

Plenty Historical Society Inc.



Registered No: A0041710X

ABN: 58 472 605 779

Registered Office: 27 Howell Road, Plenty, Vic., 3090

Tel: 03 9435 9117 or 9432 0921

Email: kerlan@vicnet.net.au

"PLENTY NEWS AND VIEWS"

Preserving the History and Culture of Plenty

Vol: 1, No: 21 - November 2007



Produced with support from
Nillumbik Shire Council



Contact with Plenty Historical Society Inc. can be made through the following:

President:	Ms Neisha Forbes	0438 793 776
Vice President:	Mrs Barbara Wright	9435 8201
Secretary/ Public Officer:	Dr Kerry Fitzmaurice	9435 9117
Treasurer:	Mr Alan Pearce	9435 9117
Committee:	Mrs Carmel Cunningham	9435 7536
	Mrs Glenda Embling	9436 132

NEW LAYOUT

Beginning with this edition of Plenty News and Views, we have adopted a new layout for the newsletter with the objective of making it more easily recognisable and to assist with its promotion in the community. It is five years since the first issue in November 2002 and some refinement of the newsletter layout is considered appropriate at this time. In future editions, we hope to bring more articles of historic interest from the past to the attention of our readers, and expand the content each quarter. Comments on the changes are welcome.

1957 PLENTY FIRE AND BEYOND

On the 50th Anniversary year of the 1957 fire in the Diamond Creek, Plenty, Greensborough area where one resident was burnt to death in his car, from an historical interest it seemed appropriate to publish the reports on the fire tragedy as published in "The Sun" newspaper on Friday 1st March 1957.

"A crippled man was burnt to death in a fire which raged for nearly five hours in the Diamond Creek/Greensborough area yesterday."

"Sixty-five children from the Sutherland Children's Home were rushed to safety to Greensborough, three miles (4.8km) away, when the fire threatened the home."

"Six houses and the historic St Katherine's Church of England in St Helena, near Greensborough - 100 years old this year (1957) - were burnt down. And five cars, three utilities and a truck belonging to the fire-fighters were lost in the blaze."

"The dead man, George Lawry, 46, a poultry farmer of Larch Crescent, Diamond Creek was burnt to death trying to escape from his car. He was less than 100 feet (30 metres) from safety when caught by the flames."

"A truckload of fire-fighters saw Mr Lawry, a cripple, hobble from his house and get into his car as the fire swept towards him. He had started the car and was turning it to make a run for the main Diamond Creek Road, half a mile away, when a sheet of flame surged between him and the fire-fighters."

"We had to get out or burn" Mr Bill Stoneham of Greensborough said. "We piled on to the truck and started up the track. Lawry had his car going and we thought he would get through. But he backed it straight into the fire and it looked as if the fuel vaporised. We didn't see him after that. We didn't know he was a cripple - 100 feet on

the other side of the road and he'd have been alright."

"Mr Lawry was found dead in the passenger seat. His right foot was caught between the gear lever and the brake, Only 100 feet away his father's house was smouldering but not badly damaged."

"The Children's Home matron and her staff rushed the children to safety in two orderly but fear driven dashes in a station wagon. The children were driven away from the path of the rapidly advancing fire through dense smoke and ash-laden air. Last night, all children from the home were billeted with Greensborough families. They will probably return home today - but nearly all the pets they were crying about won't be there to greet them."

"The home of Mr and Mrs Norman Heard was destroyed while Mrs Heard was driving her own and a neighbour's stock to safety. All that is left of their mixed farm are several fowl pens, a shed and a tractor. Mr heard was in Melbourne when the fire started and did not arrive home until after his farm had been razed. Mrs heard said: "The fire swept up to the place but they had it under control and we thought it was almost out when it started again, It was heading right towards the neighbour's stock. I got them out - about 60 head all told - and drove them out of the way keeping close to our dam in case the fire got too close. But when I came back the house was just about gone I had thought it was safe after the earlier fire."

"Mr A. N. Huitt, whose cattle Mrs Heard had saved, lost all his outbuildings, hay and winter-feed. All that was left standing was his house."

Fight for Church

"The Vicar of Greensborough, the Rev. R. J. McCall, and the Vicar of Eltham, the Rev David Warner, were two of the first fire-fighters to reach St Katherine's Church in a vain effort to save it. The church would have celebrated its centenary this year and had just been redecorated. The church was one of the most beautiful churches in Victoria and was built by Major Anthony Beale in 1857 in memory of his wife, Katherine. Major Beale was paymaster for the British East India Company at St Helena, and became a friend of the vanquished Napoleon. He migrated to Australia and took up land at Greensborough."

"The secretary/treasurer of the church, Col. F. W. MacLean, said: "We'll build it again. We won't have the centenary celebrations - we'll have a rebuilding fund."

"The Sutherland Children's Home was saved after a three-hour battle. At one stage

two fire fighters were all that stood between the spearhead of the fire and the home. For 10 minutes they fought a blaze in a washhouse only 10 yards from the main buildings and classrooms." First Constable C. Nilbett, of Diamond Creek, said: "They saved the day. If the washhouse had gone the rest would have followed."

AILSA FITZMAURICE'S RECOLLECTIONS OF THE FIRE:

Fate brought the Fitzmaurice's to Plenty in June 1956. Although I had spent my formative years in Panton Hill where my father was Headmaster at the school and we lived in the Schoolhouse, as a child it was a magic place, and no doubt these deep impressions had coloured my thoughts as we drove over the old stone bridge at Greensborough and up Buck's Hill on the Diamond Creek Road. The air was so fresh and pure and the black poll cattle grazed over the green rolling hills where Apollo Parkways is now situated. Along the main road at that time there were only six houses and we felt on a real high. However when we reached our destination, the old Plenty General Store and Post Office, reality hit me. The history of this building has been previously related and what was to become our new life style was indeed a challenge. One never knew what was going to happen before the day was over.

There was a tin shed on the corner of Howell and Yan Yean Roads - the Plenty Fire Station. I was to learn the shed would become a part of my life too. As fire calls at that time came to our phone. It was my job to use different signals on a bell to indicate whether it was a house, grass or bush fire. Having signalled the fire, I would then run over to the Fire Station, open the doors and chalk up where the fire was. This allowed Bill Upton, the Fire Captain and Noel Furse to be out in 3 minutes in the old "Blitz" truck - two wonderful men. There was only tank water and a few dams with which to fight the fires, so these were desperate days.

I recall some six months or so after we came, I heard a great roaring noise like an express train and I looked out the shop door to see a wall of fire - as high as the trees - confronting me. Trying to be calm I said to the young girl working for us: "My husband has bought a hose to cope with a situation like this." I ran to the tank and found the hose had not been coupled up and to my great relief saw my husband driving ahead of the fire truck down Yan Yean Road. The fire had raced the men from Faneco Road. They formed a chain with buckets - as water hit the store a cloud of steam went up around the petrol pump.

I retreated inside to cope with further dramas - a woman was expecting twins had come for protection, and a young father wanted to dash through the flames to find his wife who was just home with a new baby and their house was in the path of the fire. As he was restrained, another young man said he would go, and his father said: "I'll knock your block off first, it is an inferno." I must have looked like Dolly Parton

with all the pension money stuffed down my blouse for safekeeping. Four houses in front of us burst into flames, cars belonging to the fire fighters were burnt and one man perished, The police set up their headquarters in our living room, and it got pretty crowded as we sweltered all night.

LAURA UPTON'S MEMORIES OF THE FIRE.

I was in the yard and happened to see the S.E.C. cables come down and start the 1957 fire at the Faneco Road/Yan Yean Road corner. At the time, the Plenty Fire Truck was attending to the still burning logs at the McKimmies' house, that had been burnt to the ground a day before from a fire that crossed the river from Janefield. The fire burnt to through to Eltham North. Around the time school finishes for the day, there was a wind change that sent the fire racing South towards Plenty. The school children had to remain at the school till someone came to collect them. One man was burnt to death, several houses and other buildings were destroyed, and the cars that were parked on the right-hand bend after the Fire Station were burnt.

We know from past experience that sandwiches for the firemen are OK on the first day of a fire, but more substantial food is required when fires burn over longer periods. This fire was on a large scale and needed a lot of men. Fire fighter, Jeff Roberts' wife, Brenda, and his mother, Myrtle cooked meals at my house. The men coming home from work could then eat before going out on the fire truck, and fire fighters coming off a shift could also eat. Some fire fighters found a bed with residents or used cars to sleep in; they also could have a shower. Not all people had a phone so word was sent to their homes to let their families where their family members were located. Other people milked cows, minded children, and helped in any way they could.

A fund was set up to raise money to help families that had suffered from the fire; it ran for six weeks with a fair amount being raised. A big concert was held in the Heidelberg Town Hall, where all artists gave their time without charge. The 1957 fire took over a week of blacking out.

CHRISTMAS BREAK-UP

Our last function for 2007 will be the Christmas Break-up to be held on Thursday 6th December in the Plenty Community Hall. As in the past the Society will be conducting its Christmas Raffle again this year, to be drawn at the Christmas Break-up, and tickets will be forwarded to each member with a request that they sell them as a means of raising funds for the Society's activities. This raffle has been a major source of our fund raising activities in the past and we seek the assistance of all members again this year.

GAMES/TRIVIA NIGHT

Although numbers attending on the night were low, the Games/Trivia Night was a great success and those attending enjoyed a lot of fun. The function raised an amount of \$415 on the night, and this was a welcome addition to Society funds. Our sincere thanks go to Carmel and Ted Cunningham for organizing the night. A suggestion has been made to hold a dance in 2008 then return to the Games/Trivia night the following year.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's Sixth Annual General Meeting was held at the Plenty Fire Station on Thursday 4th October 2007 and was attended by 23 members and visitors. At the meeting the following members were elected as Officers and Committee members for the next twelve months:

President:	Neisha Forbes
Vice President:	Barbara Wright
Secretary/Public Officer:	Kerry Fitzmaurice
Treasurer:	Alan Pearce
Committee Members:	Carmel Cunningham Glenda Embling (Another committee member is required and a volunteer would be appreciated.)
Auditor:	Milton Embling

We were pleased to welcome Cr Warwick Leeson, Mayor, Cr Peter Yates, and Mr Vin McKay, Group Manager Leisure and Community Services, Nillumbik Shire Council, and Ms Liz Pidgeon, Local History Librarian, Yarra Plenty Regional Library to the meeting.

Our Guest Speaker for the evening was Ms Lesley Alves, Historian and Treasurer of the Oral History Association of Australia, Victorian Branch. Lesley gave an interesting talk to members and included a number of recorded brief interviews of people to illustrate the topic of her talk. The Society is greatly appreciative of Lesley in addressing the meeting.

Lesley has also researched the history of the Uniting Church in Nillumbik and has written a book as a result. She has kindly consented to our publishing the following brief extract in our newsletter.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PLENTY UNITING CHURCH

Methodist Church services were first held at Plenty early in 1925, under the auspices of the Diamond Creek Methodist Home Mission Station, which had several churches throughout the Diamond Valley. Plenty was then a developing orchard and farming district. A new school had opened there in 1922.

In 1925 the Victorian Methodist Church encouraged the building of new country churches by offering 50 pounds to communities who could raise 100 pounds. The Methodists of Plenty took advantage of the offer, and their new wooden chapel was opened in December of the same year. Within five years of opening, this church was debt free. This was a remarkable achievement, considering that people were beginning to experience the economic strain of the Great Depression, and it gained for the Plenty congregation a reputation of generosity.

In the 1950's the Plenty Methodist Church had a large Sunday School, with 35 children attending from the nearby Sutherland Homes as well as 40 children from local families.

After the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia in 1977, the Plenty Church became part of the Diamond Valley Parish. Owing to diminishing numbers of members at Plenty, and the need to rationalise services, the Parish decided to close the Plenty Church in the 1980's. In 1985 a hall that had been built adjacent to the chapel was moved to Hurstbridge, and is still used by the Hurstbridge congregation of the Uniting Church.

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"HERITAGECARE"

At a recent meeting of the Yarra Plenty Regional Forum, Paige McAlpine, Heritagecare Officer with Conservation Volunteers made a presentation about a new initiative, the Heritagecare partnership between Conservation Volunteers and Heritage Victoria, funded by the State Government's heritage strategy - 'Victoria's Heritage: Strengthening our communities'. The presentation focused on the community stewardship and hands on heritage projects and gave examples of these currently happening all around Victoria. Paige is happy to talk to people about any project with which they would like to become involved.

The Heritagecare program is being implemented and delivered by Conservation Volunteers comprising Hands-on-Heritage (continuation of an existing program) and Community Stewardship (a new program) and will:

- Assist public and private owners by providing volunteer resources and skills for the conservation of important heritage places, objects and collections;
- Support broadly-based community participation and learning through the management of local heritage places, objects and collections;

- Hands-on-Heritage projects are short-term heritage projects involving a group of volunteers for up to five days.
- Community Stewardship projects will be longer term - Typically up to six months in duration - with volunteers participating 2 days a week. Projects will focus on increasing volunteers skills so that they can sustainably manage heritage projects in their own area.

Are you passionate about Victoria's heritage places, objects and collections? Would you like to do something to help conserve these special heritage places for everyone to enjoy? The Society is endeavouring to have Paige McAlpine talk to members at one of our meetings in 2008 to further explain the initiative and possibly have our members join with volunteers in a project in Plenty.

Our Vision (Where we want to get to)

To create and nurture an active and sustainable organization that is assertive in preserving the unique natural and historical environment and culture of Plenty and district in complement with Nillumbik Shire Council's heritage overlay. In this way, we respect and recognize the diversity of the community, and enhance knowledge and pride in the community and respect for the Society.

Our Mission (The Society's role in achieving our vision)

Plenty Historical Society and its members will maintain a focused approach to historical, cultural and environmental matters and issues to ensure the Society can maximise its exposure and presence in the wider community and draw on the many resources in the region. We aim to identify and link with other historical and community resources, recognising the importance and value of that infrastructure, at the same time encouraging, educating, growing, and maintaining the interest of our membership.

Our Values (The way we do things)

- We will identify, promote, respect and preserve the historical, cultural, environmental and community characteristics of Plenty and district;
- We are committed to preserving the historical records, memorabilia, natural environment and artefacts of Plenty and district;
- The Society maintains a powerful link with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Nillumbik Shire Council and other organizations as the unified voice of its members and as a group to lobby for retention of historical sites, natural environment and other items of historical interest;
- The Society is committed to providing its members with a forum to explore issues of local history and the natural environment;
- The Society is committed to supporting, encouraging, educating and maintaining the interest of its members in an atmosphere of mutual respect, satisfaction and enjoyment;
- The Society will foster excellence in researching and maintaining the history of the area;
- The Society is committed to sharing its resources and encouraging and assisting other individuals and organizations wishing to conduct historical research within Plenty and districts provided such activities are considered by the members to be in the best interests of the Society and the community;
- The Society is committed to being progressive in outlook and to giving consideration to all relevant developments in technology;
- The Society is committed to widening its exposure and activities to include the wider community and will work in association with community members on projects considered of benefit to the majority; and
- The Society is committed to principles of stewardship and accountability.

We will demonstrate our values by:

- Listening to, working with, and respecting the views of the community;
- Being honest, trustworthy and maintaining our integrity in all that we do;
- Maintaining a high level of professionalism, innovation and continuous improvement in all our activities; and

Managing our resources with utmost responsibility and maintaining a sense of balance in our approach and attitudes at all times.