



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Newsletter Volume 5 Number 4 November 2008

Preserving Our Heritage

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The latest news

The Annual Meeting

New President for the Society. Ian Lester has taken over as President of the Leongatha and District Historical Society. Other members of the executive are:-

Vice Presidents ; Lola Bailey and Rob Williams

Secretary : Lyn Skillern

Treasurer ; Audrey Hall

Chief Archivist ; Pat Spinks

New display and storage cabinets

We received a grant from the South Gippsland Shire which enabled us to have made 2 specially designed display cabinets for the hallway. These were built by Gary Tumino and are perfect for the location. The cabinets will house displays in the top area and our collection of shire minutes will be stored underneath. Thank you to Thelma Townsend and Lola Bailey for sorting and cataloguing these minute books.. The old heavy cabinets have gone to Coal Creek and are already in use.

End of year celebration

Our end of year celebration will be held on Sunday November 30th at the home of Pat and Jim Spinks. This will take the form of a barbeque lunch. Members are asked to bring a salad or sweet to share and meat will be provided. Drinks will be BYO. Please let Pat Spinks know what you are bringing in the way of food (phone 56686365). The Spinks home, "Hollyside" is on Canavans Road Leongatha North. Please see the map on page 4 of this newsletter for the location of "Hollyside" and directions are on the last page. All members are welcome to attend this function which will commence at 12 noon.

Life Membership for Our Lorna

Lorna Dowel received a well deserved life membership of our Society at the annual meeting in August. Lorna, a descendant of an original settler, grew up in the Blackwood Forest area near Wonthaggi and moved to Leongatha South as a young woman. A keen researcher and collector of local history, Lorna has helped countless people research family and other local history over the years. Her main role now is keeping the obituaries up to date.



Lorna with Geoff Michael

Hamann's Bush



Carlyn Yeung, grand daughter of pioneer Carl Hamann speaking at the launch of the Hamann's Bush Guide on September 14th.

Some 40 people gathered at Hamann's Bush to launch the Hamann's Bush Guide. Guest of honour was pioneer Carl Hamann's grand daughter. Carl Hamann Snr left the land uncleared, Carlyn's father Carl Jnr then gave the land to the then Shire of Woorayl to be preserved as remnant bush. The Leongatha North Landcare Group prepared the booklet and Landcare funded the publication. The guide contains the history of the bush and information on flora and fauna. There is a pathway in the bush for visitors to follow and enjoy this unique piece of our heritage. The booklet is available at the Mechanics' Institute free of charge.

Olympic Silver Medal. Congratulations to Cameron McKenzie-McHarg who won an Olympic silver medal in the rowing at the Beijing Olympics. Cameron grew up in Leongatha and is the son of Society members Colin and Chris

Report on the Coach Tour October 26th 2008

On Sunday October 26th 48 members and friends enjoyed our annual coach tour to local heritage sites. The group boarded the coach in Michael Place and we were soon on our way out of town heading towards Mirboo North. Ian Lester provided a brief commentary as we went along pointing out places of interest. After turning into Mt Vernon Rd, Don Chalmers pointed out where the road had originally been and explained how difficult it was to transport onions to market from their farm on this old road. The Chalmer's family home "Stonehaven" was most interesting, being built of cement bricks made on the property in the 1920s after a good year when onions prices were high and yields good..



Tour participants at Stonehaven

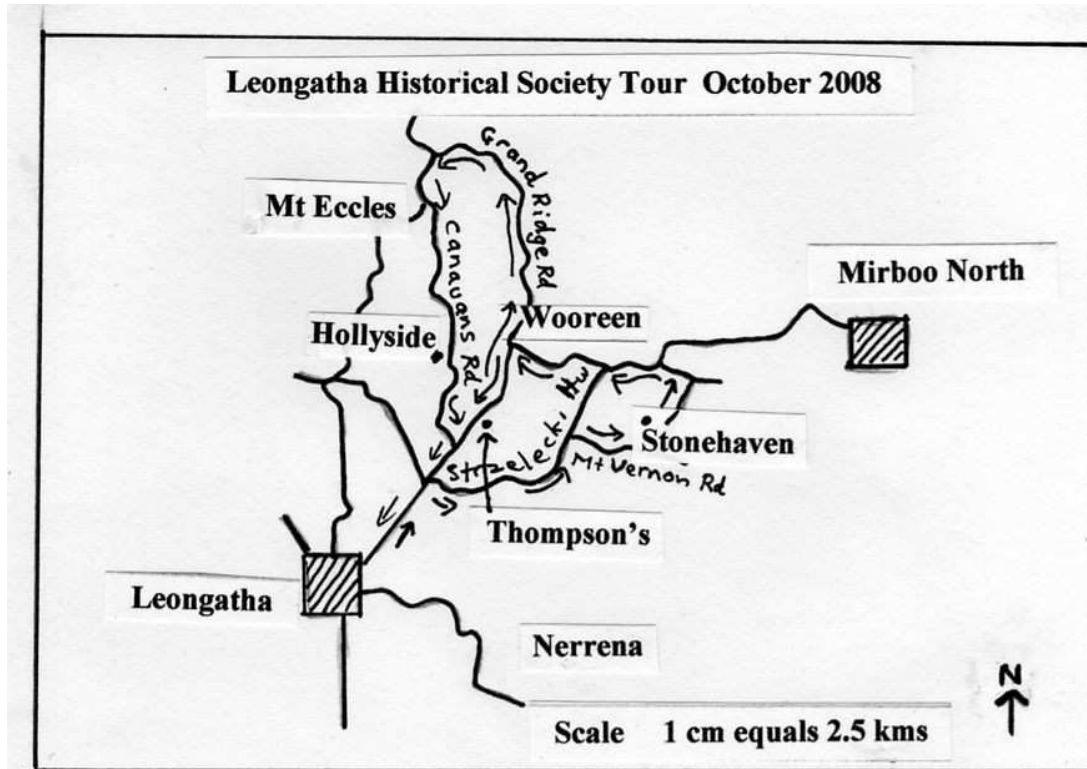


Hollyside

The garden and the views from the garden were beautiful. The tour continued on to Berry's Creek and Wooreen where we visited the home of David and Janette Thompson. This house, dating from the early twentieth century, was originally owned by a Robert Forrest. He left it to his house keeper Charlotte Swindell and she in term left it to her niece Myrtle Aleindi. David Thompson purchased the property in 1972. Here again the garden was splendid and a joy to walk around. Wooreen School and Avenue of Honour were next on the tour. The story of the Wooreen school kidnapping is retold in this newsletter. Pat Spinks pointed out the sites as we travelled along the Grand Ridge Road and Canavans Road via

the Mt Eccles Hall. At Hollyside, the home of Pat and Jim Spinks, we were able to walk in the magnificent gardens and see inside this beautifully renovated late nineteenth century home. Thank you to Pat and Jim Spinks, Don and Jeanette Chalmers and David and Janette Thompson for allowing us to visit their homes

The Society members who made the day possible also deserve our thanks especially Geoff Michael, Pat Spinks and Ian Lester.



Feature Article

Did the Onions Help? A story about Ada Crossley

Ada Crossley was born in Tarraville near Yarram in 1871 and grew up there. She later went in to be a world famous singer. She visited Leongatha

This story of Ada is reproduced from a book published by the Commonwealth Education Office in 1978.

Wallis Crossley worked hard on his small farm near Tarraville in Victoria. Like many of his neighbours he grew onions for which the soil and climate of the area seemed particularly suitable. For many years, he planned to give his wife a pleasant surprise. She was very musical and had learnt to play the piano while in Melbourne as a girl. One day, when Wallis returned with his bullock wagon from Melbourne there was a small wooden framed piano on it. At this time in the 1870's pianos were rare in Gippsland and the Crossley piano was not only the first in Tarraville, but also for hundreds of kilometres around as well.

Their young daughter, Ada, had a sweet voice and seemed to have inherited her mother's talent for music. She played the piano before she could read and, by the time she was 14 years old she was the star of every concert in the area, both as a pianist and singer.

In 1888 Melbourne organised a great festival to celebrate the centenary of white settlement in Australia and Sir Frederick Cowan had been invited from England to supervise the musical side of the festivities. The Crossleys wanted to have his opinion about their daughter's voice. At first, he did not want to listen to her. He said that hundreds of parents imagined that their children had unusual talents and were then very disappointed when he could not agree. When he was finally persuaded to listen to Ada, he

had to admit that he had seldom heard a contralto voice of such beauty and purity. But, if she wanted to become a professional singer, he said, she would need proper training. He helped to find a very good teacher for her in Melbourne and arrangements were made for Ada to remain there.

Ada's first public concert with the Melbourne Philharmonic was in 1892. She was a great success.

Even before her twentieth birthday, Ada was already one of Australia's most popular singers, and there was really no need for her to leave Australia. She was in two minds; travel appealed to her and opportunities for success were much greater in Europe and America, but competition was greater too. She was much admired in Australia, so why not stay? On New Year's Day 1894, she tossed a coin to make the decision for her. It came up "heads" so she went to Europe.

She was immediately successful in England and later in continental Europe and America. In the United States, she caused much discussion amongst people interested in music when she told a newspaper reporter that she thought the clarity of her voice was due to the many onions she had eaten as a child.



Ada Crossley at "Veronica", the home of John Lardner in

Leongatha

'All the Tarraville children' she said 'are given onions every day and they have the loudest and clearest voices in Australia.' No doubt, hundreds of American children would have hated her for saying this especially if they did not like onions.

In 1904 Ada Crossley returned for a tour of Australia and sang everywhere to full houses. In Kalgoorlie on a very hot February night, so many people crowded into the theatre that many fainted. Throughout the performance, unconscious bodies were passed over the crowd towards the exits. Three years later Ada did another tour of major Australian cities.

Few first class artists have been as free from conceit or snobbery as Ada Crossley. She married an Australian doctor who was working in London, and their house was always open to young Australians. If they were musicians, they could be sure that Ada's advice and practical help would be freely and gladly given. Once she travelled all the way from London to Edinburgh, where a young singer from Melbourne was giving his first concert, so that he would have at least one Australian supporter in the audience. Before she reached the age of forty, Ada already felt the power of her voice weakening. She was too sensible to ignore this and gradually, over a period of five years, gave up her singing. She died in 1929.

Wooreen School Kidnapping February 14th 1977 by Lyn Skillern

It was about 10.30 in the morning when some small girls ran into the Wooreen school to tell their teacher that a man with a gun was coming in.

All that happened next happened quickly and the teacher, Robert Hunter, had one thing in his mind - he must protect those 9 children at all costs. Robert Hunter had been a teacher for 9 days.

Edwin John Eastwood had been convicted after the kidnapping of the 6 children and 1 teacher from Faraday school in 1972. He had escaped in December 1976 from Geelong jail and, while on the run,

planned another kidnapping at an isolated school. Wooreen was his choice. It could have been any number of the small schools located in the hills of South Gippsland at that time. A note on the door said “ have gone on a nature study trip would be back in one hour”

The Sun newspaper reported on February 15th that the missing 4 boys and 5 girls were aged between 6 and 11 and that they were looking at possible kidnap as the case resembled Faraday

The children were taken by Eastwood to a camp that he had carefully set up in the forest 60 kms out of Yarram and 11 kms off the South Gippsland Highway.

1. At 11 am on Monday Eastman entered the school, bound the school children together and led them to his utility. The children were in the back and Mr Hunter, bound and gagged, was on the front floor. They then travelled along Grand Ridge Road towards the east. \
2. At 1 pm near English’s Corner the van was sideswiped by a timber truck and the truck driver and young companion taken hostage. Two others were taken hostage at the crash scene when they stopped at the crash.
3. Eastwood now had 14 hostages and no van. He hailed a campervan and took two women hostage. All the group then travelled in the campervan and headed towards Woodside and the campsite. There they were chained by the hands
4. At the normal school finishing time parents started arriving to collect children and the alarm was raised. People started searching the nearby bush for the teacher and children
5. At 7 pm the truck and ute were reported to be blocking the Grand Ridge Road
6. After reaching the site of the crash at 11 pm, school bags were found.
7. Late in the night the search at Wooreen was called off due to fog
8. In the early hours of Tuesday, Robin Smith (from the truck) escaped and walked 9 kms to a farm to raise the alarm
9. At 7.45 am Eastwood was captured after being stopped at a road block near Sale. Shots were fired but Eastwood was the only one injured.
10. Eastwood was charged with kidnap an other offences and remanded in custody to face trial.

The event had a dreadful impact on the children and teacher. Two never returned to Wooreen school and it was not long before the school closed. Officially, Wooreen school was amalgamated with Leongatha Primary School. The buildings and grounds were sold by the Education Department

Research Update

- Lyn Skillern has started collecting material for the Leongatha Secondary College’s centenary book and is after contributions especially reminiscences. She is also continuing with her research on those who served in the First and Second World Wars. Stories of local nurses would be welcome.
- as mentioned before, the Society is interested in stories to do with Stradbroke Hospital

Australia Day 2009. Were you born in Stradbroke hospital?

The history of Stradbroke Hospital will be the subject of the Society’s Australia Day activity on January 26th 2009. This hospital was located on the present IGA site and functioned up until our new hospital was opened in 1958. A talk about the hospital’s history and that of its matron Sister Potter will commence at 1 pm and this will be followed by afternoon tea. An exhibition of photographs and memorabilia relating to the hospital will be on display and those present who were born there will be invited to fill in a form to help us organise a data base on the hospital. Members and visitors will also be able to tell their stories. The forms will be available soon and we will start collecting the information from mid November. If you were born at Stradbroke Hospital we want to hear from you...

How to get to Hollyside : head towards Mirboo North and turn left into Yarragon Rd after going up Crightons Hill, the first hill you come to. Travel along Yarragon Rd for a short while and turn left into Canavans Road. Hollyside is on the left after you cross Wilkur Creek. There will be signs

Program for early 2009

The rooms will be open on Thursdays and Fridays except for December 25th and 26th and January 1st and 2nd.

• January 26th Australia Day

Remembering Stadbroke Hospital; our Australia Day activity at the Mechanics' Institute beginning at 1 pm. Come along and hear stories about this hospital which functioned on some of the IGA site from the 1920's until 1958. Those who were born at the Stadbroke Hospital will be able to register their name on our data base.

February

February 17th Monthly meeting

March

March 14th The South Gippsland Historical Network Conference at Coal Creek Korumburra from 10 am until 4 pm. Key note speaker Patrick Morgan who will speak on Early South Gippsland History, other presenters will be speak on :- Early Wonthaggi, Early Korumburra , The Clement Family, Researching soldiers in the family, Maritime History, Bush skills, The Great Southern Railway and the Walkerville Lime Kilns

March 17th Monthly meeting Guest speakers Don and Jeanette Chalmers, They will be giving a presentation on the Chalmers family and their connection to the area.

April

April 22nd. Join us for dinner at the RSL and then enjoy a talk on local service men and women

May 3rd Open day at *Tullaree* the former home of the Margaret Clement, the *Lady of the Swamp*