

# TIMELINES

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Murwillumbah Historical Society

July 2013 Vol. 2 No. 1



## Welcome

Welcome to the July 2013 edition of *Timelines*, the newsletter of the Murwillumbah Historical Society. The aim of these newsletters is to introduce some of the rich historical heritage we share here in Murwillumbah and environs. We also take the opportunity this edition to welcome some recent new members to the Society.

Thanks to our readers for the feedback you have provided. **Please keep helping us improve this newsletter - your feedback, input, corrections and contributions are most welcome.**

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- 

## Vale Jack Knight

*As notified in the last issue of Timelines, the Society lost a long time friend, member and supporter in Jack Knight in December 2012.*

*This article remembering Jack was written by Tony Clark from information supplied by Dorothy Knight, Bill Aked, and Archie Crawford. It was approved by Dorothy Knight and the family.*



*Jack with one of his other passions; woodworking (photo courtesy of Archie Crawford)*

John Eric Knight (Jack), born at Sunnyside Hospital, Tumbulgun Rd, Murwillumbah on 21 August 1930, was the second child (of four) to



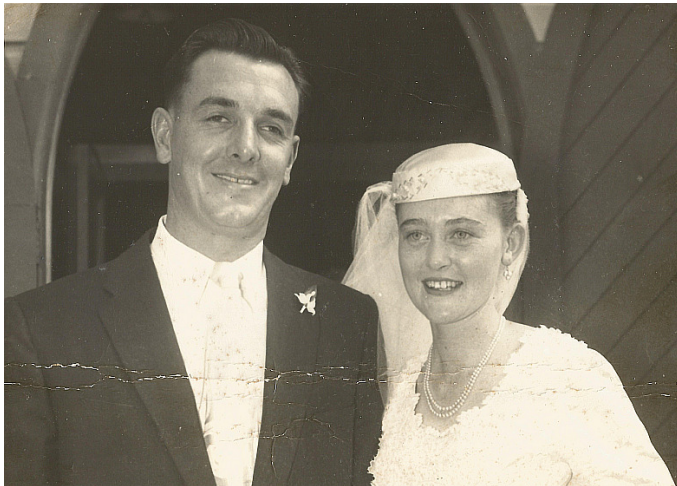
## WE WANT YOUR OLD PHOTOS!

If you have or come into possession of any old, family or historic photos please don't bin them; donate them instead. Please contact the Society (02) 6672 3337, email [enquires@mhsresearch.org](mailto:enquires@mhsresearch.org)

John and Alma Knight. John Knight worked as an engineer at the Condong Sugar Mill.

Jack was educated at Murwillumbah Primary School then Murwillumbah High School before finishing in 1945. Upon leaving school, Jack moved to Brisbane where he obtained work in a factory for his Uncle Rex (inventor of "KILLRUST") for a couple of years, returning to Murwillumbah in the late 1940's. He then commenced work with Ebbott and Fenner's Holden Dealership situated on the corner of Bray St (now Tweed Valley Way) and Prospero St, South Murwillumbah. He worked there until 1955 whereupon returning to Brisbane to work at a garage in Clayfield, before returning once again to Ebbott and Fenner in 1957.

In 1953 Jack first met Dorothy Bashforth, a girl from Mullumbimby who was a trainee nurse at the



*Jack and Dorothy on their Wedding Day in 1958 (photo courtesy of Dorothy Knight)*

Murwillumbah Hospital. They married on 22 February 1958 at the Church of England situated on Murwillumbah St, (now the TAFE College). They rented a ½ house in Hartigan St for a short time before moving to another ½ house in River St in 1959. In 1961 Jack and Dorothy built a house at 19 Barnaby St. It was at this house that all 3 boys were born; David (1964), Paul (1967) and Chris (1970). In 1972, they moved once more, to the current home at 25 Barnaby St. They have 8 Grandchildren and 2 Great Grandchildren.

With the closure of Ebbott and Fenner in the early 1980s, Jack went to work for Bill Aked and then Sham Lashand at Auto-One in Wollumbin St, working there until his retirement in 1996. It was then that he took up on some of his interests. Jack joined the Tweed Valley Woodcrafters where he was a respected committee member and also became President of the association. He was a member of The Parish Council for the Anglican

Church where he also helped by doing the mowing and general maintenance of the Church and grounds. Jack joined the Murwillumbah Historical Society in 1996 and his help and local knowledge were invaluable in the collaboration and presentation of exhibits and displays.

Sadly Jack passed away on 20 December 2012 and will be sorely missed by all of those who were fortunate enough to have known him.

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## The Austral Building

*Research and story by Nick Gouliaev. In this edition's article Nick analyses the architecture and history of another iconic Murwillumbah landmark.*

- **The Austral Building**
- Corner of Commercial Road and Wollumbin Street, Murwillumbah
- Construction - 1934-35
- Leased - June 1935
- Architect - E. J. Board & Sons, Lismore.
- Builder - Percy Nott
- Property Developer and Original Owner - Cornelius Constantine Vlismas (1885-1987)
- Current Owner - Mark Teakle (purchased from Vlismas family 2005)

The site was vacant land in 1911 with a large billboard advertising movies (then called "talking pictures") being shown in the movie theater located in the School of Arts Building (demolished in 1970s).

Later in 1911 the site was purchased by Brown Brothers Tyalgum Sawmilling Company which occupied the site and extended along Wollumbin Street to where McGuiness Funerals Parlor is now located, and along Commercial Road to today's Australian Hotel. (there was no Proudfoots Lane at that time). Behind Brown Brothers timber sales and builders' hardware business were a Blacksmith's and other business establishments opening onto what is now Proudfoots Lane. A service lane branched off giving access for deliveries to the rear of the Australian Hotel (later closed off by local business person Ted Carney and built over).

In 1934 Brown Brothers sold the site and moved further along Wollumbin Street to new premises on the site where Hutchison's Tiles is now located.

The site passed into the ownership of Cornelius Constantine Vlismas and plans were made to commence site works starting in 1934 for a new 2 storey building with external and internal walls of brick, timber floors to ground and first floors,



*Murwillumbah's iconic and very Art Deco Austral Building greets traffic crossing the Tweed River into "downtown" Murwillumbah from South Murwillumbah (photo courtesy of Nick Gouliarov, 2013)*

timber framed pitched roof; clad with roof tiles facing the streets and metal cladding of the roof at the rear of the building. The street fronts of the building had new sidewalks constructed with overhead shop fronts' awning roof; a metal framed cantilevered structure with metal clad ceiling lining to the soffit of the awning roof and metal roof cladding over. Metal stay rods structurally connected the cantilevered awning roof to the brick walls of the first floor.

The building was designed to have 5 shops at ground floor street level with foyer and access stairs connecting to the first floor of seven professional office suites overlooking the bridge, river and streets below. The building was designed in the Art Deco style with a new name, "AUSTRAL BUILDING", proudly displayed above the street awning and with the low profile letters masterfully cast into the cement render of the rendered walls and located on feature walls facing Wollumbin Street and Commercial Road, as remains today. The rear of the building is designed to provide service/deliveries to the shops with parking accessed from Proudfoots lane or from Commercial Road. The fire stairs are located at the rear of the building serving the first floor

professional suites.

The building was completed in 1935 with the first tenants moving into ground floor shop areas and first floor professional suites that same year.

This iconic building has very important historical significance encapsulating the character and pride of Murwillumbah with the timeless elegance of its Art Deco architectural style, and is the landmark building first seen on entering the township's business area .

The Austral Building is continually undergoing maintenance and restoration work and its excellent condition is a tribute to owners past and present. The current owner Mark Teakle (since November 2005) is continuing the attention to preservation, ensuring that any work completed is strictly in keeping with the historic features of its street facades.

The largest shop floor area is at the corner of the building and was formerly occupied by the first tenants of the building, the Tong See Family. They opened a General Store, paying rent originally of £9.10s in 1935. During their tenure the business expanded to include the neighboring retail floor area (currently "Curves") and extending

to today's Mexican Restaurant "South of the Border". Tong's, as they were commonly known in town, enlarged their offering to include groceries, mercery, drapery, crockery and fancy goods.

A great variety of businesses occupied the other shops over the years. One notable and very popular shop from 1938 was the "California Milk Bar" (featured in Timelines April 2013), facing Commercial Road a few doors away from Tong's.

Today the shops are occupied by a variety of tenants including Wheelers Real Estate right at the corner, wrapping around the corner into Commercial Road.

The upstairs office area consists of seven professional suites, recently refurbished and partially occupied by various businesses. In the 1960's the whole of the floor was occupied by the TAFE College for a number of years before moving to its current premises on Main Street.

Recent refurbishments to the whole of first floor modernized the office spaces with air conditioning, computer cabling, internal repainting and upgrades to the hygiene facilities.

At street level the shop-fronts have clear glazed windows set in the original metal frames, the entry doors are original timber-framed Art Deco "stepped" top rail with clear glazing. A lowered ceiling adorns the entry doors and the shop windows are lined with the original patterned/embossed metal ceiling lining with Art Deco leadlight windows above, extending the width of each shop and to the underside of the shop/street awning, with more square/clear glazed windows above the awning creating more ventilation to each shop area to suit the Murwillumbah climate.

The building's leadlight windows feature geometric shapes of sunburst patterns, vertical and linear ziggurats, florals and chevrons set in the original metal frames, all in the original condition except one recently damaged and temporarily re-glazed with ordinary ribbed glass (soon to be replaced with Art Deco style glazing).

The entry doors to the foyer are double doors, clear glazed, timber framed and retaining the Art Deco appearance.

The floors to each shop entry are mosaic tiled in a geometric, rectangular pattern with terrazzo sill (a classic Art Deco design), still in the original condition. The external walls to shop fronts, below and between windows are still tiled with the black original glazed wall tiles, with geometric horizontal rectangular pattern lines below the shop windows, tiled with pale green feature tiles.

The shop front awning over the sidewalk retains its original soffit lining; metal lining with surface embossed pattern as produced by the Wunderlich company and extensively used in Art Deco styled buildings as ceiling or wall linings from the 1920s to the 1940s.

The street-front walls above the awning are brick work, finished with smooth cement render, painted and embellished with three hard-edged horizontal low reliefs running the length of walls just above the awning but below the windows of the offices above. These wall corbelling reliefs are spaced apart, accentuating the Art Deco "horizontality" of the building, as well as feature gable walls, with one such wall located on each street front with low



*Some of the original detail on the Austral Building (photo courtesy of Nick Goulliaev, 2013)*

relief arched corbelling over these windows. Above these arched features is a rectangular relief corbelling with corbelled letters "Austral Building" and another low relief horizontal line extending the width of each feature gable wall. These feature gable walls extend in height to finish above the

roof line. This interrupts the continuity - horizontality of the roof eaves gutter, creating a very pleasant interlude to the overall façade of the building. The upstairs windows are timber framed casements and are original in the quietly gentle Art Deco style, clear glazed, with smaller glazed panes at the top of the window frame.

The roof is pitched, clad with roof tiles facing the street fronts and metal roof clad at the rear of the building with timber fascias to all roof edges and metal gutters. The end of the roof at both ends of the building is terminated by brick gable walls. A pitched roof is not the usual Art Deco design; usually the roof line is terminated by a parapet wall which hides the roof shape, but on this building the architect decided, very successfully, to expose the roof shape.

The walls at the rear of the shops are original face brickwork with the corner of the building on Proudfoots Lane finished with cement rendered quoin stones, made to look like sandstone product.

At the rear of the building all windows are metal framed double hung with clear glazing set in the style of Colonial or Georgian Revival windows. The doors to the shops and the upstairs fire escape have been replaced with contemporary timber designs while the metal roller shutter doors are probably original. The fire escape is metal and connecting to the ground and car park area.

The shops floor level is finished 800 to 900 mm above car park ground level, with brick walls having built in vents to the underside of the building to ventilate the timber floors of the shops.

The interior of the shops in most cases is in original condition consisting of timber floors and brick walls finished with painted cement render. Additional walls installed recently are timber framed finished over with painted plaster board but the original walls are prevalent. The ceilings are a mixture of original metal embossed cladding and contemporary plaster board. The overall visual effect is Art Deco inspired, retaining the original elegance, especially in the "Modern Grocer" shop.

#### Research References and Acknowledgements:

- Murwillumbah Historical Society Research Team: Tony Clark, Joan Cuthel, Max Boyd, Joan Campbell, Quinton Snow
- Elders Real Estate: Wayne Yeo, Mandy Yeo
- Modern Grocer: Joanne Nimmo
- Patricia Tong See and George Vlismas
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*Thank you all for your wonderful assistance.*  
**Nick Gouliaev, Architect UNSW, 25 June 2013**

## A Scout Hall in One Day Part 1

*In an amazing display of community commitment, a motivated group of volunteers built the Murwillumbah Scout Hall in just one day back on Saturday 26 September 1953. We are privileged to have access to this charming story, and original photos, courtesy of Quentin Snow, son of Cecil Snow, the organiser and planner of the event and the writer of the story.*

*The story will be run in two parts.*

Murwillumbah (N.S.W.) Boy Scouts have achieved a distinction believed to be unique throughout the Scout world. They have acquired a new scout hall which was erected by voluntary labour in one day. Work commenced at 6 A.M. and the official opening was conducted at a concert which was held in the hall at 8 P.M.

Many years ago the Scouts purchased an old hall which, with the permission of the Council was moved to a position in Knox Park, in the centre of town. Recently a new Park improvement plan has been implemented and the Scouts received notice from the Tweed Shire Council to shift the hall to another site. After many weeks of cogitation the Scouts Parents Committee decided to purchase a block of ground, not far from the Park, to sell the old building and erect a new one. Various plans were considered and eventually Mr. Cecil J. Snow was asked to prepare plans and specifications for a new hall. The Tweed Shire Council offered £100 toward the cost of the new building and further agreed to wipe off a debt already existing on the old building.

It soon became evident that, because of lack of finance, the new building would have to be erected by voluntary labour. After preliminary sketches had been approved, Mr. Snow dropped a bomb one



*Cecil Snow with the advertisement for volunteers for one day (photo courtesy of Quentin Snow)*

day by suggesting that the building be erected by voluntary labour in one day. He felt sure that the necessary support would be forthcoming. The building committee adopted the suggestion which was supported by the Parents Association and a publicity campaign commenced immediately.

In the few weeks which followed, Mr. Snow spent 120 hours in the preparation of new plans, quantity lists, and in organising sectional team work. The Tweed Newspaper Co and Radio 2MW supported the publicity campaign. The Master Builders Association offered assistance by tradesmen, Master Plumbers, Master Painters and Electricians all volunteered to help. A general call was made for all tradesmen and for builders labourers and carriers.

Murwillumbah Lions Club, in association with Radio 2MW undertook to raise money on construction day and the Lions Club arranged for a



*The stud walls are up! (photo courtesy of Quentin Snow)*



*The wall frameworks quickly taking shape. Quentin Snow is shown in overalls and hat near the power pole and George Forster is in a black coat with the "Black & Decker" (photo courtesy of Quentin Snow)*

concert to be held in the hall at night.

Owing to the location it was felt that concrete piers would be necessary and a voluntary team erected the piers, and constructed a brick foundation front and a concrete path six feet wide from the hall site to the footpath.

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> September [1953] was chosen as 'Scout Hall Day' and, while many were doubtful of the result, all hoped that the day would be fine as rain had been threatening for several weeks.

The 'Day' opened with promise of excellent weather. It had been advertised that a start would be made at 6 A.M. but before that hour many tradesmen and labourers had arrived and were setting down their tools. One man reported at 10 minutes to six. He had travelled 40 miles to assist.

The day commenced with 35 tradesmen and about

10 labourers ready for action at 6 o'clock. It took them only a few minutes to 'settle in'. Others reported for duty throughout the day until a total of 86 men had 'signed on'. The foundation wall and piers were already in place and throughout the day the programme went smoothly, well ahead of Mr. Snow's schedule.

Progress was as follows:-

7 a.m. Plates, bearers and floor joists laid. Some men commenced nailing down the flooring while others built the external walls on the ground.

7.20. The Southern wall framework (52 feet long) was erected and fastened into position.

7.40. The Western wall framework was erected and bolted in position. The Northern and Eastern (front) walls followed a few minutes later.

8. a.m. Floor completely laid and nailed down. (At one period 35 men were nailing floor boards at once).

8.40. First pair of rafters fixed in position.

10.30. North and South walls (each 52 feet long) completely boarded up with chamfer boards and windows fixed in position.

11.15. Last pair of rafters fixed in position.

11.30. All windows had been fixed in position.

12.15 p.m. The plumbers commenced duty by fastening the first bracket for guttering.

12.45 p.m. Plumbers nailed down the first sheets of roof iron.

1.p.m. Electricians commenced to wire up for nine light points and six power points.

2.p.m. Painters commenced to paint the exterior walls.

*To be continued next edition...*

## Did You Know?

*This edition sees the first in a new series of stories selected by Max Boyd highlighting the famous people, clubs, institutions and more who have called Murwillumbah home. If you're like me, you'll be surprised at how much our little town bats above its weight!*



*Sir Frank Nicklin in 1959 (photo: Australian Dictionary of Biography)*

Sir George Francis Reuben (Frank) Nicklin KCMG MM was born in Murwillumbah on 8 August 1895 and gained his early education at the Murwillumbah Public School. His father George Francis Nicklin was a journalist who became the owner/publisher of the "Tweed Herald", one of the earliest newspapers to be

printed in Murwillumbah. Its location was in a building about where the Tweed Arcade is now in Broadway. About 1910, the family moved to Beerwah QLD where he worked on his father's banana plantation.

He enlisted in the AIF on 5 May 1916, and joined the 49<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the Western Front in July 1917. On 5 April 1918 at Demancourt, France he took charge when his Platoon Commander was killed, led his men bravely and won the Military Medal. He was commissioned to the rank of Lieutenant in January 1919 and discharged in April of that year.

He purchased an 8ha pineapple farm at Palmwoods near Nambour and he married Georgina Robertson Fleming on 22 October 1921. They had no children.

He was elected to the Queensland Legislative Assembly on 11 June 1932. At the election held on 3 August 1957, he became the Premier of Queensland.

In 1967 he entered hospital with a serious illness and resigned as Premier on 17 January 1968 and retired from Parliament the following month. In that year he was appointed KCMG. He died on 29 January 1978 at Nambour.

**Reference:** Australian Dictionary of Biography

## The JJ Richards Story Part 1

*Thanks to Idwall Richards, son of JJ Richards, for permission to feature this fascinating story recounting the history of the man, the family and the company. The story was written by Idwall on 4 April 2006.*

The age-old adage, "that necessity is the mother of invention" rings true with respect to the story of our family survival. That is, the family of the late Joseph John Richards.

Dad had the task of raising six kids during the depression years and he certainly had to dig deep to find ways and means of housing and feeding his offspring.

There is no doubt that early in his life he resolved to do whatever it took to provide for his children and give them the opportunity to live a full and meaningful life. The first prerequisite of course was to ensure that he was gainfully employed at all times and it was this penchant to provide, I am sure, that inspired him to have a go at anything regardless of qualifications or experience that would help him to achieve his goals.

His life began in a small town in south Wales named Burry Port (not Barry Port) in 1894.

Understandably education would have been limited in those days, but as time would reveal he was a quick learner, with the capacity to adapt to circumstances. At

nineteen years of age he left a mining job in Wales to join his uncle in the far away country of Australia, eventually arriving in Kalgoorlie in Western Australia in 1913. It was a bold move, especially in those days. Leaving behind his Mum and Dad as well as all his 7 siblings would not have been easy.

Story goes that he soon got homesick, eventually making his way to Sydney with a view to returning home to Wales. As luck would have it, whilst in Sydney, Dad saw an advertisement in a Sydney paper advising of positions vacant for miners at Bulli Colerary, which for whatever reason, he decided to apply for the job.

He subsequently met a fellow miner, Charles



*JJ as a boy in Wales (photo: courtesy Idwall Richards)*

Birch, who invited him to a Sunday school picnic, possibly fully aware that several of his eligible daughters would be attending. It was here that Dad met Dorothy Birch, and as the saying goes "the rest is history".

Joe and Dorothy subsequently married and in 1917 lived originally in a rented home in George Street, Thirroul, almost opposite Charlie Birch's home.

At this location, he brought five children into the world. The first of which was a lovely girl in 1918, who was named Australyn (after the name of the boat which brought Dad to Fremantle). The last born in George Street, Thirroul was yours truly on 31st May 1930. I was the second son and Dad named me Idwall Charles after his brother Idwall and his father-in-law Charles respectively.

Dad's original language was Welsh and although you could never pick his accent, he did have some



*Vintage JJ Richards vehicle (photo: <http://www.jjrichards.com.au>)*

trouble mastering spelling in English, so much so that I have two "L's" in my name, whereas the norm is one.

Other children born in Thirroul were Joyce Francis (Stephenson), Margaret

(Chippendale) and Joseph Ronald. The last of the tribe, Thomas Barry was born in Murwillumbah in 1936.

*To be continued next edition...*



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## Welcome New Members

The Society warmly welcomes our most recent new members: Neil de Closey, Amanda Yeo, Noeline Harris, Dianne Millar, Karen Scott and Katherine Butterworth.

It's great to have you on board and we thank you for your commitment to helping preserve our precious local history.



Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart.  
*Elizabeth Andrew*

Those who can, do. Those who can do more, volunteer.  
*Unknown*

**ABOUT THE MUSEUM:** Established in 2004 by the three local Historical Societies, and the Tweed Shire Council, the Tweed River Regional Museum is one collection and one museum in three special locations; Murwillumbah, Tweed Heads and Uki. In 2012 The Tweed River Regional Museum at Murwillumbah is entering an exciting period of development involving construction of a new addition. For further information about the Tweed River Regional Museum please visit Council's website [www.tweed.nsw.gov.au](http://www.tweed.nsw.gov.au) or contact the Museum Director on (02) 6670 2400.

**CONTACTING THE SOCIETY:** Phone: (02) 6672 3337, email [enquires@mhsresearch.org](mailto:enquires@mhsresearch.org). The Murwillumbah Museum is located in the historic 1915 Shire Council Chambers at 2 Queensland Rd, Murwillumbah NSW 2484 (the Museum is closed for extension and renovation during 2013 - the temporary office address is 33-35 Kyogle Rd, Bray Park NSW 2484). The Museum's other branches at Tweed Heads and Uki will remain open as usual during this period.

**COMMITTEE:** President - Max Boyd, Vice-Pres. - Tony Clark, Secretary - Carol Piggott, Treasurer - Ernie Cobb, Members - Beverley Lee, Martin King, Geoff Wilkes, Don Beck, Lynne Beck, Bob Gerdes, Penelope Williams. **NEWSLETTER EDITOR:** David Taylor

