

ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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NEWSLETTER

No. 119 JULY, 2015

THREE GENERATIONS OF BLACKSMITHS AT ORBOST —

THE WEHNER FAMILY

Tom Wehner was guest speaker at an Orbost and District Historical Society meeting in 2002 when he spoke on his own life and the Wehner family's involvement with the blacksmithing trade at Orbost.



THOMAS OSWALD WEHNER 1927-2007

Tom was born in 1927. He attended Orbost Higher Elementary School, firstly at Ruskin Street, then at the secondary section in Arnold Street. He attained the Intermediate Certificate in 1941 and his Leaving Certificate in 1942. He then went teaching, beginning at the Richmond State School on his 16th birthday (26-2-1943). He was there for 18 months and during that time met Jack Dyer, (the Richmond football legend). Tom was a spectator at the football match when the football burst as Jack was kicking for goal.

Tom then spent six months teaching at Murrungowar, where one of his pupils was Trevor Perry. He rode his bike from Orbost to Murrungowar on Mondays and back on Fridays, sometimes getting a ride on the back of a Forestry tip truck. At Murrungowar he boarded with Mrs Halley Johnson. Tom recalled this was in 1944 when they had 13 frosts in a row.

He then went to Teachers' College for two terms in 1945 and was sent to Framlingham State School, near Terang, in Western Victoria, for the remainder of the year.

Tom returned to Orbost and began his blacksmithing apprenticeship in 1946.

THE BLACKSMITHING BUSINESS

Tom's grandfather, Herman Wehner, had learned his trade as a blacksmith and coach builder in Germany before coming to Australia in about 1884. After working for some time in Melbourne and at Wallan he came to Orbost in 1889 and bought John William Borland's wheelwright and blacksmithing business in Nicholson Street. At the time there were two blacksmithing and wheelwright businesses in Orbost, the other one, also in Nicholson Street, was owned by Mr John Russell.

Tom's father, Ossie, born in 1895, worked hard all his life. He started working for his father in the blacksmithing business when he was 14 years old (1909), and took over the business in June 1931. During the War (1939), a troop of light horses had to go to a camp at Leongatha, and the horses needed to be shod before they left. To get them on their way Ossie shod 20 horses in the one day.

Tom completed a five-year blacksmithing apprenticeship with his father. He was aged 19 in 1946 when he started at the shop and took over the business in 1974 when his father retired from working. The business closed when Tom retired on 1-1-1992.

SOME WORKERS OVER THE YEARS

Some of the employees over time were: Charlie Gough, who was a wheelwright; Charlie Roberts worked for Wehners for 15 years; Joe Hermann, a blacksmith, painter and signwriter; Frank Morgan worked as a blacksmith and farrier for 12-14 years. He went to Delegate in 1954-56, then came back to Orbost.

Geoff Winchester was the last apprentice employed at Wehners. He started in about 1969 but had to complete his apprenticeship in steel fabrication as the blacksmith's course was obsolete by then.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

At the blacksmith's shop they worked an 8-hour day, 5 days a week, and until lunch-time on Saturdays. Despite these long hours they always had more work than they could handle.

Farm implements were made and repaired for locals and farmers further afield, as well as building and repairing horse and bullock drawn vehicles. Horse shoeing was also a large part of the work. Mild steel was not available until during the 1st World War.

Shears were manufactured; chains were welded in the fire, link by link; hooks and horse shoes of all shapes and sizes were drawn and shaped from the forge; and cattle brands were drawn out and shaped to the required initials.

Tom recalled making a pulp pick out of an axe head, and used for clearing saplings, for the Maryvale Paper Mill. It was done in the forge, then hardened and tempered.



Borland's Blacksmith Shop in Nicholson Street purchased by Herman Wehner in 1889. It was located between Salter & Sons (which included A. J. Royce's Bakery) and Herbert's Snowy River Stores.



"Craigavar", the Wehner home in Salisbury Street. Agnes and Herman Wehner with Oswald, about 1897.



The same home in Salisbury Street in recent times.



Herman and Agnes Wehner & children, Oswald and Ida.



Wehner's Blacksmith Shop, early 1930s. L-R: Charlie Gough, Charlie Roberts, Ossie Wehner, Joe Herrmann.

BRANDING IRONS

Charlie West, the well-known drover and horse breeder, who owned a large farming acreage on the Orbost side of the Snowy River, near the junction of the Buchan and Snowy Rivers, brought in three horses to be shod and branded with the renowned "WST" brand.

Branding irons were also manufactured for the Cameron farms along the Marlo Road. Numerous branding irons were made in the shop and these can be seen on the Door now in the Historical Society

Museum. This door, from the blacksmith shop, was used for trying out the brands. Not all the brands on the door were made at the shop, as some were brought in for repair and also tested out on the door. The shop was built in 1910 so the door in the Museum would be an original door from the building.

Sleeper brands were also produced for local sleeper cutters. These irons were made with the sleeper cutter's initials for identification and inspection purposes by the forestry officers and the railway sleeper passers.



Above & right: The door from Wehner's Blacksmith Shop used for testing the branding irons. This door is on display at the Historical Museum.



A branding iron from the Historical Society's collection.

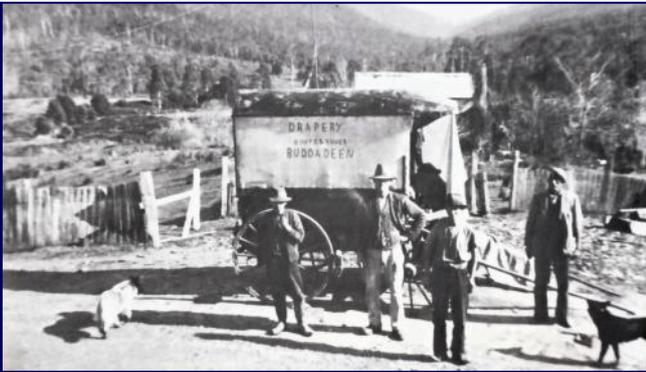


HORSES WERE ALWAYS A CHALLENGE

Horses were the worst job as they knocked you about. Marion Richardson had a nasty grey horse. She was getting married on the Saturday and brought it in on the Friday. While trying to shoe it, it grazed Tom's cheek with its foot. 'Lachie' Macalister managed to get a rope around its neck to try and contain it, but even then it threw him from one side of the horse to the other.

On another occasion, Tom had the job of shoeing some horses at Lake Tyers. There were 12 draught horses and two hacks to be shod, so he got the shoes ready before going down there. Working all day on a concrete floor made it a tiring day's work.

Budda Deen, an Indian Hawker, who had a small farm at Munro, made regular visits through the Orbost district selling his wares along the way to Cann River. He had a draught horse and parked his horse and cart in the shop yard. The horse was shod, he went to Cann River and on his return to Orbost the horse needed shoeing again.



Budda Deen, the Indian hawker (on right) with Ike, Joe and Andy Farmer, at Combienbar, about 1940.



Oswald, Ida, Hilda & Elsa Wehner Children of Herman and Agnes

ACCIDENTS DID HAPPEN! NO WORKER'S COMP OR SICK DAYS

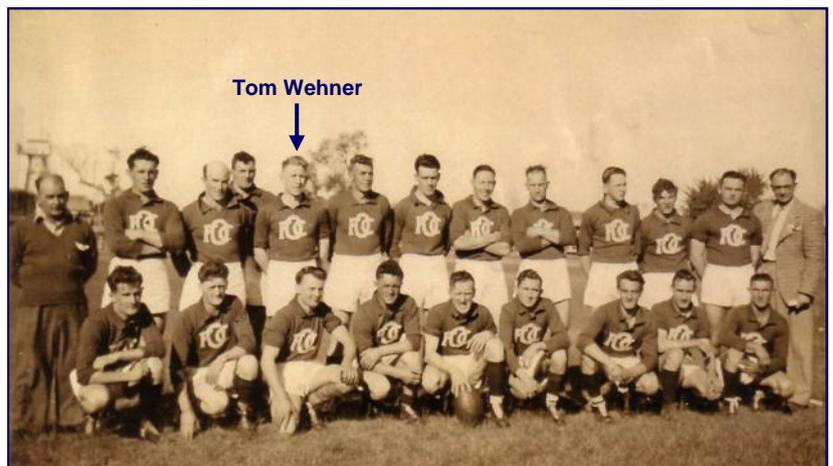
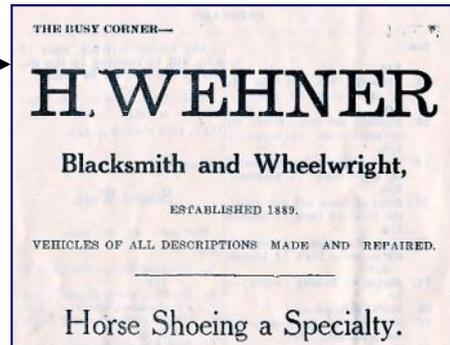
When Tom was shoeing a horse it played up and ran a nail into his hand. Tom had a tetanus needle but came out in a rash, so he got into a hot bath, the rash went, but he said the ordeal "nearly killed" him. He discovered that he was allergic to penicillin as well as also being allergic to cows. As well he suffered burns from time to time due to the nature of his work at the forge.

When his father, Ossie, was fitting a nave band around a cart wheel he broke a finger. Despite the disability he kept on working to complete the job.



L-R: Charlie Gough, Ossie Wehner, Frank Morgan 1940

1931



ORBOST FOOTBALL CLUB PREMIERSHIP TEAM - 1948

Back: Artie Young (trainer), Alex McDonald, Mat Lock, Cliff Bailey, **Tom Wehner**, Bill Murphy, Clarrie Stevens, Ray Smith, Alan Hammond, _____, Clyde Lynn, Maurie Marshall, John Stoddart (President).
Front: George Leatham, Peter Gargan, Reg Kettyle, Ray Cooney, George Watson (Captain-Coach), Jack Barton, Sam Lynn, Jim Lynn, Cliff Parsons.