

Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving Our Heritage

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Latest News

The end of year celebration

Our end of year Christmas get together will be held on Saturday December 9th at the home of Pat and Jim Spinks from 12 noon. Members are asked to bring a salad, dessert or some cold meat to share. Please let Pat know what you are going to bring. (phone 56686365)

The Statue of Lennie Gwyther



There was great excitement in Leongatha on October 24th when the Statue of our local hero Lennie Gwyther was unveiled in the park opposite the police station. What an event it was. The crowd was well over 500 and included school children dressed as Lennie or Ginger Mick, Gwyther family members from all over and special guests. Authors Mary Small (Lennie's Ride) and Stephanie Owen-Reeder (Lennie the Legend) as well as Peter Lalor author of *The Bridge* were all present. This fine bronze statue commemorates the journey of nine year old Lennie and his pony Ginger Mick to Sydney for the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932.

Many who stop at that parking area for a break will no doubt visit the statue. It is also something the district can be very proud of. *The Dog on the Tucker box* look out our Lennie will become a must see.

Vale Weston Arthur Bate OAM FRHSV (1924-2017)



Weston Bate with
Lyn Skillern

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV) and the community history movement in Victoria is saddened by the passing of one its greatest sons, Professor Weston Bate on 31 October. Weston Bate was born in Surrey Hills Melbourne, son of Mary Olive Akers, a Californian and Ernest Bate an English-born engineer. He attended Surrey Hills primary for three years before moving to Scotch College. He then served in the RAAF and flew Lancaster bomber missions from England. After the war he enrolled at the University of Melbourne under a serviceman's tertiary scholarship and was captivated by History under the tutelage of Max Crawford and his few staff. Weston began teaching at Brighton Grammar in 1949, under the headship of Philip Wilson his future father-in-law. taking teacher training classes each afternoon. He began a part time MA in 1950, while teaching. His marriage to life-long partner Janice Wilson in 1955, and their four of six children being born before 1962, delayed the MA. It then became the ground breaking *A History of Brighton* (1962, 1983).

After fifteen years of teaching at Brighton Grammar and Melbourne Grammar, Weston was appointed to the History Department at the University of Melbourne, where he became a passionate and captivating lecturer. He became Professor of Australian Studies at Deakin University in 1978 before retiring in 1989.

If his *History of Brighton* set new standards in local history, *Lucky City* (1978) and his second volume of Ballarat's history, *Life After Gold* (1993) set new heights in goldfields community history. This writing assisted the creation of Sovereign Hill, which honours him with the Weston Bate annual lecture. In retirement he wrote histories of Geelong and Melbourne Grammar, of the Metropolitan and Barwon Heads golf clubs (for he was a skilled player into his nineties), a wonderful book on Melbourne laneways and other publications. He also published a chat book of love poems to the Mornington Peninsula, *Haphazard Quilt* (2006).

Weston Bate served on the Museum Advisory Board in the 1980s. He was a long-serving member of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and was awarded a fellowship of the Society in 1991. Weston served on the RHSV Council for fifteen years from 1990 and as President of the RHSV from 1991-97 and 2002-05. His greatest gift was to energise all those he met and to inspire historical societies across the state to pursue history with more skill, passion and tenacity. The RHSV sends its deepest sympathy to his wife Janice Bate, their children James, Rosemary, Tristan, Nicholas, Linden and Christopher, their partners and their families. His last days were spent peacefully at Cabrini Prahran with close friends and his much loved and loving family by his side. A passionate lifeforce finally quelled.

A bygone, bypassed era- Bena and Ruby by Lyn Skillern

The last edition of our newsletter had an article about Ruby now we have Bena. Selectors first took up land in the Bena area in the late 1870s. A town survey was made in 1887 in anticipation of the opening of the Great Southern Railway. Robert Fuller and his son Robert John Fuller privately organised a township survey on their land around where the railway station was set to be. The town was called Cromwell and advertisements were placed in Melbourne newspapers promoting the new town and encouraging land purchase. With Bena expected to be one of the main stations on the railway line a number of businesses started. A bakery, coffee palace, store, butcher and large two-storey forty-roomed hotel were all opened by 1890. The hundreds of labourers working on the Great Southern Railway construction used the township and its facilities. By 1890 the Post Master General rejected Cromwell and the name Bena was officially gazetted. R J Fuller worked out a practicable route for the Great Southern Railway to go through Loch, alongside Alsop's Creek and rising up to Bena. His dream of a thriving township at Bena never happened. The discovery of commercial coal seams at Korumburra meant it became the main local service centre.



Early Bena, the hotel is on the far left

Establishing a farm in the early days was difficult. In 1879 city girl Mrs R J Fuller came from Richmond in an American style covered wagon with her 4 children ranging from 4 months to 6 years. It took 3 days to get to Loch and another day on packhorses to reach Bena. For furniture they had a cradle, a sewing machine taken to pieces and packed in the cradle and a rocking chair also taken to pieces. All other items had to be made on the premises. For the next 6 years they only purchased items that could come on a packhorse. The total lack of roads was a problem and early settlers blazed tracks to connect them to Poowong and McDonalds Track. These tracks were then surveyed and basic roads created.

An important decision made by the Fullers in relation to the township was to provide a hotel. They set aside lots 36 -39 for this purpose. Building commenced in 1888 and completed the following year. Known as The Cromwell Hotel the Fullers were part owners when it was first licensed. The hotel name changed along with the township in 1890 and it remained an important local facility for more than fifty years. When licensing conditions imposed building improvements on the hotel, the most economic course was to close down and demolish the building in 1942

The Bena School opened in 1890 in what had been a coffee palace, and continued there until 1895 when a building was provided by the Education Department, with financial assistance from Robert Fuller, on the present site. The students were allowed a break from school in 1891 to welcome the first train to Bena. Noted pioneer teacher Mary Leys was an early Head Teacher. She had taught at Jeetho West and Corinella East in the early days when school buildings and resources were very basic indeed. The school was replaced in 1921 and an extra room was added seven years later. In 1937 it had to close for some time due to a serious outbreak of poliomyelitis. Bena School finally closed due to lack of numbers in 2006. The school is now a private home.

The butter factory was first discussed in 1892 when a meeting was held in the hotel to discuss forming a cooperative to build a butter factory. Shares were purchased and a factory built and operational by 1893. Cream came in by rail or wagon and this made selling their cream easier for the dairy farmers of the district. By 1896 the factory was sold to a Melbourne company. In February 1901 the building was destroyed by fire but fortunately it was rebuilt. The factory had several owners and finally closed in 1942.

The Anglican Church being moved from Outtrim to Bena



The Bena community started discussing the need for a hall from 1890. The railway goods shed with its good quality wooden floor was used for community events from 1891. Eventually a committee was formed to raise funds for a public hall and this was built in 1897. A ball was held to officially open the hall in December of that year. The hall was expanded and modernized in 1925, was destroyed by fire in 1938 and rebuilt on the present site opening in 1939. The hall has had many changes but still provided the community with a meeting place

A Presbyterian Church was built in 1908 and functioned until 1973. The Fuller family set aside a site for an Anglican Church in 1889 but this was left vacant until 1937. The unused St Clements Church from Outtrim was transported from the former coal-mining town and re established in Bena.

The highway has now bypassed Bena and most of the facilities are gone. The football team amalgamated with Korumburra and there is little remaining of the town that once was.

While Ruby and Bena have joined the large number of small settlements that have declined in importance, fortunately they have retained their sense of community and provide a history that forms the basis of our early farming district.



Bena railway station

Don't throw out old paper work; you never know it could be of great historic interest.

The Leongatha Historical Society recently obtained some wonderful invoices from Robert Simons dating back to the very early settlement of Leongatha in 1890. These invoices indicate the type of items purchased at the stores run by George Roughead, Edmond Hayes and later W H Hayes and P and J Hayes, Robert Long and W S Balding and Co then Ridgeway and Balding and Ridgway and Co. The documents date from 1890 until around 1905 and give much information about the storekeepers of early Leongatha and the produce

they sold. Much of this valuable information was unknown prior to the discovery of the invoices. The documents relating to the Hayes family business led to interesting research and fascinating discoveries about the Hayes family in the area and elsewhere.

It is interesting to note that some of the invoices use the name Koorooman for Leongatha. A township called Koorooman was surveyed at what is now Leongatha North but this location was not suitable for a railway line so another township was surveyed at a point in the parish of Leongatha where the proposed Great Southern Railway crossed the Coast road from Morwell to Inverloch. In December 1890 the name Leongatha was gazette as the correct name for the town

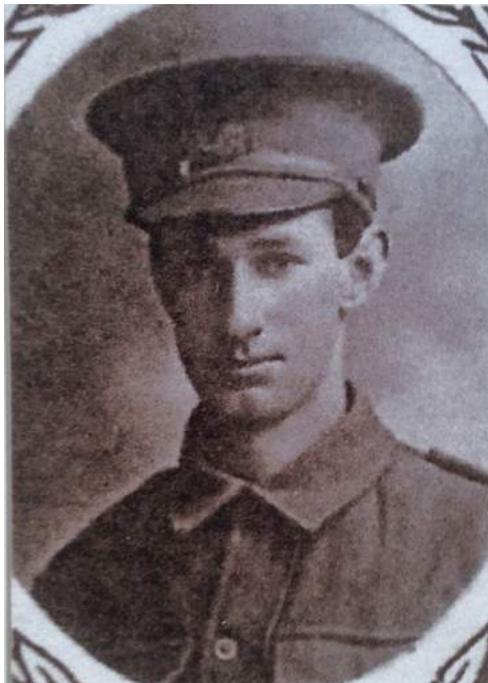
Historic Plaques

We have now received permission to place a plaque of Hayes' Store and The Star office.



Hayes' store 1890

The lost men of late 1917



Tom Hyde



Edward Shrives

September to November 1917 was an especially sad time for Woorayl Shire with many soldiers from the area killed in the battles in Belgium on the Western Front.

20/9/17 Vernon Crole of Stony Creek, KIA near Polygon Wood
20/9/17 Tasman Fixter of Rosedale and Boisdale, KIA Passchendaele
20/9/17 Alexander Grenville of Stony Creek KIA, Passchendaele
20/9/17 Emmanuel Martin of Tarwin Lower and Inverloch, KIA Passchendaele
22/9/17 Lachlan McLean of Leongatha, wounded in Belgium died at Rouen France
21/9/17 Robert Sproull of Koorooman East KIA, near Ypres Belgium
25/9/17 Herbert Claxton aka Charles Lodge of Mirboo South, KIA at Polygon Wood
26/9/17 Earnest Baulch from Dumbalk/Dollar, KIA at Polygon Wood
26/9/17 Robert Smith of Leongatha, KIA Polygon Wood
29/9/17 Frank Gallin of Meeniyon, KIA Polygon Wood
4/10/17 David McCarthy of Koonwarra, KIA Polygon Wood
4/10/17 Frank Newberry of Tarwin, KIA near Ypres Belgium.
4/10/17 Terrance Smith, of Leongatha, KIA near Ypres Belgium
4/10/17 Horace Trudgill of Leongatha, wounded at Popperinhge and died at a casualty clearing station
5/10/17 Norman Cornthwaite of Mirboo North, KIA Passchendaele
8/10/17 Charles Hey of Leongatha, KIA near Ypres Belgium
9/10/17 William Tourier of Stony Creek, KIA Broodseinde Ridge
12/10/17 Oswald Bright of Ruby KIA, Passchendaele
13/10/17 William C Smith of Mardan South, KIA Passchendaele
18/10/17 Fred Brown of Leongatha and Western Australia, KIA near Ypres
22/10/17 Edward Shrives of Meeniyon KIA, Popperinghe
2/11/17 Thomas Hyde of Koorooman East KIA, Passchendaele
28/11/17 James Darling of Mardan, KIA Broodseinde



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Earnest Baulch

Changes to our opening hours

The last opening day for 2017 will be December 15th.

We will open again on January 11th 2018.