



Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Newsletter

Volume 10 Number 3 August 2013

Preserving Our Heritage

President: John Hyett

Secretary: Lyn Skillern Tel 56686304

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Latest news

• The Annual Meeting

At the Annual Meeting on August 14th the following office bearers elected were

President John Hyett

Vice President Robert Sage

Wal Cayzer

Secretary Lyn Skillern

Treasurer Pat Spinks

Archivist Pat Spinks and Sonya Holt to share the position

The Society voted to accept the new incorporation model rules

Presidents Report 2013 by John Hyett

At this time of the year the President has the chance to look back and review the last 12 months of the society'

It is with sadness that we mark the passing of three members of the Society during this time, Lorna Dowel, Leith Johnson and Past President Don Williams. While I never knew any of these personally I am sure many of you have fond memories of the time they spent in the Society and will hold them dear in your hearts.

There are many highlights to recall during the past 12 months some of which I will relate and hope you will excuse me if I have missed anything - in this time we have;

- Celebrated the centenary of the Mechanics Institute building that is our home with a magic lantern show of the Soudan War as shown in the original Mechanics Institute.
- Enjoyed some interesting and informative talks by guest speakers, including Richard Lester on his experiences during the Vietnam War, a talk on the Knox family and the part they played in the development of the history of Victoria, Robert Sage on his family history in the area and Colin West on his time with the CRB.
- There have been some excellent exhibitions during this time – the exhibition for the centenary of the Leongatha Agricultural High School and all the permutations and name changes that followed – changing exhibitions on Pioneer families and the VicRoads exhibition celebrating 100 years since the CRB was formed. Thanks to all those who have put so much time and effort into preparing these excellent displays.
- We had an interesting visit to the Yarram Historical Society to inspect their new premises and some points of interest around the district.
- The Koorooman East Avenue of Honour has been restored and a plaque listing the names of the soldiers honoured was unveiled in front of a large audience. A lot of hard work was put in by Ian Lester and others in the months leading up to this event and their work is much appreciated.
- During the year we had the Mechanics Institute plaque fitted to the front of the building and unveiled as well as hosting a visit from the members of the Mechanics Institute Victoria.
- We have hosted visits from various car clubs during the VicRoads Exhibition and provided historical tours of Leongatha in conjunction with the South Gippsland Tourist railway.
- We have purchased a new PA system, which works well on bus tours, a new digital recorder for recording talks and allowing these to be stored on a computer and more accessible for transcribing. Some of you may have noticed that we now have gas heaters installed – the persistence of Pat has been much appreciated during the winter months.
- A vote of thanks should be given to the small band of volunteers who open the society rooms every Thursday and Friday afternoon – I don't get in as much as I would like but when I do I see the same faces again and again. If any of you can spare four hours of a Thursday or Friday, maybe as little as once a month, to help it would be much appreciated. The Society could not exist without the hours put in behind the scenes by a few people and I'm sure they would love a bit of assistance.



Eulalie Brewster with Jennifer Jones receiving her awards

I cannot close this report without referring to the honours bestowed on several of our members during the past 12 months

- Margaret Stokes – Joint Leongatha Citizen of the Year
- Lyn Skillern – Collaborative Community History Award for *From Inkwell to Internet: a centenary of state secondary education in Leongatha*
- Eulalie Brewster – two Gippsland Association of Affiliated Historical Societies awards for her work on local history – she does spend most of her time these days as patron of the Inverloch Historical Society.
- And last, but by no means least - John Murphy – Recognised by the Gippsland Association of Affiliated Historical Societies for his major contribution to Gippsland History with a large body of work over many years.

We all look forward to another interesting and productive year for the Society.

Attending Committee Meetings

All members are very welcome to attend committee meetings. We have these meetings when we have a guest speaker on meeting night. The dates for the committee meeting will be set when we organise next years program. Our members are very welcome to ask questions and make suggestions. We need new ideas to keep the Society going.

Thirty Years at the Mechanics.

At the annual meeting we celebrated 30 years at the Mechanics' with a finger food meal provided by our members. Thank you to all those who helped provide the delicious meal. Thank you to John Murphy for his interesting talk following the meeting.



Andrew Skillern in the front room 1984

The following is a transcript of an article from *The Great Southern Star* in 1983 reporting on the Shire's decision to hand the Mechanics' Institute to the then Woorayl Shire Historical Society

History group takes the lot

Leongatha's history will finally have an official home, in the town's Mechanics' Institute.

The issue of the town's centenary in 1988 was one of the main points to help swing the issue. In a submission to the Woorayl Shire Council, the Leongatha Historical Society offered reasons why the group would need the entire area of the Institute and why the building should not be structurally altered.

The building is the only one in the shire to be classified by the National Trust and the historical society pointed out the interest in the unique reed and plaster walls, the pressed steel ceilings of the first two rooms, the doors and lead light windows and the fixtures in the billiard room.

The historical society will use the front room of the building for display purposes, the second room for meetings, storage and research and the billiard room for films and further displays

The group told the council that there was a great need to collect the area's history together and to prepare for the shire's centenary in 1988, coinciding with the national bicentenary

Council expressed their concerns in discussion that the two other groups interested in the building the CAB and the social worker would need to secure other premise

"I move the motion that the matter be deferred until the Citizens' Advice Bureau and the Social Worker can be informed of the position," Cr Harold Vagg said.

"We as much as told these groups that they would be housed in the Mechanics' Institute. What will happen to them now," Cr Cusack said.

Cr Mary Checkley was keen to see the matter settled

The education department could vacate the area in the old council buildings and the Citizens' Advice Bureau has indicated that this area would be suitable

"It will be good to see the Historical Society using the only historically significant building in the shire. They should be allowed to use it now and permanently because the shire risks losing some valuable pieces of its heritage

"This is our chance to give history a home," said Cr Joy Hoy

"It is an opportunity to prepare for the shire centenary in 1988

Secretary of the Historical Society, Mrs Lyn Skillern was present at the meeting when the shire council officially passed the motion giving control of the building to the historical group.

"We have not had official word but we are very pleased with the news," Mr John Murphy, the historical group's vice president, said.

"We didn't wish to cause problems but the historical society really needs the whole building to do justice to the area's history. Other historical groups in Warragul, Wonthaggi and so on have historical landmarks for their local history collections and the Mechanics' Institute is the only suitable spot in the town.

The Pioneer Exhibition

The Vic Roads exhibition has now closed and the display highlighting pioneer families has returned. Displays on the Dodd, Riseley, Brumley and Maher families are now set up. Photographs of pioneering times are also being displayed in the hallway.

Denis Maher died as a result of an accident which occurred when he was assisting in the felling of a tree near the Leongatha Railway Station site in 1889

The following are extracts from the inquest into his death. It shows a number of features about pioneering times. The fact that falling trees caused many deaths and the fact that medical care was so far away.

Page 3 The verdict

After hearing the evidence of the witnesses sworn ... the death of Denis Maher. I find that the deceased, Denis Maher, died at Leongatha on the 16th of September 1889 from injuries received in the falling of a tree at Leongatha on Saturday September 14th such injuries being the result of an accident.

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Depositions taken before me Jacob Thomas, Justice of the Peace in and for the Eastern Bailiwick of the colony of Victoria at magisterial inquiry held before me at Leongatha touching the death of Denis Maher.

This deposition on oath saith

My name is Charles Rhoden I am a sawyer on the Great Southern railway for Mr. O'Keefe. I knew the deceased Denis Maher. I last saw him alive on Monday the 16th of September at 8.30 am. On Saturday last, 14th he was one of the men in my gang, we were engaged in grubbing a tree on the railway reserve Leongatha, at about 3.30 pm. We had a rope fast to the tree in order to direct its course in falling in order to avoid some adjacent tents and smithy. I had left one man, Patrick Bourke, to watch the tree and give notice of the falling. Bourke gave the alarm and we all pulled on the rope. The tree swayed very slowly and then fell. In falling it struck one other tree and broke it. About 41 feet up and tore a second tree out by the roots. The tree fell in the direction we all thought it would. Denis Maher and William Holm were engaged on the rope. After the tree fell I saw the two of them entangled amongst the fallen limbs at the head of the tree. I picked up Holm and saw he was seriously injured and alone went for the doctor who I thought might have been at the camp. I found he was not.



Denis Maher

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I made enquiries and found Poowong the nearest place where medical aid could be got. I dispatched a messenger to Poowong for the doctor also to Foster. Poowong is about 18 miles and Foster about 28 miles. The two doctors Hayes of Poowong and Hayden of Foster arrived on Sunday at 11 am. Holm appears to be killed almost instantly as the tree fell. Denis Maher when I saw him was struggling out from amongst the fallen limbs. He was assisted by some of the men with whom he had been working. He said he thought his leg was broke, he did not complain of other injuries. Both doctors attended him and they said his left leg was broken badly and advised his removal to the hospital with the least delay. On Saturday night he said he thought his ribs were broken as he had pain there. On Saturday night and Sunday morning he complained of excessive pain in the broken leg and wind in the stomach. I left him about 3 30 am on Monday morning to try and prepare some means of taking him to the hospital (in Sale).

I next heard he was dead.

I understand that Denis Maher was about 40 years of age and married.

To the best of my opinion it was the limits of the tree we were grubbing that caused the accident to Denis Maher.

William Holm who was killed at the same time was about 38 years of age and married.

Signed C Rhoden

Denis Maher was buried in the Leongatha cemetery on September 16th 1889. His grave is the oldest in the cemetery. The burial service was conducted by his brother in law Michael Shanahan as no priest was available

During the Daffodil Festival we will be open on Thursday, Friday and Saturday (August 29th, 30th, 31st). If you can help out in anyway please contact Lyn 56686304 or Pat 56686365

Membership for the year 2013-2014 is now due. We need the details below for our new register of members as required by the Incorporation Act

Leongatha and District Historical Society
P O Box 431
Leongatha 3953

Name.....

Address

Telephone number.....

Email address

I do not wish to have my contact details passed on to any other group

Family \$35

Single \$25

Newsletter only

Your donation is be most appreciated



Leongatha & District Historical Society Inc.
welcomes you to the

Shingler Memorial Lecture and Dinner

Saturday 19 October 2013
6.30 pm for 7 pm start
Tickets \$35.00
BYO drinks

Dakers Centre
Smith Street Leongatha

Speaker:
Mr Patrick Morgan,
noted Gippsland historian

Subject:
Mysteries of Gippsland

Tickets to be purchased in advance
from the Mechanics' Institute on
Thursday and Friday between 12 noon & 4 pm

Phone 5662 2492
or contact
Robin Williams 5662 3013
Margaret Stokes 5662 3492

