

# ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

P.O. BOX 284 ORBOST VIC 3888



<b>President:</b>	Beryl Macalister
<b>Vice President:</b>	Heather Terrell
<b>Secretary:</b>	May Leatch
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Ruth Whadcoat
<b>Museum Curators:</b>	Eddie Slatter
Marina Johnson	Margaret Dewar
Geoff Stevenson	John Phillips
<b>Research Secretaries:</b>	Ruth Whadcoat
	Rhonda Smith
<b>Newsletter Editor:</b>	John Phillips

## NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER, 2008

'Snowy River Mail', Wednesday, September 5, 1928:

### ORBOST REMINISCENCES

At the A.N.A. smoke social last week Cr John Johnston, who is affectionately termed the "father of the Orbost Shire Council," treated the gathering to some old time reminiscences.



**Cr. John J. Johnston - 1907**

South Riding Shire councillor for 35 years - 1894-1929.  
Shire President - 3 terms: 1905-06, 1916-17, 1926-27.

Cr. Johnston said that to refer to him as the "father of the council" was fitting, as with the present month he finished up 34 years' service to the ratepayers. In the early days there were no roads and no money, and although the finances of the shire at present, owing to Roads Board works and other necessities, were in a

parlous financial condition, the ratepayers had the decencies of traffic and living. The road to Marlo was now bad enough, but he remembered when nothing but jungle and wild pigs separated Orbost and Marlo. At that time he was living at Tabbara, on the east side of the Brodrigg, and going for the mail was something of an undertaking. One had to ride on horseback across Cabbage Tree Creek, which runs into the Brodrigg between Tabbara and Marlo. Reaching the house of the Stirlings, at Marlo, who were the first inhabitants there and the pioneers of East Gippsland a warm welcome was inevitable.



**Stirling Home in Willis Avenue, Marlo**

The next stage of the adventure was to swim across the Brodrigg to the Island, then over the Snowy River to Wat Wat, where Mr. Powney now lived. There was not so much cream in

those days to spill on the road! The route from there was through Newmerella, and it was the practice in those days to make the late Mr W. Watt's the rendezvous for lunch.



**William Watt's Farm - "Ilfracombe", Newmerella  
Across the Highway from the former Railway Station**

Then the journey to Orbost was continued until the punt, just above the present Snowy River bridge, was reached. Crossing the river, the mail seeker wended his way to the late Hon. James Cameron's barn, at Lochiel House, where, at one room in the barn Mr Donald Munro presided over a boot repair department, and between whiles attended to the business placed in his jurisdiction by the Postmaster General. That was in 1884.



**James Cameron's Barn (left) and Lochiel House  
(centre)**

There was no need of prohibition in those days, as Orbost was destitute of pubs, so there was no sojourning akin to the meeting of the outbackers in New South Wales and Queensland, who rode or drove 80 to 200 miles for the mail and participated in the solace dear to the old pilgrims of the track. The return journey was practically a repetition of the incoming, and snakes and wild pigs were the only companions of the mail carrier.

When he first came to Orbost the present shire

was known as the Snowy River riding of the Tambo shire. All that portion east of the Brodribb was known as No Man's Land. The Government offered the Tambo shire £3,000 to take it over, and that money was spent on the road to Bendoc. Afterwards the Orbost shire was formed. There were no roads or bridges in those days. Nearly every settler had a boat. Large mobs of cattle from New South Wales for the Bairnsdale market crossed at Marlo or at the ford near the Orbost Butter Factory.



**Snowy River and Orbost Township 1889**

At one time 500 head brought down by Mr Dawson took three days before they were crossed at Marlo. One mob of 50 ringed, and as the tide was running out they landed on the bar on the east side of the Snowy, and had to be brought round Cape Conran to Marlo. Another mob near the Orbost butter factory ford caused trouble. The first two or three slipped over the edge, and the remainder thundered over them, drowning them in the mud. Some fun and excitement varied by pig hunts was got in those days. He had been fencing at the Brodribb, and when returning on one occasion along the narrow cattle track between dense forest timber and morass, had an encounter with a wild boar, but without any disastrous consequence. They used to go out catching suckers in the tussocks, and he had a vivid recollection of one day grabbing at what he thought was a sucker, but what proved to be an old sow, which in the frantic effort to escape turned him turtle. He thought he was a gonner.

In these times people made a terrible row if they could not get their cows over the road to Marlo. If a dry spell came they wanted the water cart out. Those little hardships annoyed him when he looked back and ruminated over the difficulties the old settlers had to contend against. The result of uncongenial weather conditions on the 1927-28 crop was that the yield was not up to season 1926-27, when the

average yield may be set down from 70 to 80 bushels to the acre along the Snowy River Valley.

Green beans were a delusion and a snare, and some growers who tried out the Melbourne market lost on the transaction. A plentiful supply of vegetables, and a rush of beans flooding the Victoria market, was like a seismograph in an earth tremor, and the marketing of green beans was left severely alone by Snowy River and Brodribb growers, who turned their attention to the seed bean market. All went well till harvesting time. The crops were right and the price was right, but heavy rains coming at an inopportune moment destroyed a large percentage of beans but still the price was so good that the monetary return from the crop was satisfactory, and those who took full precaution against unpropitious weather were well rewarded.



**Thomas & Eddie Paten Scarifying Beans, Bete Bolong**

An experienced bean grower in the Snowy valley gives an idea of the precarious state of the green bean market last season. He says:-"I sent green beans to Victoria market. Later I would get a wire saying that beans were unsaleable. My expenses to send a bag of beans to the Victoria market, outside the cost of production, were:- Pickers, 3/- per 50 lb bag; bag, 3d; freight on railway, 11d per 50 lb bag; cartage from railhead to Victoria market, 2d per bag; commission 10 per cent. On those figures the grower had to pay, after producing his crop, 4/2 per 50 lb bag outside of commission. Any balance over that was returned. With the price at 18/- to 20/- per 50 lb bag it was satisfactory. However my experience last December was as follows:- "I sent to market 280 bags of prime young Canadian Wonder beans. Got a wire that market was glutted; practically unsaleable. I got back an account sales for 210 bags with a cheque for 12/10. That was my recompense for 210 bags of prime beans for the Christmas

trade."

Naturally growers stopped picking, and turned their attention to dry beans, and luckily prices are good, ranging from 30/- to £2 per bushel.



**Harvesting Dry Beans**

A dry winter has been beneficial to the district as in June the land was practically waterlogged. Now ploughing is in full swing, and with harrowing and discing three weeks will be occupied, after which the sowing of maize and beans will be commenced.

There is a decided move to increase the milk production of the district, and additional dairy herds have been established. An early spring has had the effect of a flush in the supply thus keeping the butter factory busy.



**Orbest Butter Factory, Forest Road - 1927**

An incident in the supply of milk from a herd of 50 cows is worth noting. A dairyman was somewhat nonplussed when his test went down from super to first and second grade. The manager of the factory visited the farm and found that a sick cow was amongst the herd. On his advice the animal was segregated, and at once the test rose to super. This shows how careful dairymen should be.

Cows have come in too early, and dairymen are taking steps to prevent this next winter.