

Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

Preserving Our Heritage

Newsletter

Volume 15 Number 3 September 2018

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Society rooms number: 56622492

The Society rooms are open Thursdays and Fridays between 12 & 4pm

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Latest News

The Annual Meeting of the Leongatha Historical Society will be on Wednesday September 12th at 8 pm. Lyn Skillern will speak about her recent visit to the war graves in France. While there she found the graves or names on memorials of 97 men from the district who lost their lives. Please come along to enjoy this event

The War Medal of Leslie Walker. Private Leslie Walker of Leongatha was killed at Fromelles on July 19th 1916. Recently one of his war medals turned up in a garden in Tatura. Harry Whyte, who found the medal, wanted to give it back to the family or if that did not happen give it to the Leongatha RSL. Amazingly two great great nephews have been found



The Shingler Lecture/Dinner.

This year the event will be held on Saturday September 15 at 6.30 pm.
The guest speaker will be Dorothy Giles who will tell us about the history of the Gannon family's connection to newspapers in South Gippsland. Lyn Skillern will also be speaking about the history of the *Great Southern Star*.

Leongatha and District Historical Society Inc.
invites you to the

Shingler Memorial Lecture and Dinner

Saturday 15th of September 2018

6.30pm for 7pm start

Tickets \$35.00

BYO Drinks

Dakers Centre

Smith Street, Leongatha

Speakers: Dorothy Giles & Lyn Skillern

History of the Great Southern Star Newspaper

© the Giles / Gannon Family

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

Phone 03 56622492

Or contact

Geoff Michael:- 03 56623548

Robert Sage:- 03 56625662

Pat Spinks:- 03 56686365



The Star
GREAT SOUTHERN



Bookings must be made by Monday September 10th.

. Leongatha's Hero of 1898 Bushfires set out by Alan McGuinness

Leongatha's constable Patrick John Gorman was awarded a Police Merit Badge for his bravery and pre-eminent valor in rescuing a woman and her five children. Gorman joined the police force in 1886 and after a short time in Melbourne metropolitan stations he was transferred as a mounted constable to Gippsland. He spent five years in Warragul before being sent to be in charge of the Leongatha police station, where he spent 5 years, and then a promotion to Morwell for the next 10 years. Further promotions saw him rise to the rank of Inspector before his retirement in 1924.

The Age newspaper of Monday, 31st January 1898 described the events of the day.

“Leongatha, Saturday.

Today was the worst on record here. The township was surrounded by flame, and people were in a state of panic. Business was temporarily suspended, and shop employees, in common with others, enlisted in the large army of fire fighters. Over 100 men were stationed at different points of defence, under direction of Constable Gorman. It was largely due to his tactical skill and the willingness of the men to obey his directions that Leongatha escaped destruction.

The great body of the fire lay between the Labor Colony and the railway station.

This morning broke with an easterly wind blowing the flames right on to that portion of the town where are situated Irwin's store, Campbell's blacksmith shop and Hanley's private residence. The heat in this quarter was terrific, and as the flames leapt from tree to tree in mighty sheets that made it appear as though the very atmosphere was alight, it seemed as though the places named were doomed. What little water there was available was poured over the sides of the buildings, and the fighters beat at the flames with wet sacks. Still the fiery element swept onward. The rescuers were forced to retreat before the mad and hissing blaze, until a providential change in the wind sent the fire in an opposite direction, and left the threatened buildings intact.

But the houses to the east of the town were now menaced, and Constable Gorman decided that in order to save a fine row of private residences in Jeffery street it was advisable to light the scrub in advance of the approaching fire. This was done, and although it undoubtedly acted as a check when the main fire came to the attack, the heat was so intense that it blistered the paint on the houses, and it was impossible to pass along the street in front of them.

Constable Gorman had a sensational experience in this locality. Penetrating to the extreme end of the street to Mr. Jeffery's residence, he was informed that of the serious position of Mr. Statham's house. With commendable promptness he proceeded to investigate, and had

FIRES AGAIN RAGING IN GIPPSLAND.

A TERRIBLE DAY AT LEONGATHA.

HEROIC CONDUCT OF A CONSTABLE.

EXPERIENCE OF A DRUNKEN MAN.

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Constable Gorman had a sensational experience in this locality. Penetrating to the extreme end of the street to Mr. Jeffery's residence, he was informed of the serious position of Mr. Statham's house. With commendable promptness he proceeded to investigate, and had only traversed a bush track in that direction for a short distance when he was threatened by the flames on every hand. Pushing through a fiery guntlet he nevertheless reached the house, and found Mrs. Statham there with five little children in an almost frenzied state. The flames completely surrounded her house, and escape seemed impossible; but the constable was not to be beaten. Taking one child at a time before him on horseback he galloped through the mass of fire to and fro until he had conveyed his charges severally to a place of safety, which in this instance happened to be the local butter factory. By the time Gorman entered upon his last trip back the flames through which he had to pass had developed to an appalling degree. When half way through the blazing track he was overcome by heat and ex-

haustion, and fell half fainting on his staggering horse's neck. A burning tree fell at the same moment, and snapped his bridle rein. The horse, acting under the stimulus of fright, with wonderful sagacity sprang forward, and carried his dazed master and his other burden safely into the open air. Gorman was much exhausted at the time, but after an hour's rest again resumed duty.

A pitiable accident also happened to a man who was lying drunk in Jeffery street. The grass fire caught his hair. His pitiful howls attracted attention, and wet bags were promptly utilised in quenching the fire. He was terribly burnt, and must have perished had he been left another minute.

Furniture was wildly deposited in all kinds of unlikely places, and women and children in a half hysterical condition were crying wildly. Many townsmen are to be seen bearing marks of the day's battle, and not a few are handsood and half blind. The wonder is that no buildings were destroyed, although severe loss in other directions has been sustained.

A thunderstorm broke over the town later in the day, and subdued the fire to some extent, but a mighty downpour is necessary to quench the fires altogether. Mr. Jarratt lost his grass and fencing, but his house was saved, although it ignited six times. Messrs. John Scott, Eccles and Wilson have all lost fencing and grass.

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A painting of the 1898 bushfires in the Leongatha area. It is on display in the Mechanics' Institute Leongatha

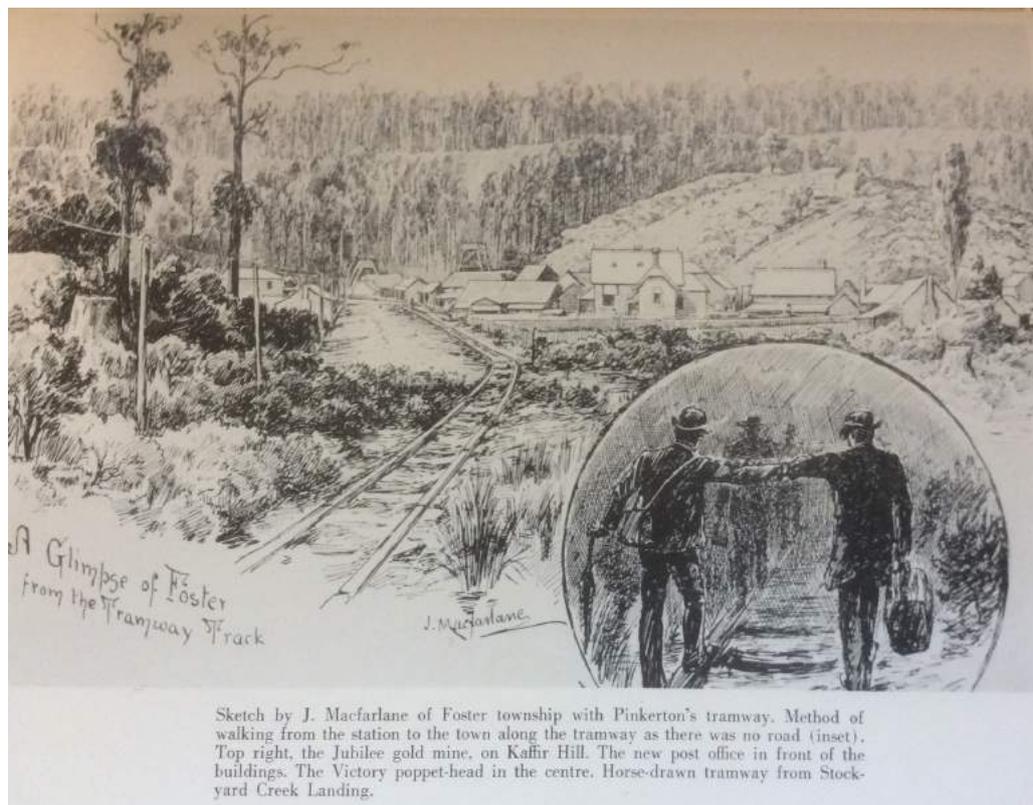
This article is a transcription of an article written in the 1890s and thus it uses the writing style of the time

From The Illustrated Australian News (Melbourne) 1 Jan 1893
The final instalment of extracts from the story of a railway journey from Melbourne to Port Albert. This is Meeniyan to Port Albert

Note the while some changes have been made, the writing style is that of the 1890s

Riding on the side of the locomotive was exciting. I mi sitting just in front of tho driver's shelter, with nothing much to hold on by, As the train swung round a corner with a jerk I felt as if I were going to be precipitated down on the ferns below rushing across a bridge over a river I instinctively leant back, only to find that I was singeing my coat on a rod hot pipe. We rattled along past the scene, of the smash, which was' marked by two upturned wagons and broken wheels,

There is a tramway track from Fish Creek to Waratah Bay run by a Mr Lowrie. Waratah Bay is a fair settlement on the Southern Ocean coast, possessing a splendid beach six miles long and steamer communication with Melbourne. By-and-bye, in the gathering dusk, we shot out from a cutting and there, beyond a stretch of gently sloping land, lay Corner Inlet, with the dark ranges behind Wilson's Promontory in the far distance and on the other side of the line was, our destination for the night, the township of Foster, nestling among the hills. We arrived at Foster and there we were standing on the station, and there was Foster about a mile away, but how were we to get to it, as there is no road between the two. It seemed as if the Great Southern line is a very high-minded, self-willed sort of line, pursuing its own independent course utterly regardless of the wants of the people round about. The Stockyard Creek tramway from Foster to its mouth crosses the railway, so we followed along the sleepers till we struck it, and then entered upon a mode of locomotion that was sufficient to qualify us for an engagement in a travelling pursuit. We all paired off, and crossing arms for a mutual support, walked or three-quarters of a mile. In the darkness it was difficult to keep on the rails, and as the line was broken in some places, uneven in many, with mud and water all around it was surprising how well we managed.



From Keith Bowden 'The Great Southern Railway'

In the month of April 1870, Alfred Sparkes and five others were splitting wood at the mouth of Stockyard Creek where it enters Corner Inlet, two miles and a half from Foster. At that time rumours of gold having been found reached them. They started off with their packs on their backs, but found that they had to make their way through almost impenetrable scrub over low, swampy ground. When they had struck the creek where the township of Foster now stands they set to work, and in a very short time were satisfied that they had discovered a very rich goldfield. They immediately applied for a prospecting claim, and no sooner had they done so than the Stockyard Greek rush set in, and about eight months afterwards there, were 700 or 800 men working steadily on the ground. Gold was found freely and in exceptionally rich yields, some of the men making as much as £300 in one week for a single share.

Everything had to be carried up to the gold field, and in a comparatively short space of time a track was cut, sleepers laid, wooden rails set on them, a horse and trolley brought from Port Albert and the tramway was ready for use. After three or four years gold began to get scarcer and scarcer, the ground was practically worked out, and the population gradually drifted away till only a low number was left.

Now the railway has come into their vicinity, the gold mines are being worked again, shafts have been sunk with success, the country round about is opening up, and it seems as if the historic township of Foster had entered upon a new lease of life.



An engine on the Great Southern Railway 1893

At Stockyard Creek there was the new jetty with a crane and a spacious goods shed, but there was nothing moored to its side. All the Foster trade comes through here, goods are brought from Melbourne in schooners of about 40 tons but though the channel has about 10 feet of water at full tide it is narrow and tortuous and difficult to navigate. The people of Foster have agitated to get it dredged, straightened and widened, and Mr Davidson, the energetic Inspector-General of Public Works, has been 'down recently inspecting it, but- the result is 'not yet known. ' The tide was out, indeed it was nearly dead low water as I crossed the creek by the only bridge, a goodly tree' with a rough handrail of young saplings nailed to its side, and made for where two fishermen were mending- their nets. After much persuasion I succeeded in inducing James West, fisherman, and sometime first officer on the steamer Tarra, running between Port Albert and Stockyard Creek, to launch his boat and row me

down to the inlet. 'Once round the first turn .we might have been anywhere. The high, mud banks shut' off everything but the sky, and the outlook was dismal enough. The boatman had to shorten his oars, and even then he was rowing more on mud than in water, but bye and bye the banks opened out, and we passed Poor Fellow Me Creek. This name had its origin with a black fellow who was helping to drive some cattle across, when he fell in head over heels, and coming up all dripping called out to his boss, oh! poor fellow me.' Another turn, and we were in sight of the wide waters of Corner Inlet. . Hundreds of black swans were feeding on the banks in front' of .the long mangrove swamps, the breeding place of the vicious little sand-fly. What a perfect expanse of water for boating and yachting, and what splendid shooting there must be along these shores and little creeks and inlets. I fear that a watering place at this point, for there is no sandy beach for children to romp and play and build their castles— nothing. but low mud banks and mangrove swamps. .

The following day I left Foster on a buggy pulled by two stout horses. The driver chose the low road in order to keep in the vicinity of the railway line and we found it a very low road indeed, for mud, treacherous holes and jagged stumps, it more than equalled the Coal Creek track at Korumburra. We could only go along at walking pace, and the buggy bumped and rocked and swayed like a ship load in a gale of wind, and, as if to complete the discomfort that virulent little pest, the sand-fly followed us in swarms. The first place of interest was the Franklin River, a fine stream then after the heavy rains. Higher up it passes through some, exquisite gullies full of tree ferns with moss grown stems and so thickly interlaced above with dark foliage that the bright sun can scarcely reach the little flowers that did grow by the water's edge, a cool, shady retreat on the hottest summer's day. All through a dense messmate forest we dragged our tedious way, through mud and swamp, till we crossed the line near Franklin station. There the railway, as indeed it is all along this section, is perfectly straight and level. A few miles more and we drove into the township of Toora, and stopped at the Royal Standard Hotel, opposite the railway station. There is plenty of good shooting and fishing to be had there, ducks and swan on the coast and wallaby inland. From Toora the road is hard and dry, and we rattle along at a swinging trot at the foot of the long line of wooded ranges that extend almost unbroken from here to Alberton. We stopped at Welshpool for dinner, getting there at 1 o'clock. The hotel is the only house and it stands within a stone's throw of the railway station. Like many other houses along the route, it was built when the line was being made and for a time did a roaring trade among the navvies. When the work was finished and the men were all away, the proprietor was left to stare at the ranges and wonder where on earth his trade was to come from. Driving along the road, with the steep hills on our left and a thick forest of messmate on our right, I was surprised when we came suddenly on a clearing in the midst of which was a large saw mill in full swing. After the silence of the bush road it was refreshing to look upon this busy scene and listen to the shrill singing of the circular saws as they tore through the hard logs as if they were matchwood. It is a new mill, but they have had the time to lay a steel tramway to Welshpool jetty down which a fussy little locomotive drags the sawn timber to be used as piles for the Melbourne Harbour Trust. Mr Mason said there was an unlimited supply of yellow stringy bark and blue gum in the forest up on the ranges. The tramway runs up there for four miles to where the work of felling goes on and altogether about 40 men are employed. Although the mill is only 30 chains from the railway, and there are a good many settlers in the vicinity, the department has hitherto refused to grant either station or siding. Yet a few miles further on at Hedley, there is a station with a great big reserve and not a living soul within coo-ee of it. After traversing the monotonous nine-mile plain we crossed the Albert River and drove through Alberton. This little township has sprung up close to the railway and distant from Port Albert about four miles. In the evening we pulled up in front of the Ship Inn, Port Albert, after a rough and wearisome journey of 40 miles.

