

# The Western Port Times

## Grantville & Districts



Volume 6 Number 8

FREE

December 2023

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This magazine is a continuation of the original Western Port Times, which was published in Grantville from 1898 until 1908 by T. C. Monger, and from 1908 to August 1910 by Harold B. and J. A. Sullivan, at which date the premise is said to have been destroyed in a fire and everything lost. Publication never resumed.

At its peak, the paper was distributed from Flinders and Hastings on the Mornington Peninsula, to San Remo and Phillip Island, Inverloch and the Powlett region, through to Jumbunna and Loch, and as far north as Lang Lang.

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**The Western Port Times.**

PHILLIP ISLAND AND BASS VALLEY ADVERTISER.

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**Links to other historical groups**

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 Friends of Churchill Island Society: <https://focis.org.au/about-churchill-island/>  
 Hastings–Western Port Historical Society Inc.: <https://www.hwphs.org.au/>  
 Inverloch Historical Society: <http://inverlochhistory.com/>  
 Also: [cv.vic.gov.au/organisations/inverloch-historical-society/](http://cv.vic.gov.au/organisations/inverloch-historical-society/)  
 Koo-Wee-Rup Swamp Historical Society: [kooweerupswamphistory.blogspot.com.au/](http://kooweerupswamphistory.blogspot.com.au/)  
 Korumburra & District Historical Society: [www.korumburrahistory.com.au](http://www.korumburrahistory.com.au) or PO Bo 329, Korumburra 3950  
 Lang Lang & District Historical Society: [langlang.net/historical.html](http://langlang.net/historical.html)  
 Leongatha and District Historical society: [leongathahistory.org.au](http://leongathahistory.org.au)  
 Phillip Island & District Historical Society: <http://pidhs.org.au/>  
 Phillip Island Nature Parks, Churchill Island Heritage Farm Collection  
<https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/churchill-island-heritage-farm#collection-records>  
 South Eastern Historical Association: [seha.org.au](http://seha.org.au)  
 Wonthagi Historical Society: [wonthaggihistoricalsociety.org.au/](http://wonthaggihistoricalsociety.org.au/)  
 Wonthaggi Genealogy Inc.: [secretary@wonthaggi-genealogy.org.au](mailto:secretary@wonthaggi-genealogy.org.au)

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From the *San Remo Times and Phillip Island and Bass Valley Advertiser*, 3rd December 1897, page 2.

## Local and General News

The San Remo Court of Petty Sessions will be held to-day at the courthouse when there is a good many cases listed for hearing. The Licensing Court will be held to-day.

The Phillip Island and Woolamai Shire Council will hold their monthly meeting tomorrow. Several contracts are to be tendered for.

Messrs. McCartin and Co. will hold a clearing sale at Mr. W. Lyne's, Wonthaggi, Powlett River, on Wednesday next at 1 p.m. sharp, when they will offer the whole of his superior dairy herd, farming implements, household furniture, etc. Luncheon provided.

A deer was seen by Mr. Victor at San Remo during the week, feeding close to his residence, it having come out from the scrub at the Point, and when chased by his dog made off towards the back beach.

This year the mutton bird eggs have been very numerous, several parties having made very good hauls. The collectors of eggs have now all cleared away till next year, all being thoroughly satisfied with their visit.

The parents of the children of the San Remo and Newhaven State schools will regret to hear that Mr. Elliott is about to sever his connection with the Victorian Education Department, and will early in next year proceed to Western Australia. It is expected that he will enter the services of the Education Department there, as he has been offered the position of senior teacher in the largest school at Perth.

It is high time something was done to the baths at San Remo, as they are terribly out of repair, their *[sic]* being various holes in them large enough to admit of any fair-sized shark. During the hot weather experienced this week bathers preferred to go into the open sea, as they considered it far safer. It is to be hoped the Council at their meeting to-morrow will do something towards putting them into a proper state of repair, as in their present state they are undoubtedly unsafe, besides being detrimental to the interests of the place.

The Melbourne Chilled Butter Company, who are renting Mr. Daly's creamery plant at the Powlett, sent away close on a ton of butter to Melbourne by the s.s. *Genista* on Thursday morning, and they expect to double the amount next week. Mr. Kent is also despatching about a quarter of a ton weekly, besides various others.

As Mr. Todd, who is engaged crayfishing at Cape Woolamai, was preceeding *[sic]* home in his yacht on Saturday evening in company with his mate and Mr. Peter Anderson, he was thrown out of his boat and precipitated into the water by a sudden lurch near the black buoy. Luckily Mr. Peter, from the Cape, made a rush and caught hold of him, dragging him into the boat, otherwise the chances are that he would have been drowned, as there was a very strong tide running.

Mr. Harry Hansen's yacht *Minerva*, which was sunk in October last during a gale, has been repaired by Mr. Todd, of Newhaven, who has made a really first-class job of it. Mr. Hansen has started painting her, and expects to have her ready for sailing in about a fortnight's time.

Mr. Charles Grayden, junr., sprained his ankle one day last week at Newhaven just before crossing the channel to San Remo.

The Registrar has received for probate the will of Francis Edwards, late of Barregowa, Glen Alvie, Westernport, grazier, who died on 22nd July last, leaving a will made on 11th July, 1897, and a codicil thereto executed on 20th July. He bequeathed his estate to his widow and family. Value of real property, £13,000; personalty, £12,000.

Also

From the *San Remo Times and Phillip Island and Bass Valley Advertiser*, 10th December 1897, page 2.

The Melbourne Chilled Butter Company's Factory sent over a ton of butter to Melbourne this week.

The court was unusually large at San Remo on Friday last, the business not being disposed of till nearly 10 o'clock. In the Licensing Court it was surmised that the Bass Hotel would lose its license, but the full bench took a different view of the matter and stated that they did not believe the charge laid against the landlord.

Too late for last issue a reminder came from Mr Mellor on behalf of Mr. John O'Brien of Inverloch, stating that we had published a notice of his case re illegal netting at Musk Creek. He was allowed one month to pay the fine. On the authority of Constable O'Shannessy of Inverloch, we are pleased to state that the fine was paid in the allotted *[sic]* time.

(continues on Page 4)

Local and General News (continued from Page 3)

The Great Victoria Colliery Company have started clearing along the Kilcunda tram line, and will finish on Saturday. They expect to commence lifting the line on Monday.

Also

From the *San Remo Times and Phillip Island and Bass Valley Advertiser*, 17th December 1897, page 2.

In our advertising columns it will be noticed that sports of all kinds will be held on Boxing Day, Monday, the 27th, for saddles, bridles, whips, spurs and cash at the Bass Hotel, and in the evening a dance will be held.

The Regatta and sports will be held on Friday the last day in the year. A good programme is prepared.

The Christmas and New Year's excursion will commence from the 18th December at excursion in all lines of excursion fares in all lines in Victoria. Returns are from one month from date.

Also

From the *San Remo Times and Phillip Island and Bass Valley Advertiser*, 24th December 1897, page 2.

Owing to the number of holidays next week, we have decided not to issue the TIMES that week, so that our staff can have the benefit of a full week's holiday.

Owing to the inclemency of the weather yesterday, the Grantville races were postponed till Thursday next.

Bush fires have been raging about the district the last few days. Wednesday was the hottest day we have had this season, being 96 in the shade at San Remo.

In the last issue of the LEADER contains a Christmas Supplement entitled "Round about Victoria." There are some splendid views of Melbourne and prominent places in and around the city, as well as throughout the colony. The production is artistically [*sic*] got up and is specially adapted [*sic*] for sending to friends at home and abroad.

Another court case of alleged mistaken identity is expected to come off next court day at San Remo, the dispute being the ownership of a working bullock, the claimant and informant hold the bullock is their property.

The conference of the Victoria District of the Reorganised Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, will be held at Queensferry, on Saturday and Sunday, 8th and 9th Jan., 1898, when visitors will be cordially invited.

On Thursday morning, about three o'clock, a very severe thunderstorm passed over the district. The lightning being vivid and the thunder close.

From the *Weekly Times*, Wednesday 11 August 1954, page 59.

## Water On Three Sides Of Her

Dear Miranda. — I have been living in the country for the last few years, after living in Melbourne and Sydney all the rest of my life. I cannot understand now how anyone could prefer cities to the country.

Although, this is called country, I am surrounded on three sides by water. Maybe you know Corinella (Vic.), as you were down this way some time ago at Bass, which is only eight miles from here.

I have a little mixed farm, but I intend concentrating on poultry. At present I have only 25 White Leghorn pullets, but in September I will get 150 day-old chicks, so I am going to be kept busy rearing them.

Other than the CWA and Ladies' Guild, there is not much in the way of entertainment down here. — "Bridgecliff" (Vic.).

From the *Argus*, Wednesday 13 October 1954, page 1

## Too Much Calcium!

Some fish not happy on Wonthaggi 'milky way'

Wonthaggi, Tuesday

Holding up a mullet he said was "too tainted to eat," Cr. S. Fincher told Wonthaggi Council today milk waste from Archie's Creek butter factory was killing fish life in the Powlett River.

He said eels were crawling out of the milky-colored river and dying on the banks.

Cr. Pincher said he and the health inspector, Mr. K. McLennan, had seen a writhing mass of eels in grass alongside the Dalystone [*sic*] bridge.

Archie's Creek enters the Powlett a mile upstream from the bridge.

Council will ask the Fisheries and Game Department to take action.

But a few hours earlier, at the nearby Bass Shire Council meeting, Cr. S. Durling, a director of the Archie's Creek factory said:

"I have seen thousands of minnows and eels as fat as mud packed around that point of the Powlett River where Archie's Creek enters it.

"They thrive on the milky waste that comes down from the factory."

Cr. McCrae: It's a matter for the C.S.I.R.O.

Further consideration will be given to the subject when the Archie's Creek factory directors meet next Thursday.

From the *South Bourke and Mornington Journal*, 4 June 1884.

## Shire of Phillip Island

Friday, 30th May 1884

Present: Councillors Stewart (chairman), Clarke, Turnbull, Duffus and Kidd.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

### Correspondence

From Central Board of Health, for report of local Board for the year 1883.—Received.

From Shire of Oxley and North Ovens Shire, suggesting legislation to prevent the careless use of wooden matches, or their manufacture or importation.—Received, but no further action taken.

From James Hayes, asking leave of absence as Councillor for the Corinella riding.—Granted.

From S. West, forwarding his resignation as Councillor for the Phillip Island riding.—To stand over, as Councillor West had partially promised to continue to sit till the end of the year.

From P. Quinlivan, asking extension of time on contract 319.—Three weeks granted, and contractor to be informed that no further extension could be allowed.

From Thomas Muntz, Shire Engineer, empowering the Clerk of Works to order for the Bass bridge such extra timber as might be required.—Received.

From Messrs. Freeman and Harvey, relative to deviations through their properties, on Clark's road, Corinella.—Postponed till next meeting.

Consideration of report re mining leases in the Shire was held over.

### General Business

The vote to charitable institutions was postponed.

The action taken by the President in having arranged for transfer of the Shire account to the Federal Bank, consequent on the stoppage of the Oriental Bank, was approved.

Report by the members for Corinella riding, re bridge over Guip Creek. On the motion of Councillor Stewart, seconded by Councillor Kidd, no action to be taken in the matter of erection of bridge over Guip Creek, and the Secretary was instructed to return the cheque forwarded as contribution towards same by petitioners therefor.

The Clerk of Works reported relative to the Upper Powlett bridge, to the effect that it was not worth repairing, the stringers being too small for the span. It would cost £8 to

redeck it.—Received.

Payments were passed to the amount of £379 4s. 8d.

The Secretary was instructed to write to the Minister of Public Works, asking that the votes for Delany's, Clarke's, and Cape Patterson roads be re-voted with estimates for 1884-5, and stating that owing to the difficulty of obtaining labor, and the opposition of land holders through whose lands the proposed roads passed, caused delay in the expenditure of the money.

The Secretary was instructed to apply to the Curator of State Forests at Macedon for sufficient trees to plant about five acres at Cowes public reserve.

The Council then adjourned.

From the *South Bourke and Mornington Journal*, Wednesday 23 April 1884, page 3.

## Cowes Annual Regatta and Easter Sports.

### Aquatic Sports.

First event for first-class sailing boats not exceeding 35ft. over all. Prizes: £10, £4 and £1. Three boats entered, viz., the Victory 27ft., Annie 32ft., and Bessie 32ft. The course was from Cowes jetty round a boat moored off Sandy Point jetty, round the Tortoise Head buoy back to Cowes three times round, equal to 15 miles. On account of the wind the Victory started as the favorite. She took the lead and retained it during the first and second rounds, closely followed by the Annie. In the third round, after rounding Tortoise Head buoy, the Victory gave the Annie a chance through going too far to the eastward. George Sinclair, who sailed the Annie, availed himself of the opportunity and sailed past the winning post first; Victory second and Bessie third. Time of starting, 11.37 a.m. Time of arrival: Annie, 4.41.30 p.m.; Victory, 4.51.15 p.m.; Bessie, 5.5 p.m. On account of the time allowance of half a minute to the foot, the Annie won by 7¼ min. only. The Bessie lost her chance at the start by going too far to the westward. The Victory, of Hastings, sailed by her owner Evan Jones, won the first class race at the previous regatta. The Annie hails from Queensferry.

From the *South Bourke and Mornington Journal*, 7 May 1884.

## Jottings From Western Port

*Fortiter. Fideliter. Feliciter.*

The announcement in the *Government Gazette* of the 2nd inst, that tenders will be received until the 27th inst. for the construction of a line of telegraph between Cranbourne and Cowes, via Tooradin, Tobin Yallock, Grantville, Queensferry, Bass, and Griflith's Point, is one which I am sure will meet with the hearty approbation of all the residents of the different localities who have the sense to foresee that quick communication is essential to general advancement and prosperity. As the contractors have to complete the work in ninety working days from the time of acceptance of contract, it is to be presumed that at least by the 1st October next "wire messages" will be transmitted. No doubt many persons will be anxious to be the first who "had the honor" of sending the first message by the new line. Be it as it may, I shall consider it a new era in the history of Western Port and adjacent county, and I shall also feel proud that I have done something towards the attainment of so desirable an object. I believe that it was during the latter end of the year 1882 that a public meeting was held at Fraser's hotel, Griffith's Point, to consider the question of telegraphic communication. It was resolved that a deputation wait on the Postmaster-General. The deputation was held, with the result that the matter would be favorably considered. On the 18th May 1883 a very strong deputation waited on the Postmaster-General with the result that sufficient money would be placed on the next estimates to carry out the work, out *[sic]* it would be necessary for the public to be prepared to guarantee the Department. The then President of the Shire of Phillip Island set to work and obtained guarantees from different parties, amounting in the aggregate to £90 for one year, the only persons delining *[sic]* being Messrs Harbison and J. W. Wood of Phillip Island, Mr. Cleeland having gone so far as to guarantee £10 a year for five years, if the line was constructed either to Cowes or Griffith's Point. But the Department had sufficient faith in the line being a paying one, as the guarantor were not called upon; and at a subsequent deputation, headed by Mr. Alex. Stewart, President of the above Shire, and introduced by Mr. Gibb, a reliable promise was made that the line would be constructed, and now tenders are called for the work. The

wire, which is to be of No. 10 guage *[sic]*, will be suspended across the Eastern passage of Westernport between two spars, and the lowest curve or dip of the wire is to be not less than 120 feet above high water level. The distance from Cranbourne to Cowes is estimated at 53 $\frac{1}{3}$  miles. I have no hesitation in saying that the line will pay in spite of the fact that I was informed by one gentleman "that the undertaking would not pay in our lifetime." But supposing that it does not pay, surely the Government can devote money for the benefit and convenience of thousands of persons who have spent their capital in outlay of land and improvements, and cannot get an adequate return for want of quick communication. As I have before said, on a question of life or death should a doctor be required, no communication, for two days at least, can be made after the present mail leaves Cowes, unless one proceeds to Griffiths' Point, and thence to Cranbourne, which is the nearest telegraph station.

From the *Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, Wednesday 17 May 1911, page 15: Points of Interest.

### The Apple Of His Eye

Mr. R. G. Cole, of Grantville, Victoria, has been successful in raising a new seedling apple that promises to be an acquisition to the present number of varieties. Some specimens of fruit forwardd *[sic]* to the orchard inspection branch last week, taken from a seven-year-old tree, were of nice size and appearance. They were not unlike the Trivett's seedling, having rather a conical shape, the eye-formation and general bright red colour being somewhat typical of this blight-proof variety. The fruit is said to be somewhat resistant to the bitter pit, the tree having grown among pit-infested varieties without showing any indication of the disorder which would be likely to develop, particularly in fruit from so young a tree. Further, the variety is blight-proof, its resistancy being established by other grafts placed on the tree succumbing to the pest, which died right down to the base of the new seedling, which remained unaffected. This latter quality may be due to the blight-proof characteristics of the Trivett's seedling, from which it is supposed to have sprung.

From the *Great Southern Advocate*, 30 November 1893.

## The Stony Point Railway Facilities

Present Arrangements Unsatisfactory

(Re-paragraphed for the sake of clarity.)

An influential deputation, including the Shire Presidents of the districts of Flinders, Kangerong, Phillip Island, and Woolamai, waited on the Railway Commissioners a short time ago asking for an alteration in the time of starting the Stony Point train.

The deputation was introduced by Mr. L. L. Smith, and it was pointed out that a previous deputation had presented a largely signed petition, setting forth the trouble and hardships suffered by passengers, owing to the present unsuitable time at which the train started from *[sic]* Melbourne. In addition to the inconvenience suffered by the inhabitants of Flinders, Cowes, Rhyll, Churchill, Newhaven, San Remo, Bass, Kilcunda, Powlett, and other places, it was further pointed out that the loss of business to the watering places and seaside resorts of Flinders, Cowes, and San Remo, meant comparative ruin to those growing settlements. The tourists traffic would be cut off, and the loss would be seriously felt, not only by the inhabitants, but also by the Railway Department. It was shown that tourists and visitors could not be induced to travel by the 6.40 a.m. train. Great expense had been gone to in providing bathing and hotel accommodation, which will have gone for nothing unless a reasonable time of starting is granted.

The deputation asked for any hour between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. The Commissioners would not make any promise then, but a letter has now been sent declining to grant the request. They state that it suits Hastings and the other places on the line, and a change is "impossible." Yet it was possible during previous years to run at 8 and 8.40 a.m., when a large tourist and visitors' traffic was done.

What influences the Commissioners to consider Hastings so much is not easy to understand. It is not a watering-place, nor of any particular trade, and the passenger traffic is not large, yet these distant places which have no interest in common with Hastings have got to wait upon its convenience. There are neither residents nor passengers at Stony Point. Travellers booking at that station must come from Phillip Island, Cowes, Churchill, Newhaven, San Remo, Bass, Kilcunda, Powlett,

and other places, ranging from 10 to 40 miles distant. The time fixed for starting the steamer from San Remo drives most of the traffic in other directions, while the time fixed for the train to leave Melbourne cuts off the tourists and visitors traffic altogether.

The present arrangements are altogether very unsatisfactory, and appear to necessitate further consideration for the Railway Commissioners.

From the *Warragul Guardian*, Tuesday 30 August 1898, page 2: Dandenong.

## Dandenong Market

Messrs Alex. Scott and Co. report on Tuesday last – I have to report the shortest supply for very many years of all classes of stock. Good cows were in demand at fully late rates. All classes of pigs were extremely dear, one chopper making £4 10s. Calves also realised high rates. On Friday last they held at Grantville a most successful clearing sale on account of Messrs Quinlivan Bros., of Bass. There was a very large attendance of buyers from all parts of Gippsland and Melbourne, and sales throughout were very brisk, prices being highly satisfactory. Jersey and Ayrshire heifers to £5 8s, bullocks to £5 17s 6d, medium to £4, cows, springing, to £5 15s, young heifers 40s to 50s.

From the *Great Southern Star*, 2 October 1914, page 2.

## Inverloch

The patriotic concert held here on Wednesday last was the most successful function that has ever taken place in the hall. Such a deserving object as that of assisting the patriotic funds was responsible for such an amount of enthusiasm being shown. The hall was profusely decorated with flags and the residents of the town who worked so loyally for the object in view are to be congratulated upon their efforts. The sum of £30 was raised, which will give an idea of the gathering assembled. The secretarial duties were most creditably carried out by Mr R. H. Edwards, who was ably assisted by Mrs Edwards and a number of other ladies. The programme was a most excellent one, the cream of talent from Wonthaggi and Korumburra taking part. The night being fine, there was a large attendance of visitors from the surrounding townships to assist such a deserving cause.

## Alex In Wonderland

### Did Alexander Stewart Go To Borneo in 1885?

by Geoff Guilfoyle

Introduction: Joseph White in his book, *One Hundred Years of History* (Shire of Bass, 1974), has this to say on the matter on page 23: *At one time during 1885 Cr. A. Stewart lost his seat on the council. He had been invited to go and inspect the timber forests in Borneo, and before leaving he failed to obtain leave of absence. Councillors who did not attend meetings could have their seat declared vacant. This happened, and a by-election was held and Isaac Delaney was elected. The day he took his seat ex. Cr. Stewart attended, and after informing the council of his opinion of their action he left the meeting.* So what is the source of White's information in regard to the Borneo trip? As with so much White wrote, the answer is a blank. Other later secondary sources simply follow White's lead, he being considered until recently to be an impeccable source. I think that I have amply demonstrated over the last few years that the opposite is the case. So what is the truth of the matter? The answer is, as usual, complicated.

#### The Primary Sources

You would think a trip to Borneo, then, as today, an exotic destination, by an important individual such as Alexander Stewart would have elicited some local interest. Instead the primary sources are silent on the matter. And by that I mean there is nothing placing Stewart in Borneo. Not even the minutes of the meeting of the Council mention Borneo, just his absence.

Guessing at White's source is difficult, and may have even come from the unpublished and now lost secondary source (or sources) he has to have used in the writing of *100 Years of History*. This lack of primary sources hints that the trip in fact never took place.

So, it is obviously fiction, right?

Well, not necessarily given who we are dealing with. Alexander Stewart was, after all, a sawmiller, and Borneo was noted for its teak forests. Secondly, Stewart, whatever his other faults, did not lack for enterprise. So his going to Borneo to inspect the forests is not as outlandish as it might seem. But could he actually get there?

#### Getting There

Today, though there are no direct flights from Melbourne, you can reach the main cities of Borneo via Kuala Lumpur, Brunei or Singapore, in a day or two. In the 19th century your options were restricted to a long sea voyage. Additionally, Borneo was part of the Dutch East Indies. Getting there meant sailing to Batavia (modern Jakarta) on Java and hoping that some trading vessel was off to underdeveloped Borneo sooner rather than later and you could get passage on it. This Dutch monopoly on Borneo, however, was challenged in the 1850s with the founding by the British of the Borneo Company and further eroded in 1881 with the formation of the North

Borneo Trading Company. Giving way to the inevitable, in December 1881 the Dutch government suggested a line of demarcation be drawn through the island with the British taking the northern portion (about a tenth of the total territory). This became the imaginatively named British Northern Borneo.<sup>1</sup>

Thus sailing to Borneo from Melbourne became somewhat easier by 1885. But why would you want to?

#### Conditions

The equator runs through the middle of Borneo. So if you love stifling heat and humidity all-year round then Borneo is the place to be, especially in 1885 without the benefits of modern amenities such as air-conditioning and untainted drinking water. Oh, and not to forget the "rainy season" in December and January. And mosquitos. And malaria and other unpleasant tropical diseases. All year round – without efficacious medical treatment. I could also mention the snakes, except coming from Queensferry Stewart would have found their tropical kin rather tame in comparison. However, the giant forest scorpion would have come as a nasty surprise, along with the giant saltwater crocodile. Fortunately in the 1880s the locals, at least, were friendly...

*A report is to hand from Borneo to the effect that the natives of that place had risen against the employes of the North Borneo Company, which was formed last year for the purpose of colonising the island, and it is said that the entire staff of the company was butchered by natives. (Evening News, 20 June 1883, page 4: Massacre at Borneo).*

A massacre or two was not going to put off Australians interested in getting in on such a potential money-maker. The Australian

(continues on Page 9)



*Alex In Wonderland (continued from Page 8)*

Borneo Company was formed in the 2nd half of 1883, with William Reece being the man-on-the-spot in North Borneo...

*A meeting of shareholders in the Australian Borneo Company was held yesterday, at the company's office, Collins-street west Mr. J. J. Casey in the chair. Despatches from Mr. Reece to 14th August and a number of sketch plans were laid before the meeting, and great satisfaction with the company's prospects was expressed. It was stated that after a most laborious and careful exploration of the entire country, between Darvel Bay and Labuk Bay, nine blocks of land, comprising 58,084 acres, had been selected, and that it was all good land, and suitable for the growth of sugar and other tropical products. (Argus, 5 October 1883, page 5).*

*It is evident from Mr. Reece's advices that the mineral resources of Borneo will shortly attract enterprise and capital, there being no doubt of the existence of gold, silver, tin, and copper. The importance of the territory as a port of call for steamers on the great Eastern highway can scarcely be overestimated, more especially as valuable deposits of coal are said to exist in the vicinity of Muruden Harbour... (Weekly Times, Saturday 6 October 1883, page 5)*

*Sandakan Harbour is situated in 118deg. longitude and 5½deg. north latitude. The climate is said to be wonderfully temperate, cool breezes in variably springing up in the evening. Blankets are necessary at night, but mosquito curtains are unknown... the port is five days distant from Port Darwin... The climate is described as delightful. Valuable timber is growing in great quantities. The import and export duties are very light—about 10 per cent. (Argus, 9 July 1884, page 7).*

*...Mr. Reece speaks highly of the growing capabilities of the soil both there and at other places which he visited. "I have never seen," he says, "products grow so fast anywhere. I saw coffee plants in full bearing in fourteen months, although in other places two years generally elapse before the berries can be used. Sugarcane can be got ready for the mill within ten months. The climate is a grand one, the temperature being pretty even all the year round. The average annual rainfall is about 120 inches. The timber is some of the finest I have seen. I measured some of the trees, which were from eight feet to ten feet in diameter, and 120 feet in height before a branch appeared..." (South Australian Register,*

24 June 1884, page 6).

And there you have the key word: timber. But there was timber closer to hand, maybe not as valuable, but easier to get to and extract, such as in East Gippsland where former Grantville sawmill proprietors John Quiggin and Thomas Sawyer were at that time operating.

So why would Stewart drop everything and spend weeks at sea sailing to Borneo, just to see what possibilities the land might offer for himself?

The key to the matter is in Joseph White's curious phrasing: *He had been **invited** to go and inspect the timber forests in Borneo...*

Invited? By whom? When?

Someone, and that could only have been someone involved with operations in Borneo, invited him (and doubtless made the arrangements and, perhaps, paid the passage, which certainly would have added to the appeal for Stewart).

The answer is found not with the Australian Borneo Company but another venture established, likely in 1884\*, to cash in on the opportunities: the North Borneo Trading Company, or rather, the secretary of the company. The *Victoria Government Gazette No.82*, 30 July 1886, page 2228, carries a change of registered office for this company, now placing it at 126 Collins Street. It is signed by S. R. Groom.

Here is another item from the VGG, this one from issue No.55, 4 June 1880, page 1261, announcing that S. R. Groom has won the contract to supply 400 Western Port blue gum telegraph poles for £1470 16s. 8d. This is followed by No.58, 11 June 1880, page 1514, with an addition to the contract for £164 9s. 6d.

Seymour R. Groom was not a sawmiller; however, according to the *Melbourne and Suburban Directory for 1875* [Sands and McDougall, 1875], he was the agent for the Bass River Steam Saw Mills, in other words, Alexander Stewart's operation (also ex-Crump and Grant).

And there is the link. Groom was Stewart's agent in Melbourne and also the secretary of the North Borneo Trading Company.

While I can find no direct evidence that Stewart went to Borneo, this connection with Groom and his absence from the Council for

*(continues on Page 10)*

\* Probably in October 1884, the *VGG No.118*, 3 October 1884, declaring the registered office to be 95 Collins Street. This isn't a notice of transfer.

*Alex In Wonderland (continued from Page 9)*

several months is indirect evidence that he did, indeed, go to this wonderland called North Borneo.

He clearly didn't like the experience [see Conditions for a plausible reason why], and certainly never moved there or, it appears, sunk any money into the venture.

### The Aftermath

Joseph White, who seems somehow to know that Stewart was invited to visit Borneo yet little else of the matter, gives the blanket date of 1885 for the trip. This isn't quite correct (but close enough). More importantly, did Stewart lose his seat on the council as White states, and was the reason for it and Stewart's reaction correct?

Well, obviously not; we are, after all, dealing with Joseph White. Curiously for someone who purportedly had access to the Council minutes-of-meeting for that time (he even states on page 23 that this was a source), White seems to make little use of them. More understandable is his lack of access to the newspapers of the time which detail what actually happened. Other later secondary sources simply follow White's lead.

So what is the truth of the matter? The answer is, for once, straightforward.

Joseph White is wrong in claiming that Stewart didn't seek a leave of absence before sailing off to Borneo. He did, asking for four months at the 3 October 1884 Council meeting, the request being "held over" for consideration.<sup>2</sup>

Curiously, Stewart wasn't there in person, and seems to have done it by letter. Was he already on his way to Borneo and assumed permission would be automatically granted? No. He wasn't foolish enough to expect this. However, the amount of time requested – four months – does point to Borneo being his destination and in 1885 would have been a realistic estimation of the length of his absence.

Stewart was present in person a month later when his request was belatedly granted at the 31 October 1884 Council meeting, except he was allotted just three months instead of four, a much less realistic time frame as everyone present must have realised. But not an impossible one if Stewart had made all travel arrangements in advance (or Groom had done it for him). The motion granting the leave was put by Councillors Clarke and D. B. Kennedy.<sup>3</sup>

David B. Kennedy was one of the more interesting figures in the shire in the 1870s and 1880s. Clearly a man of some ability, he was also, it seems, a polarising figure; either hated or loved. It is hard to judge the relationship between Stewart and Kennedy; both living at or near Queensferry and representing the Corinella ward. This would have made them natural political rivals; however, there appears to be more at play here. You get the impression that both men had sizeable egos and that Queensferry wasn't big enough for both of them. It was personal as much as political. Additionally, Kennedy was not noted for his restraint.

Conspiracy-minded readers may already see Kennedy forming some Machiavellian plot to get rid of his rival by making the timetable tight, hoping that Stewart missed his return date and could be deposed. I doubt this was the case. Stewart's asking for four months (and thus missing four Council meetings) was unprecedented, and it isn't surprising that the request was held over for discussion. The most leave usually requested was a month. The absence of too many Councillors at once meant that shire business could not be transacted, and there was always one or two nonattendances each month.

His absence approved, Stewart presumably left for Borneo soon after. If D. B. Kennedy was seeking to undermine Stewart, he got his opportunity when a request from the still absent Stewart for a further month was received and read at the 6 February 1885 Council meeting. As recounted in the *South Bourke and Mornington Journal* (11 February 1885, page 3)...

*No action to be taken and seat declared vacant, as previous leave expired and Council feel powerless to grant leave.*

Why did the Council feel powerless? Clearly some debate took place on the matter, probably out of session otherwise even Joseph White would have noticed this in the minutes-of-meeting. Equally clearly, Kennedy has to have been behind the move for deposition. So far, business as usual. Whether it be Federal, State or local, politics is politics. It is what happened next that makes this event extraordinary.

Ex-Councillor Stewart showed up and took his usual seat at the table at the 6 March Council meeting, the one in which Kennedy as returning officer for the Corinella riding reported that J. W. Delany had been elected to

*(continues on Page 11)*

*Alex In Wonderland (continued from Page 10)*

fill the vacancy left by the deposed Stewart.

The fiery Kennedy and the stubborn Stewart facing off. An epic battle of words then erupted.

Except... It didn't. Kennedy, Stewart and the rest of the Council handled the matter with unusual commonsense. As reported by the *South Bourke and Mornington Journal* (25 March 1885, page 2)...

*The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed. Councillor Kennedy here asked why Councillor Stewart took his seat at the table, an election having been held to fill the vacancy caused by his non-attendance, and for which Mr. J. W. Delany had been elected.—The President said that any person taking a seat at the Council table illegally was liable to very severe penalties; but that he felt powerless to take any action in the matter as there was a point of law involved.—It was resolved, on the motion of Councillors S. West and Hogan, that a case be stated for the opinion of Council's standing counsel, as to whether Mr. Stewart or Mr. Delany was entitled to the seat. Councillor Kennedy here handed in a written protest against Mr Stewart's taking his seat.*

And that is it. Stewart left at this point and the meeting continued as usual.

Pending the clarification of their status, neither Stewart nor the newly elected Delany attended the 2 April 1885 meeting at which said status was *not* clarified by W. J. Gilchrist, the Council's standing counsel. It isn't recorded what this opinion was, but his offering – which seems to have been the legal equivalent of “still working on it” – was placed “on the table” till the next meeting.<sup>4</sup>

At the 24 April 1885 Council meeting, with Stewart and Delany again both absent, Gilchrist's final opinion – which seems to have been the legal equivalent of “dunno” – was considered. Solomon West and Kennedy put a motion that the issue be referred to Mr. Webb, Q.C. This was duly passed. It wasn't until the 29th May 1885 Council meeting that everything was resolved, G. H. Webb's opinion being that Stewart was still a member of the Council and that Delany's election was invalid.<sup>5</sup>

So Stewart was back and Delany out (not that he was ever really in). D. B. Kennedy's nefarious scheme to get rid of his rival (if he ever had one) was thwarted, yet done in a cautious and legal way so as to prevent any overt resentment from poisoning the Council.

This was shown just five months later, after the August Council elections. Kennedy was returned, as was Stewart (Delany didn't stand). That just left choosing the new Shire President. As recorded in the *South Bourke and Mornington Journal* (2 September 1885, page 3)...

*Councillor West nominated Councillor Stewart for the position of President for the ensuing year.—Councillor Clarke nominated Councillor Kennedy.—Councillor Stewart was elected by four votes to three, both nominees having consented not to vote on the question.*

And in this vote you see the Kennedy and Stewart factions at play with Kennedy never quite having the numbers. This, however, was the last time they would face each other across the chamber in a presidential vote.

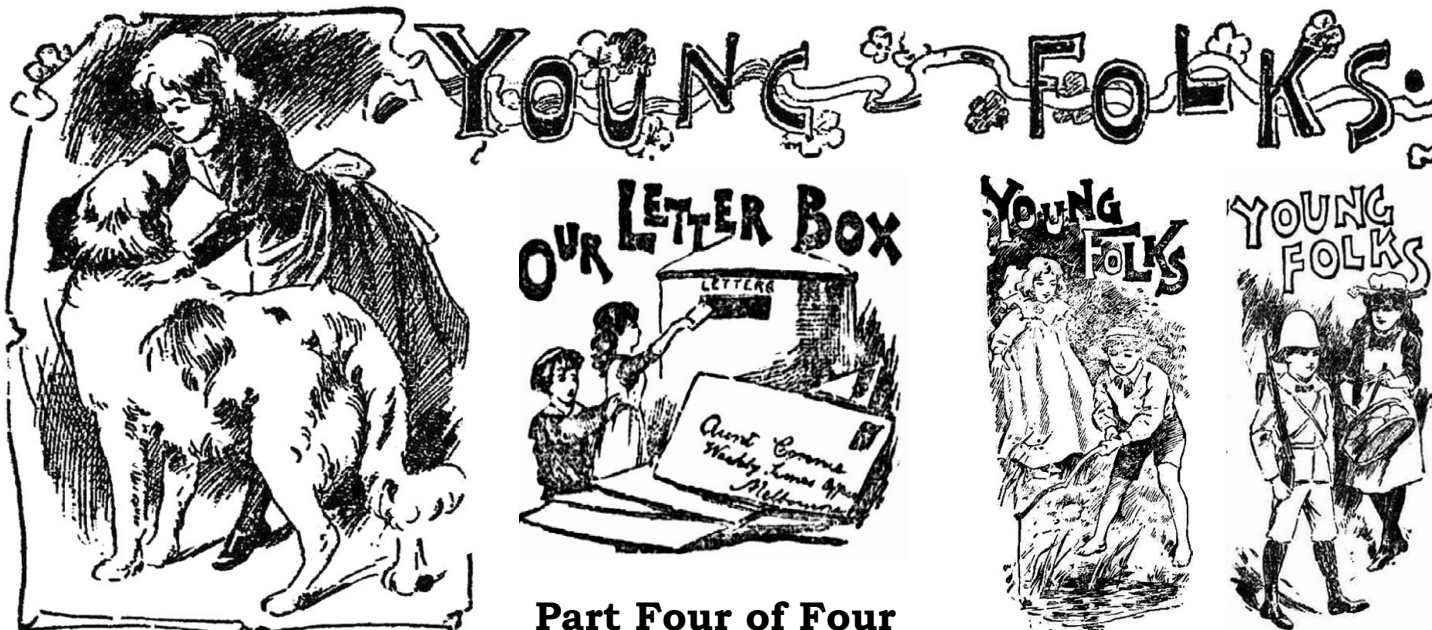
Alexander Stewart grew increasingly ill during 1886 and did not seek re-election to the Council in August. After this he mostly retired from public life, dying in April 1888. David B. Kennedy stayed on the council until the elections of August 1887 which he did not contest. He also died in April, but in 1890. Stewart was 56; Kennedy 53.

Footnotes:

1. Borneo Company Limited, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borneo\\_Company\\_Limited](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borneo_Company_Limited), viewed 29 July 2023; North Borneo Chartered Company, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North\\_Borneo\\_Chartered\\_Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Borneo_Chartered_Company), viewed 29 July 2023; *Evening Journal* (Adelaide), 6 December 1881, page 2: The Borneo Company.
2. *South Bourke and Mornington Journal*, 8 October 1884: Shire of Phillip Island.
3. *ibid*, 5 November 1884: Shire of Phillip Island.
4. *ibid*, 8 April 1885: Shire of Phillip Island.
5. *ibid*, 29 April 1885: Shire of Phillip Island; 3 June 1885: Shire of Phillip Island.



Borneo in 1947



From the *Weekly Times*, 27 February 1915, page 35.

### A Very Pretty Place

Lilian Dickinson, who lives in Broome crescent, Wonthaggi, writes:—Dear Aunt Connie,—Wonthaggi is a very pretty place. It has a very large population, considering that it is not six years old. I attend the State school, and there are about 700 children attending. We are nearly surrounded by beaches. We have six churches, a convent, one hotel, and some nice big shops. We have one theatre and one picture hall. My father works in the State coal mine, and I have one brother, who is a carpenter there. I am 13 years of age, and am in the sixth grade at school.

From the *Weekly Times*, Saturday 17 March 1917, page 37.

### Our Farm

Catherine Garbellini, who lives at 5 Mile Drain, Koo-wee-rup, writes:—Dear Aunt Connie,—It is a long time since I last wrote to you, but I hope you still think of me as one of your many nieces. I will take for my subject "Our Farm." There are 110 acres in our farm, of which 65 acres are under potatoes. The potatoes are looking well after this rain. We had about 40 acres sown down with oats and barley, but it is now cut and stacked, and the rest of the land we have sown down with grass for the horses and cows. We have six horses and a little foal, besides seven cows. We separate our milk, and send our cream to the factory, where it is made into butter. My brother at the front has been in hospital for about two months. I wish "The Weekly Times" every success. Please may I write again? My age is 14.

*[I hope your brother has quite recovered, Catherine, Yes; write again. Aunt Connie.]*

From the *Weekly Times*, Saturday 7 April 1917, page 37.

### The Native Bear

Phyllis Mackenzie, who lives at 132 Station Street, Port Melbourne, writes:—Dear Aunt Connie,—I am writing to you to ask if I may be added to your great list of nieces, and as this is my first letter to you I hope it will be a success. The native bear is a dear little fluffy animal, with large brown sensitive eyes. There are a good many of the bears to be found at Inverloch, a pretty little place on the South Gippsland line. At Christmas, when I go to stay with grandma at Inverloch, I often have the good luck to find a gumtree with a little bear in it. This Christmas, when I was up country, there was a dear little bear in a tree opposite grandma's. I used to go and see it every day. It stopped there for quite a long time. One day when I was taking my sister to the store I saw some naughty boys throwing stones at my little friend. I tried to stop them, but it was no use, so I went and told grandfather, who was much annoyed at children throwing stones at dumb animals. When they saw granddad they quickly took their departure. The next day the little bear was gone, and just through those naughty boys. I am 13 years and one month old. Please may I write again?

*[Yes, Phyllis; write again.—Aunt Connie]*

From the *Weekly Times*, Saturday 6 July 1918, page 37.

### Koo-Wee-Rup District

Katie Carbellini, living at Three-Mile Drain, Koo-wee-rup, writes:—Dear Aunt Connie,—It is a long time since I last wrote to you. This time I will take for my subject Koo-wee-rup and District. Koo-Wee-Rup is a large, one

*(continues on Page 13)*

*Young Folk (continued from Page 12)*

sided township. It consists of a large hotel, a coffee palace, a school, a baker's shop, two butcher's shops, three churches, four general stores, a lollie shop and a blacksmith's shop. Large quantities of oats, barley and potatoes are grown, but some of the farmers are talking of growing flax. I have left school and am helping at home. I wish this war was over. I have had one brother killed. Many of the boys from here have gone and some of them have returned. Wishing the Young Folks' page every success.

*[I am sorry to hear of your sad loss, Katie. Thank you for your good wishes. I shall be pleased to hear from you again.—Aunt Connie.]*

From the *Weekly Times*, 9 November 1918, page 54.

### **Among The Hills**

Nellie Irvine, who lives at "Fulton Grange," Poowong, writes:—Dear Aunt Connie,—This time I am going to write about Poowong, a small township in the heart of the hills, among which are dotted many farms. The township itself is about six miles from Nyora railway station, and about a mile from our farm. The road from Nyora winds in and out among the trees, most prettily. A motor bus runs to Poowong and provides a very nice ride. The main road of the township is very wide, and a row of trees, and also some grass growing down the centre, which gives a lovely effect. There is a butcher and baker's shop combined, also a fruit and sweet shop, and a general store. The main industries of Poowong are onion growing and dairy farming. The farmers grow their own oats, maize and millet, while the ground is also suitable for potatoes. The place is over-run with rabbits, and unless gardens are made rabbit-proof all the plants would be spoiled. The river Bass flows through the district, and in the hot weather many delightful hours may be spent on its cool and shady banks. I am not a country girl—I am staying here for my health, but it is so fresh and pretty, and there are such heaps of interesting things to do that I should be happy and content to live here for the rest of my life. I am nine years and 10 months old. I should like to write again, Aunt Connie, if I may.

*[Certainly, Nellie, write again. I hope your health will soon be restored to you—Aunt Connie.]*

**For bronchial coughs, take  
Woods' Great Peppermint Cure, 1/6**

From the *Weekly Times*, 30 November 1918, page 54.

### **Bird Day At Wonthaggi**

Bertha Dawson, who lives at Wonthaggi, writes:—Dear Aunt Connie.—This is the second time I have written to you. This time I will take for my subject Bird Day. It was Bird Day on Friday. We found six birds' nests, but not one had any eggs. The children in the upper class room found many nests, and nearly every one had eggs in. We had a pleasant walk through the tea-tree. We came to a funny little hut; all the windows were broken. Inside was an old engine. There was nobody in. There was some water in front of it so that we could not pass. The hut was near the railway. But soon it began to rain. We all ran into the tea-tree. After it stopped raining we went back. I am seven years of age, and in the lower third at school. Please may I write again?

*[Yes, dear, write again—Aunt Connie.]*

From the *Weekly Times*, Saturday 17 May 1919, page 50.

### **Edith Likes Farm Life**

Edith Davis, who lives at Lang Lang, writes:—Dear Aunt Connie.—I used to live in East Prahran, but now I am living in the country. I have two brothers and one sister. We have two miles to walk to the Heath Hill school. There are 30 children attending the school. We have a nice garden and a big playground. We are all proud of our teacher. On Friday an honor board was unveiled by Mr Kelly. It is about four feet long and four feet wide. It has *[unclear word]* names of the boys who fought. We will always look up with reverence to the honor board. We sang the National Anthem and four other songs. Mr Downward, M.L.A., and four other gentlemen gave addresses. It was very nice to listen. The school was full. After the ceremony was over the ladies went and got the eatables ready and the girls and boys had a picnic. We had a lot of games. I will always remember the unveiling of the honor board. I like being on the farm. We are milking 11 cows. We have a lot of calves, two of which we hand feed. We have about 70 pigs, 50 hens and about 60 ducks, including ducklings. There are a lot of mushrooms about, and we go out gathering them. We have had about three buckets full. We have a pony and he is very quiet. We have rides on him up and down the paddocks. I trust you will accept me as one of your many nieces. I am 12 years of age.

*(continues on Page 14)*

*Young Folk (continued from Page 13)*

From the *Weekly Times*, Saturday 31 May 1919, page 50.

### **The District of Yannathan**

Airlie Ragg, who lives at "Lightwood Park," Yannathan, writes:—Dear Aunt Connie,—This is the first time I have written to you, and hope you will accept me as one of your nieces. I would like to try for a prize, so I will take for my subject the district where I live. There is no township at Yannathan. Our nearest town is Lang Lang, eight miles away. There is a school, hall, church and butter factory here but they are situated in different parts of the district. The chief thing that is done here is dairying. Some of the farmers send their milk to Melbourne, others send their cream to the factory. The country all around here is very flat and is often flooded in the winter. The Lang Lang River flows through Yannathan. Most of the farmers around bore for water, and have windmills to pump the water for the cattle. It is good grass country, mostly rye grass and clover. There is no railway here at present. Our nearest station, Caldermeade, is eight miles from here. There is a branch railway line being made from Koo-Wee-Rup to a place called McDonald's Track and the Yannathan station is going to be on the farm where I live. My brother and I go to the Heath Hill School, which is nearer for us than the Yannathan School. I have a little sister, her name is Nancy. She is just four years old, and is going to school next year. My father has been taking the "Weekly Times" for a long while, and I always enjoy reading the Young Folks' page. I am eleven years and three months old and in the seventh grade at school. So, wishing the "Weekly Times" every success. Please may I write again?

*[I am pleased to add you to our list of nieces, Airlie, and shall be glad to hear from you again.—Aunt Connie.]*

From the *Weekly Times*, Saturday 4 August 1923, page 46.

### **The Beauty of Spring**

Rosie Swan, who lives at Bass, South Gippsland writes:—Dear Aunt Connie,—As I have not written to you for a long time, I think I will try again. I was greatly pleased to see my last letter in print. Springtime has come at last, with all its beauty and freshness. The birds, flowers and trees looked their best, and was it a wonder? I resolved to take a walk in the bush. To spend a day of glorious wonders in the bush with all its lures and fascinations and wonders undisturbed. Early

one bright morning I packed some lunch and set out on a journey. The dew had recently fallen, and the grass sparkled and glittered in the early sun like diamonds. The mossy green grass, on which I trod seemed like an endless stretch of green carpet. The stately gums stood upright, waving their boughs majestically at me. On either side of me wildflowers grew in an abundance of colors, and blackberry bushes clung to the trunks of trees and to short stumps, and shrubs. I followed the winding track, to a mossy bank, where the murmuring stream gently flowed past. Here I sat down and took in nature's loveliness while the murmuring stream lulled me to sleep. I was awakened by the straining noise of a pair of kookaburras on a tree near by. I picked my arms full of the loveliest wild flowers, and walked to a place where the pink-tipped daisies grew so rapidly, and laid down my wild flowers, to make daisy wreaths, which amused me for some time. Evening was drawing on, so I gathered my flowers and walked slowly toward home, feeling rather miserable to leave such a beauty spot. Now and then a pair of goldfinches twittered among the bushes. Magpies gathering food for their young, kept watch over their nests as I passed. I at last arrived home, feeling that my ambitions were realised. So that was the end to a "Perfect Day." We have had a rainy month. I like reading the Young Folks page, and wishing it good luck, I will close. (13 years 10 months).

*[I am glad to have heard from you again, Rosie.—Aunt Connie.]*

From the *Weekly Times*, 10 November 1923, page 48.

### **The Kernot District**

Rhoda Miles, who lives at Kernot, writes:—Dear Aunt Connie,—This is the first time I have written to you. I am very interested in the Young Folks' page, and thought I would like to write to you. First of all, I will tell you about the district in which I live. There are beautiful river flats about Kernot, which make the property very valuable. The name of the river is the Bass River. In the months between December and June we all go fishing and get good hauls of blackfish, and plenty of eels. Kernot is a dairying district. We are milking sixty cows, and we send the milk to Melbourne. The railway station is not far from our house, and we are about half a mile from the school. I like going to school. I am in the fifth grade, and I have a brother Stanley in the seventh grade, and I have three other brothers and one sister who have

*(continues on Page 15)*

*Young Folk (continued from Page 14)*

left school. I am ten years and eight months of age. Wishing the Young Folks' page every success. Please, Aunt Connie, may I write again?

*[Yes, Rhoda, but when writing use one side of the paper only.—Aunt Connie.]*

From the *Weekly Times*, Saturday 30 January 1926, page 55.

### **Christmas in Gippsland**

From Betty Steedman, who lives at St. Helier, South Gippsland. I am spending my holidays at my friend's Auntie's farm. It is in South Gippsland. We came up here on Christmas morning. We had two fowls for dinner, and a plum pudding. I got sixpence out of the pudding. On New Year's Day we had two ducks and another pudding. I got a silver horseshoe out of it. They have five calves and their names are Mollie, Nancy, Beatrice, Maggie and Snowy. Nancy is the youngest. She is about five months old. The other four are one year old. They also have ten cows, and five are milking at present. Their names are Kitty, Cherry, Daisy, Pet and Grace. There are 22 chickens and about 20 fowls. They have a pony called Jack, and we ride him. We also milk the cows. Jess and Dolly are the two draught horses. My friend's uncle has been harvesting, so we have helped him by trampling down the hay and getting it into stacks. Then on Sunday night we had a beautiful Christmas cake with "A Merry Christmas" written on it, and on each side it had written on it, with pink icing, "To Betty" and "To Milner." My name is Betty and my friend's name is Milner. They have two dear little puppies, so we named them Flip and Flop. They are very playful little things, and we have a nice little kennel for them. We went to Nyora once. That is about six miles from where we are staying. I am 10 years old, and I am in sixth grade at school.

*[You mustn't forget to write again when you are back at school, Betty.—Aunt Connie.]*

From the *Weekly Times*, Saturday 24 July 1926, page 55.

From Mollie Medew, who lives at Rhyll, Phillip Is.:—My sister Sylvie and I are staying at Rhyll with grandmother, and we go to school. We spend a lot of time on the sand in front of the house. My mother and father are on their farm up at Gippsland. I have three brothers at home. I will soon have a birthday. It is on August 15 and I will be eight years old. I am in the second grade.

*[Do you build sand castles, Mollie?—Aunt Connie.]*

### **And a bonus letter from 1906...**

[Note: punctuation, or absence of, as per original].

From the *Leader*, 8 Dec. 1906, page 31: Correspondence.

Archie's Creek via Grantville Victoria

Dear Cinderella,—

I was very much surprised as well as pleased to see that my first letter was successful in gaining the Competition prize, which I received yesterday, and so I must thank you very much. Also for publishing my "One Letter Comedy." I have only one (1) pet and that is a tabby cat. I call him "Tabby." He is such a nice old thing. When I say to him "Give me a kiss" he will rub his mouth up against mine. We have another cat but she is not so nice as mine. She has three such dear little kittens, they are just beginning to run about now. One is tabby with white paws, and the other one is black with white paws while the third is all black (can you give me three nice names for them). My father drives the coach from San Remo to Archie's Creek every day. He has three (3) horses their names are, Kate, Rose, and Lofty. We live right beside the Butter Factory. It is such a nice Factory and they keep it so clean. There is a lot of butter going away from there now. Archie's Creek is right in the hollow between two hills and it is very cold in the winter. There is an Hotel, General Store, Butter Factory, Blacksmiths, Saddlers, Bootmakers, and eight houses including the people living at the business places. I go to school and I am in the fifth class we have to walk about 1½ miles to school. There is only a small Garden at our school but it is a nice one all the same. Our teacher's name is Mr. Kellock, he has only been here since the holidays. The teacher that we had before the holidays was so nice his name is Mr. Stewart, so the school that gets him next will be lucky I think that this is all the news this time. So I will close with love. From Your Loving Friend

Bessie K. Cuthbert

14 years

P.S.—I don't know if there are any rules for correspondence or not. I like reading the children's column very much. I am collecting Post Cards. I have got 55 post cards and a Post Card Album.

*[There are no rules for ordinary correspondence, Bessie—only for competition letters. Call your kits "Smudge," "Whitefoot" and "Sambo." Write again.—Cinderella.]*

For more letters see *The Western Port Times*, Vol.2 No.5 September 2019; Vol.2 No.10 February 2020 and Vol.3 No.1 May 2020.

# The McLeod Prison

## Part Four: 1929-1937

From the *Koo Wee Rup and Lang Lang Guardian*, Thursday 10 October, 1929: District News.

### Lang Lang

Arthur Griffiths, alias Reginald McRae, escaped from the Penal Settlement, French Island, between midnight and 4 a.m. on October 2nd. He effected his escape by breaking the lock of the settlement boat and rowing across to the mainland. Unfortunately for him, the boat got stuck on a mud flat and remained there for about five hours before it floated off. He then landed at Tenby, near Corinella, at about 8.30 a.m. Before leaving the island he secured his suit case and private clothes, and on landing he discarded his prison clothes and donned his own suit and made for the scrub. Constable Orgill was informed of the escape, and with commendable promptitude set off in search of him, but before doing so he communicated with Constable Thomson, of Bass, and Constable Baker, of Loch, who set off at once. After searching and tracking the escapee for several hours they came across him at the Almurta station, a distance of about eight miles from where he landed. When accosted by the police he protested his innocence and stated he was in search of work and had never been on the island. Constable Orgill proved to be too old a bird to be caught with chaff. He took hold of his waistcoat with the object of examining it, but in reality to smell it, and found camphor fumes very pronounced. He said to his comrades, "It is him; put the handcuffs on him." It appears that when the prisoners private clothes are taken from them a liberal supply of camphor is put amongst them to keep the moths away. The prisoner was brought before Mr W. Cole, J.P. and remanded to appear at the City Court, Melbourne, on Wednesday. Constable Orgill, in searching the suit case, found five hacksaw blades belonging to the Penal department. It is quite obvious what he intended to do with them if the opportunity occurred. Had the Penal department communicated with Constable Orgill when it was discovered that Griffiths had escaped there is not the slightest doubt that he would have been on the shore waiting to receive him with open arms. Instead of that they communicated with the officials in Melbourne first, thereby losing valuable time. Constables Orgill, Baker and Thomson are to be commended for their smart capture.

From the *Kalgoorlie Miner*, Tuesday 15 October 1929, page 5.

### Escape From Custody

#### Dash For Freedom

Melbourne, Oct. 14.

In the City Court Walter [sic] Griffiths, a young man, of good appearance, was charged with having escaped from lawful custody.

Constable Thomson, Bass, said on the morning of October 2nd a prisoner from French Island landed from a dinghy on the mainland near Corinella, and went off into the bush. Accused was arrested at Almurta. While taking him back to Grantville, witness said, "You had a rough time on the water last night." Accused said, "Yes. The dinghy drifted on to a sandbank and delayed me two hours, otherwise I would have had a good start."

Griffiths, who refused to plead, was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment.

On a further charge of having broken into the storeroom at the settlement and stolen hack saw blades, rowbacks to how ns [sic] of jam, and a jemmy, valued at £1, Griffiths was committed for trial at the Supreme Court sessions on 15th October.

From the *Koo Wee Rup and Lang Lang Guardian*, 22 Jan. 1931

### With The Prisoners at French Island

(By "Onlooker")

With the wind blowing at about half a gale and the prospect of a heavy sea, thirteen enthusiasts recently turned up from the Bayles Cricket Club to play a game of cricket with the prisoners on French Island—25 miles by road five across the bay. Some of the Bayles boys looked very white and were real glad to reach the landing. Walking from the pier along well-made paths, the visitors were astonished at the progress that had been made; stately pines on either side, then beautiful and well laid out grounds and pretty flowers, well-kept lawns and vegetable garden. "This is not a prison," exclaimed one, "it is a gentleman's home." Yes, and many gentlemen's homes are not nearly so nice; nothing prison like here. But here is a cannon, and a most dreadful looking one, too, and one thinks if they don't behave it might be turned on and blow them to pieces. On further examination, however, it is found

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*The McLeod Prison (continued from Page 16)*

to be only a wooden one, doubtless made by someone in their spare time. Then we come to the superintendent's home or office, and are very cordially received by him and his officers. We then have our first look at the prisoners. We are amazed. Can these tall straight-limbed, lithe, bronzed men with clear eyes be "the bold, bad men" we hear about? No, they are guests at a guests' home, the clean open-air life making them men. If only 25 per cent. reform, then I say they are paying guests. The writer could here pick out a team of athletes which would compare favorably with any in Victoria. The whole place is sweet and clean, and, to use an old expression, "one could almost eat off the floor." As to discipline, four officers control 50 men. This speaks for itself. After dinner (we took our own food) we played the match, His Majesty's Guests v. Bayles. We were sadly beaten, but we make no excuse for that; the better team won. We were allowed to go anywhere. They have fishing, swimming and wireless, but depend largely on outsiders for sport. They tell us it is a red letter day when teams come over, and they talk about it for days afterward. Once more we move to the dining room for tea. Here all the food, in the way of cakes left over, cheer their hearts and stomachs, and perhaps remind them of home and mother. (Sports, take plenty of "cookies" when going there.) After tea there were some speeches and we sang "For They Are Jolly Good Fellows," and as a compliment to us they sang it, too. One could make himself very happy there if only he could see the outside world now and again. Something could be done in this direction by letting out, under supervision, of course, those in the special class, whom have only a few months to serve, to play a game of cricket or football with outside teams. It would be something to look forward to, and would also help them to get used to the world again. To sum the whole matter up, the writer thinks it is money well spent on this reformatory prison, and reflects great credit on those who have the management. Wet through and tired, but very happy, it was the best day we had for a long time—the day with the King's guests.

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Fire stoves mantelpieces, coppers etc., the best in Wonthaggi at Melbourne prices. The Melbourne Furnishing Coy., Graham-street, Wonthaggi.

From the *Herald*, Tuesday 24 July 1934, page 10.

## Two Who Couldn't Escape Missed At French Island Muster

At muster at the French Island penal settlement last evening it was discovered that a prisoner, Eric Pike, 20, was missing.

Early today he was found just outside the settlement territory on the island.

Pike was originally convicted on November 26, 1929, of the manslaughter of a farmer, and was sentenced to three years' hard labor and to be detained during *[sic]* the Governor's pleasure.

He was released on February 23, 1933, and nine months later was sentenced to one month for having illegally used a motor car.

Because of the breach of his parole as an indeterminate prisoner, he was returned to reformatory on December 12.

The Inspector General of the Penal Department (Mr J. Akeroyd) said today that Pike would come before the Indeterminate Sentences Board later, and be charged with *[unclear word]* having tried to escape.

From the *Herald*, Wednesday 19 September 1934, page 5.

## French Island Escapees Seen Near Frankston Early Today

### Footsore Men With Ragged Clothes

The two escaped prisoners from French Island are believed to be on the road between Frankston and Dandenong. Police from both centres are making a search following a report that two men answering the descriptions of the escapees were seen in Frankston at 2 a.m. today.

The suspects were first seen soon after midnight when they were given a lift on a motor truck between Hastings and Tyabb. They arrived in Frankston two hours later, but the police were not notified until 9 a.m.

The missing men are:—

Eric Pike, 20, height, 5ft. 10½in.; weight, 13 stone; brown hair, blue eyes, scar on right cheek, very sallow complexion.

Thomas Fullerton, 21; 5ft. 10in., medium build, fair hair, brown eyes, fresh complexion, scars on chest and thigh.

Both were serving indeterminate sentences.

The truck driver who picked up the men about a mile out of Hastings last night, said today that he had not paid particular attention to the men's clothes, except to note that they were torn and ragged. One of them complained that his feet were sore and he was carrying his

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*The McLeod Prison (continued from Page 17)*

boots.

He had thought that they were local residents when they hailed him.

When he dropped the men at Tyabb they had walked on toward Frankston. Evidently the two men arrived in Frankston a couple of hours later, for a local resident informed the police today that he had seen two strangers in the town about 2 a.m. They seemed to be walking in the direction of Dandenong.

The search began in Frankston and practically every bathing box along the beach was visited. Three constables set out in a car soon afterwards to cover the road to Dandenong, and Dandenong police also organised a search.

As the men left French Island some time on Sunday night, they must have been in hiding somewhere between Stony Point and Hastings. The dinghy in which they are believed to have made their escape has not been recovered.

From the *Herald*, Wednesday 6 February 1935, page 1.

## **Escapees Are Recaptured**

### **Two Men Disappear From French Island**

Having apparently clambered through the small rear window of the cubicle in which they were quartered, two men escaped from the McLeod settlement on French Island at 1 a.m. today, but were recaptured about 2.30 p.m. in dense bush at Stockyard Point, on the Island.

The men were Frederick Lambert 21, and Leonard E. Ryan, 22. They were first missed at the 6 a.m. muster, and all watch stations on the island were immediately warned of the escape, which, it is believed, took place at 1 a.m.

At 1 p.m. the headquarters of McLeod settlement was informed that the foot prints of the men had been found in the bush about three miles from the settlement.

Two warders followed the tracks, and the men were easily retaken. Lambert was recently sentenced to six months' imprisonment for shopbreaking and larceny, and Ryan to six months' for loitering with intent to commit a felony and for larceny.

From the *Herald*, Friday 10 May 1935, page 5.

## **Youths Escape At French Island**

### **Missing from Early Muster**

Police and Penal Department officials are combing French Island for two youths who were missing from a special early morning muster at the settlement yesterday.

The youths are Leslie G. Atkins, 24, and Clive Muir, 22.

They are believed to be still on the island.

The last escape on the island occurred on February 6, when Frederick Lambert, 21, and Leonard E. Ryan, 22, were recaptured shortly afterwards at Stockyard Point on the island.

The missing youths are believed to have taken food with them, and may be able to live some days in the dense bush in which the search is being made.

Atkins is serving a six months' sentence with indeterminate detention to *[unclear word]* on a charge of having maliciously set fire to a house.

Muir, who is serving two cumulative sentences of six months on each of two charges of larceny, is 5 ft. 8½ ins. high, of medium build, with dark hair, fresh complexion and brown eyes.

Last month Atkins was bitten by a snake and after treatment was taken to the Royal Melbourne Hospital where he made a complete recovery. He was returned in perfect health to the island.

From the *Herald*, Thursday 20 February 1936, page 2.

## **Two French Island Escapees**

### **Traced To Glen Forbes**

Stealing a dinghy from a concrete shed at McLeod Penal Settlement, French Island, today, two young men who were serving sentences escaped. It is believed they have headed for Wonthaggi.

The escapees are:—

Robert Cunningham, alias Malcolm Cameron Stuart, 23.

Eric Howell, 23, laborer.

The escape was discovered when reveille was sounded between 6.30 and 7 a.m. today.

A search was organised immediately, and Constable Ogill *[sic]* discovered the dinghy and found tracks in the sand, which he followed to Glen Forbes, where, it is thought, the men may have caught a train to Wonthaggi.

Howell, who is about 5ft 6½in. in height is of medium build, has fair complexion, and brown hair and eyes. Cunningham is about 5ft 7in., of medium build, dark complexion, black hair, and brown eyes.

Howell was committed to a reformatory prison from Bendigo General Sessions on November 1, 1933, for receiving. He was sent to Castlemaine Reformatory on November 1, 1933, and was paroled on September 17, 1934.

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*The McLeod Prison (continued from Page 18)*

Both men were wearing prison dress, and Howell wore a pair of overalls. Penal Department officials explained, however, that the uniform would not be informative to outsiders, as French Island is a reformatory.

Both men have long criminal records. It is thought that they escaped from their quarters during the night and set out for the mainland on a favorable tide, which would flow about 5 a.m. The mainland is about a mile from French Island.

### Long Records

On February 26, 1934, Cunningham was discharged on parole, but three months later was sentenced to 12 months' hard labor and was recommitted to a reformatory.

Another sentence of 12 months' hard labor was imposed on Cunningham on May 15, 1935, for shop-breaking and stealing, and later he was transferred to French Island.

On November 27 he was again arrested and placed in the reformatory at Pentridge. He was taken to French Island on September 9, 1935.

Cunningham was sent to a reformatory in 1928 for breaking and entering. On April 29, 1931, he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment on another charge. On May 6, 1931, he was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment for breaking and entering and larceny from the person. He was recommitted to a reformatory on February 3, 1932, for breaking his parole.

It is believed that the escapees were sighted rowing across the bay by an observer on the island who used powerful field glasses.

From the *Shepparton Advertiser*, 21 February 1936, page 5.

### Prisoner Escape From Penal Settlement

Melbourne, Thursday.

Having secured a small rowing boat by breaking the padlock of its shed, two prisoners escaped from the McLeod Penal Settlement, French Island, about 5 a.m. today.

At 1 p.m., more than five hours after the search had begun, the police were concentrating on combing the district around Glen Forbes, where it was reported that the men had been seen early today.

An extensive search by police and warders is being made in the beach country between Glen Forbes and Grantville, but it is believed that the men may have boarded the Melbourne train. The men are:—

Eric W. Howell, aged 24, laborer.

Robert Cunningham, aged 23, laborer also known as Malcolm Cameron Stuart.

Warders believed that the prisoners awaited a favorable tide to escape toward the mainland which is nearly a mile distant.

A party under Constable Ogill [*sic*], from Glen Forbes, found the boat abandoned on the stretch of mainland directly opposite the settlement, and they followed the tracks in the direction of Grantville. Later Constable Ogill [*sic*], who knows the country well, picked up tracks of the missing prisoners near Glen Forbes.

### Accomplices On Mainland

The possibility that the men travelled by train to Wonthaggi and completed the journey to Melbourne by motor car is also being investigated. Officers of the Penal Department think that the men may have been helped by persons on the mainland, who provided them with clothes suitable for travelling, and that Howell and Cunningham were on the morning passenger train to Wonthaggi.

From the *Koo Wee Rup and Lang Lang Guardian*, 12 March 1936

### Lang Lang Court

At the Lang Lang Police Court on the 4th inst. Robert Cunningham and Eric. W. Howell, who escaped from French Island but were later recaptured, were charged with having been rogues and vagabonds. After evidence had been given by Mr J. Greig, superintendent of the McLeod Settlement, and Constable Baker the men were sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment. A charge of larceny from a dwelling was reduced to simple larceny, and the men were sentenced to six months' imprisonment, the sentences to be concurrent.

From the *Herald*, Thursday 1 April 1937, page 1.

### Escape From Island Prison On "Honor" System

Lang Lang, Thursday.—Arthur Thomas Elliott, 20, escaped from the McLeod prison settlement at French Island during the night. He is believed to be hiding in scrub country between the prison and Tankerton.

Elliott, who had just completed the fourth week of a sentence of nine months, imposed at Dandenong, for having been in possession of housebreaking instruments and for shop-breaking, was last seen at 10.30 o'clock last night.

His escape was not noticed until the roll

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*The McLeod Prison (continued from Page 19)*

call shortly after 6 o'clock today. A search of the island was fruitless, but early inquiries showed that no boat was missing.

Escape from French Island is difficult and dangerous without a boat. The nearest point on the mainland to the prison settlement is Corinella, five miles across a swift running sea channel.

His description is: 5ft. 6in. tall, brown hair and eyes, scar on index finger. He was dressed in prison clothes.

French Island reformatory is conducted on the honor system; only trusted men are sent there. They are employed on farm work and tree planting, and live in dormitory dwellings and cottages, with only enough restraint to ensure discipline. Escapes from the island are seldom attempted.



(Top) undated but almost certainly 1946 photos of the supervisor/administrative cabins at the prison farm, and (bottom) boat at prison farm pier. Source: Public Records Office, VPRS 10516/P0001. French Island Penal Settlement – Corinella.

From the *Argus*, Wednesday 24 November 1937, page 3.

## Fugitive Not Yet Caught Police Search Beaches

Lang Lang, Tuesday.

William E. Lewis, aged 24 years, who escaped from the McLeod penal settlement at French Island on Saturday night, is still at large. Believing that he may have crossed to the mainland, police have been searching the beaches between Lang Lang and Grantville, Grantville and San Remo, and Lang Lang and Tooradin. The beach from Cowes to Newhaven, on Phillip Island, is also being patrolled.

Superintendent Porter, who is in charge of the penal settlement, and warders discovered tracks near Sandy Point leading to some dense scrub. They are watching for Lewis to come out as they feel sure that he is in the scrub.

\* \* \*

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