

Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving Our Heritage

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Latest News

The Shingler Lecture/Dinner.

This year the event will be held on Saturday September 15 at 6.30 pm.

The guest speakers will be Dorothy Giles with the assistance of others who will tell us about the history of the Great Southern Star and the Gannon family's connection to newspapers in South Gippsland. More details will be sent to members in the future.

VALE Reg Williams

Local identity Reg Williams passed away recently at the age of 85. Reg had been a regular visitor to our Society on Thursdays and Fridays and a contributor to our history of the businesses and shops in the town. Our condolences go to his daughters Carol and June and their families

Street Stall and raffle

We had a very successful street stall on April 6 raising \$383 and Deb Moloney ran two raffles raising over \$500. Another street stall is planned in the next month.

Anzac Lunch

Richard Powell spoke to the Society at our annual Anzac event. This year a lunch was held instead of a dinner. Richard spoke about the men on the Meeniyan Honour Roll

Kath Murphy

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Kath Murphy. A stalwart of our Society who died recently at the age of 91. From Damian Murphy

Kath was born in the small Mallee town of Charlton, the youngest child in a family of eight. She was the daughter of a wheelwright, a first generation immigrant from Ireland. Kath grew up in the tiny town of Culgoa further into the Mallee. Her stories from her Mallee childhood of digging out the sand from the back door, the mice plagues, the isolation, the heat and the flies stayed with her all her life.

Her early life in the bone dry Mallee during the depression years set her up with the values that endured and which led to the rewarding life which ended a short time ago. Those values were family, faith, compassion, friendship, service and empathy.

When she completed primary school she joined her older sister Noreen at Catholic Ladies College in East Melbourne. She boarded at St Joseph's Hostel in Albert Street, which was run by strict Josephite nuns.

When she completed Leaving Certificate she was all set to commence a course at teachers college but they were closed due to the World War II. Kath then joined the Education Department in the Visual Aids Section after completing a course at the Workingman's College, which became RMIT.

At weekends she sold pies and ice creams for her uncle Noel O'Brien's catering business at VFL grounds such as Richmond and the MCG. . She was an avid dancer and she and Noreen would be regulars at St Kilda Town Hall dances.

Kath was only 20 when she first set foot in Leongatha where she was to spend the rest of her life. Her oldest brother Jack had the licence on the Austral Hotel in Korumburra and during her holidays Kath would be working in the hotel and looking after Jack and his wife's young family. It was her love of dancing that led her to frequent the numerous balls in the district. She presented as somewhat sassy, and in 1948 won the Belle of Belles at the Leongatha Memorial Hall. John happened to be there that night and she caught his eye.

He took his opportunity with Kath and proposed to her on the banks of the Ruby Creek a few months later. He promised her that she would not go hungry.



Kath, second right, at the celebration of 21 years in the Mechanics' and Olivia Skillern's 21st

At that time he was growing onions and share farming with his father. He took out a second mortgage on the farm and by the time they were married in 1950 he had a partially completed three roomed dwelling for them to move into.

During the 1950's John was active in the National Catholic Rural Movement, which was sponsoring numerous European post War migrants into the area. Many found a welcome table, and often a bed, at Rubybank during that difficult transition period. Many went on to be pillars of this community including brothers Tony, John and Gerald Lamers, John McGrath, the Tattersalls, the Weedenbergs, Sylvester Torcutti, and the Nieustegs. Kath formed lasting friendships with their spouses.

Feeding a large household became the big challenge of her life. Seasonal foods were eaten fresh, bottled, pickled, dried, stewed and frozen. The Fowlers bottling system worked overtime, even in summer, as if a drought was always around the corner even in Gippsland, a land of abundance.

She was a consummate cake cook. Sunday afternoon teas were impressive for the cousins, the Davis's, the Kindelan's, the Bridge Dairy Murphy's and the O'Briens. All would come and the sponges with passionfruit icing were demolished in a flash.

Also a great collector, Kath fostered an interest in local history in all the family. She collected Noritaki china, brooches, lace, glass buttons, belt buckles, books, Australiana and historical ephemera. She developed a great ability to display and curated exhibitions of women's fashions, Christening and Wedding gowns, lace items and WWI history at the Historical Society rooms in the Mechanics Institute.

She was a founding member of the Leongatha and District Historical Society and a member of The Leongatha North State School Auxiliary, St Laurence's Parish Council, the fete committee, the Board of the Woorayl District Memorial Hospital where she was influential in naming Koorooman House, and also Meals On Wheels.

Kath was engaged in fundraising for orphanages, for "Those Who Have Less", and Community Aid Abroad, and supported many missionaries in other ways.

In 2005 she was named as the Leongatha and district Australia Day outstanding Citizen of the year.



The Murphys, John and Kath with their children from right, Damian, Josephine, Nick, Kate, Luke, Angela, John and Greg

Kath had something of a competitive streak in relation to her cooking prowess and thus was a regular entrant in the Leongatha A and P Society show. She literally papered the kitchen walls with first and second prizes for a wide variety of cakes, plum puddings, jams, collections of

cakes, pickles and fruit mint sauce. She regularly swept the competition. The kitchen at Rubybank was almost a one man batching plant for cakes to feed the masses for Sunday afternoon teas and for various street stalls. She loved making marmalade!

Kath was a most valuable and long-term member of the Leongatha Historical Society. She had a wonderful knowledge of the area's past and people as well as that of textiles and collectables. Whenever we needed sponges and other items of food for an event it appeared. Her jams sold as Lizzie Larkin products were legendary. Kath received an order of merit ward from the Royal Historical Society of Victoria for her wonderful contribution to the preservation of local history in the area. It is also important to mention that our Kath was the woman behind the author in her support of our most noted historian her husband John.

The Great Southern Railway 1893 Part 2

From The Illustrated Australian News (Melbourne) 1 Jan 1893

The journey from Koo Wee Rup through to Korumburra via Loch and Bena does not rate a mention in the article.

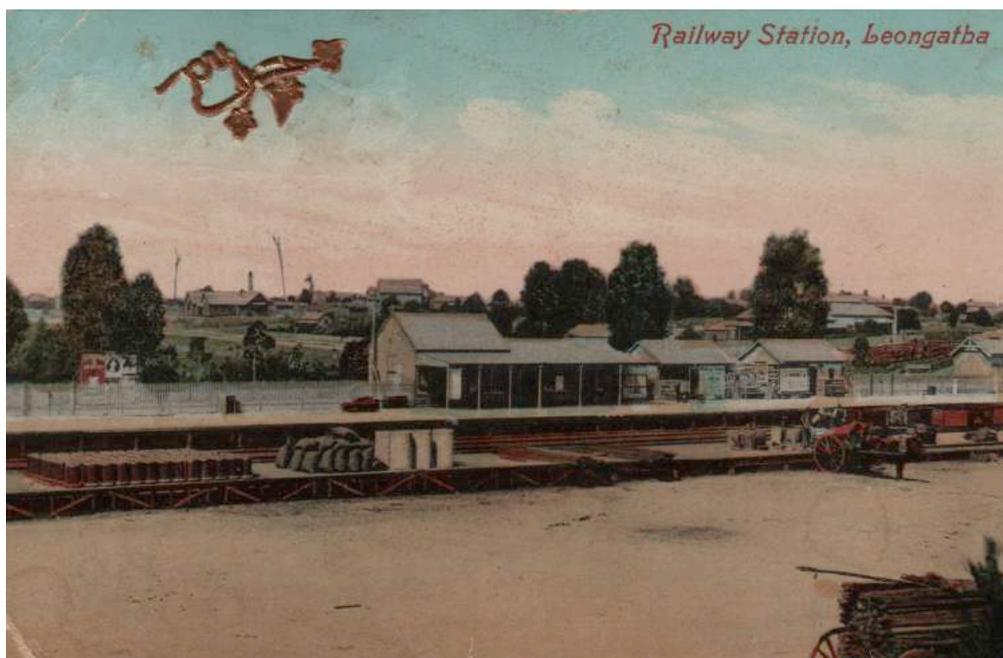


Bena Station

Little more than two years ago the ground where on the township of Korumburra now stands was covered by virgin forest. In these two years the railway line has been opened, coal pits have been sunk, a thriving little township has sprung up, and the future looks to be one of considerable prosperity. On inquiry I found that Mr. Hardwick, the manager of the Coal Creek Proprietary Company coal pit, was down the gully there," about a mile away,' and I could find him by following that track. I followed it, and found it muddy, but I had not gone far before I was overtaken by a gentleman who evidently revelled in it, for he slushed through it up to the ankles, with a long stride and a swing of the shoulders that raised my envy. I stuck to him, for after I had gone hopelessly into it once or twice I grew careless of the consequences, or whether I left my boots behind me or not. After being disappointed at the place indicated we at last found the manager. Some distance further on he was at work with two men prospecting for coal, and he had found it, but could not then tell whether it was the upper seam or that underneath. We took a shortcut back to the mine; and at once got on the cage; a man sang out, 'Men on — right," and all my internal economy came up to meet me as we surged down into the depths. Eighty-six feet -and bottom, but pitch dark in spite of the little tallow lamp with which I had been presented. I groped a few steps after the manager's light, and then bumped my head. I stooped a bit. And went on again; another bump, lower still, and so on till I felt like 90 -years of age, waddling painfully along, completely doubled The Walls were damp, the indoors uneven; and although the air was perfectly fresh there was a queer un canny feeling in the place. The end of the drive appeared in view. Two dim figures were

working by the aid of two small lamps hooked into their hats. They seemed along way off when first I saw them, and I was astonished to find myself almost on top of them when I had gone but a few yards further. The drive, which seemed to me to be about a mile long turns out to be only 55 yards. Mr. Hardwick, who has had 30 years' experience in the coal districts of England, says he never saw a finer roof. I felt a deep sympathy for these two men, who were steadily punching away at the mass of black coal in front of them, sitting in that cramped position for eight hours a day. We worked our passage back again, and I was glad to step out and stand upright in the warm sunshine. At the present time all the coal that is being raised is taken by the contract or for the Great Southern Railway. There are five or six other mines in the same district, and all that is wanted now to thoroughly develop the seams is railway communication, which is likely soon to be granted. The contractor's train pulled up at Korumburra station, and left for Foster half an hour afterwards. The line' from

Leongatha Station in the early days.



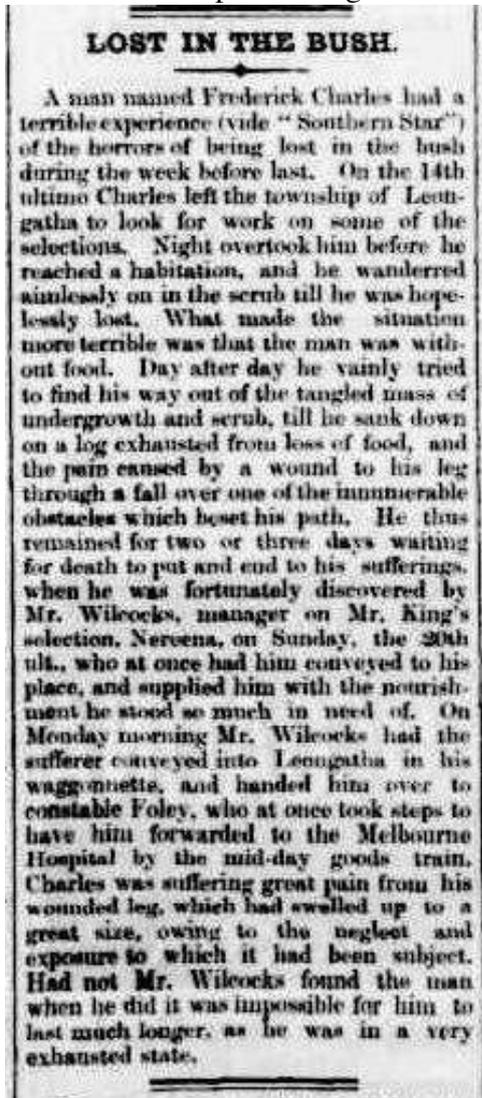
Korumburra to Foster is 40 miles long, with 11 stations between. It is an eminently picturesque route, passing, as it does, through hilly country, with fine forests and beautiful-fern tree gullies, or over low plains with long lagoons lying like a mirror among the reeds and grass. It is a constant succession of changes of ever varying beauty, and the eye is never tired of looking to right and left as the train rushes on its way. The first place we stopped at was Leongatha, or, as it was formerly called, Koorooman. It is said. that from there back to Nyora will be one of the finest agricultural districts. The Victorian government have just taken the line over, and regular traffic has begun. In the township all was bustle, building was going on a pace, and the sound of hammers was everywhere. Although only around 12 months old there must be about 50 houses, with two large hotels, two banks, shire hall, mechanics' hall and stores. We were rattling along in good earnest, and were some distance past West Tarwin when we came to a sudden stop right opposite old Meeniyan. A block on the line 2 miles off through a broken axle, and we can't go on without the staff.' After waiting for two hours and a half the locomotive whistled out a warning call, and we all scampered back to our places, and were once more rattling along at a good speed.

“LOST IN THE BUSH” by Alan McGuinness

Topical news lately has been the successful rescue of missing people in the bush. The Star newspaper recently carried an article when camper Sebastian Orefors was missing for 5 days in April and found near Toora North, and then Narelle Davies and her horse was lost for 4 days near Mt. Buller in May.

Our records show an incredible similarity to an article in the Warragul Guardian in 1892 quoting the ‘Southern Star’.

“A man named Frederick Charles had a terrible experience (vide ‘Southern Star’) of the horrors of being lost in the bush during the week before last. On the 14th of March Charles left the township of Leongatha to look for work on some of the selections. Night overtook



him before he reached a habitation and he wandered aimlessly on in the scrub until he was hopelessly lost. What made the situation more terrible was that the man was without food. Day after day he vainly tried to find his way out of the tangled mass of undergrowth and scrub, till he sank down on a log exhausted from loss of food, and pain caused by a wound to his leg through a fall over one of the innumerable obstacles which beset his path. He thus remained for two or three days waiting for death to put an end to his sufferings, when he was fortunately discovered by Mr. Wilcocks, manager on Mr. King's selection, Nerrena, on Sunday the 20th March, who at once had him conveyed to his place, and supplied him with the nourishment he stood so much in need of. On Monday morning Mr. Wilcocks had the sufferer conveyed into Leongatha in his wagonette, and handed him over to constable Foley, who at once took steps to have him forwarded to the Melbourne Hospital by the mid-day goods train. Charles was suffering great pain from his wounded leg, which had swelled up to a great size, owing to the neglect and exposure to which it had been subject. Had not Mr. Wilcocks found the man when he did it was impossible for him to last much longer, as he was in a very exhausted state.”

Visiting the War Graves in Northern France

Lyn Skillern has recently returned for a trip to France and the UK. In the company of her daughter Olivia she attended the Dawn Service at Villers Bretonneux on Anzac Day and visited the war graves on the Somme, Flanders and Fromelles. Lyn and Olivia were able to find and photograph the grave or memorial of 97 local men who lost their lives in France in WWI

The graves were in many small and large cemeteries throughout the region. The story of the journey to find the graves will be in a later newsletter.



Lyn Skillern in front of the memorial at V C Corner Fromelles. The names of 8 local men killed in July 1916 at the battle of Fromelles are to her right.

The men on the memorial wall

- Phillip Bellingham, Boorool, 59th Battalion.
- Jack Edney, Leongatha, 59th Battalion.
- Timothy Halloran, Wooreen, 59th Battalion.
- Otto Kiellerup, formerly of Allambee and Leongatha, 59th Battalion
- John Francis Phelan, Mt Eccles, 59th Battalion.
- Thomas Russell, Leongatha, 59th Battalion
- Leslie Walker, Leongatha, 59th Battalion.
- Roy Leigh Ross Tarwin /Meeniyan 59th Battalion

A Recipe from our members

Fruit Mince

This is the fruit mince used for the ice cream Christmas pudding Lyn Skillern makes for our annual Christmas lunch. Stir the mince into softened vanilla ice cream. It can also be used for fruit mince pies.

Place the following in a saucepan

- ½ cup brown sugar
- 2 cups sultanas
- 2 cups currants
- 1 tsp mixed spice
- 2 tbs butter
- ½ cup mixed peel
- 1 grated apple
- 1/2 cup brandy
- 1 cup water
- the rind of a lemon
- the juice of a lemon

Bring to the boil and simmer for 2 minutes
When cool place in a jar and keep in fridge

