



USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
MECHANICS' INSTITUTES OF VICTORIA INC.

Newsletter No 25 – Summer 2011

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MIV NEWS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria Annual general meeting was held last November at the Melbourne Athenaeum. Elections for office bearers and committee members were held at the AGM and the new office bearers and committee are listed below.

President: Mr Peter Pereyra
ppereyra@buildingcommission.com.au

Vice President: Ms Jill Bartholomeusz
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Ms Bronwyn Lowden
bronlowden@hotmail.com

Mr Bruce Stubbs
brucestubbs@ymail.com

(Cont. p. 2)



MIV Committee members are pictured above busily at work at the 2010 AGM. Left to right, are Luke Mitchell Peter Peryra, Graeme Dudley, Corinne Brewis, Judith Dwyer, Wallace Kirsop, Donald Barker, Frank Hurley and Tim McKenna.

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MIV Sub-Committees (as at January 2011):

MIRC Sub-Committee:

Peter Pereyra, Judith Dwyer, Linda Aspinall, Tim McKenna, Wallace Kirsop, Don Barker.

Conference Organisers:

Peter Pereyra, Judith Dwyer, Jill Bartholomeusz, Bronwyn Lowden.

At the May committee meeting of MIV, a decision was taken to join with the Australian and New Zealand History of Education

Society (ANZHES) and RMIT University to hold a library history conference in December 2012. This conference builds on the momentum generated from the highly successful 2009 library history conference which MIV jointly organised with the Centre for the Book at Monash University.

In further MIV news, the next committee meeting is to be held at the Ballarat Mechanics' Institute on Saturday 14 May 2011 and will feature a guest speaker.

MIRC REPORT

The Scanning Project continues with Anne Palamountains expert scanning of the records of mechanics institutes. In the last six months records from institutes at Whorouly (see photograph on cover), Narre Warren, Buxton and Trentham have been collected. Thanks are extended to Donald Barker and Corinne Brewis for their assistance in the collection and return of records.

There are good reasons why mechanics' institutes should have their records scanned. Firstly, it preserves original records from damage and gives researchers access to the scanned images. Secondly, scanning can enhance a website

with images highlighting some aspect an institute's history. Thirdly, old records are not only of interest to historians, but also to family history researchers. Family historians can investigate the interests and activities of their ancestors: did they belong to the mechanics institute? Did they use the library? Did they contribute to the rebuilding fund? These are just some of the questions that may be answered from your records.

For an interesting story that resulted from the scanning of the Berwick Mechanics Institute records, search for 'Quietly Club Berwick' on Google, and look at the Casey Cardinia links to our past blog.

NEWS HEADLINES

GRANTS

Janette Hodgson has provided the following information on the various grants that may be available to mechanics' institutes.

The following guide provides links to selected sources of Commonwealth and Victorian financial assistance to community groups. It also provides a selection of links to non-government organisations which provide community grants.

Commonwealth Government Grants

A guide to grants available from

Commonwealth Government agencies can be found through GrantsLINK. GrantsLINK is a comprehensive website maintained by the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government offering direct links to existing information on Commonwealth Government grants programs. GrantsLINK makes it easier to find suitable and relevant grants for community projects from the many Commonwealth grants that are available. The site can be browsed by subject, agency

or grants name or searched by key word. GrantsLINK also offers advice on finding the best source of funding and on writing application forms.

The Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts administers a range of grants and funds for artistic, cultural and heritage activities and events in Australia.

The Community Portal provides information for community groups in Australia including a selection of links to sources of grants and funding.

The Australia Council's Arts Funding Guide provides an overview of their funding programs and other forms of support for the arts in Australia.

Victoria

The Department of Planning and Community Development's Grants Finder lists a large number of Victorian government grants by area of interest and by program. Grants are available for a wide range of groups and projects including volunteers, sporting groups, community infrastructure and multicultural events. The Grants Information Line (phone 1300 366 356) staffed by Information Victoria can provide general information about programs and funding.

Arts Victoria provides funding for individuals and arts organisations.

Local History Grants administered by the Public Record Office Victoria.

Sport and Recreation Victoria funding.

Heritage Grants to support the maintenance, use and education of heritage sites in the state.

The Victorian Multicultural Commission provides community grants.

Non-Government Organisations

ANZ Trustees provides a listing of a wide number of funds and foundations providing grants

Australia's Open Garden Scheme provides grants for garden-related community projects.

Australian Ethical Investment Scheme provides grants to community groups annually.

Commonwealth Bank Staff Community Fund Local Grants Program aims specifically to assist community groups with projects that improve the health and well being of children and young people nationally.

The Community Enterprise Foundation is the philanthropic arm of the Bendigo and Adelaide Bank Group.

Fosters Community Grants for specific projects run by community groups and charities.

The Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal aims to take a leadership role in assisting regional, rural and remote communities to respond to social, cultural and economic change. The FRRR administers a number of funding programs and grants.

The Givewell site provides a comprehensive database of Australian charities, giving strategies, bequests, charitable trusts and corporate philanthropy, as well as links to charities and related sites.

Landcare Community Grants are funded in partnership with Australia Post and provide grants for projects aimed at improving the environment.

Macquarie Group Foundation supports groups and activities in Australia and overseas.

The Myer Foundation and The Sidney Myer Fund

Optus Connecting Communities Grants Program provides grants to organisations to help

reduce social isolation and to reconnect disengaged youth.

Perpetual Trustees Australia

Peter Brock Foundation provides funding and support for community groups and organisations with a focus on welfare services, social issues and community programs.

The Reichstein Foundation funds projects aimed at assisting disadvantaged communities.

The Rockefeller Foundation

The Telstra Foundation provides community development grants for projects particularly aimed at children and young people. They also provide assistance through their Indigenous

Community Development program and Social Innovation Grants.

Wesfarmers makes contributions to community-benefiting activities through its corporate office and through subsidiary businesses

Woolworths provides support to local community organisations and charities.

A number of commercial enterprises provide assistance and advice via subscription services to databases and printed materials. These include:

GrantsearchAustralia who publish the

Grants Register.

Easygrants newsletter published by ourcommunity.com.au.

Fund Base provides a database of government, philanthropic and corporate grants and funding programs.

Pathways Australia provides a database of corporate and government fundraising opportunities for not-for-profit organisations.

Philanthropy Australia publishes the Australian Directory of Philanthropy .

PILCH

The Public Interest Law Clearing House (Vic) Inc. (PILCH) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation which is committed to furthering the public interest, improving access to justice and protecting human

rights. PILCH does this by facilitating pro bono legal services to Victorian individuals and organisations in need, and by undertaking law reform, policy work and legal education.

HERITAGE GRANTS TO MECHANICS INSTITUTES

The following mechanics' institutes were beneficiaries of Victoria's heritage grants program funded projects 2010-11.

Clunes, Former Free Lending Library. \$40,000 for structural repairs

Talbot Free Library. \$27,000 for urgent repairs to brick walls

Wallan, Mechanics Institute/Public Hall \$70,000 for repair works to the roof, gutters, downpipes, weatherboards and brick walls and restore early paint scheme.

AROUND THE INSTITUTES

ACHERON MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The following report is from the Acheron Mechanics' Institute Newsletter and demonstrates the extent of community support and commitment enjoyed by that institute.

Thanks to all the volunteers who arrived at the Hall after the August annual dinner and made the 'clean up task' much easier this year. Our major project this year is to see the Hall exterior repainted, which needs doing every 8 to 10 years. The Acheron Hall committee has applied to the Murrindindi Shire Council for a grant to help pay for the painting. We have realistic expectations that our application will be successful. The

bulk of the funding will come from our reserves.

Our dinner was a great success. The meal provided for us by Allan, Lisa and staff was delicious. Even though the evening was not strictly speaking a fund raiser we managed to make \$2000 with the raffle and auction. Everyone seemed to have a great night.

ARTHURS CREEK MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

A grant from the Nillumbik Shire has allowed for the construction of a new kitchen. A commercial dishwasher and pie warmer have also been purchased. The popular annual garden walk was held on Sunday 14 November accompanied by the

usual raffle.

BERWICK MECHANICS' INSTITUTE & FREE LIBRARY

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 9th March commencing at 4.30 pm at the Berwick RSL Hall. Our building is not large enough nor has the facilities to cater for the fifty or so members and guests who are expected to attend. The guest speaker at the AGM will be John Wells, local historian and author. All MIV members are welcome to attend.

New library manager Lyn Wyatt has implemented some changes, including new book ends for the shelving. The Heritage Subcommittee are in the process of cataloguing some of book stock on to the Libraries Australia databank. We are also investigating low cost methods to have interviews made years ago by Pam Darling of some senior Berwick citizens recorded on audio cassette to be transcribed first to disc and then to paper. A grant application to Public Records Office Victoria was sent last November to assist fund this worthy project. We are awaiting a reply.

Funding of Berwick MI's operations has become a concern, as the cost of our operations again continues to exceed our income. Last year we withdrew funds from our Term Deposit to overcome a shortfall. We are scheduled to have a review of funding issues with officers from the City of Casey. We are hopeful that the financial burden of the recent flooding problems within the city does not prevent a substantial increase to our grant application. The City of Casey has been a strong supporter of Berwick MI's activities over many years. The BMIFL is also investigating ways to celebrate its 150th anniversary which falls in October 2012.

Contributed by Graham Hughes

FAWCETT

The official re-opening of the Fawcett Mechanics' Institute hall after restoration will take place on Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th May between 10.00am and 4.00pm. The opening ceremony will be at 2pm on the Saturday. The event will feature displays of arts, crafts and

photography as well as a white elephant sale. A commemorative booklet has been published and will be available for sale. For further details contact Sam on 5772 3227.

MALMSBURY MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The Malmsbury Historical Society meets in the Malmsbury Mechanics' Institute and is open for research enquiries between 9am and 2pm on Tuesdays (Except school holidays). They are an active society as demonstrated by the following update on the Malmsbury mechanics' institute library collection which has been provided by Sue Walter.

In an earlier issue of "Useful Knowledge" (Winter 2008) I highlighted some interesting aspects of the remnant library of the Malmsbury Mechanics Institute (MMI). The article created a bit of interest in the old re-bound books with a fabric covering that had commercial advertising logos on them. I conjectured that it was a deliberate act, as opposed to simply using 'off-cut' fabric, but with virtually no examples of similar binding in other MI libraries it was still a guess.

Since 2008 our library catalogue, borrowings record and minute book from the 1890s – our only known surviving examples of such records – have been scanned by MIV and copies made available for the MIRC. It was during a recent delve into the minute book while researching a former MMI member (Edward Stone who was a Malmsbury Mayor and whose name is on the foundation stone of the MMI Federal Hall) that an answer to the rebound books was found.

The 1890s was an interesting time for the MMI. The Minute book (July 1892-Jan 1896) shows they were regularly buying new books, lecture were being held, old newspapers were being sold for scrap paper, female members were discussed, a debating society was formed and the building was being leased out to other groups and for fundraising (dancing, cricket club, lodges). Catalogues were requested and books were being ordered from George Robertson & Co., A. J. Smith

& Co., Melville Mullen & Slade, Coles Book Arcade and Mr Stephens in Kyneton, plus cheap or second-hand editions from Kenyon in Richmond. On one occasion the committee decided that no more than 3 shillings and 6 pence should be spent on any one book and on another occasion Dr Harry Main privately purchased some 217 books from Kenyon for only £4 which he then sold to the institute.

In August 1895, the minutes show that the Secretary was ordered to “write to Robert Harper & Co. Melbourne to enquire their conditions for binding”, hinting at an earlier letter that had been received but details not apparently recorded in the minutes. Next month Dr Main moved that the “offer made by Robert Harper and Co. be accepted”. It was seconded by Mr Morris and carried. By November 1895 Robert Harper & Co. had written back “informing the committee that they are prepared to receive a number of books from them and as agreed will bind the same free of cost for the right of advertising on the cover.” Dr Main moved that the “president and secretary select 200 books and forward them to Harper & Co.” No list of what was sent appears to be recorded, but the minutes of December 1895 show that the committee had spent 7 shillings and 10 pence “for freight for 2 boxes of books to R Harper & Co. for rebinding and advertising on same.”

These minuted items would indicate conclusive proof that the books were rebound and advertising printed on them deliberately, for the mutual benefit of both MMI and Robert Harper and Co.

Now that we have confirmed dates of when this offer was being made, I would like to hear from any other MI that has surviving minute books from the 1890s that show that other institutes were offered the same deal to see whether the offer was made to, and accepted by, Institutes other than Malmsbury, and/or has surviving library books bound the same way.

In an effort to determine the links between Robert Harper and Mechanics Institutes, a quick search of the digital Argus online (National Library of Australia), Robert Harper M.L.A. (for east Bourke) chaired a meeting of the

Australian Deposit and Mortgage Bank in the Athenaeum upper hall in Melbourne in August 1894 [*The Argus* 16/8/1894 page 3] and at their Annual meeting there in February 1895 [*The Argus* 28/2/1895 pg 7], however no public advertisement from Jan 1895 through to September 1895 for an offer to rebind books was found. There is, however an interesting report in the Argus in August 1895 where a proposal in State Parliament for introducing a tax on all imported books bound in leather, to try and create employment for unemployed book binders in Victoria, was rejected [*The Argus* 16/8/1895 page 3]. Is this proposal linked to Harper’s free binding offer?

Susan Walter Research Co-Ordinator
Malmsbury Historical Society Inc.
(malmsburyhistorical@gmail.com)

MELBOURNE ATHENAEUM

On Wednesday 16th February, The Melbourne Athenaeum presented an exhibition of historic images of the Athenaeum building. The exhibition was well attended and was launched by Professor Geoffrey Blainey AC.

The Ambassador’s of Melbourne are volunteers who you might see in the city on all the major street corners. They wear distinctive red uniforms and offer assistance with directions, public transport enquiries, events, and general questions about Melbourne. City Ambassadors can be mainly found along Swanston Street at corners such as Flinders Street and Bourke Street.

The Collins Street Precinct Group (CSPG) arranged a street walk for the Ambassador’s on 23rd November, and



part of that street walk was a visit to the Melbourne Athenaeum Library. The group are pictured below at the library.

MIA MIA MECHANICS INSTITUTE

The Mia Mia Mechanics Institute has received a grant of \$5000 in the latest round of the City of Greater Bendigo community grants for maintenance of hall and grounds.

NEERIM JUNCTION MECHANICS INSTITUTE

The Neerim Junction Mechanics Institute usage has increased greatly in the past year. It was with enthusiasm that the Function at the Junction was revived this year with a few of the 'oldies' and a new cast of up and coming dancers and performers. The highlight being excerpts from Jersey Boys and the ever popular magician.

The monthly book swap which has running for a year now has been popular. The cold winter months saw people huddling beside their fires and sometimes venturing out to the book swap. May was the morning tea for breast cancer with the book swap and attracted a good crowd.

A bonus this year has been yoga classes twice a week in the foyer. A lot of new people have visited the hall.

It is with regret that we have not had the Blue Light Ride this year which has raised a lot of money for the district plus engendered a real sense of community spirit. The powers that be said NO GO maybe next year!

*Faye Bransgrove
2963 Main Neerim Road,
Neerim Junction 3832
Ph 03 5628 4285.*

PRAHRAN MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

The PMI is currently in the process of purchasing a 2 storey building at 39 St Edmonds Rd, Prahran, just around the corner from our present building at 140 High Street. Settlement date will hopefully be 28th February.

The ground floor contains space for nine car parks and office space. The office space will be rented out to provide income for the PMI. There will be approx. 500 square

metres of space available on the top floor which should allow us to have a lecture hall / theatre as well as a lot more space for the library. There will also be space for our resident organisations: the Mechanics' Institutes Resource Centre, Cinema and Theatre Historical Society archives, Australian Railway Historical Society library and Prahran Historical and Arts Society.

We will probably not move into the building for some time as we have to install a lift and fit the building out as a library. We have until December 2014 to vacate the High Street building.

Upcoming event at the PMI: Wednesday 16 March evening lecture: Jenny Davies on *Beyond the facade: Flinders Street, More Than Just a Railway Station.*

*Tim McKenna
Secretary Librarian.*

TALLAROOK MECHANICS INSTITUTE

October last was comedy month at the Tallarook Mechanics' Institute featuring Damien Callinan and Circus Trick and Tease. His show is a partly biographical account of Damian's journey to the microphone via the dance floor. Along the way he delivers his observations on everything from wedding dance floor behaviour to the antidote to dance for Australian men ... beer. It's not all talk. Damian takes to the dance floor with a series of highly choreographed tributes to everything from 80's dancing to suspiciously funded fringe movement.

Circus Trick Tease is a raunchy, raucous & entertaining collection of misfits including a maladjusted strongman, his neurotic female compatriot & their international star. Together they play out their chaotic roles in dazzling display of acrobatics, precarious balances and gratuitous headstands.

On a more prosaic note the popular Farmers Markets that are a regular feature at the institute have resumed and the first one for 2011 was held on the 6th of February. Details of the farmers markets can be found at www.tallarookfarmersmarket.com.au

WALHALLA MECHANICS INSTITUTE AND LIBRARY

The Board has been able to carry out an initial assessment of the library collection held at the Mechanics. One of the surprising finds in this process was the discovery of a catalogue of the collection as it was in the 1890's. Through the good works of many in the community, there is a substantial collection of books which have the Mechanics library details or stamp pasted inside and this allows us to determine which books were from the actual library collection itself rather than donations after the rebuilding of the Mechanics in 1988. The collection has considerable historic merit and further work is required to sort through the books. Categories of books which you would assume to be part of such a library are almost non-existent such as technical books of the period. These were an important part of the policy of Mechanic's libraries in providing an education for their readers on matters relevant to the local community such as mining or farming. However, in the meantime, the Board has adopted a policy which has three aims. Firstly in the long term we aim to restock the collection with books that it would have held in the heyday of Walhalla. This will be a slow process and may cost money but over the years it could be successfully undertaken. Secondly we would like to build a collection of books published about Walhalla or by Walhalla people. Thirdly we plan to remove the books that were placed in the library but which are out of character with the period in which the library operated. Eventually we would like to see the library open on busy days in the Walhalla calendar so that people can see what role the library would have played in the history of the town and appreciate the collection held there.

WARRANTYTE MECHANICS INSTITUTE & ARTS ASSOCIATION

Thanks to the tremendous grant made by the Bendigo Bank, our old Hall enjoyed major renovations earlier this year, with a new foyer and toilets, a rainwater tank

and a rear deck. But the money ran out, as money does, and several important works could not be completed; the Pottery Studio, which has not seen a lot of love, in a building sense, since its Fire Station days, badly needs a toilet and some air conditioning; the Hall is waiting for various repairs and upgrades including hand-rails, verandah posts and kitchen re-flooring. So, in fine Warrandyte tradition, a Hall Building Fund has been established with a target of \$25,000. The Bank, bless their little community socks, looks like pitching in again, but a serious program of fund-raising is planned over the next - well, how ever long it takes!

First up, on 27 November, was a night of songs, sketches and frivolity to be MCD by old Follies master of mayhem, Martin Walker. All the favourite faces will be on stage, plus a few even more professional contributors including blues/folk headliner Liz Stringer, long-time stalwart of the Australian folk scene, Graham Dodsworth, guitarist extraordinaire Mark Rigoni and songbird from PIP, Angeline Thompson. The format was a 'Follies cabaret style' night (BYO food & drinks), with seating limited to 120 lucky people. There was also be the odd raffle thanks to some extraordinary offerings from group members and local traders.

The painting, pottery and arts groups have been active but the Warrandyte Theatre Company's production of Pig Iron People was a major effort. It is reviewed below by David Creedon

Pig Iron People by John Doyle is historically significant for a number of reasons: It is the first amateur production, and only the second production (amateur or professional) ever of this play. One of the main characters is a 1962 Valiant. An extraordinarily high percentage of the male actors (three out of four) are named David (no complaints from me). Of course, the punters who forsake the comfort of the couch and the formulaic familiarities of The Collectors or The Bill on a Friday or Saturday night care little for such trivia. In exchange for their money and, more importantly, their time, they are looking to be entertained and/

or challenged. And this play is hugely entertaining and challenging. Entertaining because the pig-iron people, the four older Australian residents of Liberal Street, are spectacularly uninhibited, expressing without embarrassment what they think on matters both intimate and banal (my most memorable line: Jack tells Janette that Claude's scungy old chamois has fresher skin than her) – our era of 40 square homes and Facebook is not conducive to such street theatre. Entertaining also because the writing does not just tell a story; it is also pleasurable and poetic – for example, one character talks about love's first blush, then another sings "There's a kind of hush all over the world", which segues into Claude's anecdote about knocking over the drummer of Herman's Hermits, "the most famous bloke I ever hit ...in a car". I attended two performances, and I am sure even more subtleties would have been revealed if I'd attended a third. The play is challenging because it is an unashamedly partisan political satire, contending that the much vaunted "broad church" of the Liberal

Party contains a very nasty authoritarian, even fascist, element that lurks behind and manipulates the salt of the earth "Howard battlers", who are themselves shown to be pretty narrow-minded – if you're unwilling to free up a parking space, you're not likely to have much sympathy for boat people. Challenging also because it is so much more than a satire – the pig iron people, although initially apparently amusing stereotypes, whom it is easy to look down on, are gradually revealed to be uniquely and tragically individual. The performances are all excellent. David von Howell is grotesquely brutal as the revolting Kurt. Bill Connolly and Noelene Cooper are hilarious and touching as the gold-hearted Claude and Rosie. Lisa Upson and David Tynan are heartbreaking as Janette and Jack trapped in a loveless marriage, whose lives would have been so different if they'd been born a generation later. Angeline Thompson and David Sweeney are vulnerable and complex as the jaded soapie star and damaged jingle writer.

The editor would be pleased to receive reports from members relating to happenings and activities at their mechanics' institute or hall.

Items of interest could include historical snippets, meeting reports, news of functions or events held or grants received and improvements made. Contact Donald Barker at donhel14@bigpond.net.au or telephone 03-9762-4149

HISTORY PAGE

Research by Brian Foley into the rate free status of mechanics' institutes also reveals some

While looking for acts that relate to specific mechanics' institutes I came across an item in the Argus of Saturday 21 Feb 1931. The article which was accessed via the NLA Trove web site (due to the poor image I cannot attach it) relates to the Yarrowonga Mechanics Institute and Free Library and a ruling by the Chief Justice Sir William Irvine as to whether R E Thompson who was Secretary of the Yarrowonga Mechanics' Institute could be a councillor of the local Shire. Thompson stated that

interesting insights into the Victorian voting franchise and local politics in the 1930s.

the Athenaeum Hall was used for raising revenue for various purposes so it was rateable under the Local Government Act. In 1920 the Shire Secretary had added the property to the list of rateable properties and the institute secretary added to the list of voters. His Honour ruled that because the land was reserved for the purpose of a 'Mechanics Institute' and therefore could not be rateable, it followed that Thompson could not be a councillor.

Still on Yarrowonga. The 1930

Yarrowonga Land Act has a most interesting clause: That the Shire erect a municipal building which would include space for a book room and public reading room for the Yarrowonga MI & FL use. Also that council provide an annual grant

of 140 pounds to the Institute annually. It would be interesting to get a copy of the court ruling and if the 140 pounds is still being paid?

Brian Foley

A HISTORY OF DOON'S MECHANICS' INSTITUTE AND BONNIE DOON'S FREE LIBRARY

In January 1899 a Mechanics Institute hall was officially opened by Councillor Finkelstein on the corner of Wilson and Main Streets in Doon. The township had been named by its Surveyor, John Hardy in 1865 and would continue with this name until the completion of the Yea-Mansfield section of the railway in 1891. In his speech at the opening, Councillor Finkelstein said that the people of Doon deserved great credit for the successful effort they had made in erecting so imposing a structure which, being a public hall and open to all was in effect a national hall. His speech was followed by a grand ball and supper. Approximately seventy people attended with festivities continuing until daylight. The Mansfield Courier of 28th January 1899 reported that the event was a brilliant affair with the ladies displaying some very fine costumes. The reporter believed that the funds of the institution would be greatly augmented by the takings collected at the door prior to the event.

At Christmas 2009 the building was opened again, this time as a café and bakery named Les Amis in Bon Crescent, Bonnie Doon. In its 110 years the original Mechanics Institute has had an eventful life.

In April 1902 a meeting was held in the hall for the purpose of forming a public library. It was decided that subscriptions would be 1/6d a quarter and the librarian would be paid 1/- per hour. The Mechanics Institute Free Library continued until the building was offered for auction on 10th May 1929 at the Mansfield Sale Yards on account of the trustees. Once the original premises were sold, plans were drawn up for the building of a new library in Bonnie Doon on a block specially reserved for the purpose. It was decided that the books

held in the old building would be moved to the new library on its completion.

In July 1929, two months after it was offered for sale, the original Mechanics Institute was sold to Mr. Evan Evans who renovated it for use as a general store. In its early years as a shop, three local men were involved in the enterprise, Evan Evans, Tom Maxwell and Alf Mitchell. The premises were variously known as Evan Evans and Son, Maxwell and Evans and Mitchell and Evans. Mr. Evans was in charge of the bakery and general goods and Mr. Mitchell ran the butchers shop. The "big shop" continued in this way until its sale in 1947.

Maurice and Leon Bourke bought the store on 21st July 1947. They continued to run it as a country general store selling everything required, under the name Mitchell and Evans with Leon's brother, Vincent Rice running the butchery. In 1950 the Bourkes took over the Post Office when it was automated, also including it in their shop.

The original Goulburn Delatite water storage reservoir scheme was adopted in 1912 by the State Ministry but after World War II it was suggested that the size of the existing reservoir – Sugarloaf – should be increased for irrigation purposes by raising the dam wall an extra hundred feet. After some protests from local landowners, the Water Commission eventually decided that the enlargement of the reservoir would proceed and work would be completed by 1954. The Commission had already decided that this would involve moving the town, including the War Memorial, diverting the railway, building new bridges and constructing another main road on higher ground behind the cemetery. As much as possible of the old town was moved to



Mechanics Institute

The Mechanics Institute in its original position in old Bonnie Doon prior to its sale in 1931.

its current position on higher ground in 1954/1955.

By mid 1955 steady rainfall had soaked the area and the water in the new Lake Eildon was rising much faster than expected. Amongst the buildings moved were two-thirds of Mitchell and Evans general store and the 'new' library which had been opened by Councillor Friday in 1931. The two buildings were sited adjacent to each other in Bon Crescent close to the new main road through Bonnie Doon.

The Bourkes continued to operate the store under their own name until 1970, adding an extension to the southern side in Bon Crescent and installing petrol bowsers.

After 1970 the shop had a succession of owners. Pirri and Frank Bondy took possession of the premises two weeks before Easter in 1970 and opened a restaurant in the newer section while the old hall remained as a general store. Around 2000 antiques were also sold in part of the premises. In 2008 the current owner bought the old building and started another transformation, opening part of it as a French style café/bakery named Les Amis at Christmas 2009.

The history of the newly completed Free Library commences with its opening being recorded in the Mansfield Courier of 27th February 1931. The official opening had taken place on the previous Saturday and in his speech Councillor Friday paid tribute to the energy and interest of Mr. M. Kennedy by whose efforts the library was

chiefly achieved. Councillor Friday said that the building was a neat and ornamental addition to the town, besides serving a useful purpose in distributing knowledge. The newspaper report recorded that a very successful euchre tournament in aid of funds terminated a pleasant evening.

The only other hall in old Bonnie Doon was the Loyal Orange Lodge which had been destroyed by fire in 1942. In 1978 the Bonnie Doon Sporting Complex containing a large meeting room was built but between 1942 and 1978, the Free Library was the only available meeting room and was also used by a variety of groups. These included the Mansfield Hospital Auxiliary, Australian Red Cross Society, Infant Welfare Centre, weekly euchre games held on Tuesdays, table tennis, kitchen teas, travelling shows, plays and entertainments. Many fund raising fetes and bazaars were held there to raise funds to build and equip the new Sporting Complex Hall. In 2001 the Free Library was the venue for a final event before official closure – a display of the history of Bonnie Doon including the railway, the school and its gold mining days. The event also paid tribute to the young men of the district who left to fight in the First World War, many of whom did not return.

While the old Mechanics Institute now looks resplendent, the 'new' library has not fared so well. In 2010 it looks quite dilapidated and its outer covering of asbestos cement sheet is of course a

health issue. However a successful grant application means the years of neglect are over and plans well advanced to remove the asbestos and move the building closer to the Bonnie Doon Community Centre. Repairs and restoration are expected to take some time to complete but now the original Mechanics Institute has another new life, we hope the Free Library will soon return to being a vibrant community space once more.

Corinne Brewis,
Bonnie Doon Community Group,
December 2010



Pictured above is the 'new' library.

REVIEWS

Jill Blee, Phil Roberts (eds) *Under Minerva's Gaze: 150 years at Ballarat Mechanics' Institute*. Ballarat Mechanics' Institute: Ballarat, 2010. ISBN 978-0-646-54258-4.

The Melbourne Athenaeum: A journal of the history of a Melbourne institution. Melbourne Athenaeum Incorporated: Melbourne, 2010. ISBN 978-0-646-52285-2

The Ballarat Mechanics' Institute and the Melbourne Athenaeum have both been the subject of past historical research. The MA thesis by Keith Davison *The Ballarat Mechanics' Institute 1859-1951 and the influence of Henry Cole Batten 1911-1951* and Nathan Spielvogel, *History of the Ballarat Mechanics' Institute 1859-1929* were important contributions amongst others. Similarly, on the occasion of the centenary of the institution, R.W.E. Wilmot wrote *Melbourne Athenaeum 1839-1939: History and records of the institution*. The early days of the Melbourne Athenaeum were examined in greater detail by Jill Eastwood in 'The Melbourne Mechanics' Institute: Its first thirty years' which was chapter three in *Pioneering culture: Mechanics' Institutes and schools of arts in Australia* edited by Philip Candy and John Laurent.

Both of these recent histories are collections of essays written by contributors

who have had a close involvement with the particular institute. The Ballarat history has chapters on the institute's architecture, theatre and library, school of design and the role played by women in the institute's life. The history of the institute is summarized in the first and penultimate chapters and the final chapter deals with the last 25 years, which have seen a revitalisation and expansion of the institute's activities.

The Athenaeum journal adopts a more personal and intimate style by recording the participation and involvement of eminent individuals in the life of the institution. These include playwright Ray Lawler, author Marcus Clarke, and journalist Edmund Finn (Garyowen). Five chapters are devoted to the contributions of various secretaries of the institute: Henry Fyshe Gisborne, the first secretary, and the long serving secretaries John Henry Curtis (1879-1909), R.W.E Wilmot (1909-1949) and Leslie Stephens (1949-1984). A further chapter is devoted to the architecture of the building.

These publications are valuable contributions to the growing literature on mechanics' institutes in Australia and they are also a testament to the longevity and resilience of both of these institutions.

Reviewed by Donald Barker