

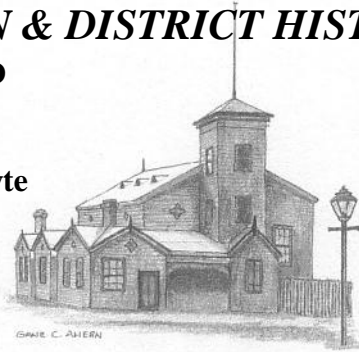
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NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE EDITOR

The feature article of this Newsletter, "The Yarra Glen Entertainers —Playing Their Part in History", has been written in response to a prompt from one of our senior citizens that the efforts of this group should not go unrecorded. They strived for and won the top Victorian prize in an activity that started out as a private entertainment and ended up providing lots of pleasure to many. They have truly played their part in our history. Norma Miller, Thelma Exton, Alma Goss and Val Walker enjoyed reviving their memories, poring over the photographs and digging out the old programmes. A file of these documents will be kept in the YG&DHS Collection.

Also published in this issue is a poem contributed by Gwen and Fred Sadlier. They found it among their files but cannot remember where they got it from. If anyone has any idea of its origins please contact the Editor.

Our district has a long association with some very well known names in the Arts. The following come quickly to mind and I am sure with some serious research many more can be identified. Somebody might like to prepare a catalogue.

In 1907 Arthur and Minnie Boyd purchased 143 acres at Yarra Glen on the river (along Yarraview Road; once River Road) for the purpose of setting their son Merric up on a dairy farm. They named the property Tralee (now called Yaarn and owned by the Nicholson family). Arthur and Minnie's son Penleigh was studying at the Art Gallery and his brother Martin was a boarder at Trinity Grammar in Kew and came to Yarra Glen at weekends. Their younger sister Helen was aged only 3 when the family came to the farm. Religion was an important part of Minnie's life and while at Yarra Glen she taught at the Sunday School of the Anglican Church. Ironically Merric was to become a potter rather than a farmer and the family returned to Brighton in 1913.

Minnie Boyd (1858-1936) painted and sketched many landscapes at Yarra Glen including *Farm at Yarra Glen* and *Backwater of the Yarra* (both 1908), *The Sun's Healing Rays* (1909), *River Wreathed with Gold* (1910)

Arthur Boyd (1862-1940) painted and exhibited *Sunset on the Yarra* (1911) and two watercolours of the area during this period.

Theodore Penleigh Boyd (1890-1923) painted *Wattle on the Yarra* and many others.

Other artists include the following:

Louis Buvelot: who painted *Near Lilydale* and *Near Fernshaw*; and many other works in the Yarra Valley. Eugene von Guerard painted a work entitled *Lilydale from the Christmas Hills with the Dandenongs in the Distance* (1878). This is incorrectly described. The view is clearly from 'Banool' looking over Yarra Flats and View Hill towards Healesville.

Fred Williams (1927-1982) included *Yarra Valley at Yering* in his series of paintings of the Yarra River.

John Mather (1848-1916) painted a work believed to be entitled *Yarra Glen*.

Then there are the literary figures. It is well known that the writer Joseph Furphy was born at Yarra Flats on 26 September 1843. As Tom Collins he wrote *Such is Life* (1903).

Martin Boyd (1893-1972), as mentioned above, spent his school holidays on the family farm at Yarra Glen and later wrote that it was one of the happiest times of his life. Returning for a visit late in his career he felt it to be 'the true home of my spirit'. In his novel *The Montforts* (1928) the house 'Crosspoint' is believed to have been modelled on 'Tralee'. There are also settings based on the region in some of his other novels.

Yarra Glen Roads & Streets

a series about their history

Symond Street

Or should it be Symonds or Symons? The Street Directory and the street sign name it 'Symond', other maps and directories have it as 'Symonds' Street. Our research has not identified any potential persons with the name Symond. There is a strong possibility the street was named after George Symons who owned significant parcels of land in the district including land adjoining the un-named road when it was gazetted.

In 1853 George Symons purchased the pastoral licence for View Hill (Tarrawarra) from William Ryrie. This pastoral licence covered approximately 12,000 acres north of the Yarra in the region now known as Tarrawarra. In a document in the Melbourne University Archives it states that "Mr Ryrie sold his station to Messrs. Symond & Perry for 13,500 pounds." Only the name Geo. Symons appears on the land maps. In 1854 and again in 1856 Andrew Ross noted in his role as electoral officer that Symons was occupying Mr Ryrie's residence at Yarra Flats as a cattle station. In January 1855 George Symons wrote asking for an extension of time to pay the last two instalments because the price of cattle was low.

In June 1858 George Symons bought 140 acres of land referred to as Portion 7 County Evelyn, Parish Burgoyne. (see map). It is now bounded by Yarraview Rd, Symond St, Glenview Rd and the undeveloped extension of Anzac Avenue. He paid £224/8/6.

Only two years later, at the age of 36, he died on 16 September 1860 at his residence 37 George St Collingwood. The cause of his death was pulmonary consumption.

George Symons was born in England in November 1824, the son of Philip and Ann Symons (nee Harris). His parents were tenant farmers at Bulleigh Barton, in the parish of Ipplepen, Devonshire. George married Elizabeth Bickford Henley in 1849 and shortly afterwards they must have sailed for Australia. In October 1851 Melbourne newspapers carried an advertisement for 'Symons and Perry', Auctioneers. Their 'newly erected premises' in Bourke Street included a place for the deposit of gold in anticipation of business from the newly established goldfields. During the following years Symons and his partner William Perry advertised auctions for a diverse range of goods: 20 tons flour, 25,000 Manilla cigars, a

galvanised tin house, land allotments in Prahran, and even a ship, the brig *Australian*.

Elizabeth and George had five children. Jane Kathleen was christened in Melbourne in 1851 (she may of course have been born elsewhere). Her siblings were all born in Collingwood: Ada Louise 1852, Charles William 1854, George Francis 1856 and Annie 1857.

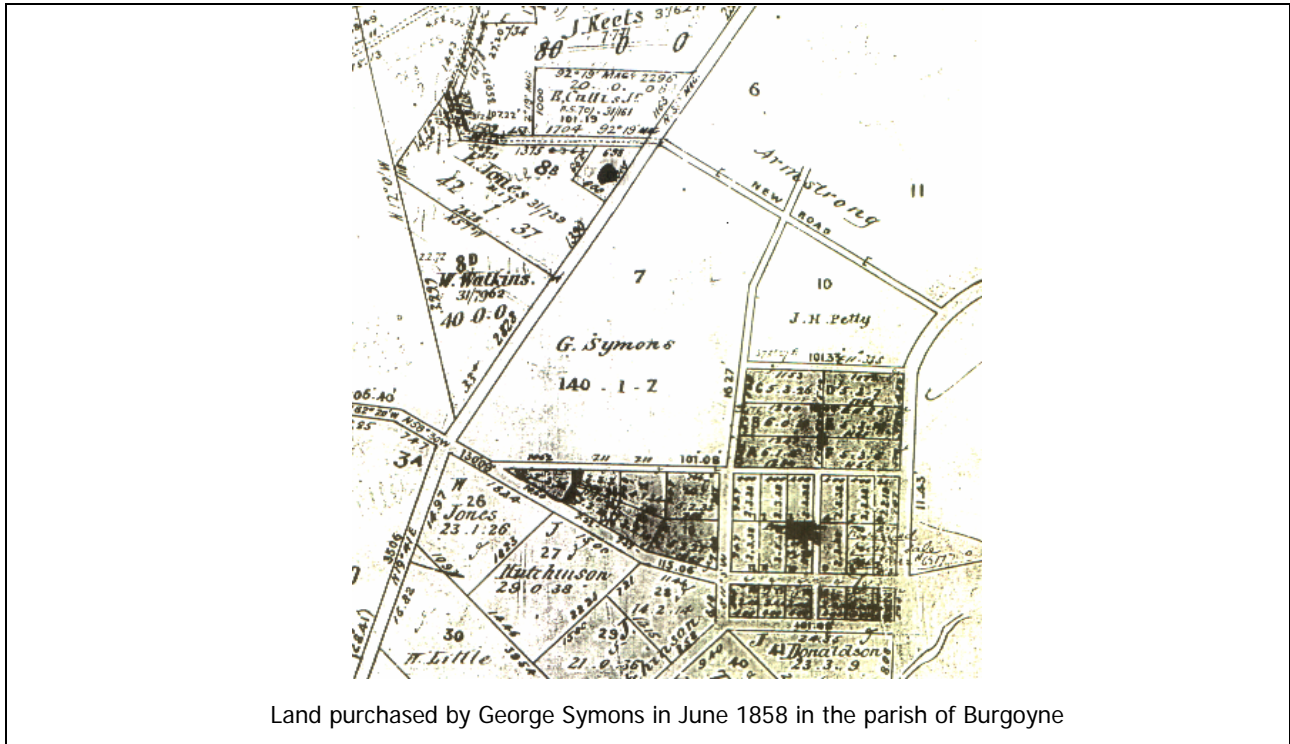
Sometime after her husband's death, and before 1871, Elizabeth returned to England with four of her children. Charles remained in Australia and died there in 1875 aged only 21.

Symond Street commences at the junction of Steels Creek Road, Glenview Road and the Eltham-Yarra Glen Road (next to the Cemetery). It runs in a south-easterly direction to a T-junction at Bell Street. The land owned by Symons and his neighbour John Hicks Petty on the southern side of the street remained largely pastoral until the late twentieth century. The one exception was the homestead of Petty himself which was directly opposite the current junction with Irvine Crescent. Petty was Postmaster from 1861 and in 1893 he erected a new building to house the post office, bank and telephone exchange. These operated until 1950. Opposite the Pettys, in the triangle now formed by Irvine Crescent, Bell and Symond Streets, were the Yarra Glen Sale Yards which operated from 1886 until 1935.

The Yarra Flats Common School was opened on 1 May 1879 on the site of the current Yarra Glen Primary School. The land had been purchased from Mr Thomas Armstrong who at that time owned most of the land on the northern side of Symond Street.

In the latter half of the 1940s and early 1950s Gordon Hubbard operated a small sawmill on the western side of the school land. He also had a residence there. The property was destroyed by fire in the mid 1950s and the sawmill was re-located to the corner of Mill and Ellis Roads. Mr Hubbard built a new brick and tile house on the corner of Symond Street and Yarraview Road opposite the school.

Many houses to the west of the school were built in the early twentieth century, although a lot have now been replaced. The weatherboard houses to the east of the school along to Irvine Crescent were built in the 1950s.



Land purchased by George Symons in June 1858 in the parish of Burgoyne

The Yarra Glen Entertainers — Playing Their Part in History

In the 1980s Les Harry and his wife Ivy purchased a farm at Dixons Creek. Les was a retired butcher so the farm was a retirement interest. Les loved to play the piano and it was no time before he and Ivy had identified a group of local people who enjoyed singing. Soon it became a regular event on the fourth Saturday of the month to meet at the Harry’s for an evening around the piano. When Les and Ivy sold the farm they moved to Yarraview Road where their new house boasted a very large room big enough to hold rehearsals for an entertainment group.

On the 17 March 1986 a small band of singers gave a rendition of tunes arranged as a sketch entitled ‘Schooldays’. King and Jean Jarvis, Thelma Exton, Norma Miller, Steve Bell, Ivy Harry and Dorothy Fothergill together with Les Harry on piano performed to an audience at the Healesville Seniors Club. Their costumes had been hastily put together and they held their

music in their hands so they would not forget the words.

Encouraged by the applause they soon added ‘The Wedding of the Painted Doll’ to their repertoire and travelled around the Valley to entertain Senior Citizens Groups, Bowling Clubs and nursing home residents. The group expanded to include Wilf Anderson, Kath Beach, Maureen and Steve Bell, Betty and Norm Brown, Laurie Down, Thelma Exton, Sheila Ferguson, Dorothy Fothergill, Alma and Percy Goss, Joyce Haddock, Moina and Ocker Hall, Ernie and Joyce Harriss, Jean and King Jarvis, Bill Lawrence, Gwen and Stan Lawrey, Alister and Shirl McKenzie, Norma Miller, Faye and Rob Muddyman, Christine Rhodes, Glad Stephens, Ilma and Jack Wallace. Maureen Bell made the costumes, Les Harry played the piano, Rob Muddyman played guitar and Jack Wallace the piano accordion. The Muddymans, well-known country music singers and song-writers, were the

only ones with any experience of performing in public.

After about six months Norma Miller took over the arrangement of the programme and Val Walker was invited to become the pianist. The troupe was self-supporting — all the money they raised went back into the costs of materials and Norma was now making all the costumes. Because few of the members had ever received any vocal training, Val re-wrote most of the music in a lower key.

The Victorian Council on the Aging Inc. (VCOTA) presented a Concert Party Award each year during Senior Citizens Week. Buoyed by the success of their concerts the Yarra Glen Entertainers decided to take part in the awards in 1990. In February and March a pair of judges from VCOTA traveled around Victoria to attend a concert of each of the 25-30 participating groups in their home towns. They short-listed about seven groups to compete at the semi-finals in the Dendy Theatre, Brighton. Four groups were then selected to go on to the final at the end of March. In the first year of entering the competition the Yarra Glen Entertainers reached the finals and were awarded Third Prize. So the next year they had another go and were awarded Second Prize, one point behind the winners Mornington Revellers. The success of the Yarra Glen Entertainers is put into perspective when it is noted that many of the groups they competed against included people who had spent their lives as professional entertainers, seamstresses and costume designers or had other associations with the entertainment industry.

Norma Miller was now convinced the Yarra Glen Entertainers could 'take the prize'. It was

through her leadership and direction, and her work on the costumes which inspired the group to carry on. She says it was the dedication of each of the members, their willingness to give the time and their cooperation that resulted in success. And success they had – for on Saturday April 11 1992 at a special supper dance at the Hilton Hotel in Melbourne, the Premier of Victoria Joan Kirner presented the Yarra Glen Entertainers with First Prize. Norma relates how she was advised by telephone of the award soon after the Final but told that she must keep the secret until the night of the presentation almost two weeks later. She was asked to bring as many of the Yarra Glen Entertainers as possible to the Supper Dance *but without letting any of them know of their success*. None of the group can understand how Norma, who is naturally garrulous, could keep such excitement to herself for so long.

Much of the success of the group can be attributed to the sense of fun and camaraderie enjoyed by the members. Their spirit was evident on the occasion when Thelma Exton spent time in Maroondah Hospital with a broken leg. She was not surprised to see Norma and a couple of the others appear for a visit but she was surprised when the ward continued to fill as the entire group filed in. They then launched into concert accompanied by Val on the small piano they had brought with them. The nurses loved it and were soon fox-trotting in the corridor. The Entertainers were an intrepid lot. Once Thelma was home again she was expected to perform despite the fact she was still recovering from the operation on her leg, and her sister Alma also performed at another time with two broken ribs.

The Yarra Glen Entertainers continued their performances for another five years giving two or three concerts a month. The last concert was given at the Wantirna Friendship Club on 18 September 1997. The final event was a luncheon on 12 November that year when the remaining funds were divided among the members. As all the members were over fifty years of age when they started in 1986, there had sadly been some who had passed on during the eleven years the Entertainers were together. For those who remain their eyes light up and the tales unfold as they recall the fun they shared and the acclaim they received from their audiences.



Top L-R: Norma Miller, Betty Brown, Joyce Harriss, Joyce Haddock, Alma Goss, Glad Stephens, Thelma Exton, Faye Muddyman

Bottom L-R: Rob Muddyman, Jack Wallace, Percy Goss, Wilf Anderson, Alister McKenzie and Laurie Down

A poem on Yarra Glen

By Messrs G. Lorimer and O. McKenna

To hear a poem on Yarra Glen you've waited far too long,

For as I know you'd love to hear its history in a song.

So now you should be happy to be hearing this at last

In words that are relating to the present and the past.

We all agree that Yarra Glen, of which you are so proud,

Is blessed with all the greatest gifts that nature has endowed

The verdant hills and pasture lands, the valleys deep and wide

Contribute to the beauty of this grand old country side.

To a spot down by the Yarra where the gums and wattles grow

The pioneers came and settled in the years of long ago

To till the soil and build their homes they worked from dawn to dark

While many lived in humpies that were built of stringy bark.

The pioneers in those early days who worked to clear the land

Were faced with many hardships and as you can understand —

There were no motor tractors and the bullock teams were slow

But they did have four-horse coaches that were run by Cobb & Co.

Back in the days when Yarra Glen was known as Yarra Flats

The ladies wore long dresses and the men wore boxer hats

With bowyangs on their trousers and their pipes were made of clay.

Such things are not the fashion in Yarra Glen today.

When we read of all the changes that have taken place since then

We should pay a special tribute to the people of the 'Glen

Who have set a great example by their courage and their skill,

Especially those old pioneers who are living with us still.

We conclude with fondest memories of the pioneers who are gone

And we eulogise their efforts for their jobs so nobly done;

Their names will be remembered in our verses and our prose

And will never be forgotten while the River Yarra flows.

[Ed: We have been unable to identify the authors of this poem or date it. If anybody can assist with this information please send an email or note to the Editor or the Secretary.]

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RECENT & FUTURE

EVENTS

Membership Fees

The YG&DHS annual subscription to the Royal Historical Society of Victoria has recently been paid. An insurance cover for public liability has also been taken out to cover the Yarra Glen & Districts Historical Society at the rate of \$9 per head of our membership. This means that the cost of membership will need to be discussed at our next Annual General Meeting in October.

Maroondah Aqueduct

A ceremony was held near Yering Gorge last month to formally recognise the closing of the section of the aqueduct that runs between Christmas Hills and Research. It has been replaced by the Winneke-Preston pipeline. Melbourne Water invited Fred Sadlier, a member of YG&DHS, to turn the section off because Fred had been caretaker of the section for many

years. (See photographs and article in: *Mountain Views Mail* 3 May 2005)

Association of Eastern Historical Societies Conference 2005

Brenda Cawte and Leigh Ahern attended the annual AEHS Conference on Saturday 30 April. It was held at the Box Hill Town Hall. The guest speaker was David Gawler who presented an account of the life of his father John Stevens Gawler. The latter was the first Dean of Architecture at the University of Melbourne and also a Councillor at Nunawading and Box Hill.

Knox Historical Society 40th Anniversary

Sat. 14 May 2005 – Millers Homestead

Healesville Historical Society

Sun 22 May 2pm

Jean Short speaking on 'Nursing'

Healesville Historical Society

Sun 26 June 2pm

Ray Meagher speaking on 'Handsaws'

AEHS Annual General Meeting

Sat. 24 September, Deep Creek Rd,
Ringwood

Thanks to 'Hoogies' Hardware in Bell Street who continue to provide us with space for our photo display.

