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P.O. BOX 284 ORBOST VIC 3888



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## NEWSLETTER

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### MY TIME AT THE COMMONWEALTH HOTEL, 1960-66

This story has been compiled from an interview with **PAT MARSHALL** conducted by Vicki Everett on 25th May 2012.

The result is a slice of social history from the 1960s.



The **MARSHALL** family has had a long association with hotels in Orbost. Before purchasing the Commonwealth Hotel in 1919, Agnes and Thomas Marshall ran Orbost's other hotel, the Club Hotel, from 1912-19.

In 1926, they began building a new and quite grand hotel next door to the old wooden 16 room Commonwealth Hotel. Built in 1901, the old hotel was too small for the booming 1920s. Unfortunately, when the foundations of the new hotel had just begun, Thomas Marshall died, leaving his wife Agnes to complete the project. The new Commonwealth Hotel opened in 1927 and was further extended in 1933. The eldest Marshall girl (also named Agnes) assisted her mother in running the hotel and took over as licensee in 1930. Over the years, other members of the Marshall family took turns in running the hotel for five year periods.

**Pat and Maurie Marshall ran the Commonwealth, also known as the 'top pub' from 1960-66.**

Pat Marshall (nee O'Hehir) was born in Bunyip, Gippsland on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1926. Her parents were farmers, Michael and Margaret O'Hehir. Before marrying Maurie Marshall in 1948, Pat worked in the city. Maurie was the youngest of 10 children born to Agnes and Thomas Marshall. He served in the Air Force during World War II and after returning to Orbost, he and Pat ran a café underneath the Commonwealth Hotel for seven years (where the carpet shop is now) and then farmed for five years before coming to the Hotel in 1960 to take their turn at running the family's hotel.



## THIS IS PAT'S STORY:

We were in the Hotel for six years (1960-66), taking over from **Frank Marshall**. We had been share farming on Frank's farm while he ran the Hotel. After our time at the Hotel, **Una Roberts (nee Marshall)** took over. She had been running the Corner Hardware [in the Gippsland & Northern building just across the road] and had to get rid of that before she could shift to the Hotel. That's why we did an extra year.

When we came to the Hotel, I was 34 years old and already had 6 children with my 7<sup>th</sup> child born when we were at the Hotel. Our whole family lived at the Hotel but we also had a house in Gladstone Street. It had been built when we first got married.

Maurie and I had Room 10 at the top of the stairs, the girls had Room 24 and Margaret-Ann had one of the balcony rooms outside, and the boys had double bunks in Room 9. Chris was in another room.

### THERE WEREN'T THE MOTELS THEN

The Hotel had 34 bedrooms, all upstairs. There was also a big lounge with a TV and a writing room which was just like a smaller lounge and people could play cards or write letters or just sit and relax. Down at one end, also upstairs, was a bathroom and two shower rooms and two toilets for men only. Half way along the main passage was the women's

bathroom, toilets and shower and down the other end was another shower and a toilet for men. Downstairs were more toilets.

There weren't the motels then. All of the rooms in the Hotel were full every night, often with commercial travellers. I think the tariff was £4 to £5 for dinner, bed and breakfast. While the motel out on the highway might have been there already, the motel in Salisbury Street [the Country Man Motel] was built during the time that we were at the Hotel. I can remember that the builders stayed with us. That was the start of the motels in Orbost.

### STAFF OF ABOUT 20

I had to be able to do everything. If the chef was drunk or absent, I had to take over the cooking and if the housemaids were not able to work, I did that too. Mostly, I did all the office work.

We had a staff of two house maids, one to do the rooms at the big end of the Hotel and the other girl took the small end. There were eight barmen because it was a long bar and in those days of 6 o'clock closing, we used to have all the barmen come in at about 5pm. **Wally Bates** was the head barman, and **Max Baker** was also there. I think that there were four permanent barmen and four more who came in at night and at weekends. There were no women behind

the bar. I did the bar a couple of times when we were short-staffed and used the Pluto tap to fill the glasses. The men laughed at me.

In the kitchen, we had a chef and also a girl to do the silver, and a kitchen maid and two waitresses. **Elsie Steel** and **Norma Stevens** were our waitresses. They were extremely good and reliable. **Margaret and Jenny Belcher** were relieving waitresses and also **Lorraine Olsen**.

There was a yardsman who used to stoke the fires early in the morning and do clean-up jobs. Early on, there was a big wood stove in the kitchen, then we had an electric stove put in which made life a lot easier. We kept the old wood stove just in case of a power strike. Mostly, we used coal. It was lit every morning for the breakfasts. There were also wood fires upstairs.

The Hotel had a laundry and **Mrs Davies** would come in every day. Two big string lines used to go right across the back yard and they used to wind them up and the sheets would blow in the breeze. We had boilers in the laundry which had to be stoked throughout the day. We had commercial electric washing machines and a steam ironer with a big electric roller. Mrs Davies used to put all the sheets through that.



ABOVE: The laundry was down the far end of this run of garages for guests out the back of the Hotel. Note the large poles with string lines which were used to dry the washing. The truck belonged to the Hotel and was used for carting the beer from the train station to the Hotel. Photo taken c. 1960 and supplied by Pat Marshall.

I would have to do the kitchen if there was no one else on duty or if the chef didn't turn up. We also had women doing the cooking at times and they were very good. I can remember **Mrs Perkins** and **Mrs Nina Davis**. **Mrs Kelvie** used to do the weekends.

I had to inspect the bedrooms now and then to make

sure that they were being cleaned properly. Also, there'd be an inspector come in from the Hotels Association and he'd go through everything. They were very thorough. The Health Inspector could come in without warning and go through the kitchen.

## TWO DINING ROOMS

We had two dining rooms. The workmen always used the back dining room because they didn't have to get changed, and the kids also ate there. It could seat about 30 people. The front dining room could seat about 60 people for meals. It was always spotless with white linen tablecloths and serviettes and silver bread containers, silver salt and pepper shakers and sugar bowls, knives and forks. This had to be polished every day. There was also a Ladies' Lounge downstairs.

We would always have soup on the menu, a couple of roasts with different meats, a salad and a choice of four sweets. Or they could have a grill.

## I KEPT GOING ALL THE TIME

My time at the hotel was just continuous work, starting at 7am. I had to be there to book people out in the morning and get the kids off to school. **Thelma Towns** used to take **Chris** with her in the morning because he was too young to go to school. She lived at the Hotel and took care of the kids for me, so there was always someone with the kids. When Thelma left, her sister **Gladys** came in, so I was lucky really.

## BUTCHERS AND BAKERS

We used to order month about from local butchers (**Dooleys and Keith Scott**) and bakers (**Sederlens and Westons**). **Gordon Andrews** used to run a vegetable and fruit market and he would deliver to us. He had his market at the back of where Leatham's Dairy is now.

We used to have a lot of buses come through, Pioneer and Bond's. They would stay overnight with 30-40 people on each bus and we supplied dinner and breakfast.

We had several kids boarding with us, bank boys. Also, when the motel was being built, about ten workmen boarded with us with three meals a day provided. We also had men who were working on the High School extensions.

Mostly I had the afternoons reasonably free until about 4pm when I'd be in the office to book people in, and then there'd be the evening rush from 5pm.

I'd get to bed at about 11pm.

### 'THE CUPBOARD'

My husband **Maurie** mostly worked in the bar. He was pretty much full time there. After the bar closed at 6pm, guests who were staying at the hotel could drink in 'The Cupboard' which was a smaller room.



LEFT: This photo was taken in 1943 and shows Maurie Marshall in his Air Force Uniform. He and Pat married in 1948 and then returned to Orbost. Towards the end of their time at the Hotel, Maurie became ill and died on 18th March 1966, just three weeks after leaving the Hotel.

### 6 O'CLOCK CLOSING

The police would come in and clear the bar out every night at 6pm. Late closing at 10pm was just coming in when we left the pub in 1966. The bar wasn't open at all on Sunday. Decimal currency came in on the weekend that we left which was a relief because I didn't know if I could ever work out the money. Smoking was allowed in all areas of the Hotel. The .05 blood alcohol level killed the bar trade, also supermarkets have alcohol now, and clubs are licenced. It's changed a lot.

Our busiest days were Monday to Wednesday with all the commercial travellers. At Christmas time, we were flat out. Sometimes, we had to put young couples into single beds or put up a folding cot in the writing room.

I was glad to leave the Hotel in 1966 because Maurie had become ill. We had only a few weeks here at home before he was taken to Melbourne where he died. With seven children under 16 to think of, I scarcely had time to worry. We managed. I did book-keeping for **Mrs Curphy** (Haberdashery shop), **Margaret-Ann** started work at Williams Shoe Shop and **Gerald** began with the Forestry. Later I went to work for **Jim Duggan** at the Newsagents and stayed there until I retired.

### PEOPLE AND INCIDENTS I REMEMBER

At the Hotel, I loved meeting people, being able to help people. I don't remember any bad times. A couple of girls got married from the Hotel and had their wedding receptions there. I enjoyed that.

One time, we had a bunch of Young Farmers stay at the Hotel. They played up and filled all the beds with confetti and sugar. What a mess. Another time, there was a chap arrested by the police at the Hotel. He was a jewel thief from Sydney. Another person that I remember was an old woman who used to keep cats, a **Cat Woman**. She wanted a bed one night and she had a dead cat in her basket.

Another thing that I remember is that the Aboriginal people lived over at Newmerella and I don't think that they were allowed over the Snowy River bridge after 6pm.

I think that running the Café was the hardest work. There was the picture theatre across the road then. Also, we used to have Bonds and Pioneer buses for lunch every day and sometimes they'd come down the Bonang Highway and they'd go over a bank. One night, at 1am in the morning, Maurie had a phone call, a bus had gone over a bank and could we organise something. So I'd pack my two kids into a pram and run for the café and light the fire and put a meal on. I'd open tins of beef stew and make a big beef stew pie and have it ready by the time they came in, all starving and cold. Two or three times we had to do that. Una [Marshall] would put them up at the Hotel so they'd have a bed for the night.



ABOVE: Ted Deering, Chris (child) and Pat Marshall, Margaret Deering and Margaret O'Hehir (Pat's mother). Margaret Deering was Pat's bridesmaid and she and Ted and Pat's mother were visiting Pat in Orbost.