

THE MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Published every month except December.

The Society meets every 3rd Tuesday of the Month 7:30pm Collins St. State School Library

From the last meeting...

- The excursion to the Jones/Cranwell properties was enjoyed by all. A letter of thanks has been sent.
- A copy of Mrs. J. Cafiso's book "A Niemann Family History" has been donated to the Society.
- A submission has been forwarded to the Morwell Shire Bicentennial Committee requesting funds for:
 - (a) Copying equipment and film to copy old photographs.
 - (b) Film and expenses to undertake a pictorial review of Morwell in the 1980's to be entitled "A Week in the Life of Morwell".
 - (c) Compiling the material obtained by (a) and (b) into a book for sale to the public by 1990.
- Mrs. Taylor and Mr. Warren offered to undertake the collection of a history of the Haunted Hills.
- Further excursions will be planned:
 - (a) to Mr. Frank Lawless's property to inspect an historic shed.
 - (b) to the Coleman property at Yinnar and to the site of the old Yinnat race track.
- Mr. Coleman produced photographs of Kingsford - Smith's visit to Morwell in October 1932 - to be copied by the Society.

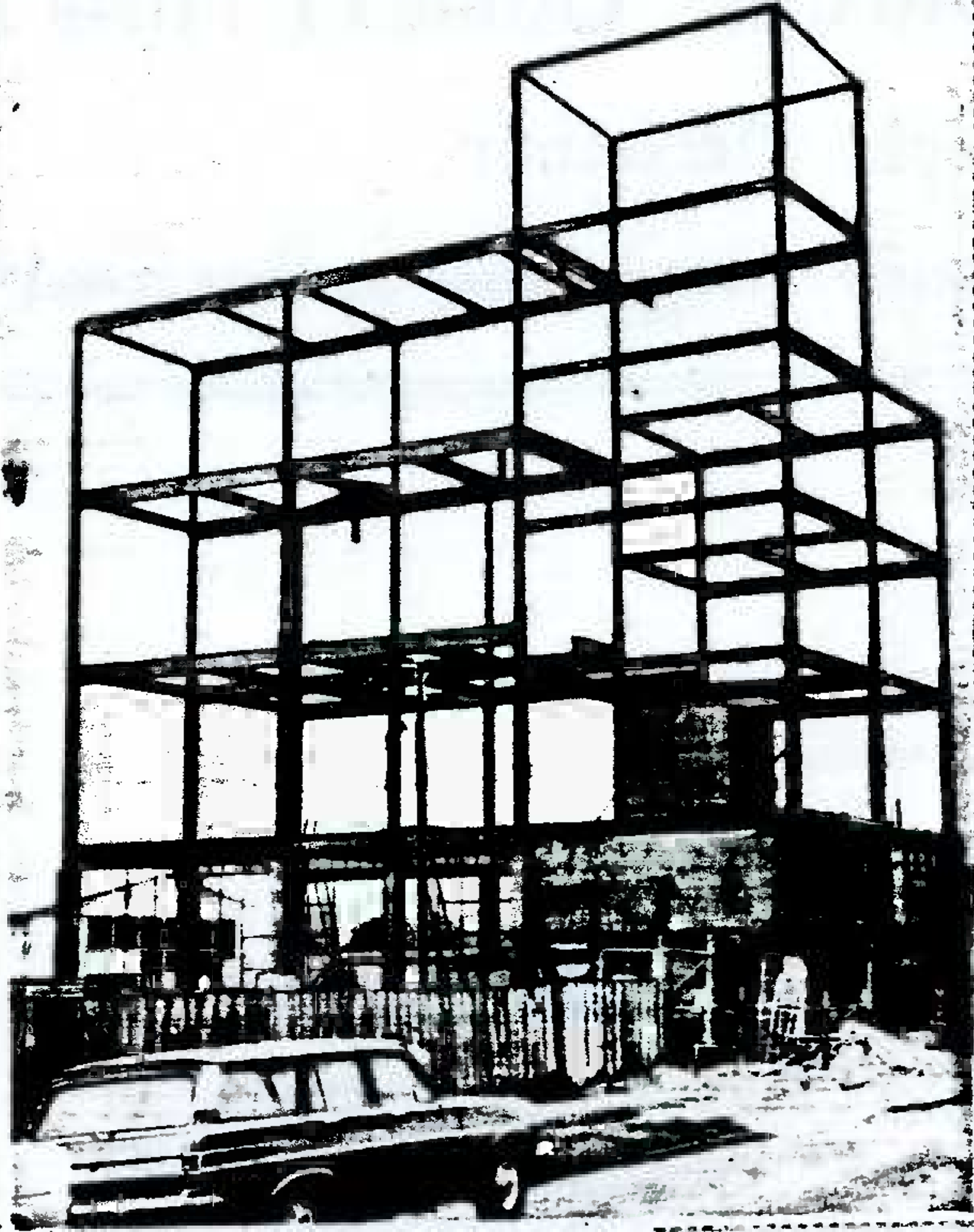
....Correction from the previous newsletter-Mrs. Ann Beaton should read Mrs. Una Beaton. Apologies for this error.

ANNUAL MEETING FOR THE SOCIETY

Tuesday March 18 1986

Collins Street State School Library

UP GOES THE EXCHANGE



* ONE of the finest views of the Latrobe Valley will be had from the top of the new multi-storey telephone exchange now being built in Church St., Morwell. Our picture shows the current stage of development at the new exchange.

REMEMBER THIS ?

L.V EXPRESS APRIL 29, 1970

1986 is a significant year for several organizations in Morwell. Maryvale High School celebrates its 20th birthday, the Presbyterian Church celebrates its 100th birthday, the Anglican Church celebrates its 100th birthday and Morwell Rotary Club celebrates its 40th birthday. Any other birthdays?

Commercial Road State School has for sale, photocopy prints of Morwell. There are 3 in the set and they may be purchased separately, unframed or framed.

Cost - 3 unframed - in folder \$5.00
- framed - \$25.00 each

The 3 prints depict:

- Catholic Presbytery and Catholic Church
- Commercial Road - looking east - circa 1920
- Commercial Road - looking west - showing the Church St. crossing - circa 1954.

The framed prints are on display in the foyer of the school.

If interested, please contact either

Howard Williams - 34 2641 or

Leo Billington - 66 1342

Some members of the Society are considering a possible alternative night for meetings. What preferences are there instead of Tuesday night?

Since the Historical Society re-grouped late in 1984, the number of newsletters being printed has increased from 20 to 30. Receipt of the newsletter is one benefit from being a member of the Society. Another is the opportunity to join with others who have a common interest in local history. While attendance to meetings may not always be possible, excursions are now being planned that will provide an extension of the interest in local history. During March and April, subscriptions can be paid to our Treasurer, Mrs. D. Taylor, 17 Denise St. Morwell. Subscriptions are \$5.00 per person, and a newsletter is guaranteed to keep you informed.

HIS HORSE WAS ROASTED ALIVE

Twenty-eight years ago Mr Albert "Toby" Farley's horse was roasted in a bushfire at Jeeralang Junction.

**FLASHBACK
TO 1944
LOCAUST**

Only minutes before Toby had hastily dismounted — to struggle through smoke and scorching heat to the sanctuary of a nearby waterhole.

Had he not known of the dam's existence Toby would undoubtedly have shared the fate of his horse — as did 13 hapless people who perished in the flames at nearby Hazelwood.

As it was, he was terribly burned. Toby will tell you today "I'm very lucky to be alive".

In terms of human life and destruction of property, it was Gippsland's worst bushfire.

In 1944 Toby Farley was assisting his parents, the late Mr and Mrs George Farley snr, on the family farm at Jeeralang Junction — not far from the site of the present town of Churchill.

Today he lives at Hazelwood South with his wife Iris and family — Terry, 21, Desmond, 19, and Heather, 17.

Dry — like now

On the fateful day of February 1944, Toby had gone by horseback three miles up into the Jeer-

alang hills — when they were as tinder-dry as in this current season of 1972.

Barely half a mile on, smoke enveloped man and beast.

With the fire threat now so ominous, Toby decided to return home.

Oven-heat

Minutes later burning debris was being blown past in the oven-heat wind blowing at near-gale force.

Dismounting, he let the horse go, deciding that each had a better chance on his own.

Waterhole

Toby struck out through the suffocating smoke for a waterhole he knew was located a few hundred yards off the road.

It was so hot he could scarcely breathe.

Stumbling onto the waterhole, he waded in up to his armpits, crouching to leave only the top of his head above water.

Suddenly a terrific burst of flame broke through, and he dived for his life right under, almost drowning himself.

Above water it scorched the lungs to breathe!

A couple of minutes later Toby struggled back to the bank. But his clothes dried out almost instantly — and burst into flames.

He immediately flopped back into the water.

Sk ingraft

When the main fire had finally passed, Toby struck out for home.

This was two miles across blackened smouldering paddocks. It was a painful trudge, his back being terribly burnt.

On reaching home, his brother Jack decided to drive him at once to Morwell community hospital.

But the hospital was full with fire victims from other fireswept districts. Jack then drove him to Yallourn.

Toby spent five weeks in Yallourn hospital, and received a skin graft.

THE 1944 FIRES....

BUSHFIRE SWEEPED FROM MOE TO YARRAM

From Page 1

The holocaust of February 14, 1944, is vividly remembered by many Moe, Morwell, Traralgon and Hazelwood people. Thirteen Morwell district people lost their lives in Gippsland's most tragic bushfire.

Grotesque in death



Roasted on the Hazelwood flats in 1944 as though in a giant furnace — cattle and horses contorted in death after the disaster of 28 years ago.

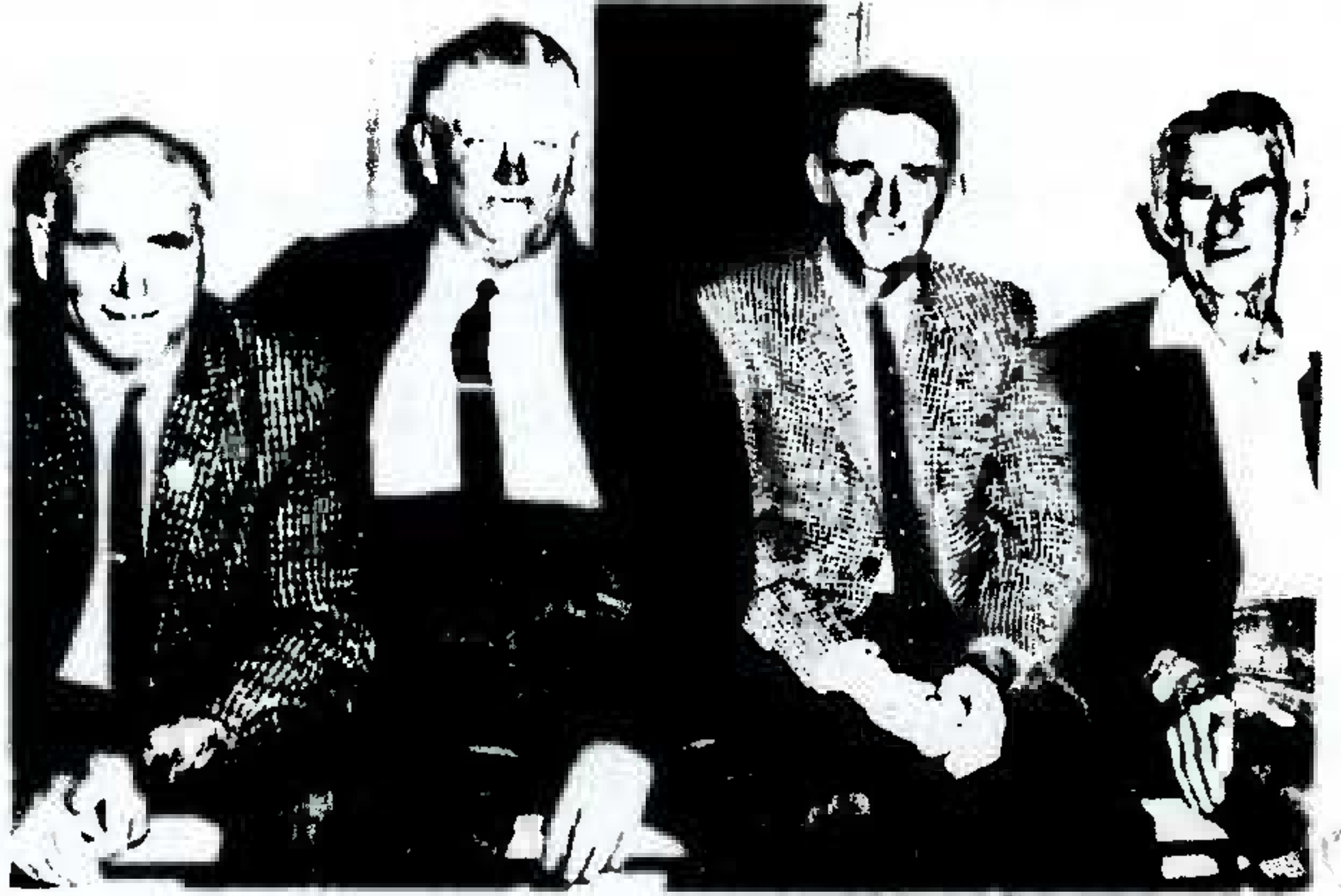
Whipped up by a fierce dry north-westerly an inferno swept 40 miles across the Latrobe Valley flats, the Jeeralang hills and Strzelecki range to Yarram.

Nearly all the victims were trapped on farms or roads in the Hazelwood area a few miles from Morwell township.

Thousands of sheep and hundreds of cattle sizzled to death as in a giant barbecue — and more than 60 homes and buildings were consumed like matchwood.

Although there were several separate outbreaks of fire in the Morwell-Traralgon sector, the blaze that developed into a bushland furnace started north of Moe.

13 PEOPLE DIED IN HAZELWOOD INFERNO



Farmers who survived

Pictured are four men who were farming in the Hazelwood-Jeeralang Junction district at the time of the great 1944 bushfire.

From left: Mr Cyril Hare (Hazelwood South), Mr George Buckley (Hazelwood North), Mr Albert "Toby" Farley (Hazelwood South, formerly of Jeeralang Junction) and Mr Jack Medew (Morwell, formerly of Hazelwood South).

The fire swept all their properties, and Toby Farley almost lost his life.

He was five weeks in hospital, (Story P.1).

Jack Medew's farm was on the present site of Churchill.

George Buckley is a fourth generation Morwell district farmer.

His great-grandfather, Benjamin Wager Buckley, held land immediately north of Morwell in the 1870s.

The Church-st shopping area of today is built on part of that farm of a century ago.

George Buckley's father William was a farmer at Hazelwood.

His grandfather, Joseph Henry Buckley (son of Benjamin Wager Buckley), a one-time Morwell Shire councillor, farmed on the site of Buckley's Hill reservoir almost in the centre of present-day Morwell.

Mr Buckley's farm extended east to Waterhole Creek (well-known landmark on today's Princes Highway) and west to Latrobe-rd.

Buckley-st, one of Morwell's developing commercial areas, is named after him.

Mr Buckley at various

periods worked a small property close to the brown coal mine on his present-day township.

"I'D HAVE BEEN A GONNER"

In an interview in Morwell today Mr Toby Farley (pictured) said:

"If I hadn't reached that water-hole, in that terrible heat I'd have been a gonner like my horse.

"Its roasted carcass was found only 200 yards from where I dismounted".



Died together

Sweeping through the Haunted Hills, Hernes Oak and the Morwell Bridge area, it destroyed pasture, fences, several homes, farm buildings

and several score of livestock before reaching Morwell.

Burnt to death

The roaring inferno reached its height on the Ridge two miles south of Morwell, near the present day Hazelwood power station.

Eight of the 13 people who died were burnt to death within the radius of a mile, three of them at the one spot.

This fire touched the southern borders of the town.

On the north side, flames came within half a mile of the railway.

A flax mill adjacent to the Latrobe Road and about nine houses near the site of the present Morwell High School were destroyed.

Jumped road

The northern fire swept eastward over Buckley's Hill close to the town. Near the Bridle Estate it jumped the Princes Highway.

There the flames joined the conflagration sweeping the Hazelwood flats.

Lighted, bark was blown for long distances ahead of the main wall of flame, causing numerous spot fires. Four people lost their lives in this sector.

Inferno

Hazelwood North, Hazelwood South, Hazelwood Estate, Billys Creek and Jeeralang Junction suffered the full blast of the inferno.

Sheet of fire

Members of families on the land everywhere fought desperately to save homes, livestock and equipment — and in some cases lost their own lives while so fighting.

The main sheet of fire was driven into the hill country of the Jeeralangs.

On the northern flank, flames spread into the Traralgon South area.

There they linked up with another fire that had started at Mattingleys Hill three miles south of Traralgon.

A third fire that had broken out close to Traralgon township in the Argyle-st (Princes Highway) area spread into the Loy Yang district.

90 Mile beach

Sweeping south of Rosedale, this fire went right through to the Ninety Mile Beach region near Giffard.

On to Yarram

These two fires merged and the scorching gale-force wind drove the flames through the Strzelecki Range.

By nightfall the flames were licking the outskirts of Yarram and touched the coast.

In places in the hill country — which had more settlement then than now — fires were lit by flying debris up to a

Tanks boiled

So intense was the heat at several homes burnt out on the Hazelwood ridge that tanks of domestic water came to the boil.

A man jumped into one water-trough to escape the searing flames. He was so badly scalded that he died.

In places foxes were seen racing for their lives across paddocks with their tails burning and the flames overtaking them.

Birds in the area was decimated.

MORWELL ADVERTISER
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