dried fruits - everything had to be weighed up and packed in brown paper bags. Biscuits, sweet and dry, came in large tins. We weighed them when wanted, and sold broken biscuits. Down in the grain shed, wheat, bran, pollard, potatoes, onions all had to be weighed up. Customers brought in their own bottles for vinegar and kerosene.

We cut the bacon on a large cutter and wires with pegs on each end were used to cut large blocks of cheese. Ration books were in use at that time.

We sat on the bags of wheat etc to have our cuppa at tea break. Whoever went for smoko put the jug on - only two staff were to leave the shop at a time.

Sometimes I would be asked to go in the office to work on the books but I preferred being behind the counter. Across from the grocery they sold hardware - everything, really. They had lovely china ware and we girls would be anxious for the boxes to be opened. We usually ended up buying most of the china ware.

When the war finished the men gradually came back to work. A few girls were kept on and luckily I was one of them. It was here I met my husband-to-be, Perc Mooney, who had come home from the war and applied for a job as grocer at Purvis Stores branch at Moe ( a job he had worked at in Erica before he enlisted). He was sent here to Morwell, accommodation booked at the old Coffee Palace on the Highway, then owned by Mr and Mrs Stan Broadbent - there were only about three places to stay in those days.

I always enjoyed working at Purvis's and the men were great to work with. They blamed the girls for any mistakes - but we knew they didn't mean it! Perc and I worked together for about three-and-a-half years. Then, about late 1949, Perc went to a job at the S.E.C. stores in Wallace Street, serving petrol and tools in the store. He left there and went to work for Purvis Stores in Traralgon. The S.E.C were putting men off work. Most workers were married men with families and Perc, being single decided to leave.

We were married in January 1952 and after a few weeks Perc was asked if he wanted his job back at the S.E.C. He was transferred to the Main Office in the stores workshop section and worked there for nearly thirty-five years until he retired in 1984. We bought our house at 12 Travers Street three weeks before we married. It was just a house on a large block, no garden, fence or anything. There were only four other homes in the street, gravel footpaths, no sealed road into the oval. The street had lovely date palms in front of each block. Water was laid on to the homes but there was no sewerage for three or four years after we moved in.

We had nothing but what money we had we put as deposit on the house. We went without lots of things we needed - did the washing in a copper for about seven years. We had an ice chest - the iceman called once or twice a week. We walked everywhere we had to go and didn't buy a car until we had paid our home off in eight years. We bought a few things then including an old Skoda car for a hundred pounds.

**To be Continued**

# ***WORKING IN MORWELL DISTRICT***

## ***The Timber Industry***

**Lou Bond**

The experienced bushman or timber worker was not in great numbers in the 1920s. We were fortunate to have a father who had gained a lot of knowledge working in sawmills, fencing and general bush work and, after long hours observing and helping him and a Mr Jack Toogood, a local timber getter, we gradually learnt most of the arts of timber getting and its uses.

It was in my early teens that I watched Jack Toogood fell a four-foot-diameter spotted gum tree to split pickets for use in pig and calf paddock fences on our farm. Two men felled the tree, then its trunk was sawn into three foot lengths using a six foot cross cut saw. The tree trunk was then split into the required sized sections by using a maul and wedges. There was a special tool for the splitting of pickets and palings, this being a heavy, two inch iron blade a foot in length, tapered on one edge, with a two inch diameter strong wooden handle of eighteen inches in length. The section or billet of timber to be split would be held almost upright, the splitting tool would be placed across the grain in the timber at the required thickness and forced into it by striking the tool with a wooden mallet. The tool was then levered to tear the timber apart and this method was known as 'backing' by timber workers. Pickets were usually three to four inches wide and thousands could be split from one tree.

Palings were obtained in the same manner using a similar tool but the timber had to be a free-splitting variety before this was attempted. To decide on a particular tree for working, a six inch square of bark was removed from the tree trunk, then a similar sized piece of the trunk, to a depth of two inches, was also removed. The piece of wood would then be stood on end and lightly split with a sharp axe. An experienced bushman could tell whether the tree was free-splitting or unsuitable to work. When splitting fence posts, rails or timbers of any length, the decision arrived at by this method was important as it would mean a good day's work, or energy wasted, by the number of posts split during the day.

If it was decided to fell the tree that had been 'tried', a nine to twelve inch 'scarf' was cut into the trunk at waist height, in the direction that it was expected the tree would fall. The remainder of the bark was then removed at scarf level and a six foot cross cut saw, operated by two men, was then used to fell the tree in the required direction. It was usual for two men to work as a team in forest work and it was considered dangerous work, with very sharp axes and other hazards. When the tree had fallen, it was measured for the various lengths required - six feet for posts, nine feet for rails, twelve for stays and three for pickets. The bark was then removed, by the use of axes and sharp splitting bars, from the trunk, all scrub and vegetation cut and removed from near the fallen tree for free movement, then the tree was cut by cross cut saw into the required lengths. Every second length of trunk was then rolled one full roll so as to expose the end of the section to be split. We always used a six pound sledge hammer and tempered steel gades (similar to wedges) in preference to the wooden maul and iron wedges. There were eight gades in a set: two entering gades (nine-inch-long, thinly tapered tools), four shorter but thicker gades, and two nine inch gades of a heavier type. The entering gades would be gently tapped by hammer into the end of the log about six inches from the top and bottom, in line with the centre of the tree trunk.

## ***The Timber Industry (cont)***

If the tree was reasonably free splitting, a crack would appear along the top end of the log and this was followed by the other gades that were driven along this crack until it was opened to the required width. A sharp axe was then used to cut any splinters of wood that were holding the log together. The log was again rolled over with the use of crowbars and the same routine was completed. If the log still held together, the crowbars were driven in the opened crack and levered in the opposite direction and generally the trunk would fall into two halves. These would again be halved by using the same method of splitting and this was repeated until the required sized post was produced. Most strainer or anchor posts, of seven foot lengths, were cut from round timbers about fifteen to eighteen inches in diameter and many people used round poles of about six inches in diameter for stays.

Many telephone poles, shed poles and mill logs were obtained in the Haunted Hills forests. The cartage of needed timbers was by various transport. If we had a large contract for fencing, hundreds of posts could be needed to do the job. Then we would hire a bullock wagon and team to haul the materials from the bush area. We were fortunate that, in the 1920s, the last private bullock team in the Driffield area, owned by Mr "Bill" King, was usually available, and it was quite an experience to see "Old Bill" on his old mare, with his long whip coiled over his shoulder, riding along beside his plodding team. Most bullock drivers have the image of being loud of mouth and noted for their profanity but "Old Bill" was a quiet and gentle man, only whipping his team as a last resort to haul the wagon from a bog, or overcome a steep hill on a bush track.

Another form of transport was by horses and sledge if the country was wet but this form of carriage was for short distances only, perhaps to cart to the nearest trafficable road where the timber could be loaded onto larger vehicles. Horses and drays were our usual form of transport in the drier months and most of our posts were carted in this manner. For the long, heavy timbers such as telephone poles and shed poles, this was left to the bullock wagons, for the bullocks were also used to roll the poles and logs onto the wagons

When new bridges were being built, a bushman would 'cruise' the forest for days to find the species of tree needed then look for the required size and length of trunk. The necessary number of logs would then be hauled to a chosen area and 'squared' to the size required. This was done by a 'brodaxe' - a tool twice the size of an ordinary axe and a lot heavier. The use of this axe was specialised work and was mastered by only a few men. An expert with a broadaxe could square a log to make it appear as if it had been sawn at a mill. This work was very dangerous as the axeman straddled the log and the least mis-hit could almost sever the man's leg with the razor-sharp, heavy axe.

Bushmen were generally very proud of their axes and would very seldom allow another person to use them. The tools used for timber work by two men would be: Two falling axes, one splitting axe, one hammer, eight gades (set), one crosscut saw (six foot) and two splitting or crowbars. It must be remembered that all the methods of timber getting or splitting described here were used well before the advent of chain saws, and the sophisticated methods of timber splitting and mechanical motorised hauling and loading machinery. This was especially true of the cutting of pulp wood which was cut by axe into six foot lengths, loaded onto trucks by hand and again manhandled to unload at the mill. All the modern methods that we see today are a flow on from the technology learned from World War 2 and applied to private enterprise, which took most of the hard work out of bush work.

**To be Continued**