



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving our Heritage

Newsletter Volume 18 Number 4, September 2021

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

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Latest News

Annual Meeting

It is hoped that we will be able to hold our annual meeting on 13 October at 2 pm. Members will be informed by email of the Covid rules we need to follow in advance of the meeting

Keeping the Historical Society rooms open

In order to open the Historical Society to the public we need help staffing the facility. Please give us an hour or two of your time in order to have the Mechanics' Institute open on Thursdays and Fridays from 12 to 4 pm.

Email leongathahistory@gmail.com or call 0400249048.

Cataloguing

Pat Spinks and Kellie Smith have made a start on cataloguing again. We need help cataloguing the large back log. If you are prepared to learn about cataloguing, please let us know.

Feature article

WW1 Exemption Court, Leongatha By Society member John Hyett

DISCLAIMER :- The writer's grandfather's second cousin, Frank Hyett, Secretary of the Victorian Railways Union, was very active in the anti-conscription campaign. My sympathies lie with those who, for whatever reason, resisted the efforts of those in power who tried to force them against their wishes into the slaughterhouse of the war.

During the election campaign following the double dissolution of the Australian Parliament in 1914 the Labor Party leader, Andrew Fisher, declared that Australia would defend Britain "to the last man and last shilling". At the time the *Defence Act 1903* restricted the compulsory military service for males between the ages of 18 to 60 years within the territory of the Commonwealth of Australia. During the 13 months prior to his resignation the Fisher Labor government passed legislation including the *War Precautions Act* and the *War Census Act*.

The *Defence Act 1903* allowed exemption from military service on religious grounds (although in 1910, the *Defence Act* was amended to remove the reference to religion and referred instead to persons being able to satisfy the prescribed authority that their conscientious beliefs did not allow them to bear arms) and later *War Service Regulations* added the following grounds for exemption:

- Where it was in the national interest for a man to continue in his work, education or training;
- If military service would cause serious financial hardship;
- For the only son of a family;
- If at least half of the sons in a family enlisted;
- For sole support of aged parents, widowed mother or orphan siblings under 16 years of age or physically incapable of earning their own living.

Under the *War Census Act* all males between the ages of 18 and 60 were required in September 1915 to register and complete their details. Fisher, who was an avowed anti-conscriptionist, resigned as prime minister and from parliament in October 1915 and William Hughes, very much in favour of conscription, was elected by the Labor Party as their leader and hence Prime Minister. Following this, in December 1915, regulations under the *War Precautions Act* required further questions to be answered, including:

- Are you willing to enlist now? Reply 'Yes' or 'No'.
- If you reply 'Yes' you will be given a fortnight's notice before being called up.
- If not willing to enlist now, are you willing to enlist at a later date? Reply 'Yes' or 'No', and if willing, state when.
- If not willing to enlist, state the reasons why, as explicitly as possible.

With the massive loss of lives in the European War, Britain required more reinforcements from their allies but Australia was struggling to meet the required numbers through voluntary enlistments. It must be remembered that for the entirety of the war only 38.7% of eligible males between 18 and 44 were enlisted in the forces with a further 16.6% rejected for various reasons. This meant that 44.7% of eligible males did not attempt to enlist. In order to meet the numbers required Hughes introduced a referendum bill in September 1916 with the referendum to be held on 28 October 1916 to allow compulsory military service for overseas conflicts.

In anticipation that the Australian voters would approve conscription a series of court hearings were arranged to be held to reject or approve exemptions for those who had indicated they were unwilling to enlist. On 10 October 73 hearings were listed to be held in Victoria, these to be heard by a Police Magistrate and a representative of the army. The *Argus* of 12 October reported the results from the first five hearings at Traralgon, Glenferrie, East Melbourne and Ballarat. In total 316 cases were considered with 53% granted 15% adjourned and 32% refused. Here there seems to be a difference between city and country as at Traralgon of the 124 heard only 37% were granted 9% adjourned and 54% refused.

The hearing of the Exemption Court at Leongatha was held on 24 October with 105 cases listed. Those who had claimed exemptions were not permitted legal representation and had to put their case for exemption to the court personally.

One hundred and five submissions were listed for hearing at Leongatha on the 24th, of these 6 (5.7%) withdrew before the hearing. Of these six no record of army service was found for five of them, the other enlisting on 30 October 1916. From his record it appears that at some stage previously he had been rejected for poor eyesight.

Thirty-one exemptions were granted (29.5%) the majority on the grounds they were the only sons or at least half the sons in the family had already enlisted. Two exemptions were granted, presumably on religious grounds although no mention is made in the newspaper report of them having a conscientious belief in not bearing arms. One was a licensed reader for the C o E and intending to go to training college and the other a Presbyterian home missionary.

Eighteen (17%) temporary exemptions were granted, half of which were adjourned until the next scheduled court hearing on 4 December, most of the others until the end of December or January to allow crops to be brought in and one being conditionally granted, his only brother being a cripple, his father only having one leg and him being the sole support of his mother. One of those granted a temporary exemption was a teacher at the High School who stated that the Education Department intended applying for a permanent exemption for teachers. The Police Magistrate replied along the lines that teaching was not a matter of national importance.

Six (5.7%) were ordered back to the medical board for reassessment, one having previously enlisted in August 1915 but had been discharged from the army in November 1915 as permanently unfit for service due to the ongoing effect of rheumatic fever he had contracted some six years previously.

This leaves us with the forty-three (41%) whose reasons for exemption were rejected. Below are a few examples of their reasons for requesting an exemption and the response from the court:

- Just arranged to harvest 1000 acre crop of wheat in the Mallee –*That is no ground for exemption*
- One brother KIA, he and another brother ran the farm, too much work for one man and could not get assistance –*refused but might be able to get temporary exemption*
- One of a family of four one brother enlisted the other two aged 14 and 6. Father a cripple and mother dead. Did not know if his father received a pension – Application refused
- Claimed exemption on account of having to attend to grazing pursuits. – Police Magistrate - *That is no reason you should be one of the first to go to serve your country, you could employ a returned soldier. Your brother had the experience and the soldier the hands. It was absurd to ask for an exemption on such grounds. -Application Refused.*
- Brother of the above – been rejected on medical grounds unable to continue to work farm the way it had been, had to look after sheep and poison rabbits – PM *that would not take much brains. Application rejected, farming and grazing are not of national importance*
- Exemption claimed on account being dyspeptic and not able to eat ordinary food. – PM *The military department will give you food to suit you; The Indian troops had special food; goats being taken to France for them -Application refused.*
- Father was indisposed and did nothing on the farm. He was the sole support of 'his parents. - Military Officer: *In about 80 per cent of exemptions applied for in Gippsland the reason is given that the father is a cripple. Police Magistrate - No one would think so to see them going to the show, Application refused.*

Of the forty-three applicants that were refused an exemption I can only find four who subsequently enlisted. In all from the one hundred and five who had indicated in the December questions under the War Precautions Act that they were unwilling to enlist it would appear from my research that only five enlisted eventually. The referendum (more accurately a plebiscite as it did not propose a change to the constitution) was held on 28 October, four days after the exemption court hearing and the proposal to allow conscription was defeated. The scheduled second court hearing at Leongatha on 4 December was never held. A second vote on conscription was held on 20 December 1917 and that was also defeated.

Pioneer Business Women from notes by Kath Murphy

Mrs Cath Shanahan

In 1889 she made her presence known when she placed an advertisement for her Koorooman (as Leongatha was known) drapery business in the Mirboo Herald. She is most importantly known for her role in gaining a primary school for Leongatha in 1889. Mrs Shanahan wrote to the Education Department requesting a school be opened for the more than 40 children running wild for want of a school. She then offered the use of a storeroom at the back of her Roughead St premises at a nominal

rent for six months to use as a temporary school. Six weeks later a school opened. There were no desks or slates and the building most unsatisfactory but a school it was.

Mrs Maher

Widowed when her husband Denis was killed by a falling tree while working on the construction of the railway at Leongatha, Mrs Maher, with the help of her relations, the Shanahans, established a Coffee Palace on the corner of Jeffrey St and Long St. Coffee Palaces provided accommodation and meals for travellers and were generally located near railway stations. Called the *Railway Coffee Palace*, it had rooms for one Shilling and stabling if needed. Mrs Maher later remarried and eventually moved to New Zealand. The building, which still stands, became a doctor's residence and surgery and later a private home.



Mrs Maher's Coffee Palace c1890



The same house in 2014

Mrs Anastasia Thornley (nee Burke)

A noted pioneer and hotel owner from Foste, Mrs Thornley opened a Coffee Palace in McCartin St offering accommodation, meals and stables.

Mrs J R Rowan

Mr Rowan established a Coffee Palace in McCartin St. His wife was well known for her catering for functions from bazaars to balls. The Rowans later ran McCartin's Hotel.

Mrs Bertha Keillerup

Mrs Keillerup placed a large sign in the front garden of her home in Roughead St offering beds for one shilling and meals for sixpence. She later opened a store.

Her sons Otto, Fred and Genius all grew up in Leongatha. The three served in WWI. Otto was killed at Fromelles and Fred at Gallipoli.

Miss Preston.

The Mikado Tea Rooms in McCartin St offered light refreshments with oriental décor. In 1903 Miss Preston served strawberries and cream in early summer in a café which was furnished with cane tables and chairs, paper lanterns and fans. This would have been very exotic indeed for the time. Tea rooms were very special in the rural communities of the day. It was where women met up with friends on sale day and enjoyed something special in their hard lives. In those days men went off to the saleyards and women shopped and enjoyed morning tea with others. Before going home, tea would again be consumed with a cream bun or fruit slice. The Mikado Tea Rooms are seen in the photo below.



Miss Lyne

In 1900 Miss Lyne introduced herself to Leongatha by announcing the opening of her photographic studio in the Coffee Palace building in McCartin St. Her first commission was to photograph 100 children in fancy dress at a 'soiree' held to thank the children for an excellent concert they had given in the Mechanics' Hall for the Children's Hospital. She later set up a studio in the Milner building. The Milner building is in the photo above. It is to the right the vacant block where the Colonial Bank of Australasia was being constructed (NAB site). Miss Lyne was on the right side of the building and Milner's bakery the left side.

Bakeries in Leongatha Part 1 - the love of bread

- by Lyn Skillern

When the early pioneers cleared enough land, hops were planted to provide the basics for yeast and thus enabling them to make bread. Damper made without yeast was the common form of bread used throughout Australia by early settlers, explorers, drovers, shepherds and swagmen.

When a township was established, a bakery was usually one of the first businesses to set up. Mrs Gooch was an early baker in Leongatha. The end of Peart St closest to Brown St was named Gooch St in her honour. In more recent times Gooch was changed to Peart.

Milner's Building

The two shops shown below were built by William Milner in 1890-91. Sometime after the first photograph was taken Annie Milner established a bakery in the left-hand shop. A bakery remained on that site up until the 1950s.

John Hyett compiled this list of bakers in Leongatha over time from the electoral roll. Some are the names of bakery owners and others bakery workers.

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Milner William 1906 | Steinfort Louis James 1926-27 |
| Geale Horace Frederick 1908 | Oath Phillip 1926 |
| Aberdeen Kenneth Grant 1908 | Dean Samuel John 1928 |
| Smith James Joseph 1912-1917 | Broadbent Frederick Jnr 1934 |
| Home Edward Oliver 1912-1934 | Smith John Henry Albert 1935 |
| McKenna Arthur Christopher 1912 | Warran Vivian Robert 1967 |
| Marshall Charles Edward 1912-13. | Turner Joseph 1967 |
| Worden George Edward 1912 | Tucker David Owen 1967 |
| Nicholson Duncan 1913 | Turner Raymond Frederick 1967 |
| Bishop Arthur Christopher 1916 | McInnis Peter Graeme 1967 |
| Fox John Charles 1917 | McInnis Gordon William 1967 |
| Shearer John Leigh 1921-1925 | McInnis Kenneth Grant 1967 |
| Wright Harold 1922 | MacNamara Francis Joseph 1967 |
| Faulkner George Edward 1922-26 | Lamont Graeme Stanley 1967 |
| McMurtrie David James 1925-34 | Deenen Anthony John 1967-72 |
| MacNamara Edward Francis 1925-26 master baker | |
| McCartin Lawrence Francis 1925 | Deenen Hermanus Hendrikus 1967-72 |
| Steinfort Alexander Carl 1926-34 | |
| Helliwell Charles 1926 | |

In future editions of the Newsletter we would like to tell the stories of many more bakers. Please help if you can by providing more names and personal memories.

Membership form. For the Year 2021-2022

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 Bendigo Bank, Leongatha:
Leongatha & District Historical Society
BSB: 633000 a/c: 182712406

(Please include your name as reference,
and notify us by e-mail to leongathahistory@gmail.com
You can copy this form, paste it to a new document and email back to us. 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: