

# Things Past

Newsletter 79

September 2014

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

PO Box 289 Mt Evelyn VIC 3796

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## Dates for your diary

'Dreams From a Suitcase' (*Sogni Dalla Valigia*). Maria McCarthy will speak on Italian migrants to the Yarra Valley and the book which won an RHSV Community History Award. Saturday 20 September, 1.30pm Hardy House, 49 Birmingham Road, Mt Evelyn.

RHSV History Week 19-26 October inclusive.

Yarra Ranges Heritage Network Open Day at Mont De Lancey, 19 October 10am–3pm.

History Group Meeting Monday 20 October, 7:30pm Hardy House.

Launch of *Morrison House Changed a Community*, Sunday 7 Dec, 1.30pm Hardy House.

## The Stationmaster's daughter

Alma Rahilly came to Mt Evelyn in 1927. Her parents were Jack (probably John, but always called Jack) and Belle (Isabella) Rahilly. Jack was the Stationmaster at Mt Evelyn from 2/4/1927 to 23/11/1931, according to the Departmental Residence record card. Alma was born in 1917, so was 10 years old when her family came to Mt Evelyn. She is now 97. Her sister Joan, 7 years younger, died in 2009.

*There were always gardens at the Railway Station, but we didn't have much of a garden except Dad had a small vegetable garden at the back of the house. Dad always opened the station for the fruit growers out of hours, and so we always were given lots*

*of fruit – can't remember ever having to buy fruit.*

*When we first went there we stayed at a boarding house across the line – The Outlook. The lass who was there – Knowles – at that time there was a dam in between –*



Above, Alma Rahilly at age 97, July 2014. Photo Paula Herlihy. Below left, Alma's father, Stationmaster Jack Rahilly.

*she thought she was swimming. She was very young and I had to go in and rescue her.*

Alma was friendly with a girl from Grantully and went with her to a farm that grew violets. They were friends with the Morrisons. They attended the Methodist Church; this was the Union Church 'away out towards Silvan'. She remembers services at the school as well, and her dad playing the piano and people being pleased he played so well. Her father loved playing piano and walking.

*Dad didn't like cars. We went by train or we walked everywhere. We walked from Mt Evelyn to Mt Dandenong. Dad's idea of entertaining people was to walk them up to the top of Mt Dandenong. We went to Warburton and walked all over there.*



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### From p.1

We played hopscotch on the footpath. There was a little shopping centre [in Mt Evelyn], a hall which is probably still there, a Church of England, and on the corner just opposite us there was a butcher's shop, and then further along there was Hughie Wray's. Hughie Wray had two shop fronts; one was a sweet shop and the other that you walked through into was the linen shop or draper. The grocery shop was further along. Hughie Wray 'took it in turns' to nurse his two sisters. There was no doctor at Mt Evelyn. Across York Road just across the Railway cutting there were three shops, and one might have been a baker.

There isn't a lot to remember – there wasn't a lot at Mt Evelyn in those days!

There wasn't a lot of bush in the town – you had to go a fair way out. Mt Evelyn was a very basic, rudimentary town – of course there were the 'shooters and stabbers', i.e. the Italians. We got pocket money by gathering up the beer bottles from the back of the Hall and selling them for 1 penny a bottle.

Dad was talking to a great friend of his – he was talking to him at the station one night. And the next morning, one of those shovels that comes down to collect things, the top half of him went up and the legs went down – every one was horrified. A foreman at the Silvan Dam – only young too.

When we were at school which was half way to Silvan Dam – when the ambulance passed we never knew whether it was an accident at the dam or the Italians had been having a fight.



Above left, trigonometry point on top of Mt Dandenong. This was the destination of walks up the mountain. Above right, Alma and her sister Joan about 1928.

The Zig Zag area was called the 'Toorak' of Mt Evelyn. People who lived there included solicitors called Outhwaites, a lovely Scots lady called Mrs Hordern and Cedric her grandson who used to go to Scots on the train. Cedric was about my age.

Miss Snowball in 1928 ran the Post Office on the Main Road between the Butcher and the Church of England (not from her Snowball Avenue home). Alma's teacher at Evelyn State School was Mr Bell. She was friendly with his children and they used to walk to school together. Alma remembers carrying her sister to school – she took one end and Mr Bell's daughter took the other – if you took the head Joan would bite and if you took the legs, Joan would kick. When she got to school, Joan ran off happily to play. She loved the young male infant teacher; Alma can't remember his name but remembers Mr Bell and Mr Gilrock. She remembers the Wrideway girls and a boy called Billy Church; she thinks he later joined the Air Force.

Alma remembers the children used to sing a song called 'Tardy Scholar' :

Tardy Scholar is your name  
If you're scolded who's to blame?  
Ah, you know how well we know you  
Cos Tardy Scholar is your name.  
And Poor Tardy Scholar said ...  
'I can spell in B A Bay  
And I learnt the other day  
How to figure on my slate  
Yet you say I'm always late.'



Above, the Rahilly family and friends on a walk up Mt Dandenong.

## The Gregarious Flower Farming Marshalls of McKillop Road

### 2. Jock Marshall (1900–1974)

In the previous newsletter we were introduced to the flower farming Marshall family. John (Jock) Marshall was an immigrant from South Shiells, in the north of England near the Scottish border.

Jock began his working life in Australia 'on the susso' (the sustenance allowance given to unemployed people who were given government road work). While working on road camps in the Western District he met Christina Robinson, married her and established a farm in McKillop Road, Mt Evelyn, after being granted land through the Closer Settlement Board in 1926. The land was a rectangular shape and bordered by Lily Avenue (see MEHG booklet *Flower Farming in Mt Evelyn and District*).

While John (Jock) may not have made his name farming, the family did survive on the small farm. He is remembered as a beautiful tenor singer at local concerts, an enthusiastic lecturer for the Masons, a water-diviner and farmer who, according to son James, always prioritised going fishing over horticultural work. James' memories of his father introduce us to life between the 1920s and 1950s, reminiscent of Steel Rudd's *On Our Selection* stories.

'He didn't really keep any Scottish traditions. He just believed that everything Scottish was the best in the world. He wouldn't grow daffodils on the farm because he said they were (English) weeds.' On the other hand, he chose the property, not on the basis of farming potential, but because the pre-existing oaks reminded him of home.

Jock, and later his two sons, Jimmy and Harry, were well known for singing at charitable concerts in Mt Evelyn. After the Mechanics Institute Hall was burned, for example, Jock



Above, Jock Marshall (third from left) with family friends, 1926-1927. Photo courtesy Joan Marshall.

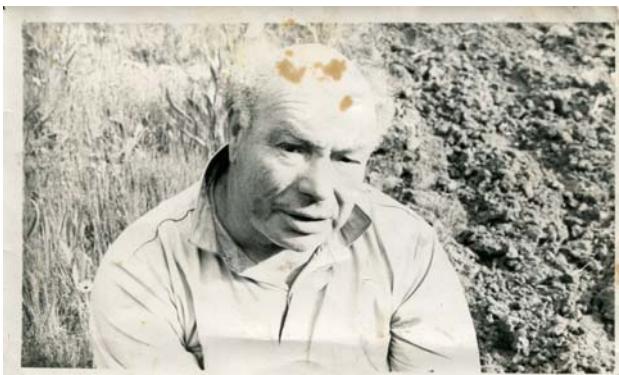
sang for the fund-raising towards the new Mt Evelyn Public Hall, established in 1954.<sup>?</sup> The home, too, was 'never without music', thanks to the piano playing skills of close friends Pauline Koolmees and Jack Feeney.

Jim described his father's passion for fishing, a passion that he shared with some other well-known Mt Evelyn residents, headmaster Mr George Baker, neighbour Bob Smith and butcher Charlie Stubbs. I asked if the fishing cut into the farm work and Jim answered, 'More like the farm work cut into the fishing! We lived on fish.' Bob Smith, who lived on the corner of McKillop Road, often went with them but also had his own private fishing spots. He used to turn over all the cow and horse pats to collect worms for his fishing.

'Dad was always fishing. He used to do a lot of fishing locally around the Stringy Bark Creek, Quinns Dam and the Olinda Creek. Blackfish and trout. Charlie Stubbs would leave the shop, get his old van out, drive out past the school (Mt Evelyn Primary) and toot his horn in the morning. Or (he'd) go out to our farm and if Dad were out on the farm ploughing he (Dad) would just walk off and leave it there and come down and say to Mum, "Fix the horse, Mum, I'm going fishing with Charlie."

They would go and collect George Baker, who would leave his school responsibilities and wait on the road for them. 'They would go somewhere down the Yarra, fishing.' That was why the school became so run down, until Mr Krieger replaced Mr Baker, 'strapping everyone in the first week' to signal a new and tougher regime.

Jock's expertise in water habitats developed into a gift for water divining, something he also



Above, Jock Marshall, undated photo courtesy Joan Marshall.

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pursued with Bob Smith's son Keith, and with Harold Parker from Silvan. Tina's diary entries record regular days when John and Keith were away water divining in places such as Alexandra, Ferny Creek and Panton Hills (occasionally combined with a spot of fishing!). In February/March 1968 Jock was absent from the farm water divining on at least 12 days. (Museum records state that 1967 remains the driest year in 140 years, the drought lingering until broken in March 1968.)

'We never had water in those days. You had to cart and there were wells around the property.' There were beliefs that there was no water in the hills, or the Dandenongs, but Jock proved them wrong. The men would use boring rods, steel rods 5/8 inch think with a hook and eye at each end and an augur (boring tool) which was 18 inches long. After divining the men would bore for water at £2.10 a hole. No water: no pay.

'They would bore up to 80 feet deep with these hand augurs. At Cec Gear's property, later Bert Grigg's (next to Bishops garage on the York/Monbulk Road corner), they found water at 110 feet but had to bring rock boring equipment in.' The windmill Cec installed there was previously at the Outlook Guest House where it had been something of a landmark.

'The only failure Dad ever had was on our own damn farm!' Harry and Jim dug a hole six by four feet wide and 38 feet deep, but failed to find water. Then Jim divined and found water only two feet wide of the chosen site. 'Divining is a gift. Some people have got it and some haven't. I don't fully believe in it, but I can do it.' The sources of this water were underground streams running 30 to 40 feet under the surface, flowing for miles.



The Marshalls' farm house in McKillop Road in 1926. The old house burned down only a few weeks ago. Photo courtesy Joan Marshall.

During the Second World War, Jock moved to East Melbourne to work at the Maribyrnong Munitions works. According to Jim, 'he started as a cleaner and finished up in control of the whole of Victoria's outside contracts for munitions.' His natural aptitude and rapid rise in the organisation could have led to a much more financially secure future but 'No, he wanted to get back to his own life on the farm'. Jock was also a great reader who had a 'remarkable memory' and, according to son Jim, had an 'absolutely remarkable mind'. He was a very keen Freemason who 'was never home'. Two or three nights a week John Koolmees (flower farmer) or Jack Feeney (a magnificent pianist) would drive him to Masonic meetings.

The old Eastern market in CBD Melbourne had dozens of old bookshops, 'old bookshops everywhere'. When Jim was working in Melbourne, his father asked him to go to these bookshops and find 'any old books about the history of Egypt, Israel and all of that Mediterranean area.' Jim found quite a few and Jock would read them.

'He'd sit up all night reading books and then he'd sit up all night making [his lectures] up in his head. He committed them to memory and never made a mistake. He very seldom wrote them down but eventually the family convinced him to commit them to paper. He delivered these lectures to the Masons. One particular lecture called "The Three Pillars" he gave 1500 times, at Masonic Lodges all over Victoria. The lectures concerned the history of religion, of Israel, the Biblical times and so forth and in the 1990s people were still interested in obtaining copies of them.' Jock received his 50 year jewel award for service to the Masons just before he died of lung cancer, after years of chain smoking.

Although Jock loved the small selector lifestyle more than the farming, a few of his descendants have continued in the horticultural tradition.

**Janice Newton**

### House lost to fire

Jean Edwards told us that the old Marshall house burned down recently. Part of the house is still standing but the front, which was probably the old part, was destroyed. Jean added, 'There are a few other buildings that date back as far as 1900 – not surviving well now'.

# Bibliotroves and book inscriptions

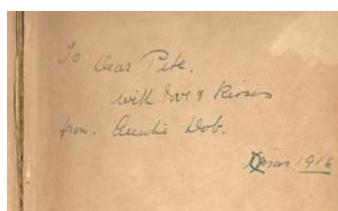
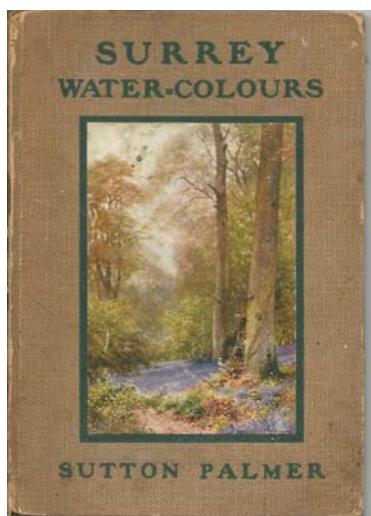
Readers tend to grab the nearest slip of paper as a bookmark, then forget about it. The owner of second hand bookshop Bent Books has a blog on items found in her books (bibliotroves?): photos, letters, banknotes, invitations, old tram tickets: <http://stuffinoldbooks.tumblr.com/> Inclusions in books from a conservator's point of view: [http://www.iada-home.org/ta91\\_065.pdf](http://www.iada-home.org/ta91_065.pdf)

If the book was a gift, it may have an inscription with date and signature, revealing something of both giver and recipient. I wondered how much family history could be gleaned from such inscriptions. For instance, I have a rather moth-eaten copy of *Surrey Water-colours* by Harold Sutton Palmer. The inscription reads: *To Dear Pete, love & kisses from Auntie Dob, Xmas 1916.*

'Dob' was my great aunt, Laura Wheeler, who was nursing in England. Her nephew Pete was then three years old. His father was away at the war. His mother had lost possession of their house at Woomelang in the Mallee and they were living in East Melbourne. 1916 had been an eventful year for Laura.

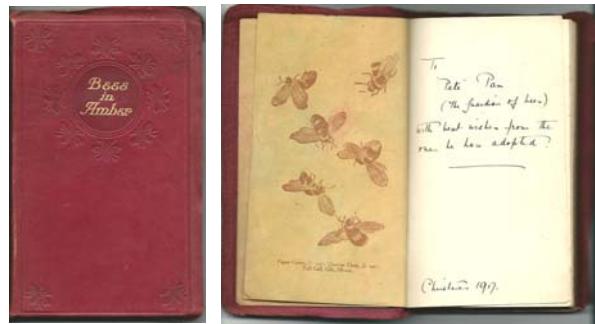
*In February 1916 I was a member of Queen Alexandra Imperial Nursing Service Reserve and assigned to the nursing staff of the Cambridge Military Hospital Aldershot. Aldershot was the nerve centre of the Army and Cambridge Hospital a part of that nerve centre.*

*The hospital had perhaps 100 years [of] pre-war traditions and equipment. Its corridor from which the wards jutted was close on a quarter mile long, 400 beds and progressed to 1200 beds just after I was there. It became the Surgical Hospital – medical cases went to another hospital. We received wounded men in less than 48 hours from when they were in*



**Inscriptions in old books can provide insights into family history and mystery.**

**Above, Laura Wheeler's message to her nephew in *Surrey Water-colours*. Top right, *Bees in Amber*, a best seller during WWI, with unsigned inscription.**



*the trenches in France. It was a tremendous experience for me.*

*No doubt the "highlight" was being chosen by the matron to take charge of the Jaw Cases Section – a new department being started by Captain (later Sir) Harold Gillies, a New Zealander who was starting his plastic surgery on jaw cases. He was the founder of that type of plastic surgery – in conjunction with special dentists and an artist who painted every facial injury before and after every operation. The nursing staff, including me, had to be educated to his work.*

*I still wonder why the Matron chose me to be in charge. As I pointed out to her, I was only a Staff Nurse and most junior member of her staff. Was it because I was the only Australian on the staff and if things did not work out none of her nurses would be blamed? Matron did pay me the compliment [that] she thought I was the most capable one, as nobody knew anything of jaw cases. (Laura Wheeler 1973, 'Down Memory Lane').*

Amid her responsibilities, Laura found time to send a gift to her little nephew in Melbourne.

By the end of 1917, Pete's father (also known as 'Pete') was back from the war and awaiting his Army discharge as medically unfit. The family was living in a tent in the grounds of Koonwarra Private Hospital, where Pete's mother was looking after the hospital linen.

Another book from the family collection, *Bees in Amber, A Little Book of Thoughtful Verse* by John Oxenham, has an inscription in a distinctive hand, unsigned:

*To "Pete" Pan (The guardian of bees) with best wishes from the one he has adopted. Christmas 1917.*

I'll probably never know who was 'adopted' in 1917. There is no one left to ask.

**Karen Phillips**

*and then of course they come in with ‘Tardy scholar is your name’ again . . . \**

*At the shop next door the boys used to buy conversation lollies and hand them out to the girls of their choice. They had words on them like ‘I love you’ and so on.*

Alma went up to Grade 6 at Evelyn State School and after that she went on to Mt Lilydale Convent. She had a scholarship to MLC, but she had a cousin who was Dux of MLC. Not wanting to hear the family fighting about her cousin, she opted to go to the convent instead.

At the convent one day Alma saw the Reverend Mother washing the kitten – asked her why – the kitten had fallen in the pan toilet!

The old priest Father Byrne was marvellous – the nuns used to try to get him to eat something because he gave everything away and never got enough to eat. He would never have a fire unless he had a visitor. One year they made him promise he wouldn’t give away the Christmas gifts they gave him. They made him a scarf and gloves. He said he wished they hadn’t made him promise because he knew so many people who needed them more than he did.

When she lived in Mt Evelyn, Alma went to Lilydale to learn cooking – she can remember making pea soup and puff pastry.

Jack Rahilly was transferred to Springhurst near Wangaratta when Alma was 14. At Springhurst she got bored and went back to Mt Lilydale Convent to do typing. She boarded at Lilydale until she was 17, then worked for AMP in Melbourne.

Alma loved nursing, which she did for three years – Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) in hospital and then the Navy. Her ‘fella’, Rick, was killed in World War II.

**Alma Rahilly, interviewed by Paula, Pat and Mary, 23 July 2014.**

\* Alma sang this song very tunefully over the phone, to the tune of ‘Champagne Charlie’. For another version of ‘Tardy Scholar’, see: <https://au.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20100913085157AAZEovD>

## Wings over Lilydale Inlet



**Past or future? When the ice-caps have melted and the Yarra Valley is a fiord, it might look like this. The Wurundjeri, who called the Yarra *Birrarrung*, ‘River of Mists’, were of the Crow moiety. Above, looking over Lilydale from Bastow Road, 15 August 2014. Photo Kevin Phillips.**

**NEWS FLASH!** Please see “What’s on” at Yarra Ranges Regional Museum for details of “Not Forgetting Yous At All”: The Story of Barak and the de Purys, 18 September, 10.30am.

### From Kev’s rain gauge

Rainfall for August 2014 for Mt Evelyn, McKillop, Melbourne and Melbourne average.\*

Mt Ev	McK	Melb	Melb Av
66.1mm	82.1mm	38.0mm	50.2mm

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

### Kevin Phillips Contact us

As a courtesy, please address any issues with the content of *Things Past* to the Editor.

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