NEPEAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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Painting: ‘Sierra Nevada’ by Vic , from the Andrew Mackinnon Collection [see p.8]
What a busy time we have had! 3200 volunteer hours logged January-June, plus many unrecorded. Thanks to all who have contributed so much to the various areas of work. To give an example, at 10.30 pm at a Shire Council Hastings meeting on a recent wild and windy night, watching Frank Hindley and Gary Naughton argue so competently against the bulk of the Continental Hotel proposed development, I thought, "Commitment doesn’t come higher than this!” And I’m sure their hours of preparation will not have been recorded in the log.

At the Royal Historical Society seminar we hosted in June, 50 members of societies from the Peninsula and further afield heard experts present interesting material on Copyright, Aboriginal Affairs and using social media to increase interest in history.

The 68 people at the combined Rye and Sorrento Historical Societies’ Mid-Year Lunch at Rye Hotel on July 1st were enlightened and entertained by Adam Magennis, Boonwurrung man, artist and Shire Heritage Archaeologist, describing some of his projects. He showed his passion for identifying and conserving indigenous sites and educating others, and also his ability to find creative solutions to sensitive issues.

You may recall hearing of an important collection of Boonwurrung artifacts found years ago, and meticulously recorded, by Helen Begg (member Michael Begg’s Mother). We have some of the microlith tools in the museum, donated by her. The bulk of the collection remained at the Beggs’ home, and Adam was able to tell us that it is now being examined and catalogued at the Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery.
The ‘journey’ towards getting a much-needed storage facility has progressed, with a generous Shire grant of $50,000, to cover plans and permits only. On July 19, Shire Officer David Hampton, Heritage Adviser Dale Kelly, and Mornington architect Steve Hofer, inspected the site to discuss options.

The almost completed reprint of Kathy Skelton’s excellent book Miss Gymkhana, R.G.Menzies and Me, about growing up in Sorrento in the 1950s, will be launched on Sunday afternoon, November 13th, at the Sorrento Hotel. See page 14.

We have received a very generous offer from one of our members to fund a model of the fossil Zygomaturus, or ‘pygmy rhino’, found in a Sorrento ocean beach cave in 2012 (the topic of our last November meeting). We are now in contact with Melbourne Museum, where it is housed, to discuss the logistics. The model will be on display and made so that it can be handled by visiting children.

Joy Kitch

RAFFLE RESULT

Congratulations to member Joan Nolan on winning the painting Ticonderoga by artist Ron Farnhill, especially fitting as her great grandmother Mary Seaton was a passenger on it, staying on to work at the Quarantine Station and marry local man Edward Russell. The raffle raised $888.

MEMBERSHIP

We welcome the following new members to the Society and look forward to meeting them at meetings and functions:
Mark Ewart, Peter Grant, Betty & Joanne Cheetham, Jen & Noel Davies, Peter & Corrie Searle, Noel & Ann Erbs, and Chris & Hilary Yencken.

Thanks to members who have already renewed their subscription.
Please notify us if you haven’t received a renewal notice.

Gary Naughton,
Membership Secretary
HERITAGE WATCH

POINT NEPEAN

Progress reports on re-drafting the Point Nepean Master Plan were published in July by the State Government and the park manager (Parks Victoria). They show evidence of time and effort spent in comprehensive community consultation, though the duration of the process has resulted in further delays in Quarantine Station development.

Plan modifications under consideration include an increased emphasis on indigenous history within the Park, and the possible extension of the Park as a tourist experience, to include surrounding waters out to Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff.

The reports also note two vital points stressed in our submission - the need for the Plan to include both an agreed policy on resource provision, and a system of advice to Parks Victoria as manager, especially regarding maintenance of the area’s significant heritage status.

SORRENTO’S HISTORIC CENTRE

Shire Council has resolved to amend planning rules for the historic central precinct in a long overdue reform, allowing enforcement of maximum building heights along Ocean Beach Rd. and setbacks more appropriate to this coastal village high in heritage significance.

We trust the Minister will amend the State's Planning Scheme with an immediate interim order, lasting until the amendment detail is drafted and adopted after full and proper process including the opportunity for public scrutiny. The changes can be seen as in line with the 2014 State Government policy for Mornington Peninsula, which allows Sorrento to be treated as a small coastal town, where village character and heritage might be fostered and maintained without the growth, increased densities, and level of development expected of either Melbourne metropolitan areas or the designated major activity centres of the Shire.
CONTINENTAL HOTEL

A developer sought planning approval to construct a 7-level building (including five above the slope of the site) behind and in the grounds of this 4-storey limestone heritage building erected by George Coppin’s Company as a landmark for the surrounding district. NHS submitted and argued before Council that the proposed building height was excessive and destructive of the heritage significance of the historic hotel. Council proceeded to vote on the proposal, (approving it by a slim majority), without adequate consideration of heritage issues, and without a permit from Heritage Victoria, despite the 1875 building being State Heritage listed.

Frank Hindley, Convenor Heritage & Planning Group

Above: Sorrento’s historic landmark, Photo: Gary Naughton
Below: The proposed development of the Continental Hotel
When John and Melba Webb sailed into Port Melbourne on the M.V.Georgic with their children aged six and two in May 1949, they were met by relatives and taken straight down to the Baths in Sorrento, where they would stay for the next 23 years. After life in a London flat near the Houses of Parliament, it was quite a culture shock - this quiet sleepy place (the Baths closed until September) the poky, shabby accommodation, the prospect of little income before summertime, and adjustment to life in a new country.

How did they come to be there? New Zealand-born Melba Lecaldano went to Europe in the late 30s to meet her Italian relatives, and then worked in London. Her sister Linda who had gone to Melbourne visited her in 1939; their planned return home together was delayed by the war. Melba met and married serviceman John Webb in 1941; Marius was born the next year, and his sister Tessa in 1947.

In 1946 Linda returned to Melbourne and married Ernesto Comunello (or Ernie Smith), who, with brother Bruno, had been part of the top end of Bourke Street restaurant world, until interned as enemy aliens during WW2. When Italy renounced its alliance with Germany in 1943, internment ended for Italians, but they were forbidden to run a business within 60 miles of the City.

Internment did not interrupt the career of the Comunellos' Greek ex-colleague George Tsindos. He had added to his Melbourne restaurant interests the Monte Vista Guesthouse in Sorrento and advised his friends to buy the Baths from Tally Erlandsen (owner since his father Erland's death in 1937). Bruno left in 1945; Linda and Ernie stayed till the Webbs' arrival, which allowed them to return to city restaurant work. Although probably somewhat daunted, as new arrivals John and Melba were glad to be offered a going concern with built-in lodgings. They enrolled first Marius and later Tessa at 'St. Joey's', but three grades were taught together, and teaching standards were low, so Marius was later sent to school in Melbourne, boarding with his Auntie Linda. Father Hipwell, the Parish Priest, would urge the Webbs to 'get churched', as they had only had a quick civil wedding while John was on leave from war service.
Even in 1949, the Baths and jetty were deteriorating, so there was plenty of off-season maintenance to be done, and some boats moored for owners (professional, part-time and recreational fishermen). Realising the business had to expand to be viable, John ordered 3 sturdy clinker built motor boats from Pompey’s in Mordialloc, named them after constellations (Scorpio, Taurus, etc.) reflecting his interest in astronomy, and rented them out in 4-hour shifts starting at 5am, along with 2 rowing boats let out by the hour. Work days were very long, and the busiest of all was Boxing Day.

Marius would help during his holidays and knew the Holt boys (about his own age) from over the road at Chattanooga. When he was 13 or 14, he remembers, Harold Holt brought in the first flippers and goggles from overseas, a great novelty.

Other income came from the sale of fruit and vegetables, sandwiches and very popular scones, made in a woodfired oven in the kitchen (which also served the family) and hot water at sixpence a billy, hire of towels and togs, and of course bathing fees. Then there was the hot sea bath, booked in advance, comprising a tub and chip-heater in a wooden cabin on the jetty.

The bathing scene had changed a lot post-war; men and women now swam together (except for local nuns, who were of course given strict privacy). Heavy pickets had to be installed round the baths for summer and removed for winter, and young oblate clergy had free bathing rights in return for their help at these times.

By the 60s, beach culture was much more like today’s. John invested in a small fleet of 5 pedalos, very popular as a novelty, though rather heavy and hard to handle. These, and ‘surf boards’ (actually rather heavy fibreglass planks), were great fun to paddle round the shallow waters of the Front Beach and made up for the loss of income from hire of woolly swimsuits and towels, no longer in demand.

The ‘Rustic Retreat’ sign had changed to ‘Sorrento Tea Rooms’. Leo Johnston had added a fish shop, later bought by Bud and Carole Graves, who eventually offered to buy the whole business. The Webbs asked $30,000, but made very little out of the sale in the end. Purchased under a Ports and Harbours lease, a change in the law stripped the business of its value.

After retirement from the Baths, the Webbs lived happily on in Russell Crescent, Sorrento, until first John (in 1996) and then Melba (in 1999) passed away. Marius now lives in Umbria, but comes to visit about twice a year, and we are very grateful to him for sharing his memories with us.

Janet South, Archivist & Research Officer
The Society has been very fortunate to receive two substantial collections of images & memorabilia for the Museum this year.

**The Andrew Mackinnon Maritime Collection:**

Andrew, the son of local Sorrento couta boat fisherman Ted Mackinnon, was an avid ‘shippie’ - daily observing and recording all the vessels entering & leaving Port Phillip Bay between 1993 & 2015. A life long hobby resulted in a collection of sea related memorabilia and thousands of photographs, many of the latter kept in albums where he recorded the name, date and relevant details of each vessel. Andrew is reported as saying “It’s a bit more interesting than collecting stamps or knitting.”

Among the artefacts was the painting of the *Sierra Nevada* [see front cover]. This is said to be painted on wood from the wreck of the ship and signed ‘Vic’ - possibly Vic Keating.

Unfortunately, in September 2015, Andrew lost his battle with cancer. To ensure that his valuable collection was available for research and for other ‘shippies’ to peruse and for the general public to enjoy, he bequeathed it to the Nepean Historical Society who took possession in May 2016.

**‘Dalwhinnie’ Collection:**

Many of the Society’s members will have visited *Dalwhinnie* [opposite the Policeman’s Point tram terminus], to participate in one of Valerie & Dennis O’Gorman’s occasions celebrating our local history.

The house was built by the Sorrento Tramway Company in 1913 as the residence for the Manager Harry Watts, his wife Emma & their eleven children. In 1921 the new owners, the Wimpole family, named the house *Dalwhinnie* after a village in Scotland. It was their holiday house till 1995 when it was purchased by the O’Gormans. Restored, the Federation style residence became a ‘living museum’ decorated with photos, paintings & memorabilia of the era.
Museum News - continued

Sadly, earlier this year, Dennis died and Valerie very reluctantly decided to sell Dalwhinnie and donate the paintings, photographs & some memorabilia and tennis artifacts including a very old tennis court line maker to the Museum. These will be used in future displays. Our museum already has many lovely pieces of clothing on display from Janet Worthington-Wimpole, whose family owned Dalwhinnie when she was a child.

Photo: Dennis & Valerie O’Gorman, Christmas Day, 2015

Thank you Andrew & Valerie for two wonderful records of Sorrento life. NHS is proud to have been chosen to have the responsibility for their care and conservation. Now our task is to document, catalogue and prepare them for exhibition and research.

Margaret Broadhead, Photo Curator &
Joy Kitch, Collections & Display Co-ordinator.

REMINDER
AGM 7th October at 8pm
VOLUNTEER NEWS - JO DAVIE RETIRES

At our May Volunteers’ Coffee Morning, we farewelled Jo Davie, a special volunteer, who joined us in 2003, ‘To make the tea’, she has always said. However, her talents and intelligence were quickly recognized, and she was soon helping Val Johnson, Co-ordinator of Collection and Displays, and continued in this rôle with me. As well as her essential conservation and documentation work, Jo helped curate many special exhibitions over her 13 years, including those borrowed from other places, such as the Public Records Office, often beetling up to Melbourne or elsewhere to collect them (with terrific skill imparted to her by her racing-driver father). She was also a valuable asset to the team conducting group tours of the Museum, always elegantly attired, Ascot-style, for school groups and her great catering skills, flower arrangements and classy set-ups, not to mention sheer hard work, without fuss, have enhanced many NHS functions.

We are missing you, Jo, on Tuesdays at the Museum, with your quiet efficiency, wisdom, sanity, and wonderfully positive approach to life.

THANK YOU JO … Joy Kitch Collection and Display Coordinator

THANKS TO ALL OUR WINTER VOLUNTEERS

Many thanks to those who have been keeping our museum open, even in cold windy weather. I had an excellent response to my appeal for school holidays. New members Colleen Isaacs and Neil and Jill Meaden have learned the ropes very quickly.

Thanks also to swappers and fillers-in when needed, especially Jenny Nixon. Please continue to read the updates left on the desk. I can send these to you by email if you wish.

Val Stieglbauer, Museum Roster Co-ordinator
PUBLIC ACCESS CATALOGUE

The database of the collection can now be searched by visitors to the Museum.

For some years volunteers have been entering details of items added to the Museum collection to a computer database. The Mornington Peninsula Shire has now developed software which will, at a later date, enable a regional catalogue of the collections of all historical societies on the Peninsula to be consulted via the internet.

As a first step, the NHS has made a Public Access Catalogue of its own collections available for use by visitors within the Sorrento Museum. The catalogues lists museum artefacts, photos, maps, books, documents and other materials. Many catalogue entries include a digital copy of the item which has been created by Murray Adams, the Shire Local History Digitisation Officer.

The Public Access Catalogue is located in the Heritage Gallery, together with instructions on its use.

Doreen Parker, Librarian
Museum News - continued

RECENT ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

The following books have recently been added to the Society’s Library collection in the Heritage Gallery at the Sorrento Museum. Members can borrow items for up to 3 weeks while non-members can consult them at the Museum. Thank you to those who donated items. Titles marked with * also available for sale in the Museum Shop

**Ballast sites- operations and craft of Port Phillip** by Bob Leek. 2012. Shelved at 387.5448 LEE

**Between the fire breaks: memories of the Rosebud Pine Plantation** by Margareta Storey. 2016. Shelved at 634.9751 STO

**Broken gates by Robert Collings.** 2015. Shelved at 823.3 COL. *
(A novel set in Sorrento in 1882.

**The colonial experience: the Port Phillip District 1834-1850;**
edited by Richard Broome and Alan Frost. 2nd ed. 1999. Shelved at 994.502 BRO

**Dark Emu: Black Seeds! Agriculture or accident?** By Bruce Pascoe. 2014. Shelved at 630.899915 PAS*

**Melbourne down under: the jewels of Port Phillip Bay** by Sheree Marris. 2011. 508.9452 MAR (Marine life and structures)

**Mornington Peninsula: sea breeze and sand II** by Anne Monteith and Bryce Dunkley. 2010. Shelved at 919.452 MOR *

**An old and respected colonist: a biography of James Sandle Ford.** By Carol Darroch. 2015. Shelved at 994.52 DAR. * (Ford was the man who named Portsea) *

**Sail traders of Port Phillip and Victoria** by Bob Leek. 4 volumes. 2008-2012. Shelved at 387.2043 LEE

**Western Port: pioneers and preachers** by Valda Cole. 1975. Shelved at 283.9452 COL

**An old and respected colonist: a biography of James Sandle Ford.** By Carol Darroch. 2015. Shelved at 994.52 DAR. * (Ford was the man who named Portsea)

**These walls could speak volumes: a history of Mechanics’ Institutes in Victoria** by Pam Baragwanath and Ken James. 2015. Shelved at 374.9945 BAR
We have two interesting new books in the shop:-

**MORNINGTON PENINSULA Sea Breeze and Sand II** by Anne Monteith and Bryce Dunkley, a gorgeous coffee table book which includes some of Andrew Mackinnon's photographs, is available to members at the special price of $35.00.

In **DARK EMU, Black Seeds**, Bruce Pascoe puts forward a compelling argument for reconsidering the 'hunter-gatherer' label for pre-colonial Aboriginal Australians. Indeed, the evidence he presents insists that right across the continent they were sowing, irrigating, harvesting, and storing, as well as erecting permanent buildings.

Jan Weston

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**PROMOTIONAL STREET STALLS**

**COMING STALLS**

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Suzanne Ewart and Jan Weston
SPECIAL NHS BOOK EVENT

Sunday November 13th at Sorrento Hotel.

2.00-3.30pm

The launch of the reprint of Kathy Skelton’s delightful memoir of growing up in Sorrento in the 1950s, MISS GYMKHANA, R.G. MENZIES and ME.

Hear author and playwright Hannie Rayson talk about her love of Sorrento and writing the play ‘Hotel Sorrento.’

$15.00 includes WELCOME DRINK AND CANAPES

Book and Pay by Cheque, or

Direct Deposit (BSB No.063891, Account No. 10006495)

before 1st November to Sorrento Museum

VALE

NHS member Gordon Jacques
9th March, 1931 - 23rd July, 2016
Our Condolences go to his family
COMING EVENTS

Our meetings are held on the first Friday of the month
at 8pm in the Sorrento Museum, Mechanics’ Institute
Corner of Melbourne & Ocean Beach Roads Sorrento
Free and open to all - Tea or Coffee afterwards by donation
If you would like to join us for dinner prior to meetings
at 6.15 pm at Sorrento Trattoria, 20 Ocean Beach Road, Sorrento, please ring the
restaurant by 12 noon on the day before the meeting. Tel: 5984 5655

Friday 2nd September at 8 pm
NHS Members’ Night - Volunteers will share interesting aspects of their work
Bergliot Dallas: The Steel Ball
Maggie Broadhead: Down to the Sea and Ships
Doreen Parker: Archives and Public Access
Janet South: Portrait of a Peninsula Property

Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd October 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm
Seniors’ Week – free entry to the Museum for seniors including DVD presentation.

Friday 7th October at 8 pm Annual General Meeting
Speaker: Jane Alexander
Co-ordinator of Arts & Culture for the Mornington Shire and
Director of Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery.

Friday 4th November at 8 pm Monthly Meeting
Speaker to be announced

Sunday 13th November,
MISS GYMKHANA, R.G. MENZIES and ME by Kathy Skelton
Book Launch See page 14

Friday 2nd December at 6 pm
Save the date for our end of year Christmas function
NEPEAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Office Bearers of the Society 2015-2016

PRESIDENT: Joy Kitch
VICE-PRESIDENT: Marie Clark
SECRETARY: Val Stieglbauer
ARCHIVIST: Janet South
COLLECTION & DISPLAY COORDINATOR: Joy Kitch
TREASURER: Anna Hackwill.
COMMITTEE: Jenny Nixon, Clive Smith, Natasha Wicks

The Nepean Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the support of:

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