



Snippets

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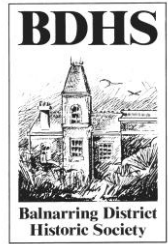
Balnarring and District Historical Society Inc.

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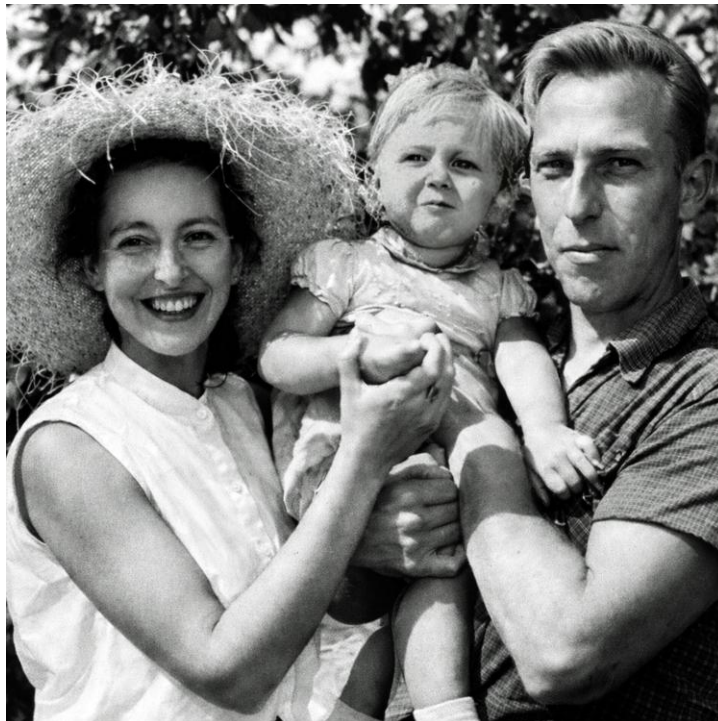
February 2026

Editor: I. Hackett



NONDA-WONDA(H)

The August 2025 issue of Snippets included the story of the property 'Nonda Wonda' in Merricks. It had belonged to the Huntley family and was sold to Wendy and Jeff Doube in the 1970s. Wendy told how her husband had given away the old house sign to visitors from Holland who were tracing relatives who once lived there. The following newspaper article appeared in the Age in January, 1953:



Adventure and success highlight the story of Mr and Mrs Schneemann shown above with their son Mauk on their orchard in Merricks North.

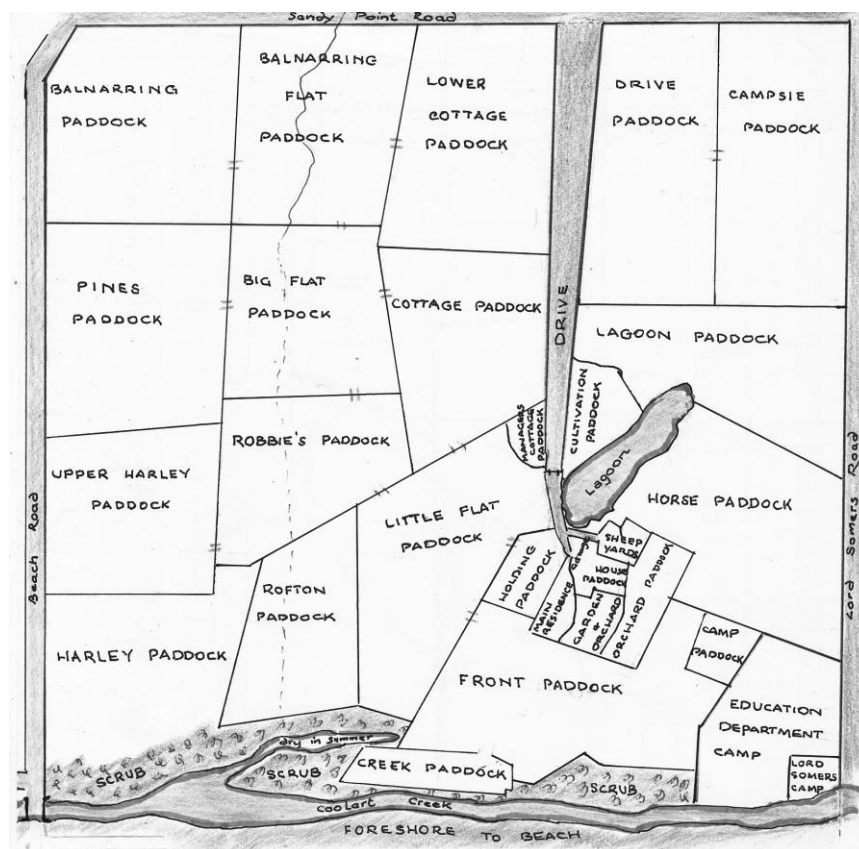
A Dutchman, Mr Scheemann was a POW in Germany for 18 months. When the war ended he married and went with his wife to Indonesia as a tea-planter. Terrorists harassed them for four years until they came to Australia for a holiday with their son. That was four months ago and they decided to stay.

Already they have picked their first crop of cherries and their apples and plums are ripening,

Mr Schneemann bought the orchard and named it Nonda Wondah. In Aboriginal language it means fruit tree

Wendy stated that the Schneemann family had rented the house from Bill. It appears the couple had given the property its name, 'Nonda Wondah'

COOLART'S PADDOCKS



When Margaret (Luxton) Roffey and her family ran Coolart during the 1960s-70s the paddocks were named as shown on the accompanying map. This has been re-drawn from a larger, more worn version held in the B.D.H.S. archives. The names indicate an identifying feature to distinguish one paddock from another. Sometimes this reflects topography, or land use, a nearby feature or a person.

The map is akin to a story book about the property.

Coolart's boundaries are (Balnarring) Beach Road to the west; Coolart Creek separating the creek from the foreshore and beach to the south; Lord Somers Road to the east; Sandy Point Road on the north. Access into the property was via the long drive which led in from Sandy Point Road.

At the end of the driveway, south of the lagoon, is the homestead and farm building complex. The sheep yards are shown. Paddocks nearby are:

Holding Paddock which, as its name implies, was used for holding livestock on a temporary basis.

House paddock; the paddock closest to the house

Garden and orchard are self explanatory

Orchard Paddock: lies close to the orchard.

Paddocks to the west of the driveway are:

Drive Paddock - next to the driveway's entrance

Campsie Paddock – closest to the 'Campsie' property which, at one time, belonged to the Mairs family, pioneers of the Somers area.

Lagoon Paddock- the northern end of the lagoon forms part of its boundary

Cultivation Paddock – kept under crop

Horse Paddock – where the horses were turned out to graze.

Between the homestead and the beach are:

Front Paddock - fronts the foreshore

Camp Paddock – the small paddock adjoining the Education Department Camp an area that had been acquired from Coolart at the beginning of World War 2 for an Airforce Initial Training base. The Education Department has held the land since.

A second, separate camp on the creek front is the Lord Somers Camp, a holiday camp on land donated in 1929 by Coolart's then owner, John Feehan.

Creek paddock is a small paddock fronting Coolart Creek

To the west of the driveway is:

Lower Cottage Paddock - adjoins Cottage Paddock and was further out from the cottage.

Cottage Paddock – closest to the manager's cottage

Manager's Cottage Paddock is the small area immediately around the cottage for use of the manager's family

Robbie's Paddock – named for Coolart's manager – Ken Roberts aka Robbie.

Balnarring Flat Paddock – refers to the nature of the land and its position adjoining Balnarring Paddock.

Big Flat paddock – immediately south of Flat Paddock.

Little Flat Paddock – again referring to the nature of the land

('Big' and 'little' may refer to importance rather than size)

Rofton Paddock – a combination of the names Roffey and Luxton

Harley Paddock - the Harley Davidson Motor cycle clubhouse building was directly opposite Coolart land.

Upper Harley Paddock - again referring to the motorcycle club. It adjoined the other paddock but was further up the hill.

Pines Paddock: There was a row of pine trees growing right along the Beach Road. They had been planted as a wind break and, at this time, were mature, majestic trees.

Balnarring Paddock – nearest Balnarring township's centre.

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A LINK TO PUFFING BILLY

Ron Nobelius owned the Cherry Dale orchards in Merricks North in the late 1940s early 1950s. He had come to 'Cherrydale' in 1938 with his wife and three young daughters to manage the property for G.W. Peart.

Ron, or Nobby as he was known locally, was descended from a long line of orchardists and horticulturists whose heritage was Swedish. His great-grandparents had moved from Sweden to Finland where his grandfather, Carl Axel, was born.



Carl Axel migrated to Australia in 1871 when he was twenty years of age. He first found work in a nursery in Toorak and then began working for Joseph Harris in South Yarra. Harris was a leading nursery man of the time who experimented with seeds gathered from all round the world. While still working for Harris, Carl Axel bought land near Emerald in the Dandenong Hills. He spent each weekend on his land, clearing the timber and undergrowth, preparing the land for cultivation and eventually planting it out. The nearest railway at the time reached Narre Warren and, after taking the train, he walked the remaining 16 miles to his land put in a weekend's work and walked back to the station for the return trip. His hard work paid off and in 1890 he was able to start his own business – Gembrook Nurseries.

People soon called it Nobelius' Nursery after the name of its owner.

Fifty acres were under cultivation. Strawberries, raspberries, apples, pears were sold to markets in Melbourne and Sydney. His stock included fruit and ornamental trees which were sourced from countries around the world. The business prospered. During the Depression of the 1890s when many other businesses were forced to close, Carl Axel's business expanded thanks to projects put in place by the State and local governments to provide jobs for the unemployed. Many of these were beautification programs such as planting shade trees along streets and creating parks and gardens. The nursery grew in size and in clientele. Carl Axel and his wife had a large family and the nurseries became a family business. Four of his five sons were involved in the business. The propagation and sale of fruit and fruit tree stock formed the core of the business partly due to the large orchard holding he had established in Tasmania. By the onset of World War 1 the nursery was the biggest in the southern Hemisphere, with two million stock trees. It was exporting to a number of overseas countries as well as within Australia.

In early days Carl Axel moved his produce to the markets by road to the nearest railhead at Narre Warren. This was costly and meant using bullock drays. He was one of a group of growers from the area who persuaded the Victorian railways to have a line put in from Ferntree Gully to Emerald. Nobelius had permission to erect a siding and cool store along the route so that he had better access for his plants and produce.

Nobelius and Sons as an orchard continued after the death of Carl Axel in 1921 when the business was sold and the proceeds divided within the family. Several of his sons had a vested interest in the 12 acres that continued to operate as a wholesale nursery. It was a family business until it sold in 1955.

Carl Axel's oldest son, Carl Oscar (Nobby's father) established his own orchard, 'Kia Ora' at Narre Warren in 1910. His orchard grew apples and pears and five acres was planted with lavender. Bees from his hives produced honey from the lavender. The blooms were also harvested and sent to a distillery to extract lavender oil for the perfume industry. One of Oscar's brothers ran the only lavender distillery in Victoria at Emerald. Oscar had two sons, Ron and Jack. Ron the eldest found his way to the Mornington Peninsula, to Cherrydale. His brother Jack had a fine baritone singing voice and won a number of awards. He was much in demand as a singer. He worked at Kia Ora with his father prior to World War 2 and he set up his own orchard near Narre Warren after the war years.

Meanwhile Ron was living in Merricks.

"Cherrydale" had been established as an orchard in the 1930s. G W Peart, a well-known horticulturalist from Bairnsdale, had bought the Merricks property, then called "Credo", from David Strain in 1929 with the intention of growing cherries. He took on Nobby as a manager in 1937 and the business grew. 'Cherrydale' became known state-wide for the high quality of its fruit.



The packing shed in 1991

In 1947 Peart decided to sell. He first looked to two of his long-time employees and made them an offer at what the newspapers called “most liberal terms in recognition of their services”. The two men were Henry Johns who acquired 140 acres comprising a mixed orchard and land for dairy cattle, and Ron Nobelius.

The 120 acres Nobby acquired included the 40-acre cherry orchard, an apple orchard and dairying land.



Nobby at work in the orchard

Ron Nobelius had no sons but his three daughters elected to work at Cherrydale. As Margaret, his elder daughter wrote, “We (Margaret and her sisters, Jeanette and Jill) helped at home. We elected to work on the farm and orchard after finishing whatever schooling we did. We helped with the spraying, pruning and picking of the fruit as well as helping with the cattle. Hard work at times but we enjoyed the outdoor work.”

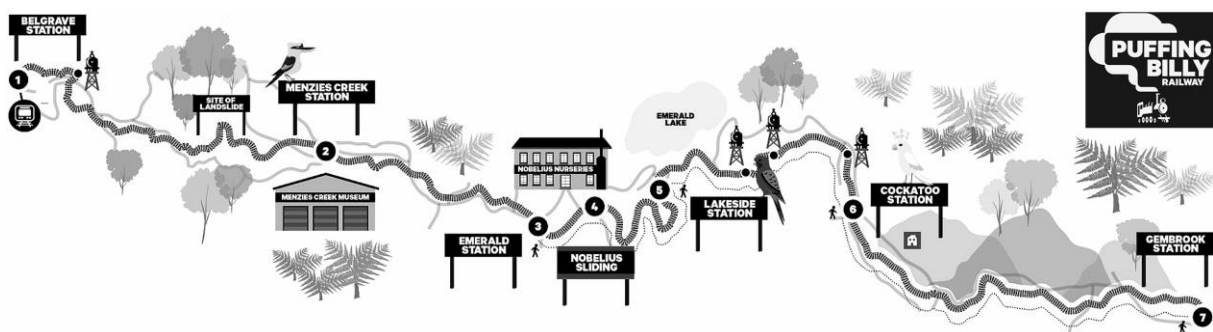
The cherry orchard occupied the land on the northeast corner of the Bittern-Dromana Road and Balnarring Road. The picking season in summer was a particularly busy time, offering casual employment to many local people.

Ron Nobelius, Nobby, was a well-known person in the Merricks district, very involved in a number of community organisations and activities until he and his family moved to Dandenong in the early 1950s

What had been the Nobelius nursery in Emerald finally closed in 1981 and a public campaign was launched for the remaining 12 acres to be purchased for a community heritage landmark. It is now the Nobelius Heritage Park. The associated Emerald museum retains a collection of items and archival material relating to the Nursery.

The railway line to Emerald closed in 1953 but enthusiasts formed the Puffing Billy Preservation Society and gradually re-opened sections of the track.

Today, Nobelius Siding is still one of the stops along the Puffing Billy route.



Gus, the Fisherman

Gus Hansen was a local identity at Balnarring Beach for about three decades. He had first come to Tulum (Balnarring Beach) in the early 1920s, no doubt attracted by the excellent fishing. It was renowned for a variety of fish but whiting in particular.

August Vilhelm Hansen was born in Haderslev, Denmark and had arrived in Australia in



November, 1876, in time to celebrate his 10th birthday. His parents settled in Williamstown and Gus attended the North Williamstown State School with two sisters and later their younger brother. At the age of twenty-one, he married a lass from Bendigo, Mary Webster, and the following year, their daughter, Edith, was born. She was followed by two brothers, a sister and another brother. The last of Gus and Mary's children, a girl, was born in 1899.

Tragedy struck the family that year – 1899. Their newborn daughter, Jessie, died when she was just two days old, as well as seven-year-old Frederick. Mary, too, passed away. Gus's wife was not yet 34 years old.

The following year Gus was naturalised, becoming an Australian citizen. His age is recorded as 33 years and he gives his occupation as 'laborer'.

He was employed at the Newport Railway Workshops, in either the paint shop or the upholstery section. It was while at the railway workshops that he got to know Tom Haselgrove senior. Both men lived at Williamstown and both shared a passion for fishing the waters of Port Phillip Bay. Gus kept his boat moored at Williamstown; Tom had built a boat shed on the Kororoit Creek.

Gus retired from the railways at the age of 53. For a while he was at the old Chirnside homestead at Point Cook, then owned by Captain Dalrymple. While there, he spent time fishing with the seine net, long line and hooking. At some point in the early 1920s he discovered the excellent fishing at Balnarring Beach on Western Port. In 1925 Gus invited Tom to come to Balnarring for a fishing holiday. This was the Haselgrove family's introduction to Balnarring Beach. They stayed for a week, renting the "concrete house", 'Yamba', in Foreshore Road.

Gus was living in a fisherman's shack, known as 'the Kipsy' on a lot owned by Arthur Hagger. In the early 1920s Hagger had bought four adjoining lots. Three fronted what would become Library Road; the fourth was around the corner in (the future) Mason Smith Road. On one of the lots Hagger erected a simple fisherman's shack and on each of the other three he built a weatherboard house. These houses were rented out to holiday-makers. Gus acted as 'caretaker' for Hagger's properties. This wasn't a formal role. He most likely 'kept an eye' on the other three houses when Hagger wasn't there, perhaps handed over the keys to renters. Tom Haselgrove junior recalled "On further visits we always were lucky enough to rent one of these places – mainly because of our connection with Gus Hansen."

Sometime between 1928 and 1931 Gus became a permanent resident of Balnarring Beach. By 1928 he had already earned his reputation. While praising the wonderful;

whiting fishing at Western Port Bay, a 1928 real estate advertisement mentions “the well-known fisherman at Balnarring Beach, Mr G. Hansen” with his “splendid up-to date fleet of Seven Rowing Boats for Hire either by the Hour or by the Day”[sic]. Gus would also organise and conduct fishing parties to the Whiting Beds.

He became friendly with Jim Cashen and during the 1930s they shared The Kipsy for a time. Cashen bought the house next-door after Arthur Hagger’s death.

Jim assisted Gus with his boat-hiring enterprise. There were six 14ft clinker rowboats that had been built by Clem Blunt Boatbuilders of Williamstown. These could be hired out from Gus’ boatshed with its distinctive red roof. The boatshed, a local landmark, stood on the beach in the proximity of today’s yacht club. The problem with this project was that the hirer would row to the shore, leave the boat wherever he pulled in and Gus would have to retrieve it, row it back to the shed and put it away. The business soured. The boats were sold to locals. Gus and Jim also bought a 15ft clinker boat with an inboard engine which was used for their fishing exploits. Jim used to say he was always glad to hear Gus say, “That’s enough! Let’s go Home!” because in Gus’ own words he “was buggered with pulling in the large and numerous King George whiting, up to 2lb 13 oz”.

Hec Waldron, as a boy in the 1930s, remembers Gus as an expert fisherman who hired out boats to local people and holiday-makers. Whenever he came in from a day’s fishing he was besieged with people eager to buy his fish. At night Gus often set a drag net out from the beach. The net was a quarter of a mile long and was hauled in by long ropes attached to each end. The boys lent a willing hand to haul in the net although they kept their distance if it had snared a stingray. Gus disposed of the stingray with a piece of timber with a long nail in it.

Gus enjoyed the company of young people and was always ready to share his knowledge with them. During the 1940s three young lads welcomed his fishing expertise and words of wisdom. They had seen him frequently, walking along the track, usually wearing his crumpled suit and grey felt hat. To them, at first, he seemed an aloof and severe figure, but they discovered that nothing could have been further from reality. Bryan Francis, one of the boys, tells how he and his two close friends met up with Gus. “A regular pastime of ours was playing cricket with a tennis ball outside the café. An old banksia on the edge of the road in front of the shelter shed served for the stumps. [The shelter shed stood where the rotunda now stands.] On one occasion I was batting, Donkey was bowling and I hit the ball towards the Café, just as Gus came out the door carrying a loaf of bread. The ball struck him on the leg. He picked it up and walked over to where we had gathered together. We looked and felt guilty, sheepish and apprehensive, but need not have feared retribution. Gus returned the ball with a smile, remarked that we must enjoy playing because he had seen us there often, and enquired whether we enjoyed fishing. Do birds fly? Of course we liked fishing.

Gus arranged to meet them the following morning on the beach. He gave some advice as to their fishing gear, took them out onto the rocks and told them where to drop their lines. One of them caught a whiting, *a first ever* for any of the trio. Bryan writes, “Our excitement was palpable and infectious with Gus enjoying the moment as much we did. He chuckled and smiled and praised our skills as fishermen.”

The boys became frequent visitors at The Kipsy or the Upside-down House as they called it because of its unusual shape. Gus continued to take an interest in their activities, especially fishing and sometimes went with them on their expeditions as advisor. Another neighbour, a former missionary, was the Sunday School superintendent at the nearby Methodist church. Each Sunday he collected the children

from the beach area and drove them to the church. He noticed the three friends disappearing over the sand dunes with their fishing rods just as he was driving around the corner to round them up. He gave the boys a 'fatherly talk' about commitment to the church. He also spoke to Gus. The boys were miserable when Gus spoke to them about the request and apprehensive until his face crinkled into a smile and he chuckled. When asked what he had said, he paused, winked and replied, "Remember, boys, you can eat fish but you can't eat bibles."

Bryan remembers Gus' chuckle "as coming from within as if he was enjoying a joke no-one else had seen. He did not have a hearty laugh or belly laugh, he chuckled."

On another occasion he handed over to the friends his cache of discarded lemonade bottles. These he picked up from the beach or in the dunes and they could be redeemed at the Café for 3d each. A three-penny bit (thruppence) could buy ice-creams, chocolates, fizzy drinks and boiled sweets and the boys saw this unexpected gift as a 'treasure trove'. They realised, in retrospect, how kind and generous Gus had been.

His kindness and generosity extended to all the children he knew, whether it was taking a very small girl by the hand to show her his chickens or his genuine concern for the little boy who had wandered away from his parents and was missing.

'Old Gus heard her (the mother) crying,
Dozing in his chair.
He's searching for her baby
Everywhere'.

(from *The Lost Child* by B. Howells)



Gus and Bosun outside the Kipsy

Gus had a small dog, a Pomeranian, that was his constant companion. The dog's name was Bosun and it was as popular as Gus. The two of them could often be found sitting in the sun outside The Kipsy.

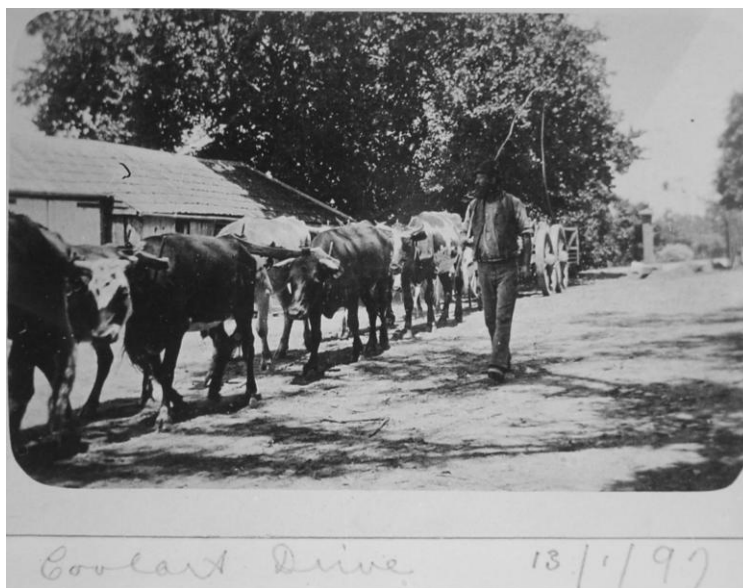
In the 1940s Jim Cashed sold the house adjoining Kipsy to Wally Turner who later opened the front room as a library. Gus and Wally walked to the café most days to collect their newspapers and they liked to sit together on a bench (two tree trunks with a plank across them) in front of the shop and talk.

Gus enjoyed an active life until a short time before his death. He died in the Alfred Hospital in January 1948. He was 81. August Vilhelm Hansen was buried in the family grave at the Williamstown cemetery. Many Balnarring identities attended his funeral and burial to farewell the fisherman.

COOLART CONUNDRUM

At one time it was thought that all materials to build Coolart's mansion were brought in by road. However, reports from local papers at the time tell how the bricks were carted from Melbourne by rail as far as Bittern then by dray to the site.

Another method explained in a note from George Slocombe to Bruce Bennett (when Bruce was writing his history of Somers) tells how the timber was transported. George's uncle, Phil Van Suylen told him that timber was brought ashore by barge and Phil helped Buckley with his bullock team to bring it up to where Coolart was being built. He drew attention to one of the photos in the Coolart collection of a bullock team in the Coolart driveway which he thinks has Buckley as the driver.



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