

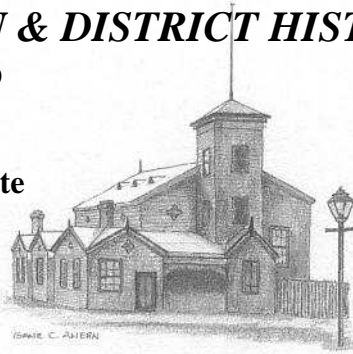
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NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE EDITOR

Whenever there is a guest speaker at the monthly meetings of the Society the topics never fail to stimulate interest and discussion. They range from a member talking of family history in the area to a topic that has no direct relevance to our district. The latter extend our knowledge and often provide pleasure in the appreciation of some skill or craft.

Two of the items in this issue of the Newsletter are based on talks given at recent meetings and represent this diversity. Our most recent speaker was a member talking about the history of his family. Geoff Keets still farms the property that was selected by his great grandfather in 1868. A summary of his talk is included in this issue. As background to the Keets family history a brief account is given of the land laws which changed European settlement in the area from large pastoral properties to smaller agricultural and horticultural farms.

In July our guest speaker was Hedley Deacon of North Ringwood. Those who attended were pleasantly surprised and intrigued to learn about stamp boxes, an item that was unknown to them and probably to most people in the community. Extracts from his talk are presented on page 4.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM will be held on **Sunday 14 October** at 1:30pm in the Yarra Glen & District Living & Learning Centre.

Annual subscriptions will be due on that date.

Nominations are called for all positions on the Committee

President

Vice President

Secretary

Treasurer

Committee members (3)

Nomination forms will be available from the Secretary at the September meeting or contact him to have one sent to you (contact details at top of this page).

Guest speaker will be Bill Murcott who is giving another talk on the Williamson family.

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LAND SETTLEMENT

When the Port Phillip District was first settled by non-indigenous people it was under the jurisdiction of the New South Wales Government. The Squatting Act was passed on 29 July 1836 to regulate the growing practice of 'squatting' on vast areas of Crown Land. Licences were issued to those who wished to graze stock on land beyond the limits of settlement. Penalties could be imposed for unlicensed use of the land. It was 1838 before a Commissioner of Crown Lands was appointed and licences began to be issued. The squatters paid an annual fee of £10 for the lease plus a levy per head of cattle. Boundaries were usually defined by natural markers such as rivers, streams or hills. The lessee could sell the licence but did not own the land.

The first squatters appeared in the Yarra Glen district at that time. The Ryrie brothers travelled overland from New South Wales and in 1838 took up 43,000 acres that included present day Yering, Tarrawarra and Yarra Glen. Joseph Stevenson obtained a licence for his Christmas Hills run in 1842 and John Dickson registered a pastoral licence for Gulf Station (no.2) in 1846. Gulf Station (no.1) fell within the limits of settlement which was a 25 mile radius from Melbourne.

A Privy Council Order in 1847 included Pre-Emptive Rights for pastoral leaseholders which allowed them to purchase part of their land at £1 per acre without contesting it at auction. The land was surveyed in square-mile blocks (640 acres). These blocks usually included the homestead and improved areas. Those who purchased land under Pre-Emptive Right included the Ryries at View Hill (Tarrawarra) and Yering, John Dickson at Gulf Station and James McPherson on the Yarra south of Christmas Hills (1857). Paul de Castella bought the Yering run from Ryrie in 1850 and George Symons purchased Ryrie's Tarrawarra pastoral lease in 1853. William Bell and Tom Armstrong after several years sub-leasing from John Dickson purchased Gulf Station about 1853-56.

In 1851 Victoria became a separate colony but it was several years before the land laws changed. Gold was discovered in the same year. The massive immigration during the ensuing gold rushes increased the demand for land, particularly as the gold diggers sought to invest their new wealth and/or a more settled existence. The Victorian Land League was formed in 1856 to combat the lobbying of the pastoralists who wished to preserve their large holdings. The League championed the ideal of the yeoman farmer who wished to be self-sufficient on a modest land holding. The first Victorian land selection Act was passed in 1860 (*Nicholson's Act of 1860*). Under this Act surveyed land was available in allotments of 80-640 acres. Each block was divided in half. The selector purchased one half of the allotment at £1 per acre and leased the other half. The lease was for a period up to seven years at the rate of one shilling per

acre per year. At any time during this period the selector could pay the balance owed at £1 per acre to obtain a Crown Grant (ie. the land was alienated from the Crown and the purchaser gained the title). The Nicholson Act and its successor failed to thwart the pastoralists and their land grabs because if more than one person applied for the same allotment it went to the highest bidder.

Duffy's Land Act of 1862 included a smaller allotment of 40 acres and changed the lease payments to 2s 6p per acre per annum for eight years which meant that at the end of the lease the selector did not owe any money. It also decreed that if more than one person applied for the same block of land the contest was resolved by lottery rather than auction. Improvements had to be made in the form of a substantial fence, or cultivation of one tenth of the acreage within twelve months, or the erection of a habitable building. Once more the wealthy had strategies to get around this. One was to have a portable building that could be towed to the area when a Lands Department inspector was due to visit. David Friar (1842–1914) selected 320 acres at Yarra Flats in 1863. His sister-in-law Mary Friar, a widow, purchased 80 acres at Steels Creek in 1863 plus an adjoining 40 acres from Robert Charlton. [Friar is variously spelt including Fryer or Frier. Mary married George Garread in 1871).

Grant's Land Act of 1865 declared 157 areas of Crown Land open for selection for agriculture including Christmas Hills, Steels Creek and Burgoyne. This Act removed the option of renting one half of the land. Selectors could not purchase the property outright in the first three years but had to lease it and make improvements to the value of £1 per acre per annum. Rents were reduced to 2s per acre but the rental could not be used to pay off the land. Having met the conditions of improving the land the selector could obtain title to the land at £1 per acre outright or pay 2s per acre for the next seven years. Land was selected by a 'wheel of fortune'. The aspiring selector registered his interest and the man whose ticket was drawn first had first choice of the surveyed land. Section 42 of Grant's Act is interesting and may have been applied in Steels Creek. It allowed gold diggers to take up licensed land, to a maximum of twenty acres, beyond the surveyed parishes but within a ten mile radius of a goldfield. By 1868 the maximum acreage was increased to 160 acres and the radius to thirty miles.

Grant's Land Act of 1869 made a number of changes to the law including the maximum land area which could be purchased (reduced from 640 to 320 acres). It also opened the whole colony for selection. As before land was held for the first three years under licence. If improved and enclosed the selector could then lease the land for a further seven years. The change in this Act was that the selector could buy the land any time after the third year with the rent incorporated in the purchase price.

George Fletcher (1830-1917) was employed at View Hill for four years and then purchased 80 acres at Steels Creek and over time added another 320 acres. William Hubbard (1837- 97) selected 80 wilderness acres at Steels Creek and later secured a block of 320 acres. He cleared, drained and fenced his property to make it 'one of the finest in the district'. James Keets selected 80 acres under Grant's Act in 1868 and added another 200 acres over time. Anthony Scott (1843-1920) first selected 80 acres to which he later added up to 800 acres which he farmed with his brother William. Their brother Jonathon also selected land at Steels Creek. Others who settled in Steels Creek were Robert Charlton, Edward Cullis, John Cummins, James Jewson, William Little, Ewan Cameron and John Burgess Wilson.

Four Williamson brothers selected blocks of 80 acres each on High Bow at Dixons Creek. Their neighbours to the north on 80 acre blocks included Thomas Bell, David Armstrong, William Bell, John Bell and Samuel Clements who had

frontages to what is now Melba Highway. Frederick William Hargreaves (1841-1919) had 80 acres in Dixons Creek to which he obtained title in 1874. He added another 63 acres in 1899. His brother Charles Edwin Hargreaves (1836-79) also took up 80 acres in the same period. Tom Walters had an adjoining 80 acre block.

Along the western side of what is now Glenview Road the first selectors were E. Jones (his block surrounded the cemetery), W. Watkins, Thomas and William Sadler.

Sources and further reading

G. L. Blackburn, *A history of the Yarra Glen district*, 1968

John H. Edwards, *The Ryrie family*. 2007

Raymond Henderson, *From Jolimont to Yering*, 2006.

Public Record Office Victoria, *Land Acts in Victoria to 1884*, www.prov.vic.gov.au/peopleparliament/qt_landacts.asp

D. J. Regan, "Victorian land selection records", *Ancestor*, vol.17, no. 4, Dec-Feb 1986/87, pp. 3-9.

Mick Woiwod, *Once around the Sugarloaf*, 1992.

KEETS FAMILY

Geoff Keets is the only person we know in the district who still farms on the property that his family selected in the 1860s. Not only that but he is a direct descendant of the original selector.

Geoff's great grandfather James Keets was born in Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire in 1824. He arrived in Australia in 1849 and settled on a farm at Glen Vale near Whittlesea. Two years later he moved to Portland. In 1852 he worked on the Bendigo goldfields for seven months. In 1853 he married Catherine Martha Cullis at Richmond. Catherine was born in Bristol about 1833 and had arrived in Australia aboard the 'Ida' on 12 July 1853.

The couple made their first home on a farm at Plenty which they rented from James Patton. Their first child, Edward John, was born in 1855 and he was followed by James George (1857), George (1861), Harriet (1864) and Arthur (1867). In 1865 the family moved to Yarra Flats where James rented 100 acres from J. Hutchinson for three years. He then selected 80 acres under Grant's Act on which he conducted general farming and dairying. As time went by he purchased a further 200 acres. In 1871 he gained title to the land. This title is still held in the family today. The original 80 acres was split in 1888 when the MMBW put the Maroondah Aqueduct through the property.

James and Catherine's children, John, George and Harriet are listed as pupils of the Yarra Flats school in 1868. Arthur was just a baby at that time but he probably attended the school during the period that a new school was built on the current site. John died aged only 35 in 1890 and is buried at the Yarra Glen cemetery.

Harriet Keets was the first to marry when she married Jack Smith (1858–1945) in the early 1880s. They had a large family, the first of whom was Martha, born in 1884. Jack was not a good provider as he was prone to alcoholism. In 1925 James Keets transferred a block of land, on the corner where the road leads up to Mt Wise, to Harriet in 1925. Jack Smith operated a bakery from this site. In later life Harriet and Jack's children returned to this home and cared for each other. Fernetta (Mrs Gow) lived there until the late 1980s.

Arthur Keets married Mary Pember in 1891. For many years they lived on the eastern corner of Oliver Street above the railway station and Mary (known as Polly) operated the Coffee Palace. Prior to that Martha Keets had helped Arthur. This is where George met his bride Lily (Lillian) Sadler. George transported timber to the railway and Lily caught the train to

work. They married in 1905 and had two sons, George (b. 1906) and Ralph (b. 1908).

George Keets (1861–1939) carted timber from sawmills in Toolangi and Healesville using a team of bullocks. Later he switched to a four-wheel wagon with a team of Clydesdale horses. The horses were entered in the Yarra Glen Show each year and regularly won awards. He continued to farm on the family property after his father James died in 1911. In February 1912 a bushfire damaged much of the grass and fencing. The threat to the community was so bad that Yarra Glen businesses closed for the day so that employees could fight the fire.

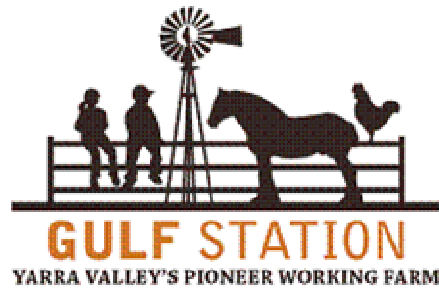
Young George (1906–1988) and his brother Ralph (1908–1971) attended Yarra Glen Primary School from 1912 and 1914 respectively. George continued on with the family farm and the Clydesdale horses. Ralph pursued a career as a builder. Obviously skilled with his hands, he had carved a baptismal font for the Church of England in 1928. In 1942 Ralph was Secretary of the Fire Brigade when he enlisted in the Army during WWII.

Ralph's son Geoff inherited the property in 1988. The old farm house and buildings were sadly beyond repair and were demolished. Geoff and his wife Sonia erected a new home on the hill and have continued to farm the property.



George Keets (1906-88) with his horse in the mid-70s. Across the road behind them can be seen the pine tree at the entrance to his property and the pines that once lined the aqueduct.

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Gulf Station has a new logo (see above) and a new newsletter called *Barn Yarn: the Gulf Station Newsletter*.

They have also launched a new website

www.gulfstation.com.au

Check it out to see (and hear) forth coming events, latest developments and all the new arrivals. Spring has definitely sprung down on the farm.

The next event is a Scottish Festival which is scheduled for November 2007.

DONATIONS TO OUR LIBRARY

Murray Houghton, *Prosit Carl!: a centenary tribute to Carl (a.k.a Charles) Walter, an itinerant photographer and botanist who in his maturer years made Anderson's Creek his home*. Warrandyte Historical Society, 2007. 68p., illus.

Donated to the Yarra Glen & District Historical Society by the author.

This spiral bound work is the result of many years research by the author into the life and work of the photographer, who by the way was responsible for the invaluable collection of photographs of the Aboriginal People of Coranderrk. In this book we find that Carl Walter (1831-1907) was also a skilled botanist and intrepid bushman. He travelled alone through the wilderness of Victoria and also accompanied government survey expeditions. In 1864 he arrived at the gold field of Andersons Creek (now Warrandyte) and photographed the "coffer dams", an unusual method of mining in the river. His affinity with the community, which included Murray Houghton's ancestor Harry Houghton, led Walter to return frequently to Andersons Creek and eventually to build a home there. This was often the point from which he commenced his expeditions. He established a good relationship with the Aboriginal People and spent time living among them not only at Coranderrk but also in northern and eastern Victoria.

The book is well-illustrated with photographs and engravings that have been thoughtfully selected by the author.

STAMP BOXES

The following text has been extracted from a paper by Hedley Deacon based on a talk he gave to the Society on 8 July 2007. The complete illustrated article written by Hedley is held by the Society. Contact the Secretary for further information.

At the start of the nineteenth century mankind was dependant on nature for his transport by horse on the land and wind on the sea. During the next hundred years man had harnessed the power of steam followed by electricity and the internal combustion engine. The stamp box was a product of this process and its story reflects the history of an age when humans achieved a greater mastery of their environment than they had managed in the previous 2000 years. The Stockton – Darlington railway line was opened in 1825 followed by the Liverpool – Manchester Line in 1830. Over the next 20 years all major cities had been connected by railway line and by the turn of the century Britain had over 5000 mile rail network. Travel was available for the working man and we saw the start of the souvenir trade.



Stamp boxes were not an overnight success and the first boxes were made of wood or brass and restricted to the UK for the first 40 years. Initially one had to take the letter to the post office and the staff would affix the stamp. It was not until street collecting boxes were introduced nation-wide in Britain in the 1870's, with a decade or two added for other countries, that we saw a surge in stamp boxes. It did not really take off until the 1890's, when they became truly popular up to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. They were produced around the world in a staggering variety of shapes and materials. This period is generally referred to by the French as 'La Belle Époque', (the beautiful time).

From the end of the 18th century through the early decades of the 19th century ... the taking of snuff [was] a regular habit. Small containers for keeping snuff were needed and the Scots developed wooden airtight containers with tartan decorated bases. As snuff declined and many manufacturers went out of business, the Smith brothers who lived in the mining village of Mauchline branched out into making tea caddies and cigar cases, then after the first postage stamps were introduced by William Hill in 1840 into stamp boxes. We also know that as well as tartan decorated boxes they made a second type of box from sycamore wood with fine scenic transfers.

Generally most stamp boxes can be identified by their distinctive sloped interior for ease of sliding out the stamp [but] the early boxes did not have this distinctive slope. [The] first containers for postage stamps were simple, if decorative. Wood boxes in Mauchline ware and Tunbridge ware and some simple brass boxes were probably produced from around middle of the

1840's. It was not until 1854, however, that there is any evidence of innovative thinking being applied to the storage and dispensing of stamps. The first registered design for a stamp box in combination with a moistener was 12th September 1854. It actually dispensed stamps from a strip of perforated stamps. Other designs were produced but with little commercial success. In the 1870's we saw the introduction of pocket cases with compartments for stamps of two different denominations, made in brass and often silver plated. These were adaptations of needle cases which were developed in the late 1860's and were very successful.

The 1880's was the decade that saw the silver stamp case come into regular production on both sides of the Atlantic.

Considerable ingenuity was also expended in the combination of stamp boxes with other desk and personal equipment. One obvious item combined the stamp box with a stamp moistener and several were produced. Attempts to produce a pocket version were not really successful in containing the water.

There does not seem to be any limit on the materials that can be used for making stamp boxes. Wood, silver brass and gold have previously been mentioned. Boxes are also found in ivory, Bakelite, paper mache spelter, pewter, aluminium, nickel, tin, bronze copper, Britannia metal, glass, leather, amber, mother of pearl and marble, porcelain, china and ceramics. This list is by no means exhaustive. Porcelain and China stamp boxes are probably the hardest to identify and it is only by looking at the maker's catalogue that one can be certain as to the purpose of the item listed. Stamp boxes have been produced by Dresden, Gabriel Legrand, Friedrich Deusch, Max Rosler, Limoges and Goss. There seems to be very few places around the world that did not at one time or another produce stamp boxes.

Without doubt the greatest creator of objects of art during the stamp box period was Karl Faberge ... His practical objects such as stamp boxes, all tend to show a restrained elegance derived from the neoclassicism of the late 18th century, reflecting the conservative tastes of his aristocrat clientele...[One should also] spare a thought for those at the other end of the scale, with a lack of materials and appalling working conditions...referred to as Trench Art [it] comprises items created in time of war in the trenches during the lull in hostilities. Items [were] fashioned from scraps of metal, such as shell casings and other materials that may be lying around.

It may surprise you to know that stamp boxes are still being produced and sold today even in Australia. I have, in daily use, a beautiful wooden coil dispenser of a very simplistic design which I purchased in Montville in Queensland about four years ago. The Post Office currently sells coils of 100 stamps in a cardboard dispensing box and also a larger triangular plastic dispenser for coils of stamps. The USA has many attractive stamp dispensers currently on sale in a variety of materials wood, metals and china.