



# Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

*Preserving Our Heritage*

*Newsletter*

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## Latest News

### Webpage

Our Website is back online. The Pioneer Kit is complete and the presentation on the soldiers from Woorayl Shire who lost their lives in World War 1 is nearly complete. Check it out at: [www.leongathahistory.org.au](http://www.leongathahistory.org.au)

### Plaques

The plaques for the walls of McCartin's Hotel, Bair's Hotel, Edney's corner building and Goller's store are ready to go and will be put in place soon. A plaque for the Bill's Trough at the Recreation Reserve is also ready.

### Soldiers

After two years of research the presentations on each of the men from Woorayl Shire who lost their lives as a result of World War 1 is complete. Soon they will be online and a hard copy will be made for the current exhibition.

### Vale Merv Lincoln

Noted Australian middle distance runner Merv Lincoln passed away on May 1<sup>st</sup>. He was born in Leongatha and attended school at Dollar and Leongatha High before moving to Wodonga.

In 1972 Merv Lincoln came to the Leongatha High Diamond Jubilee Celebrations (60 years) and officially opened the Nicholas Oval at the school.



## **The History of Education in South Gippsland**

### **Part 1 by Lyn Skillern**

#### **South Gippsland environment 1870**

When Strzelecki travelled through South Gippsland in 1841 he found the forest almost impassable and the trees massive. The Great Forest was so thick that the idea of clearing it and establishing farms seemed impossible. The demand for land however led the government to pass selection acts in the 1860s and this led to the opening up of West and South Gippsland.

#### **Early settlement of the region**

It took some time before selectors started to come into West and South Gippsland. The first selectors were led by guides and found land to select. They then registered their selection and had it surveyed. Later surveyor Lardner and his team divided the land into farms and townships. Selectors then chose their plot from a plan. They then had to come in, find their land and start to clear it using basic tools while living in tents. Wives and children did not always come into the forest selections at first. They lived elsewhere and came to the new farm when some sort of home was built. Some women and children came with their husbands and fathers and had a difficult life style while land was cleared. My own great grandmother, Mary Ann Beamish, waited in Werribee until her husband Henry had made a house. Family history does not tell us what the house was like. Mary Ann had 6 children when she arrived and had 3 more living while on the selection at Neerim North. One of these was Frank Beamish my grandfather.

## Early schools

The Education Act was passed in 1872 and this meant that school was compulsory, free and secular. Children were supposed to attend school until they were 12. An education department was established and schools were built throughout the Colony

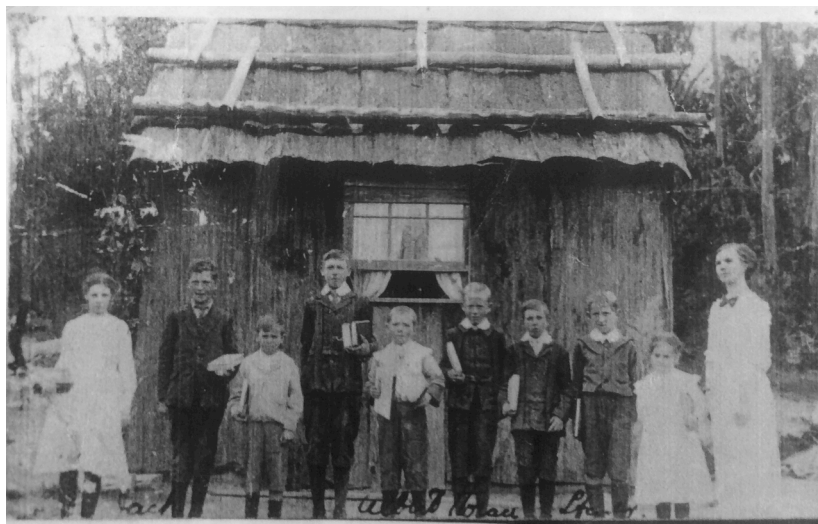
As settlers came to live in our area to establish farms, others set up businesses in the towns. The Great Southern Railway was being constructed and many families lived in camps near the construction sites. The number of children in an area grew and schools were needed.

## The education system in the late nineteenth century

Education as we know it did not exist, it was very different. The great majority of the population could best hope to go to a State School to the age of 14. There were very few secondary schools and most of these were private and expensive. These were schools like Scotch College, Wesley Grammar, Methodist Ladies' College and so on. The age of starting school seems to vary and most started at 6 or 7, however others did not get a chance until they were 8 or 9.

The Merit Certificate, obtained in year 8 was enough to get you a job as a pupil teacher. A pupil teacher taught classes and was a type of apprentice teacher. They had to study and sit for exams to get their qualification called *A Licence to Teach* and another called *The Art of Teaching*.

Schools in rural areas were not established without a lot of campaigning from the parents. Henry Beamish of Neerim North started his campaigning in 1888. His children had to walk 3 miles to school and their attendance was irregular especially in winter. He finally obtained a school in Neerim North East in 1896. In 1897 the school had an enrolment of 37 students.



## Problems faced by our early educators

### Some history from Jeetho West School number 2254 tells us much about education in the early days

In late 1879 Mary Leys of Jeetho applied for the head teacher position of the school to be set up in 1880. The school was to be near the Bass River Bridge, Jeetho West. She had passed an exam for *The Licence to Teach* in Melbourne on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1876 but had not yet been examined on *The Art of Teaching*. She thinks she will be a suitable teacher for the 15 or so students who will attend.

On May 8<sup>th</sup> 1880. Jeetho West School Address was given as:

Jeetho West School

Poowong P O via Drouin.

Isolation for teachers was a significant problem

On September 17<sup>th</sup> 1880 Mary wrote to the Education Department

The school had to be closed from Monday 13<sup>th</sup> as the bridge over the Bass River completely washed away in a flood. School will re-open when a new bridge is built. This will commence on Sept 20<sup>th</sup>.

On July 9<sup>th</sup> 1881, she stated that the new building for the school will be ready in 2 weeks. She asked for the furniture to be forwarded as soon as possible. She also wants a stove to be sent with the furniture as there is no fire place in the new building.

*“This is a very cold wet district and a fire is necessary for both the health and comfort of the pupils attending the school”.*

There was a note on the letter stating that she was to obtain the consent of the trustees will be required before a stove can be fixed in the new building. She is also required to obtain a lease on the building which was constructed by a local (without a fireplace) to rent to the department.

Later in 1881 there is a proposal to make Jeetho West School 2254 a half time school with Corinella East School 2224. Mary asked to be head teacher of the combined school. She explained that her relatives live in the neighbourhood and it would therefore be practicable for her to work at two schools. She continued travelling between the schools until 1884 with the children attending school for only half a week.

In 1882 Mary asked for permission to change the holiday system for Christmas. She wants to have 2 weeks at Christmas and 1 in mid-winter. She discussed the matter with Mr Bolam of the local board and she was told to obtain the necessary approval in writing from the department. There is no school holiday system as we know it now. In 1883 she is still trying to have a mid-year break.

In February 1883 Mary asked if needlework needed to be taught in a school with an average attendance of under 20. She was told that needlework must be taught in all schools where there was a female teacher.

On May 5<sup>th</sup> 1884 Mary handed Corinella East to a Miss Finlay as Jeetho West School became full time due to increased enrolments.

In May 21<sup>st</sup> 1888 she asked for leave on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of June to allow her to visit some of the town schools and in order to see some practical work and the best methods of teaching.

*“I wish to complete my examination in *The Art of Teaching* for a licence to teach and think I should be better qualified to pass if I could have practice lessons from experienced teachers in the larger schools in Melbourne. I have been advised by the District Inspector Mr Craig Esq M A to apply for leave of absence for the purpose named.*

I have the honour to be, Sir

Your Obedient Servant

Mary Leys “

Leave was not granted for this purpose and in September she was told she will be paid at the minimum rate until she qualified fully.

On May 20<sup>th</sup> 1885 Mary wrote that the school was closed since Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May because she was ill. As there is no doctor in the area and she was too ill to travel to town by coach to get a certificate she consulted Dr McMillian by letter. She attached a letter from the Doctor and asked for leave until 22<sup>nd</sup> May when she hopes to be well. The Doctor was in South Yarra. He wrote regarding her very inflamed sore throat.

Mary continued to teach at the school until a new school opened in Loch and Jeetho West was closed. She was not given the position of head teacher at Loch. A man was appointed as there were to be many older boys enrolled. Poor Mary.

*I would like to know more about Mary but that is for another time  
The next edition of the newsletter will have some early history of Leongatha State School*

## **Sons of the West: Leongatha and District's VFL zoning recruits from the 1980s**

**by Olivia Skillern**

Leongatha has a strong history of football players heading to the big cities to play in Australia's top football competition the Victorian Football League (VFL)/Australian Football League (AFL). The current breed featuring Jarryd Roughead and a couple of Heppells were recruited through the AFL draft. Previously however, recruitment was decided based on where you came from, a system known as Zoning.

The zoning recruitment era in the VFL, between 1968 and 1985, produced a number of top level footballers from the Gippsland region. The Gippsland and Latrobe Valley Football Leagues fell under Footscray's zone and so Leongatha and districts finest found their way to the Western Oval (Whitten Oval).

As the zoning era started to come to an end some Leongatha and district locals found their way to the kennel and the 1980s and 1990s was a strong era with three of the areas favourite sons displaying their talent in the VFL/AFL.

### ***Steven Wallis:***

Debuting in round one 1983 Steven Wallis is arguably Leongatha's most successful player from the zoning years. From 1983 Wallis played 261 games for the Bulldogs before retiring in 1996. During his time at the Bulldogs Wallis was a solid defender who occasionally made his way into the midfield.

In 1989 Wallis became captain of the Footscray team. It was a tumultuous year for the club with a merger with Fitzroy hovering above their heads. With guts and determination from the supporter base, this merger did not occur.

Throughout his time at the club Wallis played several finals series, represented Victoria in State of Origin and still holds the club's consecutive games record.

Wallis' son Mitchell is a current AFL player at the Western Bulldogs with younger brother Joshua playing for the Footscray Bulldogs VFL side.



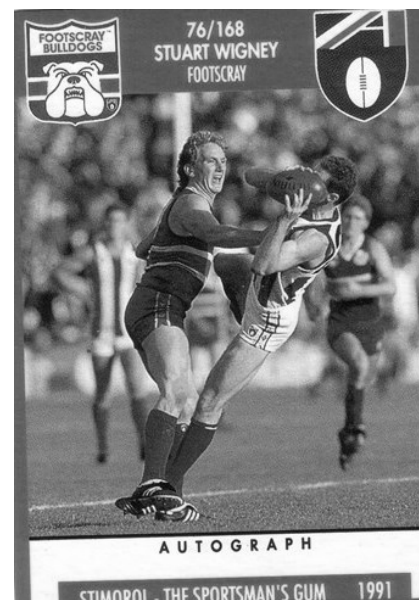
### ***Stuart Wigney:***

Stuart Wigney played for several VFL/AFL sides during his career. A key position player, Wigney served his sides well throughout his 72 games.

Recruited to Footscray, Wigney made his debut in 1988 playing four games. He went on to play at the club for another three years with his best season being 1990. In that year he played 19 games claiming 284 disposals, 132 marks and 18 goals. He was also selected to represent Victoria in State of Origin that year against Tasmania.

After a challenging year in 1991 Wigney was traded to Sydney but only played one game for his new club due to injury. As a result Sydney chose to trade Wigney and he found a new home at the Adelaide Crows. Wigney played two solid years for the Crows assisting them to the preliminary final in 1993.

Wigney finished his career at Richmond Football Club where he played 14 games in 1995 and 1996. In 1995 he played finals for the Tigers but only managed two games in 1996.



### ***Barry Standfield:***

Hailing from Fish Creek, Barry Standfield represented Footscray in the VFL from 1990 until 1996 when he was traded to Adelaide where he played until 1997.

Although not playing in the first team until 1990 he was playing at Footscray in the under 19s and Reserves from the mid-1980s when he was recruited through zoning.

Round One 1990 saw Standfield debut for Footscray alongside club great Chris Grant. He played seven seasons for the club with 85 of his 99 games being played between 1992 and 1995. During his time at the club he contributed significantly including in the 1992, 1994 and 1995 finals series. After an injury plagued 1996 Standfield was traded to the Adelaide Crows.

Standfield found success at the Adelaide Crows where he debuted with a five goal haul over the Brisbane Lions. To rub salt in his old club's wounds, he also kicked five goals against the Bulldogs.

Unfortunately Standfield lost his place in the team late in the season and missed out on playing in their premiership side that same year.

After leaving the Crows Standfield returned to Gippsland and returned to local football spending time at Fish Creek, Leongatha and Korumburra-Bena. In 2001 he won the Peter Moore Medal for being the Best and Fairest in the Alberton Football Netball League.

The success of players like Wallis, Wigney and Standfield helped give the region a great name as a place to find future AFL footballers. Although the change to recruiting saw players represent different teams, footballers from the area continue to strive for AFL careers. These three are just some of the players who hailed from the area but they show there is a great football culture of the region.

## **The Biesterfeldt Family at “The Pines” at Ruby.**

**by Ruth Caughey**

Henrich Peter Biesterfeldt was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 1870 in Wedel, Germany. By 1890, after arriving in Australia during 1886 and spending some time picking oranges at Elmore near Bendigo, Henry had found his way to Gippsland and settled on 20 acres at Ruby which he called ‘Rubyhill’.

When Henry first arrived the rolling hilly land was heavily timbered with blackbutt and blue gum with some hazel and blanketwood. The trees were cut with an axe and the land was fired in summer to deal with the undergrowth.



Much of the timber was used for fences, weatherboards for the house and some furniture, all made with the help of a bush carpenter named Peter Penshang.

Ploughs were useless for the first 10 years because of all the stumps, but they eventually rotted out and the whole farm was then cultivated.

An orchard was planted with all sorts of fruit trees: oranges, lemons, apples, pears, peaches, nectarines, limes, cherry and every sort of berry.

Asparagus, parsnips, carrots, leeks, onions, peas and beans, lettuce and rhubarb were also planted during the years.

Henry took on dairying and built some sheds and a barn on the farm.

He was part of the Herd Testing Association in Leongatha and found this interesting and helpful. Henry was also part of the South Gippsland Breeders Association. There were also pigs kept on the farm. In the 1930's there were 4 breeding sows which had produced two litters of 8-10 piglets a year.

Later Henry gained an extra 100 acres. The property was divided into 12 paddocks the largest which was 16 acres. In the mid 1920's Mr Biesterfeldt realised that although they were following everyday methods of dairying and butter fat prices were good, they were only ever paying their way. So to increase the output of the cows Henry decided he would need to increase the output of the land.

Henry became a strong advocate for liming pastures. He applied 10cwt an acre and estimated that the effect on the soil would last 5-6 years.

Lime corrects the acidity in the soil and promotes growth. This meant that the grazing capacity increased and the cattle were in better health.

Maize, millet and oats were grown but Henry discovered that there was a lot of labour involved and decided that a mixture of cow grass and lucerne would have better growth during the summer months. During winter spring stores were kept in the silo.

The silo that was built and still stands today has a capacity of 130tons. It is 45ft high and 12ft 6inches in diameter. 4000 handmade concrete blocks were used in the structure.

A water tank was also constructed at a height of 20ft, some of which was underground. This held 23, 000 gallons and was filled from the roof of the barn. To have water that was under pressure, a tank was also built on top of the silo. It was 5ft high and held 4000 gallons and was filled from the other tank by a centrifugal pump.



Henry aged 34 married Edith Louisa Nitz aged 19 years on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1905 in the Lutheran Church East Melbourne. Edith had been born in London and had a German Father.

Together they had 6 children: Harry/Henry, Norman, Freda Edith, Frank, Eva and Greta. Edith was the president for the Gippsland Hills Group of the CWA for many years and took some interest in craft work. After the war years she started a school to teach the arts of leatherwork and quilting.

**Harry** was born 16 December 1905. He grew up assisting his Father in making “The Pines” to the successful farm that it was. He then took on his own property which was next door to his parents. He was considered a kind and gentle man who played violin at the local dances at the Ruby Hall. When his Father died Harry moved back with his Mother until her death in 1985. Harry didn't get married or have children and died 5<sup>th</sup> March 1987 and was buried at the Leongatha cemetery with his Mother.

**Norman** was born in 1908, also grew up to be a farmer next door to his parents. Norman became engaged to Alberta Tomlison from Korumburra in May 1934. They married and had two children Austin and Anita. The family moved away from The Pines at Ruby and lived in Carnegie for a time. Norman died 1954 and was buried at Springvale Cemetery.

**Freda Edith** born in 1907 and died aged 1 in December 1908. She died in an accident and was buried at Leongatha Cemetery.



**Frank** was born 11 August 1909 and became a bank officer and worked in Kooweerup before enlisting in the RAAF during WW2. He enjoyed lawn bowls and married Rosalind Bessie Giles. They had 2 daughters.

**Eva** born 31 January 1911 and became a teacher at Leongatha High School for a time. She married Samuel Kubli in 1934 and they had 2 children. They then divorced and Eva remarried a Gottfried Beck in 1956.

**Greta** was a shire secretary before she married Samuel Blair in 1939. They also had 2 children.

The property after many years of neglect was finally abandoned in the 1990's. Austin Biesterfeldt was considered the owner and had rented out some of the land to neighbouring farmers. He was not interested in farming and was always hard to contact and difficult to communicate with.



The silo at “The Pines” still stands today but the sheds and the house have deteriorated and are now in ruins.