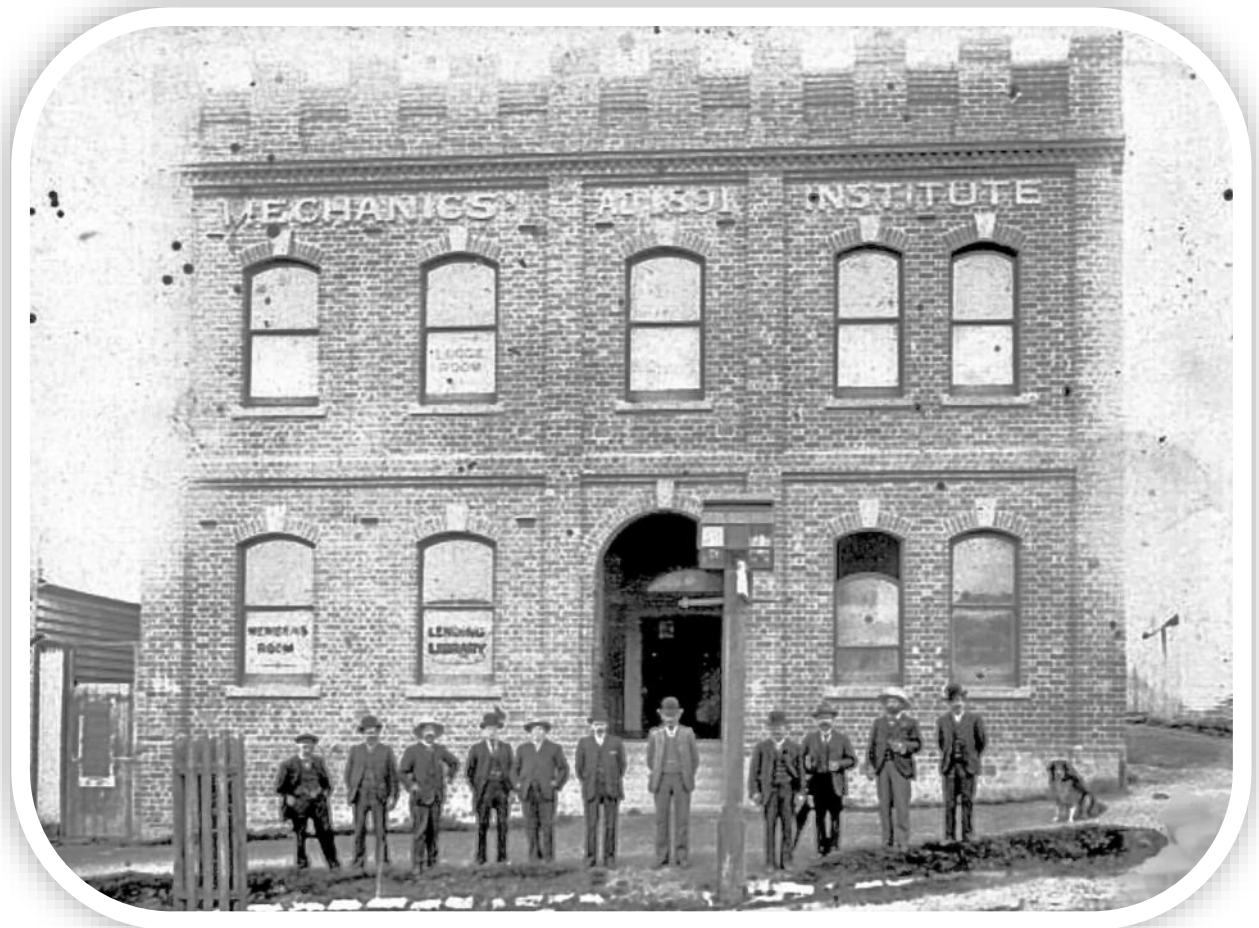




Useful Knowledge



Korumburra Mechanics' Institute. See page 24.

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2025-2026 MIV Committee

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Denys Correll

Peter Nankervis

Peter Pereyra

Robert Shackleton

Cover: Korumburra Mechanics' Institute.

Image from the Korumburra and District Historical Society Facebook page.



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History Library**

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The MIV would like to acknowledge the support of our 'home' the Prahran Mechanics' Institute Victorian History Library.

Note from the Editor – Heather Arnold

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition, which to be honest is a bit late; it was to be a Summer edition, but clearly that ship has well and truly sailed.

I am happy to accept articles and photographs for the *Useful Knowledge* magazine - email them to me at mivnewslettereditor@gmail.com. Has your Mechanics' Institute received a grant, had some building works, celebrated a significant birthday, held some great events? Feel free to send me a report.

Annual General Meeting

This was held on November 22, 2025 at the PMI Victorian History Library. Read the report on page 4.

Wesson Lecture

This was held on February 8, 2026 and was a wonderful success. Read the report on page 5.

Website

have reported on this before and can now now tell you that we have a web designer working on the new Website and will soon be a reality.

Facebook Page

You can find our Facebook page here- <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61554953512575>

Membership price increase —preliminary notice

Membership renewals from July 2026 for Individuals and Institutes are \$40.00, plus \$30.00 extra for a printed newsletter (newsletter free if sent electronically). Overseas members may wish to pay two or three years in advance to keep exchange fees and commissions at a minimum. Please contact your local bank branch and the Treasurer for more details—treasurer@mivic.org.au

Mechanics' Institutes Australian Bicentenary, 2027



In 2027, we are celebrating the bicentenary of the Mechanics' Institute movement in Australia.

Keep up date with what is happening on our website—<https://www.Mechanics'inaus.org/> or our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Mechanics'inaus>

Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future is a conference bringing together the Mechanics' institute community from across Australia. The conference will be held at the Melbourne Athenaeum on March 13, 2027, followed the next day by a bus tour of selected Melbourne and regional Mechanics' Institutes on March 14, 2027.

The conference will create a space to connect, share ideas, and strengthen networks between those with an interest in the past and future of these remarkable institutions. Through a program of presentations, lightning talks, and workshops, participants will not only explore history and future directions, but also build relationships, exchange experiences, and celebrate a shared legacy.

Call for Papers—<https://www.Mechanics'inaus.org/melbourne-conference-call-for-papers>

The program will be organised around two thematic streams:

History — exploring the development and legacy of Mechanics' Institutes in Australia.

Future — examining their evolving role and opportunities ahead.

We invite submissions of abstracts aligned with either stream in the following formats:

Presentations (20 minutes)

Lightning talks (8 minutes)

Workshops (90 minutes)

We welcome both academic and practice-based contributions, and encourage submissions from anyone with an interest in, or knowledge of, Mechanics' Institutes. For proposals focusing on the history of individual institutes, we recommend the lightning talk format, as part of a planned session showcasing a range of institutional histories.

The call for papers closes on August 15. Registration opens September 1; program will be announced in November.

Presentations at the 2025 Annual General Meeting

We held our Annual General Meeting on November 22, 2025 at the Prahran Mechanics' Institute. Three of our committee members retired at this meeting: Judith Dwyer, Corinne Brewis and Pat Anderson.

Judith was for many years our Secretary and the convenor of the Mechanics' Institutes Resource Centre and convenor of the scanning project.

Corinne was the convenor of the library group for many years and coordinator of government grant applications on behalf of the libraries.

Pat has acted as minutes secretary over the past few years.

We are very grateful for their immense contribution to the MIV and are thankful that they are happy to still be involved with the MIV, so we will not lose all their knowledge and expertise.

We welcome Neville Balfour to our committee. Neville is President of the Footscray Mechanics' Institute and his wife, Liz, is their Secretary.



President, David Berry, presented our retiring committee members with a certificate of appreciation.

Above, from left, Pat Anderson, Corinne Brewis, Judith Dwyer and David Berry.

The Committee.

Back from left: Robert Shackleton, Peter Nankervis, Neville Balfour and Denys Correll.

Front from left: Heather Arnold, Chris Dormer, David Berry and Gary Bester.

Absent: Peter Pereyra.

Photographers: Gary Best and Liz Balfour.

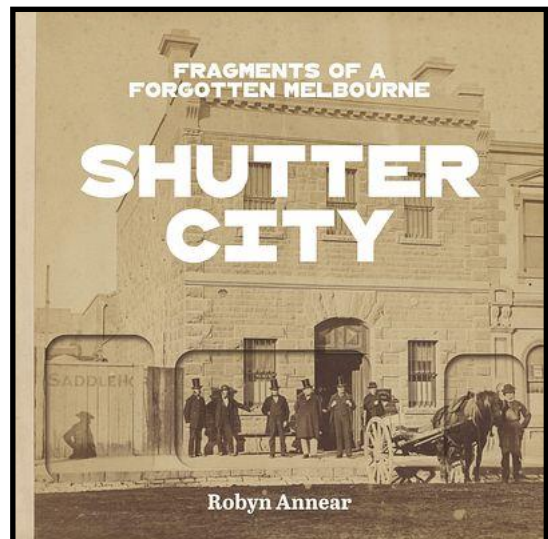
Wesson Lecture 2026

We were delighted to have historian and author, Robyn Annear, as the 2026 Wesson Lecturer. She spoke about her career and concentrated on her most recent book— *Shutter City: Fragments of a Forgotten Melbourne*, a fascinating look into Melbourne from the 1850s to the 1870s, through a detailed analysis of original photographs. As her publisher notes: *Robyn Annear peers into every shadowy corner to reveal postcard streetscapes as miraculous time-capsules, packed with hidden-in-plain-sight historical detail. Her discoveries - she calls them 'sparks' - illuminate and decode each of Shutter City's street views....her lively and insightful commentary weaves the street views and their 'sparks' into a vivid narrative of a near-forgotten Melbourne and the photographers who captured it.*

She was indeed both lively and insightful and her presentation was well appreciated by the audience.

We had 42 people attend, very happy with the turn-up, and many of them had heard of the event via the PMI Victorian History Library newsletter. We are very grateful for the promotion and the other help we received from the PMI staff.

It was our Vice-President, Chris Dormer, who suggested Robyn as a speaker, and who liaised with her. Robyn was an inspired choice, so well done, Chris!



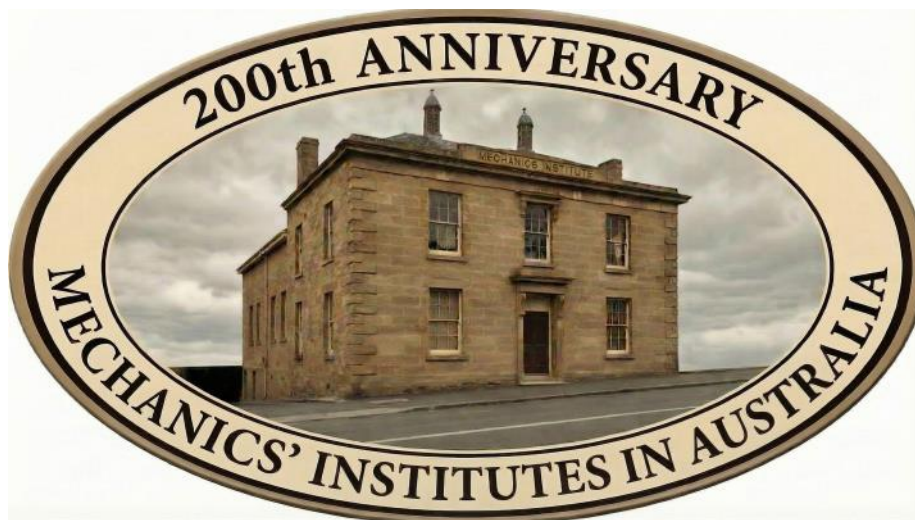
Top: Robyn with Chris Dormer

Left: Robyn with David Berry

Photographer: Robert Shackleton

Shutter City: Fragments of a Forgotten Melbourne, published by Melbourne University Publishing in 2025.

Tasmania: Celebrating the Bicentenary in 2027 of Mechanics' Institutes in Australia



In Tasmania we are holding a series of events in Hobart and Launceston over the weekend 19-21 March 2027, with an extension for those who want to visit some of the remaining Tasmanian MI halls. It will be almost to the day when 200 years ago the Van Diemen's Land Mechanics' Institution was founded on the evening of 23 March 1827 in Hobart Town.

Our bicentennial celebration starts with a reception at the State Library of Tasmania's headquarters in Hobart on the evening of Friday 19 March. On the morning of Saturday 20th there is a guided walk through Hobart's CBD that includes early library sites and concludes with morning tea and a talk at Wesley Hall in Melville St, the home of the Van Diemen's Land Mechanics' Institution, later the Hobart Town Mechanics' Institute, from 1840 to 1871.

The seminar program takes participants to Launceston on Saturday afternoon for a viewing of the nationally significant collection of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute (1842-1945). The collection is to be housed in the planned but yet unbuilt Jenny Gill Archive at the Launceston History Centre. There is an informal dinner for all participants in the evening.

Sunday 21 March is set aside for seminar papers on aspects of MIs and early libraries in Tasmania, with a viewing of the Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery's collection of early Tasmanian libraries including those of Mechanics' institutes. The highlight that afternoon is the John West Memorial Lecture on the history of the Hobart and Launceston Mechanics' Institutes. It will be delivered by Emeritus Professor Stefan Petrow, offered in collaboration with the Launceston Historical Society.

For those keen to travel around Tasmania in the following Easter Week there is the option of a brochure-guided tour of Mechanics' institutes scattered around the state.

A registration brochure for the weekend event will be issued this year in September. It will have details of the final program and registration fees, as well as supporting information on travel to Tasmania and some accommodation options for those who request them.

If you would like to be put on a mailing list for the latest information on the program, registration and activities associated with the celebration, please email Mike McCausland (mmccausl@yahoo.com) or ring John Dent (0408 133 656).

Friends of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute

Riddells Creek Mechanics' Institute celebrates 150 years

By Val Sparshott

A most successful and sunny, fun day to celebrate this occasion was held on October 18, 2025 with the Kyneton Brass Band playing out the front to attract passers by.

Bunting was all around the outside and inside of the building, provided by the local Lions Club. The event opened at 9.00am with the cutting of the ribbon by the Mayor Dominic Bonanno at 10.00am.

A "Birthday Cake" was also cut and enjoyed, along with Devonshire Teas provided by Dromkeen Tea Rooms. Thank you. They were delicious and very popular.

Local historians were available to answer any questions. The local Fire Brigade had a display as they have been involved with the Hall since early days.

Several past residents attended and descendants of past Hall Committee Members. I was able to give one descendant four copies of the minutes pertaining to his ancestor's history and involvement in the Riddells Creek Community.

The hall has on display many early historical photos of families, School photos, Bush Fire Brigade and John Carre Riddell, shops, the baker on his jinker. In fact one of the Lions Club members looked at the School photos and her great grandfather, George Mitchell, was the head teacher. He taught at Riddell after doing a short stint at Cabbage Tree (Couangalt) and Gisborne. From Riddells Creek he went to Gippsland.

The story below is from Melanie, his great granddaughter.

"On the day the schools inspector was coming to check on my great grandfather (as they did) my great grandmother who had baked scones for the visit complained about how contrary the wood stove was and that a new one was needed." The inspector said "You can't possibly need a new stove as these scones are perfect."

Back to the Celebration. Entertainment was provided by a local singer and Riddells Creek Dance School students who gave a great performance. We also had Boot Skooting instruction and then dancing which was great fun. The day finished at 3.00pm, but no one was in a rush to leave. A memorable day for all.



Val Sparshott is featured in these photographs at the 150th celebrations. She is with the Mayor, Cr Dominic Bonanno, in the photo on the right.

The Lowden report

By Jim Lowden

Muttama Hall Celebration

The Centenary of the Muttama Hall, located in the NSW Riverina, provided a very apt way for the community to celebrate and reconnect. The timber-framed corrugated iron clad Hall has served its region well during peace and wartime. Proceedings commenced on Saturday evening, 17 May 2025, with a three-course sit down dinner for 110 in the Hall, replicating what had taken place at the opening in 1925.



The program started with a minute's silence for those from Muttama who had paid the supreme sacrifice or served for their country in wartime. Those present also remembered the two locals who lost their lives when the town was under siege by bushfire in 1987. Then followed reminiscent accounts and a keynote address.

Sunday was a family day centred around a market with fifty stalls and a range of food vans, live music, a display of memorabilia and documents, vintage vehicles, face painting, and a jumping castle.

At midday the 7th Light Horse Gundagai Troop led a procession down Muttama's main street to the Hall. There they were greeted by: Hall Committee President, Robert Flint; Parliamentarians, Michael McCormack and Steph Cooke; and Cootamundra-Gundagai Mayor Abb McAlister, who made a profound speech:

'These village halls have played a huge part in the history of our communities. The Muttama Hall Section 355 committee work extremely hard to ensure the hall will continue to play a part in Muttama's history. I'm delighted the committee have taken up the centenary project to celebrate and share this historic hall's past'.

The 95 year-old Marie Willis, the oldest former resident, cut the celebratory cake.

The Muttama Hall image is from this site <https://regionriverina.com.au/muttama-community-marks-a-century-of-tin-timber-and-treasured-times/90627/>

Keighley College notches up 200 years

Keighley is located about fifty miles north-east of Manchester, in the proximity of Bradford and Leeds. Traditionally, a Labor heartland, a Constituencies Boundary Commission has recently merged it with the neighbouring Conservative spa town of Ilkley. Together they represent a population of eighty thousand, with a large multi-cultural cohort.

Keighley College's website proudly headlines 'Delivering expert education since 1825'. Indeed, it is no idle boast for the Keighley Mechanics' Institute was a trailblazer in the teaching of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Furthermore, it also became involved in the teaching of art and industrial design. The present student cohort of some 2000 is currently led by Principal Kevin O'Hare, who has a particular interest in the Creative Arts and Digital Programs. A very recent publication *Keighley School of Art* by Colin Neville tells that story very well. Happy Birthday Keighley College!



The original Keighley Mechanics' Institute, which burnt down in 1962. These images from <https://www.keighleynews.co.uk/news/14521205.the-fateful-night-in-1962-when-keighley-Mechanics'-institute-burned-down/>



Youthism in and of Mechanics' Institutes

By Jim Lowden

Jim welcomes your comments and experiences so that this paper could be finessed for delivery at next year's Mechanics' Institutes Australia Bicentennial Conference. Contact Jim at theruralstore@bigpond.com

As we move towards the bicentenary of the Mechanics' Institute Movement in Australia, it is timely to plan a way forward for the next century and beyond.

Clearly the future of the movement lies with the youth of today, but exactly how to facilitate that youthism, needs positive and ongoing address. The aim must be to again make our Institutes the strong, dynamic beating heart of each community. Institutes must be a cradle to the grave entity and be inclusive for all ages.

The aim of this article is to canvass ideas and solicit wider input to pave a way forward.

A good starting point would be a Family Open Day and Brainstorming at The Hall involving everybody. (Ideally this should be held as an annual event, on or close to, the anniversary of the opening of the Hall (Foundation Day) and can be used as a countdown for major celebrations, awards and the annual birthday cake and always involve youth in its cutting, with a photo opportunity!

However, to get the ball rolling, plan a six month lead up time: to produce flyers; extend invitations to local MPs and Councillors; engage stallholders; entertainment and music, hopefully volunteered.

All local groups, including, those that use the Hall, should be given an opportunity to set up a table to promote their group. Each group should have a Fact sheet – Group History; Meeting dates; Membership details; Contacts. Some may be able give a demonstration during the day or provide an item on the stage or perhaps even a video of their activities.

Involve youth and district schools could provide items of song, music, dance, etc. There might be a budding magician, whipcracker, stiltwalker, balloon blower, Lego builder, yodeller, etc.

The kitchen should be used for catering for morning and afternoon tea and lunch, as a fundraiser. It could be opportunity to showcase the support of the local supermarket, butcher, bakery, etc.

The appointment of a communications officer would be advantageous for writings articles for the press, local newsletters and circulation to Council, MPs, local radio or television. A student may undertake this role as part of their coursework, similarly a budding photographer.

Plan a working bee or two to make your Hall look proudly at its best. Prepare a list of list of work required. Include youth, for they also need to share the load and responsibility of ensuring the Hall is looked after. Have a barbecue lunch for networking.

The format for the Open Day could be a 10.00am opening by the MP followed by a walkthrough of the Hall. You may even wish to individually placard your wants list with a cost, eg. underpinning; new roof; railed disabled wheelchair ramp; new spouting and downpipes; upgrade toilets; replace deepfreeze; AV and screen to facilitate hiring and current use; lockable reference library cabinet, etc; Don't be backwards in coming forwards, MPs have discretionary funding or can provide sourcing and Councillors must be made aware of grassroots needs of the local Hall.

Local groups would have an opportunity to pitch their activities on stage or the local CFA might do a demo outdoors.

Following a 12.30pm lunch. The Brainstorm would commence at 2pm, chaired by the Mayor or a local Councillor, with a scribe assembling ideas submitted. An agenda could include:

1. Operations: President – Hall History; Secretary – Hiring, Features; Etc; Treasurer – Costed wish list of projects. Be brave, plan an horizon of say ten years!
2. The Hall as the Hub – Auctions; Celebration; Consulting Rooms; Dance Hall; Education; Exhibitions; Film Screenings; Games; Garden; Lectures; Library; Markets; Makers' Space; Meetings; Place of Last Resort; Theatre
3. Ideas for Youthism – Drop in; Education; Exhibitions; Games; Information Technology; Music; Publicity; Staffing of Events

Youthism in and of Mechanics' Institutes by Jim Lowden, continued

4. Ideas for Adultism – Education; Games; Meetings; 'Welfare Centre' with weekly cuppa and perhaps even a walk.

5. Outreach – Government; Council; Regional and Shire-based Institutes; Schools; Universities; Local, State and International twinning, even if only to swap newsletters for ideas. It would be good to get Institutes visiting one another, eg. Jindivick, Footscray and Eaglehawk could run billiards tournaments. Other Institutes have attached or nearby tennis courts. Institutes could promote one another's events eg, art classes, book-binding, quilting, leatherwork, pottery, etc. Pitch for an Artist in Residence, whether it be an author, painter, sculptor or photographer.

In the meantime, a review of your Institute could include a basic Institute checklist for:

Building Condition; Utilities – Electricity – including solar panels and batteries; Fire; First Aid; Kitchen; Security; Sewerage and Water. Log any deficiencies for action and develop a prioritised and costed wish list.

Consider Signage: Road Directional, Roadside and Hall Signage; Contact numbers for Hall hiring; a Notice-board with regular user groups and their contacts; Coming Events. These would universally feature your logo and motto. If one or the other or both do not exist, perhaps these could be created by way of a community competition.

A typical website (A lot of people do not use Facebook!) could contain Hall information: site map; Hall plan; stage dimensions; seating capacity; PA and AV capabilities; the kitchen and its commercial, cooking, heating and freezing capabilities. It could also include charges and a Friends membership form. A potted history of the area and Hall would be of wider interest. Pages for regular users or local business supporters/partners could finance the project.

Advise your local Council and the Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria (MIV) of your contact details and keep the contact details current.

Build an email broadcast list including potential users: stock and station agents; funeral directors; caterers; wedding planners; local organisations and businesses; churches; schools; regional Mechanics' Institutes; MIV; and local people, Councillors and MPs; and a go-to person at your regional University and/or TAFE.

Investigate and activate: Working with Children Certificates; Food Preparation and Handling Certificates; Responsible Service of Alcohol Certificates; First Aid courses; and the placement of a defibrillator on the building in collaboration with Council. (These are a compulsory placement on Halls in South Australia.)

Contact your local secondary school about utilising students with IT, journalistic, art, design and production skills to assist in the production of an email newsletter, press releases and event flyers or programs.

Each Hall should start a library whether it be in the Hall, or in an external all weather storage unit. Include some children's titles and some non-fiction titles. It would be good to assemble a reference library for the area including history, natural history, sport, etc. Start folders for: Hall history and the people that have managed or been associated with it down through the years; for local people that have served in the military forces; local identities; places or events. The more you read the more you know. Information inspires!

Let us start with a visit to your Hall by local schools. A pre-visit by a teacher, to inspect the Hall and its archive, would enable the development of a work book that students would fill in during their visit. Perhaps a drawing or model competition featuring the building or an element of the Hall (Bio-box; Kitchen; Ticket window; Stage; Doors; Windows, etc) could be planned. The resulting pictures could be hung in the Hall, during an annual Open Day.

Contact the local Council about starting a monthly, fortnightly or weekly drop in morning, afternoon and/or evening in your Hall and what funding might be available for the purchase of a folding table tennis table, chess sets, or music player.

Plan three or four events a year: Christmas in July; Christmas Tree; End of Harvest; Hometown Day, celebrating a major local event or person; Quilting Weekend; Wildflower and/or Plant Weekend and Sale; an Annual Lecture from a Notable Son or Daughter; Art Show – Painting, Drawing, Sculpture, Pottery, etc; Scone or Rabbit Bakeoff. The persons who suggested a Porridge cooking competition at Carr Bridge Hall in Scotland or a Ring of Stones at Glen Innes (NSW) have long been vindicated by International recognition. Leverage sponsorship.

Youthism in and of Mechanics' Institutes

Plan an exhibition of drawings of the Institute by local school children. At Kyneton local school children, after an inspection of the Institute, constructed models of the Institute which went on show at the Institute; at Mount Best there was a youth drop in centre weekly. At Bayton, table tennis engaged youth and at Warrandyte and Lilydale, youth have been engaged in theatre productions. At Milawa, youth used the Hall for band practice; at Croydon youth programs were conducted by Council and at Dean a Young Farmers' Club used the Hall. Newham's kitchen was used for School cooking lessons; at Dandenong youth are engaged in mechanical engineering skills; Sydney gives youth scholarships; Kilmore gave substantial annual awards for good ideas.

It is now eight years since the Wellington Council Paper was given at the Third Mechanics' Institutes Australia Conference at Ballarat in 2018 which highlighted the fact that Wellington Council gave annual untied grants to each of its Halls. Despite providing a copy to each Shire in Victoria and lobby the Municipal Association of Victoria, Councils still do not equitably distribute rates that they collect for community infrastructure. It is important that a Hall, group be formed in each Shire to take this matter to Council and Government to legislate, if necessary. You may even wish to share the risk and hopefully a profit by bringing a performer or a speaker in to the district.

A composite of ideas can be seen overseas with the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution (BRLSI). Like most Institutes it hosts a number of community organisations, but it also has a commercial tenant and aggressively hires out its town-centre space. It engages youth at an early age with its exhibitions and weekend and holiday workshops, many relating to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics). It curates periodic exhibitions based on its extensive collection and archive. Almost weekly lectures are held and these are either by personal attendance or streamed for a fee online. BRLI also maintains 'a library' of past lectures which can be accessed online for a fee. The Institute electronically distributes its weekly newsletter. Short courses range from invisible mending to languages.

I would welcome your comment and experiences so that this can Paper could be finessed for delivery at next year's Mechanics' Institutes Australia Bicentennial Conference.

Indeed, 'Our buildings are our legacy, they will speak for us long after we have gone'. Accordingly, we need to now ensure the continuation of this legacy, through positive innovations and communication.

Jim Lowden—theruralstore@bigpond.com

Badger Creek Hall plaque

The Badger Creek Hall turned 100 in 2025 and in January this year, they unveiled a plaque on the building commemorating their history.



As Kathleen Cameron, the Hall Secretary explained—After much ado/years of consideration, we finally got our own historic building plaque made without the MIV wording, we never were a Mechanics' Institute.

Here's the photo of our unveiling in January 2026, with Adam Cole our "committee member who gets things done!"

Well done, Badger Creek!

Launch of the Maldon Athenaeum History Vignettes

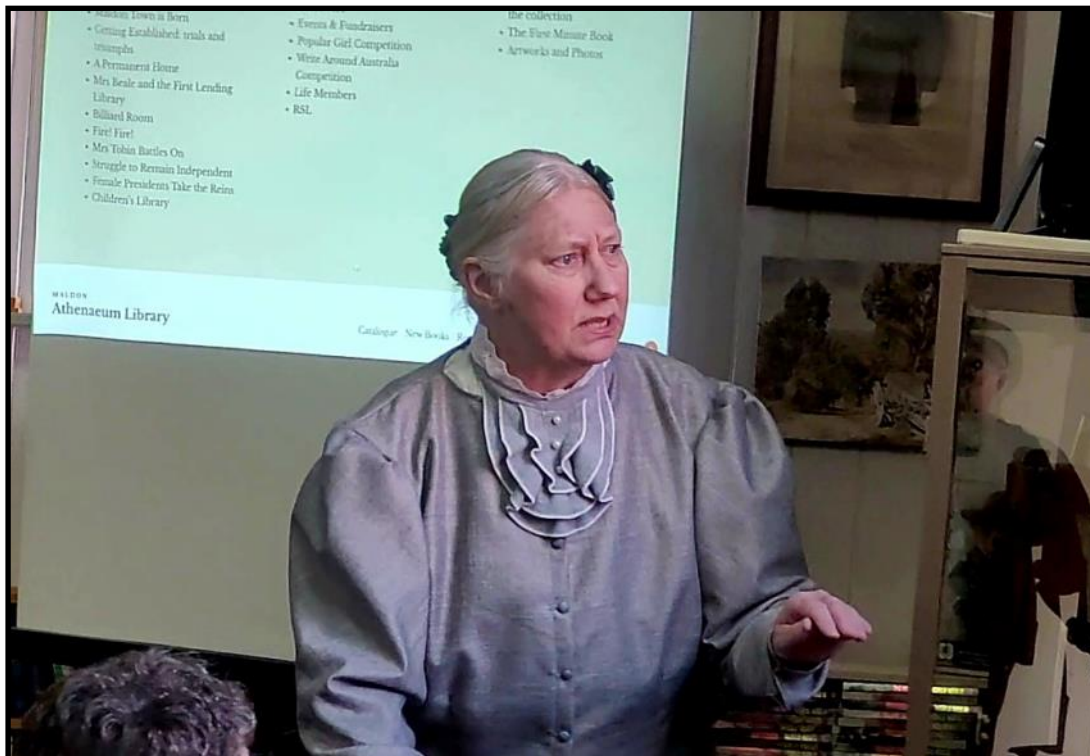
By Dr Lynda Achren

The hall behind the Maldon Athenaeum Library was recently packed with people for the launch of the Athenaeum's history on our website. Conceived as a series of short, evocative accounts and descriptions, these fully referenced vignettes of history were researched, written and edited by library members. Vividly depicting eras, events, individuals and the wider community, they present highlights, struggles and daily life within the changing social contexts since the Athenaeum's founding as a Mechanics' Institute in 1863.



Historian Robin Annear (pictured left) officially launched the vignettes on the new Our History website page, and provided an overview of the history of Mechanics' Institutes in Victoria. The audience heard that many, like the Maldon Athenaeum, once included not only reading rooms and libraries, but also mining museums and billiard rooms. Robin also raised the audience's awareness of how the Maldon Athenaeum occupies a special place in this history as one of the few Mechanics' institutes that continue to offer a library service after many others closed their doors when government-funded Municipal and Shire libraries were established.

Following this, the audience was introduced to the Our History website page and viewed a selection of the vignettes published there. One of these, 'Mrs Beale and the First Lending Library' was the cue for the 'ghost' of Mrs Beale – played by actor Helen Gramberg – to make an appearance, much to the amusement of those gathered for the launch. The real Mrs Beale was a destitute widow appointed as unpaid live-in caretaker of the Athenaeum in 1871 who, four years later, became the (paid) librarian.



Mrs Beale, as portrayed by Helen Gramberg

Launch of the Maldon Athenaeum History Vignettes

Below is an extract from the vignette:

Mrs Beale and the First Lending Library

For much of its history, the Athenaeum was a very male affair. It was eight years before a woman was even mentioned in the minutes. That woman was Mrs Beale, the live-in 'keeper' appointed to look after the Athenaeum ... when it moved into the former Post and Telegraph Office. She was there in 1872 when juniors, both male and female, were admitted as members for the first time. She was there in 1873 when the cellar flooded and a man was hired to empty it. She was there for the whole period when the Athenaeum was expanding its services to also include a lending library.

Appointed on 1 November 1871, Mrs Beale wasn't paid a wage. Instead, she got a roof over her head, with the exclusive use of two rooms, water, firewood for heating and cooking, enough kerosene for lighting one lamp and a piece of ground out the back for growing her vegetables. In exchange, she had to:

- *keep the Reading Room and Museum clean and tidy*
- *light and attend to the fire and lamp when needed*
- *open the doors daily to subscribers at 9am and close them at 9pm unless subscribers were in the room, in which case closing time was extended to 10pm*
- *make sure that only subscribers used the room, unless the committee directed otherwise*
- *keep a general oversight of the property when the librarian, Mr Freeman, wasn't there.*

Perhaps Mrs Beale continued the routine of locking up the chess and drafts boards on Saturday nights and replacing them on tables on Monday mornings as had been done before the move. Perhaps she attended the readings held fortnightly on the winter nights of 1873 and '74. These were hugely popular – the Athenaeum was 'crowded to overflow' for the reading on English, Irish and Scottish poets ... Mrs Beale may have been among the crowd; undoubtedly she was there afterwards cleaning up before opening the next morning.

In June 1875 Mrs Beale became the librarian after Mr Freeman [the previous librarian] left the district. She was paid £10 a year as was Mr Freeman before her. The lending library she presided over was focussed on colony-building with titles such as 'New Rural Industries', 'Mineral Statistics', 'Patents and Patentees'. Later there were government publication such as Smyth's 'Aborigines of Victoria' and Shillinglaw's 'Historical Records of Port Phillip'. ...

Mrs Beale wasn't there long enough to see the focus of the library begin to change when, in 1887, the committee decided to introduce 'light literature'. Two pounds (£2) was allocated to buy some novels. If she had been, perhaps she might have read them at night by the light of her kerosene lamp. ...

Mrs Beale died in 1890 when she was 90 years old. We don't know where she spent the final few years of her life, but in 1883 a Miss Croft successfully applied to be resident caretaker and librarian, which she volunteered to do for no salary.

This is one of the 20 vignettes published so far on our website: www.maldonlibrary.org.au. Others include 'Struggle to Remain Independent' which tells of how and why the Maldon Athenaeum fought to keep its library operational when so many other Mechanics' institutes were shutting their doors; 'Billiard Room' which includes an account of the fight by a few locals to shut down the billiard room; 'Popular Girl Competition' which helped to raise money to rebuild after the Athenaeum (and its billiard room) burnt down; and the saga of 'The First Minute Book' which somehow survived the fire to eventually reside safely in the State Library Victoria.

More vignettes are planned but not yet available on the website. Others, as yet unthought of, may be added over time. We would appreciate your feedback and suggestions.

Dr Lynda Achren
Project Coordinator
maldonathenaeumlibrary@gmail.com



The Ghost of Mrs Beale interacting with the audience while Lynda Achren: Project Coordinator (left) and Tina Fratta: Athenaeum President (centre) look on.

An early history of Mount Egerton Mechanics' Institute and Free Library

By Jessie Davis

The *Bacchus Marsh Express* of March 2, 1878, reported that on Tuesday night a concert in aid of funds for the new Mechanics' Institute was held in the largest classroom of the State School at Egerton.



Mount Egerton Mechanics' Institute

In May 1878 - *The trustees for the Mechanics' Institute have been notified that the sum of 35 pounds has been accorded to them by the Government.*

It was reported in the *Bacchus Marsh Express* on July 13, 1878 that *the foundation blocks for the new Mechanics' Institute have been placed in position by the contractors, and the Egertonians now look forward with some degree of certainty to the time when the young men who at present excuse themselves for spending their evenings at the billiard or card tables by saying there is no other place to go, will be found regularly congregated together round tables of the commodious Institute and reading room now in course of construction.*

The same paper reported on the October 19, 1878 - *that the long talked of Mechanics' Institute is now erected in Egerton. It is a magnificent building for an up country town, fully suited to the requirements of the place and it's Commodious Hall which has a platform erected at one end, is calculated to seat over 300 hundred persons, while there is a comfortable anti-room (with brick chimney) at the back, which will be used for reading and newsroom purposes. The opening of this hall was inaugurated with a concert and a Ball last Friday night, which was one of the most successful ever held in the district and resulted in about 60 pounds to the credit of the Institute funds. In connection with the concert Mr. Martin Loughlin, one of the largest shareholders in the Egerton Mine, being requested to take the chair, declined, but at the same time generously donated the sum of 25 pounds. Including this gift and the proceeds of the opening about 430 pounds have been collected, but as the, Institute, pianoforte and seats will cost something near 600 pounds. The trustees will have to affect a loan to meet the deficiency,*

trusting to the liberality of the Government, the subscriptions from public and further entertainment, to wipe out this liability.

In July 1879, *Bacchus Marsh Express* reported that the "reading room" of the Egerton Mechanics' Institute was, with the exception of Sundays, open with a fair supply of books, and the local papers, between the hours of 6 and 9 o'clock every evening. The item concluded *that so far the opening of the free reading room promised great usefulness as it had been well patronized by the younger members of the community.*

In January 1902, the *Argus* newspaper that a movement was in progress to have the Egerton Literary Institute opened to the public as it had been closed for two years.

In July 1902 Dr. Corry complained to the Ballan Shire that the Egerton Mechanics' Institute was in danger of falling upon his stables. The Department inspection determined that the Hall (Mechanics' Institute) was dangerous and notified the Trustees that it must be closed. Repairs must have been made although there were still issues for in 1905 the building was still open although in March the Health Department informed the Shire that an iron roof was required.

From the Ballan Times, March 1905 in a Ballan Shire Council report: from Public Health Department approving of the opening of Egerton Mechanics' Institute subject to certain conditions. Received.

Ballan Times, June 1, 1905 -

A public meeting to elect trustees and committee of management to the local Mechanics' Institute was held Monday night and despite the inclement weather the attendance was good. There were 6 nominations for 5 positions as trustees & the following were elected; - Messrs. H. Evans, S. Truran, T. Nardot, F. Setter, & W. Norton, Mr. Kerin, the other nominee, tied with Mr. Norton with 22 votes each, and as the former was in the chair and he gave his casting vote in favour of Mr. Norton. There were 11 nominations for seven positions on the committee. Mr. P. Carney was elected Secretary to the meeting and a permanent secretary will be elected at the first meeting.

From the Ballarat Star in August 1908 -

The monthly meeting of the committee of the above was held in the institute on Tuesday night last, Present- Messrs. D Kerrin, (President in the chair) Messrs. J. Tanner, J. Ryan, G. H. Hopwood & P. Carney. Correspondence-From the Public Library, Melbourne, regarding the books which the Institute has on loan. Resolved to return the books when the period for which they are on loan expires.

An early history of Mount Egerton Mechanics' Institute and Free Library

The relocation of the Mechanics' Institute

On May 29, 1908 Dillon & Ware, contractors for the removal of the Mechanics' Institute to a new site, have now got it placed on its new position. (Dr. Corry who lived next door to the Hall on the corner of the Egerton/Ballan Road, Mt. Egerton was frightened that it would fall on his horse stables). The work of removal was very tedious. It took 7 days to bring the building down and the contractors had a very hard job. They had to put rollers underneath it and as the road was very low on one side, they had to build it up with packing as they went along. The contractors are deserving of great credit for the manner in which they carried out the work and considering that the actual weight of the building is over 80 tons, and very "OLD" it was thought that it would be badly shaken in transit, but the skilled workmanship of Messrs. Dillon & Ware and their staff has landed the building on its new site as sound as it was before its removal.

It was reported on May 31, 1912 that tenders are invited and will be received until 8pm on Tuesday, June 12, 1912 for the erection of 2 new rooms and vestibule in front of the Mt Egerton Mechanics' Institute and Free Library. Mr. P Carney, Secretary, has received from Mr. M Loughlin, a cheque for 40 pounds for the building fund of the Mt Egerton Mechanics' Institute. A like amount from the Government is now lying at the Ballarat Sub-Treasury.

Reported on June 21, 1912 that the addition to Mechanics' Hall the tender from Mr Jas Groves amounting to 123 pounds 10 shillings for the erection of the new rooms of the Egerton Mechanics' Institute has been accepted by the trustees.

Re-opening of the Mechanics' Institute Concert and Ball

For some weeks past the residents of Egerton and district have been anxiously looking forward to the re-opening of the Mechanics' Institute and Free Library, and the event was celebrated right royally on Wednesday evening last by a Concert and Ball. The weather was beautiful, and visitors were present in large numbers from all parts of the surrounding districts. The Egerton Orchestra—under the leadership of Miss A. Kerrin, made their debut in public, and gave a very good account of themselves. The chair was occupied by Mr. G. F. Holden MLA, who in brief address, congratulated the residents of Egerton on having such a fine institution in their midst and expressed the hope that in the near future the township would again be in

a prosperous condition. The program was commenced with an overture "Irish Airs" by the Orchestra, composed of the following—Misses A. Kerrin and M. Jones, Messrs. G. Mc Donnell, H. Taylor and G. Davidson (violins), and Miss T. Wallish (piano). Miss Hilda Graham, (Greendale), gave a very nice rendition of the song—"Island of Dreams" and received loud applause. Miss Lil Setter, recited in a pleasing manner "A Simple Picture" and was well received. Master Rex Beckman (Ballarat) sang "The German Band" and in response to an encore sang "My Dusty Rose". Mrs. Watkinson was heard to advantage in the song "We'd Better Bide A Wee" for which she was heartily applauded. Mr. Gray (Ballan) fairly bought down the house by the rendition of the comic song "Stop your Tickling Jock". Attired in Highland Costume, he looked a regular Scotchman to the hilt, and had to respond to an enthusiastic recall, and repeated the last verse. In the song "The Regimental Pet", Miss T Wallish was heard to great advantage and received well merited applause.

A highly successful Ball was held on December 19, 1913 in the Egerton Mechanics' Institute on Monday night. Recently the committee of the Institute put in a new floor, it was used for the first time. There was a large attendance at a very successful dance. The new floor and the space available were much appreciated by the dancers. The dance was organized to pay for the new floor, and the financial result was beyond the anticipations of the management. Movies were held in the Institute monthly. They were projected from a stage above the entrance foyer.

In 1940, the Mt. Egerton Bush Fire Brigade occupied the area under the east end of the Egerton Hall to store their fire pump and equipment. A 2000-gallon tank was mounted permanently on a high stand and a 400-gallon tank was mounted on a platform at truck height, for ease of loading onto the truck. This was then easily filled from the overhead storage tank for a quick turn out to a fire. In 1955 Electricity comes to Egerton and the official switching on at the Mt. Egerton Mechanics' Institute took place with the oldest resident cutting the ribbon on this occasion.

Much work has been done on the Mechanics' Institute in the ensuing years 1978 an extension on the north wall for a storage area and toilet facilities built.

Maintenance is ongoing painting the interior and exterior of the hall and upgrade of the kitchen.

Colin Caldwell photographs of Mechanics' Institutes and Halls

From the State Library of Victoria



Top left: Port Fairy, 1949

Top right: Newstead, 1958

Middle left: Williamstown, 1949

Middle right: Lilydale, 1949

Bottom Left: Yackandandah, 1950

All images by Colin Caldwell, from the State Library of Victoria.

Colin Caldwell photographs of Mechanics' Institutes and Halls

From the State Library of Victoria



Top left: Koroit, 1958

Top right: Clunes, 1959

Middle left: Brunswick, 1949

Middle right: Beechworth, 1950

Bottom Left: Bacchus Marsh,
1949

All images by Colin Caldwell,
from the State Library of Victoria.

History of the Mechanics' Institute of Montreal

From: <https://atwaterlibrary.ca/history-and-archives/history-of-the-Mechanics'-institute-of-montreal/>

We trace our origins back to 1828, when the first Mechanics' institute established in continental British North America was formed in Montreal. Today, with our official name, Atwater Library and Computer Centre, we are the sole survivor of the many Mechanics' institutes established in Canada in the 19th century. The rest were either closed or merged into public library systems. We carry on proudly, aware of our roots, true to our founders' vision, but meeting current community needs with modern technology.

In 1828, some prominent Montreal citizens formed the Montreal Mechanics' Institution because they saw a need to educate workers for the emerging industries of the growing city. Patron of the new organization was Sir James Kempt, governor of Lower Canada and first president was Louis Gury, sheriff of Montreal. Vice-presidents were industrialist John Molson; merchant Horatio Gates; Louis-Joseph Papineau, speaker of the Assembly of Lower Canada, and the Assembly's representative from the west end of the city; and Rev. Henry Esson, educator and Church of Scotland pastor of the St. Gabriel Street Church. Active members appear to have been mainly artisans, craftsmen and shopkeepers who were employers.



Horatio Gates, a vice-president

Image: <https://montrealhistory.org/2010/01/original-members-of-the-mechaics-institute/>

Patterned after Mechanics' institutions that had already sprung up in England and Scotland, the aim of the new Montreal Institution was, according to Rev. Esson, "to see to the instruction of its members in the arts and in the various branches of science and useful knowledge." Rather than classroom activities, the institution ran a lecture program, organized weekly information sessions and had a library and reading room.

It was a time when the building trades were expanding rapidly, highlighted by the construction of the Lachine Canal and Notre Dame Church. The population of Montreal was about 23,000, and the principal commercial and social centre of the city was St. Paul Street. Many educational institutions were developing at the time, including McGill University which began teaching classes in the arts and in medicine in 1829.

By 1834, pre-Rebellion political unrest in Montreal, as well as rivalries based on religion and educational objectives, led to a suspension of activities of the Institution. The last meeting was held on March 24, 1835.

Second Institute Formed: A New Era

In 1840, with the Rebellion of 1837 passed and Montreal returning to political peace, the Mechanics' Institute of Montreal was formed—a revitalization of the previous Institution. The constitution was essentially the same, equipment was obtained from the earlier group, courses of study were to be similar, and eighty members of the first group were eligible for free membership for a year (twenty-four joined). John Redpath, a builder, who had been an officer of the previous organization in 1833, became president of the new Mechanics' Institute.

A public lecture program was established as "the best means of awakening in the public a desire for knowledge." (Annual Report 1841) Night classes were created to offer at various times, reading, writing, arithmetic, French, and architectural, mechanical and ornamental drawing to apprentices and workmen. Elementary school courses were offered, but the main focus was on secondary studies. This was one of the first organized efforts in Canada to encourage adult education, and it continued virtually uninterrupted for nearly thirty years, when the courses were taken over by the government.

Beginning in 1843 and continuing for some years, small industrial exhibitions were held annually by the Mechanics' Institute to present to the public the scientific advances being made by various industries active in the city. Called the Mechanics' Festival, they were popular social events in Montreal and included vocal and instrumental music and addresses. They were held in Bonsecours Hall.

History of the Mechanics' Institute of Montreal

In 1845, the Mechanics' Institute of Montreal was incorporated by an Act of the old Parliament of Canada. (Under the Act of Union, the Province of Canada had been created in 1840 from the colonies of Upper and Lower Canada.)

In 1855, the Mechanics' Institute opened its own building, at the corner of Great St. James and St. Peter streets (now St. Jacques and St. Pierre, in Old Montreal). The building was decorated with banners such as "To Make a Man a Better Mechanic and the Mechanic a Better Man." With a large lecture hall, it became one of the main cultural centres of the city, and remained so for some thirty years until the residential population shifted north and west.

By 1859, the library of the Institute had become one of its most important features. The annual report notes: "The library and reading room form the chief attractions of the Institute, and the manner in which these departments are supplied and managed will always have great influence on the membership list."

For several years beginning in the late 1850s, Alexander Cowper Hutchison taught architectural drawing at the Institute. The son of a Scottish-born stonemason, A.C. Hutchison had himself taken mechanical drawing at the Institute, and went on to become one of Montreal's leading architects. He was involved in the design and construction of major buildings in Montreal, including the Redpath Museum, Erskine and American United Church and the old La Presse building. His firm, Hutchison, Wood and Miller, would later design the current Atwater Library building.

In November 1868, a mechanical drawing class with twenty-four students having a syllabus of practical geometry, details of engines, and other machinery and solid geometry, became the last class sponsored by the Mechanics' Institute. The government-sponsored Board of Arts and Manufacturers took over running of the classes, which were offered free to members of the Institute and as a result attracted more pupils. The library and the lectures series became the main focus of the Mechanics' Institute.

Moving West

By 1910, support was growing for selling the St. James Street building and relocating the Institute closer to residential areas. The value of the land had increased vastly during the previous fifty years and it was now in the centre of what had become the city's financial and banking district. The building was sold, and the new site

at the corner of Atwater and Tupper streets was chosen. Budget for building and equipping the new building was \$120,000. Sufficient proceeds of the sale were invested to provide income to cover projected maintenance and operating costs of \$12,000 a year. President during the period 1913-1920 was William Rutherford.

Construction of the building was begun in 1918 and completed in 1920. Design was by the architectural firm of Hutchison, Wood and Miller, and by that time A. C. Hutchison was retired and the drawings were prepared by his grandson. His brother, builder J. Henry Hutchison, who served on the Mechanics' Institute board of management, headed the building committee.



Montreal Mechanics' Institute / Atwater Library, 1920 building.

Image: <https://atwaterlibrary.ca/about-us/history/>

In 1920, with great ceremony, the new building was opened. In January 1995, seventy-five years later, Montreal architect Susan Bronson spoke at a special evening commemorating the building opening. During her talk, she described the exterior of the building as follows:

"[The building has] a solid sense of architectural integrity resulting from its simple and clear composition, selective and consistent detailing, and high-quality construction.

"[It] is clad in buff brick with certain features—cornice, frames around the upper floor windows, medallion reliefs, panels below the windows, band moulding that signifies the ground level—highlighted in Indiana limestone. The ground floor, the level of which is signified on the exterior by a continuous stone moulding, is raised to allow maximum light to enter the lower level. detailing is simple and dignified, almost modern...

History of the Mechanics' Institute of Montreal, continued.

“The Atwater Avenue facade, facing the public square across the way, is perfectly symmetrical. Its composition is dominated by a central doorway that fits snugly into the centre arched opening. On Tupper Street, also a major facade, the composition is similar....The west facade has a series of long narrow windows that are proportioned according to the spacing of the two storeys of stacks inside....Nine medallions on the north, east and south facades illustrate aspects of art, science and industry.”

In 1940, the library boasted one of the finest technical reference libraries in Canada, and had a total of approximately 45,000 volumes. At the time, encouragement of non-fiction reading was a library policy, conforming to the needs of its reading public and the educational objectives of the library.

Changing Focus

In 1962, the library changed its name to the Atwater Library of the Mechanics' Institute of Montreal to reflect its interest in serving a wider public. In fact, the focus of its book collection was in the process of changing to fiction, biography and travel, with the technical aspects of the collection becoming more of historical and research interest.

In September 2005, the building was declared a National Historic Site.

Read the full article here -

<https://atwaterlibrary.ca/history-and-archives/history-of-the-Mechanics'-institute-of-montreal/>



Montreal Mechanics' Institute / Atwater Library, 1920.

Image: Atwater Library Facebook page

The tragic death of George Ernest Biggs

Compiled by Heather Arnold

On Saturday, October 24, 1914, 26 year-old George Ernest Biggs of 65 Cecil Street, Williamstown, went to the picture show held at the Williamstown Mechanics' Institute. Sadly, by early next morning, he was dead.



The program of films on the night of October 24, 1914
Williamstown Chronicle 24/10/1914
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article69979633>

This is the story, as reported in the *Williamstown Chronicle*, of October 31, 1914.

Man Drinks Disinfectant. Dies in an hour

Seated side by side at the Mechanics' pictures last Saturday night for some time were Constable Black and George Ernest Biggs, aged 26, coal-heaver, of Cecil-street. The latter entered into conversation with the officer, at the same time producing a bottle of disinfectant from his pocket, remarking, "I'm going to put this down my neck to-night, an you will have a job taking my corpse to the morgue." Black replied, "Don't be a fool." Biggs then remarked it was only a joke. The officer was however, startlingly reminded of the conversation later by an untoward incident in the death of his companion of the moment.

On Thursday Mr. T. Lonsdale, J.P., held a magisterial inquiry into the surroundings. Dr. C. Fetherstonhaugh stated that on Sunday, 25th inst., he performed an autopsy on the body of George Biggs, who died at 12.30 a.m. The corpse was that of a well-nourished man. The lungs, heart, liver and kidneys were all healthy. In the stomach was a strong smell of disinfectant. The cause of death was shock caused by swallowing a quantity of irritant, which is a product of coal tar oil,

and is very poisonous if taken internally.

Jane McFarland Biggs, mother of deceased, deposed her son was born on October 1st, 1888, and had always resided with her. He had left home at 7.30 p.m. on Saturday in apparently the best of health. Witness did not know of any trouble that would cause him to commit suicide.

Constable J. F. Smith said that he was on duty at the Mechanics' pictures last Saturday night. At about 9.30 p.m. he was told a man recently in trouble was worrying over his case and was going to drink poison. He inquired from another man if this person (who was a relative of the deceased) was about the hotel, and was told "No."

Later he saw Biggs, who spoke about having a bottle of poison. Witness said, "Do you intend to take it?" His reply was "I've just come out to have a drink." Deceased walked back to the Mechanics' with him. He seemed to be in his usual health, was cheerful and in good spirits. Witness had shown the bottle produced to a local chemist, who stated that he could not identify it, as he had sold a dozen bottles of the same disinfectant that day.

T. D. Compton, secretary, described how, about 11 o'clock, he had discovered a man groaning in Electra street. The man remarked, "I have taken it," pointing to a bottle on the ground. Witness at once proceeded to the telephone and advised the police.

Mrs. L. Ivers, married woman, said that Biggs at 10.25 p.m. had called at the hotel and had a glass of beer. He seemed quite sober. Later he came back and remarked, "I have done it," throwing a bottle on the counter which her husband had picked up and handed to the police.

Constable T. J. Walsh told how he had taken deceased to the hospital in a state of collapse in Dr. Maclean's motor car. Biggs died in about an hour.

The Acting Coroner returned a finding: "That George Ernest Biggs died from an irritant poison self-administered, but that there is not sufficient evidence to show the state of his mind at the time."

Article from *Williamstown Chronicle*, October 31, 1914
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article69979647>

News from the Stanley Athenaeum

By Chris Dormer

Warrandyte Repair Café Binding

The Stanley Athenaeum archives the local community newsletter the *Nine Mile News* each month on its publication and at the end of the year the 12 monthly issues are sent away to be bound. In 2025 the 12 copies of the 2024 NMN were sent to Warrandyte to be professionally bound by John Anderson at the Warrandyte Repair Café, an appendage of the Warrandyte Mechanics' Institute where he works as a volunteer. Recently WRC obtained a grant to have some videos made to promote their activities. One of these concerns book repairs/book-binding which you might be of interest, the black cover being made is for the NMN.

You can see John at work binding on the video on Youtube <https://youtu.be/58ycDkaTSUA?si=b-whmzdY1eBrHTkD>



Thanks to Pat and John Anderson for their work in ensuring the Stanley Athenaeum's copies of the *Nine Mile News* are available for

reference at any time at the Athenaeum.

More information on the Repair Café - <https://warrandytearts.org.au/repaircafe>

Local Government Grant Acquitted

Local Government Library Grant obtained through the Mechanics' Institutes' Victoria in 2025 has now been acquitted. This grant has assisted the Geoff Craig Lecture with Megan Carter in September 2025, the 'Home Sweet Home' exhibition, new archival supplies and the design and production of a new logo design, banners, business card and DI flyers, these will be showcased at the Spring Ditch Music Festival

House Hunting in the Archives

Want to know more about your house, then come house hunting and learn how to use valuable records in the archives and collections to help you discover the story of your house and to discover where your ancestors lived with the use of key resources for house hunting include:

historic maps, rate records, wills, probate, electoral rolls, directories, local heritage studies, LANDATA Title Search, Property and Parcel Search.

Julie Skeggs from Indigo Libraries will lead this session to assist you with your house hunting. This event accompanies the Stanley Athenaeum's 'Home Sweet Home' exhibition on display at the Stanley Community Hub, Stanley. This session will be held at Stanley Athenaeum on Wednesday 6 May, 2026 10am – 12pm. Bookings are essential - contact 0458 606 922

Home Sweet Home Exhibition

See the new Stanley focused exhibition that traces the development of houses in Stanley the 'Home Sweet Home' exhibition begins with the response of Aboriginal people who lived on the plateau that was heavily forested with a plentiful supply of fresh water and rich in resources, the early housing of the 'fortune hunters' searching for gold in the 1850s followed by the houses of the settlers who chose to stay and develop the land and the town.

As Stanley evolved and developed more substantial dwellings were constructed, the new 'Home Sweet Home' exhibition focuses on the houses of Stanley showcasing house photographs from the Athenaeum collection. There are houses that are still lived today, houses that have been abandoned and others that have totally disappeared. Featuring historic photographs of local houses, stories of the houses and the people who lived in them.



Donna with the newly designed banner.

Stanley Athenaeum and Public Room, is open every Friday 10am – 12.30 pm.
2 Mount Stanley Road, Stanley.

Enquiries: Chris 0458 606 922
stanleyathenaeum@gmail.com

Bunyip Mechanics' Institute—destroyed by fire in 1940

The Bunyip Mechanics' Institute opened on June 15, 1906. It was destroyed by fire on March 14, 1940 and the current hall, which replaced it opened October 8, 1942.

This report of the fire is from the *Bunyip and Garfield Express* of March 15, 1940.

Bunyip Hall Burnt.

At about 2.30 on Thursday morning the Bunyip Mechanics' Hall, together with the billiard room and the whole of the contents were totally destroyed by fire, as also was the unoccupied cottage adjoining the hall, and the talking equipment of the Bunyip pictures. Prompt action by the switchboard attendant at the Post Office brought a large number of residents to the outbreak, but the flames had such a hold that it was impossible to save the building.

The flames rose to a great height, and owing to the splendid efforts of many willing workers and the Drouin Fire Brigade (who had been called to the scene), with great difficulty saved the adjoining property of Mr Sanders on the north, and the sparks threatened many wooden homes on the hillside. The property was valued at about £2000, and the picture plant was worth several hundreds more.

The hall property was insured for £1575, as follows : — Main hall £1100, billiard room £125, piano £40, books £45, out buildings £15, furniture, etc. £160; billiard table and contents £50, honour board £20, store room and contents £20. The picture plant was insured for about £400.

Great inconvenience will be caused for some time to come, and it is to be hoped that steps will be taken immediately for the erection of a new hall. A meeting of the committee and trustees will be held on Tuesday to discuss the position, and decide what action is to be taken.



The original Bunyip Mechanics' Institute.
Postcard from the Editor's collection.

Donation of a Silver Trowel

The Mechanics' Institutes of Victoria has received a donation of a silver trowel, used by William Trenwith, M.L.A., to lay the foundation stone of the Korumburra Mechanics' Institute on March 5, 1902.



*The local paper, the Great Southern Advocate, had this short report of the event -
The foundation stone of the Korumburra Mechanics' Institute was laid yesterday by the Hon. Mr. Trenwith. Shortly after 3 p.m. Mr. Trenwith was introduced to the townspeople by the president of the institute, Mr. Mitchell. He delivered a short address, in which he pointed out the great advantages to be gained by Mechanics' Institutes in the country districts, and the amount of useful information to be obtained from them, and counselled the young people to take full advantage of the books therein stored*

William Arthur (Billy) Trenwith (1846-1925), bootmaker, trade unionist and politician, was born in Launceston in 1846, the second son of convict parents William Trenwith, shoemaker, and his wife Beatrice McBarrett. Unschoolled and scarcely literate, Trenwith began his education in 1864 when he joined the provisional committee of the Launceston Working Man's Club. There he developed a flair for debating and made his first appearance in the boxing ring: by 19, Billy was the lightweight champion of Hobart Town and an equally formidable orator. He married Susannah Page (d.1896) at St John's Church, Launceston, in November 1868 and left for Victoria where he set up shop in Carlton.

He became involved in local politics and in May 1879 chaired the founding meeting of the Victorian Operative Bootmakers' Union in Collingwood. In 1883 he became its secretary; his salary of £3 a week won him instant notoriety as a 'paid agitator'.

He was elected to the Legislative Assembly as member for Richmond in 1889 and held the seat until 1903, when he was elected to the Federal Senate. From November 1900 to February 1901 he served as Minister for Railways, Commissioner for Public Works and Vice-president of the Board of Land and Works in the Turner Liberal ministry, and also as chief secretary in 1901-02, under Alexander Peacock.

The trowel was kindly donated to us by John Trenwith, the great grandson of William Trenwith.

Korumburra Mechanics' Institute was opened in 1891 and moved to a new site in 1895. In 1902 work began to enlarge the building, and the additions were constructed in brick, and this is when Mr Trenwith laid the foundation stone.

Sources:

- Australian Dictionary of Biography entry <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/trenwith-william-arthur-billy-8848>
- *Great Southern Advocate*, March 6, 1902
- White, Joseph *The History of the Shire of Korumburra* (The Shire, 1988)