

The LampLight

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALLARAT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

VOLUME 12 No. 4

JULY - AUGUST 2022

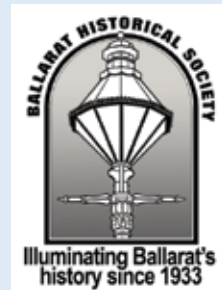


Living through the Depression Years in Ballarat

Val D'Angri honoured with Queens Birthday Award

The case for Ballarat as our National Capital

The President's Word



Firstly; it is my immense pleasure to pass on the Society's congratulations to long time member Valda D'Angri who was recognised in the recent 2022 Queen's Birthday Honours list. Val was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for service to the preservation of community history, particularly for her work in restoring the famed Eureka flag in the early 1970s, the creation of a replica flag for a touring Eureka Exhibition in 1988 and for keeping history alive through the Eureka Stockade Memorial Association and of course her long and valued service to the Ballarat Historical Society.

Image courtesy of The Ballarat Courier



Since our last meeting I have had the pleasure of visiting the Sebastopol Historical Society Museum and can I recommend this fascinating local treasure to anyone who has not visited. The museum is housed in the original Sebastopol Primary School at 185 Yarrowee Street and is open on the first Sunday of the month from 1.30pm – 3.30pm. What a joy it was to wander through rooms filled with items of mining history and hundreds of items that took me back to my childhood and school days.



A small selection of the displays in the Sebastopol Historical Society Museum. M Littlejohn images

Despite the cold, we had an excellent attendance at our June meeting where we heard Ian Moyle outline some of the traps and the many rewards of pursuing and recording our family history stories. We also heard from Simon Jacks who outlined the resources available at the Ballarat Research Hub at Eureka (BRHAE). Located in the Eureka Centre, BRHAE combines the resources of the Public Record Office, Victoria's Ballarat Archives Centre, Ballarat and District Genealogical Society and the City of Ballarat's Australiana Research Collection to provide support and assistance to researchers. Members undergoing family history or research into Ballarat's early days will find this new facility immensely useful.

July's meeting was replaced by a wonderful evening held at the Ballarat Golf Club where we celebrated Christmas in July and were challenged by a light hearted quiz evening where I was assisted in challenging members knowledge by guest quiz masters – Doug Bradby and Nina Netherway.



Our next meeting on August 9th will be the popular members night where you get a chance to bring in a treasured artefact and share its story with other members. This evening always brings to light some amazing stories, so we are looking forward to seeing what will be revealed this year. This is always one of my favourite meetings of the year so I look forward to seeing you all there.

Hope you are all staying warm

Marion

Following the story on the Queen's visit to Ballarat in 1954, Society member Joan Bulluss provided this image of Lucas employee Heather Hannah sewing a dress for the daughter of Mr Tom Beaumont to wear when she presented The Queen with a bunch of Begonias.

The image (below right) is from *The Courier* on Monday, March 6 1954 and shows a young Helen Beaumont wearing the dress.



The Case for Ballarat as the Federal Capital

Simon Jacks is the Librarian for the Australiana Research Collection at the Ballarat Research Hub at Eureka. He recently published an article on the intriguing story of Ballarat's claim to be the national capital of Australia. Simon has kindly granted permission for his article to be re-produced for this edition of *The Lamplight*.



Throughout Ballarat's long history it has hosted numerous special occasions. One of these occurred over a weekend in February 1898 when Ballarat hosted delegates from the Australasian Federal Convention. As Sweely notes, "Ballarat was vying to become the capital of the prospective Commonwealth. "(1) A visit by these delegates from this convention was considered a crucial step in this process.

Ballarat residents enthusiastically supported the idea of Ballarat becoming the nation's capital. In a letter to the editor of the Ballarat Star on 5 May 1897 a resident wrote, "I urge our mayors and councilors to be vigilant over this important matter. It is worth fighting for. It is an opportunity that will never occur again. "(2)

Speaking to his fellow delegates during the third session of the Australasian Federal Convention, on the 8th February 1898 just prior to them visiting Ballarat, Sir William Lyne said, "we have been invited to visit Ballarat on Friday and someone has whispered to me that this is

to give the representatives a good opinion of Ballarat with a view to it being selected as the federal capital. I hope that the climate of Ballarat is better than the climate of Melbourne has been for the last few days. If not, it will have a very poor show of being selected the federal capital." (3)

Melbourne was experiencing a late summer heatwave at this time. The reporters of the Ballarat Star on 12 February noted that Ballarat was also experiencing the same heatwave gripping Melbourne. (4). Fortunately for all concerned a weather change occurred during the weekend bringing relief from the heat.

Sweely points out that, "among the many reasons Ballarat was seen as major contender for the new federal capital in 1898 was its national prominence. Many colonials could associate the city with gold, the Eureka Stockade and democracy, gardens, Lake Wendouree and civic amenity." (5)

Again, as Sweely writes, “the convention delegates and officials, including notable representatives from the State of Victoria and the City of Melbourne were to take the train from Melbourne on Friday 11 February 1898.” (6)

Up until the morning of the trip it was assumed that one train would suffice for the trip to Ballarat. Upon the realization that 200 people would be travelling to Ballarat, a second special train was ordered to go to Ballarat. As Sweely notes, “unfortunately the train arrived so late that the festivities at Ballarat’s Alfred Hall had to be substantially delayed and reorganized.” (7)

The Ballarat Courier in its edition of 12 February wrote, “the reception accorded the Federal Convention delegates and a large parliamentary party on their arrival from Melbourne last night was of a most enthusiastic character. The people of Ballarat thronged the railway station, the numerous points of advantage about the station platform were crowded.” (8)

The delegation proceeded to Ballarat’s Alfred Hall for the delayed banquet. Ballarat West Mayor C.C. Shoppee welcomed the delegation from Melbourne as well as the local invitees to the reception. As Sweely notes, “in his welcoming address the mayor said that Australia would

see the realization of the convention's efforts.” (9)

In reply to the Mayor’s welcome the Hon Edmund Barton, as Sweely notes, “overwhelmed those gathered with adulations about the Victorian provincial city, its great industries and fertile fields and evidence of prosperity.” (10) Edmund Barton would be elected Australia’s first Prime Minister. The mayors of Ballarat East and Sebastopol offered their personal welcome to the delegation.

The President of the convention, the Hon. Charles Kingston from South Australia, finished the formalities of the evening by saying, “Ballarat was distinguished as the Australian City had done many things to support and assist the development of the colony.” (11).

The two Ballarat papers, the Star and the Courier, had extensive reporting in their issues of Saturday 12 February 1898 of the delegation’s visit. The Star’s headline was, “The Federal Capital. Displaying Ballarat’s Advantages. Visit of the Federal Convention. A Round of Entertainments.” (12) The Courier meanwhile ran with, “Federation. A united Australasia. One People One Destiny. Convention delegates visit Ballarat. An Historic Visit.” (13)

Sturt St during the 8 hour day procession in 1895 (BHS collection)



Some of the social engagements that had been arranged included a visit to some Ballarat mines, going to Victoria Park, a visit to Lake Wendouree and the Botanical gardens where an afternoon tea for 300 guests had been arranged.

A reception had also been organized by the local branches of the Australian Natives Association (A.N.A). As Sweely pointed out, "Frank Besmeres, President of the local branch of the ANA, had unequivocally done much to ripen the spirit of federation in the district and the forthcoming constitution would make Australians the freest and most independent people on the face of the earth." (14)



The Hon. Alfred Deakin (Museum of Australian Democracy)

Anne Beggs Sunter has pointed out, "the Australian Natives' Association (A.N.A) played a vital role in educating the public about federation influencing them to support federation referenda. Its influence was strongest in Victoria, its home state, and its impact was strongest of all in the Ballarat area during the 1880s and 1890s." (15)

From all the social engagements organized then delegates must have been exhausted as they boarded the train on Sunday 13 February 1898 to travel back to Melbourne.

Speaking back in Melbourne on Monday 14 February 1898 to the third session of Australasian Federation Convention the Hon. Alfred Deakin said, "I believe Ballarat is an intensely federal city." (16) Alfred Deakin became the first federal member for Ballarat. He was also elected Australia's second Prime Minister.

Beggs Sunter explains that "in choosing Ballarat as his seat, he acknowledged the strong support of the Ballarat people with a radical political tradition which began at Eureka, and, especially he acknowledged the work of the local A.N.A branches, which had ensured that Ballarat returned the highest vote in favour of federation in the whole nation." (17)

Regarding the vote in support of the 1898 federation referendum, Weston Bate notes, "Ballarat voted 97 percent in support of the referendum. This support showed that Ballarat was built for federation and that its citizens believed their ideas were vital and worthy and that their goals and beliefs were worth fighting for as they displayed at the Eureka Stockade." (18)

Ballarat missed out on being selected as the site of the federal capital. Its citizens had the knowledge that they had tried their very best to showcase why Ballarat should be selected as the site of the federal capital. In his annual report to the City Ballarat Council, Mayor Shoppee wrote, "never in the history of Ballarat has the city been honored one time by the presence of so many distinguished personages. Their visit was a complete success." (19)

As Sweely sums up," Ballarat had done its very best to entertain and court their convention guests. While it was not destined to become the site of the Federal Capital of Australia it did play a vital role in the discussions in the culmination in the ultimate selection of the site." (20)

Footnotes:

Gay Sweely. 'Federation and Fizz'. Ballarat's bid to become the A.C.T. in *The New Federalist. The Journal of Australian Federation History*. Number 3. June 1999. Pp. 37-41. *Ballarat Star* 5 May 1897 p.2. Records of the Australasian Federal Conventions of the 1890s, Third Session. Thursday 8 February 1898 P.53. *Ballarat Star* 12 February 1898, p. 4. Sweely, pp 37-38. Sweely, p. 38. Sweely, p.38. *Ballarat Courier* 12 February 1898, p.3. Sweely, p.38. Sweely, p.38. Sweely, p. 39. *Ballarat Star* 12 February 1898, p.4. *Ballarat Courier* 12 February 1898, p.3. Sweely, p.39. Anne Beggs Sunter. Engendering public debate on Federation: the role of Australian Natives Association. in *Becoming Australian: the movement towards Federation in Ballarat and the nation*. Kevin Livingstone, Richard Jordan and Gay Sweely editors. Ballarat Vic, Australian Studies Centre, University of Ballarat and Wakefield Press. 2001. pp 42-49. Records of the Australasian Federal Conventions of the 1890s, Third Session, Monday 14th February 1898, p.43. Beggs Sunter p.42. Weston Bate. *Lucky City: the first generation in Ballarat 1851-1901*. Carlton Vic, Melbourne University Press. 1978. p.266. *City of Ballarat Annual Report*. August 1898. Sweely, p.41

Ballarat During the Depression Years

In this instalment from the Ballarat Historical Society journal, *The Ballarat Historian* Vol. 2 No. 4, Peter Mansfield discusses the impact of the Depression years on the citizens of Ballarat.

Ballarat suffered greatly during the depression years. There have been many books and articles written about the 1929-1933 years in Australia and each of these tends to paint a very bleak picture. Each tends to show that a particular group or town suffered disproportionately. In the case of Ballarat and district it is possible to use statistical reports to demonstrate the magnitude at a local level, but instead I have chosen to rely on a series of quotations from ordinary people to show the impact of the depression.

The material has been taken from the Library's Oral History project and demonstrates a wide range of opinion. It is interesting to listen to the tapes because the interviewees spoke about the depression and the good old days as if they were yesterday. In many instances, the opinions expressed are equally applicable to the 1980's except that many of the people considered themselves to be among the lucky ones in the 1930's.

The main influences of the Depression were the prolonged unemployment and disruption to family life;

"I was lucky, because jobs were particularly scarce, to secure an apprenticeship in the railway workshops here as a fitter and turner. I commenced my apprenticeship there in April 1929, as an apprentice fitter and turner. I came out of

my time in the middle of the Depression. As the apprentices came out of their time they were dismissed by the Railways Department and then offered alternative employment as labourers with the railways. That happened to me too – issued a note, received notification of your successful completion of your apprenticeship at such and such a date, it is regretted that to terminate your services as from that date, but we are offering you a position as a labourer in the Department and if you wish to take that occupation, please let us know. I had no other alternative.

It was obvious what was going to happen, because it had happened at least two years before that. Not only were we dismissed, and it was termed regression at that particular time, but the work was rationed, so that single men were rationed one week in three, and the married men were rationed one week in seven."

This man eventually became a union official and fought for many years to improve the employment situation. In the short term his was a difficult task because unionism suffered major setbacks during the world depression. Militant unionists were frustrated because they saw their membership declining and felt that the public was unsympathetic.



The uncropped front cover image showing the tramways rehabilitation works conducted by the SEC in 1934. The work provided much needed employment for many Ballarat men during the worst of the depression.

Image courtesy of Ballarat Tramway Society

“Because they weren’t unemployed it didn’t affect them and you had the same stupid criticism about the unemployed; “they’re responsible for the situation they’re in. You’d think they’d get a job”. Now this sort of attitude was there. It’s a form of expiation as it were. I mean, you washed your hands. Having said that you solved the problem. The victim was responsible for their condition and then you washed your hands of it. That’s all there was to it. It relieves you of any need to even think about it very much.”

It is intriguing that most staunch unionists believed that the Depression was part of a world wide plot against the working classes and that the visit of Otto Neimeyer was evidence of this. On his recommendation, wages were to be cut by more than 20%. The eventual return to full employment because of the declaration of war in 1939 was treated with great scepticism (and loyalty). One person was talking about the exploitation of the workers and said that “this was the greatest slave country in the world” during the Depression.

Most other people however, believed that no-one was to blame for the Depression and that it was just one of those things that had to be endured.

The other effect of the Depression was the disruption to ordinary family life



In this undated photo, Mr Benjamin is seen selling rabbits. A very common transaction during the Depression when families had to economise. BHS collection

and it is easy to show the extremes. One woman said,

“The family had to make do with only two maids but we always went to the beach house at Christmas because father said we must keep up standards.”

Many people said that they could not recall a days unemployment through this period. The wife of a school teacher said that her husband received poor wages but always had a job, and a farm worker said,

“No, I was never out of work in my life. It affected many people but me being

young and single, I never lost any time at all.....earning 10/6 per day plus food for a morning to night job. Of course, farmers were affected too. I’ve even seen potatoes loaded on to trucks at Learmonth and sent to Melbourne. Then the farmer got a bill because cartage costs were higher than the selling price.”

The Depression meant that “susso” (sustenance payments) was available to some people, but it was less generous and less socially acceptable than the present system.

The susso system meant the break up of some families because two adults, e.g. a father and unmarried son could not live at the same address and both receive government assistance. “Jumping the rattler” meant catching a train to the next town to obtain assistance or to look for work. This meant that untold numbers of young men wandered the countryside looking for work or a handout. Susso also meant men had to queue in Camp St to receive assistance.

Ballarat people will remember the resurgence of activity in mining and prospecting. Men were prepared to accept a pick, shovel and overcoat in lieu of the susso and this resulted in a new



Men mining the refuse from street works looking for traces of gold.

Source: Ballarat Courier

Goldrush throughout the district. At Creswick;

"There were four hundred people, blokes like myself who came to Creswick and made camps all over the place. Nearly every night of the week there was a church, the Salvation Army or somebody who would be doing something and there's all those people that would bring supper. That kept us from starving, apart from that we lived on spuds and rabbits."

Some of these men lived with their families in tents for several years. Many still tried to organise their day as if they were still doing a normal job, this included working at the mine on an eight to five basis.

There was another aspect to this. Many people reported that small town

businesses went into a further decline because of a large number of men were unwilling to claim the dole locally. Instead of being seen to receiving government assistance, people came into Ballarat to spend their weekly allowance. Several interviewees pointed out that this practice caused many problems.

Many people spoke about the terrible hardships – a fellow who had been the head of a menswear department was subsequently seen walking his bicycle with a cardboard box mounted on the front mudguard, selling butter from door to door – but others spoke of the ways by which they managed to get by. The following reminiscence seems to sum up many features of the Depression even though it may be a bit unusual.

"I was living from day to day on odd work, and regretfully I was in arrears with my board. My landlady said to me; "stay on", and as she had ten other boarders, all working. They were school teachers, bank clerks, solicitors and solicitors clerks. She said "you can repay me when you return to full employment" and of course, I did. But in desperation, on a few occasions in summer time, trying to pick a fine weekend, I would gather some old sails from the yacht club, sail out to the reeds in the middle of the lake, and sleep on the bottom of the boat on the Friday and Saturday nights. I would then be credited with 7/6 off the 27 pounds which I owed in arrears, and it all helped."

Snippets From the Star

An occasional series highlighting news and events on the Ballarat goldfields from The Ballarat Star, first published in 1855 and ending in 1924 when it was merged with the Ballarat Courier.

The following article from the Ballarat Star of 16th August, 1857, provides a graphic and disturbing example of the fate of a woman, widowed, as a result of a mining accident.

"A Case of Sympathy and Succour"

There is a lady now living at Brown Hill in great distress, and on neighbour's alms, whose sad case, in what quarter soever it may become known, cannot fail to recommend itself at least to all who know a touch of pity. She is the widow of Mr Kennedy, formerly an attorney practising in Dublin, and recently a respected and hard-working miner in this district, who, sometime during the past year, met his death at Slatey Creek, by a quantity of earth falling in upon him and breaking his back. His widow a well educated woman, and tenderly brought up, was thus thrown penniless upon the world, with two children, and an infant at her breast.

A short time afterwards she was attacked with paralysis, and became hopelessly crippled upon one side of her body. Application on her behalf was made

to the Magistrates, who under the circumstances, and as magistrates, could do nothing better than procure for her a sojourn for three months in jail, and get her two elder children admitted into an orphanage. The three months expired, and the poor woman is again amongst us, distressed indeed in mind body, and estate, and endeavouring to do motherly offices to her child, under circumstances not for us to tell.

To the credit of our common nature be it spoken, the sad story of Mrs Kennedy has, in no single instance that we are aware of whether among friends or strangers, been made known in vain. Are the Court poor boxes in funds? If so, in the name of well directed charity, let the officers who have the opening of them, give largely of the contents thereof. Donations may be made at this office, and the donors will find them acknowledged in these columns.

On September 4th, the Star acknowledged donations totalling £22 4s, on behalf of Mrs Kennedy.

(From microfilm records held at Sovereign Hill)



Let's Talk History at the Eureka Centre

with Hermione Higgins

In July we welcomed Dr Stuart King for Talking History, who gave an engaging reading on the Material Geographies of Tasman Colonial Architecture. Our audience were particularly interested in prefabricated houses that were exported from Tasmania to San Francisco during the Californian Gold Rush. Coming up on August 4, we're pleased that Clare Gervasoni, from the Federation University's Art and Historical Collections, can join us to talk about the contribution of Italian speakers on the Victorian Goldfields.

Clare is the author of 'Bullboar, Macaroni and Mineral Water: Spa Country's Swiss and Italian Story'. Her research into Italian speakers in Australasia broadened from family history to serving on the committee of the Italian Historical Society and the Hepburn Springs Swiss Italian Festa Committee.

In the Hepburn Springs region alone 10% of the population spoke Italian during the 1850s, and an Italian reading room was in operation by 1864. With intimate knowledge of Italian Spa Centres such as San Pellegrino, the Italian speaking community sought to save Hepburn's mineral water springs from mining. Though classified as foreigners, their foods, wine, and community broke through many barriers and became more profitable than gold.

Later in September, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Henry Lawson's death, Brigid Magner will explore Lawson's Material Legacies. More information about Talking History and the upcoming program can be found on the Eureka Centre website.

BRHAE: The Ballarat Research Hub at Eureka continues to offer family history research workshops each month. These workshops are held on a Wednesday from 2-3.30pm. The next workshop is 'Australian Military Records on 20 July followed by and Introduction to the

Public Record Office of Victoria on 24 August. These workshops are free to attend, though booking is essential. Contact Simon Jacks, the Australiana research Librarian to reserve your place. simonjacks@ballarat.vic.gov.au

We recently had Thomas Lin, a student from Ballarat Clarendon College complete work experience with our education and public programs team. Thomas spent some time in BRHAE learning how to use the microfilm reader and accessing issues of the Courier that are yet to be digitised. Here is an excerpt from what he discovered while exploring the Courier Sep-Oct 1929.

Realising the year was 1929, I knew I had to scroll to October to witness an event that will change the course of history forever. I found it tucked away in a corner of the paper, near the end of the microfilm. Next to an ad for Tunbridge Furniture on Armstrong and Stuart Street, was a report of an "avalanche of selling" during the "biggest trading day experienced in the New York Stock Exchange" with "bottom apparently unsighted". The 29th of October, later known as "Black Tuesday", was to be the beginning of the Great Depression that affected tens of millions around the world. A result of reckless speculation and banking, the depression lasted almost a decade and significantly reduced global living standards and GDP.

To read more about what Thomas found, have a look at the BRHAE blog on our website.

Stay in touch with the Eureka Centre by picking up a seasonal brochure or subscribing to their monthly e-newsletter at: <https://eurekacentreballarat.com.au/subscribe>



Ballarat Historical Society Capture The Vision

These images were recently posted on the "Ballarat" Facebook page. The administrators have kindly granted permission for the images to be reproduced in *The Lamplight*. They were taken by Alan Eldridge Smith in 1967 and show the Ballarat trams in their twilight years on the Mt Pleasant line.

Left—Passengers boarding at the corner of Barkly and Gladstone Sts (Try doing that today!)

Below— Approaching the Barkly and Grant St intersection.

Bottom—Main Rd looking towards Bridge St



Future Meetings

Tuesday August 9, 7.00pm
Members Tales and Treasures Night
Ballarat North Community Centre

Tuesday September 13, 7.00pm
Annual General Meeting
Speaker: Neil Wright on the history of
Ronaldson Bros. and Tippet
Ballarat North Community Centre

The LampLight

If undeliverable please return to:
Ballarat Historical Society Inc.
PO Box 2292
Bakery Hill VIC 3354

POSTAGE PAID
AUSTRALIA

The LampLight

Ballarat Historical Society Inc.
Reg. No. A0007322F
ABN 57 934 755 725
ISSN 1838 6814

All mail should be directed to the Secretary
PO Box 2292 BAKERY HILL VIC 3354
Website: www.ballarathistoricalsociety.com
Email: ballarathistoricalsociety@gmail.com
Facebook: Ballarat Historical Society
The Lamplight is issued bi-monthly
Membership subscriptions (annual)
Single \$40, Family \$50

Committee Details

President:	Marion Littlejohn
Secretary:	Nina Netherway
Treasurer:	Jennie Daly
Committee:	Ian Moyle
	John Smith
	Kevin Williams
	Andrew Wallace

All editorial enquiries and submission of material
can be forwarded to;
paulandwallace@gmail.com or contact Andrew
on 0497 191 453.