Preserving Our Heritage

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Latest News

The Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Leongatha Historical Society will be held on September 13th at 8 pm. Please come along and hear our guest speaker Tony Courtney. Tony will be speaking about The Knights of St John who were involved in the Crusades and moved around the Mediterranean Sea in the middle ages and beyond. Tony has recently toured the historic sites related to the Knights of St John and has prepared a presentation for us.

Subs for the year 2017-18 are now due

Daffodil Festival

The Daffodil Festival will be run on September 1st, 2nd and 3rd. For this year's festival we will be opened for the three days from 10 am until 4 pm. Our special exhibition will be of a complete collection of Anzac tins together with information related to the events shown on the tins as they relate to our area.

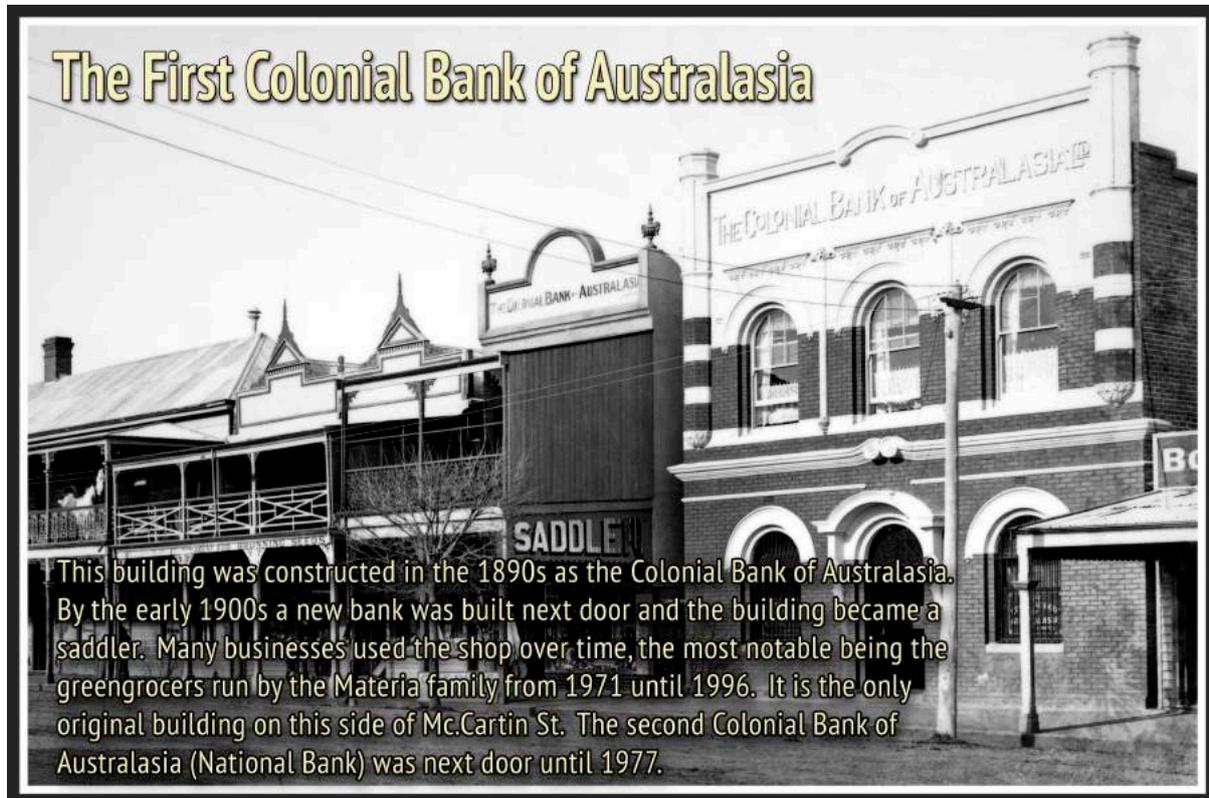## We need your help during the festival to man the museum
A special Sale of Ian Lester's books

A sale of historical and special interest books from Ian's personal collection will be held during the Daffodil Festival. As many of you will know Ian Lester has been living at Hillside Hostel in Korumburra following a slight stroke. He is hopeful of coming home to Leongatha with the assistance of a NDIS support package later this year or early next year. With this in mind Ian is keeping some of his favourite books to assist with his comfort and rehabilitation.

The rest of the books will be on sale on Ian's behalf at the Leongatha Historical Society rooms on September 1st, 2nd and 3rd from 10am until 4 pm

A new historic plaque

The next of our historic plaques is now complete and ready for mounting. The plaque honours two buildings, the first Colonial Bank (now the health food shop) and the original National Australia Bank. It also honours the Materia family and the greengrocers they ran in what is the only original building on that side of McCartin St. Thank you to Pina Materia for her help in allowing this plaque to be placed on the health food shop.

The First Colonial Bank of Australasia

This building was constructed in the 1890s as the Colonial Bank of Australasia. By the early 1900s a new bank was built next door and the building became a saddler. Many businesses used the shop over time, the most notable being the greengrocers run by the Materia family from 1971 until 1996. It is the only original building on this side of Mc.Cartin St. The second Colonial Bank of Australasia (National Bank) was next door until 1977.

The 75th Anniversary of the sinking of the Montevideo Maru

Sunday July 1st marked the 75th anniversary of the sinking of the Japanese vessel *The Montevideo Maru*. This ship was transporting over 1000 Australian prisoners of war from Rabaul in New Britain New Guinea to Japan. The vessel gave no indication that it was carrying POWs. During the night the ship was sunk by an American submarine. The POWs in the holds had no chance. Six men from Leongatha and district were on *The Montevideo Maru* and another six locals were shot on New Britain after being captured. A large number of relations and friends of these twelve men and the three local survivors gathered at the cenotaph for a wreath laying ceremony conducted by Col James from the RSL and Lyn Skillern. Flowers were placed at the cenotaph by Mandy Kuhne in memory of her uncle Bert Kuhne, Mavis Wightman, the only person there who remembered the men being alive, placed flowers in honour of Jimmy Kavanagh and Arthur Oliver who worked on her family's farm. The daughter of survivor Owen Hughes placed flowers and had wonderful memorabilia to show those present. The nieces of the Bellingham brothers also made a floral tribute. Following the service those present moved to the RSL for afternoon tea, which was provided by the RSL. There were many stories told and young family members learned more about those men who died 75 years ago. It was a wonderful event, which was appreciated by the families involved, and the Historical Society was pleased to be the event organisers. Lyn Skillern is writing a book about the 61 men from Gippsland who served with Lark Force and of whom more than half did not come home. .

A bygone, bypassed era- Bena and Ruby

By Lyn Skillern

Two South Gippsland townships now lie in their idyllic settings beside the upgraded South Gippsland Highway. Bena and Ruby are examples of the settlements that were dotted throughout rural Victoria, providing services and meeting places for their local farming communities.

During the 1870s and 80s large areas of South Gippsland were surveyed and divided into farms and townships. Those early surveyors travelled through thick forest and dense bush on order to produce maps showing where farms and townships would be. Prospective farmers could select a block from a map and start the purchase process. They then had to go into the forest, find their block and start clearing. Just imagine the task ahead of these early pioneers. They had to cut down enormous eucalypts and clear all the understory scrub using only hand tools.

Two communities settled in these early days were Ruby, 5 km north west of Leongatha on Coalition Creek and Bena, 8 km north west of Korumburra. Both townships were once on the South Gippsland Highway but are now by passed. They also had stations on the now closed Great Southern Railway.

Ruby in the early 20th century

The reason for the name given to a township in the early days is often lost in time. There are two stories behind the name Ruby. One version states that two townships on the South Gippsland Railway were named Ruby and Agnes after the two daughters of surveyor Whitelaw. It is believed that Ruby Creek was named by early selectors who found gemstones that looked like rubies in the creek. These were probably garnets. The problem with this theory is that Ruby is on Coalition Creek and the Ruby Creek is 3 km north.

The Ruby area was first settled in the 1880s and by 1900 the township had a hall, school, butter factory, wine shop, general store, blacksmith, butcher and baker

The Ruby Public Hall is the oldest building in Ruby and illustrates the development of the area after the opening of the Great Southern Railway in 1891. It is a timber building with an iron gable roof, built close to the railway station

This hall, also a Mechanics' Institute, was opened at a ceremony chaired by local resident, Mr McDonald on May 24th 1894. The land was donated by Lewis Cumming and the hall erected using local labour.   When the Ruby State School was first established in September 1894 classes were conducted in the hall with rent being paid to the committee by the Education Department. The hall was also used by the Wesleyan Church, holding services there beginning in June 1894. Over the years the hall has undergone many changes to keep up with the times. In the 60s extensive work was undertaken which involved recladding and new windows.

The Ruby Hall before the most recent renovations
The Education Department finally built a school on a three acres block 200m south of the station. This school was first used on March 9th 1916. Head teacher Alice Taylor had 40 students enrolled at that time. A five-roomed residence was built on the site in 1952. Eventually the school was closed and the site and buildings were sold. The school was briefly used as a café and now both buildings are part of a private home.

The Ruby railway station and train

There was a butter factory in Ruby, which opened in 1897 and closed in 1935. A privately owned factory, it had a series of owners, the most successful being Victor Brumley who sold it in 1931. The freezing works at the factory continued to be operated by the Logan family as a storage facility for locally caught rabbits.

One very interesting business in early Ruby was a wine saloon. Obtaining a liquor license was an interesting issue in pioneer societies. Under the licensing Act of 1890, the law allowed one licensed premises for the first 250 to 1000 inhabitants and a further license for every 500 inhabitants beyond 1000. A roadside license was sometimes granted to a store to enable it to sell bottled wine and spirits. In 1893 one such license was granted to Johann Matthies storekeeper of Ruby.

Ruby was never very large but it did have the services for a community that existed in the days when transport facilities were limited. Gradually the facilities in Ruby were closed and the highway was altered to form a straight road thus by passing the small settlement in the early 1970s. Only the hall remains as evidence of the township that was

The story of Bena will be in the next newsletter.

The main street of Ruby c1900

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Leongatha town of Churches

This article is based on a talk given at the Pioneer Church Mardan by Robert Sage
The sources used for this talk were *Land of the Lyrebird* and *No Parallel* . Other information came from Robert's family   Robert is the third generation to farm in the area starting from the 1890s.
Most of the early settlers to our region came from the United Kingdom bringing with them the traditions of keeping the Sabbath and attending worship. At first these pioneers held services in their homes. The earliest home churches were run by the Brydon family at 'Glentress' near Kardella and near Koonwarra at Lyrebird Mound organized by the Thomas family
In 1887 The Lyrebird Church and the 'Glentress' church opened The Shingler family had a home church (Anglican) and the Creighton family had a home church at Creighton's Hill.
In late 1888 Mrs Shingler wrote to the Anglican Bishop seeking someone to conduct a service. On February 25th 1889 the bishop sent minister and an 11 am service was held with

30 present including ordained ministers from Mirboo North and Foster. This was an invitation only service

The first public worship held in Leongatha was in Hayes' general store. This was a Catholic Mass and Bishop of Sale organised an ordained priest to conduct the service.

In 1890 four denominations purchased land in Leongatha. The Catholics bought in Ogilvy St, the Methodist on the corner of Church St and Bruce St (IGA,) the Anglicans in Bruce St near the corner of Church St and The Presbyterians in Peart St.

In 1891 an arrangement was made so that the Anglicans in the Leongatha community could use the Methodist Church and in 1894 when the Anglicans opened their church the organ and seating was loaned by the Methodists for the occasion.

In 1903 the Koonwarra residents shifted the Lyrebird Church into Koonwarra

In 1910 the Arawata Union Church, a union of Methodist and Presbyterian, was established and the 'Glentress' Church went to Kardella.

The first St Peter's Church Leongatha

1911 Scots Pioneer Church in Mardan was built.

Catholics had a small church built in 1905 with the current St Laurence's constructed in 1913.

These churches developed tennis courts and halls (not Methodists) Halls had multiple uses and were very important as a community facility. Sunday schools were run and well attended in earlier times. Every year Sunday school picnics were held and were looked forward to by all the children. When the roads improved small churches were built. Methodists trained lay people to speak at small places such as Ruby, Kardella South, Wooreen, Dollar and Mt Eccles.

As time went on small churches were moved and in Leongatha new brick churches constructed. In 1923 the Lyrebird church was moved to Wooreen, its third site and in 1954 it came to the Methodist church site in Leongatha. A cream brick church was built there in 1957.

The Anglicans purchased the current site of St Peter's in 1930s. A new rectory, now the Anglican op shop, was built and the new church built in 1958

The Presbyterians moved the old weatherboard church to the back of the block and in 1964 they built St Andrews. The old Presbyterian Church is the oldest public building in Leongatha

Newer denominations came to the area and in 1969 The Seventh Day Adventists built their church on A Becket Street. 1n the 50s and 60 the Dutch came to the area and established the Reformed Church. They met in the Koonwarra Hall and then built in their own church in Peart St in 1970.

The Pentecostal churches came to the area meeting in halls and schools. In 1977 the Christian Revival Crusade meet in various places before building in Hughes St.

When the Uniting Church was formed the properties were consolidated. The Methodist Church was sold and the site became a supermarket. The much-travelled Lyrebird Church went to the scout camp at Bell Park in the 80s. A break away Presbyterian group formed and in 1993 they built a new church in Turner St. The Assembly of God converted the industrial shed in Michael Places to a facility in 2000.

In 1980s the Salvation Army came into the area. They were in Wonthaggi and Korumburra and they would come on a Saturday conducting a meeting in the street in front of McCartin's Hotel

They converted a shed and then established their new facility near the corner of Long and Ogilvy Streets. The Anglican Church from Koonwarra became the Chapel of the Leongatha Christian School. In all there are 10 churches now operating in Leongatha today making the town a town of churches.

St Laurence's Catholic Church Leongatha

October meeting change of day.

Liz Rushen and Kathryn Gibson will be speaking at our meeting on Thursday October 12th. Liz and Kathryn have written a book called '*Anastasia from Callan to Stockyard Creek'* about the Irish woman who came to Foster in the early days and established the Foster Hotel. We are very lucky to have these two historians in our region and we thank them for making themselves available to speak to us.

The centenary of the Beersheba charge

On October 31st 1917 the Australian Lighthorse charged the Palestinian town of Beersheba and capture the water wells located there. It was the last cavalry charge in history. Trooper Robert Banks of Koonwarra was in the charge. He was later seriously injured in the Jordan Valley and evacuated home to Melbourne where he died. He is buried in the Leongatha Cemetery.

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