



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving Our Heritage

Newsletter Volume 16 Number 4 November 2019

President: Robert Sage

Secretary: Lyn Skillern Mobile: 0400249048

Society rooms number: 56622492

The Society rooms are open Thursdays and Fridays between 12 & 4pm

Email: leongathahistory@gmail.com

Website: www.leongathahistory.org.au

PO Box 431 Leongatha 3953

Latest news

- **End of year/ Christmas celebration.** This will be held on Saturday November 30th at Bair's Otago Hotel at 12 noon. Please let Pat know if you are attending, 56686365
- **New laptop.** We have now acquired a new laptop computer and a projector to use with the computer to show visual presentation. These were purchased with a Public Records Office grant.
- **Plans for 2020. We are now planning 2020. Any suggestions are most welcome.**
- The Shingler Memorial Lecture/dinner.** Noted Gippsland Historian Linda Barraclough has agreed to speak and planning has just begun
- **2020 will mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of Foster.** We wish our friends at Foster well and I am sure they will have several events marking this occasion.
- **The Influenza epidemic of 1919 in Gippsland.** On 13 November Erik Eklund from Federation University Churchill will be speaking on this subject at Korumburra Historical Society at 2 pm. The event will be held at the Old Council Offices. Please join us at this event.
- **The Historical Society rooms will close on 13 December and reopen on 9 January 2020**

Tracking Down the Past

On Sunday 13 October Neil Breeden gave a wonderful talk on the surveyed tracks that led into the Gippsland region in the early pioneering days. Neil explained how men like McDonald and Whitelaw blazed tracks through the scrub and that these were the basis of early transport routes. These bridal tracks were used by pioneers searching for selections and those moving to new settlements to establish businesses. Neil 's research into this subject was brilliant and gave us much information we did not know before. We are seeking a grant to have this research published in the near future.

Stradbroke Hospital births data base

So far Geoff Michael has 552 names on the Stradbroke Hospital birth register. Anyone born at Stradbroke hospital who has not had their name placed on the register are asked do so.

Centenary of Tarwin Meadows. 1852-1952 from The Age 16 February 1952. Thank you Graham Peters from the Gippsland History Facebook page for finding this.

By E.M.L.

With the advent of 1952, there dawned the centenary of one of the great pioneering families of Victoria and of their property -Tarwin Meadows of South Gippsland. The old homestead appeared to be slumbering in the sunshine to the soothing music of the ever-present breakers beyond the line of sand-dunes — the soft sighing of the towering pines surrounding the garden making fitting accompaniment.



But the history of Tarwin Meadows, which has nestled so many years in the lee of the sand dunes, is an interesting one. Indeed it has been one of action during the century which has passed, for it was by action alone that the first owner, George Black, carved for himself this pleasant spot out of the wilderness. It was a wilderness when he first came upon the tract of country, now known- as Tarwin Meadows, a dense thicket of swamp vegetation growing in the extensive swamp land that bordered the Tarwin River— a swamp teeming with wild life of every description. “ Money in Mud” It was the salt swamp that was flooded regularly by every high tide that had to be conquered, but it was the same swamp that made Tarwin Meadows, for the 'first owner- realised its potentialities as he recalled the old saying: "There is money in mud." George Black was born at Lawgrove, his father's estate in Perthshire, Scotland. The family name had originally been MacGregor, but at the time when that clan because of its turbulent history had been forbidden to use its own name, many members were absorbed nominally into other clans. Black MacGregor, when the name was proscribed, simply called himself Black. It was; at the Perth Academy that George Black was educated. He qualified for the position of Writer to the Signet, but law had no attraction for him. On the death of his father he sailed for Australia, reaching Melbourne on December 30, 1840. Once in Victoria he became manager at Boneo, Cape Schanck, for his friend, John Barker. With this experience as a background, George Black bought in 1851 the Lake Tutegong property in South Gippsland from Alex Hunter, and in 1852 commenced his subsequent development of the station property which has become famous as Tarwin Meadows Survey. When the land

was surveyed by Michael Callanan, later Surveyor-General, he said that., during the survey, he and his assistants were up to their knees in water. The first task of the new owner, therefore, was to construct substantial dykes to keep out the tide waters. Where the drains ran into the river sluice boxes which were so constructed that they allowed the water to flow into the river whilst preventing the salt water from flowing on to the land were made. When the flats were drained and cleared, they were planted with clover and English grasses. Then the wild life became even more numerous, for the black swans and wallabies came in their thousands to feast upon this novel fodder. Even as late as the seventies the banks of the Tarwin River from a distance had the appearance of black ploughed land, but on closer approach it could be seen to be a moving mass of swans. It was the Tarwin Meadows property which became famous for the introduction of the strawberry clover to Australia. Its enterprising owner, was not able in those early days to obtain any great quantity or variety of this seed so he sent to England for 30cwt of mixed clover seed, and to Holland for the strawberry clover. He had noted the similarity between his own reclaimed salt swamps and the great areas snatched from the sea in Holland. The method of sowing the clover seed was certainly a novel one. It was placed in bags which were funnel shaped, being wider at the top, and these were tied to the necks of his milking cattle so that the seed gradually filtered through and was trodden into the soil by the hooves of the animals which thus served a dual purpose. ' The strawberry soon proved that the environment of Tarwin Meadows suited it admirably, for of all the clovers and grasses introduced it thrived best of all. From Tarwin Meadows strawberry clover has been sent to all parts of Australia, but nowhere does it thrive so well as on the famous meadows just behind the sea hummocks. In those early days life at Tarwin Meadows had more than its share of dangers and excitement, for it happened to be one of the southernmost holdings in Victoria, stretching from Wilson's Promontory for 50 miles through to The Clump, where Wonthaggi now stands, and about 20 miles inland being bounded on the north by impenetrable scrub and forests of the country around what is now Korumburra and Leongatha.

This southern coast had become the most accessible landing ground for most of the convicts who had made their escape from Tasmanian penal settlements, and so the settlers in the area frequently became unwilling hosts to, escapees. One party of convicts landed in a large sailing boat at least 60 feet long, which still lies underneath the sand. Life was difficult for the womenfolk of the pioneers. Brought up amongst totally different surroundings, usually in Britain, they would have to adjust themselves to the isolation and terrors of the outback. The wife of the owner of Tarwin Meadows sought solace in her music and her painting. She took an interest in the wild life of the countryside, and did exquisite. water-colour paintings of every bird, she could observe or that was brought to her. Even today these paintings, accurate in every detail, may be seen adorning the walls of the old homestead, a delight to the eye of the observer. Yet another, problem for these early property owners was that of the assigned servants--those convicts assigned to them for work and for whom the owner would be responsible to the Government. There were many exciting and dangerous experiences with convicts assigned and otherwise. George Black devoted himself to cattle and horse breeding, and made a great success of it. There was keen competition among the buyers for his fat cattle, which always fetched top prices even though they walked all the way to Newmarket. His cattle were Hereford-Shorthorn grades.

The Tarwin Meadows horses were as famous as the cattle, and at the annual sales at Kirk's Bazaar always drew a great crowd of buyers. The first house built at Tarwin Meadows is still standing, and in use, an example of the solidity with which the pioneers of the country of Australia laid the foundations of the country. The property of Tarwin Meadows has to be seen as a remarkable achievement of industry; and foresight, bringing it to what it is today. There it stands a monument to the courage of the first owner George Black the traditions being carried on by his descendants.

Les Kew Ming a Chinese Australian hero. By Robert Allen

Les was the older brother of Horrie Kew Ming who farmed at Leongatha South. During the height of the 'White Australia' policy, one man overcame adversity on the battle field and prejudice on the football field to become a hero of both.

Leslie Henry Kew Ming was not the first footballer of Chinese descent to play Australian football, but he was one of the best and certainly one of the most influential.

He was born in St Arnaud in 1897, the eldest of five children. His father Kew Ming Lok had emigrated from China's Kwangtung Province, and his mother Louisa Cum Moon was born of Chinese and Scottish parents. Kew Ming Senior ran market gardens, shops and then hotels around St Arnaud, and after he died Louisa continued as proprietor of the All Nations Hotel in North St Arnaud.



After Kew Ming finished school, he learnt the bootmaking trade from his maternal grandfather Cum Moon in Minyip. The young Les showed early promise as a runner, and also played district football and cricket. Historian Carol Holsworth believes his sporting abilities probably helped him gain a measure of acceptance at a time when those of Chinese descent were often viewed with mistrust by the wider community.

Returning to St Arnaud, the teenage Kew Ming became an enthusiastic member of the local rifle club. When World War I broke out he wanted to enlist, but although he was supremely fit and had been in the army cadets, joining up was not that simple. Under the military regulations of the time, enlisted men had to be "substantially of European origin or descent." Based on his analysis of the 1911 census, military historian Alastair Kennedy estimates that Kew Ming was one of probably only around a thousand men of Chinese descent who were born in Australia and therefore eligible to serve.

According to his enlistment papers, Private Kew Ming was 19 years old and 5 feet 7½ inches tall, with a dark complexion, black hair and brown eyes. He embarked for Europe in October 1916 and his military career began somewhat inauspiciously when he was sentenced to 24 hours detention in the troop ship's brig for insubordination. Arriving in Plymouth in early 1917, he trained at the 2nd Division base camp before joining the 23rd Battalion of the 6th Australian Infantry Brigade in France. Wounded in the shoulder in May, he was promoted to Corporal soon after.

In October that year, Kew Ming was again in the thick of the action. During the first Paschendaele offensive, he led a party of men to dig a communication trench to a newly captured front line at Broodseinde Ridge. He was awarded the Military Medal for his bravery, the citation stating that "he set a fine example to his men and encouraged them to complete the work though under heavy shell fire. Remained on duty though wounded ..." It is interesting to note that Alastair Kennedy's research shows that soldiers of Chinese Australian

descent proportionally received a much higher number of gallantry awards during World War I than others in the AIF.

To cap off an eventful year, Kew Ming won a relay race medal while representing the 23rd Battalion at an AIF sports meet in Belgium. According to "The 23rd", a newsletter printed on the battlefield, he also featured in a 440-yard race and was prominent in 'A' company's football win over a rival company. Kew Ming was promoted to Sergeant in February 1918. He survived the rest of the war without serious mishap and returned to Australia in 1919 keen to continue his football.

He moved to Wedderburn to resume his bootmaking business, and was part of the side which won the local premiership in 1920. He then came to the attention of North Melbourne, which was a powerhouse VFA club in the years just before its admission to the VFL in 1925. Details of his career with North are sketchy, but he played half back during the 1922 season and was among the team's best in their preliminary final loss to Port Melbourne. A series of injuries culminating in a broken collarbone against Footscray put an early end to his 1923 season.



Kew Ming's running, however, continued to improve and in 1925 he won the Shepparton Gift off ten and a half yards. A photo of him wearing the winner's sash shows a strong and powerfully built athlete.

Around this time, Kew Ming married his sweetheart Vera and was lured to Echuca by a new business venture and the promise of further football. He quickly became a stalwart of Echuca's backline, where he was best known for his phenomenal kicking. His booming kick ins from full back were a feature of his game and he used to delight in recounting one particular tongue-in-cheek story that involved his team mate George Ogilvie: "Can that George Ogilvie kick! I remember one day I kicked off, George marked it at centre half forward, turned and kicked a goal."

Kew Ming was regularly picked for representative football teams, and in 1927 he was among the best in a Bendigo League team which defeated a combined VFL team by one point. He was also instrumental in Echuca's premiership win the following year.

Kew Ming may have been a war hero, but he still copped racial abuse when he played football. He never complained about this treatment, but his wife couldn't bear to watch him play because of the taunts from sections of the crowd.

In 1928, Melbourne's Sporting Globe newspaper announced a national distance kicking competition, with a prize of 25 pounds to anyone who could kick the furthest place, drop and punt kick. Kew Ming's prodigious kicking made him an obvious contender.

When local commitments prevented him traveling to Melbourne to compete, the paper arranged for a licensed surveyor to measure his kicks at Echuca's Victoria Park. On 20 September 1928, he booted a drop kick 73 yards (66.7 m) and a punt kick more than 74 yards (68.4 m). He won both sections of the Sporting Globe's competition, along with the 50 pounds prize money.

Kew Ming continued both his football and his running into the 1930s, placing in many sprint races across regional Victoria. He kept himself extremely fit and when Echuca withdrew from the Bendigo Football League in 1935, he transferred to Echuca East, despite being almost 40 years old. Around the district 'Kewie' was known as a placid man who would help anyone in need. He coached a football team in the Young Chinese League and served as a volunteer fire fighter for 25 years. A local newspaper profile described him as "extremely modest, and popular with all who know him."

When war broke out again in 1939, Kew Ming moved his wife and two daughters to Melbourne and re-enlisted in the army. Deemed too old for active service, he instead became a machine gun instructor. He also became a P.E. trainer because he was concerned that many soldiers weren't fit enough for combat. Leading by example, he played for Watsonia in the inter-services football competition, where he was two decades older than most of his team mates.



After the war, Kew Ming took a keen interest in his daughters' sporting development, learning the rules of netball so he could coach their team. Drawing on his bootmaking skills, he made running shoes for his daughter Berenice out of kangaroo leather. Berenice developed into a fine sprinter, just like her father. She represented Victoria in 1951 and narrowly missed selection for the Australian women's relay team that competed at the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games. A man to be proud of.

We need to have our members to renew their membership and increase our membership. Running the Society costs money. Please help by renewing and have a friend join as well.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

A reminder that your annual membership is now due.

\$30 for individuals \$40 for Family

A direct deposit may be paid into the society's bank account at National Bank, Leongatha:
Leongatha & District Historical Society
BSB: 083 735 a/c: 51588 3922
(Please include your name as reference,
and notify us by e-mail to leongathahistory@gmail.com)

or post to
PO Box 431, Leongatha 3953

New memberships are welcome or updating your details by completing the form below:

Membership type: Single \$30 Couple/Family \$40

Name:
.....

Address:
.....
.....

Telephone:

E-Mail:

Your Society needs help, workers, cataloguers, photographers, writers and story tellers and much more. Please help

