

# ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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## NEWSLETTER

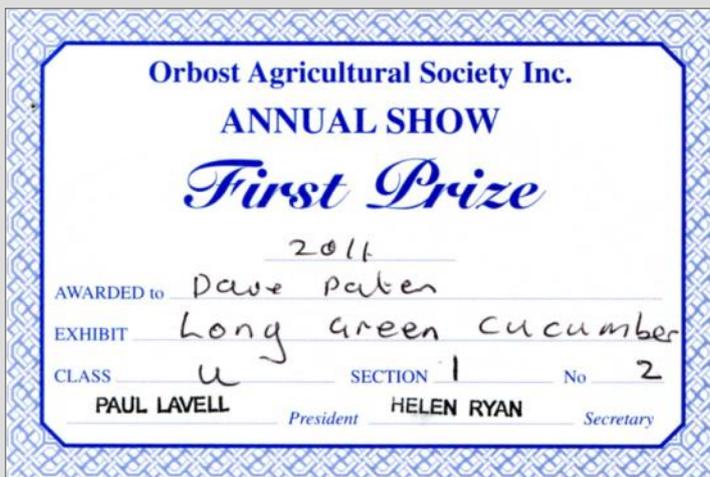
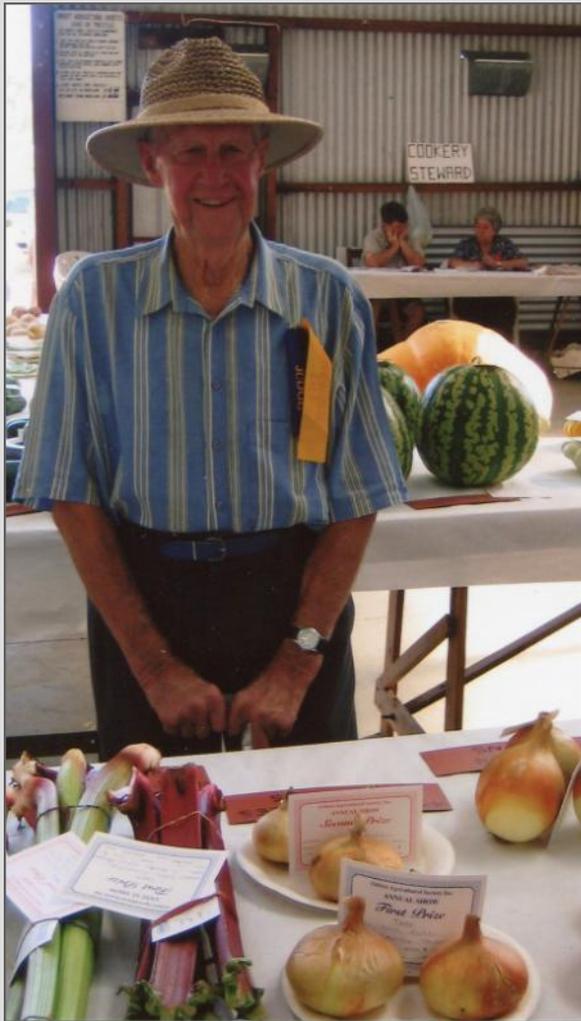
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### LOTS AND LOTS OF VEGGIES

This Newsletter has been compiled by Heather Terrell as a tribute to Dave Paten (8/8/1917—23/8/2011). When the 2012 Orbost Agricultural Show takes place this year, Dave will not be there. His presence will be sadly missed. Dave has competed since the 1950s with 2011 being his last Show.



This is how we remember Dave Paten. Dave knew the secrets of growing these giant pumpkins which he proudly exhibited at the Orbost Show, along with many other vegetables from his garden. This photograph is from 1983. At the time that he wrote his *Memoirs* in 2005, he stated that his biggest pumpkin to date was a massive 167 kgs. *Photo courtesy of Iris Paten.*



Dave's first efforts at exhibiting in the Show were with pigs. In the 1950s, Dave and his brother Alex, farmers near Fossil Hill at Bete Bolong, decided to enter some of their pigs in the Show. A pig would be sent to the bacon factory at Dandenong to be killed, cured, then judged. As he states in his Memoirs, "*We competed in that for three years but only got a second prize.*"

His next efforts were with vegetables. Over the years since, Dave has competed with remarkable success, winning numerous first prizes and sashes. His love and enthusiasm for growing all vegetables and his knowledge, respect and enjoyment of working with the soil are legacies for everyone. Dave will be particularly remembered for his "whopper" pumpkins, but as these photos indicate, he knew how to grow almost anything.

*These photos courtesy of Iris Paten.*



**David Paten**, born 1919, was the youngest of 10 children born to **Thomas Paten** and **Evelyn Robertson**. Thomas had come to the Orbest district in 1893 and worked initially for Carl Grove. Evelyn was a daughter of this district's earliest selector, James Robertson, who settled here in the 1870s. After his marriage, Thomas rented property at Jarrahmond where he started growing maize, sunflowers and beans. By 1909, he had moved to Pumpkin Point (Bete Bolong) where he continued cropping maize and growing bean seed for Henry James.

Dave Paten's *Memoirs*, written in 2005, contain many recollections of his school days and his life on the farm where he delighted in birds and butterflies, reared swan chicks and poddy calves. Observation Day sits firmly in Dave's memory of his school days. The whole school trekked off on an expedition into the nearby bush and then reported on their observations of nature. Otherwise, there was lots of swimming and fishing in the nearby river.

Dave left school at 14½ and began working on the farm. The terrible flood of 1934 is vivid in his memory. The Paten farm was very vulnerable both to the River breaking over the river flats and also to local water shedding off the surrounding hills. Many floods and setbacks were to follow.



*Above photos show the Paten farm in flood. Photos on this page are from the Historical Society's collection.*

**Photo at right:** *Thomas Paten and his eldest son Eddie scarifying beans.*

As well as the constant hand-labour and weeds, there was the rabbit plague. During World War II, Thomas grew culinary beans for the Army and had assistance from two Italian POWs from the nearby camp at Bete Bolong. The Patens had a large pear orchard and the Italian POWs used this fruit, along with other local fruits and pumpkins to make grappa.

Following Thomas's death in 1945, his two youngest sons, Alex and David took over the family farm. In 1947, Dave married city girl Iris who he'd met in 1941 while doing military training in Melbourne.

Dave and Alex gradually built up their dairy herd and raised pigs along with cropping.

The huge flood of 1952 again damaged the old house with its walls made of hessian and paper. In 1954



they moved to a new house built on higher ground out of the reach of floods.

It was during the 1950s that Dave and Alex first started exhibiting in the Show.

The 1971 flood again made a huge mess of the farm and was followed by other floods during the 1970s. By 1977, Dave and Iris had made the decision to sell the farm and move to a nearby bush block.

After the sale of the farm in 1981, their new house, orchard and garden took shape. This developed

into a showpiece with many native plants as well as Dave's beloved veggies. Garden Club members were frequent visitors.

Dave and Iris's next move was to Orbost in 1995 where another new house and garden was built. In his *Memoirs*, Dave describes the setting up of this new home "The building block had a few old fruit trees, a willow tree and long kikuyu grass. We cleaned it up since we wanted both a nice flower and veggie garden. The soil was very poor so we dug a lot of it out and brought in good soil to replace it. We now have a nice garden going with some fruit trees as well. It was just after we moved into our house that I was offered a veggie garden by the river flat, about a third of an acre, by my cousin Clyde Morgan. It was really good soil and I grew lots of veggies there for ourselves, some to sell and also compete in our agricultural show. This land has now been sold [written in 2005] and I have the use of another piece given to me by a friend of ours to share with. I am grateful for that as I can keep up my interest in all these things."



**Photo at left:**

*In April 2000, Dave won the annual Goodman's Seeds Giant Pumpkin Competition with this 167.5 kg. "whopper". Picture with Dave is Susan Laity from Goodman's Seed Farm & Garden Centre in Bairnsdale.*

*Photo courtesy of Iris Paten*



**TOBACCO GROWING** - in our last Newsletter, we asked the question:

***Was tobacco grown in the Orbost district?***

The answer supplied by Lachie Macalister was "Yes". He recalls about ½ an acre behind the old Lochiel House and Lagoon grown by Tom Joiner. Also, old Mr Ridley grew tobacco at Coringle (on the place which Max Preston has now). Jack McKeown grew tobacco at Bete Bolong, and also Jack Lynn at Newmerella.

**Photo at left:**

*Tobacco drying, Orbost district, photo from Jim Nixon collection. Does anyone know the date or location?*