

Historical Happenings

Volume 2
Issue 5

June
2006

Casterton and District Historical Society Inc.

Current Happenings

Victorian Government Gazettes.

Work is progressing on moving the books from the Glenelg Shire Town Hall. Hopefully they will all be in place at the museum by the end of June.

Killara Bridge Sign and Opening – May 5th

The Society was approached by the Council to help with the history behind the Killara Bridge for their interpretative sign. We were very pleased to be involved with this project. Thank you to Jim Kent and Des Wombwell for their help towards this project and also Mark Kampuis, from the Shire, for liaising with the Society on the Style of the sign. The interpretative sign was unveiled at the opening of the new Killara Bridge on the 5th May, 2006 by Mr Peter Batchelor.

Casterton Railway Precinct Advisory Committee - to Council

The AGM was held in April and a new executive was appointed. They are: Michael McNamara - Chair, Darren Holmberg - Vice Chair, Jan Lier - Secretary, and Deputy Secretary – Dawn Mill. Representatives from the 6 usergroups will meet monthly and will continue working towards improving the Railway Complex. The committee is awaiting a new Conservation Management Plan for the Complex as the previous Plan has expired.

Scanner for Films and Slides.

A new scanner has been purchased so that work can continue on our Photographic Collection. The scanner was purchased through a community grant from the Glenelg Shire Council.

Guest Speakers

April and May meetings.

Ann Grant and her husband Ian Grant attended the April meeting and gave a talk on Portland History House Library holdings. This was a wonderful talk by Anne and she presented the Society with a booklet outlining what History House has available for research. The Society presented Anne with copies of two photographs of Portland which were in the museum, to add to their collection.

Ian Black and Helen Moore from Hamilton History Centre attended the May meeting and gave a talk on their holdings. This too was a wonderful talk about what their centre has available for research.

The **June** meeting will be held on Monday 19th June at 2 pm at the RSL, with guest speaker Mr. Ian Welsford from the Warrnambool Family History Group. This is the first of our day meetings over the winter period and we look forward to hearing him talk about what this group has available for research. All welcome.

Reminder

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General Meetings of the Casterton and District Historical Society will be held at 2.00 p.m. in June, July and August 2006.



Henty's Radio Corner

As you may know, Jim Kent has been heard on the ABC radio recently, speaking about the history of Casterton. For those who have not been able to listen to the transmissions, here is a précis of them.

Early days of Casterton, Part 3.
The contribution of the Hentys.

Thomas Henty played in what was the commencement of settlement by the white race of people in the valleys of the Wannon and Glenelg Rivers in the years from 1834 onwards.

Edward, John, and Francis Henty moved quickly, cutting a track through the scrub so as to give them passage with their livestock, goods and chattels to this district the good Major had labeled 'Australia Felix'.

Without doubt, the Henty Brothers were the very first to depasture livestock in the vicinity of what is now the township of Casterton.

Edward established himself on 57.300 acres which was to the east of Casterton he called this property 'Muntham' He also had an additional 17.500 acres adjoining 'Muntham' which he called 'Connell's run'

Francis pegged out 23.500 acres to the south of Casterton calling his property 'Merino Downs'. John set himself up on 15.700 acres on the Wannon River just above it's junction with the Glenelg. He called his property 'Sandford House'.

On these pastoral runs, the Henty boys were the absolute firsts in this district to breed and nurture cattle, horses and sheep plus a variety of other forms of livestock and crops.

Today, greatly reduced in acreage, these once massive properties continue to produce all manners of primary production with some of the land still farmed and owned by direct descendants of the original Henty Bros.

Surveying of Casterton.

In 1847, Pearson, who owned the large pastoral run on the Glenelg river, called 'Retreat', was informed by the Colonial Secretary of NSW that a Magistrates Court would be established in his property which is approximately 12 km north of Casterton, this occurred with James Blair holding court in Pearson's dining room in 1848.

By 1849, a stone court house and a Police Station were built on Pearson's 'Retreat' station and presumably around them a survey was done for a township. I have yet to see any positive evidence of this survey ever having been done.

In the mean-time, Alexander McKinlay had, in 1846, set himself in an Inn on the Glenelg river, south of Pearson's 'Retreat' homestead.

It is interesting to note that the site of the first Police Station and Court House in the Casterton district was located where four large pastoral holdings boundaries met, they were: Corney Bros. at 'Wando'; Pearson at 'Retreat'; John G Robertson at 'Wando Vale' and Edward Henty at 'Muntham'.

Now, a Mr. Wade was at this time surveying a town 64 km from Casterton. It is now the City of Hamilton. He had instructed another two surveyors called Clarke and Derbyshire to survey a township around the site of McKinlay's Inn. No doubt Mr. Wade had been instructed to do this on advice from Captain Foster Fyans who was the then Commissioner of Crown Lands. We do know that Captain Fyans was good cobbers with John G. Robertson of 'Wando Vale' and had a township eventuated at 'Retreat', the roads to and from it would have divided his property. Then again, another reason surfaces for Casterton being surveyed where it currently is and that was a letter to Robertson from McKinlay's widow, begging him to use his influence to have the township surveyed around her Inn.

Conflicting time periods are given for the actual commencement date of Clarke and Derbyshire starting their surveying. Some reference journals give out a date of as early as 1840, as this is only four years after Major Mitchell, the first white person to traverse this district, I believe this date to be doubtful. In my humble opinion, 1852 would be nearer the mark, because it is known that there existed in 1849 a Court House and police Station on Pearson's 'Retreat' property. Clarke and Derbyshire carried out the survey forming a town of typical grid, fashion streets and although Casterton is in a valley and bisected by the Glenelg River, they produced a creditable and easily traversed township. Surveyor Clarke's name is today commemorated by having one of the main arterial streets called after him, while poor Derbyshire, for reasons unknown, doesn't share such an honour.

To be continued.....

***Helen Macpherson Schutt -
Philanthropist***
17th April 1874 - 19th April 1951

Extracts taken from a history of her life,
Part 2.

The wedding certificate describes Jane Priscilla as 'Lady' and Robert as 'Timber Merchant' and they married at the home of Jane Priscilla's parents, 28 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy, with the parents of both husband and wife present. The house at Nicholson Street still stands today and is now the St Vincent's Hospital Department of Drug and Alcohol Studies.

Coming from a family with a sound appreciation and respect for property, Jane Priscilla had married a man with similar interests. Between 1872 and 1875, Robert bought land in Langton Street, Fitzroy, in Victoria Parade, East Melbourne and in Lygon Street, Carlton and later owned parcels of land across Victoria, contributing to the wealth eventually passed to Helen Macpherson Schutt.

Jane Priscilla and Robert travelled on their honeymoon trip to Melrose, Scotland, leaving Melbourne for London ten days after their marriage, on March 1, 1873, travelling saloon class on the 'Essex', one of the line of packet ships owned by English company Money Wigram and Sons. Renowned for its beauty, early in the nineteenth century the Melrose district had already developed a name with travellers, especially those interested in fishing. Sporting lodges were built on the banks of the River Tweed and the local economy flourished with fishing and related activities.

Robert, Priscilla and Helen, then aged six months, returned to Victoria on the 'Durham', arriving in Melbourne in September 1874. Until 1881 they lived in 'Helena House', 28 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy, left to Jane Priscilla by her father, John Macpherson on his death in April 1875. Robert bought several pieces of land during 1875. From 1881 to 1889, exact details of the whereabouts of the family are unknown, but it appears they spent time in Australia, Europe, England and perhaps Scotland, leaving Helen at boarding school in Melrose. In 1887, Priscilla Smith was recorded as a resident of Jersey in the Channel Islands.

On March 18, 1889, Helen started school at Presbyterian Ladies' College, then located in Albert -

Street, East Melbourne. Aged 14, she arrived a month after the school year had begun. The Enrolment Book records her previous schooling at Hanover, Germany for two years and before that, at boarding school in Melrose, Scotland. Although the school rolls of the period no longer exist, it is likely that Helen attended Glenview School in Melrose, which had apparently established a reputation as a boarding school for girls whose parents lived or worked abroad. Helen's cousins, Flora and Violet (daughters of Adam Smith, Robert's brother and a partner in the timber merchant business) both previously attended Glenview. Family loyalty and tradition, especially in the closely knit Smith family, make it highly likely Helen attended a school known by others in the family.

Enrolling at Presbyterian Ladies' College in Melbourne, the records show that Helen knew "*German well, a little French, no Latin, Euclid or Algebra*". A 'day-girl', Helen was to "*take Music from the best master, German, Elocution and Dancing*". Her parents' address was given as The Grand Hotel, Melbourne, then a temperance hotel and now The Hotel Windsor. It appears that Helen, Student Number 1395, attended Presbyterian Ladies' College for about a year, as her name is not recorded in subsequent years, although exit cards were not kept until after 1920. Her name is not recorded in the State of Victoria Matriculation Records.

When Helen was a student, Presbyterian Ladies' College enrolled girls aged from five to 20. 250 students attended the school. There was no official uniform and girls wore long dark skirts and white blouses, with white dresses 'recommended for Prize days'. The Head Master was the Scottish born Mr John Purves Wilson, mathematician and Shakespearean scholar and the Principal was the non-teaching Reverend Samuel Gilfillan McLaren, who left his parish in Coburg to take up the position. In 1889 the school's name was changed from 'Ladies' College' to 'Presbyterian Ladies' College'.

Judging by their various homes, the descriptions of the wedding of Helen and William, and from the extent of their property holdings, the family lived a comfortable life. Robert Smith is recorded as 'Timber Merchant' for some years, then as 'Gentleman'. Active in land dealings and an investor of substance, the records of his estate investments in such companies as Colonial Sugar

Refining Co. Ltd., the Shamrock Brewing Co. Ltd. and Kauri Timber Company Ltd., among others.

Of Helen's life in the years until her marriage in 1901, little is known. For most women in her situation, life centred around activities at home and within their own social circles. No doubt she visited friends and acquaintances, she had an interest in music from her school days, and her name is mentioned in the press as attending a society wedding with her mother.

On New Year's Eve, 1899, Helen greeted the new century at a house party at 'Beleura', a gracious property of just over 182 acres acquired by Helen's father earlier that year. Built by Scotsman James Butchart around 1865 on the cliff top near Mornington, overlooking Port Phillip Bay, 'Beleura' is described by writer John Hetherington in *The Age*, December 1963, as "*one of the most notable of a number of mansions which were built on the Mornington Peninsula in the second half of last century*". Robert left 'Beleura' to his wife, Jane Priscilla and it was later owned by Sir George Tallis, managing director of the J.C. Williamson theatre company who bought the property in 1916. He left the property to his son, Mr Jack Tallis, a reclusive composer who died in December 1996, leaving the house to The Tallis Foundation, for the 'benefit and education' of Victorians. Late in 1999, 'Beleura' made news when it was revealed that Chigi, Mr Tallis' dog, a Bichon Frise and the last in a long line of dogs kept by the family at the estate, had the run of the property until her death.

Robert Smith, Helen's father, died on June 17, 1904 and her mother, Jane Priscilla, on December 2, 1914, leaving most of her estate to Helen. The total of her mother's personal estate was £27,055 and included shares to the value of £14,000 in the Kauri Timber Co.

Both beautiful and elegant, Helen is remembered by those who knew her for her kindness, her regal bearing and exquisite taste in clothes. Loyal and generous to her close family, when she left Australia in December 1923, she carefully organised gifts to mark significant anniversaries of family members with instructions for their despatch at the appropriate time.

Continued next month.

The Changes in Time Part 10

By Des Murphy

Over the years the Casterton and Coleraine area have been renowned for good stud stock, both sheep and cattle. The Stud sheep, especially in the northern area are of outstanding quality and are sought after in a very big area. The Stud Merino Ram Sales held annually attract buyers from three states and are keenly sought after. Some of the stronger types of Merino rams are outstanding for big bone and heavy cutting white wool. The prime breed of rams are sought after for their outstanding type and frame. Their progeny top the market in a wide area.

The worst part of the wool industry was the problem of wool prices always on the roll; up or down. In every year of my 60 years in the industry, chances were made backwards or forwards and the classers were in a catch 22 position. Millions of dollars were spent on research to no avail. The wool pack was an example; rising labour costs driving the industry off shore, sheep numbers down to half because of the uncertain wool prices and the rising cost of running sheep.

However, most growers did their best, breeding better wool and better sheep and when the position lent itself, changes were made in equipment such as hydraulic wool press, raised boards, better hand pieces, better sheep handling and weighing equipment, better designed yards, sheds and pasture.

Breeding first cross ewes for fat lamb is the big shining light on the horizon. Sixty years ago the prime lamb industry was a small industry, very fragmented, today it is a different story. It is growing bigger each year, every week prime lamb and sheep sales are held at Hamilton, Mt Gambier and Naracoorte. Every week in the spring and early summer the Hamilton Sales are held 2 days a week, yarding up to 70,000 a week.

Over the years, the expanding prime lamb industry has taken the place of half of the merino sheep numbers in the high rain area. Casterton was a good store sheep area, now only four store sales a year are held in the area. Ninety percent of the prime lamb are trucked weekly to the three big selling centre. Ten percent are bought privately.

Continued next month.



A Flash in the Sky

By the late Jack Gorman

Taken from, "Tales of Casterton;
the Wainies Murder and Other Stories"

Friday June 19th, 1964 began as just another working day for a Casterton auctioneer, as he sprang out of bed just after dawn for an auction sale he had in the little township at 10 am. As he gazed through the louvre windows in his sleepout overlooking the town, he was astounded to see a bright flash illuminating the town, the whole place was floodlit like day. It was an uncanny picture. From the Glenelg Inn and Island Park area the brilliant light hovered over the town for about twenty seconds and then it was gone. Spellbound by what he had seen, he immediately rang John Eden, the early morning announcer for 3DB, to tell him what he had seen and that he had not been drinking.

Back came the announcers reply "I am sure you haven't been drinking, because reports have been monitoring into the situation that what you had seen, had also been reported in Adelaide, Keith, Nhill, Kaniva and Melbourne".

A man saw the flash from as far away as the Baker-Nunn camera satellite tracking station at Island Lagoon near Woomera. It was gone before he could get a good look at it. Early morning workers in Adelaide saw it.

A taxi driver travelling through the Adelaide suburb of Brooklyn Park saw it as a thin broadening streak giving off a terrific blue glow. It was so bright I could have read a newspaper by its light he said. A studio cleaner driving through the suburb of Prospect was it, a big bullet nosed thing with pale green flames shooting from it. It lit up the buildings and the road like daylight. A woman truck driver at Keith in the south east saw it. A Senior Constable in charge of the Kaniva Police Station near the South Australian Border was a blinding flash the a blue light in the sky as he drove east along the Western Highway. A schoolboy at Box Hill saw it a red, green and then orange bright light. An airlines pilot flying 24,000 feet over Nhill saw it too. For fifty miles from the cockpit of his "Electra" the sky was lit up like day. It appeared to last for a few seconds and then go to ground over Nhill.

He thought it may have been a meteor or satellite going down.

In Melbourne dozens of startled people had rung in to the radio stations to report the phenomenon. A man driving along Johnston Street Collingwood saw flames in the sky and then a bright flash. He thought a plane had crashed near Werribee. In Belgrave Rd, Belgrave a man saw what he thought was a very large falling star at 5.02 am.

Astronomers and experts at Woomera thought it may have been a meteor exploding into the earth's atmosphere. Others thought it was a satellite burning up as it crashed down to earth.

Many theories were put forward to the origin of the strange light. It was in the early days of space exploration, and uppermost thought in all scientists minds, to walk on the moon. A senior scientific representative from the USA space organisation thought it may have been a fragment of a satellite or meteor.

For some days the flash in the sky was an object of wonder. It became the subject of strong media coverage. Many other people who for fear of being ridiculed now come forward and reported what they had seen.

Although many scientific reasons have been tabled for that strange light that flashed across the sky in the early hours of that winter morning in June, not one tangible answer has ever proved what the brilliant light really every was.



***Society Meeting Times and Dates,
With Guest Speakers for 2006/7:***

Monday 19th June 2006 at 2.00 pm

Mr. Ray Welsford
Warnambool Family History Group

Monday 17th July 2006 at 2.00 pm

Mrs. Pat Hein
Mount Gambier Heritage and History Society

Monday 21st August 2006 at 2.00 pm

Ms. Jenny Fawcett - Genseek Genealogy

Wednesday 20th September 2006 at 7.00 pm

Basil Stafford, Local/Family History Researching

Wednesday 18th October 2006 at 7.00 pm

To be advised

Wednesday 15th November 2006 at 7.00 pm

Dinner Meeting - **Ms. Joan Hunt**

December 2006 and January 2007 - No Meeting

President: Jan Lier
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Any material for inclusion can be left at
P.O. Box 48 or passed to Basil Stafford or Jan Lier.

Any ideas or comments always welcome
at P.O Box 186

You can email Jan and Cheryl
via the Ballarat Genealogy Website.

Publications for Sale

Casterton Historical Street Walk
"From Flour Mill to Glenelg Inn - \$10.00

Extracts from the Casterton and District Historical
Society Inc. 1966-1996 - \$10.00

Corndale State School Honour Board Booklet \$7.00

Casterton Cenotaph WWI soldiers - \$20.00

Casterton Cenotaph WWII soldiers - \$10.00

Major Norman McDonald
Photograph Album CD - \$20.00

History in the Depths – Gallipoli – DVD - \$20.00

Vern McCallum Photographs CDs
Casterton High School - \$20.00

Vintage Tools of Trade - \$10.00

Newsletters of the Casterton and District Historical
Society 2005 Booklet – Indexed \$10.00

Extracts from Gleanings – \$1.00

Contact Jan 55 752578



**Historical Society
Presentations to
ABC Horsham**

June 5 th 2006	Balmoral
June 12 th 2006	Public Holiday
June 19 th 2006	Casterton
June 26 th 2006	Coleraine
July 3 rd 2006	Harrow
July 10 th 2006	Balmoral
July 17 th 2006	Casterton
July 24 th 2006	Coleraine
July 31 st 2006	Harrow
August 7 th 2006	Balmoral
August 14 th 2006	Casterton
August 21 st 2006	Coleraine
August 28 th 2006	Harrow
September 4 th 2006	Balmoral
September 11 th 2006	Casterton
September 18 th 2006	Coleraine
September 25 th 2006	Harrow