

Forrest history newsletter



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OUR SOCIETY TAKES OFF

The publication of our first newsletter in November generated some warm and encouraging comments from quite a few people including nearby Historical Societies.

We received over 20 new applications for membership doubling our numbers to over 40. Welcome to the following recent new members:

Maureen Ward, John Weickhardt, Audrey and Ken Miller, Edith Strickland, Bev Mattingly, Apollo Bay Historical Centre, Jim Spiers, Nora Potter, Allan Potter, Josephine (Josie) Llewellyn (Frizon), Peter Shanahan, Alf (Darkie) and Mavis Trew, Pam and Trevor Jennings, Wendy Fletcher, Lions Club Forrest, Yvonne Harrington-Hunt, Phil Armistead (Christmas gift from daughter Nerrida), Dalley family, Barry Gourley, Kevin Gourley, Ron and Jenny Cunningham and Lyle Trew.

In addition we greatly appreciate the following generous donations:

Lions Club Forrest \$50
Bev & Graham Mattingly \$50

Last Chance

We have been distributing our newsletter free to a wide number of locals whom we thought might be interested in the history of Forrest and district. But eventually the newsletter will only go to those who have subscribed to our Society. So if you do not want to miss out on receiving future copies of the newsletter and participating in the Society's activities please let us have your subscription as soon as possible - \$25 per annum and \$15 concession for 60's and over.

Forrest Festival a Success

Saturday February the 3rd was an historic day for Forrest with the inaugural **Otway Odyssey** and the accompanying **Forrest Festival**.

Offering prize money of around \$45,000 the 100km and 50km races attracted 1000 mountain bike riders from near and far. The first leg of 50km ran from Apollo Bay to Forrest mostly on off-road tracks and the second and third sections were around Yaughar and Newcomb Spur track.

Forrest community fundraising included the Community Group, the Skate Park, Anglican Women's Guild, Lions, Football and Netball, and the new Forrest Horse Riding Club and the Forrest Hall Committee stalls.



Local contestant Geoff Fox after the gruelling 50km from Apollo Bay.

The Skate Park Fundraiser stall

Next Society Function Sun. 25th March

The next opportunity for members and visitors to get together will be on **Sunday 25th March**.

We will start at the **Forrest Market** where, for the first time, our Historical Society will have a stand. Members will be able to see our progress in archiving our collection and help with checking the information. We will be selling history booklets and copies of photos from our collection. The market takes place from 9am

until 2pm.

We are expecting that the new **Forrest History Walk**, for which we have been largely responsible, will be finished. So between 12.00pm and 12.30pm we will have some kind of launch ceremony and start distributing leaflets to guide visitors through the walk.

From 12.30pm we will have lunch together at the usual BBQ facilities provided at the Market.

At 2.30pm we have been invited to visit the **Apollo Bay and District Historical Society** where their President Ted Stuckey will tell us about their activities and show us around their wonderful **Apollo Bay Museum**. They have joined our society and have already given us considerable help with photos and information for the Forrest History Walk. We can go in convoy leaving at 2.00pm and share rides. The visit will be finished around 4.30 to 5pm.

May Jennings Milk Bar

When we finished our first list of proposed sites for the History Walk someone said 'What about May Jennings Shop in the main street opposite the school?'. We had very little information about it and thought it would be impossible to find a photo as nothing seemed to be available.

However we contacted Pam and

Trevor Jennings who were able to provide the attached photograph



and all the information we needed for our plaque.

May was Pam's mother in law, and at the same time she kindly sent along a superb piece of work by Clarey Hutchison, an unpublished work called 'Early Forrest Reminiscences'. It runs to about eight closely typed pages which she is hoping to publish sometime in the future and has given us the information to use. Below is an extract:

Early Forrest Reminiscences by Clarence Hutchison (son of William & Ethel (Bartlett) Hutchison)

'I have always liked writing and I know these stories will be appreciated by my family. They cover the time from early childhood to some twenty years later, and are mostly experiences of a personal nature.'

My first memories are of the companionship that existed between my father (William Hal Hutchison) and his work mates, in the sawmilling town of Forrest in the Otway Ranges. These men worked 48 hours a week from 7.30am to 5pm, with a lunch break and perhaps a brief smoko. Whistle to whistle, six days a week. Not only was the work hard and monotonous, but they took great pride in reaching a certain tally for the day in how many super-feet of timber they had cut.

The two sawmilling owners were W Henry & Son and JR Grant and Sanderson. These owners also owned the General Stores. Henry's being situated at their mill some 6 to 8 miles from Forrest and Messrs Sanderson had their store in Forrest. Their employees were expected to deal at their respective stores and for some time all their pays were less the account at the store. Almost bordering on slavery, now you look back on it and compare to present day conditions. These owners though, to their credit, were looked upon with great respect and loyalty and from per-

sonal contact with them through my early years, they were really lovely people. This is in no way a criticism of them, just an instance of how things were in those days.

A lot of family's lived at Henry's Mill; houses were built for them and additions to the rooms as their families grew. If anyone wanted to live in Forrest, (and a few of them did,) they had a **combined effort of saving as many 'off cuts' as they were called, and converted into weatherboards etc., suitable to build houses.** I can remember about 6 to 8 men who built us an extra two rooms, fully lined, brick chimney and built-in wood stove, all in a few weekends, which after all, only consisted of **one day per week. They wouldn't reach home until late Saturday night after their week's work and** although the family lived in Forrest, the men camped at the mill in huts during the week, and had to return to the mill with as much food as they could carry on the Sunday evening. They nearly all dressed alike with the heavy flannel shirts, a similar coat known as a **'Tasmanian Bluey', dungaree trousers.** Bowyangs were of any material wrapped around the legs of the trousers, just below the knees to save them dragging in the mud, and the usual hob-nailed boots. They must have weighed a ton, some of them had short strap as Bowyangs fitted with a buckle, as it was easier to fasten and unfasten.

The local publican, Mr Paddy Hur-

ley, was the loader at Forrest. His duties were to transfer the timber from the mill bogeys to the railway trucks in different capacities, from 10 ton and 22 ton lots. The high sided railway trucks were known as **'Tommy Bents'** whom I think was a railway official of some standing in the early days. **I'm not sure but I think there is a statue of Tommy Bent along the Pt. Nepean Highway.**

Locomotives were an early addition to haul the timber to the railhead. One of the earliest drivers employed in this was our uncle, Jack Bartlett, fondly known as Noppa Bartlett who lived in Forrest and later in Geelong. Another well known driver was Alex McClause. Soon after the advent of the locos, Paddy Hurley retired and Dad became the loader, tally clerk, mail man, messenger, you name it, he did it. One of my early **recollections of dad's early day in** this job was the morning task of taking his smoko to him, usually accompanied by my brother, Bob, or some other family member, and **without fail, eating all dads' tomato sandwiches** which mum had so carefully cut for him. I can still taste those peppery tomato sandwiches to this day. I think dad preferred his billy of beer though as there was always someone **there to 'run the rabbit', as it was called.** Everyone knew the meaning and a billy of beer was better than a billy of tea at that time of day and it only cost 6d. The one who went for the beer was the one to **'run the rabbit'.**

Forrest, when it was a timber and dairy farming town, was a tightly-knit community. When the Second World War broke out, this closeness became even more pronounced. Several locals joined the Forces, and when Australia itself became a target for a possible Japanese invasion, feelings of both patriotism and fear were strong in the community.

There were weekly meetings, which everyone attended. A Volunteer Defence Corps was set up, under the leadership of Claude Neale, an Anzac from WW1. There was also a roster drawn up for aeroplane surveillance. Everyone was available for this roster. The women took the day shifts, and the men did the nights.

The surveillance venue was in what had been a small lolly shop, built for their daughter by the O'Neills on what is now known as Joe Szigyarto's garage block. The O'Neills lived next door on the corner, but the house has long since gone. Their daughter Florrie was widowed when her husband George Newcombe was killed in the bush. Her lolly shop venture did not continue for long, and the small room was made available for the purpose of observing and reporting any planes which flew overhead.

The idea was that any sighting was to be communicated to a Melbourne number, and a pair of field glasses, as well as a phone, were provided for this purpose. As there was an airfield at Cressy, there was steady air traffic during the day, and every plane was reported. On each occasion, the response from the authorities in Melbourne was, "Yes, we know about this

WAR TIME MEMORIES OF FORREST



It was during a video interview with Bruce and Gill Neale by Rebecca Brown at the Forrest Primary School in 2005 that Bruce mentioned the Forrest base for spotting enemy aircraft during WW2. Gill has now kindly provided more information.

one."

Bruce Neale was a lad of mid- to late-teen years at this time. As well as being heavily involved in the activities of the Volunteer Defence Corps, he was regularly rostered on for plane spotting duties at night. He and whoever was his surveillance partner spent relaxed nights sitting by the open fire, and, if he was lucky enough to be partnered with the butcher's son, eating steak provided by the butcher for their supper, which they cooked over the flames.

There was no air traffic, in Bruce's experience, during the nights. Then, one morning at about five a.m., just on the cusp of first light, he and his mate heard a plane. They went out to observe. The field glasses were of no

use, as the light was dim and the plane exceedingly high. It headed off towards Melbourne, and the lads rang it through. Immediately there was reaction. The phone went mad. The boys were asked for every possible detail in a flurry of calls. What did it look like? Where was it heading? It was obvious this plane was not one which the authorities knew about. Bruce believes the air force sent up planes from Melbourne to track it, but because of security reasons, there was never any follow-up which was provided for the locals.

At this time, there were genuine fears that the Japanese invasion was about to take place. Portland was the expected point of entry. (The local high school principal at Portland at that time, Mr. J. Tyler, was told in great confidence that the wide stretches of Portland Harbour would be where any invasion would happen.). With this as a genuine threat, and given the great concern shown by the Defence people in Melbourne, it seems extremely likely that the plane which flew over was a seaplane from a Japanese submarine somewhere off the coast.

Things occurred which the general population never heard about. In the interests of keeping up public morale, the extent of any Japanese threat was probably never made widely known. This incident remains in the memory of those involved, but how significant it proved to be has not been confirmed.

Gill Neale, February 2006

Magic Lantern Slide Collection

Jim Spiers has put us in touch with a John Hyett who has a remarkable collection of Magic Lantern slides of the Otways from around the 1890's. We are hoping to be able to arrange for him to come and do a show for our members and others at Forrest in the near future.

As we saw from our Forrest History day, walking around town with older residents, we have a lot of good information from the 1940's onwards. However, there is a big gap in our knowledge of the



An example of John Hyett's wonderful images. Coach at Yaughter, crossing the Barwon River in 1894.

history of Forrest and surrounding district from the 1890's when the area was first settled.

The slideshow show will not only be an opportunity to get a better feel for that period but it might also stimulate our efforts to find ways of locating similar material and extending our collection.

For those interested in the early history of cinema it will be an opportunity to see an example of the earliest film projection which people attended even before the movies.

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Congratulations

Congratulations to our members Lorna and Alf Wilhelms who will be celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary of the 24th March. Lorna was a 'Blundy' and we are planning that Lorna and Alf will lead members on an exploration of former historic sites at Yaugher at a forthcoming Society event. Does anyone have photos of Yaugher in the old days?



New DVD on Lake Elizabeth

Member **Jim Spiers** continues to be very productive with new video and text publications. He has just launched his latest DVD called **Lake Elizabeth**. It includes interviews with John Holt on how the Lake was created in 1952 and Jenny Cunnington (Curtis) who recalls the terrifying night 13 months later when the rock wall collapsed. Other segments include the geological history of the Otways and the wildlife you are likely to see when visiting Lake Elizabeth.



Jim's DVD is available from the Forrest and Barwon Downs Stores and Blanes, Colac.

Norm Horton continues his prolific output. He has followed his popular **By the Barwon**, a History of Forrest and Barramunga with **The Ridge**, a brief Historical Guide to the West Otway Ridge, **Beechy Rail**, Historical and Engineering Guide to the old Beechey Line Rail Trail and **Homes in the Hills**, Historic glimpses of Barongarook, Gellibrand, Banool and Carlisle River.

We hope to have most of these publications on sale at our booth at the Forrest Market on the 25th March.

New database established

With **Julia Etheve's** assistance with Access software, we have now come up with a format for our database which enables us to enter pictures, documents, video and tape recordings into our computer archives with all the necessary descriptive information.

Entries will be put on display for members to add more information and correct any mistakes.

Help wanted for data entry

Do we know anybody who might be able to help the Society with data entry of our new archives? It involves transferring photo files into our data base and typing up descriptions and other information. A modest retainer of \$12 an hour would be available for this assistance, the work would be done on **Ken's computer at Kents Road** or on their own. Please contact Ken on 52 366 327.

Poll Results: 22 replies. Of those only 11 members can attend weekday events. Thursday has least difficulties.

A Fascinating Gift from Lyle Trew

Now living at Bayswater, **Lyle Trew** has joined the society and has kindly donated two valuable documents. The first is the official programme of the **Forrest Sports Club** meeting on Saturday 24th March 1945. Events include the **Yaugher Sprint** and the **Forrest Gift** over 130 yards with the first prize of 2 pounds, **the potato race on horse back, throwing a wicket, single married and old buffers races, flag race on horse back, footballers handicap and a wide range of chopping and sawing events.** Books makers fee ten shillings.

The names of the participants reads like a directory of popular identities at the time, including **K Black, W Muir, C Fox, N & J Armistead, W C Whitehead, J & M Harrington, Jim Mulgrew, W Newcombe, K V Strickland, J Seebeck, N Horton** and of course **Lyle Trew** himself.

The programme indicates that a **Grand Ball** will be held in the Forrest Public Hall in the evening. Good floor and good music, admission 2 shillings and of course that would have been the old original hall at the top of Station Street. We will have the programme available for inspection on our next meeting on the 25th March.

The second contribution is an out of print copy of **Otway Memories**, by J K Loney, which we hope to reprint if there is sufficient interest. It traces the history of the area from aboriginal times to first settlement. It contains some basic information along with a wonderful selection of stories which bring to life those early days. Forrest was *'named in honour of C L Forrest, State Parliamentary representative of Polwarth for almost 33 years, the district was first occupied by Mr J Corney who took up land on the eastern banks of the Barwon'*.

The real charm of Loney's booklet is a wonderful collection of yarns e.g.

'Sam Harrison decided a door was needed between the kitchen and the lounge so he set to work with a saw despite the pleas and entreaties of the family, working away with great gusto.

When he did pause for a breath and comment on how hard the sawing was, it was to learn he had also been cutting through the piano against the wall in the next room.'

'On one occasion the Anglican Bishop of Ballarat stayed at Milford House. The lad who cleaned the guests' shoes and boots was uncertain how to address the distinguished visitor and nervously inquired the correct title from Mrs Cawood. "When you knock on his door call out, 'It's the boy my Lord,' and everything will be alright," she advised.

Next morning, a nervous boy, holding a pair of polished boots knocked on the door. "Who's there," called the Bishop. "It's the Lord my boy," came the shrill reply.'