



Lakes Log

Volume 5 Issue 12

The Newsletter of Lakes Entrance Historical Society Inc.

A Glimpse of The Past

68

Spring 2025

Inside this issue:

Reg Northrope turns 90	2
Colquhoun Cabin in need of restoration	3
A Day in the Life of a Rigby Island Farmer	4
Strzelecki v McMillan	6
From Our Library: A Convenient Scapegoat	8

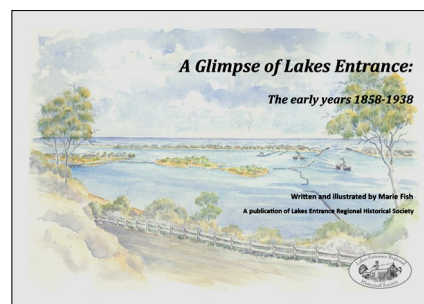
The official launch of 'A Glimpse of Lakes Entrance: The early years 1858-1938' by Tim Bull MP on 7 October was a huge success.

Author Marie Fish was kept busy signing copies of the book for an audience that seemed to have been waiting years for this concise, beautifully illustrated local history.

Marie spoke about being inspired to write a simple history of Lakes Entrance and deciding to keep it to 1858, the year the first European family arrived, and 1938 when the last of the lakes steamers sailed through the Entrance, never to return.



Tim Bull MP with Lakes Entrance Historical Society president, Anne Macarthur



Want to purchase a copy of 'Glimpse' at the super-reasonable price of \$15 plus postage?

An excellent Christmas gift!

Phone or email the Society to order.

4 Marine Parade
Lakes Entrance 3909
0466 980 166
info@lakeshistory.com
www.lakeshistory.com

Incorporation No. A0032639K
ABN 19 930 318 239
ISSN 1036-4951

Currently at the History Centre:

House & Home

A look back at how we lived in decades past.

This display includes appliances, kitchenware, ornaments, clothes and photographs.



Saturday 23 August 2025 saw Reg Northrope celebrating his 90th birthday with family and friends at Tambo Upper.

Reg Northrope turns 90

By Jenny Mays

Reg was born in Hunter Street, a descendant on his mother's side of William Carstairs. His great grandfather Henry Northrope arrived in Lakes Entrance in the late 1800s and drove coaches to Orbost. The Northropes also ran a guest house at Lake Bunga.

Reg recalls the freedom of growing up in Lakes Entrance, fishing and swimming in the 'back water' before there was a road along Marine Parade.

He was schooled at Lakes Entrance and Bairnsdale Technical School, then worked for the State Electricity Commission as a linesman—earning just four pounds and six shillings a week.

Bill Ayres, eventually to become Reg's father in law, had a fishing boat, the *Tamborita* and needed a deckhand. So began Reg's long life at sea.

In an interview with the Bairnsdale Advertiser in 2007, Reg spoke of his many years at sea, saying life had been good to him.

Despite continually suffering sea sickness, Reg fished all around Tasmania and the Furneaux Islands as well as the Gippsland coast, working 52 crayfish seasons. He was a pivotal player in the early days of the Lakes Entrance scallop fishery.

In the winter 'off' season he often went opal mining in Queensland, regularly visiting and staying on a property at



Reg on his big day at Tambo Upper
Photo: Jenny Mays

Opalton that was featured on a recent TV series, 'Outback Opal Hunters'.

A project of Reg's wife Val, was the preservation of the 'Church' house. Originally situated in Bruthen and used for church services, this little house was floated down the Tambo River to the New Works during construction of the Entrance.

After the works were completed, it was relocated again, back across the lake to Church Street, Lakes Entrance in 1910.

However this was not its last journey, as when demolition became a possible threat, Val and Reg 'rescued' it and moved it to their property on the highway, on the eastern side of Lakes Entrance.

Later, when they moved to Tambo Upper the Church house made its final move, where it rests today.



The 'Church' house at Tambo Upper—its final resting place
Photo: LERHS

Colquhoun cabin in need of restoration

Some years ago, the Historical Society took a trip to 'Goldsmiths in the Forest' to learn about the hardship endured by settlers who tried to follow the government's insistence on clearing the land for farming after World War 1.

Their efforts largely failed, due to the unsuitability of the land, most of which has now been reclaimed by the forest.

We visited Ianuzzi's cabin, constructed of logs with the cracks sealed by strips of stringybark



Ianuzzi, sometimes called Tanuzzi, was an Italian immigrant who made a living growing vegetables.



Ready to lift the tree off the roof, Nov 2025

When it was built in the 1930s, the one-roomed cabin had a sealed floor and functioning chimney, but by the time of our visit in 2013 it was in need of repair.

By 1941 the lease had been transferred to Richard Travers, who in turn battled to clear the block for cultivation and erect fences, in compliance with the conditions imposed by the government.

With this history top of mind, for many years the current owners Les and Darilyn Goldsmith, have tried to maintain the cabin and obtain funding for restoration

In October, it appeared to be the end for the little building, when a tree toppled down, smashing in the roof.

Fortunately a local contractor brought in the big machinery to lift the tree, but a gaping hole remains, leaving the cabin even more vulnerable to the elements.

Is there anybody out there with building expertise who could offer some assistance with rebuilding the cabin in the proper heritage style?

Anyone with spare time and basic building knowledge, who is able to help would be welcomed too.

Our 2026 Calendar is now available.

Still only \$15.

Phone or email to get your copy—or call in on a Tuesday morning or Saturday afternoon.



A Day in the Life of a Rigby Island Farmer

By Marie Fish

Robert's diary for November 1917 to December 1918 gave a vivid insight into the daily life of an island farmer over 100 years ago.

Around the turn of the 20th Century, Robert Hamilton McMahon was eking out a living—farming on freehold land from the Barrier to Duck Point on Hopetoun Channel and on Rigby Island.

Robert lived on Rigby Island with his wife Annie (née Teychenné), where they brought up their 12 healthy children: five boys and seven girls.

When their house at the Barrier burnt to the ground, some of the family moved into a cottage in Myer Street (opposite the present-day Primary School) while Robert and the others lived in a hut on Rigby Island.

Some of the boys helped milk the small herd of cows and deliver the milk to both the Lakes Entrance township and the New Works—by rowing boat.

As well as delivering milk to customers by boat, Robert also fattened young cattle for sale at Bairnsdale, bred horses and broke them in for both riding and harness.

He repeatedly swam his dairy herd, young stock and horses between Rigby Island and the Barrier—often daily.

The younger children rowed boats across Reeves Channel to attend school and all socialising or shopping was done by boat. Perfectly natural!

Any spare corner of land would be planted down in lucerne or other feed for the animals, or fruit and vegetables for sale. Rob also separated some milk to make butter, which he sold.

It was a hard physical life with very long days, but Rob never retired for the night without first writing up his diary.

After Robert's death in 1941 at the age of 78, members of his family came across some of his diaries, which he had meticulously kept over the years.

Most had become illegible with age, but one from November 1917 to December 1918 was in fair condition and readable. It

gave a vivid insight into his daily life, wresting a living on a small island.

Two of his descendants, David McMahon and Eunice Fitzclarence (née McMahon) decided to preserve this valuable window into the daily life of their grandfather and compiled it into a small book they titled 'Rob the Milkman'.

Extracts from Rob's Diary

Sunday, 18 November 1917: Percy and I went with the milk. We got back to the Island about 10 o'clock. I fixed up some frames of tea trees in front of the house for the creepers to climb over; then after lunch we went down to the hill and cut some ferns. After milking we went down to the township, intending to go into the English Church and hear Mr Birch preach a memorial service, as Mr Harbeck was buried on Friday. But we were late down and the church seemed pretty full, so we did not go in but returned at 9 o'clock.

Monday, 19 November 1917: We went down with the milk and two boats. I took the milk to the township while Percy served on the West and Works sides. Got bread, shirt and socks for me and socks for Percy. Arrived home at 9am. Cut sword-grass on the hill till lunchtime, then cut weeds in the cultivation paddock. Percy set some traps and caught a small rabbit.

Percy, as a teenager, had left school but still lived with his father on Rigby Island.

Tuesday, 20 November 1917: Percy took the milk. I sawed down about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a piece of H[ard] W[ood], about 28 ft long, for a gunwale for the *Windarra*. Percy got back before eleven. Percy took down a gallon to the Club in the evening. I went to bed about 9 o'clock and was asleep before he came home.

Wednesday, 21 November 1917: I went down with Percy and served the milk on the Entrance side. Percy went to serve in

the township, as I wanted to go up the run to see the cows. I pulled the boat to where we swim from, to go over to the yard. Came home, got the saddles and took some chaff. Washed out my milk billy, measure and some other things, boiled the kettle and had some dinner. Returned to the run with Percy. We could not find Judy's filly with her foal, but got the lot we could see on the clear plain into the yard and swam Molly and Prince over to the Island.

Robert had given names to every cow, horse and dog—sometimes it was confusing whether it was an animal or one of his family to whom he was referring.

Thursday, 22 November 1917: Percy and I went down with the milk. It was raining steadily with an easterly breeze. I went up to Bairnsdale, got some things and returned by the steamer. It still rained and, as Percy had not milked the cows, we had some trouble to find them. It was 11 o'clock before I got them milked and after 12 before I got to bed.

Sunday, 25 November 1917: Out at 5 o'clock. I went down and served milk in the township; Percy served the Hummocks side. I got home and went on fixing frames for creepers in front of the house, then lit the fire and put the kettle on. Percy went and set some traps. After lunch we cut some weeds and ferns in the paddock till milking time.

Monday, 26 November 1917: Started Percy with the milk, then altered two bull calves and branded them and two heifers. Caught Dot with some chaff down near the burnt-down house. Could not get near Myrtle, so came home with Dot, got a saddle and bridle and caught Myrtle on the Peninsula. Percy got back around 11. After lunch we swam the horses and went up to Letts' paddock.

Missed 3 head of cattle out of the paddock but found 12 of W Teychenné's and 4 goats there. Turned them out. Found the 3 that were missing and put them into the paddock. Brought Bonny and Rex down to the Letts and swam them onto the Island.

Tuesday, 27 November 1917: I went down and served the township with milk. Went



Robert Hamilton McMahon at the age of 55.

Image: 'Rob the Milkman'

by David McMahon and Eunice Fitzclarence

home and arranged for Ben to come to Kalimna Jetty on Wednesday morning early to help swim the cows I want to take up to Bairnsdale sale on Thursday. After lunch on the Island, Percy and I went over and rode up to Letts' paddock. I castrated a couple of young bulls. Twelve heads of W Teychenné's young cattle and 4 angora goats were near the rails, evidently trying to get into the paddock. We brought them back a good distance. Swam the ponies onto the Island.

Sunday, 7 July 1918: I waited for dinner at Petersons and stayed talking till after 3 o'clock. It came up very black after dark with wind and some rain. I wrote to Janie.

Monday, 8 July 1918: Saw V Fish at the Post Office. I paid him for bringing up the enlargement photo and parcel from Bell. Got seals and weights from Dahlsen's. I took a calf hide to Harbeck's wharf for Wyrallah. I hung the enlargement of Annie and me, then fixed some rafters and light sticks above for the creepers to climb in front of the house. I churned after milking, made up and put paper 14½lbs of butter. Wrote to Robert. I got to bed at half past 11 o'clock.

Tuesday, 9 July 1918: Took 2½lbs of butter to Peterson and 12½lbs to Barke. He gave 1½ [1 shilling and 6 pence] per lb for it. Had a good heavy pull to get home against strong wind which increased to a gale. After I got home it blew down the bark verandah that George had put up by the kitchen door and continued to blow hard all night.

Wednesday, 31 July 1918: We Went down to Lakes Entrance. Robert went to Ault's and got his bike. He sent the bike by Fish Motor Car and train to Orbost.

Who was first to explore the wilds of Gippsland, opening it up for land-hungry settlers?

Strzelecki v. McMillan

Paul Edmund de Strzelecki, self-styled Polish count, arrived in Australia in the late 1830s. Terming himself 'a scientific explorer' he impressed the local gentry with his charm and social graces.

Well educated and widely travelled, Strzelecki was aged 43 when he joined an expedition led by James Macarthur, son of the famous John Macarthur, in early 1840.

On 27 March they left 'Numbla Munjee', the station McMillan had established for Lachlan Macalister, 'to explore the country between Omeo and Port Phillip'.

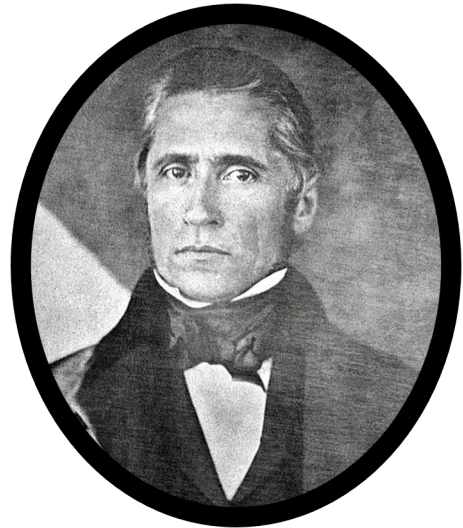


Angus McMillan

Later, the Macalisters said the Strzelecki party was told about the route McMillan had taken, the names he had given to the rivers and lakes, and that he had called the entire region 'Caledonia Australis'—but this was disputed by James Macarthur.

On 19 May, after following a tortuous route and almost starving, Paul Strzelecki arrived at Melbourne, where he was greeted as a hero.

If Strzelecki knew the names McMillan's party had given the rivers, he took no notice. The Tambo he named after Deas Thomson, the Nicholson after his fellow



Paul Edmund de Strzelecki

expeditioner Riley and the Mitchell after James Macarthur.

The Avon became the Dunlop; the Macalister the Barney; the Thomson the MacConochie; and the Glengarry the LaTrobe—and as a final insult to the Scots, he shrewdly named the entire region Gipps Land, in honour of the Governor.

In his report Strzelecki claimed discovery for all of Gippsland.

Born on 14 August 1810 at Glenbrittle on the Isle of Skye, Angus McMillan was a totally different man. He didn't seek admiration, his motivation was purely economic—more pasture for his fellow Scots settlers to run their sheep and cattle.

McMillan arrived in Sydney in January 1838 and was soon in the employ of Lachlan Macalister as overseer on his various holdings.

The Scots were seeking more grazing land and an expedition was mounted, led by McMillan and Matthew Macalister. They reached the lakes on 16 January 1840 and heading west, they named many features, including Lake Victoria and Lake Wellington, the Nicholson, Mitchell, Avon and Glengarry Rivers and Providence Ponds.

Before reaching Corner Inlet, they turned back to 'Numbla Munjee' near Ensay, telling no-one about their discoveries — within six weeks they had cut a track

Strzelecki v. McMillan

through the mountains to the Avon and in October McMillan drove 500 cattle down to establish a station there for Macalister.

McMillan had claimed the 'Nuntin' run for Macalister and 'Bushy Park' for himself.

Ordered by Macalister to 'find a port' in the region, so he could ship out his cattle, McMillan pushed through the bush and reached Port Albert in February 1841.

Soon he had to abandon the secrecy around his explorations to challenge the claims made by Strzelecki for discovery of Gippsland. As a result, many of his names for rivers and mountains were retained, perpetuating the Scottish influence on Gippsland.

Despite serving a brief term in the Victorian Parliament, McMillan did not prosper in later life.

Various other commitments in Melbourne, together with his renowned generosity to his fellow Scots and ill-judged investments, all contributed to the loss of his pastoral lands.

In 1864, he accepted a government contract to establish a road between the Omeo goldfields and Crooked River, sometimes beating a way through snow or dense and damp scrub.

The years of bush-bashing had taken their toll and McMillan's health began to fail, until he was unable to keep up with his work party.

He died of endocarditis at the Iguana Creek hotel on 18 May 1865. He was buried in the Sale Cemetery, leaving his wife and two sons in an impoverished position.

After leaving Gippsland, Strzelecki went to Van Diemen's Land, where he became a close friend of Sir John Franklin and did considerable work as explorer, geologist, and scientific farmer.

In April 1843 he left Sydney for Singapore and sailed on to London. Although he lost money in a bank collapse, he found work and lived as a well-to-do man, becoming a British subject in 1845.

He published some important works and established procedures for famine relief—for which he was commended by both British Houses of Parliament. He received many honours and was knighted by Queen Victoria.

Strzelecki was associated with a lot of influential people including Florence Nightingale.

Sir Paul Strzelecki died of liver cancer in London in 1873 and was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery. In 1997 his remains were transferred to his hometown of Poznań, Poland.

Public interest in McMillan and Strzelecki was reignited during a 1920s campaign to recognise European explorers in Victoria, and a chain of commemorative cairns was erected across the region.

Sources: Don Watson 'Caledonia Australis' 1984, Wikipedia, Australian Dictionary of Biography

Following our lament in the Lakes Log Autumn edition last year about the sad state of the sign explaining the significance of the cypress sculptures and their connection to the Lakes Entrance men who lost their lives in WW1, it is wonderful to be able to report that the local RSL Branch has stepped up and installed a new bronze plaque.

We were happy to assist the RSL with text and images for this new sign, which they assure us 'will last for a hundred years'.



From our Library ... Reviewed by Marion Holding

A Convenient Scapegoat: Angus McMillan and the Gippsland Massacres

By Rob Christie

In his introduction, termed 'Prelude and Apology', the author states that, although McMillan may have had an involvement in some of the actions, he was not 'the Butcher of Gippsland' as portrayed by Peter Gardner in 'Our Founding Murdering Father'.

Christie has collected an incredible amount of information from his research into the discovery and settlement of Australia.

This new, apparently empty land, was there for the taking by the acquisitive British Empire.

After the establishment of penal colonies at Sydney in 1788 and Van Diemen's Land in 1803, the population increased rapidly, with free settlers, freed convicts, military personnel and their families, business people and speculators.

This was devastating to the indigenous population, who were considered inferior by the cultured Europeans.

The author gives a short history of Scotland and the highland clearances, as a background to Angus McMillan's decision to come to Australia.

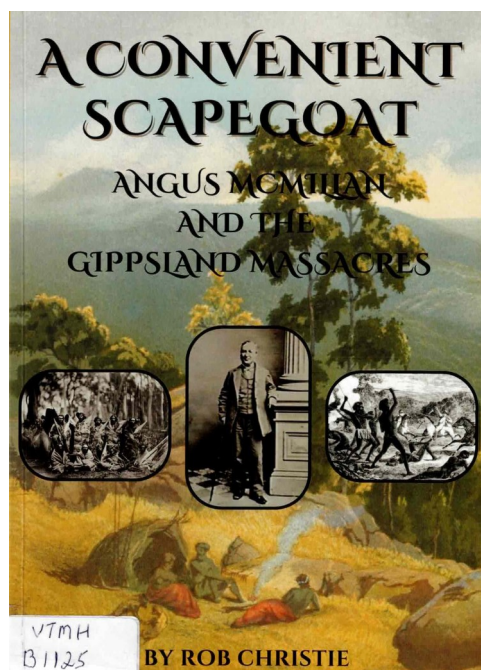
When McMillan left Greenock in September 1837 aboard the *Minerva*, he had with him a letter of introduction to Lachlan Macalister, who had established a property at Clifton, near Picton, south of Sydney. Christie presents Macalister as a harsh, cruel man, used to being obeyed instantly and without question by his employees.

McMillan became overseer and, initially because of drought on the Macalister properties on the Monaro, his brief was

to search for better, more productive pastures in the area soon to be known as Gipps Land.

The bulk of this narrative then includes McMillan's explorations, his reliance on the aborigines of the various tribes and accounts of atrocities by settlers on natives.

It neither proves nor disproves that McMillan was involved in massacres, but as Rob Christie states, he 'aims to set out a balanced account'.



Reviewer's Comment:

This book could have benefited by being edited by someone with a keen eye, not the writer himself.

Some statements are not acknowledged with source. There are words missing from the text or extra words included. Some illustrations and maps are frustratingly hard to decipher.

It is however, a fair sources of material for any person seeking information on 19th century Gippsland.