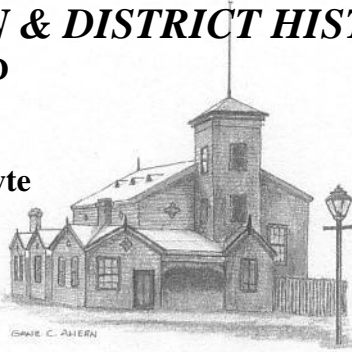


# YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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## NEWSLETTER

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### FROM THE EDITOR

In previous issues we have provided histories of the current churches in Yarra Glen: the Uniting Church (No.15), the Roman Catholic Church (No.17) and the Church of England (No.21). Recently Eric, our Secretary, was asked for information about any defunct churches in the area. This prompted us to compile the following article on the churches that were once a key factor in the life of many in the various communities. Only one has a surviving building on the site to remind people of its existence. If anyone has any memories or information about these churches we would be grateful to hear from you so that we can add to the rather scanty details we have on file. With no buildings, and records scattered or discarded, this part of our history is in danger of being lost to us. Eric's contact details are listed above or a letter to the Editor is welcome.

We were fortunate to have Bill Murcutt as our guest speaker at the May meeting. He is a descendant of the Williamson family and has been researching the family history for many years. A lively and interesting discussion ensued because some current and former residents of the district who had special association with the Williamson family also accepted our invitation to attend the meeting. One of these was John Scott, a direct descendant who had inherited "Sunnyside". A summary of Bill's address to the meeting is included below. Bill will also be attending the Annual General Meeting in October after which he will give another talk about this pioneering family.

It is not unusual to read or hear of a person celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. But it must be rare for that person to still be residing in the district in which they were born, raised, married and in turn raised their own family. In fact Doreen Ayres still lives with some of her sons in the home that she and her husband Bill established in Symond Street more than fifty years ago. It is a happy coincidence that Doreen was a member of one of the churches featured in this Newsletter. See our article about Doreen on page 4.

### CHURCHES OF BYGONE DAYS

There were several churches in the district that no longer exist. Only in one case does the building still stand and that is at Dixons Creek.

#### Dixons Creek Methodist Church

This was one of the earliest churches in the district. It was erected in 1881 on land donated by Henry Robinson, brother of Urina Hargreaves. The building was a paling structure on the eastern side of the present Melba Highway. A brass plaque on a concrete block now marks the site.

Charles Edwin Hargreaves (1836-1879) settled on land at Dixons Creek in the late 1860s but there had not even been a visiting clergyman in the ten years that he lived there. In 1879 when he lay seriously ill in hospital he vowed that he would start a Church service if he recovered. Sadly he died aged only 43, but on the next Sunday his widow Urina held a service in her home.

*After that a travelling Missionary, Mr Sherwell, took over the services. When the home became too small for all the adults and children, the leaders obtained permission to hold services in a fencer's slab hut belonging to the Bell's of Gulf Station, Yarra Glen who owned the property. The Trustees then Mr Tom Clements, Mr Fred Hargreaves and Mrs Urina Hargreaves decided to link up with the Lilydale Methodist Circuit.*

*The first minister to come to Dixon's Creek to preach was the Rev. Hounsell, a Methodist minister under whose guidance Mr John Riley became a local preacher...Mrs Sarah Gordon held the 1<sup>st</sup> Midweek Fellowship meeting in her home "Mountain Park" and two of her sons, Arthur and Frank became local preachers. Eight years after commencing services, Dixon's Creek was linked up with the Healesville Circuit which had just begun.*

Fund raising activities were held from time to time to pay off the debts for the building and the organ. In February 1898 a concert of Melbourne choristers was well attended. The decorations were put up by 'the gentlemen' and the tea was organised by Miss Wall

and Mesdames Ellis, Hodges, Reilley, Clements and Lowes.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Church was held in March 1905. The Revd Crean of Lilydale preached to large congregations afternoon and evening. On Monday a tea and public meeting was held which was chaired by Samuel Scott, President of Eltham Shire. He had presided at the public meetings for some years.

A report in the Healesville Guardian in July 1916 stated that

*Methodists in and around Dixons Creek have long felt the need of a new Church building. The old Church ... at present propped up on all sides to keep it together, has done duty for the past 30 years, and is altogether inadequate for present needs.*

Inspired by the success of the volunteers who built the Badger Creek church in a day, the Dixons Creek community organised supplies of materials and labour for a similar project. A new site next to the school was donated by William Bell. Timber cutters felled the trees in the forest, carters took them to Mr Beach's mill, and then to the site. Mr W. Smith was foreman to 30 volunteer workers of whom an average of 18 appeared each day. The ladies maintained a steady supply of refreshments. On Monday the frame and rafters were erected, on Tuesday the roofing iron and weatherboards were attached, on Wednesday the floor was laid and a start made to lining the walls, the heavy work was completed on Thursday, and the painting and varnishing was done on Friday and Saturday: all in time for the church to be opened on Sunday. The services were conducted in the afternoon and evening by Revd W. Morley of Melbourne.

The building measured 30 feet by 20 feet and accommodated up to 150 people. This new church was unencumbered by debt due to the contributions of the community. Only ten years later it was destroyed in the bushfire of 1926. A replacement built in 1927 was also destroyed in the 1939 fires. The current building, now a private residence was erected in 1940.

Church services were held at Dixons Creek for 114 years until the church was closed at a special service of thanksgiving on Sunday 17 September 1995. Revd Claire Tanner of the Uniting Church's Healesville parish conducted the service.

### **Steels Creek - United Methodist Free Church**

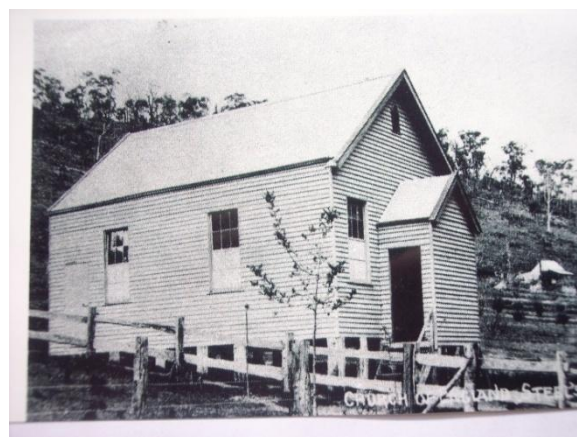
Another Methodist Church was opened at Steels Creek in December 1886. It measured 28 by 20 feet and was built by Mr A. J. Hubbard who donated his services free of charge. The first services on Sunday 12 December were conducted by Revd G. Hounsell. Disappointment was expressed in the relatively low attendances, 75 for the afternoon and 25 for the

evening, which was attributed to confusion over the arrival of a preacher from Melbourne. On Tuesday 14 December 140 people attended a Tea at the church and then adjourned to Mr Hubbard's farm on the flats for games.

Funds were required for the cost of materials and other building requirements. In November of the following years an anniversary picnic was held which was followed by a concert in aid of the building fund.

Band of Hope meetings were held on Saturday evenings presided over by Mr Hubbard who 'conducted the meetings in his usual humourous style'. The programme included humourous and instructive skits, recitations and songs. Participants included members of the Friar, Hubbard, Fletcher, Morris and Gordon families.

### **Steels Creek – St Barnabas' Church of England**



On Monday 26 November 1888 a Concert was held at Steels Creek in aid of the Steels Creek Church of England Building Fund.

There is some conjecture as to whether this was a separate building or was the one that had been built by the Methodists. As the Concert was held on the same day as the Methodists held their 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary Picnic to commemorate the opening of the Sunday School and Band of Hope it can be assumed that the Methodist Church was still functioning. A year later a newspaper reports that the Anglicans had built a church.

*The Church of England people at Yarra Glen have a nice little church, and their brethren at Steels Creek, who think they must not lack behind, have built one locally, but find themselves a little short of the requisites, hence the concert, which was held at Yarra Glen to ensure a larger gathering, and the result must have satisfied the promoters to their hearts content. (EO 17 May 1889)*

Mr C. K. Cole was in charge of the Healesville parish at this time and he assisted Mr E. H. Cameron who was master of ceremonies for the concert.

St Barnabas' Church prospered and in July 1900 a report in *The Remembrancer* (the church paper of Yarra Glen district) stated that the

*... attendances at this little church have been most encouraging. Every Sunday it is the pleasant experience of your minister to find the church comfortably filled, and sometimes almost uncomfortably. The heartiness of the service is a big item in this happy gathering Sunday after Sunday. Foremost in this is the warm-hearted work of the choir (with) Miss Hubbard at the organ and her two rows of choristers. The regular attendance of worshippers from Dixons's Creek is a pleasing feature of the service. Kinglake, too, sends down its representatives at times. – Our guardians are Messrs E. C. Morris, R. Hubbard and W. Hubbard. (LE Jul 1900)*

It is believed that the church was closed by 1959.

### **Christmas Hills – Christ Church (Church of England)**

The Christmas Hills community completed their church in 1892. It was opened by the Ven. Archdeacon Stretch on 23 October. The building was on the eastern side of Ridge Road, almost opposite Muir's bakery. Several pines mark the site today. The first guardians were Mr H. Ashmore and Mr M. Connolly.

The congregation swelled during the summer months when holidaymakers came to the many guesthouses that were scattered along the ridges. During the winter months however, the numbers were low and a church member reporting in *The Remembrancer* in July 1900 aimed to ensure that the parishioners did not 'slack off':

*In the summer so much has to be done for the comfort of visitors that there is little time to think of ourselves; but now we have an opportunity which should not be lost...We need to take more pains over the musical part of our service.*

A new organ had been purchased which was to be played by Miss Rudd whose generosity had made the purchase possible. A Bible class had been started on Friday nights.

.. The guardians of the Church in 1900 were Mr Harris, Mr Calwell, Mr Muir and Mr Shaw.

The little wooden building withstood bushfires for more than ninety years. After the second world war the population diminished and the building fell into disrepair, particularly with termite damage. The Board of Works acquired the property when it was preparing for the Sugarloaf Dam project and the church building was demolished in the early 1980s.

### **Tarrawarra - Church of England**

The first Anglican service in Tarrawarra was held on 16 April 1893 in a small renovated building that was placed alongside the railway station at the expense of Mr Richard Woolcott. (LE 21 Apr 1893) The first baptism was that of Ellen Margaret Hanley on 4 June 1893.

On the 16 April 1901 a block of land next to the State School on the Old Healesville Road was purchased for the Church. In a letter to *Mountain Views* 15 July 1980 Bill Lawrence, a long time resident of Tarrawarra said that

*...the little church was originally situated at the corner of Old Healesville and Long Gully Roads. It was moved to the top of the hill opposite the Chandler property known as "Apex" where it served for many years as both church and school house.*

Another account published in *Healeville History News* Sept 1999 was compiled by J. S. Murphy who was a teacher at the school about 1923. He states that prior to 1900 there were several attempts at operating a school. These were in a variety of buildings and only lasted for short periods of time. One was held in a hut on Fleming's property at the corner of Baileys Lane and Yarra Glen Road. This school was apparently shifted to the top of the hill and a larger building added. Murphy said that 'this building like many others in the country districts is primarily a church and is leased to the Education Department for school purposes.'

Cicely and Mildred Dennis, relatives of C. J. Dennis, lived at "Murngall" in Long Gully Road and drove to church in a buggy. Cicely regularly played the organ. She was engaged to Walter Gammon who died in a World War 1 campaign in France in March 1917. His memorial plaque hung in the Tarrawarra church and was moved to Healesville when the church closed.

The Tarrawarra Church was closed in 1920. The building was then moved to Healesville by 'Pop' Adams to become the Church Hall for St John's in the 1930s.

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## **WILLIAMSON FAMILY**

The Williamson family selected land at Dixons Creek in the 1850s and some of the land was still held in the family in the late twentieth century. This was 'Sunnyside' which was sold by the Scott family (Williamson descendants) about 1970.

Robert Williamson (1823-94) was the first to come to Australia. He liked what he saw but returned to Scotland to marry and to encourage his brothers to emigrate.

The family lived at New Cumnock near Ayr. Their father was a sheep farmer and probably a tenant farmer. In 1832 his wife died of cancer at the age of 30 years. The 1841 census shows the two youngest boys, John (1828-1907) and James (1831-1911), were living with their father and a female servant. The older boys, Robert and David (1826-84), were probably living elsewhere as farm workers.

James and David Williamson migrated to Australia in 1852 and John followed in 1853. Robert married Elizabeth Caldwell in 1854 at Straiton after which they also travelled to Australia. She was 19 years old, Robert was 31. Three of the brothers gave their occupation as carter and one was listed as a farm labourer.

David, James and John worked on properties on the Yarra River growing potatoes at Bulleen and Yarra Flats. The latter was Lot 57 in the parish of Burgoyne. By 1858 both Robert and David had purchased land in Templestowe and Doncaster respectively. In the 1860s the four brothers also bought an 80 acre block each in Dixons Creek through the land grants for £1 an acre. They named this landmark hill with the twin peaks High Bow, a Scottish term for 'high double hills'. John and James also shared 350 acres on the other side of Melba Highway. Their partnership dissolved in 1872 and the property was split in half. James took the acreage with the homestead which he called "Sunnyside".

Soon after they arrived in Australia the young men employed a housekeeper, Christina McPherson. She became James' wife in 1857. David and John then employed another housekeeper, Margaret Ferguson, who subsequently became David's wife in 1858. David purchased 65 acres in Bulleen and he and Margaret established their farm 'Knoweside' there. John followed the pattern and married his housekeeper Mary Durward (nee McHardy) in 1859. Mary was a widow, aged only 24 years, with one small child who was named Clementina.

James and Christina had eleven children and John and Mary had nine all of whom, except an infant daughter of John and Mary, were raised at Dixons Creek.

## **DOREEN AYRES CELEBRATES HER 100<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAY**

The Historical Society congratulates Doreen Ayres on her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday which was celebrated at the Yarra Glen Memorial Hall among many family and friends.

Doreen was born **Emma Doreen Victoria Hubbard** on 24 May 1907 in Steels Creek. She was the thirteenth child of William Hubbard (1859-1934) and Mary Bell Reilly (1868-1955). Two more children were born after Doreen making fifteen in all. William Hubbard was an orchardist who won many prizes at the Yarra Glen show (see Issue No.22).

Doreen attended the Steels Creek school and joined in various activities such as the Tennis Club. She lived all her life in Steels Creek and Yarra Glen apart from 1926-1928 when she lived with one of her married sisters in Coburg.



*Steels Creek Tennis Club. Doreen is standing, second from right*

William Hubbard arrived in Australia with his parents in 1860 and lived in Steels Creek from the mid 1860s. As he also came from a large family of twelve Doreen has had many Hubbard relations in the area. Through her mother Doreen is also related to the McKenzie, Brudenell and Hargreaves families.

In December 1934 Doreen married another local, William (Bill) Ayres (1909-89) at St Barnabas' Anglican Church in Steels Creek. The Hubbard family were Anglicans and Doreen would have known this little church well. Bill's family had been residents of Dixons Creek since the early 1900s and he was born there. His younger sister Eva (1913-87) married Doreen's brother Norman Hubbard (1910-57) in 1938 forging a second link between the families.

Doreen and Bill have eight children most of whom still live in the district.