

## Monbulk's Mechanics' Institute Hall



The first Monbulk Mechanics' Institute 1909

Monbulk had two Mechanics' Institute halls, the first was built in early 1900s by volunteer labour of the Monbulk Settlement.

The Hall was located on the site of the car park between the present Community Hub and the Primary School and was the focus of most social activity in the Monbulk district. It was the venue for the regular euchre parties and dances on Saturday nights and special events like Magic Lantern shows which were of great interest to both young and old before WWI. Plays were sometimes staged and well patronised by the locals, some walking many miles along bush tracks as well as those who came from the surrounding districts of The Patch and Kallista to support social events. A memorable occasion was when the Hall was decorated for the "Welcome Home" event for the returning service men and women after WWI. The annual RSSAILA TB Balls were also held to raise funds for those who returned from WWI with Tuberculosis but were not eligible for war pensions.

A free library and a branch of the State Savings Bank in the Hall were valuable assets for this isolated small community.

Unfortunately the Mechanics Hall, along with the school and many Monbulk homes were burnt down during the February bushfires in 1913. The local community banded together and commenced building the second

Monbulk Mechanics' Hall before the end of the year.

As with the first hall the second was just as well used by the community. The Methodist Church held fundraising days with stalls set out within the hall. Wedding receptions were often held there with family and friends providing the catering. The Hall also hosted débutante balls, football functions and in 1947 a Queen's Carnival was held to raise funds for the sports oval.

A dance was held in the late 1960s to raise funds for the new swimming pool. Special guests were Olivia Newton John and Ian Turpie, TV stars of that era.



The second Monbulk Mechanics' Institute in the snow 1951

Gymnastics and boxing classes for boys were held weekly, table tennis and indoor basketball were often played. There were baby shows and an annual flower and vegetable show to display the best of the local produce. Monbulk School held its annual fancy dress ball and the Scouts and Guides also held their fund raising concerts in the Mechanics Hall. From the early days films were also shown beginning with "silent movies" before the "talkies" became available.

During the next 58 years the second hall remained the centre of the Monbulk community until it also burnt down this time by vandals! The loss of the Mechanics Hall and its free library in 1972 was a severe blow to the Monbulk community.

# Monbulk through and through!

Jean d'Argaville is the daughter of Albert and Bess Crerar. Jean's great grandparents, Alexander and Mary Crerar came to Australia in 1889 with their family of twelve and selected land in The Patch in 1894. Jean's father Albert, Alb to all who knew him, married Elizabeth (Bess) Bradshaw and lived with their daughters Jean and Beth in Monbulk.

Both Bess and Alb were involved in community affairs, Bess with school Mothers' Club, C.W.A., Kookaburra Club and especially with raising funds for the Baby Health Centre which became Wellington Cottage. Alb made the beautiful polished wood measuring box used for measuring babies. Alb served on the Recreation Reserve Committee for fifteen years and during this time the ground was reconstructed and brought up to a high standard.

It was 1933, Jean and her parents were living at The Patch, and Jean had just started school at Monbulk, when her Uncle Stan's house was burnt down and there was a reshuffle of homes within the family seeing Jean's family moved to Olinda. Jean then went to the Olinda School for a couple of years. In 1935 the family moved to Monbulk so Jean was able to return to the Monbulk School. There were 130 children in the school then.

Jean worked at Hopton's Grocery Store after school and during school holidays. When she left school she began working in an office in Melbourne which she didn't enjoy so she soon found work in a clothing factory. This she enjoyed immensely. Jean married Geoff d'Argaville and Geoff, with Jean's father Alb, built a home for their family.

Over the following years Jean worked in many of the shops in Monbulk including Helen Walker's Electrical Shop, the Newsagency, Matz' Store, the Post Office delivering the mail and even delivered bread.

With such community minded parents, it is no wonder that Jean followed in her parents' footsteps and became involved in her community. Throughout Jean's life she has been active in many activities to help the youth and older members of Monbulk. She was on the committee for the first Monbulk Play Group with Hilda Lane, the committee to get the Monbulk Pool started and when her sons went to secondary school she was President of the Monbulk Group



Monbulk Brownies travelled to Kallista for a special occasion for Brownie Revels.

Back Row: Peg Johnstone, Jan Beer, —, Robyn Dennis, —, Glenys Cavey.

Centre Row: —, —, —, —, -Fawcett, Sandra Donnelly, Marge Byrne, —, Leonie Johnstone, Brenda Aaltonen.

Front Row: Jennifer Bain, Robyn Cavey, Anne Teese, Susan Gray, Roslyn Currie, Jean d'Argaville.

*Identification of the missing names would be appreciated.  
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for the Ferntree Gully Tech.

Jean was a member of the Monbulk Scouts Group and was asked to restart the Brownies. She accepted and soon became District Commissioner for Brownies for 3 years then Division Commissioner for Guides for a further 3 years. She then followed up with Ranger Guides.

Jean was also the Cottage representative at the Recreation Reserve Committee becoming Vice President then President. As Jean's boys, Larry and Adrian grew up, Jean moved her focus to the older community where she joined Legacy. As there was not a club in Monbulk, Jean first joined Upwey then Emerald club where she was secretary for 6 years before moving to the newly formed club at Monbulk. She became President in 1998 and is still a member today.

Jean joined the Monbulk Historical Society in 2000 taking the position of Secretary for one year and is still an active member. Jean was also a member of the Monbulk Elderly Citizens for about twenty years.

Given all of the above, it was no surprise that on Saturday 3rd December this year, Jean received a Tony Smith Volunteers Award for her dedicated contribution to the Monbulk community.



Jean d'Argaville receiving a Tony Smith Volunteers Award 2016

*Congratulations Jean! This award is well deserved.*

Monbulk Historical Society wishes everyone a Merry Christmas and a happy and safe New Year

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