



Historical Society

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June/July 2023 Newsletter

Welcome to our latest Newsletter.



We were delighted with the impressive turnout for our Society's recent quarterly general meeting, which took place last month (June) at the Phillip Island RSL. Despite the winter season, it demonstrates the strong engagement of our members. Minutes have been uploaded on our new website.

The meeting featured informative presentations by David Burrows, the Cultural Development and Programmes Coordinator for Bass Coast Shire, and Patrick Watt, a knowledgeable facilitator and education and museum consultant. They delved into the significance of Cultural Awareness training; a program offered by the Bass Coast Shire to committee members of the Phillip Island & District Historical Society.

Patrick, leveraging his teaching background and diverse experience, including his roles at the Burke Museum & Historic Precinct and the National Sports Museum in Canberra, enlightened us on the importance of understanding the local history of our indigenous community. He emphasized the value of developing an Acknowledgment of Country that will be prominently displayed at the entrance of our new museum. He mentioned that although the museum's primary focus will be the post-European period, it has become evident that visitors and tourists are highly interested in the indigenous narrative. Hence, it is crucial for us to possess knowledge and understanding of our local story.

It was with this in mind that committee members of the Society undertook the Cultural Awareness training this week, led by Bunurong woman Jillian West (pictured right). Little did we know that this session would not only inform but also offer a space for growth and transformation; it would challenge participants to confront their own privilege and societal structures that perpetuate inequality. It would also encourage us all as individuals to embark on a journey of self-education and actively engage in dismantling systemic barriers.



I have attached a summary of the training session, which in itself is a daunting task, in an attempt to capture the immense worth and life-changing nature of the day. Its significance can only truly be grasped by those fortunate enough to have been present. The session served as a catalyst for transformation, leaving a lasting impression on us all. I thank the Bass Coast Shire Council for providing this training and of course Jillian, for guiding us through this journey. I would urge all, to grasp the opportunity to undertake such a session, as it is more than worthwhile – it can be life-changing.



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The training session lead us into the development of a preliminary draft of our Society's own unique Acknowledgment of Country, which will now undergo review and approval by the Bunurong Land Council. As soon as this is confirmed we shall share the Acknowledgement with our members, which will be displayed proudly in our new museum.

In this edition of our Newsletter, I have also included a little story on the possible background of the supposed first European settlers home built on Phillip Island.

Enjoy

Pamela Rothfield



For Travellers

If you happen to be journeying back from the northern parts of our country and find yourself passing through Yarrawonga in October, we have an exciting event recommendation for you. On **Saturday, October 14**, the Victorian Association of Family History Organisations,

in collaboration with the Yarrawonga Family History Group, will be hosting a captivating Family History Expo. This year's theme revolves around the fascinating world of DNA.

While historical societies may not primarily focus on family history, we serve as an invaluable resource for those tracing their lineage. Local history provides a vivid context that brings life to the bare bones of birth, death, and marriage records.

Mark your calendars and if you're in the region, make sure to visit the Family History Expo in Yarrawonga. It promises to be an enlightening and enriching experience for all attendees.

VENUE: Yarrawonga P-12 College, ECA Centre

ACCESS: Via McLean or Gilmore Streets.

DATE & TIME: Saturday, October 14, doors open at 10am

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A Message from the RHSV

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria is our state's oldest and premier historical society, custodians of the diverse histories of Victoria. The Society has fulfilled this mission for an extraordinary 114 years, collecting, protecting and disseminating knowledge of Victoria's past through our events, exhibitions and publications.

Many of our PIDHS members have also supported the RHSV by purchasing books from our bookshop or by attending our events and exhibitions because



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they not only understand the importance of the RHSV in Australia's cultural landscape but have acted on that with great generosity.

RHSV constantly evolves in response to the ever-changing society in which it operates whilst preserving what has been before - that is its strength. RHSV is undoubtedly a small organisation, but punches above its weight.

Together, our greatest days lie ahead.

The RHSV's collection is not static: it is constantly expanding and helping us all understand and make sense of who we are, where we have been, and where we are going. All donations make a profound impact and will help secure and conserve significant First Nation's history as well as Melbourne and regional material. We invite you to donate to the RHSV. [Click here \(https://www.historyvictoria.org.au/donate-to-rhsv/\)](https://www.historyvictoria.org.au/donate-to-rhsv/) to donate through the RHSV website.

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MEETING NOTICE!

The next meeting of the Society is our AGM on **Thursday September 21st**. This meeting will again take place at the Phillip Island RSL at 12 noon at the Bistro for a bit of socialising, and lunch, which can be ordered at the servery. We shall then proceed to the

ANZAC Room for our meeting. Please RSVP to Judy Gittus on: jgittus43@gmail.com or call Judy on 0417 390 885.

Our New Website. www.phillipislandhistory.org.au

Our New email address: hello@phillipislandhistory.org.au



Don't forget that the Phillip Island and District Historical Society depends on increasing our membership for its secure future. A healthy membership ensures that we can continue to catalogue our collection, as well as embark on various projects which preserves and shines a light on our region's history. Spread the word! Single Membership \$30 Family \$40



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The First House on Phillip Island?

Pamela Rothfield

In the August 29 1925 edition of *The Weekly Times*, on page 46 under the heading of *Weekly Times Illustrations*, there is a photograph of a wattle and daub cottage with the caption 'The First House on Phillip Island Built in 1861'.

Whilst we know that the caption is not strictly correct, as the first significant post European construction on Phillip Island was a rather imposing structure with a twin gable roof built by brothers John and William McHaffie who held the pastoral lease for the island from 1842, it is conceivable that the caption refers to the first house of a 'settler'.

Given this possibility the photograph warrants a second glance and perhaps further investigation.



THE FIRST HOUSE ON PHILLIP ISLAND, BUILT IN 1861

The Island was not opened up for subdivision and general settlement until November 1868 – so if indeed this house had been built in 1861 – whose house would it have been?

Besides the McHaffie family and their farm workers – all of whom lived on the McHaffie estate, there were limited residents on the island at that time.

Those engaged in the business of fishing could apply for a license, provided they paid the exorbitant price of 10 shillings per month to the crown ranger. This license allowed for the construction of a dwelling on the foreshore beyond the normal limit of a chain from the



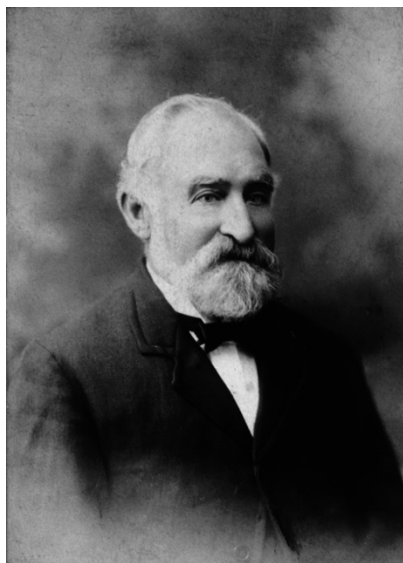
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high-water mark, which is 66 feet or 20 metres. Fishermen were notoriously poorly paid and exploited of by speculators, who would buy their catch at a fraction of its ultimate value and sell on to shops and hawkers. If this license fee was not paid, then the fishermen were ordered to move closer to the shoreline.

Because of this enormous monthly cost, many workers, typically single males, opted to live in makeshift tents or other structures on the foreshore that could be dismantled and relocated within a matter of hours.

In 1861 Rhyll had a thriving oyster industry and Captain John Barnard Lock, a master



mariner was engaged in trading oysters between Western Port and Geelong, where the delicious cargo was destined for the goldfields. For this reason, Captain Lock and his wife Elizabeth lived at Rhyll. By 1860 he had secured a license which permitted him to erect a home on the foreshore at Rhyll. It was in this house on the foreshore that his wife, Elizabeth gave birth to their first child, a daughter named Martha Ann in October 1861, who holds the distinction of being the first European girl born on Phillip Island. Elizabeth at 27 years of

age endured the challenges of childbirth without any medical assistance or aid of a midwife.

Sadly, Martha was born blind, however both mother and child survived well.

The Lock family moved back to Emerald Hill (now South Melbourne) where their next three children were born.

In 1868 when the Island was subdivided Captain Lock

secured land in what is now called Thelma Drive in Rhyll. There he built a lovely cottage with a triple gable roof, which stands to this day, which was named *Almond Villa*.

Whether or not the house depicted in The Weekly Times as the "First House on Phillip Island" actually belonged to Captain Lock is open to speculation. Nevertheless, the flat terrain suggests it could have been situated on the foreshore of Rhyll, and the house appears more like a permanent residence for a family rather than a dwelling for a nomadic fisherman.

No doubt historians will continue to delve into the mystery surrounding this photograph and its claim to be the 'First House on Phillip Island,' and perhaps one day its secret which lay hidden within the aged pages of The Weekly Times, will be revealed.





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A Summary of Cultural Awareness Training

Pamela Rothfield

July 2023

Attempting to fully convey the value and profound impact of the Cultural Awareness training session which was undertaken by the committee of the Phillip Island & District Historical Society this week is an immense challenge. Nevertheless, I have made an effort to intertwine several key aspects shared by the presenter, Jillian West, a proud Bunurong and Palawa woman, to provide a glimpse of its life-altering nature.

Jillian began the session by emphasizing that her sharing of information should not evoke guilt; rather, it stems from a collective deprivation of education regarding Australia's history. She is all about learning and comprehending the past of this nation, starting with a brief overview of Indigenous rights, including tracing back to the 1967 Referendum which finally granted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' recognition as citizens in their own country, allowing them to be included in the census.

During training session, Jillian, a lifelong advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, generously shared her wealth of knowledge of First Nations cultures, traditions and peppered with personal stories which resonated deeply, transforming perspectives and fostering the potential for personal growth.

The knowledge shared during the session opened doors to new insights and understanding. It unveiled layers of truth and history that had previously remained mostly concealed. The session served as a catalyst for self-reflection and introspection, prompting us all to question our own beliefs, biases, and preconceptions.

Jillian shared poignant tales of her late father, Japanangka errol West, an esteemed poet and scholar recognized worldwide, and a fervent advocate for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who was a staunch proponent of accessible education. When recounting the stories of her father, Jillian informed us of his significant contribution to the realm of higher education, striving to challenge institutional and societal prejudices in the pursuit of restorative justice and the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' sovereignty. We were privileged to have the opportunity to hear the profound words of Japanangka errol West, even in his absence, through the medium of digital recording.

In a calm and composed manner, Jillian provided a clear explanation regarding the necessity for proof of Aboriginal heritage. She dispelled prevailing myths surrounding the notion of a financial 'windfall' for Aboriginal people, emphasizing the misconceptions that surround this topic. With great sensitivity, she shed light on the systemic challenges faced by First Nations individuals when navigating governmental systems, including the fear



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experienced by many First Nations people when declaring their children's existence while applying for Centrelink payments, due to the persistent concern of child removal. By sharing these personal accounts, she exposed the pervasive fears and vulnerabilities that are deeply entrenched within the community. The quiet yet powerful delivery of these truths left a lasting impression on the listeners, challenging preconceived notions and fostering a deeper understanding of the complex realities faced by First Nations people.

These revelations dismantled stereotypes and provided an opportunity for reflection on the barriers and injustices that continue to affect the lives of First Nations communities. The knowledge shared during this session urged us to examine our own privilege, and actively work towards addressing the systemic issues that perpetuate these inequalities.

By dispelling misconceptions and highlighting the deeply personal consequences of these policies, Jillian has ignited a sense of urgency and responsibility within us all. The session served as a call to action; it inspired a commitment to advocate for change and strive for a more equitable society where the rights and well-being of all First Nations people are respected and protected.

Beyond the acquisition of knowledge, the training session sparked a powerful emotional response. The stories, the personal accounts and the profound losses endured by our First Nations people were deeply moving and evocative, leaving an indelible imprint on the hearts and minds of all of us. I feel confident that all participants left the Newhaven meeting room with a renewed sense of responsibility and obligation to effect change in both personal and collective spheres and a desire to advocate for justice, equality, and reconciliation.

'It is not your right to understand, but it is your obligation to accept difference.'

– Japanangka errol West

Newsletter written and edited by Pamela Rothfield

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