

MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED BI-MONTHLY

MEETINGS: 3RD TUESDAY of the month at 7.30pm

OLD MORWELL TOWN HALL

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Welcome to the January Newsletter

**IMPORTANT NOTICE: Our February meeting will be held on
TUESDAY FEBRUARY 27
(ONE WEEK LATER THAN USUAL)**

The change has been made in order to allow members to attend the LaTrobe Council public meeting to be held in Morwell on Tuesday Feb. 20. A number of concerns have been raised over recent months - lack of space for our museum display, the fate of Morwell Shire and City documents and memorabilia, re-naming of local areas and buildings etc - and we feel it would be worth attending the meeting to try to get some answers to our questions.

The Museum will be open on Fridays, 11am to 3pm, from Friday February 23. A roster is being drawn up at present. If you are able to take a turn (probably once every six weeks or so) please let Elsie McMaster know.

We hope to make some real progress this year with cataloguing and filing our collection of documents and artifacts. Anyone willing to help with this rather time-consuming but very interesting activity is also asked to contact Elsie. Training will be provided.

Our theme for 1995 was 'Australia Remembers'. Shortly after World War 2 ended, the first of the many migrants who make up a large part of our population began to arrive in the Latrobe Valley. We decided that, this year, we would concentrate on their experiences of settling in our district and we will be inviting guest speakers of non-Australian background to our meetings this year.

The Annual General Meeting of Morwell Historical Society Inc will be held on Tuesday March 19 at 7.30 pm in the Old Morwell Town Hall.

LAVINIA PARK

The following account was written some years ago by our late member **ANDY COLEMAN**, grandson of the pioneer Coleman family of Yinnar.

It was the year 1885 or '86 when my grandparents Seymour and Lavinia Coleman first settled in Yinnar. Grandpa was born in America on June 30, 1838 and, as a young man, had come to Australia on a whaling boat. Grandma (nee Small), born May 12, 1835, had emigrated from the Somerset area in England.

Previous to coming to Yinnar they spent a short time around Darlimurla district after coming from Elaine in the Ballarat area. They were married at Castlemaine on July 28, 1861. When they had thought of taking up land around Yinnar, the Hazelwood Flats were as yet a swamp and still available to purchasers, but Grandpa was of the opinion that if the soil would not grow big trees, it was not fit for production, hence their purchase of *Lavinia Park*, situated one mile west of Yinnar township. (*Lavinia Park* was named after Grandma).

Shortly after settling at Yinnar a horse race track and club were formed. Mr Joe Keogh was foundation President and Mr Tom Keogh foundation Secretary, offices they held faithfully and well over many years. The first race meeting was in 1887 on New Year's Day and for many years the first day of the year was a special Yinnar Day! The last New Year racing was about 1925. Special trains ran on various occasions from Flinders Street and also Traralgon and Mirboo North, to Yinnar station. Hire cars would meet the arrivals at the station and bring them to '*the Park*'. There were very few cars owned around the area at the time and the sight of the cars along the dusty Midland Highway west of Yinnar was memorable. There were no bitumen roads then. To see new cars was exciting and they had many admirers.

One well-known arrival by car one year was gangster 'Squizzy' Taylor, together with some of his gang. My father was gatekeeper at the time and next year felt rather unsafe but 'Squizzy' only paid one visit.

It was quite a common sight to see horses tied up to trees along the track in, as most people arrived by buggy or jinker. Many people went to the 'big event' each year to meet friends and wish them a 'Happy New Year' even though they were not race-minded. Another noteworthy fact is that the women folk usually had on their very best attire for the occasion.

The horse race track was of seven furlongs. It was sold about 1920 to another Yinnar pioneer, Mr Walter Firmin, but later was bought back by the Colemans in 1958. Several bookmakers were present at each meeting. One of particular interest was a Mr Collins of Moe who I believe is the father of Bill Collins of race broadcasting fame. (I might mention that none of the Colemans were gamblers).

The price of admission in 1918 was 1/6 (15 cents today) and for the saddling paddock, 4/- (40 cents today). I can well remember seeing the saddling paddock strewn with betting tickets and other rubbish at the day's end.

There were several well and favourably known identities who had much to do with the success of the race club, among them being Mr Harry Bond Sen. - father of our Historical

Society President (now Vice-President - 1996) Lou Bond. He acted as Clerk of Course over a long period.

It was not all horse racing each year. An important show man named 'Darkie' Morrison often had boxing bouts, buck jumpers and other events 'under the canvas'. At the ground were a refreshment booth, also a publican's booth, both of which did good trade. Very prominent with the refreshment booth was an old Yinnar identity named Mrs Dean who had charge of the hot water (wood fire) for tea making, washing up, hot dogs etc.

I do not remember the names of horses competing but I do remember one special pony named *Little Mo* and another locally owned stallion, *Concussion*. There was only one 'Cup' meeting (1900) and the winning horse was named *Clinton*. It was owned by the Colemans and ridden by my Uncle Artie Coleman. He died at a young age (20 years) after a racing fall. The cup is the treasured possession of a relative in W.A. and was on display at the Yinnar Centenary in 1974. At the finish of horse racing a dance was held in the Yinnar Mechanics' Institute at night.

Although a good many years have gone since the 'boom days' several gymkhanas and picnics have been held at *the Park*, one shortly after the last World War when some of the world's top axemen competed. I well remember one event at one of the later picnics. Some of the local youths decided to have a race around the seven furlong track. Two of the enterprising ones had a deal of practice beforehand and during the real event, only got a quarter of the way around the track - and that was the end of their quota of energy!

Grandpa was a real 'Yinnar-ite' and he walked to the township a short while before he died. Grandma, who had been a midwife, had brought many babies into the world. She died in 1916, aged 81 years, followed by Grandpa's death in 1918, aged 80 years. My grandparents are buried in the Hazelwood Cemetery together with Uncle Artie. Their lives had always been for 'the betterment of mankind' and I look back with pride on their lives and achievements.

Nowadays '*the Park*' looks a deal different as it is a choice dairy property, owned and farmed by my son Geoff, with electric fences, good pastures and concrete tracks etc. Probably the only reminders of the early days are one pine tree, an underground well (now filled in), some brick flooring where the stable once stood, and an apple tree, still bearing fruit, in the original orchard. The two trees could possibly be a hundred years old and still continue to provide shade for the cattle that graze contentedly on the surrounding pastures.

Below: The "Old Buffers' Race" at "Lavinia Park" c 1920.



THE WAY IT WAS (CONT)

Arthur Fish

In our last newsletter, we left Arthur at Casterton:

We had with us a fellow named Longstaff. He was a bit of an artist, and quite a gentleman. He had several canvases and water colours that he had done and carried with him.

Just to return to our mate Jim. Honest Jim. What's in a name? We found out later that he was known to the police by other names. But if he was a rogue, then he was a likeable one. As I said, he was a good mate and a bit of a fighter.

“Could use his hands a little bit,

And his head.

Had the science, had the grit,

So he said.”

Well, honesty in some cases is like beauty, skin-deep. He had a most trustworthy face and he always dealt fairly with me. One thing he could do and that was shoot. He showed us one day. He stepped out forty paces and set up a match box on a post. Then he came back and picked up my rifle and let drive. Away went the match box. It was one of the old Three Star brand and as I went down to pick it up he said: “It's in the centre star”. And so it was. He told us he had been a sniper in France, also that he had been a trick shooter in Wirth's Circus. Well, maybe he told the truth. He did sometimes. He told us many things which, strange to relate, Lofty accepted without question. Finally it became a case of sheer hero-worship. Lofty said to me: “Jim is my hero- I want ot be able to shoot like Jim, ride like Jim, fight like Jim”. This makes all the more shameful the thing that Jim did to him.

Things went along quite smoothly and the days and nights slipped by until came the affair of the ducks. They were not our ducks, they might have been anyone's ducks. They could have been wild ones. But anyway they swam and floated in the little lagoon in all innocence, all unmolested, until one afternoon a group of young blokes from up the town came by, bent on mischief and thought it good sport to pelt the ducks. You may have heard of stoning the crows, but though it was sport to them it was no sport for the ducks as they killed one and left some others in a crippled state.

We, of course, knowing that we would be blamed if any questions were asked, went out and remonstrated with them. They were very abusive, but there were more of us than there were of them so they went away. That night they came back. First we knew of it was a sullen thunder of rocks on the roof and one of the windows was smashed. This now matched the other window through which a few days previous Dan had hurled a frying pan. When the noise stopped Jim went out and loudly cursed them and Jim could swear in four languages for fully twenty minutes without repeating himself. They went away!

Next day Jim invited Lofty to go up the town with him. They did the rounds of the pubs and altogether met six of these young fellows, and there was not much to it as it was a one-punch job as far as Jim was concerned - with Lofty to back him up. Later that same day a boy in blue came down investigating some ducks, and finished up by giving us two days to get out of town. So we went.

THE WAY IT WAS (CONT)

Coleraine

So we moved on to the little town of Coleraine. Dan and I tramped together while Lofty and Jim followed a mile or two behind. It was only a short walk to this town and part of the time we spent stretched out snoozing in the sunshine. This was a new thing for me but Dan, wise with much roughing it, pointed out that it was warm sleeping in the sun and too cold to sleep in comfort at night, so one could sit up over the camp fire. This roundabout way of doing things seemed to make sense to me.

Anyway we made it to Coleraine and to the showgrounds, and as the nights were getting cold, I was grateful for the blanket I picked up at the camp. We were here for a couple of days until we were chased out, so then we went out and up to the Mount Koroit station. This was a large sheep station property which was a haven for the travellers. The owners must have been very lenient - or absentee.

The buildings, shearing shed and shearers' huts were close by the main road and it was an ideal camp, sheltered by huge pine trees. It was also ideal from another point of view. The railway line on its way out of town climbed its slow way out and around the hills and this was a most convenient place for jumping the rattler.

There must have been a score or so camping there, including the 'Happy Family' as they were called - Mum, Dad and four kids.

However it might have been a good camp but it was a bit out of town and somewhat overcrowded. It was here that I ran into the most astonishing piece of bad luck, rabbit-wise, that I experienced while on the trail. I went out one day and there were rabbits galore- but not for me. By actual count I hit eleven, but got none of them. In every case I missed out on a vital spot and every wounded bunny escaped down the burrows. However, I got the twelfth one. This experience almost put me off eating rabbit as I never shot for sport, only to eat, and it troubled me to think of the other eleven creeping away to die in agony.

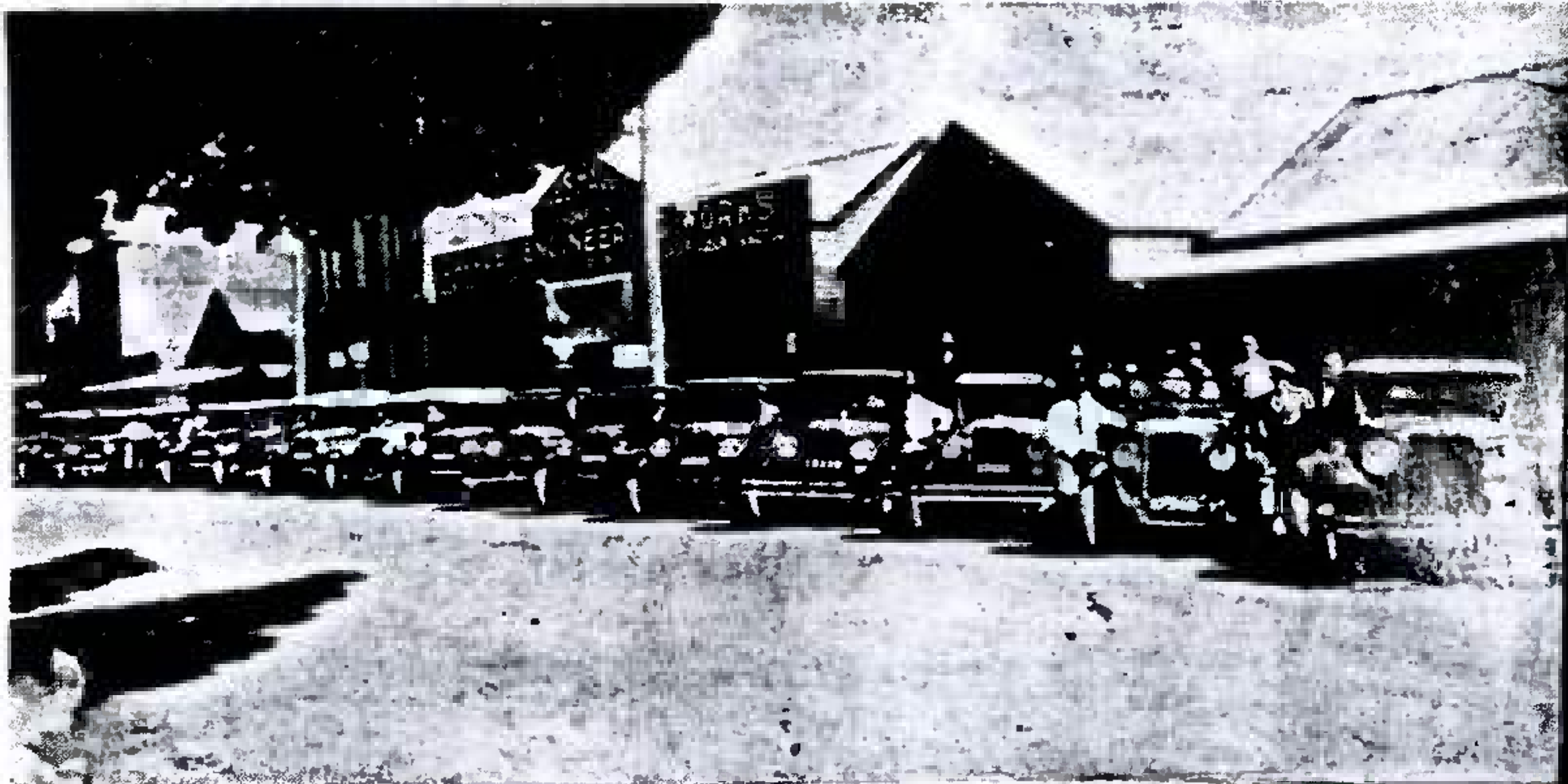
While in this place some of us decided it was time we made a visit to a barber and as there were two in town we thought our chances were pretty good for a free hair-cut. However, first place we drew a blank. We found the proprietor seated in his chair reading the paper. When we suggested a free hair cut he rose up in wrath and chased us out. "Business is bad now" he said, "sitting here doing nothing all day!". Nothing doing. So we went along to the other shop. Here we found a similar set of circumstances - the barber seated in his chair reading the paper. He looked up at the invasion of his shop and, our spokesman making known our request, he tossed the paper aside. "Well, I'm sitting here doing nothing, I may as well be cutting your hair." So we got our hair cuts, but not entirely free. Impressed by his cheery acceptance of our cases, we passed the hat around and he did get a few shillings for his act of charity.

To Be Continued

HERITAGE WEEK - 14-28 APRIL 1996

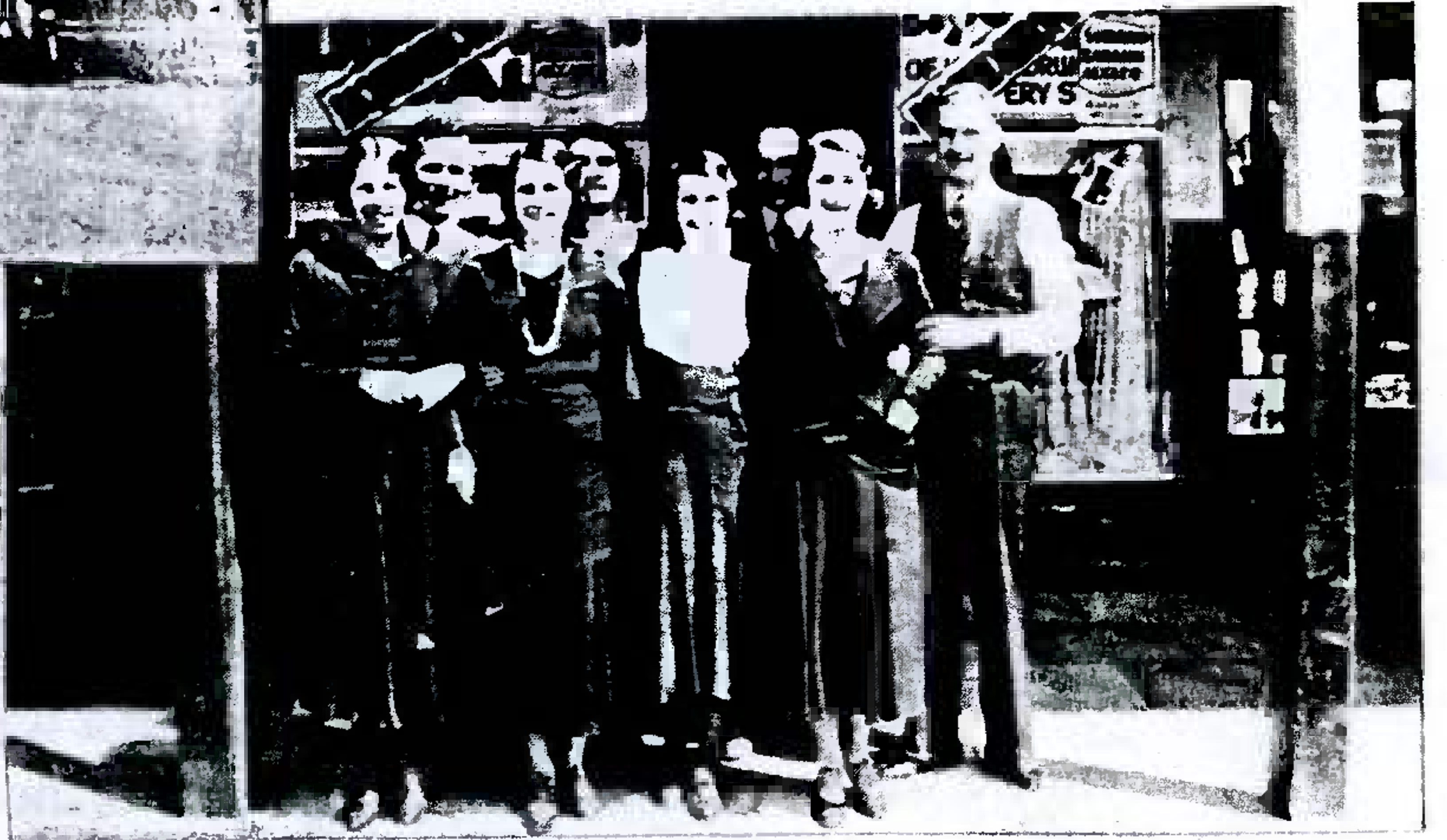
The theme for Heritage Week (actually Heritage Fortnight) 1996 is
'Main streets: Interpreting our Urban Culture'

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria is proposing to hold a series of exhibitions across the State and all member societies are invited to participate. It is intended that the various local exhibitions will be brought together later in the year into a travelling exhibition to travel throughout Victoria and possibly interstate. We plan to take part and we are at present selecting photographs from our collection for enlargement in preparation for this exhibition.



Les Hare's Garage with a lineup of Oakland cars, 1926, Commercial Road. Building on right is Cricketer's Arms Hotel.

Staff of Sharpe's Emporium, Commercial Road Morwell, 1933.
Back row l-r: D. McArthur, Miss Coffey, G. Rudin, A. Robinson.
Front: J. Duncanson, M. Kleine, J. Lubcke, unknown.
Sharpe's supplied men's and women's clothing, drapery and haberdashery to Morwell customers for over fifty years.



Above: Interior of D. C. Mills' store, corner of Tarwin Street and Commercial Road. Morwell in the 1940s. L-r: Harry Huguenin, Jean McMillan, Charles Sands. Children shopping with their mothers would receive a lolly from the jars on the counter next to the delicatessen case.