

May/June 2020

Hello members,

Though circumstances prevent us opening our research centre to the public just yet, we are now beginning to make preparations for a gradual restart at HeritageWorks, which will begin with member access only in a few weeks. Current government advice is to work from home where possible, so that is what we are continuing to do. In the three months since we have been working in isolation, it seems that the enforced home time has led to a resurgence of interest all around the nation in doing those jobs that we all put off, particularly sorting through family documents, clearing out cupboards and taking action on things on the 'pending' list. As a result our society has been receiving some interesting donations of historical material of relevance to our local area. It seems that sections of film are on their way to us, once the donor has edited his grandfather's home movies and separated the family sections from those with broader local content. Another person has been transcribing her mother's written reminiscences of her early life in Warrnambool in the 1920s and 30s and has offered to send us relevant sections when she has completed the task.



Pictured here are two recent donations which will add to our understanding of Warrnambool institutions and events. A portrait of JE Bennett, first manager of the Warrnambool Woollen Mill (1909-1929) has been held in storage in Queensland by his descendants and is currently making its way to Warrnambool by courier. John Edward Bennett, a Yorkshireman, like the two managers who followed him, was living in Geelong when recruited by the group of Warrnambool businessmen who conceived the idea of creating a new secondary industry in the town. Mr Bennett's son, also named John was subsequently to manage the North Western Woollen Mill at Stawell. With the help of money from the Warrnambool mill, a defunct Stawell mill was purchased and reopened in 1926. JE Bennett served as the first chairman of the board of directors of the Stawell mill which his son managed and the portrait hung in the boardroom.

This medal, sent from a Melbourne donor also tells an interesting story. Our society has very few items from the extravaganza that was the Warrnambool Industrial & Art Exhibition which took place over the summer months of 1896-97. This medal was awarded to ten boys from the Kew Asylum for "excellence of workmanship" in "basket & matwork & photos of asylum". The wording of the inscription on the medal is redolent of the era of less enlightened attitudes to people with disabilities. Elizabeth O'Callaghan's book on the exhibition, published by W&DHS in 2002, informs us that the judges were so impressed with the standard of the boys' work, that a special Gold Medal was awarded. In a letter to the asylum, the exhibition secretary Mr Rossiter praised the work, noting that items made by the boys would "secure ready sale down here, if placed". The Exhibition Committee decided at a meeting later that year to spend 12/- on souvenirs for the ten boys.



Coming up



Yes members, it's that time of year again. "My, my, my! How time flies", we hear you cry. Please be aware that your W&DHS subscriptions are due at the end of this month. We have included a membership renewal form with this bulletin. We would like renewing members to fill in the first page only and return it to us at your convenience, just so we know we have your correct contact details on file. Payments by electronic bank transfer are preferred, however you could also mail us a cheque. If using the former method, please make sure you tag it with your name.

Coming down

Members who live in Warrnambool will have noticed that the FJ market has reopened, however the HeritageWorks committee of management decided recently to close our stall which has operated at that site for the past two years. We thank all the members and friends who have donated goods for sale during that time. W&DHS publications and those of the Family History Group which were on sale at the market can still be obtained via our websites or by phoning HeritageWorks.

Gilles Street Rail Crossing - Can you help open the gates?

In August 2018 the railway crossing at the south end of Gilles St, adjacent to HeritageWorks was closed to pedestrians. This has caused inconvenience to local residents and to tourists using the camping grounds & Lake Pertobe, as the crossing is the only access point on the north side of Lake Pertobe. Cr Kylie Gaston initiated a petition to state parliament on behalf of the South Warrnambool residents and in response to many complaints about the blocking off of the crossing by VLine.

<https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/council/petitions/electronic-petitions/view-e-petitions/details/12/198>

The petition is online and still open. The South Warrnambool Residents Association is hoping for 1000 signatures before it goes to the next session of state parliament, 16-18 June. W&DHS committee members support the petition as we have seen people climbing the fences lifting bicycles over and walking along the railway line to cross into and out of Lake Pertobe parklands. Please follow the link if you would like to support this campaign.



*Gilles Street south
c.1926. rail crossing at
lower right. (Charles
Pratt photograph)*



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