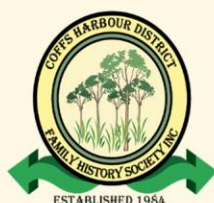


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April 2026 Issue 121

# GENIE ALLERGY



## Journal of Coffs Harbour District Family History Society Inc.



Jetty Memorial Theatre

*Now published three times a year!*

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Journal now Published three times a year by.



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**Library Hours:** Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 10.00am to 3.00pm (CLOSED 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday afternoon)  
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**Library Fees:** Members - free on production of current membership card. Visitors - \$10 for half day or \$20 for whole day. Duty Monitors are available for advice and assistance.

**Library Rules:**

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- \* Attendance Book to be signed on arrival and departure.
- \* Bags to be left in area indicated by Monitor.
- \* Pencils only to be used in Library.
- \* Photocopies available through duty Monitor and will be charged according to price schedule
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**Correspondence Inquiries:** Research will be undertaken for a fee of \$30.00 per hour  
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The Society does not hold itself responsible for statements made or opinions expressed by authors of the articles published in "Genie-Allergy". All care is taken to be accurate, however the Editor reserves the right to publish abridged articles/special features due to space constraints.

Contact Persons: President – Fiona Hulbert 6653 3866  
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Secretary – Cheryl dal Pozzo 6652 5145  
Treasurer – Ruth Dorward 0413 841 911

Please contact Fiona or Cheryl if you are interested in filling the vacant positions on the Committee



## **Our President's report.....**

***Hello Everyone,***

*Another year is well and truly under-way and I hope that we all make some interesting discoveries during the next year.*

*During the Christmas break the Society purchased three new computers. These are now installed and up and running. Two monitor workshops were conducted earlier in the year to introduce the new computers, so come in and check them out.*

*Our first Bunnings stall was a success, and we will continue these throughout the year on the third Friday of each month until November.*

*Our first Workshop for the year 'Back to Basics' was well attended. For anyone who would like a copy of the presentation in digital format with accompanying notes, this is now available on the admin computer. Bring in a USB and it can be copied for your use at home.*

*Our next workshop 'Cemetery Walk part 1' is to be held on 28 th March from 10.30 am at the Historic Cemetery. Let's hope that the weather gods are kind to us. The second part of the walk is scheduled for May. Further information to follow. Don't forget to put your name on the list for either walk, or both. Hope to see as many there as possible. There will be no workshop in April as it coincides with Anzac Day.*

*During Senior's Week I had the pleasure of meeting Nathan Armstrong – Young Citizen of the Year 2025 – who runs a business providing technical support to seniors. His assistance is tailored to the individual needs of each client. His details are below and could prove handy when you get 'lost' with new devices or updates.*

*Nathan Armstrong – ph. 0478647876 e. [info@nathanstechsupport.com.au](mailto:info@nathanstechsupport.com.au) or [www.nathanstechsupport.com.au](http://www.nathanstechsupport.com.au) Please note this is by appointment only.*

*Happy researching*

## **WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS**



A warm welcome to our new members. We hope you will make yourself at home and find us to be a friendly and helpful group. Don't be afraid to ask the Monitors on duty for help – they will do their best to steer you in the right direction with your research. We have an extensive Library available which is extremely beneficial for your research, as well as our computer software.



Can you help Lorraine Chowdhury <[lorraine@rateusapp.com.au](mailto:lorraine@rateusapp.com.au)> who wrote:

### HELP WANTED

My great-grandmother (maternal) was born on St Helena Island of the west coast of South Africa. She married my great grandfather (maternal) on 27 August 1902. Her name was Jane Bennett and my great grandfather was Enoch Dickens. According to records they had 2 children George Thomas Enoch Dickens and Florrie Harriet Dickens.

George was born in 1901 and Florrie in 1906. Birth certificates both list both as parents.

I am trying to find what happened to Jane Dickens nee Bennett.

G.P.S. 917-0021 BI-33

REPUBLIEK VAN SUID-AFRIKA  
VOLLEDIGE HUWELIKSERTIFIKAAT  
(Uitgereek kragtens Wet 81 van 1963)

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA  
FULL MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE  
(Issued in terms of Act 81 of 1963)

Gesertifiseer 'n ware uittreksel uit die huweliksregister van: Certified a true extract from the marriage register of:

**MAN—HUSBAND**

1. I.D. No. [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] 2. Geboortedatum: Jaar [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Maand [ ] [ ] Dag [ ] [ ]  
Date of birth: Year [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Month [ ] [ ] Day [ ] [ ]

3. Van Surname DICKENS

4. Volle voornam(e) Forenames in full Enoch

5. Huweliksstaat Marital status Bechteloor 6. Land van geboorte Country of birth -

**VROU—WIFE**

7. I.D. No. [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] 8. Geboortedatum: Jaar [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Maand [ ] [ ] Dag [ ] [ ]  
Date of birth: Year [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Month [ ] [ ] Day [ ] [ ]

9. Nooiensnaam Maiden name Bennett

10. Huidige wettige van Present legitimate surname Dickens

11. Volle voornam(e) Forenames in full Jane

12. Huweliksstaat Marital status Getrou 13. Land van geboorte Country of birth -

**BESONDERHEDE VAN HUWELIK—PARTICULARS OF MARRIAGE**

14. Datum van huwelik: Jaar [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Maand [ ] [ ] Dag [ ] [ ] 15. Huwelik bevestig te Marriage solemnized at Pretoria, Orkneyburg  
Date of marriage: Year [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Month [ ] [ ] Day [ ] [ ]

16. Toestemming tot die huwelik verleen deur (net in die geval van minderjariges): Consent to the marriage given by (only in the case of minors):  
(a) Man Husband - (b) Vrou Wife mother

**VERKLARING DEUR EGPAAR—DECLARATION BY MARRIED COUPLE**

17. Hierdie huwelik is tussen ons voltrek in die teenwoordigheid van die ondergetekende getuiers: This marriage between us was contracted in the presence of the undersigned witnesses:  
E. Dickens Man/Husband J. Bennett Vrou/Wife

18. D.E. Hopkins Getuie/Witness S. Green Getuie/Witness

**VERKLARING DEUR HUWELIKSBEVESTIGER—DECLARATION BY MARRIAGE OFFICER**

19. Hierdie huwelik is deur my bevestig op hede die 27 dag van August 1902.  
This marriage was solemnized by me on this the 27 day of August 1902.  
G. Brooks Huweliksbevestiger/Marriage Officer St. Luke's Church  
Kerkgenootskap/Landdros- of ander kantoor  
Denomination/Magistrate's or other office

DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS  
1902  
(Amptelike keurhoorsantienstempel)  
DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS

C. C. Niember  
Direktor-generaal: Binnelandse Sake  
Director-General: Home Affairs  
C. C. NIEMBER

Hierdie sertifikaat word sonder uitwissinge of veranderings uitgereik.  
This certificate is issued without erasures or alterations.

**DUPLICATE ORIGINAL REGISTER.**

1902 Marriage solemnised at *Maritzburg*, in the County or Division of *Maritzburg*, Colony of Natal, 1902

No.	When Married.	Name and Surnames.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at time of Marriage.	After Name or License.	Consent by whom given, or Judge's Order.
50	August 27 1902	<i>Prock Diekens</i> <i>Sare Bennett</i>	25 26	<i>Bachelor</i> <i>Spinster</i>	<i>Miner</i> <i>" "</i>	<i>Standerfont</i> <i>Maritzburg</i>	<i>Beurs</i>	<i>Mother's</i>

Married in *S. Luke's Church* in *Maritzburg* aforesaid by me *Goobroos*

This Marriage was solemnised between us } *Prock Diekens*  
 } *Sare Bennett her x wife* } In the presence of *Daniel P. Hopkins*  
 } } *Sarah Beers her x maid* }

Examined with the Original Register by me and found to be correct.  
*Goobroos*  
*Dean of S. Luke's*

R.D.—4

If you have any suggestions or can help Lorraine, please email her on [lorraine@rateusapp.com.au](mailto:lorraine@rateusapp.com.au)

\*\*\*\*\*

## Growing Up in Post WWII Sydney.

In the 1940s and early 1950s my siblings and I had many things to look forward to, including school, which we all enjoyed.

A day at Newport on the northern beaches was special. In winter we spent time cleaning up a block of land at York Terrace, enjoying a delightful sausage-sizzle over a fire pit for lunch. Many pieces of sausage were shared with the local kookaburras! In summer we swam and played on the beach and bought hot fish and chips from Dolly's at Narrabeen on the way home.

Goodyear Tyre & Rubber Co., where Pop worked, put on an annual picnic for children. It was held at Rosehill Race Course and we went by train. Every child received a cardboard sheet of tickets which were used for allocated ice creams, lollies and train rides. There was also a prize for the first child to find the 'mystery man' and the more uninhibited kids, like my older brother, rushed around asking the men if they were he. At the end of the day we lined up by age and received a gift.

We regularly took ferry rides to Manly, visited museums and the Art Gallery, went to the theatre for pantomimes and skated at the Glaciarium. The Royal Easter Show was an all day event for our family, with everything agricultural on display and ring events in the evening.

However, Empire Day and Christmas stand out, probably because of the increased activity prior to these events which heightened our anticipation. Empire Day, 24th May, was celebrated throughout the British Empire and usually culminated in bonfires and fireworks in the evening. Originally a commemoration of Queen Victoria's Birthday, it was renamed in 1903 after Victoria's death in 1901 and introduced in Australia in 1905. Various levels of Government held ceremonies and schoolchildren might listen to a speech from a visiting dignitary, salute the flag and sing God Save the King. Sometimes we were given a half day holiday.

At Railway Terrace, Merrylands, we had a community bonfire in a nearby paddock until housing development in the late 1940s necessitated moving it into our street. Railway Terrace was a wide unformed street which ran alongside the rail line so traffic was not affected.

The most memorable bonfire happened in 1946. It was the first Empire Day after the end of World War II and my brother's memories are vivid. With some local mates, he obtained a pole and lots of Ti-tree branches

from a property which was two miles (3.2kms) south of the paddock. The property, now known as Guildford Park, was fenced with barbed wire so the boys were in-and-out on their many visits in case they were warned off. The pole was secured in a stand of six truck tyres, donated by our next door neighbours who ran a trucking business, and the bonfire materials would be collected for days and guarded until about 10pm to stop thievery by rivals. The fire was then constructed in the afternoon.

Annually, nearly everyone in the neighbourhood participated in some way by providing material for and/or helping to build the bonfires. Once the fire had died down, potatoes were placed in the ashes and eaten 'piping hot' that night with burnt lips regarded as a rite of passage.

Crackers were purchased from Coles and Woolworths in Granville and from the corner store at the junction of Woodville Road and William Street. There was a great variety. Sparklers were hand held, flower pots shot coloured particles a few feet into the air and spinning wheels were generally nailed to the fence and they spun around while also spewing out coloured particles. Jumping jacks bounced about. Bungers went off with a bang and came in various sizes from 25mm tom thumbs to the 100mm penny bungers and larger. There were also sky rockets, which were stood in a bottle for lighting, and roman candles which ejected stars and exploding shells.

They were typically kept in a strong shoe box with a good-fitting lid in order to protect them from wayward lads who might lob a penny-bunger into the collection with spectacular but disastrous

results. Normally a match was used to light the crackers but my brother improvised with a smouldering rope or a 'fire-stick' with glowing ember which was put back in the fire when it faded.

I don't remember anyone getting hurt, however 1960s newspapers carried warnings that every year on cracker night "fireworks injure people and damage property". There were also threats from the Fire Brigade that bonfires would be doused. By 1986 in NSW fireworks were banned for the general public which was probably a good thing. Our move from Merrylands to Granville in 1954 seemed to coincide with an end to celebratory bonfires for us.

The Christmas period was always a happy time. I don't remember ever having visitors on the day and, in any case, our breakfast/dining table, even with folding sides extended, barely accommodated our family of six.

As far as I recall we didn't have a Christmas tree but we made chains out of coloured paper and hung them around the walls. Mum also bought compact paper items which unfolded into coloured balls and were generally hung from the light fittings in the middle of the room. We would wake up on Christmas morning to discover that the pillow slips we had left on the end of our beds had been loaded by Santa overnight. There was usually a stocking, commercially made from red cardboard and netting and filled with small trinkets, games and puzzles, probably a variety of books and toys and always, a can of Nestlé condensed milk which was wrapped and labelled. Some of us consumed the condensed milk in minutes, others by end of day, and I used to leave mine on the windowsill and take a mouthful every so often. Sometimes it would last a week. I had no thought that it might be pilfered by my siblings, I now believe that I was far too trusting! We also receive 'bigger' gifts which we would discover in the lounge room in front of the Kosi coke heater. These were apparently kept hidden in Mum's wardrobe.

Lunch was a fine affair consisting of roasted meat and vegetables followed by pudding and custard. A piece of pork, with delicious home-made apple sauce, was the norm and readily available from the butcher. We had turkey a few times, but my brother remembers this as being rather tough - chicken was better than turkey. No poultry was available from the butcher so it may have been procured from a paternal Uncle who bred domestic chickens and game fowl. Or perhaps it was obtained through Goodyear where Pop was also able to purchase jars of chocolate coated nuts. The pudding, made a few weeks before Christmas, was a rich mixture of dried fruits, butter, sugar, eggs, flour, spices and rum, tied up in a pudding cloth and boiled in the copper. In the beginning, Mum would cook the pudding with threepenny and sixpenny bits mixed in. This custom was later 'upgraded' to placing coins on individual dishes under the pudding. Everyone could see them so we lost the

joy of discovering 'treasure' but it was probably a more equitable practice with less chance that the coins would be swallowed. Thick, rich custard was the normal sauce. We didn't have ice-cream at home until moving to Granville in 1954 when a 'new' second-hand refrigerator, with freezer compartment, was purchased. It all sounds a bit primitive now!

As a family affair with so many fond memories, Christmas takes the cake as being the thing I most looked forward to.

**Diane Fitton Member No. 294**

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## **COFFS HARBOUR – then and now!**

These days, Coffs Harbour is famous for the iconic Big Banana, its beautiful beaches, the historic timber Jetty, and its stunning natural setting where the Great Dividing Range meets the ocean, offering attractions like the [Mutton Bird Island Nature Reserve](#) and the [Solitary Islands Marine Park](#), making it a popular coastal holiday spot for both relaxation and adventure.

Back then ..... Coffs Harbour owes its name to John Korff, who named the area Korff's Harbour when he was forced to take shelter from a storm in 1847. However, legend has it that the name was accidentally changed by the surveyor for the crown when he reserved land in the area in 1861.

However, Coffs Harbour has a long and fascinating history that dates back thousands of years. The area was originally inhabited by the Gumbaynggirr people, who were skilled hunters and gatherers. They lived off the land and sea, and their culture and traditions are still celebrated today. In the 1800s, European settlers arrived in the area and began to establish farms and timber mills. Moreover, the timber industry was significant to the region, and Coffs Harbour became a major production centre.

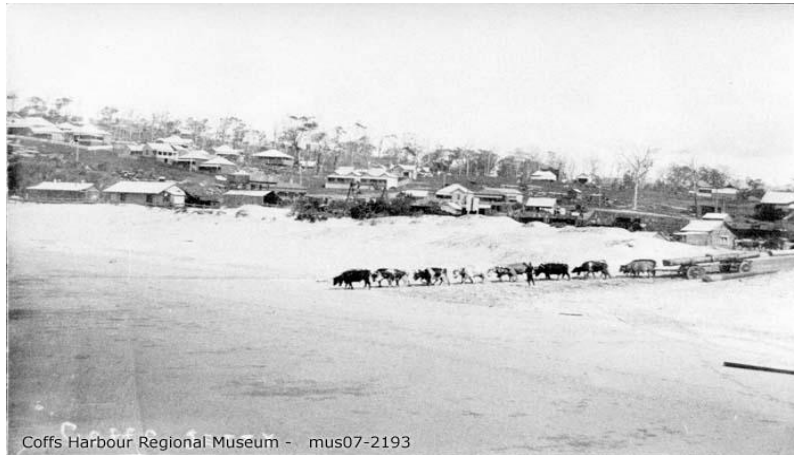
The town has many heritage-listed sites, including Ferguson's Cottage and the impressive Coffs Harbour Timber Jetty. The jetty is a historically significant timber wharf where coastal shipping once moved the timber from the hinterland. It was listed on the NSW State Heritage Register on 25 June 2021, recognizing its significance "as the longest coastal timber jetty built by the Harbours and Rivers Section of the NSW Public Works department in the 19th century."

Ferguson Cottage was originally associated with the construction for maintenance of the South Coffs breakwater by the Public Works Department, probably as a temporary construction office and was constructed in stages. Association of the building with the Ferguson Family started with Mr Andrew Ferguson who was a ganger and works supervisor for the Department of Public works on the breakwater construction in the late '40s, '50s and '60s.

Work began in 1912 on a causeway from the mainland to South Coffs Island, where a quarry was opened on the headland, a railway laid and plant installed. Whilst work on the exposed eastern breakwater (extending out from South Coffs Island) begun in 1918, numerous washaways resulted in the wall not being completed until October 1939, with the finishing work of concreting the core of the wall completed in 1943. The inadequate size of the rock available from the quarry on South Coffs Island was a major cause of the breakwater's instability. The casting and tipping of 100 ton concrete blocks to armour the seaward face helped solve the problem. As construction buildings including offices were generally built by carpenters often without plans and demolished on completion of the work, or moved to another site if transportable, the building is likely to be a rare surviving example of such a structure. The fact that the cottage is sitting on the original sleeper substructure, suggests it was probably not intended to serve for a long term.

Timber was the Coffs Coast's first colonial industry. Timber-getters arrived here from the 1860s, seeking cedar – “red gold” – a tree of the mahogany family highly prized for its rich red appearance, warm grain and workability. It grew plentifully in the subtropical rainforests of New South Wales and from the 1820s cedar-getters moved up and down the coast, hauling it out of remote gullies, making rafts of logs and floating them to the coast. It was an opportunistic pursuit requiring little more than an axe, some bullocks and kit – and a great deal of muscle. Fortunes could be made if the conditions were right but given the remoteness of the Coffs Coast from major settlements, it was a tough way to make a living.

There were no roads – just rough bush tracks and the ocean beach – and the only communication was via ships that stopped at river heads to collect the cedar, bringing supplies with them. Many of the cedar-getters were itinerant single men, moving from district to district, denuding the forest of its riches. Others came with their families looking for a place to settle. A common pattern was for a selector to arrive first as a timber-getter; then after they'd cleared the land they would begin farming.



Bullock team on Jetty Beach 1908 Picture Coffs Harbour museum 07-2193

Women took part in these activities too, planting crops and tending gardens, while also creating homes with whatever materials were at hand or that could occasionally be bought. Clothing and domestic items were usually handmade and repaired constantly to last as long as possible. In the 19th century, domestic sewing was strongly associated with femininity and was a primary duty for women in maintaining their family's welfare, as well as a recreational pursuit for many. Class was a factor, with working class women doing “plain needlework” and utilitarian tasks, while middle and upper-class women spent their time on fine embroidery and fancywork. These types of households were rare in Coffs Harbour; most women in the early days were living in tents or rudimentary huts, with few creature comforts. Clothing supplies were sparse and took months to arrive. The few local stores stocked just basic fabrics such as cottons, calico and canvas, so women depended on hawkers who came by intermittently to buy haberdashery and drapery. The exquisite hand-sewn and detailed items on display show the care that women took to clothe their families and furnish their homes, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

And more....

**The Mountain Maid Mine** – David Pont was a Glenreagh-based man who married Charlotte Shipman in 1889 [1], and passed away in 1936. His main claim to fame was his “Mountain Maid” mine, which was the principal mine in the brief-lived Lower Bucca goldfield. The mine produced £20,000 of gold. While the Lower Bucca goldfield existed for only a few years from 1896, the village which sprang-up next to it, lasted well into the 20th century as an agricultural service centre, which included a school, store, hotel, and Mechanics' Institute (School of Arts) at various stages. The mining data sheet for the “Mountain Maid” mine (held by Coffs Harbour Regional Museum) gives a location of 0751E 6402N, which places the mine 200 metres south of the village. The Upper Bucca goldfield (the Beacon Mines) also produced a village at the same time, but this Beacon Village was dismantled in the months after the Beacon company pulled the plug in 1899. The Beacon Village was up in the scrub; the Lower Bucca Village was down on the plain.

# THE LITTLE NYMBOIDA POST OFFICE



Figure circular date stamp

The black ink manuscript, Receiving Office cancellation, *Little Nymboida, 20 Aug 13*, over stamped with a *Coramba, N.S.W. 20 August 1913* date stamp, tying a 1d red Kangaroo to piece, is the only postal marking from this small office in the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales, recorded by Hopson & Tobin.

## Little Nymboida Receiving Office

Little Nymboida opened as a Receiving Office on 1 November 1910, operated by Adolph Pauls, a German immigrant and farmer, whose property was located approximately 8 miles from the turnoff at the 8 Mile Peg on the existing Coramba to Brooklana mail route, at a location then known as Eastern Dorrigo Pauls was also contracted to convey and deliver settler mail exchanged at the 8 Mile Peg twice weekly. Representations by the Mole Creek Progress Association for establishment of a mail service, described the locality as being in the area of the Mole Creek and Little Nymboida River end of Eastern Dorrigo and inhabited by 40 settlers.

Interestingly, Hopson & Tobin recorded a Receiving Office at Mole Creek, 25kms from Coramba, opening on 1 January 1898 and closing on 25 April 1900. There is no reference to this past Office in correspondence contained on the Little Nymboida Post Office file. However, co-incidentally, Hopson & Tobin record little Nymboida as also being located 25kms from Coramba. The Progress Association's desired alternate designation for the proposed receiving office, in the event that '*Little Nymboida*' might have been considered unsuitable, possibly clashing with the existing '*Nymboida*' Post Office, was '*Leonora*'. *Nymboida* was of course *Nymboida*. Local discrepancies in the spelling of place names was not unusual for the period. The Office name was derived from that of the nearby *Little Nymboida River*.

## Manuscript Cancellation

The manuscript cancellation is clearly in the hand of Adolph Pauls, as depicted in the example of correspondence contained on the Official Post Office File. Of note, in this document is Pauls' spelling of the proposed office name, '*Little Nymboida*', the spelling also used by the Progress Association in correspondence directed to the Postmaster Coramba. In respect to the over stamping of the manuscript cancellation it is relative to note that instructions issued to Pauls by the Postmaster General's Department on his appointment as Receiving Office Keeper included, "*The Postage Stamps on the correspondence forwarded in the bags you send should be obliterated by the Postmaster at Coramba*".

Little Nymboida was designated a Telephone Office on 4 May 1926 and a Non-Official Post Office in 1927. On 15 July 1931, the Post Office closed and it was again designated a Telephone Office operated by Adolph's son, Ernest Henry Pauls. The Office temporarily closed for a short period in July 1936, before again reopening in August of that year. It finally closed on 31 August 1950. Adolph Pauls passed away in 1934 and is buried at the Coffs Harbour Historic Cemetery alongside his wife Elizabeth.

*This article was written by Mr Tony Curtis. He is a member of the Philatelic Society of New South Wales, The Australian States Study Circle Royal Sydney Philatelic Club, the Australian Philatelic Society and the Philatelic Society of Canberra Inc. He is also a member of the Canberra & District Historical Society and the Yass & District Historical Society.*

## *Cinema in Coffs Harbour – Coffs Harbour’s Jewel*

### *The Tasma Theatre – the jewel of Coffs Harbour's cinema*

In the early years, “moving pictures” came to town with travelling shows that used country halls and other places of public assembly. In Coffs Harbour, the venue was the School of Arts, a basic, hall-like building which opened on the north side of High Street, between Grafton and Castle Streets, in 1904. This was a vibrant centre of community life, used constantly for dances, balls, musical evenings, plays and public meetings. In 1908, it was significantly expanded and re-modelled, with a library and reading room added. From 1912, moving pictures were shown.



Opening of the School of Arts, 16 August 1904, Picture Coffs Harbour Museum 07-1430

The Tasma Cinema opened in March 1937 on the corner of Castle Street and High Street, as Harbour Drive was then known. With an imposing Art Deco façade, it was the grandest building in “[Top Town](#)” and became known as the “theatre beautiful” Designed by leading cinema architects Guy Crick and Bruce W. Furse, the Tasma Theatre offered big city luxury, seating 113 people in the Royal Lounge, 113 in the Dress Circle and 515 in the stalls – 741 overall. Crick & Furse were responsible for the design of numerous suburban cinemas in Sydney, as well as many throughout regional NSW. They favoured the Art Deco or Moderne style; the comfort and luxury of the buildings attest to the importance of cinema to Australian social life in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. As *Everyone’s* magazine commented in 1936: Throughout the Commonwealth, comparative palaces now stand in pride as evidence of the solidity of the screen as the greatest medium of relaxation and edification of modern times.

The Tasma Theatre was the pride and joy of business partners Jack Gerard and Lawrence Penn. Penn was the original “Picture Show Man”, an old-time showman who toured the countryside exhibiting films. In 1924, Jack Gerard became Penn’s trainee and they toured Queensland and New South Wales. After showing films in temporary locations in Coffs Harbour such the School of Arts and Memorial Hall, they realised their ambitions to open their own cinema when they formed Penn & Gerard Pty Ltd in 1932. The weather was horrendous on the night of the big opening on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1937. Thousands of people milled outside while only 400 actually paid to attend the film inside – as Jack Gerard commented in later years, “just why the people of Coffs Harbour behaved in this strange manner, will never be known.” The film shown was *The Big Broadcast of 1937* with Jack Benny, George Burns and Gracie Allen. Over 31 years, 9627 films were shown, which according to Jack Gerard was “almost every American and British film produced at that time”. With the beginning of television broadcasting in Coffs Harbour in 1965, the Tasma began to lose audiences. It closed in 1968; the final film was *After the Fox* with Peter Sellers and Victor Mature. The building was demolished in 1969 to make way for the Waltons Department Store. When the mall was built in the late 1980s, the street layout changed and Castle Street no longer connected with Harbour Drive, so the Tasma site is no longer evident.

The Tasma Theatre was the dream of two fascinating characters in the story of cinema in Australia. Jack Gerard was the manager of the Tasma Theatre – but also so much more. Councillor, car dealer, service station owner, amateur geologist, radio operator and innovator, advocate for surf lifesaving, projectionist and newsreel cameraman, Gerard was a well-known figure in Coffs Harbour and across the North Coast for decades. Born in 1907, Jack followed his curiosity and applied his intelligence in many fields. He was the first person on the North Coast to build a single valve wireless receiver for example. Above all, he was a natural showman. In 1953 he painted “Australia’s largest” Union Jack on the facade of the Tasma to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Hundreds flocked to see *A Queen Is Crowned* when Jack secured the rights to screen this 1953 Technicolor story of Queen Elizabeth’s ascension to the throne. Betty Sara, the mother of the famous Bellingen quadruplets (the first set of quads to survive in Australia), won the Queen Elizabeth lookalike contest. *A Queen is Crowned* was screened simultaneously at Jack’s two cinemas, the Tasma and the Jetty Memorial. Paid admission reached 7785 – 1785 more viewings than Coffs Harbour’s population at the time! Jack received a letter of congratulations from the Queen herself.

In 1919, the School of Arts committee decided to show pictures themselves rather than leaving such a profitable undertaking in the hands of outside entrepreneurs. An excellent debut was reported: “with a six-reel Norma Talmadge drama and Charlie Chaplin at his funniest, screened by the latest 6B machine”. Mrs Minnie Franklin was employed as pianist to provide background music to the then silent movies. Films were also shown at the Fitzroy Stadium, which doubled as a roller-skating rink and boxing arena! It was a rough and ready, open-air experience.

In 1926, Lawrence Penn, later Jack Gerard’s partner in the Tasma Theatre, opened Penn’s Jetty Cinema on the site now occupied by the Forestry Building. Films were also shown at the Jetty Memorial Theatre when it opened in 1928 as the Soldiers Memorial Hall. Penn and Gerard later took over the leases at the Jetty Memorial in 1930 and the Coffs Harbour Picture Show at the School of Arts in 1932. The biggest news of the day was the introduction of the “talkies”. In November 1930, *Broadway Scandals*, an “all-talking, singing and dancing extravaganza” screened at the Jetty, followed quickly by the first talkie at the School of Arts a month later. In June 1931, Penn’s Jetty Cinema burned down in a serious fire.

For country people in particular, the cinema fulfilled two important roles – as a place for socialising and also for entertainment. Up until the 1960s, “going to the pictures” was the big social event of the week. People dressed up for this special occasion. At the Tasma, the program – two movies, newsreels, cartoons and the obligatory God Save the Queen – changed three times a week. Seats needed to be booked ahead on Friday and Saturday nights. The café next door provided drinks and sweets. Many a romance bloomed at the Tasma and a box of chocolates was mandatory. Unlike many cinemas in country towns, the Tasma was never racially segregated. Always the showman, Jack Gerard introduced Horror Nights. Although tame by today’s standards, the loud, spooky music in total darkness brought screams and squeals as patrons stamped their feet in delight. As Jack’s daughter Norma recalls, “the sounds and experience was incredible, and very scary, and LOVED by the people!” When the Tasma closed in 1968, Penn & Gerard also stopped showing films at the Jetty Memorial Hall, however other operators continued screening there up until the building was bought by the Council in 1982.

In 1988, a cinema (now closed) opened in Vernon Street, next to the Cinema Walk Arcade, and Birch, Carroll & Coyle’s five cinema complex on the corner of the highway and Bray Street opened in 1995 and is still in operation.

The Sawtell Cinema, first opened in 1941, had been operated by three generations of the Brissett Family but was a casualty of the cost of converting to digital projection and closed in 2012. Due to an extraordinary fund-raising effort by the local community, the cinema was renovated, converted into two cinemas and reopened in 2015. Today, the Coffs Coast is a hub of cinema and home to the Screenwave International Film Festival.

The Jetty Theatre that we know and love today, has a rich and interesting history. The theatre was originally opened as a public hall in 1928 to serve as a memorial to soldiers from World War I and to provide a space for community and social events.

From the 1930s to the late 1970s the theatre was used as a cinema until the lease for movies expired, after which, moves were made by a small group of interested locals to have the Jetty Theatre heritage listed and retained for live performances by a management committee.

From the early 1980's until around 2003, the Theatre was managed by a community-based council committee which, through its members' hard work, developed the building into a community venue for the cultural arts and live theatre.

In 1990 the second major refurbishment in the building's history was completed by The Coffs Harbour Vietnam Veterans. Later in 2003, the theatre was closed and underwent a major restoration, notably funded by the Coffs Harbour City Council, which transformed the building into a state-of-the art 250 seat contemporary venue capable of being adapted to a wide range of community and touring shows. 2007 saw the very first season launch at the theatre, introducing the professional touring shows and enabling the Coffs Coast to join the national regional touring network. Since then, the theatre has gone from strength to strength and become one of the highlights of the region's performing arts landscape, with its rich variety of touring shows and much-cherished community theatre.

**"I wish I had realized that family history is a perishable commodity. It disappears with time, as memories fade, and as loved ones pass on. I wish I had known that the most important aspect of family history is preserving a record of the present for the future." - Guy Black**



## Remembering WW1 Australian Soldiers & Nurses WHO REST in the United Kingdom



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Submitted by Gail Buckingham # 1261

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### *“Tracing Your Irish Ancestors: the complete guide” (4th Edition)*

John Grenham Gill & Macmillan

ISBN 9780717150243

This edition contains revised detailed guides to online Irish resources, with discussion regarding the idiosyncrasies within these records. Grenham has also outlined research strategies. There are thorough descriptions of all relevant sources' county by county.

Found in the reference section under 929.3 GRE.

### *“Men of Their Times: Pioneers of the Hunter Valley”*

Dulcie Hartley Aquila Agribusiness Pty Ltd

ISBN 0646252186

A detailed account of the migration of the Sparke family from South Devon to the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. There are a series of maps, family images and etchings from the newspapers as well as family trees of Sparke descendants. Written into the history of the Hunter Valley is the history of this adventurous family.

Found in the borrowing section under 929.2 HAR.

### *“Transport: An Australian History”*

Robert Lee University of NSW Press Ltd

ISBN 9781742232133

If you want to know about the development of transport across Australia, then this is the book for you. There are detailed descriptions of early shipping, overland transport, early aviation, the coming of the railroad and car manufacturing. The inclusion of an extensive array of images from the late 19th and early 20th centuries will bring back many memories when reading this interesting book.

Found in the borrowing section under 388 LEE.

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## The true size of Australia 🤔



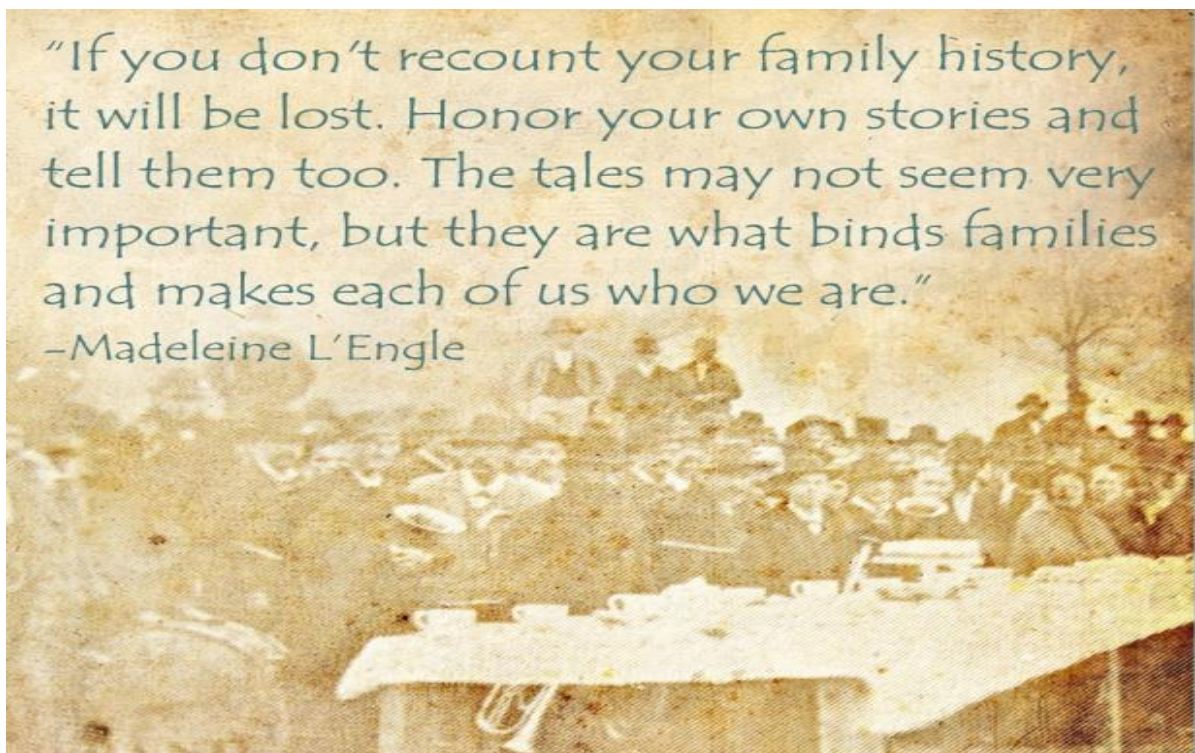
# Tell us your story!

Surely your research has provided you with a story to tell. I need your stories for our Journal and without them the “Genie-Allergy” will cease to exist.

- Perhaps you have a problem that someone can help you with.....
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- Did you have a convict in your family and what was his/her crime.....
- Do you have nobility, aristocracy or royalty in your tree.....
  
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If you do, I would love to hear from you. Please email me on [shaz@ingersole.com](mailto:shaz@ingersole.com)

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## My Passion by Len King

My reason for writing is in answer to your request for articles for the society's magazine. But an explanation first: I long ago stopped undertaking my family history and in its place became an obsession investigating industrial archaeology/history. Perhaps even earlier than family research was the history of railway transport, designers (could not discover any ladies in that field) and builders of all items relating to railways.

I lived in Christchurch, New Zealand from 1949 (aged 11) until March 1966, when I moved to Canberra to work for Rupert Murdoch at the new "The Australian" newspaper. That first date relates to my being a "ten pound pom" with my sister and mother from Dagenham, Essex, on the outskirts of London's east side. Dad was already in the New Zealand army at Christchurch, 1948, changing his military service from the UK to New Zealand..

Returning to my research interests: Railways were and are the major interest and added to this have been numerous privileges granted to me by industrial managements, mainly in and around Sydney. I was permitted to enter, being closed and already shut down, factories of many types. What are now accommodation conglomerates, often ugly, replaced mostly brick-built facilities. If people only knew what history was made where they now live, may change their outlooks into the past and where we stand today.

But what became an obsession for me was after a visit to the Newington Armoury in 1979. This was established back in 1894 and enlarged several times through to the 1950's. I established military connections and was enabled and privileged to visit this complex of more than 200 acres up to two times per month until 2006. I attained security clearance early in the piece and by 1991 was permitted to photograph whatever I viewed.

Then the 2000 Olympic Games was won by Australia and mostly took place at Homebush Bay, on the Parramatta River. From 1996 I was regularly in contact with the original Olympic Committee and many contractors, watching as the development of the area was formulated. I was permitted on site during construction of the Olympic facilities (very limited photography) and observed the original Olympic Village construction that was built on part of the Newington Armoury. Being handed at each entry time, a huge bunch of keys to have "free rein" of buildings, dating from WWI, I made several "discoveries" (wonderful) of paperwork, blueprints, plans buried in long closed cabinets. All those items I now trust are with the hundreds of historic articles stored at the Mitchell Library. My big regret in coming to live in Coffs Harbour in January 2007 was no access to those records. (I had begun opening, under direction, files of enormous size, to gain an idea of a possible extensive research project.) What had started as an interest in the small railway circulating Newington -- 2ft (610mm) gauge, a total of five miles formed of many tracks servicing three laboratories, many munition buildings of various shapes and sizes and the wharf on the Parramatta River -- became much larger. The greatest pleasure for me was in being consulted (volunteer, no pay!) into the railway's future use, with submissions to the military forces, federal and state governments and tourism authority. The site was handed over to the state government as the Games began. That railway, its electric locomotives remodelled, new passenger carrying vehicles built, now forms an attraction for visitors and tourists.

Since moving to Coffs Harbour during January 2007, because of circumstances, have only visited the parkland three times. I remember how it once was, with the employment of public servants in the laboratories and naval security patrolling the grounds, plus tons of asbestos in the buildings, unexploded ordnance in a forested area, and a remnant of the Cumberland Plain forest and its bell green (tiny) frogs.

That is what memories are made of.

I trust that these lines are not boring and perhaps of use and possible extensions?

Len King. Member 1674

## Family Stories by Elaine Cleary - Just to introduce the author of this story;

She was the middle child of eleven children living in a farming community in central Saskatchewan - about 25 miles from Uncle George's family. Her parents had moved from Quebec before she was born. Her mother (my grandmother) never spoke English. The schools in the area went from Grade 1 to Grade 8. If the children wanted to go to High School, it meant boarding in Saskatoon, an expense most could not afford. The older boys did not progress further than Grade six as they were required to work on the farm.

One of the reasons for delving into our family history is to discover where we come from, who are the people who shaped our parents and therefore us! This is a story about my mother's brother, Uncle George (born 1916), as written by him as he explored his Canadian origins. He was going back. Sixty years ago, he had left a farm in central Saskatchewan and had returned for only two short visits since. During this prolonged absence he had scarcely thought of his younger days unless some visitor or event had brought it to mind. Now he was heading back from the coast and, as the mountains turned to foothills and the prairie came into view, his mind once again began to recall different people and events and, like a movie in slow motion, the past began to unfold.

The first childhood event he could recall was when he was three years old. His mother was staying with her sister in town waiting to give birth to his baby sister. His Dad had brought him to visit her and his Aunt had given him an orange. Oranges were a rare treat then and the gift was important enough to be remembered over seventy years later. That was only the beginning. A sports day was being held in a neighbouring town and his Dad was taking him there by train. He could still remember the excitement of seeing the big engine and asking when the train was going to start. Other early childhood memories were vague except hearing a telephone call in the middle of the night informing his parents that an older sister had just died from spinal meningitis.

The house he was raised in was a wooden building approximately 24 feet x 24 feet with a full basement and a lean-to at one end. The outside was covered with tarpaper with no inside finish or insulation. In winter it was banked with snow to the level of the windows to conserve some of the heat. The house was heated by a stove in the basement, another one upstairs and a cookstove. Fuel was poplar wood cut and dried during the spring and summer. It was fast burning and gave little heat. The fires died down every night and, during cold weather, water boiling on the stove at bedtime would be frozen solid by morning. Water came from a well some distance from the house and was heated in a reservoir on the cookstove. At night, light came from coal oil lamps, which were quite smoky. The lamp globe had to be cleaned often to get the maximum light, which, at best, was not much brighter than a big candle. The toilet was outside, some distance from the house.

There were eight in the family, and sleeping accommodation was limited. As soon as warm weather came, he and his brother slept in one of the granaries in the yard. Food was quite plentiful due to the fact most of it was home grown. Turkeys, chickens, pigs and cattle furnished meat and, if butchered in the fall, could be kept stored in an outbuilding and remain frozen until used. There was always a big garden and vegetables were grown to last all winter. There was no fruit grown due to the extreme cold, but strawberries, raspberries, saskatoons and chokeberries were usually available. These were picked and preserved for winter use. Some years boxcars of apples were shipped from British Columbia. These were a very welcome treat indeed. Every fall, if money was available, a big order would be placed with a wholesale company for such items as tea, coffee, sugar and other staples. There was great excitement when the order arrived but he recalled that when the great depression was on there was little money for anything but the basic essentials.

