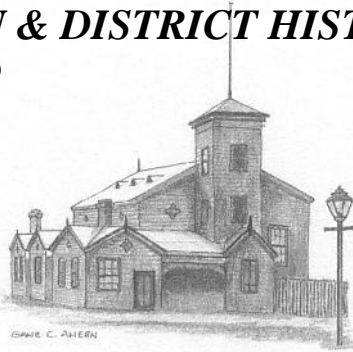


# YARRA GLEN & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

A0030684D

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## NEWSLETTER

**February 2010** (Published occasionally)

**Issue No: 34**

**Editor:** Helen Mann **Ph:** 0429 006 152 hma60229@bigpond.net.au

### FROM THE EDITOR

The 2009/2010 Committee is looking forward to an interesting year. Having been successful in obtaining a grant from the Sugarloaf Pipeline Benefits Fund we will be able to purchase computing and other digital equipment. This will enable us to copy, record, store and present our images and documents more effectively and efficiently. A lot of work lies ahead.

The reunion of descendents of John Hicks Petty (1828-1910) and Maria Byrne (1844-1922) is to be held at Yarra Glen on Sunday 7 March 2010. Terry Waters, one of the organizers, has provided an account of the Petty family for this issue (p.2).

A member of one of the district's pioneering families passed away in December. Doreen Ayres (née Hubbard) lived most of her 102 years in Steels Creek and Yarra Glen. Read more about Doreen on p.6

Those members who attended the Yarra Glen Primary School Graduation Night on 11 December had an enjoyable time. The occasion was the inaugural award of the Ahern Natural History Award which was presented to a worthy young recipient, Corey Dumergue (p.6).

*Helen*

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2009

Held Sunday 19 October 2009

#### Officers elected:

President: Brenda Cawte  
Vice-Presidents: Jill Sheffield & Helen Mann  
Minute Secretary: vacant  
Correspondence Secretary: vacant  
Treasurer: Jill Sheffield  
Committee: Barry Sheffield, Dean Putting, Barry Smith  
Communications Officer (*management of the website and email facility*): Barry Sheffield  
Publications Officer & Newsletter Editor: Helen Mann  
Projects Officer: Kristin Otto

#### Annual Report of the President 2009

My report for this year will be brief as the past year has been rather difficult for us. Thankfully in October 2008 we had no idea what was to come. We had our Christmas break-up at the Steels Creek community hall which was a very happy and interesting time.

Our February meeting was cancelled due to the fires so we next met on 8<sup>th</sup> March for a sad short get together. It was suggested that we donate a natural history book prize to a student at Yarra Glen Primary School annually in memory of Leigh Ahern and his wife Charmian whom we lost in the fire and whose children attended the school.

We asked Bruce Nixon to be our patron and he graciously accepted. In May we sent a token donation to Maureen Bond towards a Steels Creek memorial.

The A.E.H.S. Conference was held here on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May. It was very successful and we received many compliments from visiting Society members. In spite of what he had thought beforehand Eric was able to enjoy that day with everyone too!

However our good friend, Secretary, Treasurer and most active member became very ill and passed away on 15<sup>th</sup> June.

We are still stunned at our loss but are working together to keep our History group special. Eric and Leigh gave us a firm foundation to build on; we will not let them down.

Donations received from the Memorial service for Eric will be used for an annual Tetlow Talk.

During the year we also received:

A picture from Merid Menz

A book from Gwen Sadler, *Once around the Sugarloaf*

Photographs from Kaylene Butler (Mary Lawrence's granddaughter)

Books from Eric Tetlow's home library

The Yarra Glen Football Club history book by Barry Smith and Helen Mann is going well. Thank you both for all your hard work.

I am grateful to Jill for running meetings when I could not attend. Thank you Jill.

Lastly, THANKYOU for all rallying round and being so supportive. We will continue to work together in the coming year.

Brenda Cawte, President

## THE PETTY FAMILY

A reunion of descendents and related families of **John Hicks Petty II** and **Maria Louisa Byrne** on 7 March will celebrate the lives of the Petty-Byrne family in Yarra Glen from the 1850's to the 1950's. The Petty family was one of the earliest settlers in the district having purchased land within 13 years of the first settlement. The family played an important role in the business and community life of the area for many years.

In recognition of the role of the Petty family in the pioneering days of Yarra Glen, the park that fronts onto Yarra Street, and was part of the land owned by John Hicks Petty II, has been named by the Council as the "*John Hicks Petty Reserve*". This was suggested by the Yarra Glen & Districts Historical Society when the land was subdivided.

### Origins

**John Hicks Petty II** (1828-1910) was the eldest of 10 children (3 brothers and 6 sisters) born to **John Hicks Petty I** (1803-1863) and **Mary Ann Teresa Wright**. (1809-1898). The Hicks Petty name was derived from the grandparents of John Hicks Petty II, **John Petty** (1774-1831) and **Elizabeth Hicks** (c. 1778-????). John and Elizabeth were married in 1802 in Whitby, near where his great-great-grandparents were recorded as living in the early 1600s; Brompton by Swadon, Yorkshire, about 100 km due north of Lincoln. John and Elizabeth Petty's children were the first ones of our Petty family recorded as born at or near Lincoln, Lincolnshire.<sup>1</sup>

John Hicks Petty I and Mary Anne Teresa Wright appear to have eloped and got married on 26 July 1827. They were married again on 17 September 1827 most likely as part of a family reconciliation.

**John Hicks Petty II** arrived in Australia at Sandridge (Port Melbourne) on the ship, *Helen*. The ship arrived on 15 October 1852 and they waited for a pilot for three days; anchored opposite Brighton Hotel. It must have been very tempting to swim to shore for a drink! This was only about a year after Victoria (The Port Phillip District) separated from New South Wales and about 17 months after the discovery of gold in Victoria.

Within two months of arriving in the new colony John purchased two lots of land at Eltham from a Mr Holloway. In August 1856, eight months prior to his first marriage, John bought 36 acres at Yarra Flats which is now bounded by Bell, Symonds and Yarra Streets, and Yarraview Road.<sup>2</sup> This purchase was less than 20 years after the district was first settled by the Ryrie brothers, who grazed cattle on the rich Yarra River flats at what is still known today as *Chateau Yering*.<sup>3</sup> "*From time to time (John) has selected 220 acres at Christmas Hills, which he uses for grazing purposes, the water line*

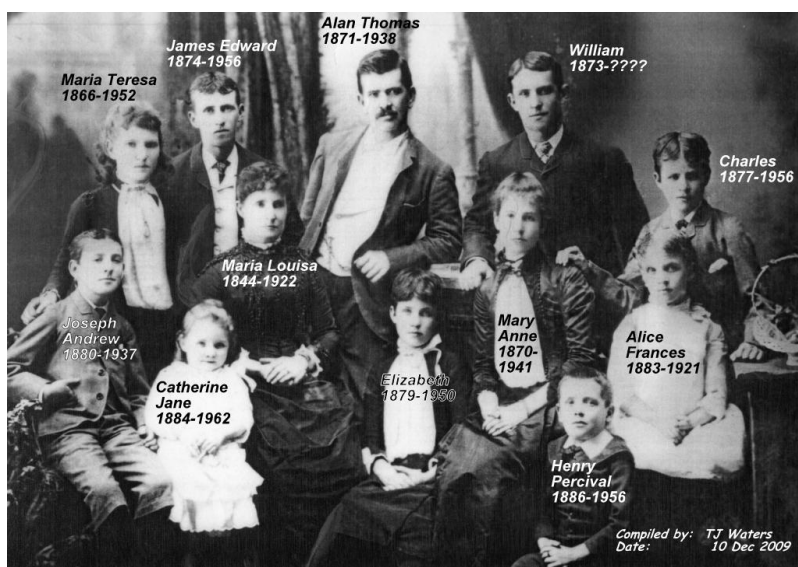
*running through his property.*"<sup>4</sup> This land was to the west and south of the Yarra Glen cemetery.

John Hicks Petty II was undertaking horse breaking when he married his first wife, **Augusta Honorina Fraisse** at Eltham on 31 March 1857. Augusta arrived in Victoria in December 1856 and was working as a domestic servant at *Yering* station when she married. Although French, Augusta had been working in England as a domestic and at that stage *Yering* was owned by Paul de Castella. *Yering* was part of the original 43,000 acres taken up by the Ryrie brothers. It is now famous for its wines.<sup>5</sup> It was the first vineyard in Victoria with the original vines planted in 1838, beginning an industry that brought fame to the Yarra Valley in the latter part of the 1800's. Under the direction of the de Castella and de Pury families, local wines were exported to British and European markets and won awards around the world.

John and Augusta were together for about seven years when Augusta died childless of liver cancer at the age of 37. She had been sick and was hospitalized in Melbourne for many months.

About four months after Augusta's death John Hicks Petty II married **Maria Louisa Byrne** at St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne in August 1864. John was 36 and Maria was 16 years younger. John and Maria may have met through Maria's brother Thomas. It appears that Thomas either owned or worked in a store in Yarra Glen.<sup>6</sup> At that time the Cathedral, as we know it today, was under construction (started in 1858 and completed in 1897; the biggest in the world completed in the 1800s).

John and Maria were married for about 46 years and lived all their married lives in Yarra Glen. They had 13 children with the first (John Hicks III) born in 1865 and the last (Henry Percival) 21 years later.



*Maria Louisa Petty and some of her children c.1890*

<sup>1</sup> Laurie Woods, personal communication.

<sup>2</sup> YGDHS Newsletter, no.16, May 2005.

<sup>3</sup> [www.yarraglenhistorical.websyte.com.au](http://www.yarraglenhistorical.websyte.com.au)

<sup>4</sup> Sutherland, A (1888), *Victoria & Its Metropolis*.

<sup>5</sup> [www.yering.com](http://www.yering.com)

<sup>6</sup> Louisa Byrne, personal communication

**Maria Louisa Byrne**, the eldest of four children, was born in Kildare, Ireland in 1844 to parents **William and Ann (nee Walsh)**. Although she came on a separate ship to her parents, they all arrived in Melbourne in March 1858. It appears they moved to Collingwood where they had some relatives, at least a **Thomas Walsh**. Maria lived for some time with her parents in Collingwood. It seems that her parents lived all their time in Collingwood. William and Ann died in 1866 and 1888 respectively.

Maria's siblings, in order of age, were Thomas, Eliza and William. **Thomas Byrne** had two girls (Mary Anne and Catherine Elizabeth) and two boys (Thomas Jnr and Michael). The girls were born in Collingwood (1871 & 1878) and the boys in King Parrot Creek (1882 - 1883). It seems that Thomas Jnr spent most of his life in the area having died in Flowerdale in 1966. Thomas Jnr married **Kathleen O'Connell** in Yea in about 1911. They had two children; Kathleen Marie and Thomas (Bonnie) O'Connell. Kathleen (married **Gerald Coonan**) attended the Petty reunion in 1985 but has sadly since passed away.

Thomas's son Michael joined the AIF in February 1916, at the age of 33 and was assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Light Horse that undertook the charge of Beersheba on 31 October 1917. Fortunately Michael survived the war and selected a soldier settler's lot near Coleraine after his return. He married **Anne Heenan** and they had two boys (Brian and Kevin) and a girl, Carmel. Kevin passed away in early 2009. Brian, Kevin's wife, **Louise nee Gurry** and Kevin's daughter Belinda will be attending the reunion.

It appears that **John Hicks Petty III**, eldest child of John and Maria, left home at about 17 years of age after an argument with his father, never to return to Yarra Glen. In 1903 he appeared on the Queensland electoral roll at California Creek (south west of Cairns). When he died of pneumonia at the age of 50 in Queensland his occupation was listed as miner. Little is also known of their second son **George** who lost an eye in an accident at the age of 15. George left home before the age of 22 and may have moved to the Northern Territory<sup>7</sup>, however, this has not been confirmed and he is listed in the 1899/1900 trade directory as being in Yarra Glen at that time.

Two of the other six boys, **Charles (1877-1956)** and **Joseph (1880-1937)** lived all their lives in Yarra Glen and are buried in the family plot. Little is known of Charles. Joseph served in WWI (8 Infantry Battalion - 13 to 23 Reinforcements, December 1915 - November 1916) and was left with an injured leg which was amputated after he returned to Australia. He worked as a mailman on his return. Apparently he died in St Evans hospital in Melbourne from complications with his leg injury.<sup>8</sup>

The other four sons, **Alan Thomas (1871-1938)**, **William Michael (1873-1934)**, **James Edward (1874-1956)** (my grandfather) and **Henry Percival (1886-1956)** moved from Yarra Glen and married. They had five, five, eight and three children respectively.

The only one of the five daughters to marry was Mary Ann (Marion), the second eldest daughter. She married **William Arthur Brew** and lived in Bunyip, about 50 kms south east of Yarra Glen. They had five children, Mary Josephine, Arthur Percival, Stanley Joseph, John Aloysius and Norman. Stanley attended the previous reunion in 1985. Apparently Mary Ann met Mr Brew whilst visiting her brother William Michael who had moved to Bunyip and married **Maud Elizabeth Wallace**. William and Maud had three boys and two girls.

The other daughters, **Maria (May)**, **Elizabeth**, **Alice and Catherine (Kate)** lived all their lives in Yarra Glen. Elizabeth died in Kew and is buried in Box Hill cemetery whilst the others are buried in the family plot at Yarra Glen. They all lived into their 70s except Alice who died of ovarian cancer at 38.

## Community Involvement

The Petty family was one of the prominent ones in the early days of Yarra Glen. It is well documented that the family established and operated the Post office in Symond Street from 1861 until 1950. John Hicks Petty II was the first postmaster. He provided postal services from a slab hut which was replaced by a more substantial building in 1893 (demolished in 1963).



*John Hicks Petty II holding John Hicks Petty III in front of original slab home c. 1866*

The location of the homestead and post office is described as:

*The land owned by Symons and his neighbour John Hicks Petty on the southern side of [Symond] 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.<sup>9</sup>*

After John's death in 1910 his daughter Maria (May) Petty was the post master until 1950. Then followed Catherine (Cath) Petty (1914-1994), daughter of Henry Percival, who is still remembered by older residents as the very efficient telephonist who operated the telephone

<sup>7</sup> Mavis Waters, personal communication

<sup>8</sup> Mavis Waters, personal communication

<sup>9</sup> YGDHS Newsletter no.16, May 2005

exchange until it was replaced by the automatic exchange in August 1964.<sup>10</sup>

The family was also active in other areas of community life. John was one of the first trustees of the Cemetery Trust. He was also the first Treasurer of the Yarra Glen Football Club which was formed in 1888.<sup>11</sup> One of his sons is listed as a player in 1903:

*In 1903 Lilydale, Healesville, Coldstream and Yarra Glen competed for the Con Dwyer Trophy. In May a senior Yarra Glen team played at Healesville which included the following players: Carey (Captain), Smith, Lithgow, Murphy (2), Harris (2), Salter, F & W Bell, S & T Albert, Petty,...*<sup>12</sup>

This may have been either Charles or **Joseph Andrew Petty** who would have been 25 and 22 respectively at the time. I wonder if either or both of them were in the Yarra Glen team that won its first premiership in 1908!

Maybe John's role as Treasurer was not because of his love of football but because he was a trusted business person in the community accustomed to handling other people's money and caring for their mail. The year of formation of the football club was also the year that saw the opening of the railway at Yarra Flats that brought significant change to the town, including a change of name from Yarra Flats to Yarra Glen.<sup>13</sup>

The Petty family was also prominent in the Catholic Church. The first ministrations of the Catholic Church were undertaken by priests from the Heidelberg Mission. Father Bourgeois was appointed to Heidelberg in 1851 and he travelled on horseback to visit Lilydale, Healesville, Warburton and Yarra Flats about once every two months. The first church in the area was a small wooden building in Lilydale completed in January 1865; five months after John and Maria married. This was upgraded to a stone church in 1871 A Catholic church, St Aloysius, was erected in Yarra Glen and was opened by the Archbishop of Melbourne, Rev. Dr Carr 120 years ago this coming July.<sup>14</sup> This was about four years after the birth of John and Maria's youngest (Henry Percival).

Yarra Glen came within the parish of Healesville in 1899 and mass was held at Yarra Glen "whenever time permitted". When Father Kennedy was the parish priest, **Marie (Auntie May) Petty** was regarded as second only to Father Kennedy as custodian of the Church. She would walk down from Symond Street after locking up the Post Office to prepare the Church for services. She also conducted the Sunday school for many years. Father Coyne replaced Kennedy in 1927 and continued until 1941. He took over the instruction of the children from May and made an extra trip to Yarra Glen on Saturdays for this purpose.<sup>15</sup>

Restoration of St Aloysius church was completed by the Yarra Glen parishioners in early 2009.

## Letters from UK

Letters (50 in total from 1864 to 1910) from the family of John Hicks Petty II in England show much insight into the life in Lincolnshire at the time and the relationships between the family members. Transcripts of letters available to us from Laurie Woods are from John's mother Mary Ann Petty, nee Wright, his brother Zachariah and his youngest sister Jane (Jennie). Some of these will be on display at the reunion.

Most of the letters are from Jennie. These contain details of the main events in the lives of her relations and much about her and her mother's health. She cared for her mother who was sick for many years and was therefore not able to socialize much. She laments at 23 years that she is destined to be an old maid:

*Also your humble servant myself doomed to the life of an old maid, for I have reached advanced age of twenty three and not so near been married as I was at twenty but I won't despair just yet.*

How times have changed!

Many of the letters from John's mother contain details of the costs of food and many religious comments. Although she was a Catholic she changed to a Methodist and was very religious.

Some of the letters refer to information that they had received from Yarra Glen. One dated September 1883 refers to an accident:

*We received your letter and are very sorry that you have met with an accident, but pleased you were recovering when you wrote we were also sorry that George has been so unfortunate as to have his eye knocked out.*

## Personality

John Hicks Petty's character was probably summarised best by **Charles Harbord Watt** who was the manager of the Commercial Bank in Yarra Flats from 1886-1889. In reminiscences of his time in Yarra Glen Charles wrote:

*Petty the postmaster, generally disliked, abrupt, outspoken, & I never heard a good word spoken in his favour, but strange to say, he took a great fancy (sic) & he became great friends of ours and when we were leaving Yarra Glen Mrs Petty told my wife that we were the only two persons that she had known him to be friendly with.*<sup>16</sup>

John Hicks Petty's personality was probably the reason two of his sons left home early. Also, maybe that his personality was the main reason that only one of his five daughters married.

Mary Mann's recollections of her visits to the post office also throw light on the Petty family. She said as

<sup>10</sup> YGDHS Newsletter no.29, Oct 2008

<sup>11</sup> YGDHS Newsletter no.28, Jun 2008

<sup>12</sup> YGDHS Newsletter no.28, Jun 2008

<sup>13</sup> YGDHS Newsletter no.18, Nov 2005

<sup>14</sup> YGDHS Newsletter no.17, Aug 2005

<sup>15</sup> YGDHS Newsletter no.17, Aug 2005

<sup>16</sup> C. H. Watt, *Memoirs*, n.d. unpublished.[YGDHS]



children they were intrigued because the Petty women would enter the post office room by sliding around the door and closing it, not allowing anyone to glimpse whatever lay behind in the domestic area. This of course aroused everyone's curiosity as to what they were trying to hide, so to speak. It was probably a product of their father's anti-social attitude. Sad to think of the effect it must have had on the lives of his children.

My mother tells me a story of her going to visit auntie May, Kate and Henry on a Good Friday. Apparently it was a hot day and mum caught the train out from Camberwell. When she arrived she was only given a black tea, a piece of salmon out of a tin and a piece of bread. She said that she was so hungry that she could have eaten the whole loaf of bread and all the salmon as well as lots to drink! Being strict Catholics they did not entertain on Good Friday. Kate took mum out to look at her cattle; they sat under a tree for sometime talking but mum did not get any more to drink or eat! Apparently at that time there was an old house and a new house but they ate in the old house. Mum said that she had a large meal that evening in Melbourne!

**Terry Waters**

**Great grandson of John Hicks Petty II**

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*Marie Louisa Byrne*

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## Sunday, 7 March 2010 Memorial Hall & McKenzie Reserve 45 Bell St, Yarra Glen

cnr of Anzac Ave, 200 metres from the Grand  
Hotel

A reunion of the descendents and  
related families of  
*John Hicks Petty* (1828-1910)  
&  
*Maria Louisa Byrne* (1844-1922)

Starting at 11:00am

The activities will comprise:

- BYO picnic/bbq lunch at the park adjoining the hall
- Display in the hall
- Historical tour of Yarra Glen
- Visit to the Petty graves at Yarra Glen cemetery
- Afternoon tea in the hall

Please address queries to:

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0417 77 1014.

## **Emma Doreen Victoria Ayres (née Hubbard)** **24 May 1907 – 6 December 2009**

Doreen, as she was known, must have a claim to having lived for the longest period of time in the district. She was born at Steels Creek in 1907 and apart from two or three years in the late twenties, she resided at the Creek or in Yarra Glen until two weeks before her death on 6 December at the age of 102.

Doreen was the thirteenth child of William Hubbard (1859-1934) and his wife Mary Bell Reilley (1868-1955). William arrived in Australia as a year old baby in 1860 with his parents, William Hubbard (1837-1897) and Elizabeth née Ketteringham (1838-1924). William (Snr) was employed by James Donaldson at Kangaroo Ground until he was able to take up a selection of 80 acres at Steels Creek under the Lands Act (1865). He added another 320 acres at a later date, on both sides of the Steels Creek Road and established his family of twelve children as farmers and orchardists in the district. William, Doreen's father, followed in his father's footsteps and became a dairy farmer and orchardist at 'Sunny Vale'. From this home Doreen attended the Steels Creek school with her brothers and sisters (she had twelve older and two younger!).

As a young girl in January 1915 she experienced several of her brothers going off to the first World War. Brother Benjamin (1893-1981) enlisted in the Light Horse and returned to Australia in August 1916; Reg (1895-1976) served at Gallipoli and also enlisted again in the second World War; older brother Alfred, known as Clarrie (1889-1916) enlisted in New Zealand and died in France in August 1916. There were also numerous uncles, family friends and school mates who saw war service and her husband Bill and some of his brothers enlisted during the second World War.

As a child, and after leaving school, Doreen assisted with the farm work. At the age of nineteen she left home to live with her married sister Elsie at Coburg for two or three years and worked for a time as a cook/housekeeper.

On 22 December 1934 Doreen married William (Bill) Ayres at St Barnabas Church in Steels Creek. They raised a family of eight children in Yarra Glen. Both Bill and Doreen were made Life Members of the Yarra Glen Football Club for their many years of dedication, support and inspiration to the Club and its members, particularly the Boys Club.



*Doreen as a pupil at the Steels Creek State School.*

## **Inaugural Ahern Natural History Award**

The Yarra Glen & District Historical Society has committed to making an annual award to the graduating student of Yarra Glen Primary School most interested and talented in the field of natural history. The award honours Leigh Ahern and his wife Charmian who died tragically in the disastrous Victorian bushfires at Steels Creek on Saturday 7 February 2009. Leigh was a much esteemed member of the Historical Society.

About fifteen friends and members of Leigh and Charmian's families, together with members of the Historical Society, joined parents and teachers at the Graduation Ceremony for Grade 6 students of the Yarra Glen Primary School on 11 December 2009.



*Corey Dumergue receiving the award from Chloe and Dale Ahern, daughter and son of Leigh and Charmian*

The Ahern Natural History Award commemorates not only the contribution Leigh and Charmian made to the ecology and conservation of our natural environment, but also the contribution they made to the community in which they lived.

The Yarra Glen & District Historical Society has been assisted in making this award by the generous donations provided by Jen & Steve Ritchie (Ahern family) and Leigh's colleagues and friends at the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

We congratulate Corey Dumergue on being nominated for the award and wish him well as he embarks on his secondary school education.