

# **Val Sheehan**

## **Our very own Mrs Coldstream**

**Researcher: Philip Burton.**

## **Val Sheehan (1927 to 2015)**

Val was born on April 2, 1927 at Koondrook near Barham on the Murray River. Second child of eight for Bill and Mary Skate.

Val was a bright student and received a sponsorship to attend Dacomb's Business College in Little Collins Street, Melbourne which meant she had to board in Melbourne. After her course, the college employed her as a junior teacher for the next 12 months.

In 1943 at the age of 16 Val moved to Coldstream with her parents and siblings where she lived for the rest of her life.

In 1946 her first local job was at the Coldstream Store and Post Office where she started to build her lifelong connections with the local families of the district and her love of the district. She also worked at Spicer's Shoe Factory in Lilydale.

At a Yarra Glen dance she met Kevin Sheehan and they married and raised four daughters and a son. Kathleen, Rosemary, Christine, Eileen and Will.

For 39 years she worked at Coombe Cottage and became a close friend and companion to Pamela Lady Vestey and together they shared a passion for preserving the memory of Dame Nellie Melba, Lady Vestey's grandmother.

## Coldstream cricket and football Clubs

She and her family were staunch supporters of both the Coldstream Cricket Club formed in 1949 and the Coldstream Football Club formed in 1952. The ground was a paddock located at the back of Val and Kevin's place. They attended the dances and fund-raising nights at Melba Hall which was just opposite the Sheehan's home.

In the 1970s she compiled a record of newspaper articles and photos of the football club from 1952 to 1972 for its anniversary, a copy of which we have in our library.

She was instrumental with her brother Les Skate in erecting the Coldstream and Yering War Memorial in 1995.

She assisted her daughter in raising over \$100,000 dollars for local charities at the annual Wallace Garden in Maddens Lane, Coldstream, over the Melbourne Cup weekend.



### Ring the bell

This old bell with a racing heritage will ring out its remaining days at the Museum of Lillydale after being discovered by Val Sheehan from the museum. According to Val the bell was used to start many prestigious horse races in Murphy's paddock in Coldstream from the 1880s through to World War One. Val found the bell with a local family recently and said it is one of the few remaining items from the district's early days when it boasted seven race courses. No evidence of the race courses remain today.

*Yarra Ranges Post* article of April 22, 1997 about Val Sheehan's finding of the Coldstream racing bell.

## **Lilydale & District Historical Society**

Val joined the society in 1990 and was an active member of the Society being both a volunteer and committee member. Right up until her short illness prior to her death, Val attended monthly committee and general meetings as well as being a part of the monthly roster which enables the society to be open to the public.

Val was affectionately known as ‘Mrs Coldstream’ by members of Historical Society and during her lifetime passionate about recording the history of the Yarra Valley.

Val was a stalwart of the society, a quiet lady, always there with a welcoming smile, always willing to help and interested in what everyone was doing.

She recorded the births, marriages, deaths & obituaries of the people of the Yarra Valley from the 1860s onwards. These have since been typed onto excel spreadsheets so members can easily find them. She talked with local families to record their stories, she wrote to newspapers etc. trying to find descendants of families that had moved away from the district so she could add their stories to the history of the Yarra Valley.

Val passed away on March 27, 2015 after a short illness. She is sadly missed, but her contribution continues to be immeasurable.



*Val Sheehan with her Royal Coronation Cup during a society Show and Tell in June 2011.*

LILYDALE YARRA VALLEY LEADER June 23, 2003 14

# A love of history

A COLDSTREAM historian and author has released the second instalment of a history of Coldstream, Gruyere, Yering and Killara.

Val Sheehan's latest offering, *As It Happened, Volume 2* provides a glimpse into historic life in the region through newspaper extracts from publications of the time, including the *Lilydale Express*, *The Argus*, and *Mt Evelyn Observer*.

Mrs Sheehan, 76, said the book, which took 10 years to research and compile, included "everything she found" about the district and its residents from the years 1900 to 1920.

The book follows on from *As It*

*Happened, Volume 1*, which covered the 1880s to 1899.

Mrs Sheehan said the reports included elaborate details, such as itemised lists of wedding presents and the names of people who gave them.

"It was interesting counting up how many of the same items that some of the couples received - it was quite alarming," Mrs Sheehan said.

Her love of history sprang from living at Coldstream for 60 years, during which time people approached her and "kept asking things that they expected me to know because I'd lived in the district so long".

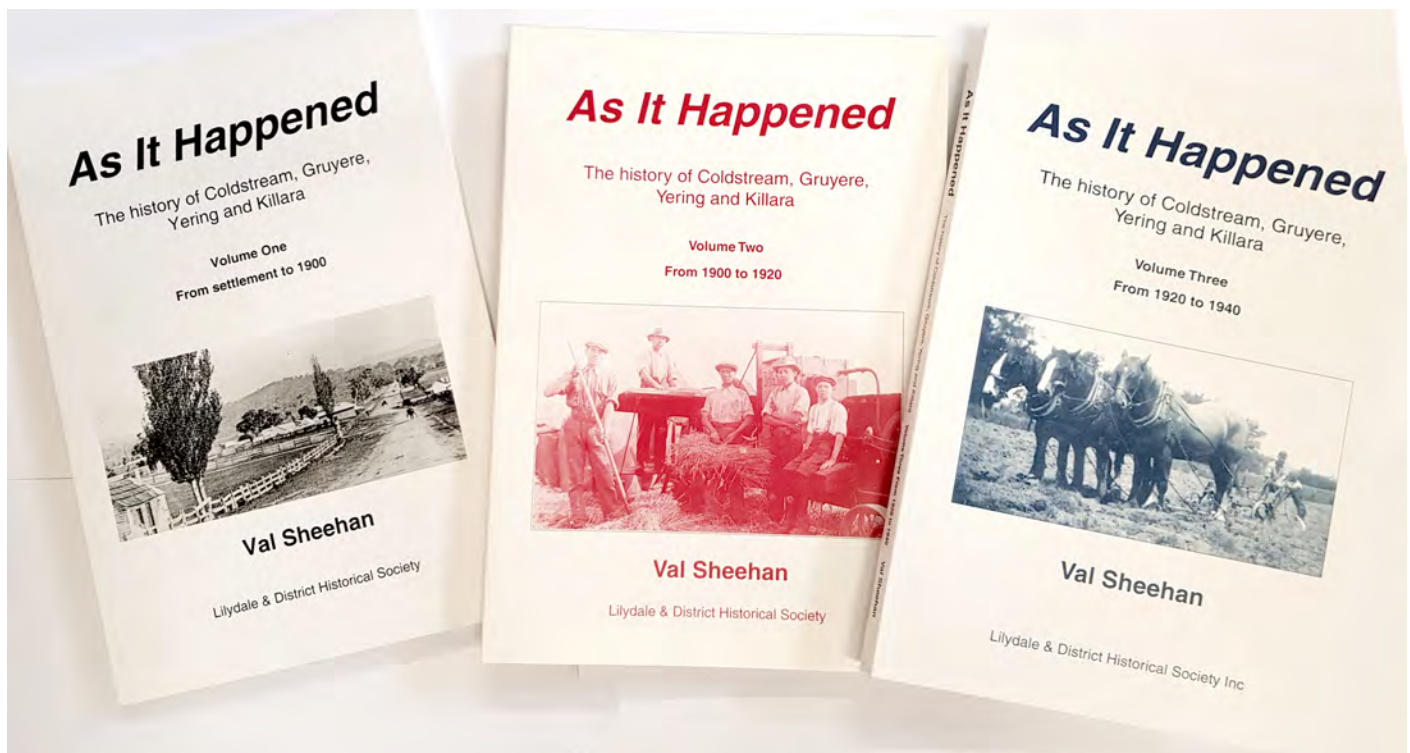
"You really need a driving force to keep yourself going with this work," she said.



Val Sheehan with a copy of her history book.

NS2LE305

Val Sheehan holding *As It Happened Vol 2* book in an article published in the *Lilydale Yarra Valley Leader* June 23, 2003, pg 14.



# ***As It Happened***

The history of Coldstream, Gruyere,  
Yering and Killara

**Volume Four**

**From 1941 to 1960**

**Part 1**



**Val Sheehan**

Lilydale & District Historical Society Inc

## **Publications**

### **First book**

Val's first book was *They came to Rushworth* a genealogy of the Skate/Clayton/Muller families of the district.

Soon after, she started on four books called *As It Happened' about the history of the Coldstream, Gruyere, Yering and Killara* area:

Volume 1 – Settlement to 1900

Volume 2 – 1900 to 1920

Volume 3 – 1920 to 1940

Volume 4 – 1940 to 1960 published in 2017

Each volume cover families, sport, social life, disasters, transport, schools, businesses, Dame Nellie Melba, Lillydale Council

These books took many hundreds of hours of research, trips to the State Library in Melbourne, reading copies of the local newspapers etc. These trips were done by bus and train. The papers eventually were transferred to microfiche and Val would spend many hours on the microfiche machine at the society.

Val also collaborated on other society publications:

*Unmarked Graves at the Lilydale Cemetery Volume 1*

*Reminiscences of Life* – Memories of Lilydale residents, which she featured in.

*Gun Alley – the story of the Backstreets of Lilydale.*

## **Yarra Ranges Award**

In 2005 Val was awarded a 'Certificate of Recognition' by the Shire of Yarra Ranges' for her contribution to the Coldstream area. For all her volunteer work at the Wallace Garden openings, the Lilydale & District Historical Society, Museum of Lilydale, Mont De Lancey Museum, Margaret Lewis Reserve and the Coldstream cricket and football clubs.

After her death a memorial stone was laid at the 'Margaret Lewis Reserve' in Coldstream on the 2nd April 2016 which reads.

Her generous contributions to this reserve and local community. Her legacy lives on in many ways, especially in her recording of the rich history of the Yarra Valley.



*Society former President Sandy Ross with Val Sheehan and Pamela, Lady Vestey at Coombe Cottage for the launch of Val's As It Happened Volume 3 on February 12, 2006.*

## **Heritage contribution recognised**

Val became a Life Member of the society in 2008 for her outstanding contribution to researching and recording of local history of the old Shire of Lillydale.

### **Award of Merit**

In 2014 the President of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria Associate Professor Don Garden awarded Val with the RHSV's Award of Merit in recognition of her service to local heritage.



## Plaque shines light on history

LOCAL historians came together to unveil a plaque commemorating the Coldstream Hotel and the town hall, both destroyed by two separate fires many years ago.

Yarra Ranges Ryrie Ward councillor Jeanette McRae and historian Val Sheehan worked hard to get the historical project up and running.

"Val has been amazing, by being able to make this historical information available in the community," Cr McRae said. "I was happy to help her."

Ms Sheehan said it was her love for Coldstream that drove her to get the plaque set up in the town. "I like history and I think it is important to have something tangible in the town about the history of Coldstream," she said. "Not many people know about it."

The hotel was licensed in 1868 and named the Sportsman's Arms, from 1917 the hotel was known as the Coldstream Hotel. The hall was built close to the hotel in 1891 and became the focal point of the district.

Fire destroyed the hotel in 1933 and the hall in 1966.

**- Melissa Meehan**



**Councillor Jeanette McRae and historian Val Sheehan unveiled a plaque that commemorates the Coldstream Hotel and Hall last week.**

*Cr Jeanette McRae with Val Sheehan after the unveiling of the Coldstream Hotel plaque. Article published in Mountain Views August 25, 2009.*



Val Sheehan’s plaque (above) and memorial stone at Margaret Lewis Reserve, Coldstream unveiled on April 2, 2016 at 11am.

# Plaque unveiled for icon

By **JESSE GRAHAM**

COLDSTREAM residents braved a cold and drizzly Saturday morning to commemorate the life of town icon, Val Sheehan, with a memorial plaque unveiled in Margaret Lewis Reserve.

On Saturday 2 April, about 60 people gathered in the reserve for the unveiling of a memorial plaque for Val Sheehan, who died on 27 March 2015, after more than 70 years in the town.

The plaque, organised by the Friends of Margaret Lewis Reserve, reads, “In loving memory of Val Sheehan, for her generous contribution to this reserve and the local community”.

“Her legacy lives on in many ways, especially in her recording of the rich history of the Yarra Valley,” it read.

Morris Maxwell opened the event, which was attended by Casey MP Tony Smith, and Ryrie Ward councillor, Fiona McAllister, and paid tribute to her work over the years, to improve the reserve, record local history and even in helping to establish the reserve itself.

“We all know that Val didn’t want any fuss made, and she never wanted me to call her our local historian, but

she did that so well she needs recognition,” Mr Maxwell said.

Mr Maxwell, Cr McAllister, Val’s brother, Les Skate, and Lilydale and District Historical Society’s John Brown all paid tribute to Ms Sheehan’s passion for her community in her time, after arriving in town in 1943.

Cr McAllister said that the plaque, set in stone by a walking path, had been organised over the past year, and said it was a “really important and beautiful memorial” for Ms Sheehan.

“Today, for me, is a very beautiful moment to say thank you to Val, and to say thank you to her family, and also to know that every time someone walks past this, if they didn’t know Val, they’ll certainly be wondering who this wonderful woman was,” she said.

“If they did know Val, they’ll stop for a moment and pause, and like most of us here, remember a moment they’ve spent with Val and know what a wonderful experience that was.”

Mr Skate told the audience about growing up with Ms Sheehan, and how the land around the reserve had changed over the years - he noted that



Val Sheehan’s memorial plaque at Margaret Lewis Reserve. 152386

she worked for Margaret Lewis herself, and had influence in the land being bequeathed for a reserve.

She helped to plant trees around the reserve, and she and Mr Skate worked to establish the Coldstream and Yering War Memorial in 1995.

“You can see why she wanted to put so much into it (Margaret Lewis Reserve), to make sure it was a success - and it certainly has turned out to be a great success, and she would be very proud of it,” he said.

“I’m pretty proud of Val, too, and so is the family.”



Les Skate, Cr Fiona McAllister, Casey MP Tony Smith and Morris Maxwell with Val Sheehan’s memorial plaque. 152386

Picture: **JESSE GRAHAM**

Mountain Views Mail April 12, 2016.



*Val Sheehan and family after her RHSV Award of Merit ceremony.*

*Left to right rear: Val's daughters Rosemary and Kathleen, Christine's daughter Eloise and her husband Ben, Christine's son Sam and Val's daughter Christine.*

*Front: Val holding her great granddaughter Mackenzie and Kathleen's husband Brian.*