Casterton and District Historical Society Inc Newsletter

**JULY 2010** 

Items in our newsletter:

Poem 1939 by Jim Kent page 1-2 The genius of Clarice Beckett p 3

THE JULY OUTING TO THE MERINO HOTEL HAS BEEN CANCELLED. <u>THE AGM WILL NOW</u> <u>BE HELD AT</u> <u>SHE'S A CAWKER</u> <u>BISTRO, MERINO</u> <u>HOTEL</u> ON

> Wednesday August 18<sup>th</sup>

#### 11am : AGM

12noon : Lunch – ring She's a Cawker Bistro on 55 791333 to book Cost \$14.00

#### **1pm:** *The Collectors*

8 short films by Casterton locals showing their collections.

Nomination forms for positions on the committee are included with this newsletter to be returned to Ros Coventry by 5pm 1<sup>st</sup> August.





**Casterton Community Museum** 

### A poem of Casterton, 1939 by local historian, Jim Kent

In far-western Victoria, where wild blacks used to roam Has arisen a town and it's named Casterton It's prettily built 'twixt hill and 'twixt dell And closely by wanders the river Glenelg.

It's surrounded by farms, and extensive sheep runs Which are here and there dotted with stately red gums Whose wide spreading branches bend gracefully down Offering shade and both shelter to all things around

For the Australian red gum is a beautiful tree It sends out its appeal to you and to me And more beautiful types where could they be found Than those that grow in the district around.

'Twas in these nature blessed parts Lindsay Gordon did ride With his saddle and spurs and whip by his side 'Twas here his thoughts were inspired to write down in line Of the gum, horse, and wattle that composed lots of his rhyme.

In surroundings like these has grown Casterton town Its main street is called Henty, runs uphill and down 'Twas named after the Hentys those old pioneers Who crossed o'er from Tasmania in far away years.

It's a beautiful district and a sight to be seen When in springtime bedecked with her mantle of green No wonder Mitchell the explorer stood almost spellbound And gazed in rapture on then unexplored land.

But the pride of the district we must recall Is that very fine building their civic Town Hall It's a beautiful structure that's praise enough It was built largely through the efforts of Lou Koch.

There are other fine buildings, and shops for to see There's the Emporium that's run by Ike Finlay There's Grant's Hotel and the Theatre near by Then Stookes and Osbornes and the jeweller, Stan Fry.

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#### Casterton New Cemetery Mapping Project

We have now completed all sections - Jan needs to finish up doing the bits and pieces on the computer, then we will walk again to re-check.

#### NATIONAL FAMILY HISTORY WEEK

30<sup>th</sup> July – 8<sup>th</sup> August www.familyhistoryweek. org.au

#### <u>Australian Railway</u> <u>Historical Society</u>

new publication: **Bygone Australian Transport** (c 1950-1985) by Bob Wilson - for other publications see <u>www.arhsvic.org.au</u> telephone 1300 220 220

#### HISTORY VICTORIA

SUPPORT GROUP – RHSV Seminar Day: 7<sup>th</sup> August <u>To be hosted by the</u> <u>Hamilton History Centre,</u> <u>at the Baptist Church, 48</u> <u>Gray Street, Hamilton.</u> "The Role of Historical Societies in 2010"

PAM ENTING VISIT – 12<sup>th</sup> at 2pm and 13<sup>th</sup> AUGUST at 10am . VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE to discuss developing a tour of the Casterton New Cemetery.

To contribute to this newsletter, please contact Jan Lier - tel Visitor Information Centre on 5581 2070 or e-mail <u>jlier3@bigpond.com</u> or Ros <u>roscov@iprimus.com.au</u> tel 5581 2875

## Historical Happenings 🔊

There's Moran and Cato and H S McBean's And Coulsons those devout and fervent Wesleyans There's Gilpins and Bryans if on shopping you're bent And the garage that's run by good sport, Barry Kent

There's the well-known firm of Peden and Son They will soon fix you up when from this world you are gone There's that grower of roses, R J Baxter by name Whose blooms have brought him much fame.

Of other fine buildings and men one could tell There's several fine banks and Mrs Gurry's hotel There's Seymours and Wyness and greengrocer Kim And many fine churches to guard you from sin.

There's Coxon's garages, one at each end of town To service your car if you have a breakdown There's boot shops and chemists, with shelves well equipped And an up-to-date hospital to care for the sick

There's a picturesque racecourse and nice Island Park Much sought after by lovers, whether by moonlight or dark There's a weekly newspaper published by old Gazzard He's and up-to-date guy, who does nothing haphazard.

Now when you've looked over the town and feel like a spell Just visit old Rod at the Railway hotel He makes you so welcome you'll feel while you're there You have not in this world, a trouble or care

His hair's growing thin on the top of his brow For he's growing in years, same as lots of us now He's wide and deep in the forehead, his eyes are brown Just the type that would help a chap when he's down.

And that's saying the same of most of the folks in these parts They are broad in their outlook, and big in their hearts Should sickness or trouble a neighbour befall They quickly respond to charity's call To end these musings at last we have come On this beautiful district and picturesque town So may peace and contentment for ever abound And bless all who live in this district around.

# Clarice Beckett, artistic genius and a daughter of Casterton

Clarice Beckett's paintings—invariably everyday landscapes or unadorned suburban vistas engulfed in fog, rain or hazy half-light—have a melancholic ethereal quality.

Clarice MarjoribanksBeckett (1887-1935) was the daughter of Joseph Clifden Beckett, manager of the Colonial Bank of Casterton from 1875 to 1903. Her mother's father was John Brown, a Scottish master builder who had designed and built Como House and its gardens in Melbourne. Beckett was inspired to paint by her mother. She was also encouraged to study music, poetry, and the classicGreek tragedies, unusual activities in the small rural town.



Casterton Community Museum



Walking Home c1931 oil on board 49.2 x 59.5 Private collection Melbourne







Our Address PO Box 48, Casterton, 3311 Phone: 5581 2070 Casterton Visitor Information Centre e-mail: jlier3@bigpond.com roscov@iprimus.com.au Early charcoal drawing classes laid strong foundations into content, form and tone. Beckett's formal art training however did not really begin until she was 27 years old. Her father was more concerned with marrying-off his daughter to one of the well-heeled gentlemen of the district.

Finally Beckett was able to persuade her father to allow her to attend the National Gallery School of Victoria in Melbourne. He agreed only on condition that Clarice's older sister accompanied her. At the National Gallery Beckett she came under the tutelage of Frederick McCubbin, a leader of the country's impressionist school. She was also influenced by Max Meldrum, well known for his vocal and dogmatic attacks on Academic and Modernist theories. He credited her as his model student Beckett but only embraced some of his theories. She declared in 1924 that her task was "to give a sincere and truthful representation of a portion of the beauty of nature and to show the charm of light and shade ... in correct tones so as to give as nearly as possible an exact illusion of beauty."

In 1918 her father retired and settled in the Melbourne bayside suburb of Beaumaris. Beckett held her first solo exhibition in 1923 at the prestigious Athenaeum Gallery in Melbourne. Every year for the next decade she held exhibitions at this gallery. But critical support was not always forthcoming; a number of critics sharply attacked her work as "fogbound art", "obscured individuality, she being of a cult, which muffles everything in a pall of opaque density". Another wrote "a dull reiteration of nature". The more perceptive hailed her work as groundbreaking, describing her as "the most original painter in Australia".

Her own difficult family circumstances worsened. Her father was a deeply conservative man and did little to assist her career. The family was comfortably off but Clarice never had a studio and forced to paint on the kitchen table or leave the house in early evening or mornings, her easel being the side of a small homemade cart in which she kept her paints and brushes. When her mother fell ill in 1934, Clarice was made responsible for nursing her. Relations deteriorated with her father and Beckett lost touch with her artistic friends and began to lead a reclusive existence.

In 1935, whilst out painting a winter night storm she caught a chill, which quickly developed into double pneumonia. She died a few days later in a state of physical and emotional exhaustion. A year later a memorial exhibition of Beckett's paintings was held after which. her paintings were put in storage in various locations. When they were rediscovered in 1970, more than 1,200 had been destroyed from being in an open-sided farm shed near Benalla for 30 years. Another 31 were destroyed in a house-fire.

Why was Beckett forgotten? Women artists such as Preston, Proctor, Cossington-Smith and others, were given wider acknowledgment than Beckett after their deaths. New trends were emerging in Australia in the mid- to late-1930s. Beckett's isolation, death and later neglect took place in a period of transition. Clarice Beckett was a courageous and deeply intelligent artist, whose techniques had never been seen before in Australia. Had she lived longer, Beckett would have made an even more substantive contribution. Amongst her papers was a cherished and well-worn copy of *Leaves of Grass*. The following lines were underlined:

All truths wait in all things,

They neither hasten their own delivery nor resist it,

They do not need the obstetric forceps of the surgeon,

The insignificant is as big to me as any.

What is less or more than a touch?

This beautifully sums up Beckett's art, her work and attitude to life.

(C) John Christian: July 1999 Exhibition: Politically Incorrect: Clarice Beckett Retrospective at the Art Gallery of South Australia.