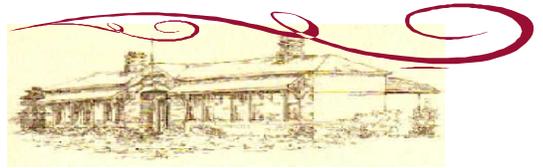


Casterton and District
Historical Society Inc
Newsletter

November 2011

Historical Happenings



Casterton Community Museum

Items in our newsletter:

The Early Days by Jim Kent
Bakers of Casterton by Jim Kent

Next Meeting of the Historical Society

November meeting, last of the year, Sunday 27th, will be a lunch held at Sloba and Iliya's at Chetwynd.

Please advise Ros if you will be attending the lunch. Cost is \$20 per head. Tel: 5581 2875

Next 2012 meeting will be a BBQ on the third Wednesday in February, 7 pm at the VIC. Please BYO salads and drinks: meat provided.



A Treatise on "The Early Days" by Jim Kent

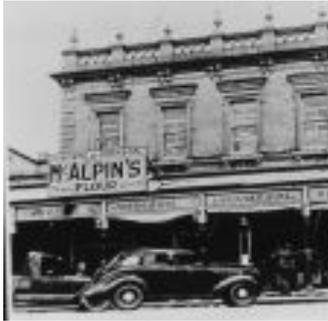
It may not be commonly known that up to 1851 what we now know as the State of Victoria was part of New South Wales, the Wales name in all probability coming from the British occupiers of this continent now known as Australia. By the mid 1830s land settlement had occurred in this southern portion of the land, mainly around the hinterland of the coastline of what is now Melbourne, Geelong, Westernport and of course in our own region, Portland, where Dutton and the Henty brothers were located. Dutton and his seafaring cobbles were almost entirely concerned with the capture of whales and seals although he did cultivate a vegetable garden, whilst the Hentys had their fingers in many pies.

After Sir Thomas Mitchell had passed through the southern part in the early 1830s it did not take long for his reports of the very first-class pastureland to become generally known. Immigration accelerated from Van Diemen's Land, now Tasmania, Sydney and elsewhere and vast tracts of this arable and grazing land was "squatted" upon by both overseas and local persons.

Like nowadays, the government of the 1830s to 1870s liked to be right in among all this settlement, and created a situation whereby these squatters who were doing all the improvements and work were very uncertain of their tenure of the land on which they worked. The government at this time was charging them a land license fee of ten pounds a year, irrespective of the area the squatter had appropriated, renewable annually, and gave no guarantee of perpetual ownership.

Governor Gipps, after whom the section of Victoria is named Gippsland, came into the picture with some rather radical changes to the costing and occupying of those otherwise Crown Lands, much to the consternation of those who had already occupied and added improvements to the land. In the early 1860s Sir C G Duffy, who was the president of the Board of Lands and Works in the now new State of Victoria, shrugged his shoulders and decided to do something positive about the somewhat chaotic state of affairs relative to land settlement.

He devised a scheme which was known as The Duffy Land Act, whereby some four million acres was opened up for forty acres and could be purchased for one pound per acre outright, or paid off in annual payments of eight yearly installments'.



Goodie Harris's emporium



Albion Hotel



Casterton New Cemetery Mapping Project



But of course like all grand schemes before and after Sir C G Duffy devised his, the “smart boys” got around this by employing “dummy” selectors to take up selections which they then added to their own by buying out the dummy selector. This kind of transaction was rife and many a dummy selector made a handsome profit on his deal.

Then James McPherson Grant came into the picture with what was known then as Grant’s Land Act in an endeavor to sort out the mess land selection had come to be in. Grant’s method was to charge a rent of twenty cents and acre payable at a ten year period, after which, if the selector had complied with the clauses re improvements, he was granted a clear title to the land. This did not remove all the “dummying” but it did slow down a bit as by this time the selector had become attached to this holding.

Another Land Act Amendment came into being in the early 1870s, which again varied the time periods and methods of payments, and also the age at which a selector could apply for a block. One then had to be over eighteen years of age, and not a wife married to the applying selector. This sorted out some of the rorts. Your correspondent had his own experience in land selection back in the 1960s. At this time I owned two highly fertile farms local to Casterton and was also leasing another farm. Trading as Cartage Contractors and Graziers our income was taxable over a five year period instead of one year if we were operating only as Cartage Contractors. I had my eye on 320 acres of Crown Land which I knew I could improve by clearing and sowing down to pasture.

I applied to the Lands Department to open it for selection and I was successful upon sitting at the opening of it, the deal being that I was to pay three dollars an acre over a ten year period at thirty cents per acre, or pay it off in a lump sum after I complied with the selection clauses. This block of land saved me thousands of dollars in taxation as I had expenses re clearing and sowing down, after water and fencing details were completed. I later sold it for \$1,000 per acre after buying it from Queen Elizabeth for three dollars per acre.



The Bakers of Casterton by Jim Kent

From the time when mankind climbed out of the trees and stood erect he discovered that instead of living on the fruit that the trees produced there also could be found on the plants growing closer to the earth the mature product of their flowering, namely the seed pods. Then another momentous happening occurred when he harnessed the heat of a fire and directed this heat via stone and earth ovens to produce a more edible and tasty product. Aptly named “the staff of life” bread in its many forms has accompanied mankind for the past centuries, even our original Australians knew to gather seeds, pound them up and mix with water and bake in primitive ovens.

And so, after that preamble, we arrive at the crux of the article, namely the bread bakers who operated in Casterton during my life-time, that is from 1927 onwards. Starting at the eastern end of our main street, Henty, after our very first settlers, we find John Craig Stewart established with a two storied residence, living quarters



Merino Downs 1920

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If you would like to contribute to this newsletter, please contact Jan Lier at the Visitor Information Centre on 5581 2070 or e-mail at jlir3@activ8.net.au or contact Ros at roscov48@bigpond.com tel 5581 2875

We're on the Web
Visit us at:

www.ballaratgenealogy.org.au/casterton/historicalociety



Casterton Community Museum

upstairs and a shop fronting the footpath. At the rear of these premises the bake house manned by John Craig Stewart and sons, Dugald, William Alexander, better known as “Sandy”, and Theodore Richardson, again more commonly referred to as “Bricky”. From these premises they produced a product of incredible quality using by today’s standards very primitive methods. A huge brick oven fired by wood known as “stringybark” baked a variety of bread loaves, and delectable small goods. Deliveries were conducted by horses and closed-in carts, one of the drivers I recall being little Billy McEwen. Another method of distribution to country customers was to wrap bread in paper and put them in the empty cream cans that went back to the farms from the local butter factory. Imagine the health authorities today condoning this method.

Now we have to move to the western end of Henty Street to locate the bakery of John R Carter where again we find the principal assisted by his sons, plus Jim Newton as baker, and Murray “Joe” Davis as junior hand. Again we see the residence and shop combined, with the wood fired bake house at the rear of the premises. Deliveries were again done per medium of horse and closed-in cart, moving throughout the town’s streets and the products taken to the householder’s door by way of wicker basket. Jimmy Joyce was one driver I remember. Another distribution method was by the mail bag contractors who delivered to the district’s mail boxes. Once again, a first class product emerged from these premises.

Then we see in 1931 a couple of enterprising brothers open up a third bakery in Casterton. Aubrey and Charlie Baxter commenced operation in a shed leased from Pedens, roughly where the St Vinnie’s shop is today. These brothers, from memory, had a shop in Henty Street to display and sell their bakery’s products. Today it is a bookshop next to the hairdresser in Elijah’s building. The Baxter boys were quite innovative in their delivery methods, using a motorised Willys van for this purpose.

J C Stewart’s bakery is long gone. J R Carter’s struggled on with a number of successors, as did Baxters in McPherson Street. Eventually a modern bakery was built on the Baxter site. I brought down from Orange in NSW a huge oil-fired oven for use in this Dutch-owned bakery. Modern baking methods by the multinational bakers, huge delivery transports, soon wrote finis to little town’s bakeries and today we see each morning a truck of sliced and packaged bread roll in over our bridge, the product originating in a huge bakery in a seaside city.

Then lo and behold in what was built in 1927 as a very modern two storied motor garage, who should set up a modern bakery in this building but an enterprising person called Andy Mangan. His modus operandi was the first and only “hot bake” oven in Casterton and it produced a very credible product. In time this business passed into the capable hands of the Herbert family. And today it operates as a bakery of breads and small goods combined with a very popular cafe-style eatery, dispensing various blends of coffees.

And so, in summary, after 165 years of commercial activities in Henty Street, we are still fortunate to have available to those of us who favour the home-style breads, a bakery where these products can still be purchased.

