# The LampLight

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALLARAT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

VOLUME 13 No. 4 JULY - AUGUST 2023

Trade Unions in Ballarat

Going to the Theatre in the 1950's

The Mercurial Madame Midas

# The **Presidents** View

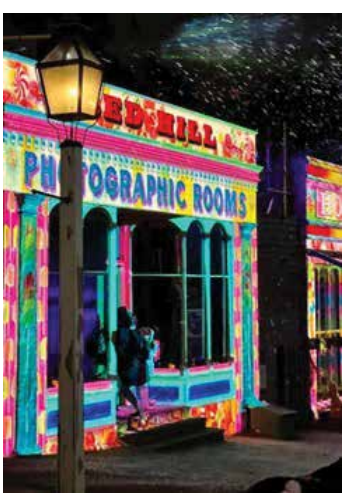
At our last two meetings I've been reporting on the progress of the Ballarat Sewer Build as it passes beneath the Yarrowee River. Despite initial scepticism, I have been impressed by the respect shown for the historic bluestone lining of the river. Over the past three months I have watched with interest as workers have carefully removed stones, then after the pipes were laid, a stonemason precisely replaced each numbered block in its original position.

I have invited the project archaeologist Jo Wilson and the site supervisor Chris Loader to be the guest presenters for our October meeting so they can explain the project in more detail and outline how they integrate a respect for heritage into their planning.

It has been heartening to see that while we continue to see the destruction of some of our heritage buildings and streetscapes, other parts of our beautiful city are being preserved.

I'm very pleased to report that sales of our book, *Ballarat 90 Golden Years,* are strong with Collins Booksellers in Lydiard Street reporting it is their best seller. This is wonderful news and we have now covered all our production costs and will return a small profit which we will use to fund future projects.

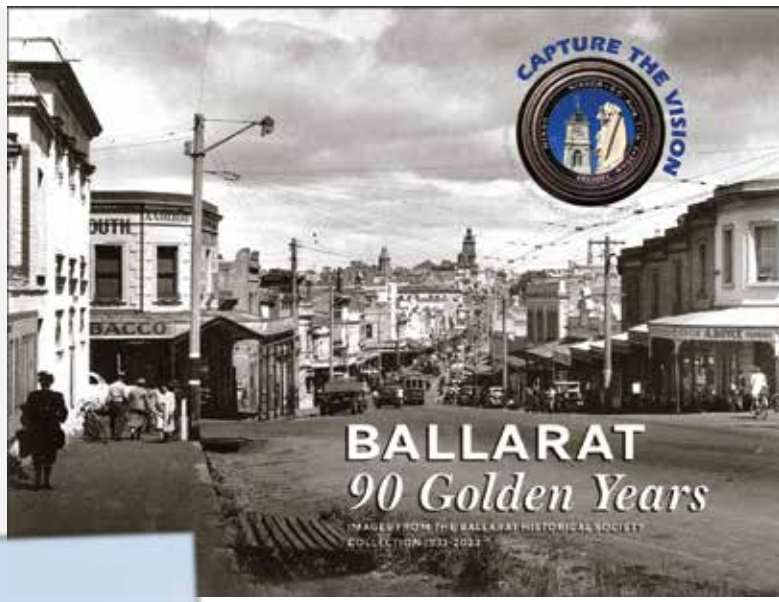

On Friday 23rd June, I represented the Society at the season opening of Sovereign Hill's Winter Wonderlights experience. What a delight it was to see Sovereign Hill transformed into a glittering wonderland complete with fake snow which somehow made the cold evening seem magical. This now annual event has proved to be a great boon to our city bringing large numbers of tourists and enchanting locals.


In closing can I take this opportunity to welcome the new members who have joined this year. It is very pleasing to see our membership growing and we hope to see you all at our monthly meetings sharing in our shared love of exploring Ballarat's amazing history.

*Marion*

# Ballarat 90 Golden Years project update




4 June 2023

Ms Marion Littlejohn

President,

Ballarat Historical Society

Dear Marion,

I write to congratulate you and your members on your 90th birthday. It is a great achievement to have survived the ups and downs of some turbulent times, and come out thriving, as your celebrations during the Ballarat Heritage Festival demonstrated.

I particularly congratulate the committee of members who created your beautiful book *Ballarat:90 Golden Years*. The photos are stunning, with very effective captions, and I like the subtle message of concern for our built heritage that comes through. The book stands proudly beside W B Withers and Weston Bate's books in recording Ballarat's history.

It is wonderful that you chose to have the book printed locally, and Revolution Print have done an exceptionally fine job in bringing the photographs to life.

I was very pleased to be at the launch in the historic Ballarat East Library, where I first visited the Society in 1974 and talked to Mr Netherway, and learned about Nathan Spielvogel.

Your 'Capture the Vision' project is an inspiration to other historical societies. My only worry is that the change in the operation of the Gold museum to the Australian Centre for Goldrush Collections will make it much harder for the general public to be able to enjoy and learn from your amazing photographic collection. But I am sure you and Nina and your committee will make the Society's wishes known. I will be very happy to assist in any lobbying efforts needed with Sovereign Hill.

It was a pity that Susan Fayed, who is the project officer for the World Heritage Bid project for the Goldfields, was not at the launch. I wonder has she reached out to your Society as a key reference for the bid? She certainly has not contacted other societies in the Central Highlands region, which reflects poorly on the management of the process.

We would love to see your society back in the fold of the Central Highlands Historical Association, as we lobby about some of the big projects that will impact our heritage.

With warm best wishes,

Anne Beggs-Sunter,

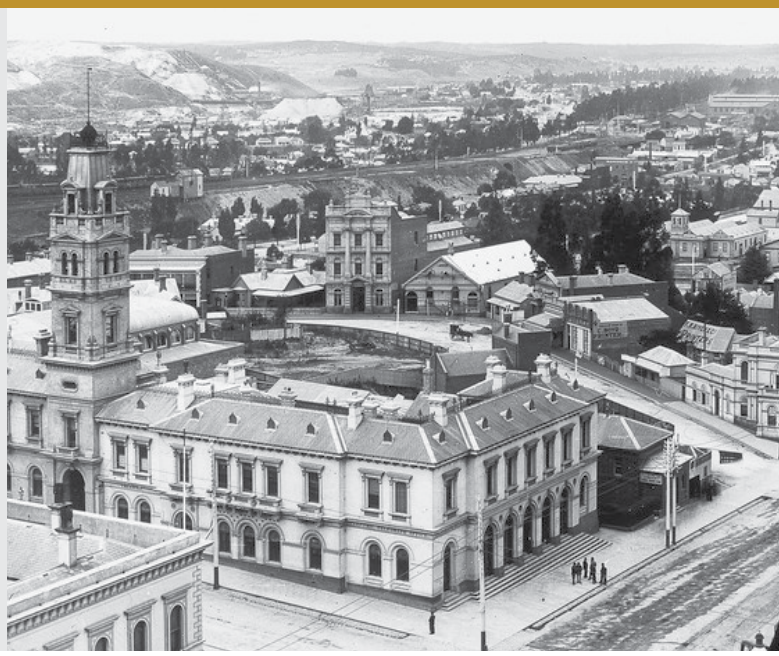
President,

Central Highlands Historical Association.

As mentioned in Marion's Presidents report, the reception and sales of *Ballarat 90 Golden Years* has surpassed all our expectations. At the time of printing this edition of Lamplight, there are less than 50 copies left, with both Collins Booksellers having the very last of our stock to sell. Apart from strong local interest, the book has found its way to England, Scotland, the United States, Germany and South Africa. We have received many emails and messages from people expressing their appreciation of our work, with one of the standouts coming from the President of the Central Highlands Historical Association, Anne Beggs Sunter—reproduced at left.

# Trade Unions In Ballarat

**The Trade Union movement has a long and proud history in Ballarat. This story first appeared in the Ballarat Historian in September 1982 as uncredited although it was most likely researched and written by Peter Mansfield. Additional material has been sourced with thanks from Brett Edgington, Secretary, Ballarat Regional Trades and Labour Council.**



Ballarat has had a long association with unionism in Australia. The Ballarat and Sebastopol miner's union was formed in January 1870 and although it only lasted a few months it was the first miners' union in Victoria. It eventually re-constituted itself as the Amalgamated Miners Association in the late 1870's.

Whilst the miners in particular had a very casual attitude towards unionism the two issues which drew some collective sympathy were working conditions and working hours. In the 1850's the workers were completely in the hands of the employer. The boss fixed the wages and hours. If these did not suit the worker he could go elsewhere. When times were good wages went up; when times were bad, they went down.

By the 1870's the major issues were conditions of work and safety, holidays, eight-hour day, and an assurance that wages were the first claim on the assets of a failed company. A 'living wage' was sixth on the list (Bate: Lucky City pp261). Although safety was the major issue in the company mines, hours of work were paramount in other fields.

The hours of shop assistants were 8am to 8pm from Monday and until midnight on Saturdays.

The Early Closing Association was formed at a public meeting on 2nd October 1856. James Oddie then chaired another meeting which called on shopkeepers to close at 7pm in the evenings and 10pm on Saturday nights. A general boycott of recalcitrant firms had achieved this goal by 1863 and this victory was one of the first significant efforts by the united action of workers. By 1870, the Eight Hour day was commonplace in nearly every industry except for butchers and bakers. Their request for a 13 hour day was rejected by the owners (Spielvogel 1 p 59). The first trade union in Ballarat was that of the Carpenters and Joiners. Soon after a Stonemasons Union and an Engineers Union began in 1853.

Each Union functioned independently. Most held a monthly meeting at a hotel and were also social gatherings of men with common interests. (It is interesting to note that the same people who wanted reduced working hours – eight hours work, eight hours leisure and eight hours rest – were also the crusaders who protested about the sin of Ballarat East which was doing a great trade by catering for the wage earning leisured class.) The Eight Hour Day had begun in 1858 and was the first rallying point for the various unions. It eventually became a holiday and sports day.

In 1889 one of Ballarat's largest industrial disputes commenced, when ironworkers assistants employed by the Union Foundry, Cowley's Eureka Iron Works and Phoenix Foundry demanded increased rates of pay. Both the Union Foundry and Cowley's came to an agreement with the workers and increased their pay rates, however the managers at the Phoenix Foundry held out and refused to grant an increase in worker rates. At this same time the Ballarat Trades and Labour Council was forming its first Disputes Committee and after considerably protracted negotiations, the Phoenix Foundry conceded to the workers' demands and lifted the pay rates.

## Working Conditions

In 1911 the hourly wage rate for Tramway motor men and conductors was 9 pence. Such things as overtime or extra rates for Sunday, uniform allowance or meal breaks were unheard of. It was expected that any meal would be eaten whilst the tram was still in progress. As noted elsewhere the Ballarat Tramway Co was owned by an English parent company. A Ballarat Tramways Employees Association was formed under the sponsorship of the Trades Hall and began campaigning on behalf of the men. The trams were all open fronted of course, and this was one of the first points of dispute between the owners and the eventually victorious union.

Textile workers were little better off. The first secretary of the Woollen Mills Operatives Union was Mr. Harrison at the Sunnyside Woollen Mill. Wages in the 1880's were between 5/- and 6/- per day. The working week was 52 hours so it was possible to earn up to 42/- per week. It wasn't until the next decade that the Ballarat, Geelong and Melbourne operations amalgamated. By 1913 the Wages Board determination stated that the working week was 48 hours and salaries were as follows; foreman 6/-, adult males 48/- and females 30/- but, no holiday pay.

Painters Union; Workers in this union also received about 6/- per day with juniors earning less than that per week. Frederick Spielvogel was the Secretary in the 1920- 40's and noted that by the 1940's award wages were £6.5.6. per week. Various other allowances and one week per year with holidays on full pay. The union was quite wealthy and was able to provide £500 to the Australian War Loan.

## Productivity

Whilst economic conditions had a significant effect on wage rates and caused great fluctuations (e.g. in 1890 the official daily rate for a carpenter was 12/- and had fallen to 8/- in 1894, a 33% reduction), the introduction of machines also increased output and was used as a major argument for shorter working hours.

The Victorian Parliament Select Committee which investigated working hours found –

The increase in newspaper pages an hour increased from 44,000 (1898) to 140,000 (1905) to 232,000 (1935). There had been no increase in employment in the factory.

A button sewing machine can put on 14 buttons in on minute compared with a hand worker who can manage one per minute.

A coal dredge at Yallourn can lift as much as the work of 800 men.

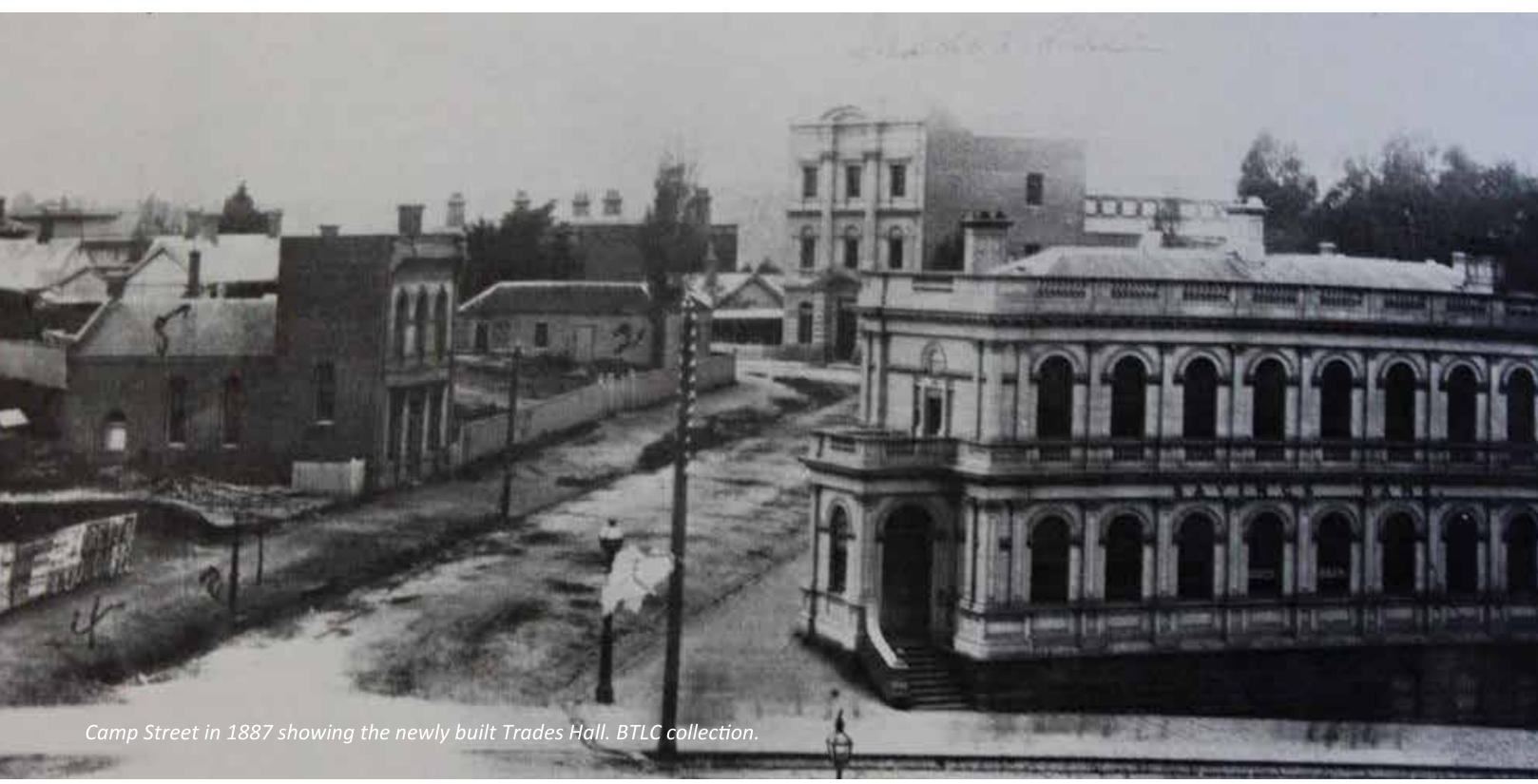
## Trades Hall

In the early 1860's the suggestion was put that a Trades Hall be erected in Ballarat. A member of the Carpenters Union (Harrison) moved;

> "that a committee be formed to raise funds for the purpose of building a Trades Hall in Ballarat and that the Government be approached for the granting of a suitable site."

Nothing came of this idea.

In 1879 that Eight Hour Day Committee decided that it would spend some of its accumulated profits on the erection of a monument to the memory of James Galloway, the pioneer of the Eight Hour movement in Victoria. Additional money was raised by the presentation of a series of concerts and in April 1880 after a huge public procession the monument was unveiled by the Major, Cr. A. T. Morrison.



*Camp Street in 1887 showing the newly built Trades Hall. BTLC collection.*

The inscription of the monument states, 'This monument is tended in trust to the City of Ballarat for the working men of Ballarat.'

The success of this undertaking inspired the enthusiasts in the union to endeavour to raise funds to build a Hall for themselves. Mr. J.W. Graham (Secretary pf the Eight Hour Day Committee and Secretary of the City Free Library) proposed that a joint building be erected – a Trades Hall and Literary Institute.

In 1886 a site was finally agreed on; the Trades Hall was to be a separate building and the Hall was to be in Camp Street, not Bath Lane or Armstrong Street. The contract price was £2,522. The foundation stone was laid in October 1887 with the Ballarat Courier reporting that the laying of this stone marks the advance of trade unionism in Ballarat. In 1887 it is reported that thirty one trade unions were holding regular meetings and the Trades and Labor Council was well established.

The building Committee specified the following;

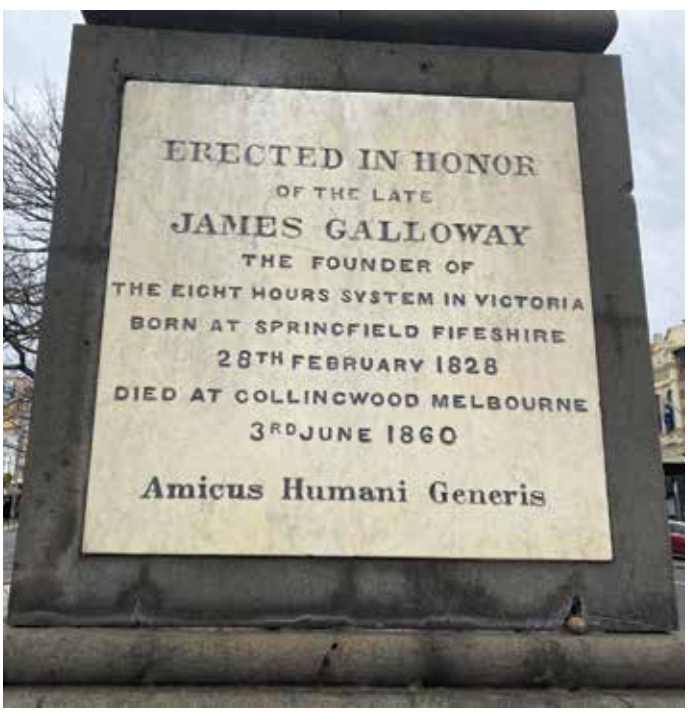
'Amount to be expended not to exceed £3,000; bluestone foundations; front of building to be Grampians freestone and walls of brick. Building to be three stories high containing fourteen rooms with a hall capable of seating 600 persons. Roof to be slate. Workmanship and materials to be of the best quality.' The design by James and Pipes at a cost of £5589 was accepted and the City of Melbourne Bank was to loan £2,000 but the Bank later changed its mind. The architects redesigned their plans, the tender was accepted, and the work was carried out by Leitch and Aitkins.

In 1890 Ballarat union sent £2,000 to the relief funds of the London Dock Strike and £1,000 to the 1891 Melbourne Maritime strike committee.

One of the strongest unions in Australia was formed in Ballarat more than a century ago. Following a public meeting at Carlyon's Hotel, W. G. Spence was appointed President of the Australian Workers Union (AWA) in July 1886. (Spence was also the secretary of the Australian Miners Association at Creswick). The AWU quickly became a wealthy and influential trade union.

In April 1891 Ballarat played host to the Seventh Intercolonial Trades Union Congress of Australia. All states (colonies) were represented except Western Australia and New Zealand. Overall, 115 people attended including just one woman.

Whilst the role of trade unionism has affected many thousands of men in Ballarat it is always necessary to make mention of the leaders who have moved into the political arena. Prime Minister Scullin was a Ballarat representative as was Senators John Barnes and A. McKissock, W.G. Spence M.H.R., D. McGrath M.H.R., J. McNeil M.H.R., J. Hogan M.L.A and W. McAdam M.L.A.




*Left and above; The Galloway Monument has been a constant fixture at the lower end of Sturt Street since 1880.*

References;

Bates, W. Lucky City 1978

A Brief History of Ballarat Trades Hall www.unionsballarat.org.au

Beacham, J. History of the Ballarat Trades and Labour Council 1856 -2000, Federation University of Australia, 2022.

Images supplied by B Edgington, BLTC.

# The Fascinating Story of "Madame Midas"

## At our July meeting, Nina Netherway presented a wonderful talk on a truly inspiring and remarkable woman.

**Alice Cornwell came with her family to Australia at the age of 17. She married a blacksmith and after her marriage failed she learnt piano and singing, published songs and went to England to study music.**


Alice returned to Australia and studied geology after her father took out a mining lease in the Sulky/Dowling Forest area. One mine was called Midas where a large nugget was found, thus Alice earned the Madame Midas nickname. She became the site mine manager and at one point, consideration was given to naming the little township Midas.

Alice again returned to England to float her Midas Company which was over subscribed. Her shrewd business acumen was most impressive. This included her purchase of the Sunday Times in London. She mixed with Royalty and had gold nuggets in her pockets to show at major functions.

On her return to Australia she bought a large timber company, an agricultural and coal mining company, all of which were most successful. She then became involved in a Broken Hill smelting operation, a copper company and helped improve harbours so steamers and other shipping could get closer to Adelaide. She supported the development of electric battery systems for portable lamps, and turned dog shows into National social events. What a truly amazing woman!

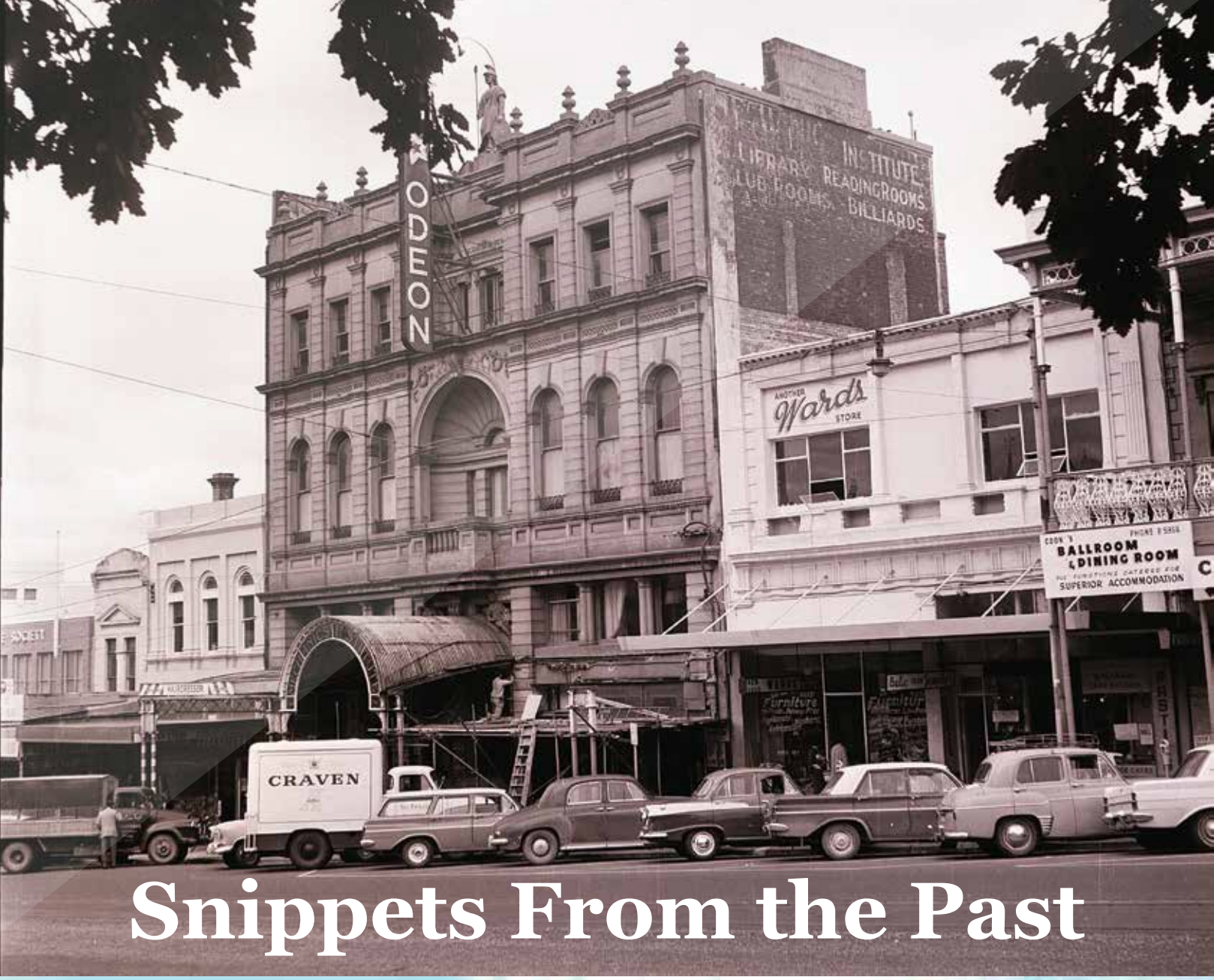
Alice was a woman of enormous energy and intelligence with astute business ability in a broad variety of enterprises. Her ability to diverge her interests all came from her initial success in the Ballarat mining industry.

*Story; Maxine Berry*

*Images; Nina Netherway*

# Ballarat Historical Society
# Capture the Vision

There are plenty of changes occurring around the City that need to be recorded for the CTV project. Here are just a few building projects either underway, or soon will be. Some are welcome, but others such as the 7 story hotel proposal in Main Rd have significant ramifications for the surrounding streetscapes.




# Snippets From the Past

# Peter Gilbert recalls the days of Jaffa's and Fantails at the local cinema

The 1940's and 50's were great times for the Flicks (pictures) in Ballarat as we had a choice of four theatres.

The Regent in Lydiard Street North was the best of the four theatres, it had superb décor, usherettes and ushers to show you to your seats and featured the latest movies. There were three levels of seating; the dress circle, the lounge, and the stalls. Bookings was essential on a Saturday night. All the latest newsreels from Australia and overseas were shown. The Regent was owned by Hoyts. The theatre now has several small theatres within the one building.

Her Majesty's Theatre was situated in Lydiard Street South and had two levels of seating; dress circle lounge and stalls, not as elaborate as the Regent but a nice interior, they also had ushers to show you to your seat. There was always a fireman on duty at all theatres, and again bookings were essential on a Saturday night.

The Britannia, later called The Odeon (and later the Vegas 70) was situated in the Mechanics Institute building. The theatre had great Saturday matinee serials, Hopalong Cassidy, The Lone Ranger, Robin Hood etc. The theatre would be packed with local kids enjoying the Saturday afternoon.

At interval you could buy a packet of Jaffas, Fantails or Young's salty ice cream or a Dixie. One shilling (10 cents) would pay for your ticket, buy an ice cream and still have your tram fare home!

The Plaza Theatre was situated in the ANA building in Camp Street. This was a one level theatre with ordinary décor and showed second rate movies, it was often called the Flea House.

When television came to Ballarat in 1956, attendances started to drop off at the pictures, so what was once an important part of our lives in the 40's and 50's was soon taken over by television which became our new leisure time.

Today there are two theatres in Ballarat, The Regent and the new Showbiz Cinema at the Delacombe Town Centre.



*Images; Ballarat Mechanics Institute Collection.*


# Talking History at the Eureka Centre

Thank you to the Historical society members that have been braving the cold and joining us for many events through winter at the Eureka Centre. It was fantastic to see so many familiar faces at Robyn Annear's talk in July on the exploration of rat pits in Australia and the claim of Ballarat as rat free.

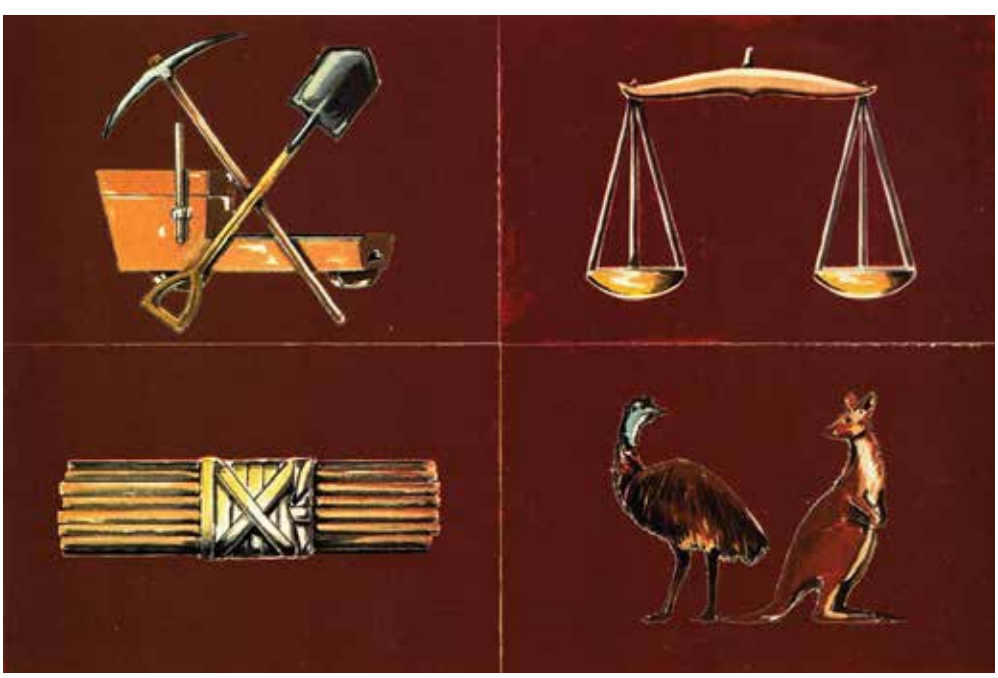
To mark the 170 year anniversary of the Red Ribbon Rebellion we have a special Talking History with Geoff Hocking on Thursday 3 August at 5.30pm. The Red Ribbon Rebellion is often considered a pre-curser to the Eureka Stockade. In 1853 the resentful miners of Bendigo held meetings and wore red ribbons on their hats to indicate that they had not paid the licence fee. The ideas powering the 'Red Ribbon Rebellion' spread throughout the goldfields, with growing tensions and grievances that finally erupted at Eureka.

Geoff will explore this and other protests that inflamed the events of Eureka and consider how the democratic reforms that followed sparked democracy across the British Empire.

Author, artist, and designer Geoff Hocking was born in the Central Victorian goldfields city of Bendigo, and over the past two decades has published several illustrated books including: 'Eureka Stockade', 'The Rebel Chorus', 'Dissent on the Diggings' and recently, 'Sandhurst - Genesis to Federation'.

Our 2023 BRHAE workshops conclude in August with 'Using Social Media for Family History' on Wednesday 16 August, 2-3.30pm. In this workshop you can find out how social media can help you find information and records and make connections with fellow researchers. These workshops are free to attend, though booking is essential. Contact Simon Jacks, Australiana Research Librarian, to reserve your place. simonjacks@ballarat.vic.gov.au

Our Spring-Summer program launches in September, and we will have a host of other exciting events and information about the 169th Eureka Anniversary to announce. Keep an eye out on our Facebook page for when this program will be available for collection or, as always keep an eye out on our website eurekacentreballarat.com.au for upcoming events and how to book.



Hermione Higgins
Education and Public Programs Officer
Eureka Centre Ballarat

*Image; Rhyall Plant, 'The Digger's Banner – Contemporary Artist's Impression', in Geoff Hocking 'The Red Ribbon Rebellion', 2001, p.28. Courtesy*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