

YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

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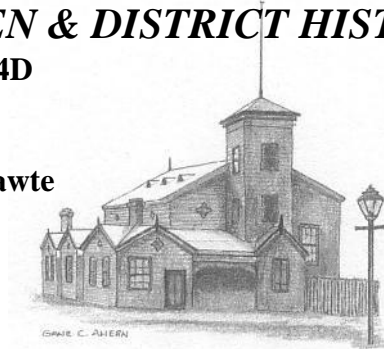
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NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE EDITOR

The Post Office building in most towns throughout Australia has held an important place in history and generally been a landmark, in some cases a grandiose building. But times are changing and the postal service is now a commercial operation. In Yarra Glen as in most other places the Australia Post service is soon going to be provided from a shop located on the opposite side of Bell Street. Although the Yarra Glen Post Office Building is not in the grand style it has been a centre of town activities for fifty-eight years and so a brief history is included below (page 5).

Also included in this issue is a letter provided to us by a member of the Smith family. This letter was written by Mary Smith (1823-1898) soon after she arrived in Melbourne in 1857 with her husband, Benjamin and family. They eventually settled in Christmas Hills and have many descendants throughout the district.

Helen

Do you remember?..... Blue bags

Have you ever wondered what was in those little 'blue bags' that Mum used to put in the rinsing water after boiling up the whites? Why were they also used in first aid?

The calico or paper bags containing 'knobs' of compressed blue powder were produced by Reckitts. The British manufacture of synthetic ultramarine powder, used by artists, first began at their factory in Blackbarrow, England. This was done by heating a mixture of sulphur, soda ash, china clay, pitch and silica.

For laundry purposes the intensely cobalt-coloured material was added to the rinsing water in its little calico bag. The blue colouring imparted a faint blue to white fabrics that enhanced their whiteness to the eye.

When someone was bitten by a bee or wasp a 'knob' of blue was quickly fetched and placed on the bite to reduce swelling and pain. There is conjecture over its effectiveness – some think that the cool moisture of the bag may have given relief rather than the ingredients.

COMING EVENTS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Sunday October 19 2008

Note – this is the third Sunday in October

History Room, Memorial Hall Yarra Glen

President's Report

Financial Report 2007/2008

Election of office bearers.

Yarra Glen Primary School

140th

Celebration

Thursday 13th November 2008

For details ring: 9730 1254



Everyone welcome to come and celebrate.

THE SMITH FAMILY OF 'PARK NOOK'

Mary and Benjamin Smith arrived in Melbourne with three children on 25 January 1857 aboard the "California". Mary was 34 and Benjamin 35. They were both born in Quarndon, Derbyshire and had married on 17 November 1846. The children who accompanied them were William Benjamin (1850-1908), John (1852-1890) and Mary (1854-1859). Another three children were born in Australia: Rebecca Ann in January 1860 (died at one month of age), George born 1861 at Kangaroo Ground but died aged only ten in 1871, and Maria born in November 1863 in Kangaroo Ground.

Benjamin was a carpenter and, as will be seen in Mary's letter, he soon found employment and a cottage for the family to live in seven miles from Melbourne on Plenty Road.

Below is the letter written by Mary Smith to her brothers in England soon after she arrived in Melbourne on 9 February 1857. It was transcribed by Cheryl Muir who said that some monetary terms used by Mary were a little difficult to interpret as to whether she was referring to a halfpenny, or even a farthing (quarter penny).

*Little Burke (sic) Street
Melbourne
Febry 9th 1857*

My dear Brothers

I am thankful to say we arrived quite safely on the 25th January, & came on shore on the 26th after a most beautiful voyage of 81 days, having through the blessing of God had no disease, death or accident. Our Captain was a steady careful man, & a very nice crew (all Dutch men). There were several vessels that came in about the same time that were injured in one way or the other. We had a beautiful start; the Captain said he had never known so good a one. We passed the Straits of Gibraltar the day week we started, & by that time days were an hour longer, & the air mild & beautiful. It was very warm in crossing the line, but of an evening it was beautiful, so cool and pleasant. I generally used to go & look over the side of the vessel at the waters for an hour or two; some times splashing & foaming, & sometimes as glass, but all sparkling as with thousands of Diamonds. You could not possibly form an idea of the beauties of the Ocean. The moon & stars are also splendid there; the moon larger than our Harvest Moon, but it would be quite impossible for me to describe, or for you to imagine. We had two thunder storms about that time; they were bad enough but still nothing to be afraid at. As we reached the Cape of Good Hope it got cooler and

about Xmas it was very cold indeed. We passed in sight of King Edward's Isle, & did we not want shawls & cloaks & still it was summer, what it is in winter I can't tell. There were many whales there as the fishers go there in the summer but cannot stand the winter. We had four storms about then our vessel's (sic) heaving & pitching in all directions. Anything that was not fastened by ropes to the sides of the berths would go rolling about the decks or your berths making a most dreadful noise, still when it was over you could scarce help laughing. Some would be deploring a cup, or glass, that had gone smash, others a bottle & the contents flowing away, then in the midst of all this the vessel would begin again & down a lot more would come. I believe the first Sunday in the New Year was the worst we had, but thank God we passed safely through it all. Several vessels were much injured that night but ours stood it without even a creak to be heard. Although we had so much trouble in the river, still when we got to sea there could be no fault found with her. We were coasting for about a week & on the Saturday morning came in sight of Cape Otway; did it not look refreshing to see the green trees once more, & the sea splashing amongst the rocks, & towards four o'clock the pilot came on board. He took us in sight of his house & cast anchor for the night, as it was not safe to go forwards. At four o'clock we started again having 40 miles to go. I forget what time we got there but there were about 15 started in a small boat for shore, two of them not getting back again. It was about six o'clock when we got on shore on Monday night, so we put our things in a store for which they charge you 6d on each package, large or small, for a week, or if they are only left an hour you have to pay the same. Then we went to look for lodging which we had difficulty in finding, as they only take men in most of the Lodging Houses, but we were very fortunate at last, to find a room where we managed very nicely. We have stayed a fortnight paying 7/6 per week and find ourselves. Melbourne is a beautiful place, superior to most English towns, in fact it is a second London; the town is so well laid out. The streets cross each other & reaching to the extremity each way, the whole street one name, not like they are in Derby, half a dozen names. Everybody here is busy & intent on making money. There is plenty of employment for certain classes; if a man cannot do one thing he must turn his hand to another. It is not a fine tradesman that will make much out, the rough & ready or as they say here the go-ahead sort of folks. Benjamin went after two places, only the second one he got which was to go seven miles in the country as carpenter. He started on the Wednesday night & left the children & me until the Saturday, 8/- per day, with board & lodgings considered as good as 12/- per day here. There seemed plenty going on, so he took a little 3 roomed cottage with a large garden, and here we

are as nice as can be, about a mile from his work. It is a beautiful little place, but I will tell you about it another time. With regards to people getting employ, some that came with us got work the next day, or the day after, & others had not when we left town. Two blacksmiths, one got work the next day 5£ per week. We met him on the Sunday. He said he was a Gentleman. The other 1£ a day. The man that cleaned the decks on the voyage got the second day 10/- per day at breaking stones and several others got work on a haul road to convey water to Melbourne (it passes through this place) at 10/- per day. One man & his wife said they meant to return in two years with plenty of money. When we left town they had nothing to do & what was worse, no money. They had 5£ coming on shore which they drank most of it. Then they could not pay their lodgings so were turned out & there (sic) boxes kept. They came to our lodgings last Saturday morn as I was getting breakfast said they had had none & no money so I gave them their breakfast & a fellow lodger gave them a few shillings, so you see it is not for everyone to do well here any more than in other places. There are people that have been looking for situations for 3 months. I have seen them so know it to be a fact; it is bone & muscle that is wanted here. You can live quite as cheap here as in England. Rents are higher, we pay 12/- per week for this & is thought cheap. We can have a field of two acres if we like, of course more money for it. Such a place as you might wait years to meet with at home. Bread is 10d 4lb loaf, flour 3½ per lb or 10/- for 50 lbs bag, sugar 4½ pound. Very good tea, best 2/- per lb, coffee about the same as at home, bacon 1/6 & upwards, cheese 1/6 to 2/-. Meat Benjamin brought home last night a forequarter mutton weighing 10lbs or more, the price 1/9 but we have it of Mr Brown the gentleman he works for. They have a large school so get their meat from town wholesale. We have it same but you can get it out of shops at 3½d & 4d per lb beautiful mutton & beef 5d & 6d good cuts but they cheaply cook for one meal & fresh again for the next as it is hot & will not keep. Liquors of all sorts are dear. Ale & Porter English 6d for ½ pint. Colonial 3d per pt very good. They tell me it is a rule here never to give change out of a sixpence in a vaults(sic). Clothes you can get quite as cheap as at home. I have seen beautiful silk dresses marked 2-10-0 & calico double width for sheets (brown) 8½d per yard. I do not think the diggings are much good now here. They say very little about them. Pots are very dear here; I wish I had brought some. A cup & saucer cost ½d & then it is such as we should push on one side in England. A plate 1/-. If William comes out & is not started tell him to bring some of any useful sorts packed in a strong box as he would not have many boxes & could have it in the stores. Our clothes were very little worse except leather & that was all green over. They require to be packed very

dry. Servants' wages are very high. A family came out with us a lot of children. One girl about 19 got a place 40£ per year, another about 13 years 12/- per week. You must please either send this letter or let them know at Derby we are here safely so also to West Bromwich with our kindest love. If all is well we will write again by next mail. They go of(sic) once a fortnight or three weeks. One closed the day we landed. With love to you all & hoping this may find you all well.

I remain my dear Brothers

Your Affectionate Sister
M. Smith

Address for us
Preston
Plenty Road
Near Melbourne
Victoria – Australia

Remember us to all friends. Salt butter 2/- per lb
fresh 2/10 eggs 4/6 to 5/- per doz.¹

Mick Woiwod continues their story:

"The Smiths are next heard of at Watery Gully on the Caledonia diggings when, on 2 August 1861, Mary gave evidence at an Inquest into the death of Prunella Bull, a little five year old daughter of her neighbour, who had died tragically as a result of burns sustained when her clothes accidentally caught fire. From Watery Gully, the Smiths moved into a house owned by Andrew Ross on the nearby Kangaroo Ground.

Ross, the enterprising School Master, was busily engaged at the time establishing an Industrial School on land immediately adjacent to present day 'Wellers Pub'. Later he moved this Industrial School to a farm next to the districts original slab school house (on the present State School site). There, he employed Benjamin Smith to build for him what became Kangaroo Ground's first post office store. As time progressed, the Industrial School became less and less viable... [and Ross] moved his establishments up to the nearby crest of the hill, where he had Smith convert the buildings into the district's first hotel".²

In 1864 the Yarra Track was being opened up and Andrew Ross quickly recognised the need for facilities for travellers along the route. The conversion of his school buildings began in late Autumn. "...the imported houses placed near the schoolhouse which had served for bedrooms to boarded pupils were rebuilt near the hotel, and served for a general store and post office also. Delay was experienced in procuring all the material for the new building. [The weather broke, making it difficult to transport timber over 'heavy' roads]... Bricks for chimneys were made in a small kiln, and hardwood for joists, etc. provided by sawyers employed for the purpose in the bush.

The hotel, in consequence, was not ready for public accommodation until the Spring'.³

When Grant's Land Act of 1865 opened up Crown Land for selection Benjamin and Mary took up 80 acres in Christmas Hills. Their block was opposite Lorimers' *Flying Squirrel Hotel*. They named the property *Park Nook* after a farm in Quarndon, Derbyshire. [It is not known if they had a personal connection to the farm in Derbyshire.] In the commerce directory of 1868/69 Benjamin listed his occupation as farmer. In the 1880s he built an abattoir at the corner of Skyline and Ashmore Roads and was supplying meat to the navvies who worked on the construction of the aqueduct.

Benjamin Smith died in Christmas Hills 10 Jul 1892 aged 70, Mary died on 6 January 1898 aged 75. They are both buried at Yarra Glen cemetery.

Seven to eight generations of descendants have lived in the district and many still do. In 1878 two Smith families were united by marriage. The eldest son of Mary and Benjamin, William Benjamin Smith, married Sarah Ann, the daughter of Samuel and Sarah Ann Smith of Queenstown. Samuel Smith was

born in Bury, Lancashire. The bride's brother Samuel is well-known as having been the proprietor of the Junction Hotel at Yarra Glen.

Maria married David Muir in 1887 and lived in Christmas Hills until the grand age of 97. She died 30 September 1961. Maria and David had nine children one of whom died as an infant. Their other children grew up within the Christmas Hills community and some of them continued to farm the Smith property.

Sources:

- ¹ Mary Smith, *Letter*, 1857. Transcribed by Cheryl Muir. In private possession.
- ² Mick Woiwod, *Once around the Sugarloaf*, Bend of Islands Press, 1992.
- ³ *Reminiscences of Andrew Ross*, Andrew Ross Museum, 3 ed., 1995.



Kangaroo Ground Hotel with store and post office c.1875, drawn by Gane Ahern

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YARRA GLEN POST OFFICE 1950-2008

This building was erected in 1949 and officially opened for business as the Post Office and telephone exchange in June 1950. It replaced the original Post Office established and operated by the Petty family in Symond Street from 1861 until 1950. The first postmaster John Hicks Petty provided postal services from a slab hut. This was replaced by a more substantial building in 1893 (demolished in 1963).

Kath Petty (1914-1994), grand-daughter of the original post master , is still remembered by older residents as the very efficient telephonist who operated the telephone exchange until it was replaced by the automatic exchange in August 1964. In 1975 the Post-Master General's Department was replaced by Australia Post.

The building, which includes a residence at the rear, was extensively renovated in 1993.



Yarra Glen Post Office at 17 Bell Street as it looked in the 1970s. The house to the left belonged to the Bath family and was demolished in 1980. (Reproduced with permission of the National Archives of Australia: B5919/1 – 2385)

Post Masters and Post Mistresses of Yarra Glen:

1861-1910 – John Hicks Petty
1910-1950 – Miss Maria Petty
1950-1953 – Lloyd Peter Hughes
1953-1954 – Bryan Royle
1954-1955 – Leonard William Garner
1955-1957 – Mrs Gwenyth Irving
1957-1959 – Philip Harold Smith
1959-1969 – Jack Fallon
1969-1973 – Douglas Guiver
1973-1976 – Noel Connelly
1976-1989 – Shirley Tait
1989-2007 – Philip Kehoe
Current - Geoff & Serena Van Den Brink

[Thanks to John Waghorn for this list.]



Allan Vernon Adams (1919-2008)

Allan was about 5-6 years old when his family arrived in Steels Creek in 1925 from Noojee. Ted and Emily Adams had seven sons and two daughters of which Allan was the last surviving member. The younger members of the family including Allan attended Steels Creek State School.

Many of the boys followed Ted into the logging business and operated a timber mill in the bush.

Allan enlisted for war service in August 1941 and endured some gruelling experiences in Timor, New Guinea and Borneo. When he and his brothers returned in 1946 they re-established their timber mill again. Allan later found employment with the Metropolitan Board of Works.

The Adams boys loved their sport: Allan was a keen football player and played for many years with the Yarra Glen Football Club. He is still regarded as one of their best ever players. As well as being a skilled sportsman he was a talented musician with the harmonica and piano accordion.

Allan enjoyed thirty happy years with his partner Wilma and spending Friday afternoons with his mates at the Yarra Glen RSL.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Lovering family

In our last *Newsletter* we recounted how two sisters had been united through the research efforts of Eric Tetlow. Since then Sylvia Minihan (née Lovering) has advised that, in response to an advertisement in the *Sun-Herald*, she has made contact with the daughter of her father's last wife and also other descendants of her Grandfather who died in WW1.

She now has a photo of her father William Lovering & her grandfather.

Stuart family

In September the Secretary (Eric Tetlow) received an enquiry from a grand-daughter of James Stuart (c.1863-1939).

Prior to the First World War James Stuart was a gardener at Pigeon Bank, Kangaroo Ground and later at Gulf Station. After the war he worked in the Peg Factory and went to New Norfolk in Tasmania when the company moved there. He and his family later returned to Yarra Glen and lived on what is now Melba Highway, halfway down the hill opposite the Uniting Church. His wife Ann lived there until her death in 1949.

Both James and Ann, and many of their family, are buried at Kangaroo Ground.

They had six children:

Ann and Nell, both born in Scotland

James (1889-1909) born in Townsville

Maggie (1892-1983) born in Kangaroo Ground

Frank (1896-1965) born in Kangaroo Ground

Victoria (1900-1989) born in Yarra Glen

Maggie's daughter, Myrtle Stuart (1913-2001) grew up in Yarra Glen, living with her grand-parents, and attended the Yarra Glen Primary School.

More information is available from Eric Tetlow.