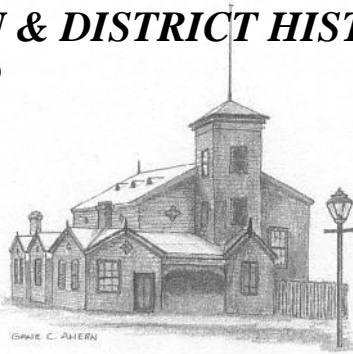


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NEWSLETTER

May 2010 (Published occasionally)

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FROM THE EDITOR

As we go to press for this issue changes continue around the district. The new highway bypass opened to traffic this week so it remains to be seen what effects it has on the township of Yarra Glen.

One of the services in the district that has changed a lot over the years is that of banking. It has flourished and diminished with the rises and falls in population. The influx of workers on the labour intensive projects of the railway and the aqueduct in the mid 1880s brought the first full time services as well as substantial buildings that survive to this day. During much of the early 20th century there was just a one day a week agency. Currently there are two full time bank branches in the town, the Commonwealth Bank on the corner of Bell and King Street, and the Bendigo Bank on the other side of Bell Street opposite the hotel. Fortunately the only major robbery we have had was in the very early days, and that was an 'inside job'. (see page 2)

The most important part of our history are the people and we are fortunate to have so many residents who have chosen to spend their lives in the district. Their memories and stories are the fabric of our history. It is always sad when we have to farewell them and so it was with the passing of Fred Sadlier in March. (see page 4)

COMING EVENTS

- Launch of the second edition of Mick Woiwod's book *Once Around the Sugarloaf* - see details on page 4
- Visit to 'Arden' in Toolangi, the home of C. J. Dennis.

An excursion is being arranged by the Society on Sunday 12 September 2010. The cost will be \$11.50 per person which will include afternoon tea and (weather permitting) a walk in the gardens under the guidance of Mrs Williams. Further details will be available from the Society closer to the event.

Helen

EARLY BANKS IN YARRA GLEN

The earliest known bank that operated in Yarra Glen was the Commercial Bank which announced in the *Evelyn Observer* in December 1885 that it was opening at Yarra Flats on 4 January 1886. Charles Harbord Watt (1861-1947) was appointed manager and initially conducted his business from temporary premises rented from the blacksmith Frank Farvis. William Farrell, then licensee of the Yarra Flats Hotel, saw a business opportunity and erected a brick building opposite his hotel which was completed in July. Now a private residence, it stands on the corner of Armstrong Grove and Bell Street/Melba Highway (pictured below). Farrell leased it to the Bank which later bought it in 1894.



In February 1886 the Colonial Bank also opened a branch at Yarra Flats, under the management of Mr O'Shannessey. This Bank was housed in a weatherboard building owned by the storekeeper Philip Kiernan near the corner of King and Bell Streets.¹ A few months later O'Shannessey was transferred and he was replaced by William Thompson, a young man of about 24 years of age. He left the Bank in dramatic circumstances in 1889 (see following article)

¹ In a rough drawn map of the town C.H.Watt shows Kiernan's store on corner of King and Bell Streets. Kiernan sold the property in 1887 and it was purchased by the Commercial Bank. The Colonial Bank then leased its premises from its rival until July 1890.

In 1890 William Herbert erected a two storey building on the corner of Bell Street and Herbert Lane which he rented to the Colonial Bank from July 1890. It is currently tenanted by Hargreaves Brewing Company. John Fairbairn is known to have been the manager of the Colonial Bank from at least 1891 until 1894.



The building erected by William Herbert in 1890 as it was in the 1930s.

Alfred E Priestley was the manager of the Commercial Bank during the early 1890s until the Bank transferred its operations to the Lilydale branch in 1892. Business probably declined in Yarra Glen after the completion of the railway and aqueduct building projects. No bank managers are listed in the trade directories between 1895 and 1900 and details are sparse for the early twentieth century. The Sands & McDougall Directory advertises an agency at Yarra Glen in 1900 and also in 1915.

A branch of the State Savings Bank of Victoria was conducted by Miss Kate Petty from a room attached to the Petty's house next to the Post Office on Symond Street.



The State Savings Bank was conducted from the small room on the right hand side of the picture, the Post Office was at the opposite end of the building.

From 1912 the SSB had collaborated with State Schools to provide penny savings accounts for children. Fred Sadlier remembered that there was a

school bank at Yarra Glen [in the 1920s]...which I think was run on Monday morning. We would take our sixpence or shilling, whatever we had, and that was all totted up by the headmaster. Then one of the

boys or girls of the eighth grade would take that down to the bank. I can remember two of us doing it at times.

In the 1930s the National Bank² was listed as an agency that opened on Thursdays only in the old bank building. This service closed in 1941.

In the 1960s the State Savings Bank operated from this building. Keith Rodwell was manager. In 1971 Mr R. W. McSweeney had taken over. The National Bank also had an agency in the town in 1971. The State Savings Bank erected a new building on the corner of Bell and King Streets in 1972. The Commonwealth Bank acquired the ailing State Savings Bank of Victoria in 1991 and has maintained its own branch in this building ever since.

The Bank of Melbourne opened premises on the opposite side of Bell Street about 1990. It was replaced by the Bendigo Bank about ten years later and this Bank continues today.

YARRA GLEN'S 'GREAT BANK ROBBERY'

In 1889 the imaginations of local people and others further afield were set alight by the mysterious disappearance of William Thompson, the manager of the Colonial Bank. The story was reported in local, interstate and overseas newspapers. Police searches were conducted and the Colonial Bank announced a reward for information.

A firsthand account is available in the reminiscences of the manager of the rival Commercial Bank, Charles Harbord Watt. According to Watt

Thompson was a Scotchman and while at Yarra Glen married a Scotch lassie, newly out from Scotland. They were both about 26 years. Thompson was to all appearances a quiet decent sort, fond of shooting. His wife made few friends and my wife and herself were not on visiting terms. She was rather common and very quick tempered and rather fond of drink.

Although Watt went on shooting expeditions with Thompson he found him difficult to get on with, 'secretive' and unreliable.

On Tuesday 11 June 1889 Charles Watt had some business with the Colonial Bank but when he went down at 10:30 in the morning he found the Bank closed.³ Mrs Thompson told him that her husband had gone to Melbourne on Saturday and he was late returning. Mr Watt made out a credit slip and asked Mrs Thompson to leave it on the counter for her husband to deal with on his return. When Charles Watt went down again in the afternoon he found that Thompson had still not returned. Watt told Mrs Thompson that if her husband did not

² The Colonial Bank had merged with the National Bank in 1918.

³ In his memoir Watt said it was Monday morning. In later reports Thompson said it was Whit Monday and a Bank Holiday and he had gone to Melbourne to attend a race meeting.

return that night it was his duty to report the fact to the Bank.

When Mr Thompson went to the city it was his custom to ride down on a small black pony. Thompson not having put in an appearance on the [Wednesday] morning I reported the fact to the Lilydale manager of his bank and I called in to tell Mrs Thompson. She was very agitated. I advised her not to touch anything. I noticed a lot of papers on the counter and a few cheques. The Lilydale manager arrived after I had left Mrs Thompson. He found the safe empty of cash.

The Inspector of the Colonial Bank also arrived on Wednesday afternoon and confirmed the shortage of cash and documents. Mrs Thompson would not answer any of his questions but proceeded to curse her husband. The Inspector found a lot of burnt papers in the fireplace but she claimed not to know what they were. A friend of hers had arrived from Melbourne, 'rather common looking' according to Watt, and the two women left for Melbourne that night.

An extensive search was conducted by police throughout the countryside between Healesville and Melbourne while detectives followed up Thompson's contacts in the city. A warrant for his arrest was issued on Thursday 13 June and the Bank offered a reward of £250. Detectives found that when Thompson went to Melbourne on previous occasions he often spent his nights in a gambling saloon. To cover this habit he had been manipulating the bank accounts for some time and his defalcations amounted to between £1500 and £2000.

On the 25th June Thompson's pony was found grazing on the Alphington Common and the saddle and bridle lay near the entrance to the Yarra Bend Asylum on the Merri Creek. The pony was taken to the pound at Craigieburn where Constable Arnold of Yarra Glen identified it. Based on this news the local press conjectured that Thompson took the express train to Sydney, as Craigieburn was on the north-east railway line, and would probably 'get away' by catching a boat from Sydney bound for San Francisco!⁴

A few days later it was reported that detectives had managed to recover about £300 of the money which they found in the possession of Thompson's mistress, 'a woman living in a well known house of ill-fame'. She and Thompson had arranged that she would follow him to Adelaide at a later date.

Thompson had in fact got as far as Port Pirie with only £23 left in his pocket. After a couple of weeks on the run he did not realise that his mistress had been detained by the police and could not join him. Unable to stand the anxiety of why she had not arrived, and growing remorseful, he gave himself up at the Adelaide watchhouse on Friday 28 June, very haggard in appearance. He was remanded until a detective could travel from Victoria to accompany him back to Melbourne.

Thompson told his escort Detective Nixon that he had returned to the Bank early on the Wednesday morning and taken about several hundred pounds in cash. He had

then ridden as far as Greensborough where he turned his pony loose. He made his way to Footscray and caught a train to Geelong. From there he booked a fare to Adelaide and later went on to Port Pirie. At the Melbourne City Police Court he was charged with having embezzled £104.1.9 from the Bank. He was held on remand until eventually appearing at the Yarra Glen Police Court on Wednesday 24 July.

Detectives Nixon and Ward accompanied Thompson to Yarra Glen on the train. Apparently, on hearing that this notorious villain was to be passing through the town, a number of people were at the Lilydale station to catch a glimpse of him. They were disappointed however as he and the detectives travelled in the guard's van.

On arrival at Yarra Flats (sic) several of Thompson's old acquaintances were on the platform, and he wished them good morning in his usual jocular manner. He has altered in appearance since he was last here, and he appeared to be in excellent spirits⁵.

At the Yarra Glen court Thompson appeared before Mr F. Hare, Police Magistrate, Tom Armstrong and Mr T. McIntyre, Justices of the Peace. The courtroom was crowded. He was charged with offences committed since January 28: embezzling £104.1.9 from the Bank, forging cheques for £725 and £432 in the name of William Herbert, and forging a cheque for £366.5.6 drawn by Robert Sutton. Thompson was then returned to Melbourne to face trial at the Melbourne General Sessions on 1 August.

At the trial Mr Tom Armstrong and Mr Donovan appeared for the defence as character witnesses. The former said Thompson was of good character, had always been upright in his dealings, and was held in high respect in the district. Donovan said he was only a young man in a very responsible position. Judge Hamilton passed sentence of five years imprisonment with hard labour, the first and third days of every fourth month of the first and last year to be spent in solitary confinement. Among other comments he said that in holding a position of trust the offences were worse than in cases where no trust reposed.

Watt states that after Thompson's release from gaol he died of consumption. Mrs Thompson had meanwhile opened a wine shop in Melbourne.

Sources

The Argus

Lilydale Express

Charles Harbord Watt. *Memoirs*. Unpublished.

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⁴ *Lilydale Express* 26 June 1899

⁵ *Lilydale Express* 27 July 1899

Frederick William SADLIER

6 October 1915 – 23 March 2010

It is sad to note the passing of another 'old timer' of Yarra Glen. Fred was in his 94th year but his memory remained quite clear. Members of the Historical Society will greatly miss being able to 'ask Fred' when questions arise about past events, buildings that have disappeared, faces in photographs and so on. Fred and his wife Gwen have been members of the Historical Society for many years and Fred was Secretary from October 1986 to 1997. He was made a Life Member of the Society in 2005 (pictured below with his certificate).



Fred's grandparents moved to Yarra Glen in 1896 when his father William (Bill) was about 18 years old. Bill was the only son and eventually inherited the farm from his father. Fred grew up on this farm which was bisected by the Maroondah aqueduct. The original house was burnt in the 1939 bushfire and a new one was built 'below' the aqueduct. Members of the fourth and fifth generations of Sadlier are now living there.

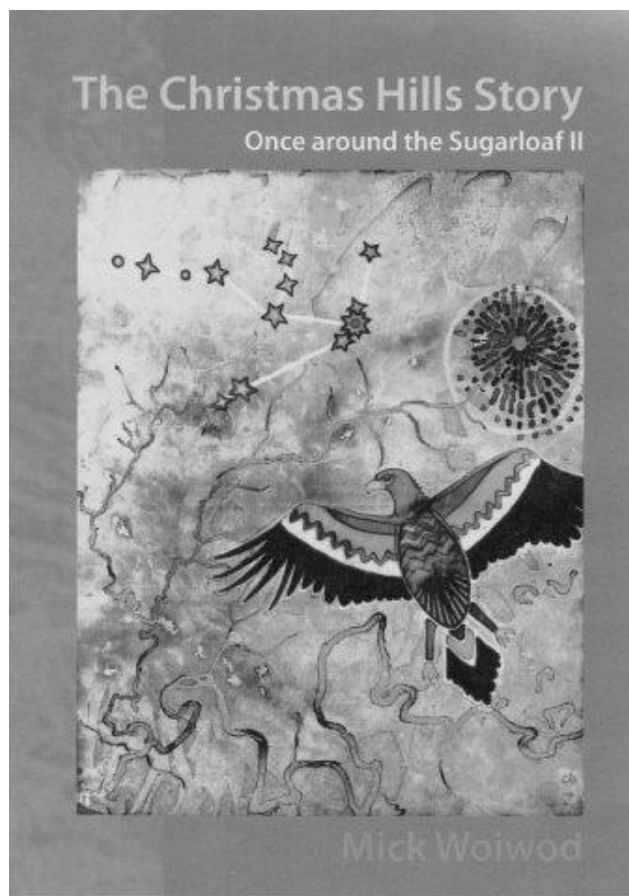
Fred and his two sisters, Elinor and Betty, attended the Yarra Glen Primary School in the 1920s. When Fred left school after completing Grade 8 he worked with his father on the farm until he enlisted for military service in 1941. After the war he secured a job with the Metropolitan Board of Works as an Assistant Caretaker and for many years patrolled the section that passed through the family farm.

Details of Fred's experiences have been recorded in interviews conducted and transcribed by the late Leigh Ahern and published by the Society:

Along the length: an account of living and working on the Maroondah Aqueduct. YG&DHS, 2003

My reminiscences of Yarra Glen since 1915. YG&DHS Publication no.4, 2006.

Pre-publication announcement



A second edition of Mick Woiwod's book *Once around the Sugarloaf* is to be published in the next few weeks. It will be in A4 portrait format rather than the 'landscape' format of the first edition and new information is included.

If you wish to be informed of the date of publication, price and availability, contact Mick Woiwod and he will let you know when these matters will be finalised. He expects book launches to be held in Christmas Hills and Kangaroo Ground.

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