



# Leongatha & District HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mechanics' Institute, McCartin St., Leongatha

## Preserving Our Heritage

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In these trying times I thought it appropriate to produce our newsletter more often in order to stay in social contact. You are receiving this June newsletter as the third of the monthly newsletters for 2020. Members who have a registered email address with the Society will receive the newsletters. Other members are able to email the Society via the email address above or ring the following number 0400249048.

### Latest News

#### VALE

**We were very sad to hear of the passing of some noted locals in recent times.**

#### **Thomas Lewis (Tom) Parsons**

Tom passed away at Prom Aged Care, Foster on 18 May 2020. Tom was born on 5 September 1922. He was a pilot in WW11 and we were very fortunate to have him speak to our Society about his time in action over Germany. Tom also donated some items of memorabilia to our collection.

#### **Robert Hughes (Bob) (Spider)**

Hughes passed away on 29 May 2020. Bob was a local resident and identity in Leongatha. Hughes Brothers furniture store ran in McCartin St for many years and Bob was involved with many organisations.

#### **George Walter Hines**

George passed away on 28 May 2020. George was a much-loved pharmacist and community member. He was a true Leongatha boy. He attended school at Leongatha State School and High school, ran his pharmacy in Bair St and raised his family in the town.



**Hines Pharmacy Bair St.**

### **Allan Love**

Noted Leongatha cyclist Alan Love passed away recently. He took up cycling to strengthen his legs after suffering polio as a small child. In 1962 he won the Victorian Junior Schoolboys Championship and in 1964 he became Victoria's fastest schoolboy cyclist by winning the Victorian Schoolboy title.



### **Veteran's Affairs Grant**

We were recently advised by DVA that we were successful in gaining a \$4000 grant to prepare material on local service personnel who lost their lives as a result of World War 11. The grant will be used to have a set of framed photographs made and add the stories of each service person placed on our website. The photograph set will be similar to the one we had made for our WW1 fallen. The Society's website entry will also be similar to our WW1 presentation.

**Opening the rooms** - Some members have decided to go into the rooms for a few hours on Thursdays. We need to put away the sport exhibition and set up a new display. A suggestion was made by Margaret Stokes that we have a return afternoon tea on a Thursday and discuss future activities. Members will be advised regarding the date of this afternoon tea.

**Next display** - There will be a range of subjects in our next exhibition. This will include a time line of the early history of the district in the hallway and a display on emergency services in the front room. We will be seeking extra material on our local police, fire brigades, the SES, the ambulance service, the hospital emergency service.

## The Magic Lantern

### Leongatha and District, 1914 to 1918 by John Hyett

The heyday of the magic lantern was during the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the development of better, brighter lighting systems and before the advent of the new-fangled moving picture or films. However, the lantern as a means of illustrating lectures or as entertainment continued at least into the 1980s, my father using a lantern to illustrate his classes at the Council of Adult Education.



The earliest reference I have seen to a lantern show at Leongatha was for a lecture on the Soudan War, presented at the original Mechanics Institute in 1893 by “The Very Magic Lantern Company”. I believe the lecture was probably given by Frederic Villiers, an artist and war correspondent for “The Graphic”, an illustrated newspaper in England. Many of his illustrations are included in slides set telling the story of that conflict.

A search of *The Great Southern Star* for the years 1914 to 1918 inclusive (the period over which the newspaper has been digitised on Trove), show that about forty-four lantern shows, lectures or illustrated talks were presented in the Leongatha district during that period. This period includes the seven months prior to the declaration of war and the almost two months following the Armistice. This equates to about one show every 7 weeks during this five-year period.

While some of these lantern events were single shows or lectures, others were repeated at various venues around the district some as many as seven times. Some lecturers were local, others came from Melbourne and some from as far afield as the Pacific Islands, China, Africa and England.

The topics were varied, ranging from religious sermons, the demon drink, travel scenes, university extension lectures, the war, recruitment campaigns, local sports, mission work both in Australia and overseas, agricultural lectures, scenery and scouting. Of these, only one set can be reasonably identified today. The song set entitled ‘The Holy City’ shown to illustrate the song sung by Miss Ettie Wilmott (the lady baritone), was, probably, one of five different versions known to exist at the time. None of the other sets can be identified and probably do

not exist today, gone the way of many historic slides and dumped or destroyed in the name of progress as the new media developed.

The format of a magic lantern lecture would vary according to the presenter, the topic and the expected audience. It can probably be assumed that the presentations by the local and visiting clergymen, being aimed at family groups, would have contained some children's slides and some amusing and entertaining slides as well as the main topic of the evening. Other presenters, such as those from the Department of Agriculture demonstrating the "Principles of Manuring" and "Poultry Farming", would probably not deviate from the subject matter.

In an article of this length it is impossible to describe all of the forty-four lantern shows so I shall make some brief comments on some of the more interesting shows and presenters.

Sister Greer, Superintending Nurse 1913-1921 of the Bush Nursing Association, gave four lectures in the district at, Grassy Spur, Dumbalk, Dollar and Meeniyan, on Bush Nursing Works and Incidents, illustrative of the work in the 21 centres and showed organising work in many other centres then being formed. She illustrated the lectures with a series of slides from her own photographs. One slide appeared to catch everyone's attention, even getting a mention in the British Journal of Nursing, that of four children boating on the Snowy River using a half pumpkin shell as their boat.

Miss Ada Nisbet, a missionary working in China, was raising funds for the "Birds Nest" orphanage for unwanted girl children. Miss Nisbet had been working in China for many years and was on leave in Australia in 1895 when the Flower Mountain mission she was stationed at was attacked by a Chinese movement, The Vegetarians, and most of the missionaries killed.

"A Patriotic Evening" showing photographs of all the soldiers from the district who had enlisted at that time as well as photographs sent home by the soldiers from Egypt and Gallipoli was presented. The lantern operator was Mr Charley Edney. This evening raised £15-9-9 for the Woorayl War Fund. The presentation was repeated several months later at Berry's Creek by the Rev Harvey with Charles Aberdeen manipulating the lantern. Mr Aberdeen showed some very good slides of his own making after the patriotic slides. The waterfall at Mt Eccles was particularly good.



Not all lectures were successful, in September 1914 a lecture on the Principles of Manuring and Values of Artificial Manures was abandoned when the venue was unable to be blacked out and only two farmers attended. Another lecture in June 1918 on the Dairying Industry ran into problems when the lecturer's lantern went missing on the railway on the trip from Melbourne.

The Lady Baritone's presentation of The Holy City was perhaps a taste of things to come for lantern presentations. Ettie Wilmott was part of Wilmott Pictures and the presentation was done between movies, a forerunner of things to come for the once thriving industry being reduced to "coming attractions" and advertisements for local cafes and shops

## **The Cinema in Leongatha** by Lyn Skillern

Since moving pictures came on the scene, the residents of Leongatha and district have been able to enjoy these films in various venues.

### **The Victory Hall**

The Victory Hall was constructed in Bair Street on part of the site of Perry/Gleeson Motors immediately after The Great War. Though a private hall, it was used as a public hall for dances and other entertainments. Early movie films were shown in the hall which ultimately lead to the destruction of the building. These films were made of nitrate and were very flammable. One night the film caught fire and the hall went up in smoke. It was uninsured.

### **The Memorial Hall**

This hall was constructed between 1924 and 1926. Facilities for showing movies were built into the hall with the projection area still being visible upstairs. Regular movies were shown here from the opening until the early 1970s. Grant Alan was the first projectionist and the maker of the film on the opening of the hall in May 1926.



The Memorial hall during WW11 with cinema signs in front.

Films were shown continuously from 1926 and were very popular. From 1952 to 1968 a kiosk was run by Mr and Mrs T McGaw. During that time films were shown on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday nights with the odd matinee on a Saturday afternoon.

Terry Ahern gave up the lease on the hall in 1964. Film rights for the hall from 1964-1969 were taken up by Mr Fullarton but with declining attendances The Woorayl Shire found it difficult to find a suitable tender. The Hughes family of Korumburra, who ran the cinema there, managed to keep the hall cinema going for a little longer. The setting up of the Drive-in theatre made showing films in the Memorial Hall and Korumburra unprofitable and the Hughes family closed both venues. During the 80s and early 90s some special showings were held in the hall of some famous Australian films including *Dad and Dave* and *The Hayseeds*.

### **The Drive in**

In mid-October 1973 over 300 people attended the opening of the Drive in Theatre which was located off the highway (Koonwarra Rd) on the site of former slaughter yards. This continued into the 1980s.



### **Stadium Cinema Complex**

In 2001 plans were made to convert the basketball stadium into a cinema. The new indoor pool complex at the Recreation Reserve was to have a double basketball stadium. This left the former stadium available for development into a community facility. The complex has run successfully ever since.



### **Memories of a rural childhood - Ian Lester**

#### **Farm buildings**

The house is basically the same today as it was years ago but with the addition of a sunroom and laundry wing. The toilet was outside. It was the dry type with a can which was often full of maggots. We boys often peed off the end of the verandah which eventually killed off the lawn. There was no refrigerator. Anything requiring a cool place was kept in the kitchen or in a large glazed pipe in the ground near the walnut tree. There was also a coolgardie safe hanging outside the laundry. At some stage we got an ice chest which was a wooden insulated cupboard with an ice compartment at the top and a storage area underneath. A drip tray collected the water as the ice melted. The ice was delivered by the cream truck from the butter factory along with the bread and milk. The telephone was a large wall-mounted unit which was connected to the manual exchange in Leongatha. The number was shared by our family, my Uncle Frank, Uncle Don and others. Each number had a letter suffix with morse

code to identify it. Our number was 171 S with 3 short rings. The party line was great for gossips who could eavesdrop on other people's conversations.

### **Nana Lester's house**

When my parents married, my paternal grandparents moved to another house previously owned by members of the McIndoe family. When Uncle Frank married, Nana moved to Leongatha to a house in Koonwarra Rd opposite what was Hallyburton's petrol station. Her next move was back onto the farm into a house that was purchased and moved to the site. It came from Leongatha North and was built from materials originally from the Bank of Australasia in Leongatha. It also had the first septic toilet on the farm, a development that was followed at home soon after. Nana lived in the house with her sister Auntie Vic, a retired nurse and they played a big role in our lives.

### **Huts**

There were two huts on the farm during my childhood. One was on the Mardan Rd about halfway between our drive and Gordon Watson's, and the other near the shearing (calving) shed beside the concrete tank. They were a single room construction made of corrugated iron and lined. There was room for a bed, a table and other furniture, and had a fireplace. They were provided to accommodate the men who worked on the farm in the days before increasing mechanisation made their jobs redundant.

I don't recall the hut at the road being used, but Helen tells me that Bob DeMaria lived in it and the Mardan Girl Guides used it for a short period after he left. I remember playing there until a swarm of bees adopted it.

### **Cow shed**

The cow shed was built in the early 1930s and is basically unchanged. The family had dairy farmed from 1934 til the early 1940s when manpower became short during the war. The layout of the shed included four sets of bales. Each bale had a feed box and each cow was fed a container of chaff to eat during the milking. The cows were machine milked and then stripped by hand. The chaff cutter, storage for sheaves of hay and cut chaff were all located in the shed. A large wooden trolley was used to transport the chaff to the bales via a series of corridors. The present milk vat room contained an overhead milk storage vat, the cream separator, the motor and vacuum pump and a large wooden wash trough. In the corner was a brick fireplace containing a large wood-fired copper to heat the hot water required for washing the milking equipment. The cream was sent to the butter factory in Leongatha and the skim milk fed to the pigs that were housed in the nearby shed.

After dairying ceased, 3 or 4 house cows were milked by hand to provide milk for domestic use. The excess milk was put through a small hand separator and the cream sent to the butter factory. The bulk of the skim milk was tipped out. As we children got old enough, the house cows became one of our jobs.

### **A Year Like No Other**

If you are writing up some of your earlier recollections of life in the district, please continue and submit them electronically via the Society's email address or post them under the Society's door. Remember photos are also most welcome.

