

MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

published monthly, except December

The Society meets every 3rd Tuesday of the month at
7.30 pm at Collins Street Primary School

Secretary: Mrs. E. McMaster phone 34 1149

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AUGUST 1988

WELCOME TO THE AUGUST NEWSLETTER

This newsletter continues with contributions recording memories of times past. Eric Lubcke must be thanked for tracking down the story of Ron McPhee. The first instalment commences in Tasmania and shall continue in the September newsletter. Jess Cafiso has been searching for memories as well. Jess managed to convince Perc Mooney that a contribution would be appreciated; this newsletter contains the result. Thanks Perc. All other cotributions would be thankfully received.

* **Big bridge day in Morwell**

PIONEERS of the old Morwell Bridge and Morwell West area will be honored at a special ceremony on October 30 at 1.30pm.

A bridge, aptly named 'Morwell Bridge' at the rear of the Morwell Civic Centre will be opened to the public and there will be a social morning and reunion of pioneering families at the new bridge site starting at 9am. Bring your own lunch and refreshments.

All Latrobe Valley residents are urged to attend the historic opening as a tribute to the district's early pioneers.

For more information on the reunion and bridge dedication contact Bob Meredith on 34 3984, Gwen Graham on 74 1929 or Lois Starkey on 74 0473.

L.V EXPRESS
JULY 22, 1988

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1988 Bi-Centenary Year.

Morwell and District

This month we continue to look at life in Morwell and District during the boom years of the 1950's. However, this time it is from a more personal daily life angle. So below you will find reminiscences from two of our members. We are leaving you to guess their identity.

Morwell in the Fifties.

Contribution 1

I arrived in Morwell (then a whistle stop on the train) to begin a new life after being discharged from the Army, having served my country during the 1939-45 war. I had anticipated that I would stop here about six months (in this one-horse town) to build up my purse and then move to greener fields but alas! I was drawn to the people in Morwell. I had gained employment with W. H. Purvis Stores Pty Ltd., one of the major private employers of the district at that point in time.

Morwell and its people were very friendly to the newcomers who fitted into their lifestyle. It was not long before one became one of the locals and joined in the activities of the town such as tennis, badminton, golf and football. For me it was only social friendly games against Connelly Boarding House. We from Broadbent Boarding House were their opponents. I am not sure to this day, who won these yearly football matches, but they were great fun. Tennis was and still played on the Morwell South Courts, badminton played in the Karma theatre, golf at the Yallourn Golf Course which was situated near and around the Yallourn Hospital. Both the hospital and the course have now disappeared

into the Yallourn Open Cut as you know.

With so few cars available one often had to walk to the Golf Course and back. Other interests were drama, dances, cards, pictures, pigeon club. The Football Clubs' debutante balls always created much amusement as the girls and boys would exchange roles.

Most Saturday nights the locals would catch "The Cattle Truck Semi Passenger Service", ex Yallourn depot to the Yinnar Dances - wonderful memories are treasured by many who travelled on that bus service.

The Morwell Pigeon Club was formed during this period and I believe it still exists today. In the fifties we used to take our birds to Trafalgar for training flights back to Morwell. The birds always beat us home.

The Morwell Players was formed in 1946 from interested people in all walks of life - every town or village in the Valley and beyond had their own Drama Clubs and competitions were divided into regions with sections competing in the finals which could be held anywhere in Victoria.

Anyone not interested in physical sport could always spend some time at the local 'watering holes' namely 'McKay's' and 'Quins' hotels.

If none of the aforementioned recreations was of interest you could play parlour games or sing around the piano or pianolas.

All this was prior to the prevalence of the private motor car and the advent of T.V.

Morwell and District in the 50'sContribution 2

We came to Morwell West in 1950, my husband having obtained a job with the S.E.C. at Yallourn. As we settled into our new abode we counted ourselves very lucky indeed. We had a house, about 4 acres of land, a cow, a separator, a garden, 'chooks', enough furniture to get by on, a briquette hot water service, (what luxury!) and even a tennis court over-run with weeds. We even had a car - a royal looking black studebaker sedan, albeit a temperamental lady even giving my mechanically minded husband trouble often in diagnosing her ailments. Why such vehicles should always be considered feminine I don't know. We didn't have a refrigerator or a telephone or much money (about 2/- in the bank), neither did we have any debts.

We soon had friends, card evenings, sing songs around the piano, family picnics, exploring and enjoying the beautiful hills of Gippsland, and sometimes down to the sea. These were concerts, social evenings and church services in the school and we sometimes went to the pictures in Yallourn or the Karma in Morwell. Sometimes, too, we went to a show put on by the Morwell Players or other drama groups.

It was not long before we could afford a telephone and a refrigerator and a little Hoover washing machine. We were even able to make the tennis court fit to play on. When the 'Studi' stopped dead never to go again we were without transport (except a bike) for a short time but then bought a little Ford 'Ute' - much more reliable although we missed the spaciousness of the 'Studi'.

By 1958 we even had a T.V. and also many more children appearing constantly in our lounge

room. Probably the Godridge family were relieved. They were the first family in Morwell West to have a T.V. in 1956 and hordes of children used to rush from school to invade their living room.

There were some draw backs like the odour from the A.P.M. and the coal dust from the open cut but over all life was good for us in the 50's.

N.B. Correction to Bi-Centenary Morwell and District notes July Newsletter Page 2

Line 1 The 40's and 50's were Morwell's boom years.

Line 13 - In 1938-39 Morwell was sewered not severed.

MECHANIC'S INSTITUTES.

A request has been received from the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands (see following letter) for information about mechanic's institutes and halls in our area.

Halls listed in the computer printout which accompanied this letter are:

Boolarra M.I.

Boolarra South

Budgerie M.I.

Gunyah Gunyah

Hazelwood North

Jumbuk

Livingston Hall

Yinnar M.I.

Morwell M.I.

Questions:

1. Does building still exist?
If yes, what is present use?
If no, what happened?
2. What date was building erected?
3. What is present condition of building?
4. Brief description of building.
5. Has a local history been written? If yes, title, author, publisher, date?

To this list we have added the following: Ryton "Excelsior Mech. Inst.", Gunyah Junction, Mirboo East, Hazelwood South, Hazelwood Estate.

The information contained in the books listed below will be forwarded to the Dept. of Conservation, Forests and Lands, but if you have any further information or further halls to add to the list, please contact Elsie McMaster - (051)341149 - before the deadline of September 16. Any photographs, old or new, would be appreciated. Our photographer will copy these so that you need not part with the original, even for a short time.

Books containing information on the above halls:

A Tale From Tipperary To Gunyah Gunyah - Bryan Fitzgerald

Journey To The Eighties In Gippsland - A.A.York

The Twelve Mile Peg - Boolarra. - Roslyn M. Carstairs.

Seventy Years Around Ryton Junction - E.J.Littlejohn

Yinnar 1874-1974 - ed. Karl Shoemaker

Steamhorse To Power - Prue McGoldrick.

A Souvenir History of Morwell - I.T.Maddern.

FROM OUR JULY MEETING.

The main business of the meeting was to vote on the resolutions concerning the incorporation of Morwell Historical Society. These were:

1. That Morwell Historical Society become incorporated pursuant to the provisions of the Associations Incorporation Act 1981.
2. That the Association adopt the Statement of Purposes and Constitution and Rules presented to the meeting as amended.
3. That Elsie McMaster be appointed Public Officer of the Incorporated Association.

These resolutions were all carried unanimously and the final steps to incorporation are now being taken. The matter should be finalised within about a month.

MEMORIAL BRIDGE.

Several of our members have been very much involved with the planning and construction of the bridge over Waterhole Creek, in the grounds of Morwell Civic Centre, to commemorate the towns of Morwell Bridge and Morwell West, which fell victim to the coal-winning activities of the S.E.C.

The bridge is in place and a dedication ceremony is planned for Sunday, October 30th. More details will follow in later newsletters.

WHO AM I?

I was born in Sale in 1878 and moved to Traralgon in 1896 when my father, a surveyor, took up a position with a legal firm there.

While at school I won the prize in a state-wide Shakespeare competition three years in succession.

When I was 20, I moved to Melbourne to try my luck as a writer. I became editor of the children's page of "The Leader" and my first book began as a serial in this paper.

I wrote thirty-eight books altogether. The best-known were a series of fifteen about the Linton family's squatting run in Victoria.

Your Ref. 87/3808
Our Ref. 25/7/88
Date

The Shire Secretary/Town Clerk
As Addressed



Dear Sir/Madam

Survey of Mechanics Institutes and Free Libraries

I write seeking your co-operation in a survey of mechanics institute and free library buildings in Victoria. Over 700 such buildings were constructed between 1839 and the early 1900's as lending libraries, halls, and institutes for adult education generally. With the passage of time many of the buildings have either been demolished or have fallen into disrepair; those that remain seem to be used as public halls, municipal libraries, art galleries, antique shops, scout halls, museums etc.

The survey is being undertaken by Mrs Pam Firth, owner of the old Healesville mechanics institute building (now an art gallery and tea rooms, and recorded by the National Trust in 1983), and is receiving assistance from a number of organizations including the Royal Historical Society, the National Trust, the Ministry for Planning and Environment, and the Ministry for the Arts. This Department is providing clerical and data base assistance.

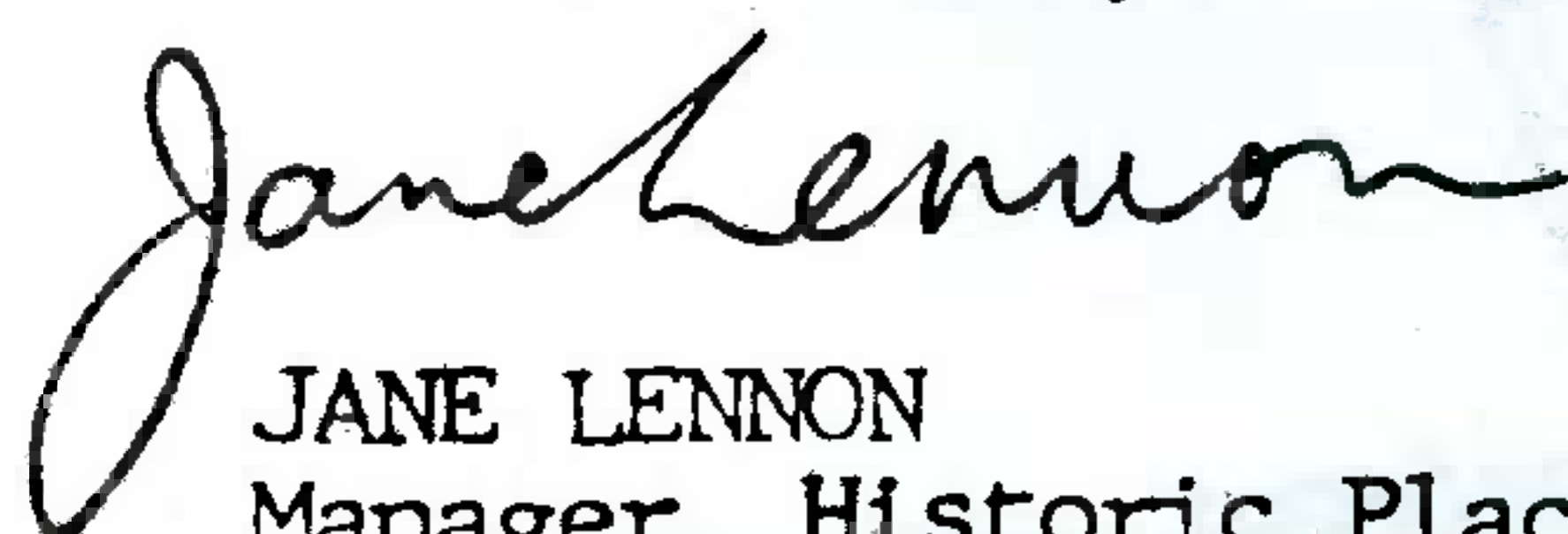
Once the survey is completed, details of each mechanics institute and free library will be published in an illustrated book which will explain the history of the mechanics institute movement and include a photograph or sketch of each building. Hopefully such a book will raise the public's awareness of these interesting and often unusual buildings.

Another purpose of the survey is to find out which of the buildings still exist and to determine what measures are necessary to preserve them. It is expected that, as a result of the investigation, a number of buildings will be nominated for inclusion on the Historic Buildings Register and the Register of the National Estate, thus making them eligible for heritage funding.

The attached questionnaire lists the mechanics institutes and free libraries which are known to have existed in your municipality. The list is not necessarily exhaustive, and you may be able to add others. I would be most grateful if you could arrange for the questionnaire to be completed and returned to this office by Friday 16 September, 1988; if you are able to include photographs (old or new) of any of the buildings this would also be very helpful.

The survey is being run to a strict timetable, and it is hoped all basic data will be assembled by the end of this year. I would therefore appreciate your interest and involvement in this important study.

Yours sincerely,



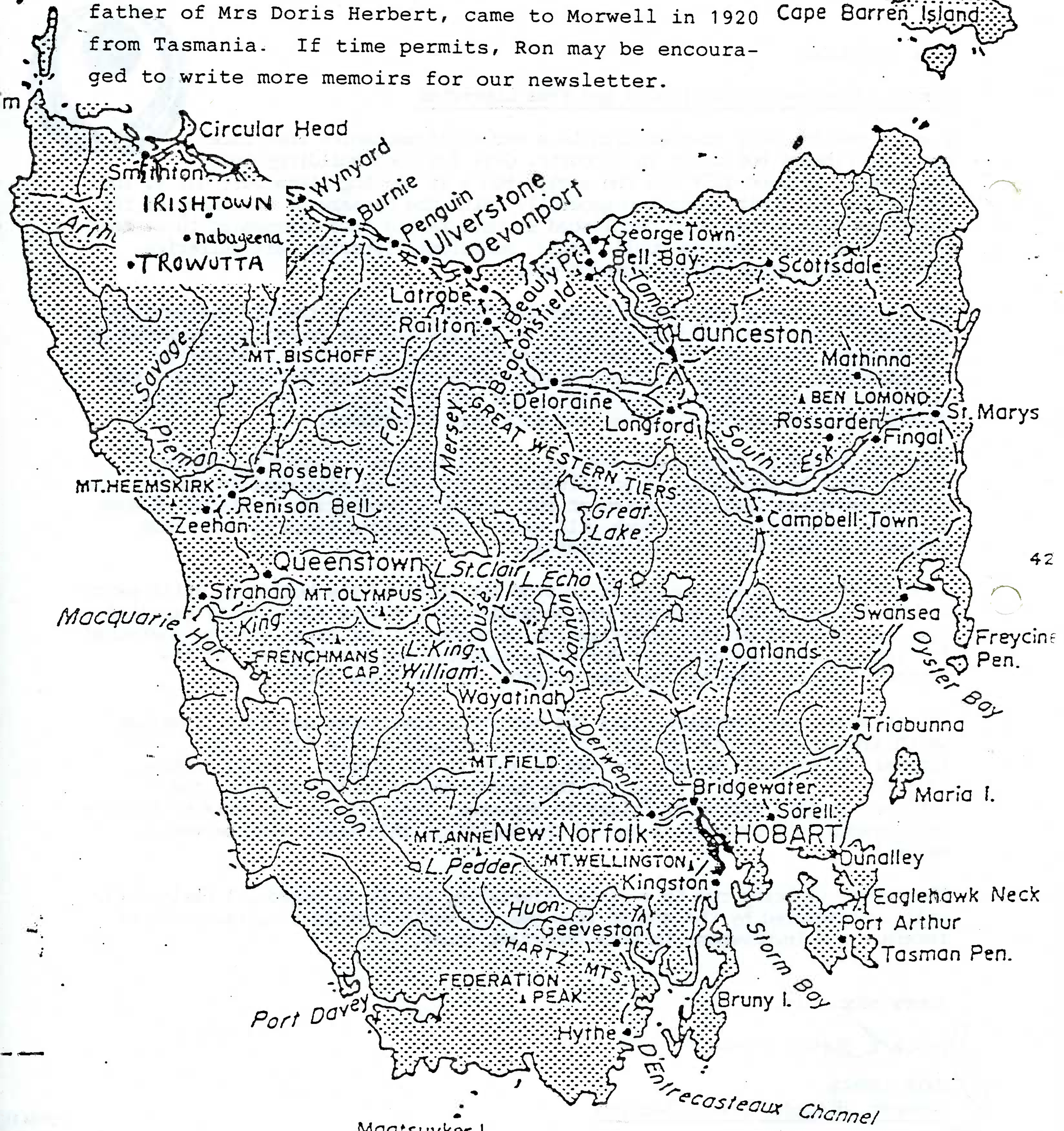
JANE LENNON
Manager, Historic Places Section

BASS STRAIT

Furneaux Group
Cape Barren Island



The Society thanks Mr Ron McPhee for his story. Ron, father of Mrs Doris Herbert, came to Morwell in 1920 from Tasmania. If time permits, Ron may be encouraged to write more memoirs for our newsletter.



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SETTLING IN TASMANIA

This is a story about settlers in the North-West of Tasmania as told recently by my Grandfather, who was born in Irishtown, in 1896, and who will celebrate his 92nd birthday this year.

Pa was born at his parents' home, no hospitals were available.

He went to school at Irishtown - a 4 mile walk, and remembers all students being taken out one day to see the first car ever to be driven into Irishtown - a T Model Ford. He was about 10 then.

At school they learnt to spell by learning 2-letter words first, then when they had finished those, they learnt 3 letter words and so on. He was taken away from school a lot by his father who needed his help on the farm. He left school at 14.

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In Pa's family there were 6 brothers and one sister. His father was one of the largest contractors in the North-West doing road making. Pa and his older brother worked in the bush clearing trees and he has many tales to tell of the different types of timber in Tasmania and his adventures while clearing land.

In Victoria we know of a timber called Tasmanian Oak, however, in Tasmania the common name for this is Stringybark, it grows in what is referred to as stringbark country. When it is cut down and taken to the mill it is known as hardwood, then when air dried and dressed it is known as Tasmanian Oak, but it is all the same tree. Some in 1920 were so big that they cut a complete table top from one tree - no joins.

This was all done at 'Lees Mill'. They used a boat to take the timber from Duck River to Victoria. Leesville is not far from Smithton.

The Blackwood grows well in damp swampy ground. The blackwood grown in the high country is known as pencil wood, it is a lighter color and has very little value, used mainly for pickets, not really classed as blackwood, but is a type of it. There is also 'Figured Blackwood' and 'Fiddleback Blackwood' which is very valuable. There is also a 'Fiddleback and Birdseye Blackwood', which is crinkled like Fiddleback and has a little mark like a canary's eye on it.

Another good timber was the Pine. The celery top pine was very good to work with, you could dry and split timber out of it, then adze it down and build with it.

There were thousands of acres of Myrtle timber. The mature trees were a red-type wood - used for fencing and burning. Not a lot of value at that time, except for an Adelaide Company which came over and bought a lot. Pa and his brother cut the trees for them. Instead of rotting from the inside out this tree rotted from the outside in. If a fire burnt off the outside rot, years later it would start rotting again. It was used for pickets.

The Sassafras tree was very scarce - it had a flower like an orange tree. It was used to make very expensive plywood. The Leatherwood tree is not very big. It is very springy and supple, too springy for axe handle. Beautiful honey is obtained from the Leatherwood tree, which has tiny leaves, very leathery.

A strange tree described by Pa with a rude sounding name is a 'Shitwood' (referred to by this name in the Bible). It is a softwood, if you put a piece or chip of this wood on the ground it looked and smelled like its name. Pa played a joke on his brother once and put a big chip behind the log where he sat to have his lunch and he had to shift because he couldn't stand the smell.

Tallowwood - not big and not good for milling, however it was very good for burning, you could burn it while it was still green. It was full of gas, blue flames would flare up when it was burnt. The wood was a cheesey looking color.

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Pa and his brother cut a lot of celery top pine for a Mr. McGuire. The pine was growing around the edge of 'Button Grass Plains'. Button grass is rough grass which kangaroos eat. This pine was carted down to the wharf at Smithton or Stanley and shipped over to Victoria. It was all done with draught horses, no timber trucks in those days (about 1919). Pa would cut a 'front' in the tree, then his brother would come after and saw them down. They would take their lunch and stop all day, then walk 5 or 6 miles back to their camp. They always camped beside a creek for water and used straw for mattresses (he said the mice were a terrible problem).

At weekends they would go home to the farm. They did their cooking in a camp oven - cast iron oven about 18 inches round with 4 legs, which stood on the fire. This pot had a lid; the meat was put inside the pot and hot coals would be put on the lid so the meat cooked from the top as well as underneath, this way it was steamed and beautiful to eat. They often caught wallabies and ate hindquarters. At night they played cards. Pa worked for a Company which was paid by the Government to find the 'divide of rivers'. They wanted to find where the rivers started to run North and where they started to run South. They eventually found this point and there was only about one kilometre between where they ran North and where they ran South. While they were cutting a track through the bush to discover this divide, they found a creek running South over a pure white pottery clay. The water was six inches deep and crystal clear and there was acres of this beautiful china clay. No value was attached to it then. Growing over the clay was 'horizontal' timber. This grows tangley all across one another, not more than 4 inches through but about 40 feet long. They had to be very careful cutting it as it would fly back. There were many injuries from this timber, with men being speared in the stomach as they cut one bit of wood and it released another. They cut a track through this timber, cutting small pieces at a time, which took a long time.

They camped in the bush and their supplies were bought out once a week and left in their tent by the local grocer. They would leave a note each week telling him what they required for the next delivery.

(TO BE CONTINUED)