

# Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

*Newsletter*      Volume 5 Number 1 February 2008

*Preserving our heritage*

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## The latest news

### The Shingler Memorial Lecture/Dinner and Book Launch

The book *One Bag in Six The Story of Onion Growing in South Gippsland* by John Murphy will be launched at the Shingler Memorial Lecture on Saturday April 12<sup>th</sup>. John Murphy will be the guest speaker and his latest book will be launched by Professor Weston Bate, noted historian and former President of the RHSV. Other local historians will be present and entertainment will be provided.

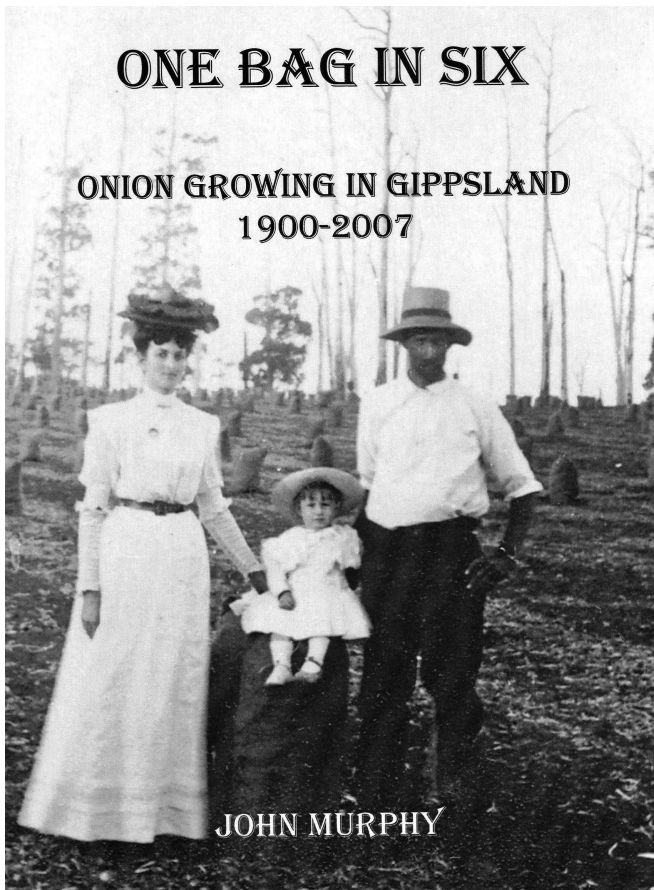
The dinner/lecture will be held at the Daker's Centre on the corner of Smith and Watt Streets Leongatha and will commence at 6.30pm. The cost of the evening will be \$30 and tickets can be obtained from the society. Booking is required. Contact us at the Mechanics' Institute on Thursday and Friday afternoon or by phone on 56622487 or 56686304.

The Onion recipe book "Six of One and Half a Dozen of Another" compiled by Johanna Haasjes will also be launched at the function. The recipes have been collected from members and many are old family favourites. Thank you Johanna for all your work.

Thank you to Geoff Michael, Margaret Stokes, Wal Cayzer and Ian Lester for the planning of the event and to Lola Bailey for the designing of the tickets and brochures.

**The Book Cover is shown on the next page**

**The Anzac Recipe Book.** The ever busy Johanna Haasjes is also compiling a booklet of anzac recipes for Anzac Day. If you have any great family variations on the anzac you are welcome to have the recipes included.



### **The South Gippsland History Conference.**

On Saturday February 23<sup>rd</sup> the South Gippsland Historical Network held a most successful conference at Coal Creek Park. The attendance was excellent and the venue looked wonderful. Many commented on how well the buildings and grounds looked. The speakers covered a great range of subjects and entertained those who came. Our society was well represented by three speakers John Murphy, Ian Lester and Lyn Skillern. Shire of South Gippsland representatives were very impressed at the way this historic venue was used and the organisers could see the day being possibly an annual event.



Sam Gatto of Wonthaggi in the church

## **Avenue of Honour Wooreen**

In 1918 an avenue of honour, containing 35 elms and oaks was planted on the main road at Wooreen. This avenue is now in a poor state and needs to be cleared and some trees replaced. Members of our society have been helping research the names of the local young men honoured by the tree planting. The 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the planting will be in July this year and it is planned to have a tree planting and unveiling of a memorial to both the local young men who went to the Great War 1914-18 and those children kidnapped from the Wooreen School in 1977.

Lyn Skillern has started to research the 149 men with connections to Woorayl Shire who lost their lives in World War One. Lyn is looking for those with a connection to Wooreen. If anyone has information on young men from Wooreen and surrounds who served in World War One could you please pass this on to Pat Spinks or Lyn Skillern.



Richard Larkin of Tarwin Lower killed in 1917. AWM

**Sport.** The exhibition on the history of sport in our area will hopefully be completed by Easter.



Country week netball 1956

This photo came from Noreen Williams fifth from the left

## Feature Articles

### Peter Peterson by Pat Spinks

In the early 1930s Peter Peterson started manufacturing butcher's cutlery and agricultural hand tools in a small building on the Port Welshpool foreshore. He later moved to Lewis St, into a much larger building. His correct name was Per Conrad Peterson and he was born in Tranas, Sweden and served his apprenticeship in Eskiltuna in Sweden.

On completion of his apprenticeship, in search of adventure he went to sea. He left the ship at Port Victoria (S.A.) and took various land jobs. He arrived in Port Welshpool in 1911 as crew on the cray fishing craft "Ruby" owned by Charles Anderson. He intended to return to his native country and take up his tools making trade but war broke out making this impossible.

He obtained a boat and started catching fish and was one of the first to start catching shark on long lines. He was very successful but the low prices paid for fish made it uneconomical to continue even before his boat was wrecked.

He gave up fishing and started making tools and butchers' knives. Having little capital he worked hard and gradually through the quality of workmanship and materials gained recognition and became very well known. He patented a much improved type of tussock hoe and a fern slasher which are still being asked for, although on his death in 1972, the business was closed.

The Peterson hoe which he developed and patented was a light weight alternative to the heavy drop forged mattock and was available from hardware and rural supply stores. If purchased from the manufacturer, Peterson would fine tune the hoe to suit the operator by adjusting the blade angle, handle length, etc. He also supplied wholesalers in Melbourne and Sydney and some tools carried their name.

His knives, used by butchers and fishermen gained high praise and were much sought after. Keith Spencer writing in Australian Shooter magazine (undated) states, that Peterson also made knives for commandos in training at Wilson's Promontory military camp (unmarked for commandos use overseas).

Per Conrad Peterson married Lillie Robinson of Port Welshpool in 1936. He died on 5 September 1972, aged 85, and is buried in the Welshpool Cemetery.

#### *References*

*"Time and Tide"* by Lillie Peterson and Margaret Cole, 1978.

*"Australian Shooter"* magazine article by Keith Spencer, undated.

*"Australian Knife History 1879-1979"* by Keith Spencer.

The Leongatha & District Historical Society has a fern hook and hoe made by Peterson on display among its collection of tools in the Billiard Room of the Mechanics' Institute.

### Early Education by Lyn Skillern

The material in this article came from the inward correspondence from Leongatha School to the Education Department held at the Public Records Office of Victoria.

It is interesting to go back and look at the type of education system that existed in the 1880's and 90's. I worked for the Victorian Education Department from 1971 until 2002 and my experience was interesting, rewarding, some times difficult, and never boring. Those teacher who came to educate the children of South Gippsland nearly 100 years before me, endured an education system that was rigid and often uncaring. They battled bureaucracy, difficult inspectors, appalling conditions, diseases, bushfires and floods but they set up a system that was valued. For all this I admire them greatly. One of these special teachers was John Jeffrey who was the head teacher at Leongatha State School from 1889 until 1905.



**John Jeffrey**

### **Jeffrey Street**

Jeffrey St was named after John Jeffrey, the first permanent head teacher of Leongatha Primary School. The school was originally on the corner of Jeffrey and Hassett Streets, where the Kindergarten is located now. He stayed at the school for 16 years, his problems were many, here are just a few. The first school was a shed. It was rented from Mr Shanahan and was very basic indeed. It was 28' by 14', had no windows, lining, fire place or tank. The furniture was inadequate and he had to place 9 children in a 6 seater desk.

Leongatha school started as a result of lobbying but one heartfelt letter from Mrs Shanahan did the trick it seems. Below is a part of this letter.

*August 13<sup>th</sup> 1889*

*" I am induced to write to you asking for a teacher to be sent to this district as soon as possible, as there are 40 or more children within school distance of this township.*

*When the inspector visited this place last April, he promised us a school with in a small space of time and since then we have not heard anything about it.*

*Now my husband has a building erected in our township itself. 28' by 14' which he is willing to lease to the Education Dept or a term of 6 months or more at a nominal rent provided a teacher is sent here.*

*It is really a pity to see so many children going actually wild here, and no school within several miles of them.*

*Will you consider this proposition and let me know as soon as convenient, if I may expect a teacher to be sent here. The population is increasing here weekly and there is urgent need for education for the many children.."*

The school started in September 1889 with Mr Denholm as teacher. He was replaced in November by Mr Jeffrey

Mr Bothroyd the district inspector was critical of John Jeffrey's teaching despite his lack of facilities and it took months and even years to provide a proper school.

When Mr Shanahan wanted his shed back in 1890 Mr Jeffrey had to hold school in his home. He used 2 rooms and the veranda.

By June 1890 there were 53 students and 1 teacher still in his home. He was permitted to apply for a pupil teacher. A pupil teacher was a type of apprentice who learnt on the job and sat for exams to become a licensed teacher.



A class room with six seater desks, Source unknown

Tom Devling applied for this job. His letter was written in August 1891

“ I beg to offer myself to you for examination for the position of pupil teacher. I was born on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1878. I got my certificate while in the 6<sup>th</sup> class at Kilmore State School. I may also state that at the same school passed the first year scholarship examination and went to the Geelong Scotch College for 12 months but in the second year scholarship exam I was unsuccessful”.

In late August 1891 there was a chicken pox epidemic. Attendance is very low

By December 1<sup>st</sup> Mr Jeffrey has 59 students and was the only teacher. He required a pupil teacher desperately.

On December 5<sup>th</sup> a whooping cough epidemic is reported. Dr Carr wants all children showing any symptoms to be excluded from school.

Mr Jeffrey is allowed to appoint his son as a temporary pupil teacher while the position is being sorted out by Mr Bothroyd.

Tom Devling eventually obtains the position as pupil teacher and starts in March 1892. He and the other applicants had to set a competitive exam to select the person most capable.

**Measles breaks out in October 1893 and a series of telegrams are sent by Mr Jeffrey**

Oct 9<sup>th</sup> 1893 measles in pupil teachers family .

Oct 13<sup>th</sup> 1893 Measles has broken out. Mr Brumley's family has 1 case and they live 200 yards from the school. Mr Devling's family have the illness. Mr Devling has isolated himself from the victim, fumigated himself daily and taken daily open air exercise.

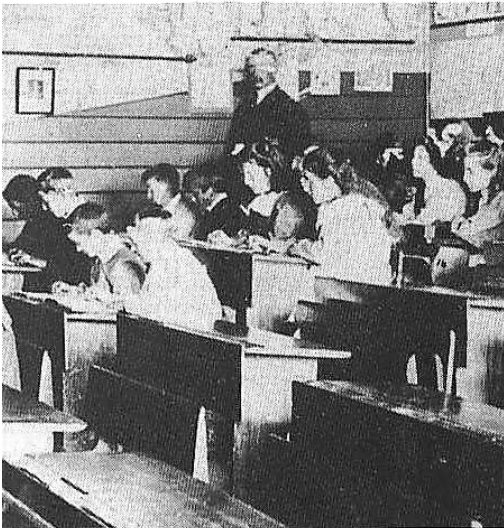
Oct 17<sup>th</sup> illness spreading rapidly 10 families affected by measles

Oct 19<sup>th</sup> 1893. Measles is rife

Oct 23<sup>rd</sup> I have been ordered to close the school by the board of health.

Oct 26<sup>th</sup> 1893. I have had the school cleaned, disinfected and fumigated under the instructions of Dr Carr.

In 1895 school is to start on January 21<sup>st</sup>. Mr Devling did not commence duty for the year until 12 noon on the 22<sup>nd</sup> as he was detained in Melbourne due to losing his return rail ticket. He went to get the train on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> and found he had lost the ticket and he could not buy another through lack of funds. He had to wait until he got the money on Monday evening and got the next train which arrived at mid day.



A class room at Leongatha State School c 1900

Feb 1 1895

**Typhoid out break.** Mr Aberdeen has typhoid. He lives 500 yard from the school in a direct line. Dr Davies has isolated Mr Aberdeen and his family have been moved away from him. One boy attends the school but he has not been excluded as he has been removed to a farm 2 miles away.

Feb 16 1895

Mr Jeffrey answered some inspector comments.

He has reclassified some students and put them up. He gave them harder work first and tested this before putting them up before the exams had happened.

As to the faulty grouping of children in the desks. He comments that he has done this to keep the sexes apart. He now sits the boys and girls of each level together for closer attention. As to spelling and grammar. He is working on this. The spelling may be due to he giving too much oral work and not enough written. To writing he introduced the Vere and Foster's bold series and this was because he found the Australia series of books disappointing. The children may not have been accustomed to the new style at the time of the exam. They now have separate books for commercial forms. The inspector

criticised the children's manner of sitting in the desks and talking. If attendance increases he will need better desks as those he has are crowded. He was criticised for not having science apparatus. He states that he thinks it unreasonable for the teacher to purchase expensive apparatus but if it necessary he will procure some.

### **Bushfires 1898**

Mr Jeffrey has to close the school because he has to go and fight the bushfires threatening his home. This is very near the school so hopefully the children were safe. The son of Mr Young the owner of *The Star* died fighting the fires and Tom Devling organised his funeral. There is much correspondence from Mr Jeffrey trying to explain why Tom Devling was absent for an afternoon to do this.

Feb 21<sup>st</sup> 1898

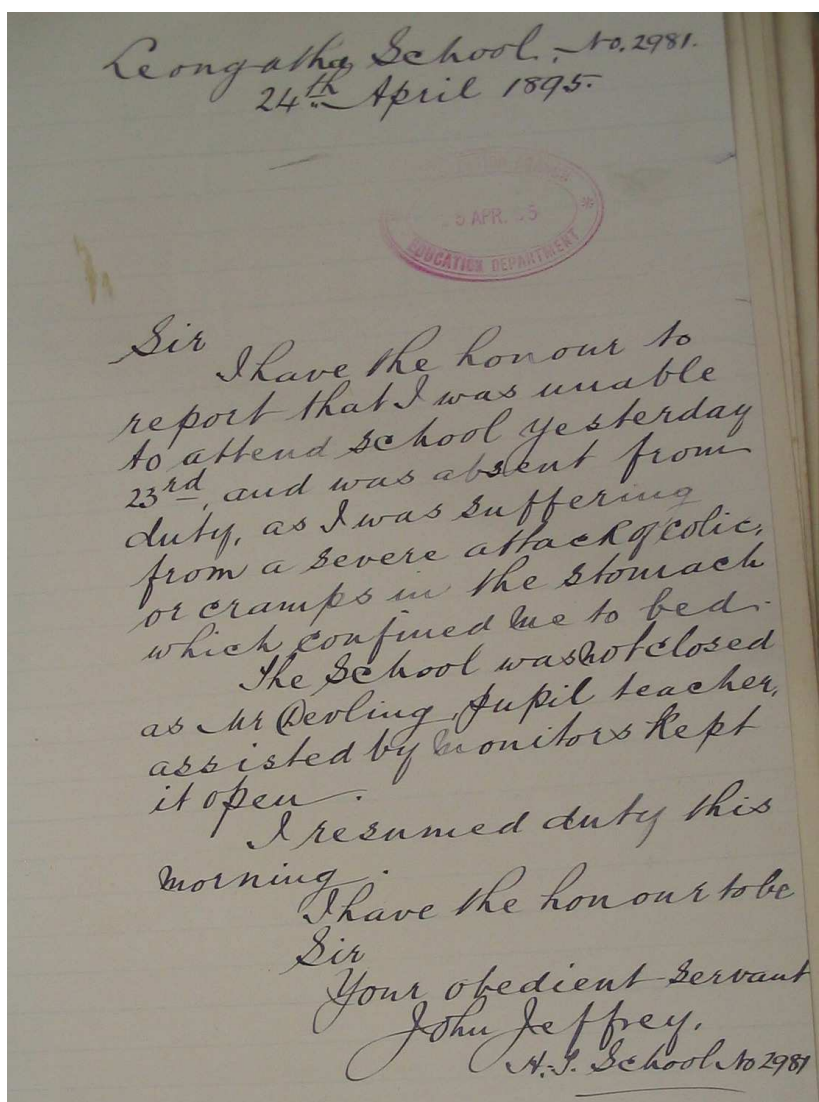
Mr Devling states that he was absent that afternoon "owing to the fact that I was called upon to attend to the funeral arrangements for the son of one of my most intimate friends.

Same date Mr Jeffrey write reporting that Mr Devling was making the arrangements for the funeral of a scholar, the son of one of his intimate friends.

The department note says " Ask what necessity there was for Mr Devling to make the funeral arrangements and why the family of the deceased could not do this.

On March 5<sup>th</sup> Mr Jeffrey replied to the request. He is forwarding a letter from Mr Devling and says " I can myself verify the part referring to the utter prostrations of Mr Young, the deceased father."

In April 1898 Mr Devling resigned and went to Western Australia. The search for a pupil teacher started all over again. Below is an example of Mr Jeffrey's writing





## **Leongatha and District Historical Society**

### *Program 2008*

The Society holds a monthly meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of each month in the Mechanics Institute rooms. **All welcome.**

The rooms are open to the public on Thursday and Friday of each week from 12 noon until 4pm – or by appointment.

#### **March**

Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> General Meeting

#### **April**

**Saturday April 12<sup>th</sup> The Shingler Memorial Dinner. This year we will be launched by Prof Weston Bate of the latest book by John Murphy “One Bag in Six, the history of onion growing in South Gippsland”. John will be the main guest speaker. There will be entertainment and interesting displays.**

Wednesday April 23<sup>rd</sup> In honour of Anzac Day the meeting will be held at the RSL Leongatha. Dinner will be followed by a talk on the exhibitions on display. The speakers will be John Murphy, Lyn Skillern and an RSL representative. A short general meeting to follow at the Mechanics’ Institute. Meet for dinner at 6.30 if you wish. The talk will begin at 8 pm.

#### **May**

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> General meeting

#### **June**

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> Bronwyn Lowden will speak on the history of Mechanics Institutes at 8 pm

#### **July**

Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> General meeting

#### **August**

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> Annual/General Meeting

Celebration of 25 years in the Mechanics’ Institute to be organised

#### **September**

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> Speakers local tradesmen on changes in the trades over time

Daffodil Festival will highlight the exhibition on the history of schools in the area. A fund raising activity involving the valuing of antiques will be held during the festival

**October 21<sup>st</sup> General meeting**

A bus tour of historic farmhouses in the area will be held on a date to be fixed.

#### **November**

Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> The migrant experience with Johanna Haasjes

**December** Christmas break-up – location to be confirmed

Two exhibitions annually : Exhibition 1 : February to July The History of Sport

Exhibition 2 : September to February The History of Local Schools.

**Dates and details to be advised**

Tuesday 18th General Meeting

Shingler Memorial Lecture and launch of “One Bag in Six” the history of onion growing in South Gippsland by John Murphy. A date to be organised

**April**

If you wish to join the Leongatha and District Historical Society pay \$20 for a single membership, \$35 for a couple or \$7 to receive a newsletter only. This can be sent to the Society's at P O Box 431 Leongatha 3953