



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving Our Heritage

Newsletter Volume 17 Number 2 April 2020

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In these trying times I thought it appropriate to produce our newsletter more often in order to stay in social contact. You are receiving this April newsletter as the first of a monthly newsletter in 2020. Only those members who have a registered email with the Society will receive the newsletters. Other members are able to email the Society via the email address above or ringing the following number 0400249048.

Latest news

Temporary Society Closure

Like many in the community, we are closed for the time being. What a time we are all having staying at home and hoping a vaccine is available soon. All our activities are cancelled until further notice but the Society can still carry out research and answer questions online using the internet.



The billiard room 1920

Closure of the Great Southern Star



Sadly, our local paper *The Great Southern Star* has closed. This wonderful source of history is, at least for the time being, not being published. Here is the story of the beginning of *The Star*.

The Great Southern Star has been an independent paper serving the community since it was first launched on August 13th 1890 by W McPherson and Company. In November 1890 William Young took over. In May 1906 he sold the paper to the Rossiter Brothers of Yarram. There have been several owners, most notable being the Gannon/Giles family. Frank Gannon ran *The Star* from 1957 to 1977 when his sister Dorothy and her husband Bill Giles took over.

We are of course extremely grateful to the Star for we have 129 years of detailed historical information. The newspaper tells us much, not only the basic news of the day but gives us a window into the society. The writing tells us what the society was like and in many cases what the views of that society were. The newspaper captures the essence of the time in which the articles were written. The stories of how great events such as Federation, The Great Depression, WWI and WWII impacted on our community are told.

So how did this wonderful newspaper begin?

William McFarlane established a newspaper in August 1890.

Not long after the first publication William Wilson Young from Mirboo North set up his paper in October of that year. He is credited with the title *Founding Father of the Star*.

William called himself a printer before he began publishing the *Great Southern Star* and then he became a newspaper proprietor.

Who was William Young?

William was a Scotsman born in 1851 in a small fishing village near Aberdeen. He arrived in Australia aged four with his mother and sister. At the age of 23, he married Catherine Stanley in Rushworth.

As his family increased in size, he decided to better his position and together with his partner Mr R Ingram purchased the Mirboo Herald and the family (consisting of William, Catherine their four children and two other children they were caring for). travelled to Gippsland by train. On arrival they found it difficult to find somewhere to live but eventually settled in a newly built house in the town. He had to learn to ride around by horse on the very small bridle tracks with dense scrub on either side. This was the way he attended to council meetings in Mardan and collected news from the settlers in the area



William Young

Hearing about the new settlement 17 miles south of Mirboo North, he rode to Leongatha with a group of men to see what was going on. The Great Southern Railway was being constructed and William saw great potential in Leongatha. With ample blocks surveyed for private residences and business premises he was greatly impressed with the suitability of the township for a newspaper. William acquired a premises and, in his words, 'seemed to scare off the printer already there'. He wasted no time in setting up his office to start the *Great Southern Star* named after the railway. At first the paper was printed in Mirboo North and transported to Leongatha on horseback. This proved to be very difficult. On one occasion he came to the Tarwin River to discover it was in flood. He managed to cross on a small wooden bridge just in time. The bridge washed away soon after he reached the other bank. William decided to transfer his printing business, including his printing press, to Leongatha. It took three days to transport the press on a wagon pulled by a team of bullocks but it arrived without any damage. He continued to run the Mirboo Herald until 1894.

The family of eight travelled to Leongatha on a wagonette pulled by two horses. It was a very difficult trip as the hills were very steep. On one occasion the brake was of little use on the slope and William had to tie a log to the back of the wagonette to steady it down the hill.

The family rented a house at first but then purchased a three acre property, with a house on it, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from town. William walked to and from his office four times a day.

Early businesses advertised in the Star. These were run by people named Ridgeway, Hayes, Roughead and Long (all store keepers) McCartin and Bair (hotels), Peter Johnson and Phillip Bellingham, (butchers.) If we add William Young to this list, we see some of our street names. Ridgeway is of course in Mirboo North while the others are all in Leongatha. Hayes' store is still standing

Tragedy struck the Young family in 1898 when a major bush fire occurred in the area. The Young family home had a shingle roof and with the fire all around the roof had to be kept wet if the house was to be saved. William's son Norman worked hard to protect their home and became very ill. The boy died of rheumatic fever a few days later devastating the family and community.

Norman was a student at Leongatha State school and Tom Devling a young teacher at the school and family friend made the funeral arrangements for the grief- stricken family.

William Young ran *The Star* until 1906 when he moved to Tasmania to run the *Circular Head Chronicle*. In 1912 he then moved back to Victoria to Frankston where he purchased the *Frankston Standard*, a newspaper that remained in the family for many years.

During his 16 years he had reported on the development of the pioneer town. By 1912 Leongatha had a high school, a new Mechanics Institute, a masonic lodge, a court house and much more.

Before William and Catherine left the district they were given a grand farewell in the Mechanics' Hall. William received a purse of 40 gold sovereigns and Catherine a canteen of cutlery suitably inscribed.

Vale Ian Lester

Many of you will no doubt have heard of the passing of our esteemed member and Past President Ian Lester. Ian was a highly valued and hardworking member of our Society. We are particularly grateful for his research into a number of subjects and his photographs of the changing face of the town. Ian's knowledge of heritage hand tools and pioneering building methods was second to none and we have his information preserved in his writing. It was unfortunate that, due to the Covid 19 virus, we could not attend his graveside funeral. His memorial service in the Mardan Hall was cancelled. Ian had not been himself for some time following a stroke but he still came along on a Thursday to be with his fellow history buffs. Sometime ago Ian handed me a folder containing his memories of growing up on the family farm. It was hand written and has been typed up. This story will be presented in instalments as a feature of the forthcoming newsletters.



Ian Lester in action

Memories of a rural childhood

Ian Lester

These memoirs are dedicated to the memory of two farmers, my father Alan George Lester 1910-1985 and my brother and friend, David Alan Lester, 1946-1993, whose premature death prompted me to start this project.

Introduction

As an adult, one's memories of situations and events during childhood can be rather brief and lacking in detail. Dates are a problem, so many references to when things happened are vague. So perhaps many recollections were added from a later adult perspective.

Many people suggested to my father that he make a record of his life, but he declined saying that people did not want to know. As I grew up at the end of an era at a time when many of the old ways, the ways of the pioneers were still being used, I feel that it is important to record my own thoughts before they too are lost.

My great grandfather came from England to Australia during the Victorian gold rush becoming a successful farmer in the Ballarat area. Several members of his family, including my grandfather, selected land at Koorooman East in 1886. My family has farmed this land and other properties for over 100 years. So, I hope these recollections do their part to record some of the activities that took place at that time.

Being the eldest son and 4 years older than my brothers, I had many regular jobs to do and was often involved in what the adults were doing. Many hours were spent playing with my younger brothers and cousins. Often when there was work to be done, punishment was endured when tasks were set and not achieved.

Two incidents come to mind as my first memories. The first involved sitting on a hassock (a sawdust filled cushion) under the kitchen bench with my sister Helen. We each had a chop bone to pick at. I suspect it was to keep us quiet while our parents ate their meal. The attitude was that small children should be seen and not heard so it was important that we did not interrupt the adult conversation.

The second related to the day sister Helen was taken to the Koorooman East Primary School on her first day. Two aspects of the day that stick in my mind were firstly the size of the building. It seemed enormous with its very high ceiling and the single classroom, far larger than I had seen before. The second was the number of children (possibly 10 to 12 children). As we had no close neighbours, my contact with children other than Helen had been minimal. I was overawed by the whole experience.

To be continued

Alan Lester



David Lester



A Year Like No Other

2020 will be a year in our history that we will never forget. History will document it as a once in a lifetime event.

While the “Stay at home” requirement and physical distancing have changed our lives dramatically, we need to think positively. The pandemic will finish sometime in the future as a result of an effective vaccine.

Staying at home does give us the opportunity to do things around the house and garden that we might have been putting off. We are putting some ideas together that both help to relieve the potential boredom at home and contribute to our rich cultural heritage.

Some suggested activities during our self isolation

The Society is always interested in preserving the history of our region. People’s own recollections and stories are very valuable. If you felt inclined to use some of this extra spare time to write about some highlights/experiences of your life in Leongatha and district, you could write about them and the Society would document your story for posterity. This can be sent to our email address :

leongathahistory@gmail.com

or

handwritten and posted under the Society’s door in McCartin St

or

post it to our P.O. Box 431, Leongatha 3953

Everyone has a story and they are all interesting.

Spend some time sorting out your photos. Select some that might be copied by the Society. Make sure they are labelled and dated.

Some websites you might be interested in checking out during your isolation :

- www.leongathahistory.org.au
- www.nfsa.gov.au.
This is the national Film and Sound Archive. Go to this site and click on Melbourne Time Capsule. Scroll down and see the wonderful historic film about Melbourne and elsewhere
- Facebook pages. Leongatha History, Gippsland History, Mirboo and District Historical Society, The Centre for Gippsland Studies, Yarram and surrounds, lost stories and photos.
- The Royal Historical Society of Victoria www.historyvictoria.org.au
- The Gippsland Regional Studies Centre
<https://federation.edu.au/library/search/collections/grsc>
- Foster Historical Society <http://www.promcountryhistory.org.au>
- Inverloch Historical Society www.inverlochhistory.com
- Australian War Memorial www.awm.gov.au

Don't forget:

- have your flu shot
- stay at home unless going out to buy essentials, medical appointments, exercising
- physically distancing yourself from others
- wash hands often with soap and warm water
- don't touch your face
- stay in contact with family and friends

Stay safe and connected