

# Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

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*Preserving our heritage*

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## **The latest news**

### **The Annual Meeting**

The Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday August 19<sup>th</sup> at 8 pm at the Mechanics' Institute.

**25 Years at the Mechanics'** 25 years ago the then Woorayl Shire Historical Society received the key to the Leongatha Mechanics' Institute. At the annual meeting we ask our members to tell us a story regarding the past 25 years. Much has happened in that time. A visit from former member and former Shire Councillor Mary Checkley last year reminded me of just how far we have come. Mary was thrilled to see our displays, computer, catalogued material and website.

### **The Lady of the Swamp**

On Sunday May 11<sup>th</sup>, Geoff Michael was presented with a copy of the will of Peter Clement, father of Margaret Clement, the famous Lady of the Swamp. Richard Shears felt that we, the local historical society, should have a copy. This will, in due course, be on display in the front room.

Our July meeting was given over to the swamp lady and we were thrilled to welcome over 50 people to the evening and we were thrilled to welcome over 50 people to the evening. Member and local lawyer Colin McKenzie McHarg described the will, written in beautiful handwriting and dated June 1881, as amazing. For Colin simply having this primary source of history in his hand was amazing. Colin went on to read out excerpts from the will with great skill and flair. John Murphy spoke about the history of the Tarwin Lower area and Margaret Stokes read out excerpts from letters written by Margaret Clement to her mother. The letters gave the audience a clear picture of how the fortunes of Clement sisters had declined. Thank you to Wal Cayzer, Rob Williams, Margaret Stokes and Geoff Michael for organising the night. And to Colin McKenzie McHarg and John Murphy for their contribution.



### **Daffodil Festival**

At this year's Daffodil Festival we will be open from 10am until 4pm on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Members are invited to be on the roster and help man the store. On Saturday afternoon we will be having a special fund raising event. Members of the public are invited to have their antiques valued for a charge of \$5. Simon Ford of Sandford antiques has volunteered to help us for which we are very grateful.

### **Hamann's Bush.**

Leongatha North Landcare have published a booklet on Hamann's Bush and this will be launched at Hamann Bush on Sunday September 14<sup>th</sup>. A barbeque will be held at lunchtime and Carlyn Yeung the grand daughter of Carl Hamann Snr will be present.

### **Mechanics' Institutes.**

In June we had the great pleasure of having 18 years old Bronwyn Lowden speak at our meeting. Bronwyn gave us a wonderful presentation on the history of Mechanics' Institutes and public libraries from their beginning in until the present day.

### **Feature Articles**

#### **Registers of Baptisms & Marriages for the Church of England Parish of Leongatha by Margaret Stokes**

I had occasion to refer to the records of St. Peter's Leongatha Anglican Parish recently and was inspired to enter on system cards for our Society. I must admit I hadn't considered the hours of work involved spread over four months. Since the inception of the local history movement in the 1960's church records have been regarded as a valuable source of information.

The Marriage Register for St. Peter's has a large gap from August 1913 to October 1922. One can only surmise that it was mislaid for that time and a 'temporary' one used, then lost. The Register contains the names and addresses of both bride and groom and whether single or widowed, the names and addresses of the two witnesses, whether married by banns or licence and the signature of the officiating clergyman. So the first existing register of marriages goes from February 13<sup>th</sup> 1895 to August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1928 minus the years afore mentioned.



The first marriage in the Parochial District of Leongatha (the church was not self-supporting until 1913 and so was not a `parish` was the marriage of Dr. Leslie Davies and Miss Eva Ogilvy, daughter of Charles Ogilvy who was one of the pioneers instrumental in the formation of the Shire of Woorayl from the south riding of Narracan Shire. He became the first secretary of the new shire.(John Murphy: No Parallel p49)

The marriage of these two notable locals caused quite a stir and was described entertainingly in the diary of Miss Amy Griffin, an Irish visitor to the area. It is quoted in full in `No Parallel` p8.  
 “There was a great wedding here in Leongatha on Wednesday ..... It was the first of any importance in the township. The residents made a great fuss. No less than the local doctor taking a wife.....

The witnesses to the marriage are not recorded in this case. However the witnesses can give a clue to relationships, neighbours and family friends. For example Hugh McCartin, a well-known pioneer and a Catholic, witnessed the marriage of Arthur Lawrence Leech of Meeniyan and Alice Maud Mason also of Meeniyan at St Peter’s, Leongatha on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1900.

The Register of Baptisms starts in 1891. At this time Leongatha was part of the Reader’s District of Leongatha/Korumburra. It was in the charge of William Elvery, a stipendiary reader, whose own child, Wilfred Horatius, was baptized on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1891. In those early days the clergyman had to travel miles on horseback, there being only pack tracks through much of the area. Children were baptised in the settlers homes at Korumburra(1891)Nerrena (1892) Arawatta , Bena-Moyarra, Jeetho and Tarwin Lower(1893) In 1894 and 1895 children of the Mounted Constable at Inverloch were baptised . As selection followed the railway line and settlers penetrated the forested hills, in the next decade baptisms took place at Koonwarra, Mardan, Meeniyan, Stony Creek, Berry’s Creek, Koorooman East, Allambee, Koorooman, Dumbalk, Tarwin, Waratah Bay, Buffalo Creek, Dollar, Grassy Spur, Mirboo South and Mt. Eccles.

In the years leading up to the First World War, in the drier months clergy went out to Strzelecki, Fairbank, Ruby, Jumbunna , Fish Creek, Ellinbank, Seaview, Buffalo and Trida. On the Rev. H.J. Harvey’s trip to Allambee in November 1916, he carried out a “mass” baptism of five Cameron children one Moore and one Clark, so parents made the most of the clergy’s occasional visits. The children were lined up from the eldest down to the youngest on the principle, I suspect, of the older children being likely to be the more obstreperous. (Shades of McInnes McGee in A.B. Paterson’s “Bush Christening”!) In all forty-one areas or settlements were visited by clergy on their tours of duty. On the odd occasion when the youngest infant was baptised first we may be sure that a bawling baby

was quickly `done' and handed back to mother! After the war we can trace through the Baptism Register the subdivisions for Soldier Settlement and the development of Tarwin Meadows for dairying

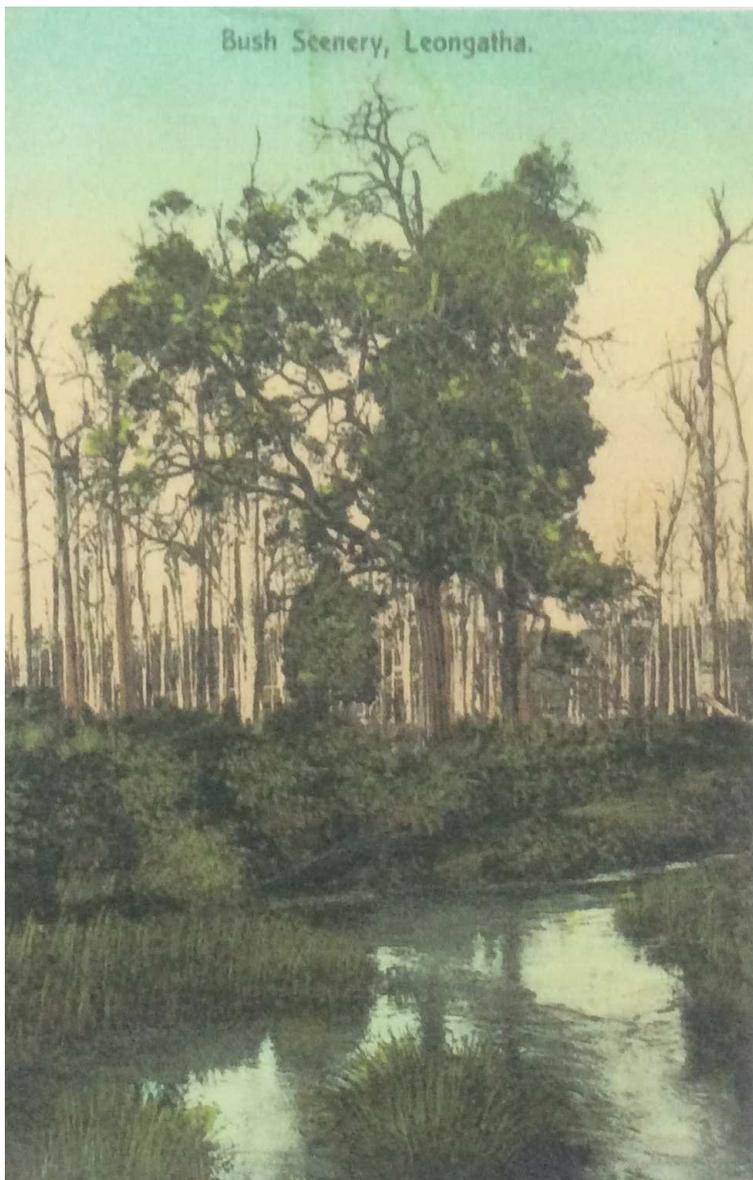
Some well-known local families appearing in the registers are Brumley, Bair, Edney, Mesley, Michael, Spencer in Leongatha, Fishers at Tarwin Lower, Inglis at Koonwarra, Coulter, Gwyther, Neal and Simons.

Occupation is noted only for baptisms, but some 19<sup>th</sup> century ones are selector, farmer later becoming `dairyman', railway employee, baker, journalist, architect, auctioneer. As Leongatha developed others are hairdresser, painter, council employee, Shire Engineer, blacksmith, butter factory mechanic, engine driver and teachers. As the 1920s advance there appears a motor driver and a market gardener in Leongatha, herd tester and carpenter at Tarwin Meadows, motor mechanic at Meeniyan and a saw miller at Allambee.

In all about 1800 names are recorded on the file cards, making them a very useful reference. Is anyone ready to tackle the other denominations?

## **Land Selection by Ian Lester**

The demand for land to be available for selection began with the discovery of gold in Victoria in 1851. Thousands of people, mainly men on their own, but sometimes men with families, came to Victoria from all over the world. Most of the gold was alluvial gold, panned from streams in the central area of the state in places with great gold heritage such as Ballarat, Bendigo and Daylesford. How many of us have ancestors which first tried their luck in the colony in these places.



Bush near Leongatha

As this gold became harder to get many men found it hard to feed their families. They could go underground and earn a wage but many valued their independence and chose not to work for the big mining companies and continued to struggle financially. As time went on and after much agitation the State Government passed an act in 1869 to allow people (men and women) to go to undeveloped areas of the State and select land for farming. This would encourage development and help men support their families

One of the most popular areas for selection was the West and South of Gippsland. This region was covered with very dense forest and had remained unsettled for many years. The view of the time was that the heavy forest cover and the reliable rainfall indicated fertile soil and would make good farmland. This was generally true and the region was opened up immediately after the selection became law.

To make a selection the selector had to travel to an area where land was available. Small settlements such as Lang Lang, Poowong, Mirboo North, Inverloch and Port Albert had developed on the fringes of the forested area. The selector would then employ a guide who had good local knowledge and would be able to show them where the available land was. Failure to use a guide could result in people becoming lost and wasting a lot of time. With a suitable piece of land chosen (the maximum being 320 acres) the selector was required to mark the boundaries with identifying marks such as wooden pegs. This was a big challenge in virgin forest where movement was difficult and it was easy to get lost.

With the boundaries marked the next step was to go to the land office and register the claim. The government surveyor would then confirm the location and check that there was only one claim to the

area. With the claim registered the selector could move onto the land and start work clearing the land and constructing a shelter and building fences.

A good example of this process is that of my great grandfather William Johnson. During the 1860's and 1870's he was prospecting and mining at Dry Diggings near Daylesford. He originally came from England and was married with children. In the early 1870's his eldest son Peter came to Gippsland with a survey party. On his return he told his father he was wasting his time looking for gold and that there were good opportunities in South Gippsland

Peter and his father returned to South Gippsland and selected land near the Coalition Creek north of Leongatha in 1881. They returned in 1884 with the rest of the family to start work and begin a permanent residence. Descendents of William Johnson still occupy some of that land today.

The task of clearing the forest was enormous. The biggest of the trees were mountain ash (black butt) eucalyptus regnans. These could be up to 300feet tall and 20feet in diameter. The eucalyptus regnans is the world's tallest flowering plant. Other areas had blue gum and in areas with poorer soils, were messmate, stringy bark and peppermint. The understory consisted of acacias such as silver wattle and blackwood. And underneath them were plants such as musk, hazel, dogwood, blanket leaf, mint bush, clematis, wiregrass, sword grass and many types of fern.

One of the settler's biggest problem was transport. The hilly terrain and high rainfall made the primitive tracks often impassable. In winter time the tracks were simply a trench of mud with bush on either side. The only reliable means of transport was a packhorse or a person's own back. The selector was therefore unable to transport building material and had to what was available on their block. They mainly used the trees they cut down. Transport also limited the tools and household items available to the settlers.

When a small area was cleared shelter was the most important priority. Often a canvas was used and the family may have been in this tent for some time before a more permanent dwelling was constructed. In order to keep the land they had selected a settler had to carry out improvements to the satisfaction of government officials and pay an annual rent. Some of the improvements recorded on land files were constructing fences, clearing land and cultivating land. The fencing was recorded in lengths by the chain. The cleared and cultivated land by the acre. The type of fencing was also recorded. If the settler used chock and log fencing or post and rail fencing, it was recorded. After 14 years of hard work and perseverance the selector was given title to the land they chose and worked on. Usually it was the children of the selector who finally achieved the object of creating the first class farmland we see today.

If you wish to research a selection's history, you can go to the Public Records Office in North Melbourne and look up the land file. These files contain improvement reports, maps, correspondence and other documents and are fascinating to read. You need to know the crown allotment number and parish name for the property. This could be on a rate notice. You can also look up the number of maps available at our Society or the PROV.

