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Annual Membership fee: \$20.00 per person- **Renewals Due In May.**

Historical Society Meetings held monthly- 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday at 7.30pm, except in January, also during *winter* on the 4<sup>th</sup> **Saturday at 1.30pm.**

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**Open Hours for the public at COPACC History Centre - 2.00pm to 4.00pm - Thursday, Friday and Sunday.**

*Working Bees at the History Centre are held on 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays of month - 10.00 am -12.00 midday.*

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### **Forthcoming Events -**

History Centre will be closed for Easter & Anzac Day – from 4pm Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April, reopening 2pm Friday 26<sup>th</sup>

February 27<sup>th</sup> – 7.30pm Meeting – Speaker Alan McLean – ‘Mystery at Moonlight Head’ – Fiji Shipwreck 1891

March 27<sup>th</sup> – 7.30pm Meeting – Speaker Norman Houghton – ‘20 years of Otway Bush Bashing’

March 30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> – AGM Western Victorian Association of Historical Societies – hosted by Swan Hill Genealogical & Historical Society.

April 24<sup>th</sup> – 7.30pm Meeting – Members Night – Show & Tell

May 11<sup>th</sup> – 10am – Geelong & District Historical Societies Meeting at Winchelsea

May 22<sup>nd</sup> – 7.30pm CDHS Annual General Meeting

### **A Note from the President –**

2019 began with a January excursion to ‘Turkeith’ the grazing property east of Mt Gellibrand acquired in 1865 by Felix & Annie Armytage on which they built a 17 room single storey bluestone home. In 1903 Urquart & Janet Ramsay purchased the property and the 5 acre garden was laid out and landscaped by William Gilfoyle. The present owners Tim & Maryanne Holt were wonderful information hosts as they gave a guided tour of their home and garden to the busload of 48 members and friends of CDHS. They deserve wholehearted congratulations on the work they are doing to preserve and restore a significant example of our early pastoral heritage.

A request for some photos last year relevant to another prominent early Colac pastoralist William Robertson of Corangamarah has yielded a scholarly article entitled ‘The Robertsons of Alvie in Van Diemen’s Land’ in the latest edition of the Scottish publication ‘History Scotland’.

Although much has been written in Victoria of William Robertson and the homes built by his sons at Cororooke, Alvie & Coragulac, this article deals with William and his siblings. 4 brothers and 1 sister arrived in Tasmania from humble roots in Alvie, Scotland in 1829. The article traces their success as farmers and businessmen and the considerable wealth they accumulated. Only William ventured across Bass Strait to initially acquire 6000 acres of land and become instrumental in the development of the Colac district.

We have been given permission to republish the article in our newsletter later this year.

On a more local level you will notice a few changes to the duty roster at the History Centre in this newsletter. Without the regular voluntary support of our membership this primary role of our society would cease to function. The duty roster is a great opportunity to spend some time in the centre and to get to know more about the wealth of information and relics it contains, as well as meeting interesting people. Visitors seeking information often contribute as much to our knowledge as well.

### **Guest Speaker –**

**November:** Speaker was Heather Threadgold whose topic was district Aboriginal Stone Sites. Heather is completing a PHD at Deakin University and illustrated her address with photos of local stone sites.

## **What has been in the Colac Herald news? -**

**November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018- Book charts region's timber industry history.** Historian *Norman Houghton* published his book "*Choppers and Chippers*" which detailed almost 140 years of the hardwood timber industry in the West Otways when there were more than 100 hardwood sawmilling companies. Their peak was in 1956. AKD Softwoods of Colac transitioned from hardwood to softwood and is now one of the biggest softwood processors in Australia.

**November 28<sup>th</sup>- Colac Police wear new cameras.** They will now record audio and video interactions with community members through new body-worn cameras. These will also be used at Apollo Bay, Beecac, Birregurra, Forrest, Lavers Hill, Lorne and Winchelsea helping to strengthen community safety, improve evidence gathering and increase accountability and better interaction between police and community.

**November 28<sup>th</sup>- Colanda site is on agenda.** The Victorian Government has said that *Colanda*, an institutional disability centre, is due to close by mid-2019. Residents will be moved into community-based homes in Colac. Geelong cemeteries Trust has sought written consent from the council to support its use of Colanda land as a cemetery in its plan for the next 100 years.

**November 28<sup>th</sup>- New look for foreshore.** Colac Otway Shire contractors have been removing pine trees near the Colac Rowing Club building as part of a Lake Foreshore Masterplan's revegetation program. They will be replaced with low-growing indigenous plants.

**November 28<sup>th</sup>- Scouts mark two milestones.** Victoria's Scouting community has recognised the service of long-time Colac Scout leader *John Dunn* as leader of Second Sea Scout Group and convenor of the Otway Plains District Personnel Committee. **Top honours for Colac siblings and Venturers.** *Thomas* and his sister *Emily Davis* have earned one of scouting's highest accolades, the Queen's Scout Award representing hundreds of hours of dedicated development in areas including community service, leadership, personal growth and outdoor adventure.

**December 12<sup>th</sup>- Construction to start on \$4.9 M roundabout.** Preparatory work has begun on a new roundabout at a notorious intersection at Birregurra but will not be completed until the latter half of 2019. This roundabout will change the angle of any future crash making a 100 or 80 kmh, T-bone crash impossible.

**December 19<sup>th</sup>- Online register preserves history of war memorials.** The Colac RSL has praised the Australian War memorial's "Places of Pride" initiative and encouraged the community to help promote places of remembrances in the area. Every publicly accessible memorial across Australia will be recorded and photographed and displayed.

\* \* \*

**January 16<sup>th</sup> 2019- Colac traffic to move onto temporary bridge.** Foundations for a new temporary, steel bridge over Barongarook Creek in Murray Street are being built. The present 80-year-old Barongarook Creek Bridge will be demolished to make way for a new bridge to accommodate increased traffic volume, including high-capacity freight vehicles.

**January 28<sup>th</sup>- Foreshore work to include new seating and lighting.** Colac Otway Shire Council plans to complete the installation of new seating, foreshore lighting and water fountains in stage one of the *Lake Colac Foreshore Master Plan* which received a Federal Government funding boost of \$250,000 last year which was matched by the council.

**February 6<sup>th</sup>- Devastation remembered: BLACK SATURDAY 10 YEARS ON: A "gut-wrenching experience": Fire memories linger: Committed cricket club (Pomborneit) rises from the ashes.** Locals recall February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

**February 6<sup>th</sup>- Electronic signs improve intersection safety.** These signs at the Colac-Lorne and Birregurra – Forrest Road intersection have warnings in Mandarin, ahead of the Chinese New Year, and were installed by VicRoads after community calls for extra safety measures specifically targeting international drivers.

**February 6<sup>th</sup>- Carpet concealed a piece of history.** A carpet was lifted in a Colac home built in 1917, to reveal old newspapers stuck to the floor boards. They were pages from the very old *Colac Reformer*. This newspaper ceased publication in 1949 when it was incorporated into the Colac Herald.

**February 11<sup>th</sup>- 30 years ago...** Colac's *Dawn Peel* was documenting scenes from Colac's wartime past. Mrs Peel received a post-graduate scholarship from the council of Australian War Memorial to do a study on rural Australian communities and how they were affected by war. She found that knitting circles would knot ropes as camouflage nets, sewed pyjamas and raised funds. Air raid shelters were built in Memorial Square, the hospital and Catholic Church.

**February 13<sup>th</sup>- Barwon stops flowing despite summer rains.** The river stopped flowing for the third time in four years. Flow stopped at the beginning of February. Groundwater pumping at Barwon Downs borefield has been blamed for increasing the duration and frequency of dry river periods.

**February 13<sup>th</sup>- Council seeks cash for new wetland.** Council has developed a concept design to transform the underperforming Irrewillipe Road Retarding Basin at Elliminyt into an attractive wetlands area and public open space.

**February 15<sup>th</sup>- Bat Action.** Council works towards moving protected grey-headed flying foxes from Colac's Botanic Gardens. Colac's bat population has quadrupled in the past month; now more than 4,000 are threatening multiple trees including heritage-listed ones. Attempts to relocate flying foxes is very expensive and could be ineffective.

**February 15<sup>th</sup>- Upgrades to foreshore include lake buildings.** Repairing repainting and restoring the Colac Sea Scout Hall, Colac Yacht Club and Lake Colac Rowing Club feature in Stage one of *Lake Colac Foreshore Masterplan*. Footpaths have been resurfaced or created along Queens Avenue, reeds removed, jetty repaired, old harbours near Barongarook Creek removed, 10 tons of debris removed from Queen Street bank, seating added and more.

**February 15<sup>th</sup>- Inspirational stories emerging.** Film researchers are rediscovering stories of the hardworking men and the tough, resourceful women who toiled together to help carve out the Great Ocean Road. The public are asked to submit stories especially of women involved or of Indigenous workers to film producer Liz Falkiner for "The Story of the Road". The official anniversary of the centenary is September 19<sup>th</sup> 2019.

# “Cr. E. N. Thomas’ general business – Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1922”

A historical narrative by Alan Doyle – May 2018

**Note:** This article is fictional, but includes actual events of the day to provide a better understanding of Cr. E. N. Thomas. There are no diaries or family notes from this period, and council minutes have been adapted to suit this story.

It’s early evening, Monday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1922, a light shines into the hallway from the office (study) at a house at 13 Hearn Street (now 165). A rustling of papers breaks the quietness in the home, as a tall, solidly built man with a stern and authoritative appearance, places notes and folders into three piles on his desk and takes a seat. It has been a long day, but he will continue into the late hours of the night. Ernest Nathanael THOMAS, known as Ern, and 52 years of age, is a Colac Shire councillor, committee member of the Colac Hospital, as well as the secretary of the Colac Turf Club. Each pile represents each organisation and has correspondence and meeting notes that are in order and quick to reference.

There is a lot on Ern’s mind, as he is always thinking of what’s good for the ratepayers and best for the town. He has followed in his father’s footsteps, the late Daniel Thomas, who was a councillor in Colac’s early days.

Money is also not too far from Ern’s mind, as wastage is not tolerated and value must be gained. Both the Shire Council and Hospital are to be managed with a watchful eye. Careful decisions and an approach are required to appease the banks. The hospital is to open its new Children’s and Infectious Diseases wards, this Friday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of August. The State Treasurer, Mr. McPherson is to open the wards, and do an inspection, along with Mr. J. McDonald M.L.A., for Polwarth<sup>1</sup>. All preparations are in order for the big day. No further action is required for this pile of notes, at present.

He knows within himself that this is the best country hospital in Victoria it has been fully paid for and is free of debt. A great achievement for the committee who had raised most of the money through community support and £500 from the government<sup>2</sup>.

He has been to the Turf club earlier today to check on the track and review the allocation of grazing land to the successful tenderers within the grounds<sup>3</sup>. He has also inspected the new road improvements, with the top of the cutting widened for up and down traffic<sup>4</sup>. The club has been doing well, with crowd numbers up from previous years and the Colac Cup is now worth £150. Preparations are now being prepared for the next AGM. The club is losing a lot of talented committee members who are retiring, due to their aging years<sup>5</sup>. Organisation for the ‘Boxing Day’ races on the 26<sup>th</sup>, December<sup>6</sup> are coming together, again no further action required for this pile, either.

He picks up a pencil and adds a few more notes to a piece of paper he has been compiling over the course of the week. When finished, he folds it neatly and places it in his coat pocket. He gets up and picks up the pile of notes for the Colac Shire meeting which meets in an hours’ time, walking down the hall way to collect his hat. He looks in the parlour and sees his wife Grace, completing the last wheat stem, with Golden thread, she is sewing to her table cover. She is to enter this fine piece of needle work in the next Colac agricultural show. Ern mentions, “Please, don’t wait up, as it may be a long night”. She gives him a smile and continues sewing. His son Stanley, a painter and decorator by trade, has left early to visit his uncle Herb to discuss some painting requirements he needs for his shop in Murray Street, auctioneers Thomas and Joyce.



**Cr. Ernest (Ern) Nathanael Thomas.**

*Image from family collection*



Driving his Singer car along the roads to the shire hall for the meeting, he constantly notes various things along the way that will require attention, such as the growing pothole on the corner of Gellibrand Street and Rae Street; it has increased in size over the course of week. Nothing escapes his keen eye for detail. Ern is respected, but not the most liked person in town. An honest and fair gentleman, who is not afraid to speak his mind, Ern must be doing something right, as he has been re-elected to the Riding of Colac, by his constituents since 1915, a total of 7 years.



**Ern and Grace Thomas beside their 1922 Singer car, (Campbell Street rear drive way).**

*Image from family collection*

He parks his car and enters the council chambers, his big frame dwarfing the doorway. There's nods of heads, shaking of hands and pleasantries said. They all take their seat at the table and the meeting is called to order, by Shire President Mr. J. Morrissy<sup>7</sup>.

It is mentioned, that with regret, the council is losing Cr. M. McLennan, who is retiring after 17 years' and has served well for his Corangamite Riding ratepayers. Also there is the loss of Shire Engineer Mr. W. R. Anderson, of 9 years' service, who is moving to Brisbane<sup>8</sup>. Both are spoken of fondly and best wishes offered to them.

The meeting begins and business is discussed<sup>9</sup>. There is correspondence from the Government Legislative Assembly, that is in reference to the Shire purchasing a small parcel of land at Elliminyt. Council wish to purchase the land at £28 an acre, and use it as a pound<sup>10</sup>. Another letter for discussion is from the Electricity Commission, which intends to expedite the construction work and supply of electricity to Colac from the Victorian grid<sup>11</sup>. These matters are pleasing to all. However the Shire financial affairs are next to order. The current debt is large and overdrawn by £13,895/0/6<sup>12</sup>. This requires attention and contingencies are put in place which must be adhered too. The hours tick away while this and other issues are worked on, with Ern in the thick of discussions. The amended by-law No. 66 preventing the traveling of stock through the main centre of town, is also agreed upon and passed<sup>13</sup>. It is now past midnight and everyone is tired and prepared to pack up and go home, as a lot has been resolved.

Finally, General business is called by the President. Everyone hopes no one has any, however all eyes cross the table, as Ern removes from his coat pocket, his 'infamous list'<sup>14</sup>. There are groans by some and silence by others. Ern very rarely has no general business. Tonight his list has quite a few items that he wishes the council to act on. There are the usual concerns of his ratepayers, who have spoken to him since the last council meeting about various issues. Some are small and maybe even trivial, but he weighs up if it is to be resolved by council. It could be as simple as the night man leaving a gate open, and the owner's chickens getting out. Tonight is no different. He mentions the large and growing pothole on the corner of Gellibrand Street and Rae Street. The town is on display on Friday. With the hospital opening, he does not want the special guests to see Colac in poor condition. He insists that the hole be repaired and the main route that is to be followed, is in tip top shape. The committee discuss the repair and agree, as all want to ensure the town will be

seen in a positive light. Next on the list is the improved road cutting to the race course. Ern complements the council for the works conducted, but notices that there are some soft edges along the new road way that require attention. Again the committee argue that it should wait, with Ern insisting on a timely repair. He continues to cross each item off his list, until it is completed. It is now very late into the night and the meeting finally closes.

Everyone collects their notes and look forward to leaving. Ern feels satisfied that all will be in order for Friday's events and Colac will benefit from this state visit. He returns home, Grace has gone to bed and left a hallway lamp on. He notices on the side table a neatly folded table cover, completed and ready for the show.

He goes to his office and carefully places his notes in a neat pile on his desk. Ern glances at the hospital pile and thinks, "I'll go to the hospital tomorrow and check on arrangements and conduct some inspections". He turns and retires to bed.

#### **Brief Biograph of Ernest Nathanael THOMAS:**

**Born:** 2 May 1870, Colac (son of Daniel THOMAS and Laura Phillis HILLS).

**Occupation:** Butcher, Councillor, Secretary.

**Married:** Grace PROCTOR, 10 August 1897, 'Ulverstone', Kooreh, Victoria.

**Child:** Stanley Proctor THOMAS, born 6 June 1898, Colac (Elliminyt).

**Died:** 14 October 1954, Colac.

**Organisations:- Elliminyt Progress Association:** 1912 to 1918 (1<sup>st</sup> President 1912 through to 1915).

**Colac Council:** Shire of Colac - 1915 to 1938 (President 1926 & 1927) (retired).

Borough of Colac - Sept. 1939 to 1944.

Town of Colac - 1945 to August 1954 (retired).

**Colac District Hospital:** 1914 to 1934 (President 1916 to 1918).

**Victorian Country Hospital Committee:** 1920 (President 1922 & 1930).

**Colac Turf Club:** Secretary for 30 years – 1915 to 1945.

**Colac and District Historical Society:** Foundation member and Vice President – 1950 to 1954.



**Ern in front of "Kooreh", 13 Hearn Street, Colac (c1920).**  
(Note: House number has since been renumbered to 165 Hearn Street)

*Image from family collection*

#### **Acknowledgements:**

- |                                                                                                                           |                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <sup>1</sup> Age, 26 August 1922, page16                                                                                  | - State Treasurer at Colac - Opens Additions to Local Hospital.     |
| <sup>2</sup> 'Quality Community Care – Colac District Hospital 1882 to Colac Area Health 2003', Dawn Peel – 2003, page 42 |                                                                     |
| <sup>3</sup> Particulars of land to be leased by tender document, August 1922, – Colac Turf Club minutes book Volume 1    |                                                                     |
| <sup>4</sup> Weekly Times, 11 March 1922, page 59                                                                         | - Colac Turf Club's Steady Progress                                 |
| <sup>5</sup> Camperdown Chronicle, 29 August 1922, page 4                                                                 | - The Turf – Colac Turf Club's Year.                                |
| <sup>6</sup> Argus, 29 November 1922, page 11                                                                             | - Colac Turf Club.                                                  |
| <sup>7</sup> 'ready for the plough', Robert J. McCormick – 1998, page 150.                                                |                                                                     |
| <sup>8</sup> Ballarat Star, 25 August 1922, page 8                                                                        | - Colac news.                                                       |
| <sup>9</sup> Colac minutes of ordinary meeting, Monday 21 August 1922. – Geelong Library and Heritage Centre.             |                                                                     |
| <sup>10</sup> Age, 25 August 1922, page 8                                                                                 | - News of the day.                                                  |
| <sup>11</sup> Ballarat Star, 24 August 1922, page 6                                                                       | - Colac's Supply to be ready by next May.                           |
| <sup>12</sup> Ballarat Star, 30 August 1922, page 7                                                                       | - Shire's Big Debit Balance.                                        |
| <sup>13</sup> Age, 24 August 1922, page 12                                                                                | - Colac news.                                                       |
| <sup>14</sup> The Colac Herald, 20 October 1954, page 1                                                                   | - Death of Mr. E. N. Thomas, Ends Long Period of Community Service. |

## **THE RAG TRADE – A HISTORY OF THE COLAC CLOTHING FACTORY - 1944 to 1981**

by Craig Pink

By the middle of 1943, the Australian Federal Government was well under way with its “Decentralisation Program” where labor force in country areas could be much more utilised, and to ultimately end up in long term permanent factories to continue after World War 2. The government by this time, had a clear decentralisation policy which would see much more utilisation of country labor force, this ranged from not only rural labor hire, but also labour hire in primary/secondary industry.

Instead of immediate family having to move away to distant cities for work in wartime demand, the decentralisation program helped immensely to keep people employed close to their homes and family in these country areas. Colac was already very well represented by this time for its wartime assistance to World War 2. Many suitable business premises including a number of local motor repair garages such as - Cole’s, Henderson’s, McKenzie’s, Parker’s - just to mention several - had been earlier earmarked by the government-run essential services which was set up to oversee wartime essential production.

In early October 1943, Colac threw open its town to the clothing factory request of Melbourne based John Sackville of John Sackville and Sons Pty Ltd. There had also been lobbying by the local Dad’s Association, who immediately backed the clothing factory project with much enthusiasm. The Sackville brand already had well established base in Melbourne, and was well known by this stage.

John Sackville initially visited Camperdown, and also Colac on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> October 1943, he was shown several premises in Camperdown which he immediately termed unsuitable. John Sackville was only allowed two clothing factories in this Western District area - Terang was also considered, but Colac was chosen on that same day as being the only suitable town.

Considered the best suited site for the clothing factory operations was the premises with Murray Street frontage operating as part of Gainger’s garage (fronting vicinity of today’s 247 - 249 Murray Street). This was not owned by Gainger Brothers, but leased to them by its owner M. Wallace. The Murray Street frontage had already been previously earmarked by government wartime essential services as a priority for wartime production, which John Sackville soon secured as the most suitable premises. He immediately set to work on shifting in machinery, and setting up for garment production for the then essential wartime effort. Initially, the Clothing Trades Union was fearful that opening clothing factories in country areas would lower hard-earned working standards gained through the union. However, the Federal Government assured the union it could have every opportunity to police factories and ensure award rates were paid, so the union came on side and supported the decentralisation project.

Progress went very well, and the Colac Clothing Factory commenced its first day of operations in the assigned Murray Street premises on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> January 1944. Skilled workers, which had been brought from the city, were on hand to instruct the new workers. The staff were initially engaged in three sections, the first section began on the Thursday as mentioned, another started on the following Monday (10<sup>th</sup> January), the third batch started on the Thursday of that same week (13<sup>th</sup> January). In its initial stages of opening, the skilled workers trained the unskilled workers; however, it could take up to several years to learn the trade properly.

### **CLOTHING FACTORY OPENED AT COLAC**

(COLAC. Friday): *Along with the opening of secondary industries in country districts there must be better educational facilities, Senator Dorothy Tangney said in officially opening the Colac clothing factory this afternoon. Among those at the luncheon at the Union Club Hotel, Colac, given by Messrs John Sackville and Sons, the proprietors of the factory, to celebrate the opening were Cr A. H. H. Stewart, Mayor of Colac; Mr McArthur, MLC; Cr Guye, MLA; Mr G. A. Davis, Commonwealth Director of Clothing and Textiles; and Mr T. J. Collins, Department of Supply and Shipping.*

*Senator Tangney explained that it was the policy of the Federal Government to open clothing and other factories in the country, and thus carry on the policy of decentralisation. The important question of education must not be overlooked. In times past the lack of those facilities caused many people to leave the country so that their children could receive a decent education.*

(From THE ARGUS – Melbourne – Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> March 1944, page 3)

In wartime mode, things were vastly different, employees were paid the full wages from commencement, pay was £4 per week for a 44-hour week. Mr J. Sackville stated that *when everything is functioning satisfactorily in a few weeks’ time, the factory would be devoted to the making of clothing for the Australian and American Army, Navy, and Air-Force.* The building was ideally situated at the western end of Murray Street, it featured ample floor space, and was splendidly lit. As part of the preparation for a clothing factory premises, the already existing concrete floor was covered with malthoid. Heating, and a cooling system were also installed. Following the practice in many factories of the era, was – *music while you work*- a radio plant had been installed.

Mr John Sackville had initially hand-picked a small number of staff from his Melbourne factory to come to Colac, amongst them was Mary Ryan, who came to Colac as a 27 year old in February 1944. Mary came from Ringwood, which was an orchard growing area, and had previously trained as a semi-private tailor before going to work at Sackville’s in Carlton, where she did their sample work as a finisher. Another of the handpicked staff, Mrs Kennedy, was to manage the factory and two other girls at Colac. The other women obtained private board, but Mary Ryan obtained board at the Federal Coffee Palace, a place she stated was like a home away from home. Two other women who worked at the clothing factory also boarded there, one came from Lavers Hill, the other from Pirron Yallock.

Mary Ryan also used to frequently go back to the factory after tea *to fix up the work the girls had done wrongly during the day.* When Mary Ryan married in 1946, her wedding left from the Federal Coffee Palace.



**ABOVE** - Colac Herald front page -  
Friday 7<sup>th</sup> January 1944 – Work  
begins at the Colac Clothing Factory.



Camperdown did not totally lose out on the deal, and ended up getting a shirt factory. This opened in a small way and was achieving production by the time of its official opening in later July 1944, trading as the "Triumph Shirt Co. Pty. Ltd.". John Sackville had clearly stated he would not have a clothing factory in Colac and also Camperdown purely because of the labor force, both Colac and Camperdown went on to struggle with hiring enough personnel over their years of operation. When Pelaco purchased the Camperdown run "Triumph Shirt Co. Pty. Ltd." in early 1951, adverts in the Camperdown Chronicle Newspaper previous and after the takeover show half the bus fare from Cobden paid for workers who worked at the Camperdown Shirt Factory. The Camperdown Pelaco shirt factory carried on business through the 1950's and was of great support to the Camperdown community.

Some of the women employed at the Colac clothing factory were manpowered on from Bilson's, some staff also rode pushbikes considerable distances such as from the Beeac area, it was classified as an essential service and the workers could not just leave. Staff included Marj and Mary Birkett, Joan Ballagh, Shirley Mulder, the pressers were men – including Geoff Finch, Billy Fox, Graeme Gibson. The day the war ended saw many of the girls parade down the street in military uniform - it was a crazy day.

After World War 2 ceased, the clothing factory reverted to civilian production, which proved profitable, and kept the employees in work. John Sackville had ambitious plans to build a purpose-built new clothing factory in Colac, but so much was against him. In early 1948 his building permit application was bluntly refused; this created uproar in the local Colac township and surrounds. In the same time-frame this permit was refused, a permit was granted for a new large shoe factory in Ballarat. Politics was certainly well at work and favours passed on, as Ballarat was the Premier's electorate at that time.

Gainger's obviously expected sometime later that their formerly leased garage premises/street frontage would revert to its former pre-war use. This proved difficult as the clothing factory had become very well set up and also very well settled in the Murray Street premises, and not easily shifted. Legal advice (see below) was eventually sought by Gainger's, but it turns out John Sackville mainly wanted the documentation to help his cause for a suitable permit to build a new clothing factory in Colac. Gainger's were also being hassled over parking their buses in Colac's main street, as among other problems it blocked shop frontages from public view. Gainger's desperately needed the garage premises back to house and maintain their growing post-war fleet of buses, and were going to serve a "NOTICE TO QUIT" to Sackville's anyway. This was finally issued to the "Colac Clothing Company" in April 1949.

As a temporary measure to alleviate out-growing the Murray Street Colac premises, the Sackvilles set up a small clothing manufacture operation in premises at 45 main Street Birregurra. This operated between 1948 and 1952 – (see the publication *BIRREGURRA BUSINESSES Past and Present* for a list of known staff, and also an interesting poem about their times at the Birregurra business premises).

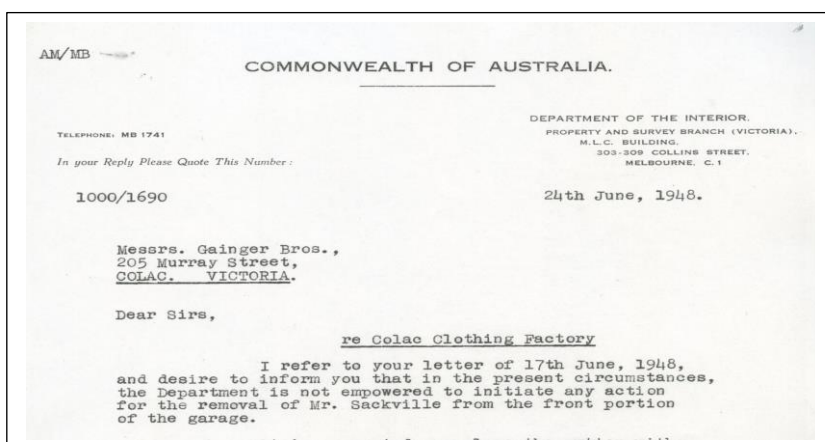
John Sackville and Sons Pty Ltd. did eventually obtain a permit to build their new factory in Colac; this was located almost directly behind the original Murray Street frontage, but with street frontage to 12 Skene Street. A human skull and skeleton was unearthed on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> October 1950 on the site while excavations were under way for the foundations of the new factory. The skeleton was found in buckshot gravel, and it was thought at the time the remains were aboriginal.

**AT RIGHT** – Official correspondence back to Gainger Brothers from the Department Of The Interior in June 1948. All it stated was to contact a solicitor, who would advise the rights of a Landlord and Tenant Regulations Defence (Transitional Provisions) Act 1946.

Document from Society files – MS Box 111 ref- 1327.

**BELOW** - Parts of Gainger Brothers evidence gathered for proposed legal proceedings to remove Sackville's from part of their old leased Murray Street premises - (last dated -27<sup>th</sup> March 1949)

Documents from Society files – MS Box 111 ref- 1327



### **"GAINGER BROTHERS v. JOHN SACKVILLE & SONS PTY. LTD."**

*Prior to war Gainger Brothers rented whole of premises from M. Wallace at £3.0.0 per week. [In 1943] War Organisation Industry took over front part for Sackville who was government contractor until shortly after end of war.....*

*Sackville paid rent direct to M. Wallace..... On July 1<sup>st</sup> 1947 Wallace let whole of premises to Gainger Brothers and ever since Sackville pays to Gainger Brothers..... Rent paid up to December 31<sup>st</sup> 1948... No written agreement with Sackville... Arrangement between Sackville and Gainger was for rent to be £4.0.0 per week... Nothing precise arranged... In fact, Sackville let run out and Gainger has sent bills which have been paid quarterly or thereabouts and sometimes not very promptly....*

*Sackville has been making representations for a building permit for a factory in Colac but so far the permit has been refused notwithstanding a lot of publicity and apparently pressure which has been brought to bear. Sackville desires the notice to quit to be served as an additional lever to obtain a permit but Gainger Bros intend taking ejectment proceedings in any case.... They own a considerable fleet of modern buses and there has been talk by the Town Council of prohibiting the buses from blocking shops in the main streets.... Gainger Bros require the premises in order to make a bus station....*

Gainger's eventually ended up with their garage premises back, and the new Sackville owned clothing factory in Skene Street opened on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1952, the transition to the new premises completed over the Christmas holiday break period.

The cost to build the new clothing factory in Skene Street exceeded over £30,000 (close to 1.1. million dollars today). Any large-scale building at this time of the post-World War 2 era was extremely difficult, with a large amount of the material including steel and

cement imported. Completed, the factory actually cost half as much again as originally contemplated, while the machinery was estimated at being worth another £30,000, with many individual machines worth well over £500 each. The main work room measured 35 feet by 130 feet, well lit by skylights and had continuous long windows the height of the room on the eastern and northern sides. Fluorescent lighting was also installed for use on dull days and winter evenings. An air-conditioning plant and extractor fan helped keep the temperature pleasant, the concrete floor also being covered with a cork type covering which made the floor pleasant to walk on. An automatic oil-burning boiler provided the necessary steam for the garment presses, while the irons were also steam heated.

In the new factory, 125 personnel were to be employed. John Sackville and his son Mr Harold Sackville were eagerly looking for more staff, and advertising to fill vacant positions. The weekly pay total was more than £1,000, a significant sum for that time which was distributed mainly in the town, with practically all of the employees being local residents. Comfort and convenience for staff was also well catered for - a large dining room, dressing room, first-aid room and rest room, apparatus for filtering and cooling drinking water, as well as necessary office space were all well-equipped in the modern new factory. A building in which bicycles could be parked was also provided. The new clothing factory building in Skene Street was constructed by Messrs Seccull Pty Ltd of Melbourne. Messrs J. A. Thompson and Sons of Colac carried out the plumbing work, while Messrs Wyley and Thurling constructed the work benches.

When the company started operations in Colac during the war, practically the whole of the work was military clothing, with the cessation of war, the manufacture of men's clothing was carried on. However, with the resumption of military/training, the need for more service clothing had recurred, and a fair percentage was to be included from the new factory output at Colac, the finished articles being forwarded to Melbourne for distribution. Mr A. D'Ambrosio and Mrs Kennedy, who had come from the Melbourne factory and had been with the company for some time, were in charge at Colac at this time.



**ABOVE** – The Colac Clothing Factory at 12 Skene Street - 1950's. Even today, little is changed when looking from an outside view, even the original entrance doors remain. Note the house at left which is close to today's driveway. *Image from CDHS files, Doug Kirkman collection.*

Over the ensuing years the ups and downs from contract gains and losses affected the textile business, just as it did any other industry. Mid-1961 saw the worst of retrenchments to date, where some 35 women and 5 men were sacked from the Colac clothing factory. The 40 sackings on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1961 totalled 43 personnel sacked in three weeks- (more than one third of the usual staff), which made a difference of some £400 to the Colac clothing factory's weekly payroll. Colac clothing factory Manageress - Mrs M. Kennedy stated that the retrenchments were inevitable, and that Colac rated well alongside other Sackville clothing factories regarding staff retrenchments in the then current downturn/recession, and that staff would be reinstated as soon as work was available again. This was hoped to be in the near future.

Late November 1963 saw Harold Sackville state that as the nearby Camperdown Pelaco factory was closing, he was negotiating with a bus company to provide satisfactory links between Colac and Camperdown to enable the women to travel daily, so as to be employed at the Colac clothing factory. Also stated by Harold Sackville was that as well as the Camperdown women who came to work at the Colac clothing factory, it would not prevent the usual intake of 10 to 15 girls put on at the factory to replace those who left during the year. 90 to 100 personnel were employed at the Colac clothing factory at this point, the Camperdown bus proposal also turned out to be a success. At this time the Colac clothing factory had a yearly wage bill of around £68,000, and specialised in men's and boys' wear which carried the Sackville brand name, with an annual output of no fewer than 115,000 garments.

In June 1966 Mr John Sackville informed the Colac City Council - *that instead of the company building up its business in both quality and quantity, its operations would be curtailed unless it is able to find suitable housing for senior management and technical staff.* As no Housing Commission homes were available for his staff, he was asking council's assistance to find rental accommodation. As no Commission homes were allocated for personnel in industry outside the metropolitan area, the City Council was to approach the problem through the Minister for Housing, and also the Department of State Development. Unless the situation was resolved, the Colac clothing factory would likely not maintain the factory at its then present technical level, and its staff of over 100 personnel.



**ABOVE** – 1964 view of Murray Street frontage where Sackville's Colac Clothing Factory at 247 - 249 Murray Street originated. It operated here from January 1944, until the end of December 1951. Gainger's eventually got their leased frontage back, their buses came out the laneway at left. This 1964 view shows Laneway Panel Beating in the old laneway at left, which is how the "Laneways" name came about. Today's view shows the laneway at left filled in and as part of the Sing Bo Chinese Restaurant. *Image - Bela Bard Brucker collection.*



In July 1966 John Sackville & Sons Pty Ltd appointed Mr John Cutler as floor manager of the Colac Clothing Company. John Cutler, who had only arrived from Scotland five weeks previous without a job in view, had previously been the floor manager of a large clothing factory in Larkhall, the largest village in Scotland, with a population of 50,000 people.

At this point the Colac clothing factory had dropped to 86 employees (77 being women), which turned out 2,800 garments per week. The previous year had 102 employees, and it was the aim of management to get back to that figure as soon as possible. Mr Cutler did state that expansion above this figure was possible. Employment was found for women from a wide radius around Colac, as well as the special bus which ran daily from Camperdown. Mr Cutler stated he had no difficulty finding suitable accommodation in Colac, - *in fact I called in at one agent last week and within an hour was shown a house that suited us*. Later he hoped to buy a house in Colac. The Colac clothing factory was the only remaining Colac industry which started during the previous wartime decentralisation program to remain operational in Colac. Production at this time centred around men's trousers, boys' knickers and dressing gowns. The factory also produced coats, the finished garments distributed to retailers all over Australia.

**AT RIGHT** – Mr John Cutler as pictured on front page of Colac Herald - Friday 6<sup>th</sup> July 1966, soon after he took up the position of floor manager at Sackville's Colac Clothing Factory. Both images from - Bela Bard Brucker collection.



Mid-March 1969 saw the Colac clothing factory celebrate 25 years of operation. In this time the Sackville owned Colac Clothing Company had produced in excess of 3½ million garments, and had paid out some £3½ million in wages. The Skene Street premises had just previously been almost completely re-equipped with new machines at a cost of about \$25,000, and had recently increased its staff from 80 to 100. The re-equipping program which was carried out over the Christmas/New Year break saw about 80 new sewing machines installed. The factory now had more than 50 machines used for plain sewing, another 30 *patent* machines for particular operations like sewing on buttons, zig-zagging, making hip pockets and waste bands etc... Production manager Graeme Gibson said of the new streamlined process – *it has streamlined the production process so that garments travel from one operator to the next, gradually taking shape. Instead of machines being on long benches, the machines are now separated in rows to give greater flexibility and adaptability. Before, we used to find we sometimes had a particular machine in the wrong place. The cloth, already cut into patterns, comes from the Sackville factory in Melbourne, it enters the Colac factory at one end, and the finished men's' and boys' clothes are packed at the other for dispatch to Melbourne*. Mr Gibson also stated that the modernisation had increased production and the factory was being kept fully occupied. The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Colac clothing factory was held at the Union Club Hotel on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1969. The Manageress, Mrs M. Kennedy, who came to Colac with Mr John Sackville in January 1944 when the business opened, had been in employment since that time (as well as previous employment at the Sackville Clothing Factory in Melbourne).

**ABOVE – “HAPPY WORKERS IN A COLAC INDUSTRY”** read the headline for this photo on front page of Colac Herald - Friday 6<sup>th</sup> July 1966, announcing the new manager. Certainly a busy scene with a floor space full of sewing machines. Also stated was that greater local expansion was anticipated.

**COLAC CLOTHING COMPANY**  
We are now inviting applications from  
**GIRLS UNDER 21**  
to commence on **January 16, 1967**  
Limited Vacancies are available for  
**SENIOR OPERATORS**  
(skilled or unskilled)  
Selective individual training for unskilled operators  
Apply . . .  
**COLAC CLOTHING COMPANY**  
SKENE STREET, COLAC

**AT LEFT** - Advertising from the Colac Herald - 16<sup>th</sup> December 1966, with the annual recruitment drive for Colac Clothing Company personnel. The January 16<sup>th</sup> 1967 start date would coincide with staff who returned from Christmas/New Year holidays...



**ABOVE AT RIGHT** – Friday 16<sup>th</sup> February 1968, a room full of idle sewing machines at the Colac Clothing Company - with only the Manageress, Mrs M. Kennedy and Mr Graeme Gibson on duty (both pictured). On this day - over 200 workers were stood down in Colac due to an S.E.C. strike. The biggest affected was at the Colac Clothing Company in Skene Street where there was no work for 98 girls and women. The strike also halted all work at the Associated Kiln Driers Sawmill, where about 50 men were stood down for the day, same for Bryan Bros and Borch Ltd, where 30 men were stood down for the day, and there was no production. Another 18 men were also stood down for the day at the HP Sawmill.

*Image from Bela Bard Brucker collection*

**PART TWO CONCLUDES NEXT ISSUE**



## CRAIG'S CONUNDRUM

**LAST ISSUE ANSWER-** Yes, pigs could be a common site on some streets of Colac, especially on sale days, as these two Monday evening images from November 1972 show. Pigs going by rail for slaughter after the sales were hunted (and often escaped as this night) on their way to the holding yards near the railway station.

(Both images from Bela Bard Brucker collection)



**AT LEFT** – This is supposedly a November 1968 view of the Connor Street Doctor's rooms ? – but wasn't it a double storey frontage at this part of the Connor Street entrance ?

Can you explain ? Do you remember ?.

## ANSWER NEXT ISSUE

(Image from Bela Bard Brucker collection)

### COLAC AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY ROSTER 2019 2.00 PM – 4.00 PM - Thankyou

| Month        | Thursday                                                                                                                                          | Friday                                                                                                                                           | Sunday                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>March</b> | 7 <sup>th</sup> D. Missen<br>14 <sup>th</sup> R. Missen<br>21 <sup>st</sup> G. Splatt<br>28 <sup>th</sup> J. Knight                               | 1 <sup>st</sup> C. Pink<br>8 <sup>th</sup> G. Bray<br>15 <sup>th</sup> E. Chambers<br>22 <sup>nd</sup> M. Saddlier<br>29 <sup>th</sup> E. Angel  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> A. McIntosh<br>10 <sup>th</sup> G. Knox<br>17 <sup>th</sup> B. McDonald<br>24 <sup>th</sup> I. Barlow<br>31 <sup>st</sup> E. Chambers |
| <b>April</b> | 4 <sup>th</sup> G. Splatt<br>11 <sup>th</sup> R. Osborne<br>18 <sup>th</sup> D. Missen<br>25 <sup>th</sup> Closed Anzac Day                       | 5 <sup>th</sup> C. Pink<br>12 <sup>th</sup> G. Bray<br>19 <sup>th</sup> Closed Easter<br>26 <sup>th</sup> M. Saddlier                            | 7 <sup>th</sup> A. McIntosh<br>14 <sup>th</sup> I. Barlow<br>21 <sup>st</sup> Closed Easter<br>28 <sup>th</sup> B. McDonald                           |
| <b>May</b>   | 2 <sup>nd</sup> D. Missen<br>9 <sup>th</sup> R. Osborne<br>16 <sup>th</sup> G. Splatt<br>23 <sup>rd</sup> J. Knight<br>30 <sup>th</sup> R. Missen | 3 <sup>rd</sup> C. Pink<br>10 <sup>th</sup> G. Bray<br>17 <sup>th</sup> E. Chambers<br>25 <sup>th</sup> M. Saddlier<br>31 <sup>st</sup> E. Angel | 5 <sup>th</sup> A. McIntosh<br>12 <sup>th</sup> G. Knox<br>19 <sup>th</sup> B. McDonald<br>27 <sup>th</sup> I. Barlow                                 |