



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving Our Heritage

Newsletter Volume 16 Number 3 August 2019

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Latest news

- **The Annual Meeting** of the Leongatha Historical Society will be on Wednesday 11 September at 8 pm. Please come along and support our Society and all its activities. At the meeting John Hyett will be giving a presentation on the life of an Australian lanternist (The life, love and lies of an Australian lanternist). John is an expert in the use of magic lanterns and the stories told by the showing of magic lantern slides

- **The exhibition** "A Sporting Community". Some of our hard -working members have been working on an interesting exhibition on the history of sport in the area. This will open on Friday 30 August. Many items from our collection will be on display as well as memorabilia on loan from members of the community. The history of sport in South Gippsland panels made by the South Gippsland Historical Network some years ago will also be on display.

'Tracking Down the Past'

On Sunday 13 October Neil Breedin will be giving a presentation about his research into the early surveyor's tracks which allowed pioneer settlers to come into the Gippsland region. Neil has carried out some extensive research and has produced a series of maps to illustrate this research. Tracks such as Whitelaw's Track and McDonald's Track will be explained. The presentation will be held in Meeting Room One at the Leongatha Memorial Hall at 2 pm. The entrance is in Michael Place. Afternoon tea will be served as part of the event.

The Daffodil Festival

This year we are opening the display on the history of sport for the festival.

Vale John Murphy.

The story is based on the eulogy delivered by John's son Damien Murphy



John Murphy after he was presented with his GAAHS award for his outstanding contribution to the recording of Gippsland history.

Nicholas John Murphy passed away aged 95 after a short illness on 1 June 2019, 12 months to the day after the death of his spouse of 68 years, Kathleen Murphy. He was buried a year to the day after her burial following a service at St Laurence O'Toole's Catholic Church, Leongatha. This was the church in which he worshipped for his whole life, in which he was married 69 years ago. This church is up the road from the high school where he was educated and later president of the school council. The milk tankers that rumble past are from the town's main employer, the butter factory, whose history he wrote.

Mourners coming to John's funeral may have passed the statue of the famous local Lennie Gwyther with whom John attended high school, the post office where he commenced the mere 5 ½ years of his long life working for someone else, the architecturally impressive Memorial Hall whose history he wrote, the unique Mechanics' Institute where he played billiards, borrowed the books, helped to preserve, and gathered with the members of the Leongatha and District Historical Society.

In seeking to honour his packed life of 95 years Damien noted that when the Polish explorer Paul Strzelecki traversed this area in 1840, he considered that the regions capacity to grow blue gum and black butt had "no parallel in the colony". He suggested that the life of John Murphy has no parallel in recent times in this community.

John's was a life marked by hard work and love of the pastures of South Gippsland, devotion to family, to the Catholic Church, to learning and to the local community of Leongatha.

John's father was born in 1888 and was apprenticed as a baker in Richmond. When he was 21, he lost his job and answered an advertisement for a position as a baker in the newly established Merbein irrigation area. He later obtained a 15-acre fruit block, and was later joined by his parents and brothers who had been conducting a dairy in Burnley. He married Aileen Doyle from Burnley in 1918. His wife found the heat and dust of Merbein and the distance from Mildura trying and they decided to move closer to Melbourne. They looked at land in Colac and Leongatha and in 1921 John's parents with their two young daughters, Mary and Aileen

moved to Leongatha. They purchased an 80-acre parcel of the Begg estate abutting the Ruby Creek on Spencers Road Leongatha North, which they named *Rubybank*.

His father paid top dollar for the property which would have added to the difficulties of the family during the Depression years. John's older brother Richard was born in 1922 and he was born in 1924. Three other daughters followed, Kathleen, Margaret and Carmel. There was a dairy on the property and his father also cultivated onions.

The Leongatha North School opened in 1923 and Richard and John and the younger girls had their primary education in that one-teacher school. Conditions during the 1930s were difficult. Being on a farm meant the family was able to survive by milking cows, fattening pigs, growing onions, and selling the odd box of mushrooms and passionfruit. Milking machines only arrived in 1929 and electricity only came in 1939. When John finished his primary school, he had to help milk the cows before riding his horse in to the high school.



John Murphy with the other past presidents of the Leongatha Historical Society at the 50th anniversary of the Society in 2014.

John was at the high school in Leongatha from 1936 to 1938 and completed his Leaving Certificate. At age 14 he commenced work on 1 January 1939, three weeks before his 15th birthday. He obtained a position as a postal clerk at the Leongatha Post and Telegraph Office. In early 1941 after a short stint at the Wonthaggi office he obtained a position as a telegraphist-in-training at the Central Telegraph Office at the Elizabeth Street Post Office (now known as the GPO). He taught himself to touch type at that time, a skill that was to be of great assistance years later.

When World War II began, his brother Dick enlisted in the Navy and John went to Port Melbourne to attempt to enlist but under the Manpower Regulations he was in a reserve occupation and he had to remain in his existing post. He always honoured those who served their country. Four of his mates from his small high school leaving class enlisted in the RAAF and did not return. John's father was injured in an accident and he was unable to milk his cows. The Manpower authorities released John, who at that stage was working in a post office near Puckapunyal, to return to the farm. He arrived back on a hot day in September 1944 aged 20½ and remained at *Rubybank* for the rest of his life.

On his return he had to milk the 30 odd cows, feed the pigs and there were four acres of onions to be hoed and weeded. He soon learned that the days of a 40-hour week were a thing of the past but after years working in an office found that he enjoyed the outdoor life. His love of farming started and endured for a lifetime.

Working with his father, they milked cows and cultivated onions and potatoes, upgraded the infrastructure on the farm, and he was fortunate that 1945 was a good season. During that year

he worked for the next-door neighbour Mr Daniel Spencer who was growing potatoes and onions.

After the War ended, his brother Dick returned to the farm. There the two brothers grew an increased acreage of onions and potatoes. John also threw himself into the life of the community and met his future spouse Kathleen O'Brien in 1948 when she won Belle of South Gippsland at a Leongatha Hospital fundraiser. Kathleen had come down from the Mallee, and while working in Melbourne, was visiting her older brother Jack who had the licence on the Austral Hotel in Korumburra. He and his other brothers Matt and Gerry also had a blacksmith shop in Leongatha. John and Kath soon became engaged.

His next task was to build a house for them. He engaged an unemployed Swiss boat builder who was living in a tent on the Coalition Creek to assist him. His father's bank would not advance any further funds. He went to another bank and obtained a second mortgage of £1500 to build the house. He was not afraid to borrow money for land or improvements. Around this time Dick had left the farm to establish Bridge Dairy.

John married on a cloudy day on 27 May 1950. After the honeymoon they moved into the almost completed house which, with renovations and additions still stands solid today on Spencers Road.

The 1950s and the first half of the 1960s were a period of family formation and farm expansion. The couple had eight children, five boys and three girls, over the period from 1951 to 1966. It must have imposed an incredible load on them. Being on a farm meant that everyone had to pitch in and much of the food was grown on the farm. With a growing family John looked to expand the farm. Over the next four decades he built two new cowsheds and purchased a number of neighbouring parcels of land which now form the basis of the family dairy enterprise which is flourishing to this day.

While busily milking cows and weeding onions, he was also heavily involved in the life of the Parish. He was a member of the Knights of the Southern Cross and the National Catholic Rural Movement which assisted many recently arrived Dutch and Italian families who still reside the community, many involved in the dairying industry.



The church of St Laurence O'Toole

He was widely read and always had a love of literature and history. In his library were many hardback books purchased in the 1950s. He was treasurer of the Free Library that operated out of the Mechanics' Institute. In 1964 he became the inaugural President of the newly formed Leongatha Historical Society and remained in that role for many years. This was the beginning of his life as an historian.

His first venture into writing local history was a short obituary for Mr J T Knox, the well-known engineer, in 1977. This was expanded into a booklet titled *Knox's Rockhill Farm* (1979) about a notable landmark on the Nerrena Road. He followed this up with another booklet *Nerrena-A Pattern of Progress* (1979). His sister Margaret had settled in that district after marrying Tom Kindellan from a pioneering family.

In 1983 the Historical Society moved into the Mechanics' Institute in McCartin Street and it became a repository of local history. The records of the Leongatha Labour Colony (1893-1919) were available and John was able to put together a history of that unique institution published in 1983. This led to him being commissioned, against competition from professional historians, to write the centenary history of the Woorayl Shire. He was named Citizen of the Year in 1984. After the commission for the Shire history, John spent many days travelling to Melbourne researching the early newspapers published in the area including, *The Great Southern Star*, *The Leongatha Sun* and *The Leongatha Echo*.

In the run-up to the launch of *No Parallel - The Woorayl Shire 1888-1988* (Hargreen Publishing Company) he was invited to give the Bi Centennial Australia Day address on 26 January 1988. He wrote a series of articles for *The Great Southern Star* to coincide with the Centenary of the Shire. The book was launched by well-known historian Prof Geoffrey Blainey, and was associated with a round of social engagements.

For 12 years from 1989 he was the Gippsland representative on the Council of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. This took him all over Victoria where he met many fellow enthusiasts for local history. In recognition of his service he was made a Fellow of the Society in 2000.

Around that time, he joined the recently formed Mechanics' Institutes Victoria and enjoyed their conferences and inspections of continuing and long-lost Mechanics' Institutes around the state.

The Historical Society provided great support and effectively sponsored a number of the booklets that he wrote and in 1991 he produced the *Leongatha Mechanics' Institute and Free Library 1891 – 1991*.

In 1993 he was retained to write a centenary history of the Shire of Mirboo. This was a major task, but he was greatly assisted by the response of individuals and organisations in the Mirboo area and in 1994 he produced a substantial book, *On the Ridge - The Shire of Mirboo 1894 – 1994* (Allen & Unwin) to coincide with the centenary of that Shire. To produce that book, he interviewed over 80 locals and consulted numerous primary sources. He was able to access individuals who had first-hand memories of the opening up of that part of Victoria and their memories ring through the book. Both the Shire centenary histories contained substantial bibliographies and references to a wide range of primary sources and would have been worthy doctoral theses.

In the following years John authored a number of other booklets published by the Historical Society, although often financially underwritten by the author: *Mirboo North and District Bush Nursing Hospital 1931 – 1993* (1996), *Faith of our Fathers - A History of St Laurence O'Toole's Parish Leongatha 1901 – 2001* (2001), *The Meeting Place - Leongatha Memorial Hall 1924 – 2004* (2004), *The First Century - The Leongatha Butter and Cheese Factory Coy. Ltd. 1894 – 2005* (2005), *Town Water - A History of Leongatha Waterworks Trust 1905 – 1983* *Leongatha Sewerage Authority 1939 – 1983* *Leongatha Water Board 1984 – 1993* (2005).

Writing the history of the Leongatha Memorial Hall took John back to his youth- to early dances, films, and a dental surgery that operated at one stage in one of the rooms.

In the Australia Day Honours in 2004 John was awarded an OAM for service to the community “as a contributor to the preservation of history relating to the Gippsland region.”

His final work was *One Bag in Six – Onion Growing in Gippsland 1900 – 2007* (2007). He enjoyed writing this work as he was able to research the history of an industry in which he had been an active participant. He was very proud of it. The title came from a common share cropping arrangement for growing onions.

He was also proud of his book on the centenary of Leongatha Butter Factory as the farm at *Rubybank* had been supplying cream and milk since 1924. The only time he ran for elected office was an unsuccessful tilt as a director of the Factory. He attended the 2010 60th anniversary of the founding of Murray Goulburn Co-op in northern Victoria and gave an address. He had seen the ups and downs of the dairy industry over the decades, had always supported the co-operative and was saddened at the demise of Murray Goulburn Co-Op.

Over the years he became a repository of local history and would be fielding calls from the media, family members researching their history or seeking a definitive account of a matter of history, and professional researchers seeking help with their thesis

In 2013 the Gippsland Association of Affiliated Historical Societies presented him with the Gippsland Regional History Award for “an outstanding contribution to recording and publishing the history of Gippsland.”

He loved the land and felt himself so fortunate that his father had picked South Gippsland after leaving Merbein. Up until three or four years ago he was still poking around the paddocks cutting thistles or doing a bit of fencing.

He was a man of his times. He always dressed when going to town in his rusty ute or to church. He was sociable but not gregarious. He rarely went to the pub. His longevity was such that people who had crossed paths with him over the decades would seek him out for wise counsel. His love of Kath made them a partnership and in his later years they rarely left the farm after a lifetime of community involvement together. When she suffered a stroke about 12 years ago, he switched to being her carer. He looked after her for a decade or so until she went into Koorooman House three years ago, and he then visited every day to read poetry and the newspaper until she passed away a year before he did. It was a love story for nearly 70 years. In later years he sat on the veranda “chasing sunshine” and saying that he was “the monarch of all he surveyed”

Rubybank was and is a family farm. As the family grew the enterprise grew, necessitating a variety of contributions from each of the children as they came and went and returned to make the farm its continuing success. John Murphy stood proudly at the apex of that close-knit family. He was an honest, generous benefactor of many charities, a pillar of the community and a person of great integrity of whom all the Murphy's can be proud.

Congratulations Jarryd Roughead

Leongatha's Jarryd Roughead will retire after a very successful career playing football for Hawthorn in the AFL.



Jarryd (centre) after Hawthorn's Premiership win in 2008

Jarryd was born in Leongatha in 1987. His father Michael was a successful Leongatha player from a young age. Jarryd played for Leongatha juniors and seniors before being selected to play for Gippsland Power in the State wide Under 18 competition. After the under 18's season finished Jarryd helped his local team win the [WGLFL](#) premiership.

Jarryd was recruited to Hawthorn with the 2nd overall pick in the 2004 draft. He was selected along with future dual-club superstar Lance Franklin. It was widely known that Roughead and Franklin were to be key members of Hawthorn's line up as they grew older.

The Roughead family were well known football players. Jarryd's grand father Jim and grand uncle Jack were notable players for Leongatha. Jarryd's great great grandfather George Roughead, ran a store where Smith's bottom shop is located in the very early days of the town. He is the one after whom Roughead St was named and George played a significant role in establishing the recreation reserve where the Leongatha football teams have played since the 1890s.

**Leongatha Historical Society's
Special Sports Exhibition will open
for the Daffodil Festival on Friday,
August 30 at 12noon.**

**Featuring
memorabilia
and the sporting
history of the area.**

**Special references
will be made
to football.**



**Mechanics Institute
McCartin Street, Leongatha**

**Leongatha & District
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
Established 1964

Wanted someone to take on the newsletter. Articles can be written by anyone interested in our local history. We need someone to put the newsletter together four times a year.

