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

Historical Society Meetings held monthly 4th Wednesday at 7.30pm,

except in January, also during *winter* on the 4th **Saturday at 1.30pm**

News/Updates/Information - Website: colachistoricalsociety.org.au

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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 1st & 3rd Wednesdays of month - 10.00 am - 12.00 midday.

Please note that articles printed in this Society Newsletter are subject to Copyright.

Forthcoming Events -

Wednesday May 22	5.00pm	Annual General Meeting with Guest Speaker Alison Harcourt nee Doig 'Reminisces of Colac' followed by a light meal, then AGM
Saturday June 22	1.30pm	General Meeting- Speaker Helen Paatsch – 'For the Pleasure of the People'
Saturday July 27	1.30pm	General Meeting- Visit Jason Schram's <i>Colac Memorabilia Collection</i>
Saturday August 10	10.00am	Geelong & District Historical Societies Meeting Hosted by Geelong South West Rail –Venue Birregurra Railway Station

A Note from the President –

We are pleased to have installed a new modern display cabinet in the History Centre to display our collection of aboriginal artefacts. We appreciate a grant of \$1022 from the Colac Otway Shire from its Community Grants Program towards the cost. Congratulations and thanks to Deb Chant who arranged for Mathew Phelan from Aboriginal Victoria to identify the artefacts to enable them to be registered. Deb has also used this information to create an interpretative guide for visitors viewing the display. This formed part of a larger exhibition currently on view entitled 'Celebrating our Local Aboriginal History' prepared by the Family History Group as part of the 2019 Australian Heritage Festival.



Preparing the Aboriginal Exhibition featuring the new display case of artefacts:

From left: Mayor Jason Schram, John Clarke, Deb Chant, Matthew Phelan & Robert Missen

Guest Speakers –

February – Alan McLean – Who gave an enlightening talk about his research which enabled him to write a book entitled *Mystery at Moonlight Head* – the Fiji Shipwreck disaster of 1891.

March – Norman Houghton gave an illustrated insight into his years of bush-bashing, fighting leeches, blackberries and precipitous slopes researching his books on the sawmills and tramways of the Otways.

April – Members Night –Items included a silver rowing trophy awarded at the 1892 Colac Rowing Regatta and an early Colac Cricket Club Minute Book.

What has been in the Colac Herald news? –

February 22nd 2019- Light Show to mark Anzac Day. *Colac Memorial Square's cenotaph* will become the focus of a light-projection show, commemorating the Anzacs. Colac Otway Shire Council has worked with Colac RSL, Colac Cemetery, Colac and District Historical Society, Colac and District Family History Group and St Mary's Parish to gather photographs for projection onto the sides of the cenotaph over one week until Anzac Day.

March 1st-Historic map hidden in vault. A *Winchelsea and District Historical Society* member found a book in the archives that mapped out an eastward extension of the Great Ocean Road in 1950 as far as Barwon Heads, by the Town and Country Planning Board in Melbourne. However, the road was never made.

March 11th-Work starts on extra water storage for region. *Barwon Water* is investing in the growth of Colac by building a new tank to store 5.5 million litres of treated drinking water which will boost our total treated water to 9.1 million litres.

March 20th- HERITAGE SITE. Bridge work stalls after discovery of Aboriginal remains. The incident is reminiscent of the discovery of *Aboriginal remains* near Barongarook Creek in Colac 20 years ago. Those bones were discovered in a trench 50 metres from the creek when building Barongarook Gardens Aged Care Home in 1999. Bones about 400 years old should be treated with respect and be reburied having been seen by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council.

March 20th- Family pays tribute to trader. Colac's *Jack McMahon* had a remarkable work ethic earning the trust of Colac shoppers for more than 60 years in his McMahon's Upholstery and Blinds Business that he established in Murray Street in the early 1950s.

April 1st- Brigade reaches milestone. Past and present members of *Cororooke's fire brigade* celebrated 75 years of community service. CFA Captain Wayne Burnett has been there for 35 years and captain for the past 22 years.

April 5th- Major art auction hits region. A former lawnmower shop on Murray St has become home to a new major *art and antique auction*. Auction group Victorian Auctions and Valuations had identified Colac as an ideal auction hub in the south-west region.

April 5th- Trash trap will keep lake clean. *Colac Otway Shire Council* installed a new style gross pollutant trap at a stormwater outfall at the end of Stoddart St to reduce the amount of street waste reaching Lake Colac. It can collect 1.7 metres of waste in nets and will be emptied at scheduled intervals.

April 10th- Newsagent wins state honour. The Victorian Association for newsagents presented veteran Murray St newsagent *John Blane* with a lifetime achievement gong honouring him for 50 years of being in the business starting at age 17. At 22 he ran the business when his father was too ill and died when John was 23.

April 24th- Shining a light on war history. Projectors are showing a reel of images celebrating the community's military history onto the cenotaph created by local multimedia artist *Matthew Bonner* funded by a State Government grant of \$40,000 to commemorate Anzac Day.

April 24th- Flags honour service people. More than 1,000 Australian flags flap proudly in the wind on the graves of people who served in the Australian Defence Force in the *Colac Cemetery* and also at Whoorel, Warncoort and Beac cemeteries.

April 26th-Permanent art space for district creatives. Colac Otway Shire Council has dedicated a former library annexe in Gellibrand St to be a new "Colac Makers Space", leased by *Creative Otways* who will share with Colac Camera Club, Colac Wednesday Painters, and Colac Community Art Mob.

April 26th- Diver to salvage crashed plane. A salvage diver is a step closer to retrieving a Second World War-era plane, a 2-seater CAC *Wirraway*, that sank to the bottom of *Lake Corangamite* in 1950. It was ditched by Elite pilot Vance Drummond during a low-level flying exercise who survived the crash and was rescued by locals.

May 8th-Aboriginal heritage on display. The Colac and District Family History Group have launched a new display at the History Centre focusing on *Colac and district Aboriginal family history* researched and curated by Deb Chant. There is also a display case of Aboriginal artefacts provided by the Colac Historical Society.

May 10th- Demolition for retail site. Demolition has started at Colac's former *Rhys Evans site* in Murray St to make way for a new convenience store.

Colac War Memorial - Anzac Week Light Show 2019 – Photos by Davida McDonald



“Lasseter’s Lost Gold Reef and its Colac Connection”

By Alan Doyle – October 2018

Lasseter’s Gold Reef is one of Australia’s greatest mysteries or myths of all time. A gold reef that apparently exists in the Petermann Range in outback Australia on the border of Western Australia and Northern Territory. It has been searched for by many, but never found. This famed reef is named after Lewis Hubert LASSETER, born 27th September 1880 at Bamganie, near Meredith, Victoria.

Lewis Lasseter created headlines around Australia and beyond with his story of his early discovery in 1897 of the reef and his ambitious quest to find it again. He convinced private investors in 1930 to sponsor him for an exploration team to find his lost reef, at approx. £50,000. The exploration party - called the Central Australia Gold Expedition Company (C.A.G.E.C.) would fail in its search, which also resulted in Lewis’ death.

Throughout his life, Lewis Lasseter made several claims about how he discovered the reef and other various personal achievements, with some questioning many of his stories. His Colac connection is one he never seemed to mention.

His parents were William John Lasseter and Agnus Cruickshank, and he was the third child of four children. They included William Arthur b. 1876, Lilian Jeanette b. 1878, Lewis Hubert b. 1880 and Claude Henry b. 1883. The family lived at Bamganie, which is now known locally as “Lasseter’s Gully”. His mother died in 1888, from apparent sunstroke. His father, William John Lasseter had occupations of shearer, labourer and a coach carriage painter. By 1890 he was the Colac Shire council’s Rabbit Inspector, a position he held to about 1893. Living in the Meredith and Colac districts he was known to be a heavy drinker, and not much of a father to young Lewis.



Lewis Hubert Lasseter

Lewis ran away from home at the age of 9, and over the next seven years he was taken in and cared for by the respected Colac resident George Francis Sydenham and his wife Zoe, at their home, ‘Moana’. They did their best to provide him with a good upbringing. G. F. Sydenham owned the ‘Sydenham’s Economic Store’ in Murray Street. After many successful years he sold the business in October 1890, as he had taken the job of Valuer and Rate collector for the Shire of Colac also in October 1890. He held this position until 1899. The store became ‘Belyea and Fulton’s Economic Store’.

Lewis took up employment as a groom (stable boy) at the age of 14 for George Sydenham, who by this stage was like a father to him. He was given a Christian up-bringing at St. John’s Sunday School, where he received 2nd prize for his attendance at the annual gathering at the Victoria Hall on 20th August 1896. However, there was a life changing experience for young Lewis just ten days following the event.

There was a burglary at Belyea and Fulton’s Economic Store on the night of 30th August 1896, and young Lewis was accused, along with 25-year-old Henry Boreham. George Sydenham some days later discovered in Lewis’ room various items that alarmed him. He discovered a pair of gloves and upon further investigation he found revolvers and pocket knives in a box. He laid out all of the items in his sitting room and asked Lewis for an explanation of how he came by them. The answer was not convincing, and George didn’t believe him. He reported the find to Colac policeman, Senior Constable Dowler. The policeman made a further inspection of Lewis’ room and found various other items that matched the description of articles stolen from Belyea and Fulton’s Economic Store.

Following further questioning with Constable Curtain, Lewis was asked if he knew anything about the break-in at Belyea and Fulton’s Economic Store on that particular night. Lasseter replied “No, I do not”. George Sydenham then said, “It would be better to admit it”, with Lasseter replying, “Admit what; I know nothing about it”. It was only after Constable Curtain and Sydenham performed another search of Lewis’ room and found further boxed items from the burglary that he admitted to the crime stating, “In the company of Henry Boreham, I broke into Messrs Belyea and Fulton’s”. He described securing tools for the break-in, which were stolen from coachbuilders Brett and Johnson’s, using Sydenham’s key. Lasseter was arrested. Both Constable Curtain and Sydenham proceeded to Boreham’s

residence in East Colac, where he was not home. Further articles of the theft were discovered. Boreham was later found at Corunnun in a hut on Mr. Hibberd's farm. Boreham was arrested and cautioned, to which he said "I will admit everything". On the way back to the police station Boreham stated that he and Lasseter had loaded revolvers when they were looting the premises. This was of a great surprise, that they were masked and prepared to shoot their way out if caught (Henry Boreham until recently had a small shop in Murray Street).

Later, Lewis was also prosecuted with theft of a pair of field glasses from Mr. Billings boatshed on 30th July 1896. He had rowed under the boatshed and then got through the trap door. Mr. Billings did not wish to press charges. This would have been a great crushing blow to the Sydenham's who had tried to lead him in the right direction of life and now George would have to go to court and describe the stolen items he found, as well as speak in favour of Lewis.

Charges and proceedings were heard at the Colac Police Court on 22nd September 1896 and adjourned for trial. The trial was heard on 6th October 1896 at the Geelong County Court and General Sessions, by His Honor Judge Arthur Wolfe Chomley. Both Henry Boreham and Lewis Lasseter pleaded guilty on two accounts of burglary. Henry Boreham was sentenced to six months hard labour and Lewis Lasseter was detained to serve his sentence at the Boy's Reformatory in Pakenham for two years. Lasseter later absconded the institution in October 1897.

In his book *'Lasseter's Gold'*, Warren Brown explains, that in the year 1897, "...- it was all very confusing" (pages 167 & 168) – He mentions the Colac connection, as well as Lewis Lasseter's claims he was found by an Afghan cameleer, 400 miles west of Alice Springs, dehydrated, sun-bleached and clinging to life – clutching an oatmeal bag filled with gold nuggets. Other stories are that he left the Royal Navy in 1901, after serving as a gunner on HMS *Powerful* for four years, and another that he gave up seafaring around Cairns, Queensland and decided to look for rubies in the McDonnell Ranges. He had on rare occasions pencilled on documents his discovery date of the reef was 1894, making him 14 years of age.



Lasseter's expedition, MacDonnell Ranges, 1930.

Lewis Lasseter seated in front with hat.

Source: National Library of Australia

The only truth for the years 1896-97 is that Lewis Lasseter was in Colac, committing armed burglary and sentenced to a Boy's Reformatory.

Interesting Fact: Within 5 weeks of Lewis Lasseter being sentenced, G. F. Sydenham would conduct his first Magic Lantern viewing of the Otways at the Victoria Hall in Colac, on 12th November 1896.

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Colac Herald, 21 August 1896, page 2 - St. John's Sunday School.

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

by Craig Pink (part two) concluding from previous issue -

March 1970 saw the Colac clothing factory running at only partial capacity due to a shortage of labour hire. In a letter to the Colac Promotional Committee - Mr H. Sackville stated his disappointment at the low intake of workers. *Because of normal wastage through the year, it is important that we employ about 20 new operators during the January/February period. We have engaged only six, this means that we are running our plant at idle capacity.* Mr Sackville also said he did not need to stress the importance of the continuing success of the clothing factory to be able to draw on local labour. The manageress of the factory Mrs M. Kennedy said also at this point that staff were needed for 10 new machines which had been installed at Christmas. Also questioned about the three employees recently put off, Mrs Kennedy explained that these were put off due to seasonal changes. *The employees concerned were pressers, not machinists, and the factory was now making overcoats, which did not require pressing.* Mrs Kennedy also stated there was no suggestion of employees being taken by bus to work in Sackville's new plant in Geelong. Cr Mathews said he was sure the Promotional Committee would give the clothing company all the help it could, and the shortage could be overcome.

Mr Graeme Jackman started work with the Colac clothing factory in late 1970, effective 1st January 1971, he took over the position of manager at the Colac clothing factory from Mary Kennedy. Mr Jackman was 22 years old, grew up in Charlton, and had trained at the Sackville company's Melbourne and Geelong factories for a short time after doing his National Service in earlier 1970. Mrs Mary Kennedy (at 78 years of age) then became Recruiting and Personnel Officer at the Colac premises.



ABOVE – Clear plastic covers several machines not in use, as well as a pile of finished garments that are stacked in the south east corner where the delivery door was. The work area was always a mass of overhead electrical leads dangling everywhere. Manageress Mary Kennedy can also be seen busy at work near left of centre.

LEFT/RIGHT - Thursday 16th January 1969 – The Colac clothing factory returns from the annual Christmas break. Colac Herald photographer Bela Bard Brucker took numerous images, but as usual, all did not make the newspaper. The factory opened with new changed-over machinery, which was expected to speed up output, and also enable a wider range of garments to be made. 100 employees were engaged, mostly females. Both images from Bela Bard Brucker collection



ABOVE – Dressing gowns in their final stages of manufacture. Graeme Gibson is supervising at right rear of image. It was this image that made Colac Herald front page on Friday 17th January 1969, along with other images of local industry about the return to work after the Christmas break and annual holidays.

Mary Kennedy had had a long association with the Sackville clothing company, 43 years of it ! Mary originally came to Colac to help out when the clothing factory started out in the front section of Gainger's garage in January 1944, where 16 personnel went on to be employed. As Harold Sackville stated – *it was her technical knowledge and her natural motherly manner with the girls that prompted the directors to appoint her as manageress. It was for the same reason, and her knowledge of what was required of girls entering the clothing industry, that the directors wanted her to stay on as recruiting officer.*

BELOW – Mary Kennedy had a long association with the Sackville Clothing Company, and at 78 years of age, stayed on as Recruiting and Personnel Officer. Advert from Colac Herald 30th November 1970.

Public Notice

John Sackville & Sons
(Colac Branch)

wish to announce that as from January 1,

Mrs. M. KENNEDY

will take up new duties
at the Colac Clothing Company

— as —

**RECRUITING and
PERSONNEL OFFICER**

AT RIGHT – Mary Kennedy as she appeared in Colac Herald – 30th November 1970. Not quite ready for retirement, but turning 79 in February 1971. Mary managed the Colac side of Sackville Clothing for some 27 years - 43 years total with the Sackvilles. Mary originally came to Colac in January 1944 only to help out, but when her husband died shortly after arriving here she decided to stay on.
Image from – Bela Bard Brucker collection



By late July 1971, the Colac clothing company had just put on twelve more staff, and was advertising for further positions, but just several months back in May 1971, a total of 45 personnel (half of the staff) had been retrenched due to lean times again in the industry. Renewed fears that the company would cease production in Colac were also very likely, and with no appointed manager it was just stated that the Colac premises was operating with *satisfactory management arrangements*. A Sackville spokesman (in late July) for the company said that production of summer stock had started, and that more staff were now needed to fill vacant positions.

In August 1974, after more than 30 years of operations in Colac, the Sackvilles made the decision to lay off the remaining 45 staff, and close the Colac operations of its clothing manufacture. The Colac staff were told the shock news on Wednesday 7th August by the company's joint managing director - Mr Maurice Sackville. Many long term staff had been extremely loyal to the company, including Mrs Mary Kennedy who was the former manageress, now personnel officer, who came from the Melbourne Sackville factory in 1944 when the Colac factory was first established in Gainger's garage in Murray Street. Current Manager Mr G. Gibson had been on the staff for 25 years. Consumer resistance to price was high on the list of reasons for the downturn in sales output, but many factors over a period of time influenced the decision to close the Colac premises. The Sackvilles had tried desperately to keep the Colac factory open, but with the then current conditions in the textile industry - as Maurice Sackville stated - *we looked at all avenues, and as I said to staff, Colac is one cog in the wheel. We have to keep the wheel turning... pull in our horns... tighten our belts... That's what we are doing...*



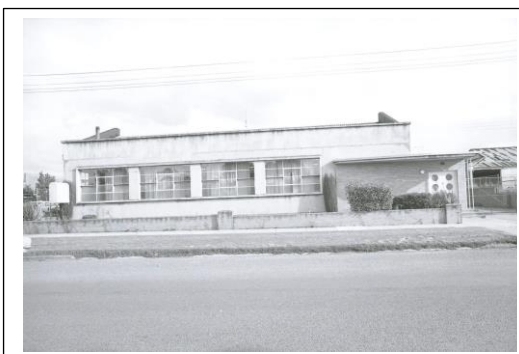
LEFT/RIGHT – Early August 1974 - nearing the end of more than 30 years of the Sackville clothing factory at Colac. With only a week's employment ahead of them, these employees had a bleak outlook unless other work was lined up. The Geelong Sackville clothing factory was just too far for most to travel, or resettle. Both Images from – Bela Bard Brucker collection



The staff were to be laid off from the next Friday, positions were offered in the Sackville clothing factory in Geelong, but was too far to travel, or relocate for most locals at the time.

A NEW PHASE BEGINS -

The old Colac clothing factory laid idle for some 8 months, until bought in April 1975 by Melbourne based clothing manufacturer firm B. & K. Champion Products Pty Ltd, of Fairfield. The firm already had a staff of 140 personnel at Geelong and Melbourne factories, and intended to interview for staff for its Colac operations in May and June, stating that 80 personnel would be employed at the Colac premises in Skene Street, with production beginning in July. The company was established in 1967 under the name of Beacham-Ratray Pty Ltd in a small terrace house in Bay Street, Brighton, with a staff of two. These two (Beacham and Kerdel) were the present shareholders/directors of B. & K. Champion Products, which was established in 1972.



AT LEFT– April 1975 view of the former Sackville clothing factory in Skene St. Colac - ready for its next owners and perhaps a new lease of life. The shed at right at that time was the workshop area of A.K. McKenzie Ford Dealers. Image from – Bela Bard Brucker collection

AT RIGHT- Repainting at Skene Street in early June 1975. One of the delivery doors at south east corner can be seen at right of image, which still survives the same today. Image from – Bela Bard Brucker collection



AT LEFT – Monday 23rd June 1975, the first day at work as B. & K. Champion employees. Mrs Iris Mestrovic gives instructions on overlocker operation on the first day of opening. Windcheaters and T-shirts were considered easier to make as part of the employees re-training, before moving on to other more complex garments. Image from – Bela Bard Brucker collection

B. & K. Champion supplied a range of children's, women's, youth's and men's cotton knit fashion, printed T-shirts, wind-cheaters, club and school garments and so on.... In 1973, B. & K. Champion acquired Jason Knitting Mills Pty Ltd, which supplied a large range of Australian rules football jumpers, cricket, tennis, rugby and athletic apparel. The Colac factory would be involved in the cutting, making and also pressing of both fashion and sporting wear, which would be marketed in Australia.

Former Sackville employees from the Colac clothing company were sent a letter of invitation to be employed as part of the new ownership of B. & K. Champion, many of whom became employed again at their former workplace of the old Sackville days, but without the old authority of Mary Kennedy. After repainting and renovating at the former Sackville premises at 12 Skene Street Colac, the first 19 women and girls started as B. & K. Champion employees on Monday 23rd June 1975. As most of the women already had years of experience at sewing on plain machines, Mrs Iris Mestrovic (wife of manager Mr Mestrovic) gave instructions on overlocker operation as the new employees made wind-cheaters and T-shirts as part of their initial training. Once the overlappers were mastered over the first few weeks, other more complex garments were introduced. The premises opened and did reasonably well, but it didn't take long for the same old troubles such as lack of staff to escalate again.

Ed Beacham and co-proprietor Peter Kerdel of B. & K. Champion Products flew to Los Angeles in June 1976 to sign a four year contract with Jag Jeans. This contract was worth a lot of dollars, and would supposedly lead to major expansion at Colac. The American Jag Jeans company was in association with the Australia Jag Jeans, which dealt mainly in jeans, but this was a move to supply the American market with children's tops – both fleecy and cotton knit fashion garments. The first consignment of 12,000 garments was air freighted to Los Angeles in mid-July 1976, most of the garments having been made at the Colac Skene Street premises.

Although the B. & K. Champion business partners were critically aware of the government's policy to *open the gate* on imports of cheaper clothing from Asia, these new garments (designed by Peter Kerdel) were aimed at the higher end of the American market, and were confident their Colac factory could keep up production, and even expand.

However, the staff problems at the Colac factory were only partially overcome, and it was still struggling for staff as a number of experienced female machinists had left. These women had to leave as their husbands were drawn to the city for work as their local work had dried up, the offer of work in the cities thought to be the best option for some at the time.

To meet demand, a second shift started at the B. & K. Champion Skene Street factory in August 1976. Initially, this was a month trial to see if it would be economic, manager John Lawless stated he was confident the move would be successful. In the first week of the trial there were nine machinists, but soon lifted to 16. There were 65 machinists working on the day shift, with a total of 81 personnel. The factory was flat out meeting orders, amongst them exports to America. Previous staff shortages, including several families leaving Colac were now overcome. It took up to three months to train a machinist, but good production was now being obtained from both shifts. Then current turnout was 8,000 garments a week, with loads carried daily to Melbourne by the firm's own vehicles.

AT RIGHT - Early July 1976 - loading finished garments at Colac for despatch to Melbourne. From left - production manager John Lawless, despatch clerk Susan Salmon, at right - Graeme Parris - driver of the B & K. Champion Bedford van. This was part of a consignment of 12,000 garments, most of which were from the Colac factory, and were air freighted to Los Angeles in mid-July 1976. Image from – Bela Bard Brucker collection

AT RIGHT – From the Yellow Pages of 1979 Geelong and Colac District telephone book – B. & K. Champion at 12 Skene St Colac.
Image from CDHS files - Local District telephone book collection.



June 1977 saw the B. & K. Champion Skene Street Colac factory surviving the then current textile industry crisis; the factory employed 65 personnel as day staff, and a further 24 on an evening shift from 5pm to 9pm. Many other clothing factories had closed in recent times, as well as the recent closure announcement of the Geelong Crestknit Leisure Knits factory, throwing 19 people out of work. CrestKint had also closed its factories at Collingwood, Hawthorn, Camperdown and Portland by this time.

Although the B. & K. Champion factory in Colac began well in mid-1975, August 1977 saw the future of the company placed in doubt by the release of an Industry Assistance Commission's report recommending abolition of subsidies and its tariff protection. However, this recommendation was rejected by the Federal Government - to which it then boldly promised to continue its support for the industry for three years to guarantee jobs in the textile industry.

In May 1979 there was a promise of expansion for the company when a merger with the jean company Amco was proposed, and there was talk of Blue Bell of the United States acquiring both companies (Blue Bell traded in Australia as Wrangler). Effective 1st May 1979, B. & K. Champion merged with the Australian Jeans company Amco, shortly after being purchased by the Blue Bell Of America Company in later May 1979. If the merger was successful, B. & K. Champion would be 50% owned by the world's second largest clothing company. By July 1979 the B. & K. Champion trading name had changed to Jason BR P/L, the outlook considered very positive for the clothing factory future in Colac, 15 additional machinists were now on site, and space for another 10 workers was to be utilised over the next two months. This would in turn bring employment back to the peak of 103 which was reached the previous year.

However, it was later reported that the large conglomerate of the Blue Bell Company did not want to include Jason BR in its

deal with Amco. In November the same year (1979), the managing director of Jason BR Pty Ltd, Mr Ed Beacham, gave an assurance that the Colac factory would not close.

AT RIGHT – Colac Herald front page - Wednesday 11th July 1979. It became a complicated entanglement of company take-overs which saw the eventual failure of the Jason BR clothing factory in Colac, which ended in its final closure in September 1981.

Unfortunately though, in the same month the Jason BR Pty Ltd company went into receivership.

The struggle started in early 1979 when the Australian company Amco Holdings P/L took over a half share in Jason BR.

AT RIGHT - August 1979 view of the Skene Street factory premises clearly shows the “BR” part of the **JASON BR** name visible. The Jason BR name came in mid-1979. “LITTLE CHAMP” is the other *in-house* brand logo shown on the wall.

Image from – Bela Bard Brucker collection

The merger of the two firms was to allow for expansion and development of Jason BR, which around that time announced it hoped to take on extra staff at its operations in Skene Street Colac. However, in the same time-frame the US giant corporation Bluebell moved to take over Amco, but unfortunately for Jason BR, the giant US corporation had no intention of including Jason BR in the deal with Amco. Without this merger, Jason BR would certainly fail.

As Colac manager John Lawless stated at the time - *they're good steady workers, you give them the work and they get it out fast.. .. they're a terrific bunch of people and I would hate to see anything go wrong. Here's a factory full of people eager to work... .. they've worked hard for the three years I've been here, and now they're faced with the prospects of losing their jobs... ..*

Hoping to sell the business as a going concern, the Jason BR company traded in the hands of receivership, but with no buyer found, the decision had to be made to close the Colac operations, and also its factory in Fairfield Melbourne.

In late August 1981, the official receivers of Jason BR announced to the 40 remaining staff at the former Jason BR Colac operations that it would now close. As the Jason BR company had been trading in receivership since November 1979, the closure was obviously not entirely unexpected - just very drawn out. The Skene Street factory was to remain open to honor existing orders and use up stock, with just over two weeks work for the remaining staff, it would close on 18th September 1981.

The former clothing factory premises at 12 Skene Street closed at this point, and did not reopen again as a clothing factory. The premises went on to become Swayne & McCabe's Workshop, which saw several expansions - one with the failure and closure of Bryan Bros & Borch when Swayne and McCabe expanded into additional fitting and turning/lathe work, and later again with the manufacture of the *Boomerang* round hay bale feed out wagon in the building, which again saw further expansion of the Swayne & McCabe business. Swayne & McCabe outgrew the site and built new larger premises on the corner of Rossmoyne Road, Colac West which they shifted to in mid-2009. Bulla next leased the 12 Skene Street premises and used the building as a workshop - initially for refurbishment of equipment that came from Western Australia when they started manufacturing Cadbury branded ice-cream, then for ongoing expansion and maintenance of their overall operations in Colac. Bulla vacated the 12 Skene Street premises at the end of June 2018. The building remained vacant until May 2019 when “HOW BAZAAR” antiques shifted to the site (as 8 Skene St. to open mid-June 2019) from their former North Geelong premises which had Princes Highway frontage.

Hundreds of locals worked at the Colac clothing factory over the years, Leonie Bowen worked at Sackvilles' Colac clothing factory for about three years starting from 1957. Leonie well recalls starting work at 8am, *and if you were late your pay was docked. Working on an industrial machine, each worker had a specific part of the garment to work on, there was no specific quota to work to, but Mrs Kennedy sure walked about the workers and made sure you were working.* Leonie also stated she *really enjoyed the experience.*

Margaret Thomas recalls starting at Sackvilles Colac clothing factory as a 17 year old in 1966, both her mother and father went with her on that first day, and took her into the office of Mrs Kennedy who was the manager. Margaret fondly recalls Mary Kennedy as - *a very imposing woman who had an air of authority about her, even though she wasn't very tall and was quite slim. She had silver coloured hair with blue tints in it. She always wore a light blue overall that covered her street clothes. She would walk up and down the aisles of the machines in the factory checking on the workers and every now and then picking up garments and making sure there were no mistakes. If she found any you had to undo everything and start again. There was one time I remember when she found a bottle of beer in one of the toilets and came out on to the factory floor marching up and down the aisle with it trying to find out who owned it. No-one admitted it was theirs. She had strict rules and everyone knew you had to toe the line, we certainly knew who was the boss.*

An afternoon tea in 1982 for former Colac clothing factory worker Ivy Murphy, started a yearly re-union. Ivy had become very ill, and fellow former Colac clothing factory workers Violet Alsop and Betty Johnstone organised an afternoon tea for Ivy, which went on to become an annual event, which grew to a yearly re-union. The first re-union was held at the Botanic Gardens, then

DELAY IN STARTING NEW FACTORY STAFF

The Jason BR clothing factory in Colac (formerly B. and K. Champion Products) has been unable, as hoped, to employ extra staff because of an incomplete take-over bid of Amco Holdings Pty Ltd by the American based clothing manufacturer Wrangler.



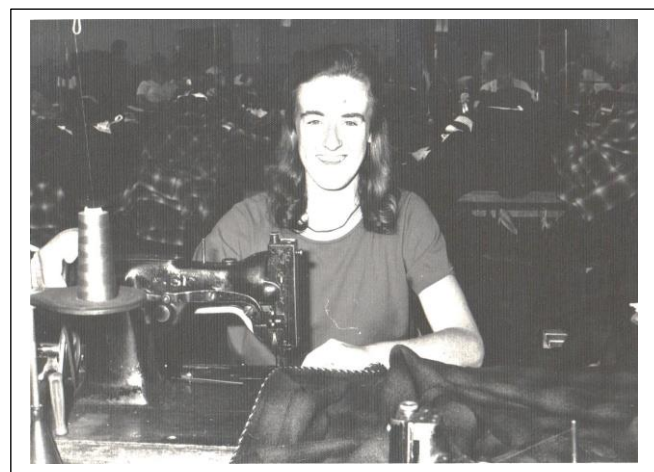
the re-union's moved to the Colac Angling Club rooms on the Lake Colac foreshore, where it stayed for a long time. The Society holds a photo and names of the 40 Ex-employees who attended the 1994 re-union, this was reliving 20 years since the Colac Sackville owned clothing factory closed. Various reunions were held over the years, which the Sackvilles generously sponsored, and although unable to attend in later years, the Sackville's still sent money to cover the costs of the yearly re-union.



AT LEFT - The November 1992 reunion - from left – Mary Ryan, Alf D'Ambrosio and Edna Wilson. Alf came to Colac around 1945 as Foreman of the Colac clothing factory, he stayed about 10 years.

AT RIGHT - A luncheon in March 1998 shows Edna Wilson at left, with Mary Ryan.

AT RIGHT - LOWER - Harold Sackville at left, with Graham Gibson. It was the first time Harold had attended the luncheon since the clothing factory closure. (Colac Herald Photos)



AT LEFT – Margaret Thomas at her workstation in the days of her working at the Colac clothing factory in Skene Street. A portrait of individual staff was taken in Margaret's time there - certainly a kind gesture from management at the time.

Image from Margaret Thomas

Although numbers have obviously dwindled over the years, an annual re-union still takes place in Colac for ex-employees of the old Colac clothing factory. This year it will be held on the last Saturday in November.

Many thanks to Society members Norman Houghton and Dawn Peel for sharing their own research notes relevant to the untold story of the Colac clothing factory, which was the original basis of this article.

Rabbit Matters

by Norman Houghton

Rustless Rabbit Proof Fences. At the height of the rabbit plague in the late nineteenth century a standard means of control was the rabbit proof fence made of wire netting buried into the ground to prevent the rabbits burrowing under. Wire netting was fine on most soils but to the west of Colac in the marshy bogs at Pirron Yallock, Swan Marsh and Carpendeit and to the east at Murroon it rusted quickly and could not be used. The solution adopted in these parts was an all timber fence with slabs or palings sunk into the ground from the post and rail frame. The bigger runs such as Tirrengower and Corangamite whose outer boundaries ran to over 35 kms used enormous quantities of timber. The rabbit proof fence on Corangamite, for instance, consumed 14,080 posts, 28,160 rails and 197,000 slabs. The timber fences had a useful life of 40 years. One of the more thoughtful fence builders of the day later ruminated in the pages of the Colac Herald that a tree takes 100 years to grow and the wood is used for fencing that lasts less than half that time. He concluded that it does not make sense to do this.

The Rabbit Man. In 1885 the farm labourer who released the first English rabbits from their shipping cages at Winchelsea in the 1850s was tracked down to Ballarat and interviewed by the press. He said that the squatter thought he was doing a splendid thing for the country by introducing the rabbit and he would have almost shot anyone who killed any of the rabbits immediately. The man further stated that releasing the rabbits was a great thing for working people because meat would be two pence a pound dearer but for the rabbit.



CRAIG'S CONUNDRUM

LAST ISSUE ANSWER-

AT LEFT – November 1968 view of Connor Street Doctor's rooms before 2nd storey was built on.

AT RIGHT – October 1970 view showing near completion of 2nd storey.



AT RIGHT – 2003 view, soon before demolition of the now former hospital. Over its years of use, the upper level was used for various set-outs of patient rooms. (Image from Society files)



AT LEFT – November 1970 view of Dickins Food Market in Murray Street Colac. Did you shop there, do you remember its location, and what became of it ?

ANSWER NEXT ISSUE

(Image from Bela Bard Brucker collection)

COLAC AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY ROSTER 2019 2.00 PM – 4.00 PM

Month	Thursday	Friday	Sunday
June	6 th R. Osborne 13 th D. Missen 20 th G. Splatt 27 th J. Knight	7 th C. Pink 14 th G. Bray 21 st E. Chambers 28 th M. Saddlier	2 nd A. McIntosh 9 th G. Knox 16 th B. McDonald 23 rd I. Barlow 30 th G. Knox
July	4 th D. Missen 11 th R. Osborne 18 th G. Splatt 25 th J. Knight	5 th C. Pink 12 th G. Bray 19 th E. Chambers 26 th M. Saddlier	7 th A. McIntosh 14 th G. Knox 21 st B. McDonald 28 th I. Barlow
August	1 st D. Missen 8 th R. Osborne 15 th G. Splatt 22 nd J. Knight 29 th R. Missen	2 nd C. Pink 9 th G. Bray 16 th E. Chambers 23 rd M. Saddlier 30 th E. Angel	4 th A. McIntosh 11 th G. Knox 18 th B. McDonald 25 th I. Barlow