

November 2009

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Historical Happenings



Casterton Community Museum

The Dance Halls and Orchestras of Casterton

by local historian, James Kent

All Welcome

**Next Meeting of the
Historical Society is on
November 18th at
Merino Hotel: dinner
and film *Stringybark*
about the
timbergetters of the
region - from the
Promoting Heywood
History Group.
6.30pm: \$15 for dinner
8.30pm: \$5 for the film**

Errata: corrections from Ken Fitzgerald re Dame Mary Gilmore article

E-mail: Tuesday, 6 October 2009
There are a couple of errors in James
Kent's article on Dame Mary Gilmore.
John Gilmore was my great uncle and
I have quite a number of letters and
documents pertaining to him.

- He died from tuberculosis,
not food poisoning.
- William Gilmore was his
uncle, not his brother.
- Dame Mary died at 97 years
of age, not 92 years.

As a source of entertainment in past years dancing in couples was a very popular pastime all over the world. This type of group activity also played a large part in the courting aspect of the entwined couples on the dance floor.

Today's younger generation have no concept of the type of dancing that took place in almost any type of building that had a floor of sufficient size to accommodate those couples who, in an embrace, chose to gyrate in a graceful manner to the music of wind and stringed instruments.

Not so today – the old dance halls are quiet. The younger generation on the rare occasions they do gather in dance halls are content to just gesture towards each other quite oblivious to the fearful noise rendered by musicians who have neither rhythm nor tempo to their music.

These youngsters would have no knowledge of the Circular Waltz, the Modern Waltz, the Slow Foxtrot, the Quick Step, the Barn Dance, the Pride of Erin or the Tangoette. However, enough criticism, on to the dance halls of Casterton.

Coming into Casterton from a northerly direction brings you into McPherson Street and there on the corner of this and Murray Street, where now stands a Peden building, there once stood a major dance hall. Built by Malcolm Campbell in the very early 1900s, he named this edifice the Argyle Hall, no doubt the name drawn from his Scottish leanings.

It was quite a large hall fully equipped with a stage, kitchen and what used to be referred as "the supper room". Malcolm's primary purpose was to establish a roller-skating rink where exponents of this art could reach competitive conditions. As time progressed the roller skating activity gave way to dancing and regular "hops" were held there.

This old hall then became know as the Palais de Danse and Charlie Holmes and his orchestra supplied the music. At the start of World War 1 in 1914 it assumed a new role for which it continued to be used until the end of World War Two in 1945. From being known as the Palais it became known as the Drill Hall because this was where volunteers for the armed services gathered to commence their drilling education.

Casterton New Cemetery Mapping Project



Held on the 2nd and 4th Saturday from 10 am to 12 noon have commenced again in September with the return of better weather. We are now about three quarters of the way through mapping the entire cemetery.



Groups who used this hall for these purposes were The Light Horse Brigade, The Volunteer Defense Corp and the Air Training Corp. After the cessation of hostilities in 1945 this old dance hall remained unused until a chap established a vehicle panel repair and paint shop within its ancient walls.

After this burst of activity has run its course it assumed another mantle, this time in the manufacturing role. Quite a work force reported there daily for the manufacture of hand gloves and so the old Argyle Hall provided the premises for yet another venture. When the glove-making enterprise moved to a new building once again this old dance hall became unoccupied.

The controlling powers then placed the building on the market where it was purchased and to the best of my memory was dismantled and removed to a farming property down Brownings lane in the Nareen district. I believe it was the intention of the purchaser to reconstruct it as a shearing shed on his property.

And so the old Argyle Hall was no more on the corner of McPherson and Murray Street.

Whilst we are in McPherson Street we will go down to its southern section to where once stood a truly elegant piece of architecture in the form of the Oddfellows Hall.

Before you become too perplexed as to the nomenclature defining this dance hall, it was the title of the owners which was a benevolent society attending to the medical and funeral wants of its members. Later on it was to become the home of the Manchester Unity, better known as the MUIOOF, again a benevolent society, one of many such organizations who were operating in the early days of Australia's colonization.

This dance hall was equipped with facilities such as kitchen and supper room and could handle engagements, family reunions and so on. It also provided the place for a number of other bodies. For a number of years the brethren of the ROAB lodge used it for its regular meetings until moving to their own building.

The members of the Glenelg Scottish Pipe Band under the command of Pipe Major Bill Cameron used this old dance hall on a regular basis for practice nights. From its hallowed walls there came the agonizing wails of the bagpipes as learners tried to master the art of playing these ancient instruments.

Another usage for this hall was on election days when it was used as the polling booth. In my youthful days it bore the derogatory name of The Rabbitters' Hall, where on a regular basis old time and modern dances were held on Saturday nights.

It stood adjacent to the Power Station, two huge six-sided rooms guarding the central entrance doors, within where I spent many an enjoyable night engaging in dancing and other activities. I don't know what happened to it – I must have been up north when it disappeared. The site is now a playground for the Primary School children.

(The hall was apparently later demolished when it was considered to have become unsafe: Ed.)

Casterton Community Museum



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If you would like to contribute to this newsletter, please contact Jan Lier for further information at jlir3@bigpond.com or contact Ros on roscov@iprimus.com.au

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/casterton/historicalsociety

FIELD TRIP TO DERGHOLM, BAILEY'S ROCKS AND CAUPAUL

A fine day was spent in early October, visiting Dergholm hall, the school, church and cemetery, and a picnic at Bailey's Rocks finished up at the impressive Caupaul Station, near Dergholm. The current owners, of ten years, have renovated and improved the gardens to make it a very lovely home. We were much taken by the place and greatly appreciated the tour, the wildly enthusiastic welcome given by the five farm dogs, and the kind hospitality shown by John and Dinah Farquharson

CAPAUL STATION

Not a great deal of information can be found about Capaul. The following is from Marj Quigley from Harrow Historical Society and some of the residents from Daryl Povey.

It appears that Caupaul was not one of the original pastoral runs and was cut off the Kadnook property in the first place and was either Lake Paddock or Buckle Kuppel.

Two Donaldson brothers, originally from Cavendish lived there. John Donaldson married Margaret Walker in 1869, she died at Caupaul in Oct 1874 aged 35 as did her baby. She is buried in the Harrow cemetery.

John Donaldson married a second time and went to Queensland. His brother James was likely with him at Caupaul, it is not known if they owned it or was managing it. He married the daughter of the Harrow publican and was licensee of the Hermitage for a few years. James was one of the Harrow cricketers who played for the Murray Challenge Cup. David Edgar of Pine Hills was involved with Tallangower, Lake Paddock and Kadnook.

It appears later as a birthplace for a number of children. These are a few items from Daryl Povey's database:

pre 1865 - Thomas William SYLVESTER & Mary FITZGERALD lived there

1866 - Patrick MOORE & Johanna Elizabeth FITZGERALD had a child

1871 - Owen O'REILLY & Ellen Constance MALONE had a daughter

1874 - John DONALDSON & Margaret Wilson WALKER had a son born there

1875 - George Robertson PATTERSON purchased *Caupaul*

1875 - James DONALDSON was there in 1875 when he married Mary Jane HEATH

1880 - John WHITE who married Elizabeth HUGHES - was overseer

1900 - Elizabeth FLACK lived there when she married Thomas Corbett SEYMOUR

1900 - John FLACK who married Ellen PRIEST was a labourer there.

The unusual name, Caupaul, is a source of interest to many - the most plausible explanation seems to be that it came about as a shortened form of Buckle Kuppel - Kuppel presumably became Caupaul and thus it remains. But why a totally different spelling - sounds better than Kuppel? Any other knowledge or theories on the origin of the name welcomed.