



Foster & District Historical Society Inc.



## PROM COUNTRY NEWS JUNE 2019

### Office Bearers:

President: Meg Rogers

Vice-President: Mike Heal

Secretary: Kerry Corcoran

Treasurer/Archives: Noela Cripps

Curator: Jennifer Jones

Research : Nola Taylor

Maintenance : Reg. Williams



Current exhibition at the Museum.

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### **President's Report**

The Foster & District Historical Society has been busy as usual with the wonderful exhibition of John Gunn's photography a draw card for visitors. This will run till December when it will be replaced with an exhibition to celebrate 150 years of settlement in Foster.

Rob Pritchard and I attended the 20/20 meetings on the society's behalf which is overseeing the celebrations for this event.

In conjunction with the Foster RSL, we erected flags in ANZAC week again this year on the graves of the WW1 soldiers in the Foster, Toora and Welshpool cemeteries.

The RSL will be celebrating 100 years in November and has asked for photos etc that we may have to help them commemorate this event.

Michael Heal and I have been attending mediation court sessions in Melbourne regarding our bequest from Colin Hall and we are pleased to report that we were successful in securing \$75,000 of the \$100,000 we were left after the will was contested. What a wonderful gift from Colin for the society. A committee has been formed to manage this money.

Colin was the grandson of Charles Hall who was a contractor for wood splitting on the Hoddle, road making, bridge building and instrumental in clearing the Black Swamp and building the sea wall.

Rob Pritchard and Kerry Corcoran have shown 3 groups through the museum in the last quarter and all groups were interested and appreciative of the museum (and the morning tea served up!)

Thank you to all volunteers for manning the desk through heat, hail, rain and wind, this is what makes our society so successful.

History matters

Meg Rogers

President.

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### **WHAT'S ON**

**Exhibition 'Corner Inlet through the lens - the life and work of photographer John Gunn' continues until the end of the year. It was officially opened on Saturday 9 March 2019.**

**July meeting – Tuesday 2 July , Crawford Hall. 7.30 pm. Guest Speaker Heather Arnold 's subject is the Koo-Wee-Rup swamp.**

**August meeting – Tuesday 6 August at 7.30 pm. Annual General Meeting.**

**September meeting – Tuesday 3 September at 7.30 pm. Guest Speaker is Jill Miles. She will present a talk on her grandfather William Wood.**

### **Foster 150 Celebrations - Rob Pritchard**

Gold was discovered in Stockyard Creek in January 1870 and the township, named Foster in the following year, quickly became established. The year 2020 marks 150 years since then and preparations are being made to celebrate the anniversary. A small committee, under the auspices of the Foster Community Association, has been working on a series of activities which is attempting to involve the wider community across the whole year.

The museum will be opening a new exhibition in mid-January with a time-line of local, national and world events from 1870 to the present day. Mike Heal and Nola Taylor are preparing an update for the *Palings to Pavements* book published for previous anniversaries and *The Mirror* editor is already including articles from early editions under the banner "Back to Foster" which has created a great deal of interest.

January will also see a large number of former pupils of the Secondary school in the town for their centenary "back-to" celebrations. In addition that weekend, the time capsule buried outside the Water Board offices will be opened and it is hoped that local people, or their descendants, who placed items in the capsule, will be there to witness it. Later in the year another time capsule will be buried outside the museum and we hope that our members will contribute items for inclusion.

The Foster Show will be the key event in February and their committee plan to include activities reflecting the district's development.

Other activities spread across the year which the planning committee are calling for are special sports matches and competitions, a celebration of local food and wine, indigenous history, a FAMDA production, open gardens and flower arrangement displays, an environmental focus and culminating in December with a closing event organized by the Chamber of Commerce.

150 years is a significant landmark and it is hoped the residents of Foster will embrace the occasion with enthusiasm.

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### **Foster 2020 Time line – Richard and Jennifer Jones**

As part of the Society's contribution to the Foster 2020 celebrations, we propose to include a time line of events that occurred during the past 150 years. The time line will follow three parallel lines – world events such as wars, 9/11, Australian events such as Federation, Olympics, major bush fires and Foster events. We have plenty of information about the world and Australian events but need your help on identifying significant and perhaps not quite so significant events that have happened in Foster.

We are hoping to include an Australian timeline for the 150 years from the work of local artist Roland Harvey who has drawn one up from the pre-history times to the bi-centenary. We will add to this and be asking visitors to the Museum during 2020 to make prediction of what might happen in the next 150 years.

**Please send your recollections of significant events in Foster in the past 150 years to Jennifer or Richard Jones on [jonesrjsb1@gmail.com](mailto:jonesrjsb1@gmail.com) Whilst 2020 may seem a long way ahead, it will come quickly enough and we will have to do some work on setting up the timelines.**

## 'The Depression Years' by Stan Grylls

At the June meeting of the FDHS, Marilyn Smith a member of the Society spoke about her father Stan, and read his account of his travels to Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland in his efforts to find work during the Depression years in Australia. The years of the Great Depression are officially stated as 1929-33, but Stan's story makes it clear that it lasted much longer. He gave us a fascinating insight into life on the road during the Great Depression; the people he met, the jobs he had, his living and working conditions, which were not always adequate, and of course the weather conditions.



Marilyn Smith nee Grylls



Stan Grylls

In 1934 as a 21 year old, he travelled on the ship the *Westralia* to Western Australia and spent two years there, working for 'a quid a week'.

After his return to Victoria, and on the suggestion of the Reverend Reg Hunter, he travelled to Wentworth in New South Wales for fruitpicking work. His means of transport was a push bike, a Malvern Star semi-racer. His strategy for never getting a puncture was to get worn tyres, cut the bead off and fit them inside the others. His fruit picking work continued in Curlwaa, New South Wales, and Pomona in Queensland. His travelling companion for part of the trip was George, a New Zealander who had cycled extensively in Australia. George agreed to allow Stan to accompany him on his journey to the Gulf of Carpentaria. They travelled up the Darling river to Wilcannia, then on to White Cliffs and Wanaaring, crossing the border at Hungerford, and then on to Thargomindah.

Stan worked on a number of stations in the area such as Eromanga, where he parted company with George, Mt Margaret and Thylungra. He had a fencing job, was an assistant to the windmill expert at Mt Margaret and drove the truck. He then went on to Charleville, Blackall, Barcaldine and Longreach. In Longreach he experienced the 'train-jumpers,' who were easily recognizable 'by their battered suitcases, pants flared below the knees - I understand this was to make it easier to climb on moving trains - and of course covered in soot'. He explained that 'they were easy enough to get on with, and never robbed their own kind.' They 'were not popular with the police, unless the Sergeant wanted some work done. Then the train would be stopped at the crossing, and the boys grabbed as they jumped off.' He noted that 'they were well fed, but when they were no longer

required, would be taken out on the road far from the railway and dumped.' He travelled on to Muttaborra, Hughenden, and Charters Towers. After reaching Townsville, he travelled south by train and bicycle to Sydney. The meter on his bike clocked up 2500 miles before he lost it at Albury. He eventually made it back to Victoria, where he gained some work carting hay and then fruitpicking. By this time he had swapped his bicycle for a motor-bike.

In conclusion, Stan wrote:

on the trip we were known as Bike Bagmen – the reason being the boys used to bot flour, tea and sugar from the stations – never got any meat. What money we had was used to buy everything we needed. Down the coast, and in the farming districts, the best you could get was a billy of tea and perhaps a sandwich. Bagmen came in different categories. Some on bikes, others with horse and vehicle, or just horse, and some motor vehicles, as distinct from the swaggie, who carried his swag, had corks on his hat, and often had a mangy dog trailing on behind.'

After his travels, he was accepted into the Youth Training Scheme and learned welding at Melbourne Technical College. He enlisted in the RAAF in 1940, after War was declared in September 1939.

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## **SANITARY CONDITIONS IN FOSTER AT THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**



Foster township (1880-1910) Courtesy State Library of Victoria

Mike Heal, Vice-president of the FDHS, discovered reports on the sanitary conditions in the Foster township while on a research visit to the Public Record Office of Victoria in May 2019. They are entitled: *Report under section 119 of the Health Act 1890, of the Council of the Shire of South Gippsland for the Year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1897* and *Report on the Sanitary conditions of township of Foster, Shire of South Gippsland, 3 May 1900.*  
VPRS 594/PO/Unit 3- Date range 1898-1902.

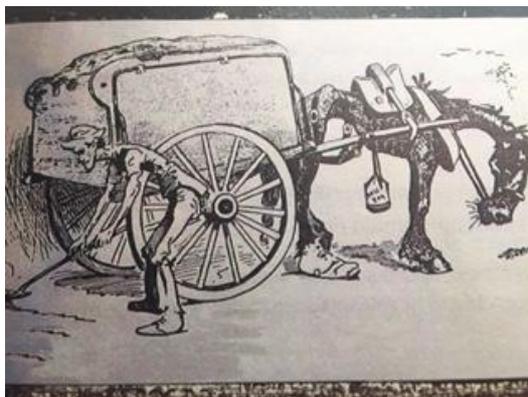
These reports offer graphic evidence of the realities of living in communities with no provision for the disposal of rubbish or human waste. To put it into context, the first houses in Melbourne were connected to the sewerage system in 1897. Excerpts from these reports will be published in this and subsequent newsletters.

The 1897 report by O.F. Gemlin, MD, the Health Officer, stated in answer to a question about privies, that 'the pan system is not yet in force in shire, but a notice of motion is now on the books, is adopting the single pan system for Foster. At present the pans are emptied by householder in own way.' The report consisted of twenty-five questions which ranged from requesting an estimate of population at the end of the year, ( Foster 400 and Toora 150) to the means by which house and surface drainage was carried away, together with the situation and mode of construction of the main drain and outlets. Most of the drainage went to Stockyard Creek and was carried to Corner Inlet. The town was wholly dependent on rain for water supply, but creek water was sometimes used in cases of emergency. With respect to private yards it was noted that the householders buried their own rubbish. Epidemics, such as Scarlet Fever occurred in December 1897, with some mild cases of measles reported several times during the year. Below are The Health Officer's general remarks:

The health of the inhabitants is on the whole good. The inhabitants of Foster seem averse to the adoption of the pan system on the score of additional expenses. It's evident that unless some radical improvement is made in the sanitary conditions of Foster, serious results will ensue.

As a follow up to the report, in a letter to the secretary of the Shire of South Gippsland, dated 26 April 1898, J. W. Colville, Secretary of the Public Health Department, Offices of the Board, wrote

Sir, I have the honor to write to the attention of the Council to the statements, respecting the condition of Foster, made by the Officer of Health in his annual report for 1897, and to the unwholesome state of the township discovered in July 1896 on the occasion of an inspection by Dr Wood. The Board will be glad to hear at an early date what action the Council Propose to take in the matter.



The Night cart

The *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of township of Foster, Shire of South Gippsland 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1900*, demonstrated that nothing had been done to improve the sanitary conditions of Foster in the interim. T. E. Dunkley conducted the inspection on 8 and 9 March 1900 in the presence of O. F. Gemlin, Health Officer for the Shire of South Gippsland and the Inspector,

Constable Mackay. One of the topics covered was the Drainage of the Township. His report stated that :

With the exception of two underground earthenware pipe drains, to be afterwards described, there is not a formed street channel in the township. They are just earth cuts. The drainage from both streets and houses ultimately finds its way into Stockyard creek. In Main Street the channels are unformed, and are choked up with grass and weeds. The drainage from seven houses flows into these channels and there, stagnates and is said at times to be most offensive.

The two channels from Main Street lead into an unformed channel that crosses by the Police quarters and the Health Officer's residents and turns to the south east And ultimately reaches the creek. From the corner of Main Street opposite Mrs A. Thornley's Exchange Hotel an underground earthenware pipe drain crosses the Station road and discharges into the creek. This drain is provided with two catch pits (brick) to allow the solid matter of drain to settle. In both of these pits there was a collection of foul-smelling sewage in a semi liquid state and about 6" in depth. These drains and pits are said to never be flushed except when it rains and consequently during the summer and dry weather, they must get very foul. A drain from the cellar of the Exchange Hotel used to open into the pit in Main Street but on account of the escape of foul-smelling gas through drain into cellar. It had to be closed up, so I was informed. The other underground drain is in an unmade right of way between the Royal Mail Hotel and W. Jones butchering premises in Pioneer Street. This also discharges into the creek. The catch pit of this drain was also very dirty and foul.

The Stockyard Creek which may be called the main sewer of the township, is very much impeded in its flow by a large number of logs and fallen trees lying across the bed and by a dense growth of Blackberry bushes. The bed of creek should certainly be freed of these obstructions. In dry seasons there is said to be a bad smell arising from bed of creek. This was not noticeable at time of inspection. The water supply of township is by rain-water collected and stored in over Ground tanks. The creek water is said, never to be used for drinking purposes. Besides the drainage of township, the creek also receives the sludge waters from Victory Gold Mine. This enters the creek on the east side and about the centre.

(To be continued in next issue)

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## **Museum Opening Hours**

The Museum is open daily during the school holidays and on Saturdays and Sundays during term time. It is closed Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and Good Friday.

Hours of Opening are: 11.00 am -3.00 pm.

Other times by appointment: (03) 5682 1201/ (03) 56822297

## **Admission Fees:**

This is a volunteer run and maintained museum and FDHS relies upon the small admission fee to run and maintain the museum on behalf of the Foster & District Community.

ADULT: \$5.00

CONCESSION:(senior, pension, special & student over 15 years) \$4.00

CHILDREN : (5-15 Years) 0.50 cents

FAMILY: \$10.00

CHILDREN (under 5 years): Free

MEMBERS: Free

Foster & District Historical Society Inc.

## **Membership**

Becoming a member of the Foster & District Historical Society Inc. helps us to preserve and present the district's history. You receive free museum entry, newsletters and invitations to events and new exhibition openings.

Single: \$20.00

Family: \$35.00

Foster & District Historical Society Inc. meets at 7.30 pm on the first Tuesday of the month from February to December. The AGM is held in August. The meetings are held in the Crawford Hall ( entry rear of museum complex from the car park.) We have many interesting speakers. Visitors and new members are very welcome.

*The Foster & District Historical Society Inc. is a member of the South Gippsland Historical Network, an affiliated member of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. Foster & District Museum has been appointed by the Public Record Office as a Place of Deposit for non-permanent public records and is an accredited museum through Museums Australia ( Vic)*