Snippets

from our collection

Balnarring and District Historical Society Inc.
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May 2026 **Editor: I. Hackett**

HAUNTING HOOFBEATS

This district has been acknowledged a 'suitable area for horses' from the earliest days of European settlement. With good pastures, undulating topography and gentle climate it has attracted many involved with horses to settle in the district. Some have been from the horse-racing world and a few well-known thoroughbred horses have found their final resting place on nearby properties.

Captain John Feehan, a World War I veteran, bought Coolart in 1926. He was a committee member of the Victorian Racing Club and the owner of several successful race horses. The most successful of these was Mountain God, a steeplechaser. The horse won the Grand National Steeplechase in 1921, then again in 1922. Mountain God was retired to Coolart to live out its remaining years there. Feehan and his wife went overseas from time to time. Mrs Feehan's sister lived in England and they travelled to see her and, on occasion, they went to Switzerland where Mr Feehan was receiving treatment for his failing eyesight. One year as they boarded the ship for their European trip Feehan issued an instruction to his manager, Harry Eastward, who was seeing them off. "Mountain God is not to be here when I return". The horse was ageing and it was feared he would suffer during the coming winter months. Harry Eastwood did as his boss asked and put the horse down before the Feehans returned. Mountain God was buried at the side of the track that led down to the beach.

Sidney Ferguson and his son Colin bought land jointly in Balnarring in the 1950s. It had been part of the property, Palmer's Hill, that had belonged to racing identity, S.O. Wood. Sid had once been a leading lightweight jockey, who rode both in Australia and overseas. He later turned to training horses and was based in Mentone. In 1952 he handed in his licence and retired "to potter about with a horse or two in the country." Col, like his father was an owner-trainer of race horses, having obtained his licence in 1937.
The two sold up in Mentone and moved to Balnarring Beach where they rested and spelled horses on their farm, Braeside. The beach location gave them the

opportunity to swim and work out horses at the beach. Ferguson's favourite horse, Chilperic, spent his final year at Braeside. It died at the age of twenty-three. A leading horse during the 1930s, it had won the Toorak Handicap at Caulfield during the 1933 Spring Racing Carnival. Chilperic was buried at Braeside, down 'on the flat'.

David Hains a highly successful financial trader in the business world bought 150 acres of rolling pastureland in Merricks North where he aimed to breed and train thoroughbreds. The property was named KIngston Park.
One of his most successful horses was Kingston Town which was born in 1976. It went on to become one of the racing-world 'greats'. As a yearling, Kingston Town did not excite much interest and failed to sell at auction. Hains kept the horse and sold an interest to his wife's father, Mr G. Monsbourgh. The horse first raced as a two-year-old and ran last. After it was gelded and sent for a spell, it was again raced and this time it won convincingly. Trained by Tommy Smith, Kingston Town went on to win three Cox Plates and eleven other Group 1 races. It had thirty wins and seven places from forty-one starts. It was the first Australian race horse to win over $1,000,000 in prizemoney. In 1980 Kingstown Town was named Australian Race Horse of the Year and was inducted into the Australian Racing Hall of Fame.
At the end of his racing career Kingston Town was retired to the property in Merricks North. While romping with his paddock mate he severely injured his leg and when it could not be healed, the champion was euthanised. Some say Kingston Town was buried on the property.

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THE COLE FAMILY AS I KNEW THEM

by **Maree Shenton**

From the BDHS archives

The Cole family had farmed land at Merricks from the 1870s and by 1970 they owned about 1,800 acres. There were several houses on their property, the oldest being the original homestead, Minto. Larnoo was the home built for built for Tom Cole, his wife Elsie and their two daughters, Phyllis and Lorraine. It was the home of the two daughters throughout their lives.
Marie Shenton was the wife of Andrew Cole, the second cousin by adoption of Phyllis and Lorraine Cole. Here Maree gives her impressions of 'Larnoo' and the two sisters who called it home.)

Our family was always made feel welcome. At 'Larnoo', you waited to be invited, you didn't just call in. You would be told a certain day and a certain time, which was made by mutual agreement. The sisters were very hospitable.

Lorraine was the bright and bubbly one, Phyllis was quieter. Lorraine would welcome us enthusiastically and invite us to come in. She was always great with our boys, taking them for a ride on the tractor and showing them other things around the farm.



Lorraine {left) and Phyllis

There were cats everywhere inside the house. They would be on the table, on the chairs, everywhere. You couldn't prepare the food and leave it in one area as the cats would jump up and eat it.
Nothing was ever thrown away in the house. There was no waste. The pantry and refrigerator were filled with little packages, wrapped and labelled leftovers, so there was little room for anything else. One day, when Phyllis was out, we went through the refrigerator and put out the leftovers. When Phyllis returned, we proudly showed her what had been done. Instead of thanking us, she was annoyed and made us replace everything that had been thrown out because she hadn't asked us to do it.

The Cole property was settled in 1870 by George Cole and his bride, Elma Stuart who was the daughter of a sea captain. The Stuarts has a property at Tyabb. The wife, Elizabeth Stuart, was left on the property to manage things while Captain Stuart continued to sail abroad. George Cole died young – in his early 50s. His son, Tom Cole, also died young.



Larnoo

Tom had married Elsie Biven and 'Larnoo' was their home. After the death of Tom, Elsie and her daughters continued to run the property. Lorraine did the outside work; Phyllis ran the house.

Both Lorraine and Phyllis were very musical. Their grandmother, Elizabeth, had been musical. Phyllis played the organ at church. She was also very involved with the church's annual flower show. Both the 'girls' had been schooled at home. At 'Larnoo' everything was kept. They had a bird at one time, that was

kept in a cage by the door. The bird had died but the cage was kept in the same place.

The girls were not allowed to have boyfriends. A young man came calling on Lorrane at one time but Elsie used to always sit between them. It is said that it was in her will that if either married, they would lose 'Larnoo'. The girls were once asked if they had boyfriends. Elsie's rejoinder, before either could answer, was: "They have me. Why would they need a boyfriend?"

When it was Elsie's 80th birthday Andrew and I were not able to go to the function. Lorraine wrote us a letter, describing in detail what had happened at the party.



Elsie (right) at her 80th birthday celebration

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Hagger's houses

During the 1920s- 30s the name of Arthur Hagger was well-known at Balnarring Beach. Hagger was the owner of several houses which he rented out to holiday-makers.
Arthur Hagger had been born in 1868 and grew up in Eaglehawk, Bendigo where he trained to be a carpenter. While still a youth he escaped serious injury in a construction accident that killed another worker.

In 1922 Hagger bought several blocks of land at Tulum (Balnarring Beach) from Lewis Berryman, one of the early buyers when Tulum lots were first offered for sale before World War 1. Two of the blocks fronted what is today known as Library Road. The third was the corner block with today's Masonsmith Road and the fourth was the adjoining block along Masonsmith Road. Both roads were then known simply as Government Road. Hagger built a series of basic weatherboard houses, one on each of the lots.

In 1924 the census shows he was living in Tulum. The house in which he lived – known as Hagger's Hut - was at No. 9 (on Library Road)
When Gus Hansen came to live at Balnarring Beach he was staying in Hagger's Hut with Arthur Hagger. The two of them were praised in the local newspaper for making picnic tables and seats for the foreshore.

In 1927 Hagger married Ada Muriel Booth and the couple relocated to Dandenong in 1931. Hansen, a fisherman, continued to live in the house at Number 9. It was also known as The Kipsie (an Australian slang word meaning a hut). In the 1940s it was called the Upside-Down House by the local children. A second building stood at the rear of the block. This was a shed used by Hagger, and referred to as "Hagger's shed".



Gus Hansen at The Kipsie

The other three houses were leased out to holiday-makers throughout the year. It has been said that Hansen kept an eye on the other houses when Hagger wasn't there, an unofficial caretaker. Jim Cashen also lived for a time with Gus in the Kipsie.
In the late 1930s Arthur and his wife had moved to Mildura where Hagger's occupation is given as storekeeper. His death occurred in Mildura in 1942.



The middle house, (number 11), was briefly owned by Jim Cashen, then in 1944 it was bought by Wally Turner. Turner was either a single man or widower who had retired to Tulum from Hawthorn.

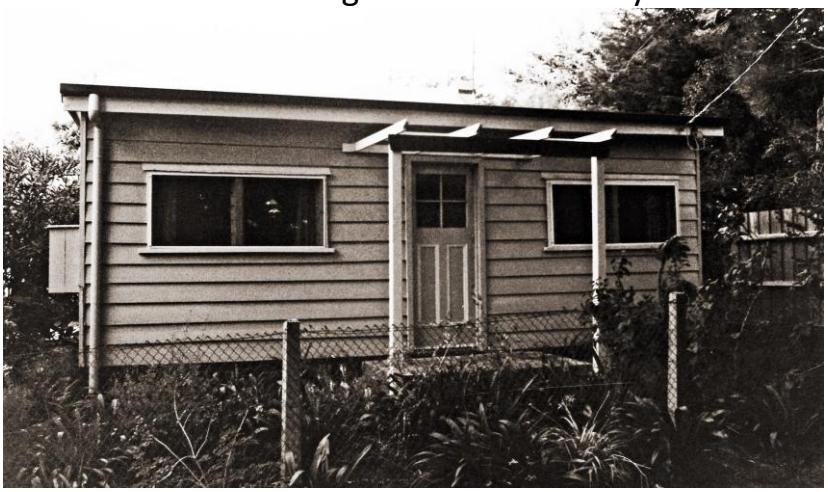
The Haselgrove family holidaying at no 11. c 1940

In the early 1950s the Shire of Flinders Library was expanding its services by setting up lending libraries in buildings throughout the shire. Some were in purpose-built shared buildings; some a dedicated space in a store and at Tulum, Wally Turner offered the use of a room in his home. Books were brought from the shire's central library and changed around periodically. The house became known as The Library. Over time, it became the Old Library, a name by which it is still known. The government road was changed to 'Library Road'. Turner died in 1969 and the house was sold the following year. A

period of renovation followed but the basic lines of the original building were kept.

The land on the corner was excised from the other properties in 1940 and the cottage on it bought by Wilfred Mason Smith and his wife, Lyn. Wilfred Mason Smith, a retired bank manager was very involved with a number of charities. He died in 1945 and his wife continued to live there for a number of years. Lyn Mason Smith asked if the street could be named after her husband and government road became Mason Smith Road, now written as one word. The original cottage was demolished in the early 1970s.

The fourth Hagger-built house was sold to the Edwards family. May Edwards bought the cottage while her husband was in the army during World War 2. She set about making it into their family home. Word has it that she paid £1 a week rent for the house and when £200 had been paid, the house was theirs. Later May ran a café from a log cabin structure at the front of her property where she sold Devonshire teas and soft drinks.



The Edwards' former house.

The two houses fronting Masonsmith Road, (nos. 7 and 9) had at one time been zoned commercial, but this was altered when one of the later owners of the corner house put forward a plan to turn the house into a fast-food establishment with fish and chips to be sold from a side window. Opposition from neighbouring property owners saw the zoning altered in 1973 to residential.

Of the four houses, two of them, the Edwards' house and the Old Library still have a resemblance to the original houses that had been built c 1922. They are among the oldest houses in Balnarring Beach.

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A MIGRANT'S ANSWER ON CRIME

(*Information from Trove newspapers and Balnarring Byways vol 3 "Take it From Here" written by Bert Heitsch)*

The Sun-News Pictorial, Saturday 16 December 1950

To the editor
Sir –
Thank you or the article, MIgrants and the Law in last Tuesday's Sun
There are outlaws in every nation, and unfortunately quite a few New Australians have been involved in crimes here. But the majority of us are sincerely doing our best in our new country. We are happy to have the opportunity to live a normal life again and we really want to become good citizens.

We are doubly grateful as your article is the first in our experience.
When living in Germany, we always found at the end of a criminal report the sentence: 'The person committing the crime is not known but spoke in a foreign accent'. And in most cases, when you follow up the case, the criminal turned out to be a pure German with no foreign relations. But there was no-one who stood up for us.
Yours etc.
Mrs G.G. PICHLER
(Immigrant Centre, Somers)

Mrs Pichler's letter was prompted by the editorial in the Sun Editorial of that week's Tuesday edition. It had published official figures to correct the impression that an unduly large number of New Australians were lawbreakers. The Sun pointed out that "names of foreign offenders leap to the eye from the printed page when British names escape notice." It added, the official figures given should restore perspective.



Gertrud Pichler was newly arrived in Australia. She and her husband, Richard, had sailed aboard the *Fairsea* from Bremen, Germany, bound for Melbourne as post-World War 2 migrants.

En route to Australia

Gertrud was German-born, Ryszard (Richard) had been born in Poland to Austrian parents. They had married not long before they left Germany. On arrival in Melbourne, they were placed at the migrant centre at Somers.

The Pichlers liked the area and looked to establish themselves somewhere nearby. They bought five acres in Balnarring from Eric Rundle who owned Warrawee and, initially, were caretaking the remaining five acres of the lot offered for sale. They built their home and set up a chicken farm. This later expanded into a shop sited closer to the road, where they prepared and sold roasted chickens. Their chicken bar became a very popular venue for take-away food throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

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THE ROTUNDA at BALNARRING BEACH

In 2026 the picnic rotunda at Balnarring Beach was given a new look. It was painted white and the roofing material replaced by panels that allow the light to come through, making the inside of the structure much brighter. As well, the old barbecues have been replaced, new picnic tables and benches provided and a series of attractive wall panels put on show. These explain different features of Balnarring Beach under the headings The Indigenous People, White Settlement, Shore-nesting birds, Dolphins, and, Horses on Balnarring Beach.

The Rotunda had been erected c 1980
In November, 1977 the Balnarring District Progress Association sent a letter to the Hastings Shire requesting that the shelter shed that formerly occupied this site be renovated. It pointed out that the wooden structure had stood for many years and that “its present state detracts considerably from visitors’ first impression of the beach”. A fresh coat of paint was recommended.

The wooden shelter shed referred to had been erected in the 1930s.

In January 1978 a more ambitious request was made. The committee asked Council to “prepare a specification for and supervise the construction of a vandal-proof Tourist Shelter to replace the shelter shed’. The structure that the committee had in mind would accommodate tables for up to 150 people and be equipped with either a gas or electric barbecues, a concealed rubbish bin area and a washing up sink with tap water. Lighting was also requested. The total estimated coast is given at $30,000

The plan for the proposed structure was an octagon with electric barbecues at its centre. It should be of brick, of matching colour to nearby features. Later amendments included that the three sides facing the road should be left open and that the openings on the other five sides of the octagon should not be glazed. The roof was to be brown Colorbond and fitted with a skylight over the BBQ which was to be operated by a coin-in-the-slot attachment.
The area around the shelter should be landscaped.
The dimensions of the proposed Tourist Shelter were later scaled down to keep the cost within the allotted amount.
The building went ahead. The brownish bricks used were similar colour to the new brick façade on the store and the shelter had three sides open to the road with high oblong window openings in the other walls.
The brown toned building proved to be dark inside and not long after it was opened for use, alterations were made to it. Bricks were taken from two other windows to enlarge the unglazed window space. The beach side of the structure still had the high, narrow windows.

In November 1980 a new toilet block was constructed at Balnarring Beach and was ready to use by late December. The builder was local builder, Mr Rob Whall. The toilet block complemented the Rotunda in materials and colour.



The rotunda before recent renovations

(*Information from the minute books of the Balnarring Beach Foreshore Committee)*

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You are invited to attend

the Annual General Meeting of the

Balnarring & District Historical Society

on Thursday, June 11th, 2026

at the Balnarring Hall.

1.15 p.m. for 1.30 p.m. start