

ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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NEWSLETTER

MARCH, 2008

"Snowy River Mail", Wednesday, August 29, 1956:

Old Marlo Sailor Sails on Last, Long Voyage

The salt of the sea ran truly in the veins of Mr Harold Martin Jorgenson, a highly respected, well known resident of Marlo, to whom all the ports of the Baltic, many of the Mediterranean, and other parts of the world were well known.

At the age of 89 years, this grand old man sailed on his last long voyage, when he passed away at the Orbost and District Hospital on Sunday August 12th.

The late Mr Jorgenson had been living at Marlo for the past 60 years. He had built his home there in the early years, and worked on the paddle boats and barges that plied their trade on the Snowy River from Marlo to Orbost.

Later he became Ports and Harbour Master and in the eventide of his long and adventurous life, when he retired from laborious work, the call of the sea was so strong that he ran two motor boats for fishing and pleasure trips.

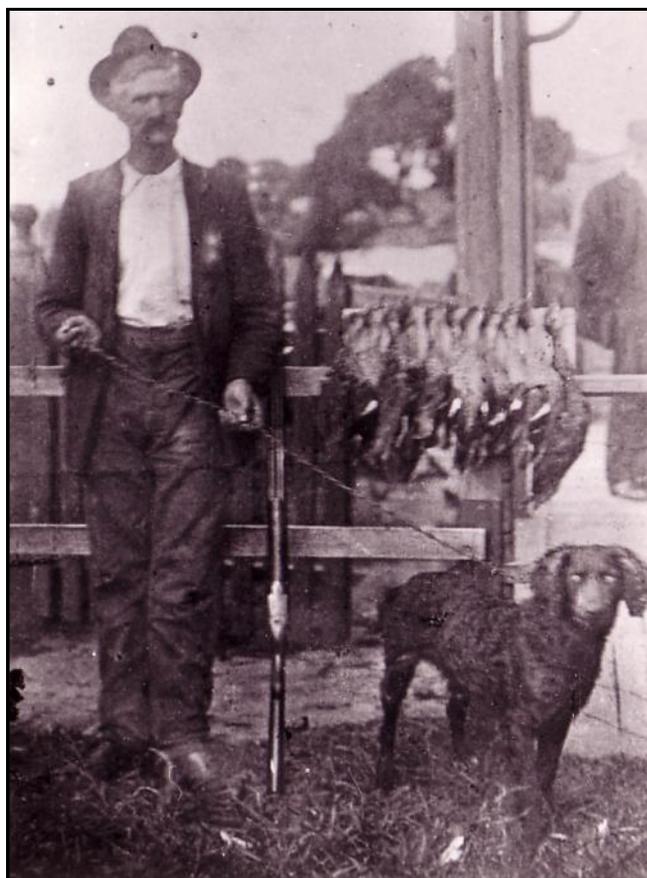
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It was not to be wondered that the genial Martin Jorgenson should have settled at Marlo where the sound of the surf pounding on the eastern extremity of the Ninety-Mile Beach must have been sheer music to his ears, so long attuned to the mighty swell of the vast oceans he had sailed.

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Born at Oslo (Norway), all his people were fishing folk, and had gathered the silver harvest of the North Sea. In those distant days of his early boyhood he also sailed with the herring fleet, and before his school days were finished he had visited all Baltic and many Mediterranean ports.

At the age of 14 he shipped aboard the "Gold Rain" a sailing ship of 500 tons, with a cargo of Norwegian ice for London. The vessel was lost on the treacherous sands of the Dogger Bank. That was his first wreck.

Four years later, during a hurricane at Colon, in the Panama Zone, a huge tidal wave swept a

German brig and its crew, including himself, from its anchorage and left them high and dry on the



Mr Martin Jorgenson and his dog

sand dunes 30 feet above the tide mark, with 17 other small schooners.

His next voyage was to Australia, as ship's carpenter, in "The Amazon", a fine four-mastered ship out of Grenock.

After spending a few weeks in Melbourne, he joined up with "The Neptune", a Richmond River barquentine, loaded with 400 cases of dynamite, and general freight, for Sydney.

In a violent rain storm, she was driven on to the jagged rocks at Pearl point close to where the Bemm River empties into the Southern Ocean, some twenty five miles east of the mouth of the Snowy River. The vessel went to pieces in two hours, the crew of nine narrowly escaping with their lives.

Amongst the wreckage washed ashore, they found a case of "White Seal" whisky. Some of it they drank, but some of the liquor was used to keep a fire burning on the beach.

After four days without food, they found a cattle pad, which led to a bush track.

Following this for a few miles the shipwrecked sailors came to a river and were overjoyed to see a small bark hut on the opposite bank.

The stream was in flood. When they hollered a man came out of the humpy. He had no boat, so the party plunged into the swirling waters and swam across.

The owners of the hut, Mr Harry Sumner and his wife, treated them well, and told them the river they had crossed was the Bemm.

The following day, the flood having somewhat abated, the party recrossed the river and set out for Marlo. Walking and wading through water most of the way, over the inundated flats, they reached the high land at the mouth of the Snowy.



Jorgenson's Ricardo House at Marlo

The river was teeming with fish and the backwater and shining lagoons were covered with innumerable black swans, ducks, pelicans and other wild fowl.

Young Martin knew all about shoalfish.

"It looked a good place to me," he was wont to say, with his blue eyes smiling reminiscently, and would add "I thought it was time I took a turn ashore."

In those days the railway was being extended from Sale. A rough road winding to and out of the tall timber linked up with Bairnsdale.

Orbost — a small settlement — and the bush inn at Marlo. Beyond, to the Cann and Mallacoota, there was only a packhorse road.

In these days of bitumen roads, and a trip to Melbourne taking only a few hours, it is difficult for the motorist or resident of this thriving area of Victoria to picture those early times when aborigines still roamed this far eastern corner of pristine Gippsland.

However, be that as it may, young Martin Jorgenson soon had a job of timber cutting. Then he worked with a road contractor.

For the next four years he was mate of a small steamer, helping the trading schooners from Melbourne in an out of the river across the Bar, and upstream to the landing places of the saw miller's camps.

But the fishing interested him most. In his spare time he built a boat and soon all the channels and banks, where the big blue-nosed bream fed with the rising tide upon feathered-legged and black mud crabs were to him an open book.

His catches of luderick, perch, sea-salmon, kingfish and golden-eyed mullet were incredible.

One day, when out after wallaby, he discovered a long, winding lagoon filling up an old bed of the Cabbage Tree creek.

Pushing his way through the thick tea-tree scrub, he came upon a blackfellow, and his lubra fishing from the bank. They told him they caught plenty of fish.

Young Martin wanted to examine that lagoon from end to end, but it was impossible without a boat.

There was no way of getting his own boat from Marlo through the dense bush, and he asked the blackfellow if he would make him a canoe, but met with a flat refusal. After much talk he persuaded him to build one for five shillings and a plug of tobacco.

Picking up a tomahawk from his camp, the blackfellow strode off to the forest, through a waist-high tangle of bracken fern and flowering shrubs.

Martin and the lubra followed close behind. The party halted at the foot of a tall stringy bark with a slight bulge in the trunk. Cutting down a nearby sapling, the blackfellow stripped off a long length of the bark. Running it around the trunk of the

selected tree, he tied the ends together, then stepping within the loop and passing it around his waist, he commenced to climb the tree.

Placing his feet on the rough bark and leaning well back, he gripped the improvised rope on either side with his hands and lifting and jerking the loop upwards on the trunk, ascended step by step. When he had reached a height of 15 feet, Martin tossed up the tomahawk to him.

In a very short while he cut and stripped off a thick sheet 12 feet long and 4 feet wide. The rough, deeply fissured exterior was then peeled from the sheet until a smooth, clean surface was obtained. Martin, a master boat builder, stood by deeply interested in the black man's craft.

Meanwhile the lubra had made a fire alongside a fallen tree. Lifting the prepared sheet from the ground, the canoe-builder placed it on the prostrate trunk, and standing behind it, away from the fire he pushed and pulled the sheet forwards and backwards over the flames and hot ashes. The sheet soon began to soften and sag. When it was quite hot the corners were turned up and in, and brought together "like one would fold a piece of paper" and the ends lashed with a stout length of stringy bark fibre.

The other half of the sheet was similarly treated. As the frail shell rested on the ground four holes were quickly cut along either side of the upper rim, opposite to each other. Cross sticks placed through these with bark string, held the structure rigid and firm. Some long thin poles placed on the bottom of the canoe formed a flooring. The job was completed in a little over three hours.

When the canoe had been carried down to the bank of the lagoon, Martin shaped up a pair of rough paddles. Very gingerly he stepped aboard his crazy craft and set out to explore the lagoon. It was five miles in length and in places the water was 30 feet deep.

Over a period of two years he made use of this canoe and many a fighting four pound perch and fat wild duck, fell to his rod and gun.

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In 1910 Martin Jorgensen was married at Marlo to Miss Eva Eves, of Orbost.

There were seven children to bless the union: Mrs W. McKimmie (Orbost), Mrs A. Johnston (dec'd), Mrs H. Smith (Orbost), Mr Harold Jorgenson (Orbost), Mr Rupert Jorgenson (Marlo), Mrs A. Johnson (Melbourne) and Mrs C. Macdonald (Bairnsdale).

The late Mr Jorgenson is survived by his widow, who is now living in Orbost with her daughter.

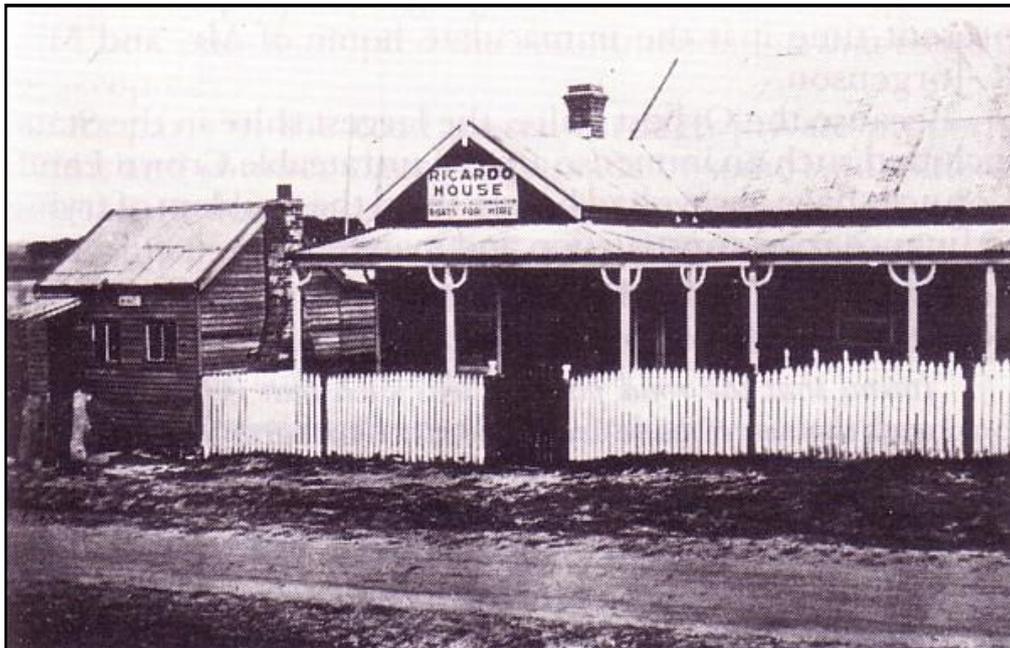
"Snowy River Mail", Wednesday, August 29, 1956:

There passed away at the Orbost and District Hospital on Sunday [12th August, 1956], an old and very well known resident of Marlo, Mr. Harold Martin Jorgenson, aged 89 years.

Besides, the widow, four daughters and two sons survive.

Funeral took place to the C. of E. portion of the Orbost cemetery on Tuesday afternoon.

Pastor D. Tarran officiated.



Ricardo House next door to Marlo's first School (on left)

Ricardo House was a Guest House built by Martin Jorgenson opposite the hotel and run by himself and his wife.