

Things Past

Newsletter 95

January 2016

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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Dates for your diary

Book launch, *Seventeen Year Old Soldier: Jim Baddeley Recalls his Great War*, Friday 19 February, 7.30pm at the OTree Restaurant, corner Victoria & Albert Hill Roads Lilydale.

AOEHS meeting Saturday 20 February, 1.30pm Hardy House. Bronwyn Higgs will speak about *The Happy Hermits* and information that has come to light since the book was published.

See page 6 for Eastern Regional Libraries Genealogy and Military History events for 2016.

Swift's sawmill on Olinda Creek

When Clement Hodgkinson surveyed land along Olinda creek in 1855, he showed a sawmill operating at what is now the eastern end of the Mt Evelyn Reserve. The site appears to be on the northern bank but the creek has since changed course.

Hodgkinson's plan did not give the name of the mill owner but on 17 April 1856 McDonald and Goodyear wrote to the Surveyor General from the Dandenong Timber Yard Brunswick Street Collingwood, requesting a tramway down the spur to the Running Creek Saw Mill 'to convey timber where it is too steep'.

On 21 April Surveyor Hodgkinson wrote in support of the proposal 'as it would render available for the Melbourne market the very excellent timber procurable in the higher part of the Corhanwarrabul ranges should reserve right of way 20' width commencing at sawmill and ascending leading spur of the main range to a point two miles distant from sawmill ... (they should have) exclusive use for six years.¹ Part of Inverness Road and the track leading off Wilkilla Road down the spur would run very close to the proposed tramway route.

That is the latest reference we have to McDonald and Goodyear, though their names appear on Lot 27 on the Parish Plan.

Another firm was operating a sawmill in the area shortly afterwards. Muriel McGivern mentions that the earliest name for Mt Dandenong Road was Sawmill Road, as it was the route to Swift and Counsel's sawmill on Olinda Creek.²



Above, a bullock team hauls a log down Swift's timber skid. Engraving by Robert Bruce from *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, 1/2/1869, SLV.

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From p.1

Settler John Collier's obituary stated that he had come to Olinda Vale 58 years before (i.e. in 1858) and was employed at Swift's saw mill, a plant powered by water from the creek.

'There was then no sign of settlement except the huts of the cutters. Bush tracks led into the dale, whence supplies were obtained. But the forest giants – and there were some big trees on the creek in those days – returned good money for the outlay, and work went on until the inevitable cut-out.'³

Swift's sawmill was mentioned in an interesting account of a walking tour in 1868:

A DAY'S RAMBLE AMONG THE SPURS OF THE DANDENONGS

Sunset found us at the door of the Lilydale Hotel An early hour on the following morning found us all astir ... our party having added to it Mr Walters, the indefatigable portrayer of our wildest scenery by means of photography.⁴ A walk of four and a half miles brought us to Swift's Saw Mill, on the Olinda Creek, and then the climbing began.

... we reached the summit of Mount Corhanwarrabool [sic], where is erected the stage and flagstaff used in the trigonometrical survey, and on account of which it has gained the name



Above, Sassafras Gully by Carl Walter, State Library Victoria. The photo is dated 1870, two years after the excursion 'among the spurs'.

of the 'Observatory'. Our descent from this point was made by a gorge to which we believe no name has been given, but which is remarkable in all its features. The trees are of stupendous height, some which have been cut down measuring over 400 feet. Fern trees fill all the hollows, and the note of the lyre-bird is no infrequent sound in this secluded region.

From this our route brought us suddenly on a picturesque group of settlers' cottages in a sheltered nook, to which has been given the euphonious name of Harmony Vale, a name most applicable, it is reported, to the life of the families who reside in it.⁵

From this point we entered by far the most picturesque of all the spots we visited. The local name is Blackwood Gully, but its main feature is the profusion of fern-trees with which it is clothed. These trees, mingled with sassafras, are countless in number, and so close that daylight can scarcely penetrate to the sandy watercourse by which the ascent is made. They assume the most grotesque forms, and as the bed of the creek meanders for nearly two miles under their shade, the variety in which they group themselves is endless.

Leaving this lovely glen, we crossed a spur of the mountain into the valley from which we had started in the morning and [retraced] our steps to Lilydale.⁶

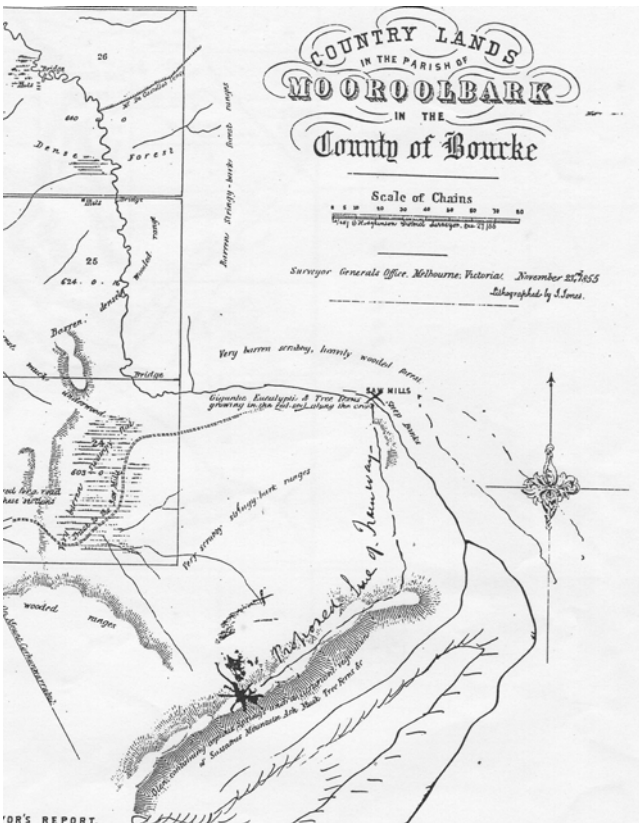
Swift's sawmill was mentioned in another article in 1869:

SWIFT'S TIMBER SKID, OLINDA CREEK

Among the most picturesque dells of the Dandenong, and about five or six miles from Lilydale, an extensive saw-mill is steadily at work converting the giants of the forest into deals and quartering for the service of colonists who are rapidly peopling the vale of the Yarra.

To supply his wants the proprietor, Mr Swift, has to send his cutters some miles up the ranges,

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Above, part of the survey map of Olinda Creek, Parish of Mooroolbark, with route of McDonald & Goodyears' proposed tramway marked.

Miss Snowball's house burns down

Miss Mary Frances Snowball was Postmistress of Mt Evelyn from 1913 to 1933. She ran the Post Office from either a closed-in verandah or a front room of her house.

We always assumed that her house, at the bend in Snowball Avenue, dated from the early 1900s and would have been one of Mt Evelyn's oldest houses. In fact the original house burned down in 1931.

Fire at Mt. Evelyn. VALUABLE BUILDING DESTROYED.

Fire may be a friend or an enemy and a fiend. It was in the latter category that it appeared at Mount Evelyn at 7 o'clock on Tuesday evening, when the large home owned and occupied by Miss M.F. Snowball and her adopted daughter, Miss Hilda Snowball, was completely demolished within the remarkably short period of 45 minutes.

Shortly after the alarm had been given a huge crowd had congregated, but the flames had complete mastery, and it was impossible to save anything, so nothing remained but to stand by and watch the premises being rapidly reduced to ashes.

In the early stages it was feared that Miss Snowball had been trapped in the inferno, and desperate attempts were being made to effect a rescue when word was received that she was safe, having gone to a store to purchase provisions just before the outbreak occurred. Miss Hilda Snowball, who at the time was attending to her horse at the stable, was unaware of this, and naturally concluded that her mother was in the house.

The building was a wooden structure containing eight large rooms, and was a well known landmark, being one of the early houses of the district. The origin of the fire is a mystery. It has been suggested that it was caused by the airing of a sheet before a fire during Miss Snowball's temporary absence.

The alert Lilydale Fire Brigade noticed the reflection and were quickly on the scene, under the leadership of Captain Benyan; but they were too late, owing to the rapidity of the fire, to effect a save.

Miss Snowball, who is Mount Evelyn's postmistress and a resident of over 20 years, will be a severe loser. In addition to the building much valuable china, works of art, pictures (including old family portraits) and a piano, along with other irreplaceable personal belongings, were lost.



'A more convenient site': the Post Office, built 1931. Image National Archives of Australia: B5919, 1458. The building, at the top of Snowball Avenue, is now a gift shop. The newspaper report below indicates that Snowball Avenue was once the driveway to Miss Snowball's house.

Viewed the next morning, the spot presented a desolate appearance. Five chimney stacks stand amid a heap of ashes and twisted iron surrounded by scorched camellia trees and other flowering shrubs.

No postal material was destroyed. It was only recently that the post office business was transferred from the premises to a more convenient site.¹

Miss Snowball re-built on the same site. Hilda married John Barber later that year. Two years on, Hilda was involved in another dramatic incident while staying with her adoptive mother.

After firing a shot from a sawn off pea rifle at his wife, John Barber, 24, farm hand, of Wandin North, turned the weapon on himself and received a fatal charge in the head. ...

Mrs. Barber was nursing the baby in a bedroom when her husband entered, and an argument began. Her husband ... then suddenly produced the sawn-off rifle and levelled it at her. Grasping the baby to her breast, she ran out of the room in a stooped position.

She heard the report of the shot close behind her, but the bullet went high and embedded itself in the wall. ... She continued her flight along the drive towards the post office, and heard the report of another shot. She was too afraid to go back to the house. The postmistress (her mother) ran for the doctor and the police.²

The newspaper report called this 'A tragedy that caused a certain seething of revolt locally' – whatever that meant. Originally the story came down to us in a distorted form: that Hilda had

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Swift's Sawmill, from p.2

*and when the logs are trimmed they are dragged by bullock teams down the hill sides to the mill. This is an operation of some danger, as the sudden canting of a log might bring destruction on the whole team as well as the drivers; but time and constant use soon form a track, and the one of which we give a view in our large engraving ... is now over a mile in length, running up one of the most picturesque spurs in the neighborhood, diverging into one of those sheltered gullies where the *Eucalyptus radiata* attains enormous dimensions.⁷*

Neither article mentions a tramway. Swift's logs were brought down the 'skid', not on rails. When tracing the route of the Cave Hill tramway, Ralph Alger identified a snig track that had probably served the mill at the Reserve and then was re-used for Mitchell's tramway. It followed the tributary that joins Olinda Creek almost opposite Hazel Street.⁸ This might well have been the timber skid in the illustration on page 1, 'diverging into one of those sheltered gullies'.

It is not clear whether McDonald & Goodyear and Swift were operating sawmills at the same time, or if Swift took over McDonald & Goodyear's mill between 1856 and 1858. Both the original survey and a 1866 map of the Upper Yarra say 'Saw mills' but mark only one site. The distance of 4½ miles from Lilydale to Swift's mill given in the 1868 article would fit with the Mt Evelyn Reserve site. Overall it seems more likely that Swift's sawmill was the one at the Reserve site, the same one formerly operated by McDonald and Goodyear.

Notes

¹ Serial 6605 Box 10 file 56/347 in J. Newton 1996, *The First Selectors of Mt Evelyn*, p.25.

² M. McGivern 1967, *A History of Croydon*, Vol.II, p.20.

³ *Lilydale Express* 8/12/1916 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/74598144>

⁴ Probably Carl Walter, who photographed the Aboriginal residents of Coranderrk in 1866.

⁵ Harmony Vale was a settlement bordering the upper reaches of Olinda Creek, Kalorama, based on the selections of Jeeves, Richardson, Child and Hand. It may not have been as harmonious as the writer believed. By 1874 'A Tourist' was complaining that the settlers had closed the bush tracks to Harmony Vale. *The Age* 5/12/1874 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/201531144>

⁶ *Geelong Advertiser* 28/2/1868 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/150465417>

⁷ *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers* 1/2/1869 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/60450879> *Eucalyptus radiata* now refers to the Narrow-leafed Peppermint, a medium sized tree. It is likely that the Mountain Ash *E. regnans* was meant.

⁸ Ralph Alger, 'Reminiscences of the Cave Hill Tramway', *Light Railways* No.111, January 1991. Snig: to haul a long object, e.g. a log, with one end raised.

Karen Phillips

Miss Snowball's house, from p.3

shot and killed her husband. The inquest was satisfied that Barber had shot himself.³ The papers reported the death as a suicide but, from the account of the incident, it seems possible that the fatal shot was accidental.

Hilda remarried in 1936. Miss Snowball gave up the position of Postmistress in 1933 but continued to live in Mt Evelyn till her death in 1948.

¹ *Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian* 12 September 1931 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/60438569>

² *Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian* 28 January 1933: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/60440735> *The Argus* 23 February 1933, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/4526607>

³ *The Argus* 23 February 1933, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/4526607>

Karen Phillips

Volunteer Award

Congratulations to Anthony McAleer, who received a Volunteer Award from MP Tony Smith in December. Anthony was recognised for his research into the stories of Mt Evelyn's servicemen. It is largely due to Anthony's work that our WWI servicemen are now commemorated by plaques at the RSL Memorial Gardens, recreating the Avenue of Honour.

Rail Trail Friends wind up

At their AGM on 23 November 2015, the Friends of the Lilydale to Warburton Rail Trail voted to wind up their group. The Warburton Community Economic Development Association (CEDA) will adopt the Friends' aims and take on their role as advocates for the Trail. Council took over as the Committee of Management of the Trail in 2007 and is now responsible for maintenance.

Many thanks to the Friends for their wonderful work in establishing and caring for the Trail. It has become one of the major attractions of the Yarra Valley and, in numbers of users, Australia's premier Rail Trail.

Online resources

Google Maps has aerial photos of Melbourne in 1945. The photographed area extends east to Ringwood – not as far as Mt Evelyn, unfortunately. See: <http://1945.melbourne>

For the rail buffs: 'When there were stations', <http://www.stationspast.net/>

On Facebook: 'Lrrsa: Light Railway Research Society of Australia Inc' & 'Abandoned Railways of Australia'.

There is also a 'closed group' (you have to join to view) called 'Closed Railway Lines and Stations of Australia', <https://www.facebook.com/groups/531274093606869/?fref=nf>

Layers of history at the Recreation Camp

The History Group toured the Mt Evelyn YMCA Recreation Camp 2015 in November. It is a site with many layers of history, probably dating back as far as the 1850s.

The camp is built on a levelled area, made partly by excavating from the valley wall, partly by building up the flat ground on the valley floor. This work, which was probably done in stages, has pushed the Olinda Creek into a new course, closer to the north side of the valley.

Frank, who showed us round, mentioned that there had been an old water wheel in the creek. It may have belonged to a saw mill that operated beside the creek from the mid-1850s. See page 1.

Frank said there had once been a trestle bridge over Olinda Creek a short distance inside the present camp entrance. It is likely that the bridge once connected with Hazel Street. Jean Edwards has told us that Robert Hazel Smith was a wood cutter; he and others supplied wood cut into cords (4' lengths) for Mitchell's.

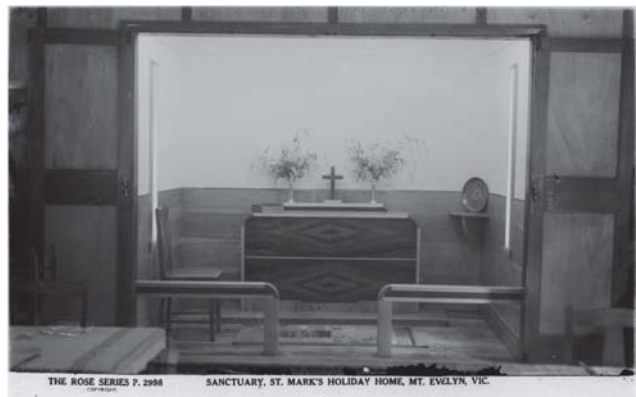
'The wood was cut on the north side of Silvan Road and dragged across and down Hazel Street (then McKillop Road) and presumably stacked beside the line for David Mitchell's rail transport. About 1915 the Roads Board prohibited the dragging of the wood across the main road.'

This prohibition might have led to the extension of the tram line further up the creek. The hillside above the camp is one of the few places where the tramway formation is still visible. An unusual rectangular concrete structure beside the tram track was a water tank to supply the locomotives. Barry Callanan has shown us a photo of a similar structure on the Cave Hill Estate.

The Recreation Camp was built on the site of Brother Bill's holiday camp, which opened in 1940 and was destroyed in the bushfires of 1962 (*Things Past* #89). The present Recreation/Office building, which housed the original chapel, still survives from the old camp. Frank told us there is a stained glass window, now boarded up inside a wall.

The camp was briefly taken over by the Army in 1942. Frank had spoken to someone who remembered seeing the Army tents on the flat area behind the buildings, where the archery range and ropes course are now located.

The Recreation Camp site is one of the gems of Mt Evelyn, surrounded by lush creekside vegetation and hidden away in its gorge or 'glen'.



Clockwise from top left: History Group members in front of the main building; building surviving from Brother Bill's camp; the sanctuary of the original chapel; view of the site, a hidden gem of Mt Evelyn. Photos Paula Herlihy; Rose Postcard, State Library Victoria.

Genealogy events at ERL

Eastern Regional Libraries Genie Exchanges for 2016. Join other family historians to swap research tips and stories and ask for assistance. Free event.

Knox Library, Mondays 9.30am-11.30am (new times and day)

15 February
18 April
20 June
22 August
17 October

Croydon Library, Thursdays 9.30am-11.30am

25 February
28 April
23 June
25 August
27 October

Military History Group, Croydon Library, Fridays 2pm

26 February
29 April
24 June
26 August
28 October
9 December

Kathy Smalley
Family & Local History Librarian, ERL

Do you know these people?

Linda Coombs asks if anyone can identify the people in the photo below. Linda thinks one of the women looks like her great grandmother, Clara Tegart nee Rexter (1876-1943). See *Things Past* #88 & #89. The photo looks a little late for any of the people to be the right age for Clara. They could be members of the Rexter family, which had a long history in and around Mt Evelyn.



40 years at Dalmeny

At the end of last year, Greg and Helen Luke celebrated 40 years at their home Dalmeny, 1975-2015.

Street Names booklet

Having sold out of our booklet *Street Names of Mt Evelyn*, we have taken the opportunity to revise it. The first edition was published in 1996 – 20 years ago, before we had completed the research for *Tracks to Trails*. It is 40 years since the renaming initiative of 1976, when Mt Evelyn's duplicated street names

STREET NAMES OF MT EVELYN



Mount Evelyn History Group Incorporated

were replaced. The booklet, which should be available from February, will be priced at \$8.

From Kev's rain gauge

Rainfall for December 2015 for Mt Evelyn, McKillop, Melbourne and the Melbourne average.

Mt Ev	McK	Melb	Melb Av
57.1mm	50.9mm	46.8mm	59.0mm

Total rainfall for 2015.

Mt Ev	McK	Melb	Melb Av
822.5mm	815.8mm	439.2mm	648.3mm

Total rainfall for 2014.

Mt Ev	McK	Melb
766.1mm	907.0mm	475.2mm

McKillop readings courtesy Jean Edwards. Melbourne figures Bureau of Meteorology: <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/data/>

Kevin Phillips

Contact us

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