



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Newsletter Volume 9 Number 3 August 2012

Preserving Our Heritage

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Help wanted

We are in great need of help from our members. We need your support to

- stay open on Thursdays and Fridays.
- catalogue items
- prepare displays
- plan activities please volunteer

Remembering J T Knox

Our next meeting on September 12th will be devoted to the subject of J T Knox, his fine engineering career and his contribution to the local area. The meeting will begin at 8 pm with the discussion on J T Knox being first on the agenda. A short general meeting will follow.



Knox's Rockhill farm in the 1977

Magic Lantern Show

This year marks the centenary of the beautiful Leongatha Mechanics' Institute. The building consists of two large rooms, a hallway and a billiard room. The construction materials are unique. The exterior walls are concrete bricks with the interior walls being made of Tarwin River reeds and plaster. All the ceilings are pressed metal and have their own unique designs. The front room windows are stained glass. The huge billiard room functioned independently until 1982. The library was in the front room and offices were in the other room. When a new library was built the entire building became the home of the Leongatha and District Historical Society in August 1983.

Our building is the second Mechanics' Institute in Leongatha. The original building was located next door on the site of the Memorial Hall and was opened in 1891. In 1895 a Magic Lantern show was held in the original hall with the main subject being the Sudan War.

To celebrate the centenary our president John Hyett, a collector of magic lantern slides, presented a Magic Lantern Show. John had acquired some slides of the Sudan War and they were a part of his presentation.

The evening was a great success and the slides gave those in attendance a great insight into the visual entertainment of times long ago. Thank you to John for the interesting show and all those who helped with the supper



The front room of the Leongatha Mechanics' Institute in the 1990s. The superb ceiling is clearly shown.

A centenary plaque for the front wall of the Mechanics' Institute has been obtained from the Victorian Mechanics' Institutes Association and will be attached soon.

Koorooman East Avenue of Honour

This Avenue of Honour has been restored and a plaque giving the names of the men from the area who went to the Great War (1914-1918) has been placed on a large rock. Thank you to David Shambrook and Ian Lester for their hard work on this project. The Shire of South Gippsland contributed to the vegetation clearing and restoration of the avenue. The grand opening will be on November 11th.

Vale Lorna Dowel by Lyn Skillern

- Lorna was a member of the Leongatha and District Historical Society for over 30 years and her knowledge of the local area and its inhabitants was remarkable. She was so respected by the Society that she was given a life membership in 2008.
- As a local and family historian Lorna had a great pedigree. She was justifiably proud of being a descendent of an original South Gippsland pioneer who's recollections are recorded in *Land of the Lyrebird*. That's local history royalty.
- Lorna loved history and enjoyed reading about all topics. She also kept wonderful scrapbooks. In these she placed articles about her family and friends as well as the significant events in relation to the historical society and the wider community. Her cuttings on the lady of the swamp, for example, went way back and covered the story from the 50s. It is in relation to the scrapbook that I can point out one occasion when Lorna proved me wrong. I was writing a piece for the newsletter about the time we received the key to the Mechanics' Institute. I said that certain people were present with me on that day. Lorna disagreed and named those she thought were there. The next Friday Lorna had her scrapbook with a photo all ready to prove that I was incorrect. This was a great wake up call for me as I thought I remembered events perfectly. Now I say, as I recall.
- Our best memory is of Lorna sitting on her stool, scissors in hand cutting out obituaries from local papers and placing them in our alphabetical files. She would be working away and joining in to the conversations, often given us previously unknown gems. She was always cheerful and grateful for the friendship of others.
- Lorna loved to talk about her childhood in Blackwood Forest and she always disliked plum jam (even mine) as it was the only flavour she had as a child. The stories of hard work and the difficulties of growing up when she did were told from the heart. She remembered the poverty and mine disasters of the time so well. She loved helping new residents of Blackwood Forest learn about the history of the area and she wrote up many of her memories for future generations to be able to read and enjoy.
- Sadly Lorna was unable to take part in the Society's activities in recent times and we missed her very much. We say farewell to Lorna and remember our local treasure.



The Annual Meeting of the Society was held on Wednesday August 8th. Below is the report by John Hyett

The President's report AGM 2012

I've completed my first year as president of the society after moving into the area some 19 months ago and retiring from work at the end of last year. I've enjoyed the year and am getting to know the members and how the society functions and have been made most welcome by everybody. Living at Venus Bay I do find it a little difficult at times to contribute as much as I would like in the society activities but hope you will all bear with me on this.

Some of the highlights of the past year have included:

- In October 2011 a bus tour was organised to take our members and friends to see some of the historic homes in the area. This tour was enjoyed by all who attended and the society plans to conduct more in the future
- On Australia Day 2012 an historic walk was held at the site of Leongatha High School. This popular activity was a fitting start to the centenary year for Leongatha Secondary College
- Dave Kelly from the Masonic Lodge was an important speaker in February as the Leongatha Masonic Lodge closed after 100 years and has since been sold. The lodge has a wonderful history and it was an eye opener for many present.
- The Sister Potter plaque has been finally been completed and installed, much I would imagine, to the relief of our erstwhile secretary.
- I would like to congratulate Lyn Skillern on her publication of *From Inkwell to Internet a century of State Secondary Education in Leongatha* for the centenary of the Leongatha High/Tech/Secondary College. The book sold out quickly and a reprint had to be ordered.
- A grant was received from the Shire to install two gas heaters in our building but it would appear that it is not a simple process to install heaters, but we are all looking forward to warm rooms for next winter
- We celebrated the centenary of the Mechanics Institute building we call home with a Magic Lantern show that included slides on the Sudan War first seen in Leongatha in the original Mechanics Institute building in 1895.

Two exhibitions have been held during the year:

Lets get a head was the theme for the exhibition that was set up for the Daffodil Festival and beyond. Anything to do with heads was on display including hats, wigs, teeth, hairdressing items and much more.

A century of class is the title of the current exhibition as 2012 is a big year for the Leongatha community with the centenary of State Secondary Education in Leongatha being celebrated in April along with the centenary of the Court House and the 120th anniversary of the brass band.

The cataloguing of our collection continues thanks to our archivist, and the building remains open to the public on Thursday and Friday afternoon thanks to our dedicated

Officer bearers for 2012-13

President John Hyett

Vice Presidents Robert Sage and Ian Lester

Secretary Lyn Skillern

Treasurer Pat Spinks

Archivist Pat Spinks

Life in pioneer times Cooking by Ian Lester

Most cooking in the pioneer days was done in a camp oven. Damper, meats and vegetables could all be cooked in one. They were made of cast iron and came in a range of sizes from six inches to over fifteen inches in diameter. Camp ovens had cast iron lids and some had three short legs. New ovens had to be seasoned in order to prevent the contents sticking to the surfaces of the oven. Seasoning means heating the camp oven up with something like fat to form a carbon layer on the inside of the oven. A camp oven was to be heated before use.

With a suitable temperature achieved and the contents placed inside the camp oven it was placed on a bed of hot coals and a shovel was used to place more coals on the lid. Camp ovens were never washed with soap and detergent but rinsed using hot water and allowed to dry. As the fire risk in early buildings was very high, much of the cooking was done outside in the open. To prevent problems with rain a shelter of canvas or bark may have been erected over the cooking area. Many early rural homes had a kitchen built that was separate from the house or a single fireplace that served as a cooking place. Today camp ovens are used by vehicle-based campers. The problems are that they are heavy and can be damaged by rough handling. Bedourie ovens are made of steel and are virtually impossible to break.

When cooking outside over an open fire utensils were often supported with a tripod, which consisted of 3 steel legs about 3 feet long joined at their top end. A chain was used to support such utensils as billys, frying pans and grilling plates a suitable distance from the fire.

Another device, which served a similar role, was the fire gantry, which was attached to a permanent fireplace. It consisted of a metal arm 3-4 feet long, hinged where it was attached to the fireplace. It had a chain on the far end to suspend the utensil over the fire. The arm was swung away from the fire to attach the utensil and swung back over the heat.

Also used were parallel steel bars approximately 6 to 8 inches apart and joined at the ends and 3 feet 4 inches long overall. These supported utensils over an open fire and are supported by bricks.

Drovers seemed to use all these methods and could produce great food especially damper and hearty stews.



A camp oven at the historical society

Stop Press!!! The gas heaters have been installed. It has taken a while. Well done to Pat Spinks for her efforts in organising the tradesmen.

The Court House Centenary October 2012

The calendar of events for the celebration are shown below. Our rooms will be open and we will have some appropriate material on display

Date	Monday 22 October	Tuesday 23 October	Wednesday 24 October	Thursday 25 October	Friday 26 October	Saturday 27 October
Events - day			Council Meeting (2pm)	Mock Trial Mary MacKillop CRC: 10am Leongatha Secondary College : 1.45- 3.15pm Leongatha and District Historical Society is open on this day.	Leongatha and District Historical Society is open on this day.	Various events in and around the Court House and CBD area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical Police Vehicles & SG Historical Car Club • Public lectures (family law, citizenship & democracy, JPs, TBC) • tree planning, commemorative rock and time capsule • unveiling of two commissioned paintings of the Court House exterior and interior • Court House open for people to wander through
Events - evening		7.30pm Michael Challinger public lecture on historic court houses of Victoria (+ an informal dinner at McCartins beforehand)	Citizenship Ceremony (early evening) (TBC)		Leongatha Lyric Theatre <i>Trial By Jury</i> + another performance (TBC)	Leongatha Lyric Theatre <i>Trial By Jury</i> + another performance (TBC)

