MORWELL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED MONTHLY, EXCEPT DECEMBER

Meetings : 3rd. TUESDAY of the month at 7.30 PM

OLD TOWN HALL , MORWELL

Vol. 10 No. 11 NOVEMBER 1994

WELCOME TO THE NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER

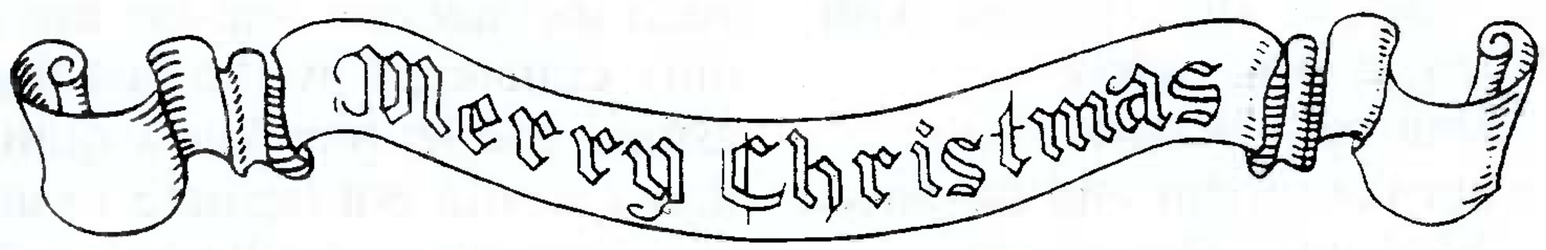
There are two important dates for your diary this month.

1. On ***SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20,*** we will be conducting the second of our historic walks around Morwell. This one will take in the western end of Commercial Road, Ann St, Hazelwood Road and Tarwin Street and will start and finish at our rooms in the Old Town Hall. Commencement time is 2.00 pm and our leader will be Mr Will McRoberts.

2. Our final meeting for the year will be held on ***TUESDAY NOVEMBER 15,*** in the ***Green Room, Morwell Hotel Motel.*** We will meet at **6.00 pm** for a counter tea before the meeting. Guest speaker for the evening will be Mr Jack Evans. Please come along and bring a friend.

✸✸✸ The first meeting for 1995 will be held in February. There will be no newsletter in December, but you will receive one in January.

We have yet to make a decision on the opening hours of the museum display over the holiday period. The current roster operates until the week before Christmas and the museum will not open in the last week of December. If you have been on the roster but will be unavailable at any time during January, please let Elsie McMaster know by the beginning of December if possible.[Phone (051)341149]



THE WAY IT WAS - *(cont)* - ***A.R.Fish***

Now, he was a real gentleman, one of two partners. Then, too soon the meal was over. The cook was busy about his stove. The girl had gone up to the front of the shop to serve behind the counter. The kind gentleman had departed, and I was ready to go. Enter the villain. A greasy, evil-looking fellow sneaking in with a kind of sidling movement, coming up to me and slipping into my hand a two-shilling piece and whispering furtively towards my ear "Come back at about eight tonight". Well, 'in vain is the net spread in the sight of the bird' so I did not keep the appointment! But I kept the two bob and it was enough to keep me feeding over the weekend. There is, of course, a sequel but that was still three days in the future.

So, back to the camp - the showgrounds - where about forty or so men were living. 'Some take the track for gain, some take the track for loss and some of them take up the track as Christ took up the cross.' There are reasons various and strange why men are motivated to leave home and carry the knot. One young fellow that night, sitting on an upturned box, with the last meal of the day finished and the campfire flickering and throwing shadows in the twilight, and he singing away one of the pop songs of the day- "Well, can I sleep in your barn tonight, mister?" And the men listened tolerantly as he went on. He came to the pathetic part where he records the sad fact that his sweet, loving wife has shot through with a stranger, when he was rudely interrupted. "Shut up!" A dark-visaged fellow rose from the gloom and advanced menacingly. "Shut up!" The singer faltered and made a protest but the scowling menace loomed closer. "Shut up! Shut up or I'll knock you down into the corner!" So he shut up. A tender spot must have been touched that time and no doubt the lid had been lifted on some personal tragedy. Some take the track for loss of hope, some take the track for peace and no doubt on the road there were those men who had taken to the road to get away from domestic difficulties. Reminds me how, one evening on the banks of the Murray River up at Renmark, I shared my tent with a man who had done twelve years for killing his wife. Well, he was a good mate, though one could have cracked rocks on his face, but he was a bit quiet. Unlike that man who one evening came to the same camp seeking shelter from the approaching rain. As he approached I could hear him talking and as the night wore on he still talked - non-stop - never staying his constant flow of conversation to await any answer. I dozed off and when I woke in the night he was still talking, maybe in his sleep. Morning light came and he went away - still talking.

Yes many strange characters are met with on the track but they were not all swagging it. Some, like that man in the cafe, were waiting by the waysides of life. Well, as I said, I kept the two bob but not the appointment. Young though I was I had heard the knights of the road talking about this fellow and I knew that he was a sex deviant. I had already had one such experience. It was down at Stawell while camping in the mud hut and there was this dirty little Scotsman who wanted to share my bed. I had no such inclinations and his insistence was only countered by the fact that I was armed and let him know quite plainly that I would not hesitate to use the rifle. But back again to the funny man in the cafe in Horsham.

By Tuesday of the following week the larder was again empty so it was out on the town again. Up one side of the street and down the other with the same results

- not even a stray crust of stale bread or a scrag of meat - so it began to look as if the answer would be somewhere in the cafe and the woodpile. So, I breasted the counter and asked if they wanted any wood cut, to which the girl replied that "you can try round the back". This time it was a different story. Not this time did a kind and benevolent gentleman come to the rescue. He must have been away or out of town. I discovered afterwards that this nice man had got into partnership with the 'queer' person. But I attacked the woodheap with vigour and, of course, with the axe.The time moved on and the pile of chopped wood grew. So did the blisters. No amount of hungry looks towards the kitchen brought any response. Of course, I woke up what was doing - the funny man was getting his two bob's worth out of me. Finally in disgust I threw down the axe and approached the cookhouse and spoke to the cook. "Here comes the boss now", he said, and the boss, the queer man, came through from the shop. He said something to the cook. He walked again up the alley way to the front of the shop, and I followed close on his heels.He picked up a small paper bag and put into it three small cakes. This he thrust into my hands and before I could say 'Jack Robinson' he out the front door and went swiftly up the street. I stood silent with amazement. The girl behind the counter turned out to be a real good friend. She was, up to that moment, a silent spectator but she must have had some inkling of what was going on. She asked me to give the bag back. "Give it to me," she said. I handed it over and she took in its place a much larger bag, and filled it up with a much greater selection of good things to eat and gave it to me again. I was almost overwhelmed by her kindness. Said she, "Are you right for smokes?" So I replied that I was right out. Being a non-smoker, this was truthfully said. She pushed two packets of twenty over to me. Did I have any money? I said I had none. This was a lie for I still had the balance left over from the apple picking, but that was my emergency bank. So she gave me six shillings out of the till. Whether that was also on the house or out of her own wages I had no way of knowing but maybe she herself had had some experience of the queer one.

It was in this same town of Horsham I had another strange and disturbing experience. It happened this way. There was some kind of sports meeting scheduled to take place at the showgrounds the next weekend and the police had been round and moved us all out. So we scattered everywhere round the town and some of the boys moved on out of town when they could find no alternative shelter. But lucky me found a place. I carried my swag down to the local swimming hole. This was where a small weir kept back the waters of the Wimmera River and here was a little park and, most important, a small bathing shed. A long, low-roofed narrow shed built mostly of corrugated iron but it had a good floor and was high and looked a good place to camp. So here I bedded down for the night, completely disregarding the 'Camping Prohibited' signs. But self-preservation, as I had often been told, is the first law of nature. It was evening and the sun had gone down. From without came the quiet silence of the evening and the smooth sound of the water rushing over the weir. I stretched out and was on the way to the land of slumber but I was suddenly disturbed. From close to the camp came the sound of hasty trampling footsteps. The door burst open and a man came in, hurrying and eager, and ran up along the shed to the further end. I looked up. Coming into the gloom he had not seen

me lying there in the dark. He was down on one knee, peering through a hole in the iron wall. His breath was coming in short, agitated and hasty gasps. I made my own presence known. Tactfully, so as not to embarrass him, I coughed, then sat up. "What's the matter?" I asked.
"Sorry mate, I didn't know you were there". Then he said, "Did you see a woman in a brown coat come over the footbridge over the river about six o'clock?" There was a narrow footbridge over the river at this point on the wall of the weir. "It's my wife" he said, "she's left me and the three kids and she's carrying on with this bloke from over the river. I'm waiting to get the goods on them. I'll divorce her. I just want proof. I'll trap her. All I want is a good witness. Stick around, I'll make it worth your while."
He resumed his watching while I pondered this set-up. Certainly I did not want to get involved in any divorce mess-up, even as only a witness. But while I though on this, time suddenly ran out. He suddenly cried out "Here she comes now, with him. Quick - we'll follow them down the river". and he caught me by the sleeve and tried to urge me along with him, but I had doubts and hung back and by this time I was out of the shelter and he was anxious to be after them. "Quick!" he urged, "come on, we'll catch them in the act!"
He half dragged me a couple of steps in his haste. "Here's five bob," thrusting cash into my hand. "Wait" I said "Wait til I get my coat," and I dived back into the shed while he hurried down in the wake of the amorous couple. I quickly scooped up my bed roll, not stopping to roll the swag, slung the tucker bag over my shoulder, and ran out - in the opposite direction. That was one night I slept under the stars - luckily a fine, mild night. What was going on elsewhere under the stars I could only imagine. I never did find out how it turned out. Afterwards, of course, I did feel a bit of a heel. Bad enough the poor fellow losing his wife, without losing a half-dollar on top of that, but no doubt many a man would think the latter loss the worse one.
(To Be Continued)

GLIMPSES OF PIONEER DAYS
(CONT) - ***Jesse William Huggett***

Monster Trees: On the Sunday afternoon, Watty, my brother Frank and myself were out with the gun, looking for lyre-bird, when we came upon a monster tree - it was a blackbutt. We waited there for the others to come up and then father took a length of string from his pocket and stretched it round the tree as high up as we could reach. It was of enormous girth, measuring no less than sixty-six feet. Well, in connection with this big tree, I might mention here that when working in the Tanjil forty years later, a few miles from Baw Baw, Mr Keppel who kept the Australian Hotel at Marysville wrote to the Melbourne 'Leader' about being out with his man in the Cumberland and finding a monster tree - a blackbutt - sixty-eight feet around. Well, I wrote in reply to him and pointed out that he was forty years too late coming on the scene - but thinking again I wondered if there might have been another such tree up in that region, so I wrote and enquired of him on which side of the river the tree was found. He said it was on the north side so I knew then there must have been at least two of these forest giants up there in the bush. Alluding to these giant trees the 'Leader' referred to them as giant vegetables and the Melbourne 'Age' speculated they had probably been growing for at least 2000 years and possibly were living and growing when our Saviour was on earth.

The Yarra Track:

_When the government made a special grant of money for making a road to Wood's Point (Yarra Track) a few weeks preliminary work had to be done and Mr Hutchinson, the ganger, said we might go on at 1/- an hour, so we went to his camp at Mt Grant. We had eight or nine weeks of navvy work carrying corduroy logs, log-rolling logs, and bridge-building. His gang and Davie's rolling gang joined together and, with a block and tackle and a new length of inch-and-a-half diameter rope, we pulled three ninety-foot logs over Bell Hell Creek for the bridge. There were a hundred and forty of us on the rope.

When we finished on the road job we went back to Cumberland Creek and were there for a few weeks , and then at the end of April returned to McCraes Creek but did not get much there so we left for town. This was in 1886. I then decided to learn a trade. My brother and father went up to Warburton looking for gold. I got work at a tannery - after owned by Hugh Thompson - but was put off when work was slack so I took on a job of splitting tub staves for the sugar company at Sandridge. I joined the Manchester Unity lodge on 25th March 1887 - the "Good Samaritan" Branch, Collingwood.

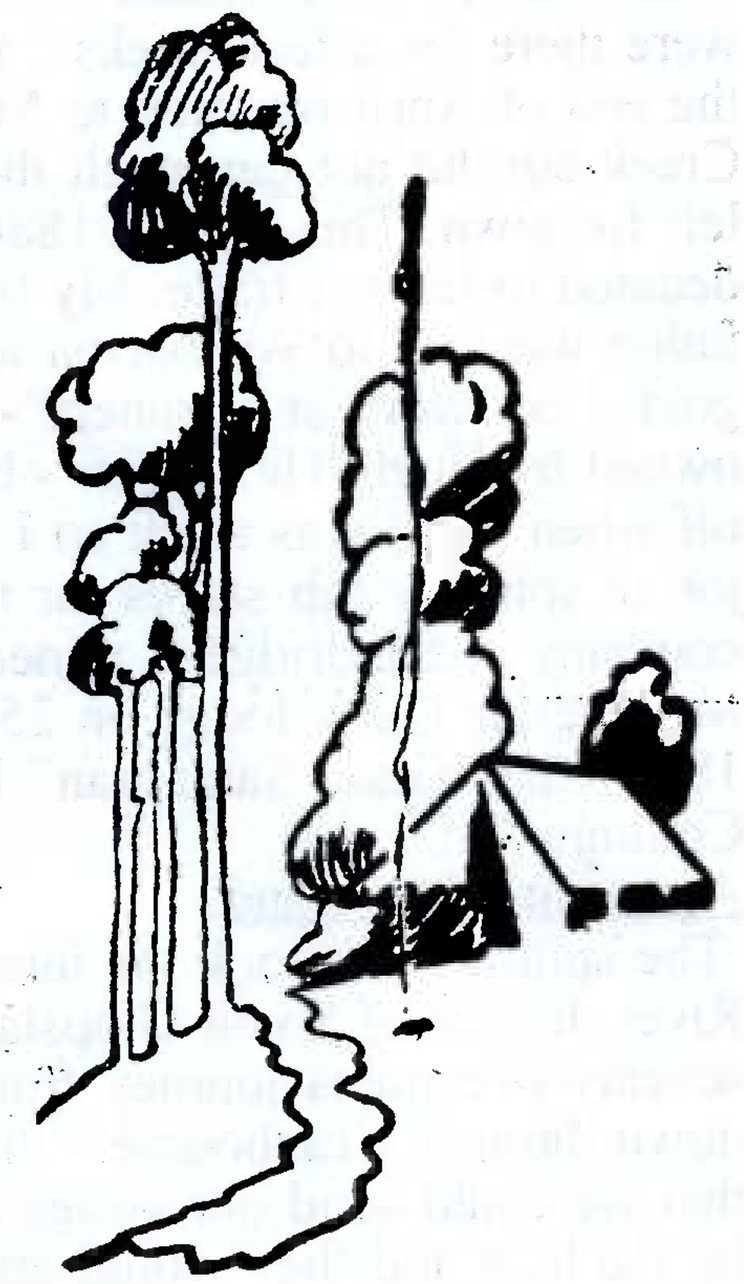
Again into Gippsland:

The splitting job took me into the Bass River district of South Gippsland - about seventy-five miles journey from here down through Cranbourne - they told us that we could send our swags and gear by the boat and they would arrive at Settlement Point (Mr Anderson's) as soon as we could get there by land. We got to Cranbourne the first day and stayed at the pub there, then started out again the next morning. We had a trip to make that day of over forty miles without breakfast! Well, we got over forty miles on the road from Cranbourne and it was drizzling rain so we camped and. as we had no swags, we had no shelter, so we got wet. We made another start again at daylight and after about five miles we came to a hut. This was where we had to ask for directions. It was pouring rain but we did not go up to the hut until we were sure the occupants were out of bed and were moving about, so when we saw smoke coming up out of the chimney we went up and knocked. This was about two hours later. We were by this time mighty hungry and wet.

Mr Stewart, the owner and occupier, invited us in to breakfast, and he served us up wallaby meat pasties and hot scones and coffee! I think we never enjoyed a meal as much as that one. He told me he made his living by snaring wallabies, getting swans' eggs, and stingrays for oil, and also getting stuffing and setting up birds. He tanned some of the wallaby leather with the fur on the outside, bought sides of leather for soles and made boots for his wife and children (of which they had eight). The only footwear he bought was watertight boots for himself. He also had about forty fowls, which he fed on wallaby meat, so the eggs he got from them cost him nothing. He always had plenty of eggs and as they kept a cow they had their own milk and butter, and if he wanted fresh beef, well there were plenty of wild cattle running in the scrub, all mud-fat, and just to be knocked over with a gun. Well, we borrowed some tools and started on the job in the silver wattle about four miles away. It was a grove many acres in extent with trees eighteen to twenty-four inches in diameter and 100' high, and so close together it was impossible to fell one without getting hooked up on others. We moved a bit further down the river to a place where there was a stand of blackwood. It was

pouring rain at this time and we still had no swags so we built a shelter of fern fronds and logs and laid down, wet to the skins, for we could not get a fire to burn owing to everything being so wet.
The next day, Sunday, the weather came out fine and dry so after dinner my brother strolled off to look at the timber on the other side of the river. Later I decided to follow him and went over to a big log near our hut. It was propped up on its roots and I discovered it only needed my bit of weight on it to make it drop, and I fell with it into a hole about fifteen feet deep. I felt it going under so I made a leap into more shallow water and managed to scramble out and up the bank. I could have been drowned as I was not able to swim.
It was a wonderful river for fish - blackfish, eels, trout, and native herrings. One evening my brother and I started out with two rods and lines, but they were going so fast that I used the rods while brother Frank had all he could do to take the fish off the hooks and rebait them. In less than half an hour we had caught over twenty pounds of fish, but as we had no salt they were all bad by morning, as it came out very hot.
We found that the blackwood, though good for sawing, was too cross-grained for splitting, but we had to stay until our swags came up. We had no frypan but a splitter who lived a mile away had one that he used to lend us - it meant a long walk if we wanted to fry anything. Going for it one Sunday, my brother having gone in a different direction, I got to where the track led off to the splitter's hut and while standing looking down the track I felt something strike my leg. I was very shocked to discover I was standing on a snake. I lost no time in getting off him and, as I had no stick, I lost him in the rubbish. I had a narrow escape from being bitten but as I was standing close to his head he could not get round to bite me - it was his other end that was hitting up against my leg. Had I been bitten then my exit from this world would have been speedy, as my brother was far off somewhere and the nearest township was Bass - fourteen miles away. The other closest town was Dandenong - 57 miles.

(To Be Continued)



EARLY GIPPSLAND ANGLICANS

"Early settlement in Gippsland was a time when a more than ordinary proportion of rough men lived in a rough environment...on the whole, the standards of behaviour tended to decline in a community beyond the compulsion of law and the influence of religion. The first clergymen to visit Gippsland commented particularly on bad language, intemperate habits, indifference to religion and ignorance of church forms and ritual."
I.T.Maddern: Morwell Historical Society News Vol.1, No. 23.

The first clergyman to minister to the needs of Gippsland people was the Rev. E.G.Pryce who, with a black guide, made his way from Monaro in N.S.W. down the Snowy River to Alberton in 1854. He was welcomed by all denominations and made at least two visits to Gippsland in the following years.

The next visiting clergyman was the Rev. Francis Hales who left Melbourne on horseback on 2 April, 1848, calling at every little settlement between Melbourne and Port Albert. He wore '*strong trousers, waistcoat and waterproof frock coat, the skirts of which I was obliged to tie out of the way, a pair of shoes, leather gaiters and spurs, a straw hat fastened to me with black tape. My luggage was a pair of saddlebags containing three shirts, three pairs of socks, three white cravats, a night shirt which gave me a pleasant change at night, and a night cap to wear in the bush. My journal, memoranda and a few papers, small portfolio with paper, a few sermons of my own, hair brush, razor, combs, nearly a pound of tobacco which Dr Adam kindly gave me as bush money, and my pocket Bible. I had besides, thread and needles, matches, a large bush knife, some soap and a piece of wax candle which, at Dr Adam's suggestion, Mrs Wilmott gave me.'*

The Rev. Hale held services in homes, woolsheds and hotels, returning to Melbourne in June 1848.

In November 1848, the Rev. Willoughby Bean was appointed minister in charge of the whole of Gippsland! He was based at Port Albert where he held his first service on 26 November. He said:
'*I was much struck and painfully so, with the air of apathy and indifference with which the service was gone through, when compared with my little flock at Williamstown. I appeared to be the only person present engaged in prayer. All the rest sat with their eyes fixed on me as though astonished at such a strange display or occupation. I might, however, make an exception in favour of Mrs Phillips and her sister, who occasionally made the responses.*'

In 1849, Bishop Perry, accompanied by his wife, set out from Melbourne to visit Gippsland. They were attended by an escort of native troopers and travelled over country which was, says Mrs Perry, '*so steep that I thought it must be impossible not to slip over the horse's head going down and over his tail coming up.*' At Shady Creek (now Trafalgar) they had to dismount and cross crazy, make-shift bridges over the Latrobe and Moe Rivers. The party then spent the night at a 'hotel' at Moe. Mrs Perry describes it:
'*Besides the amazing gaps between the slabs, the door of the room, which was as usual the door of the house too, was about a foot too short both top and bottom, so the wonder was we were not worried by dogs and other animals. There was no milk, no butter, nothing but excessively bad salt beef, bush tea and , happily, good bread...Our bedroom was a very narrow skillion , with a black earth floor all hills and dales, which stuck to our feet and dirtied the bottom of one's clothes. The window was a square hole sawn in one of the slabs. Glass or anything else to supply its place, was never heard of. The bed was clean and the mattress wool instead of straw, which two comforts conduced to our having a very good night.*'

At Moe, 'Parson'Bean and a parishioner, Mr Sparkes, met them and accompanied them on the rest of their journey to Sale and Bairnsdale, from where they continued on to Tarraville and Port Albert, returning to Melbourne via Loy Yang.

The difficulties of travelling in Gippsland in the latter part of the nineteenth century were constantly mentioned. Before the coming of the railway, travel was mostly by horse, or on foot in the more rugged areas, and the huge trees, dense undergrowth, fast-flowing rivers and swamps were constant problems. Travellers regularly became stuck in "The Gluepot", a notorious morass to the west of Moe, and vehicles often had to be abandoned with broken axles. At least two Anglican clergymen were drowned attempting to swim their horses across flooded Gippsland rivers - the news of one of these tragedies, the death of Rev. Hartmann, reached Bishop Moorehouse as he took a service in the railway goods shed in Morwell in the early 1880's.
SOURCE: "The Church of Our Fathers"- Albert E. Clark