



# ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC BULLETIN

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561



## REPORT ON SEPTEMBER MEETING (09.09.2015)

The September Meeting of the Albury & District Historical Society marked an important milestone for the group, when the members voted unanimously on accepting the new constitution. Our President Michael thanked everyone for their support and in particular Catherine Browne and the Committee for their hard work in bringing this to fruition. Howard Jones revealed the intriguing story of colourful local personality Jockey Jack who was born as May McDonald. Even after considerable research it is still difficult to separate the fantasy from the fact as she spun many yarns over the years. She dressed as a man for most of her life which suited her varied occupations. These included rough-rider, horse breaker and trainer, groom, boundary rider, bullock driver, shearers roustabout and station hand. There is no doubt she was a consummate horsewoman who could ride the wildest buckjumpers and train successful racehorses. This was evident in the advertisement for the Barton Brothers Circus in Tasmania who claimed they would give ten pounds to anyone who could provide a horse that May McDonald couldn't ride. In her later years she lived quietly at the Waterworks with some local families providing her with meals. It is interesting to note that the Border Mail was not keen on publishing an article about her in the 1960s in case it would offend the respectable citizens of the town. Edward Dale from the Henty Historical Society informed the meeting that they are using Albury's new constitution as a model.

## NEXT MEETING

WEDNESDAY

14 OCT, 2015

7.30pm at Commercial  
Club Albury

Early Band Music in Albury, 1855-1925. There were at least five brass bands in Albury during this period as well as drum & fife bands.

The importance of these bands to the people of Albury, the rivalry between the bands and the personalities involved.

**Speaker:** Greg Ryan

## MURRAY ART MUSEUM

ALBURY

PUT YOURSELF IN THE  
PICTURE. EXPERIENCE  
MAMA'S EXCITING MIX OF  
LOCAL, INTERNATIONAL  
AND INDIGENOUS ART.  
OPENS 5 OCTOBER

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Jockey Jack

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Harry Brewer Correction

## ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

PO Box 822 ALBURY 2640

<[www.alburyhistory.org.au](http://www.alburyhistory.org.au)>

For your reference A&DHS account details are:

BSB 640 000 Acc No 111097776 (Albury & District Historical Society Inc)

**Patron:** Patricia Gould OAM

**Honorary Life Members:**

Howard Jones, Helen Livsey,

June Shanahan, Jan Hunter.

**Public Officer:** Helen Livsey

**President:** Michael Browne 0428691220

**Vice-President:** June Shanahan

**Secretary:** Helen Livsey 02 6021 3671

**Treasurer:** Ron Haberfield

**Minute Secretary:** Catherine Browne

**Publicity Officer:** Jill Wooding

**Committee:** Richard Lee, Jill Wooding,

Ray Gear, Marion Taylor.

**Bulletin Editor:** Marion Taylor

[marion.taylor7@bigpond.com](mailto:marion.taylor7@bigpond.com)

**Journals, Stock:** June Shanahan

**Meeting Greeter:** Jill Wooding

**Bulletin dispatch:** Ron Haberfield

**Meetings:** 2nd Wednesday of the month 7.30pm usually at Commercial Club Albury.

Committee meets 3rd Wednesday of the month 5.15pm at the Albury LibraryMuseum.

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

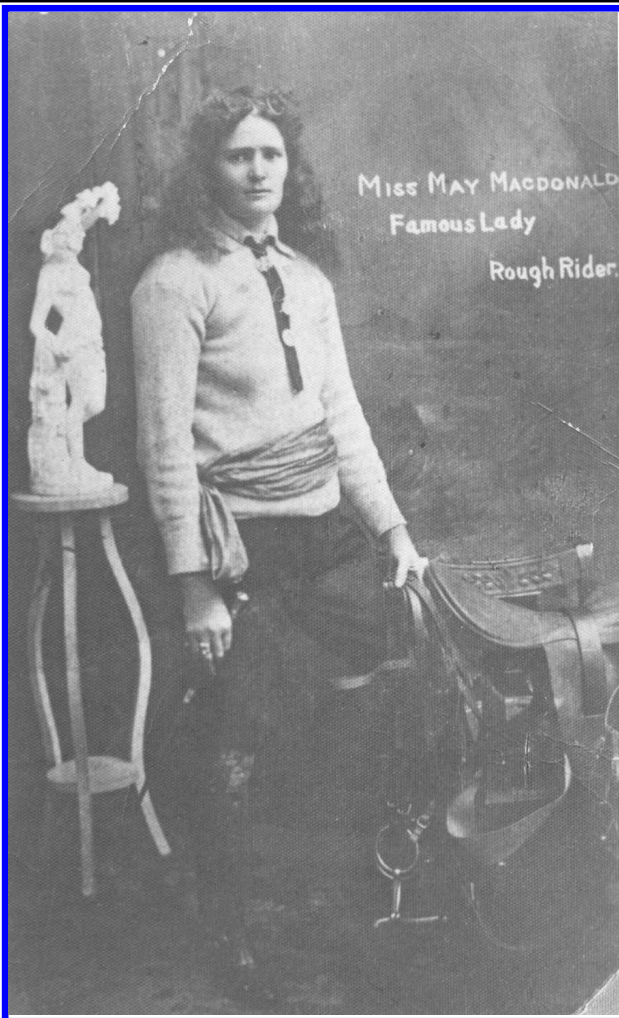
Single: \$25

Family: \$33

Corporate: \$50

**Research** undertaken \$25 first hour.  
Enquiries in writing with \$25

## JOCKEY JACK— MISS MAY MCDONALD BY HOWARD JONES



Miss May McDonald, Rough Rider  
Photograph Courtesy: Albury LibraryMuseum

JOCKEY Jack was a woman named May McDonald. She died in Albury in August 1964, aged in her late 70s or 80s, and was buried in men's pyjamas.

A few myths have grown around Jockey Jack, mainly because she was a bit of a fibber when it came to her origins as a so-called "man-woman". Journalists accepted her stories in full. In 1916, when she was new to Albury, she gave them interviews that appeared in several newspapers. Forty years later, a young Albury journalist, Ken Blair, produced three sensational features. However, Jockey Jack never mentioned in interviews that she twice went to jail for theft, in 1910 and 1915.

She somehow became a kid jockey in her teens, everyone thinking she was a boy. She apparently started dressing as a man about 1908, when she was perhaps 20 or 21.

She claimed the stewards "discovered" she was a girl when she had a fall at the Warrnambool Races and was taken to the jockeys' room to be examined. However, she rode at races across Victoria long after that and was known to be a woman.

Later she came to the North-East. She worked horses on a Greta property and raced at Greta, Moyhu and Corryong. A journalist dubbed her "the Woman from Snowy River".

The first time she is mentioned in the Border Morning Mail as a "man" is December 28, 1910. She had been charged (as Jack McDonald) at Corryong Court with stealing a bridle and halter and was jailed 3 months at Beechworth. She was sent by train to Wodonga, then by train to Wangaratta, where locals recognised her as May. Another train took her to Beechworth.

Within a month of her release, she gave a dazzling display of horsemanship at the Tallangatta Races, as Jockey Jack.

Where and when May McDonald was born is uncertain. Once she said she was born in Melbourne, another time "on the water". There were too many May McDonalds born in Victoria in the 1880s to be sure which one was Jockey Jack.

She always maintained her mother died when she was three, and that her father was killed in a mine accident at Bendigo. Farm families raised her but she claimed to have been ill-treated and whipped by a family near Horsham. She also lived at Drouin in Gippsland.

To quote from the Myrtleford Mail, September 7, 1916: "At 17 she encountered a deceiver, and to hide her shame, she resolved to take on boys' clothing and try a new life."

However, 40 years later she told Ken Blair she had never wore girl's clothing: "Even when I was a small girl I used to dress in men's clothing."

What was the "shame" she referred to? There's a clue in Truth in its court report from Tallangatta (January 16, 1915), where she was accused of stealing money from a man at the Laurel Hotel at Mitta Mitta. She said she needed the money "to go in search of her child". This is the only mention anywhere that Jockey Jack had a baby.

The 1915 report is illuminating:

"It may be recalled that Miss McDonald made her debut at a race meeting in Tallangatta some years ago (in 1911) in circumstance which caused the countryside to wonder. The spectacle of a man-woman parading about in their midst created a sensation which is still talked about locally.



## JOCKEY JACK..CONTINUED

The accused, who appeared in court in masculine garb, was attired in a neatly-fitting suit, with lounge hat. She frequently burst into tears during the proceedings."

This time she was jailed in Beechworth again, for a month but then came to live in Albury as a horse breaker and trainer.

Little notice was taken of her in 1916 until Police Supt William Childs called her in and demanded she start dressing like a lady. Jockey Jack refused and received widespread publicity that made the superintendent look a fool.

Childs was no fool - as a detective he had introduced the fingerprints system into NSW in 1903. He became the state's Chief Commissioner from 1930 to 1935.

He told her there had been complaints about her wearing men's clothes, including a waistcoat and watch chain. She claimed he

offered to get her a job in Sydney so she could leave Albury.

Jockey Jack said she wasn't going anywhere. She would not change her clothes as they were part of her life of looking after horses.

Nothing came of the police action and Jockey Jack settled down in Albury living in Young Street and later near the waterworks on the Murrawatta property.

In September 1956, she made colourful claims to Ken Blair about joining the Army as a man in 1917 and leading an Armistice Day parade in Albury on a horse ahead of two state governors - it never happened.

She claimed to have worked as a shearer's roustabout at Hay and that she became engaged to a jockey, Tommy Heligan.

### OPPOSITE SHELVERTON HOTEL. **BARTON'S CIRCUS.** T O - N I G H T.

**— TREMENDOUS SUCCESS!  
CROWDED HOUSE LAST NIGHT!  
ROARS OF LAUGHTER!**

Caused by Barney the Backing Mule, the Midget Dummy; **ROY BARTON**, the Bounding Jockey; the Chinese Acrobats; **MISS OORA TREVOR**, the Aerial Queen, on the flying trapeze; **MATILDA BASTON**, the Barebacked Rider; the **WISLANG** Family; the Highest Jumping dogs in the world; **MISS MAY McDONALD**, the only Lady Backjumping Rider in the world; £10 to anyone who can produce a horse that can throw May McDonald. Host of other attractions. New Novelties and Up-to-Date

### **IN MALE ATTIRE.**

**"AS GOOD AS ANY MAN."**

Melbourne, January 2.

The governor of the Beechworth Gaol was introduced to a curious character this week. In the commitment warrant the prisoner was designated as May McDonald, but in appearance she looked like a man, being dressed in a suit of men's grey tweed and a felt hat. She had been sentenced to gaol for stealing a bridle and a halter. For 12 months she has been masquerading as a man in the Upper Murray district, and had been earning her living by training horses and sometimes riding them. She was a clever jockey, and familiarly known as "Jockey Jack." She did not appear at all embarrassed, and said she preferred her mode of life, as it was an easy way of getting a living. When asked why she adopted male attire she answered that she was fond of horses, and was as good as any man, and that there were plenty of men who, dressed in female attire, would make better women than men.

Jockey Jack explained she got her nickname while working at Greg Greg station on the Upper Murray as Jack. The son of the station was also Jack, so the family dubbed her Jockey Jack because she rode well.



According to Des Martin, she trained horses under the name of J.J. McDonald and entered pony competitions in the Albury Show. She usually took a pony for children to ride. "It was only when you saw the beauty of her hands you realised she was a woman," Des wrote in his history of the Albury Race Club, A Century of Racing.

She told Ken Blair that Albury's decent people had treated her well. "I've played a lone hand and I've been left that way."

Recently I asked Ken Blair in Sydney how he managed to get interviews with Jockey Jack. "I just knocked on the door of her house near the waterworks," he said. "She liked steak and the fee was to take her a piece of steak each time."

When Jockey Jack died her age was reported in the Sydney papers as 80, on her death certificate it said she was 85, born in Melbourne. In 1916 when she was told to stop wearing women's clothing she told the journalist she was 29, that would make her birth year 1887 and age at death 77. On searching births for that year in Victoria there was an Elizabeth May McDonald born in Carlton to a Mary McDonald aged 19, father unknown. There was a Mary McDonald living in Melbourne at that time who was well known to police for vagrancy and drunkenness offences. Was this Jockey Jack's mother? Jockey Jack said her mother died when she was three and she was sent to a home until she was seven. The facts will not be known until more records become available to search online and we can look at the children's wards register of Victoria. I could find no records of an appropriately aged male called McDonald killed at that time in the Bendigo mines. Did he exist or was this another fabricated story? At the age of 17 in 1904 she said she had a failure in life, she encountered a deceiver and was going down the road to destruction. Did she have a child? She said in 1915 during her court case at Mitta where she was found guilty of stealing cash that she "needed the money to go and find my child." I searched the births for that year in Victoria and could find no child registered under May McDonald. Amongst all her seemingly far fetched tales there were many that can be substantiated. She did travel and perform with the circus. The Barton Bros circus first appears on Trove in 1900, travelling through South Australia in 1901, Victoria in 1902, Gippsland in 1903, then back to SA in 1904. Did she join the circus around this time? In the Adelaide papers of October 1905 it was reported that "a well known horsewoman is to attempt to ride Bucking Peter the notorious buckjumper". The circus then travelled to Geelong, then to Tasmania. In November of 1906 a notice appears about her serious accident stating it did not happen while she was performing for the Barton Bros circus. A couple of months later in February of 1906 she is back in the saddle for Barton Bros in Tasmania described as Miss May Mack, late member of Kemp's Roughriders, the only successful lady rough rider in the Southern Hemisphere. The advertisement says 10 pounds for anyone who can produce a horse that can throw her off. The circus then travelled into NSW for the first time going up the coast. In November 1908 they performed at Lismore but May must have jumped ship because she is reported as opening at Barraba with Martini's Buckjumping Show. In February of 1910 she is found performing for the Verto Company with Percy Verto the conjuror. Along with a conjuring act it seems that Percy also showed moving pictures, the Melbourne Cup of 1903 being one of them. The newspaper reported Miss May Mack will introduce her Plastique Cloak Act and the "various pictures evoked considerable applause as did Percy Verto with his sleight of hand work and Miss May Mack in her pose plastique of beautiful Iris." May McDonald had reinvented herself again from a starving orphan living on her wits to a buck jumper and then a conjurors assistant. She was a woman of amazing talent, guts and determination who followed her own path without caring about what people thought of her. She was a consummate horsewoman who could ride the wildest buckjumpers and train successful racehorses. Today she wouldn't be given a second glance but back then she was an oddity and a bit of a freak show. However, after talking to several people who remember her in Albury in the 1950s I got the impression that eventually she was accepted as a character in the community who lived her life quietly and without interference from others. This was in stark contrast to her early years when she survived an incredibly tough childhood, possibly gave up an illegitimate child, spent time in jail and was persecuted by the authorities for dressing and working as a man. I hope she found some peace at the end of her life with her horses and dogs down at the Waterworks.

SCHOOL OF ARTS, CASINO.


**VERTO'S**


**BIOTINT AND VARIETY CO.**

**Tuesday and Wednesday,**

FEBRUARY 8th and 9th.

INTRODUCING THE LATEST PICTURES—"The Melbourne Cup," "Splashing in the Briny," and thousands of feet of others. PERCY VERTO, Conjuror, who defies police and public to secure him with handcuffs and irons. MISS MAY MACK, the Beautiful Iris, in her pose plastique, the admiration of the ladies. HARRY ALFONSO, the Pocket Comedian. Popular Prices.

HARRY CLIFFORD, Advance Agent.



## **FINANCIAL MEMBERS LIST**

Auchinleck Honor	Haberfield Ron & Barbara	Palmer Susan
Betteridge Julie-Anne	Hamilton Geoff & Dorothy	Passant Michele
Blom Gerard	Harbick Pauline	Passant Leighton
Boadle Ron	Harper Peter	Pennay Bruce
Bollenhagen Marie	Harrison Ray & Judy	Reid Narda
Brennan Ann	Henwood John	Royal Doug
Browne Catherine & Michael	Higgins Frank	Ryan Trish
Bullivant Jacqui	Hocking Geraldine	Ryan Greg & Cheryl
Burdack Ray	Howard Lee	Scholz Ken
Burgess Simon	Hunter Doug & Jan	Scott Patricia
Colley Vivienne	Jack Peter & Susan	Shanahan June
Comitti Marilyn	Jackling Noel	Stevenson Faye
Commercial Club CEO	Jones Howard & Hazel	Stewart Beverley
Cossor Eric & Bronwyn	Judd Steve & Carol	Stokes Mavis
Coyle Leo & Jan	Langmead Grace	Strachan Pat
Crossley Keith	Lee Richard	Strang Irene
Dale Edward & Kay	Leggatt Harry	Symons Val
Douglas Norm	Lenahan Margaret	Taylor Marion
Eagles David	Lindner Dawn	Thomas Nicole
Freeman Roma	Livsey Helen	Thurley David
Gear Ray	McEvoy Rochelle	Trampusic Gloria
Geddes Beverly	McGrath Bill & Betty	Walsh Terrence
Gherashe Verna	McQuellin Chris	Whitbourn Peter & Carol
Glachan Helen	Moriarty Brian	Whitla Jean
Gleeson Margaret	Nugent Audrey	Widdison Doreen
Gould Patricia	Osbourne Denise	Willmet Rhonda
Gregory Roma	Paech Rupert	Wooding Jill & Joe

If your name does not appear in the above list and fees are not received by 20 October you will not receive the next Bulletin.

## **HISTORY FAIR AT ST PAUL'S COLLEGE WALLA WALLA**

Three society members, Richard Lee, Jan Hunter and Doug Hunter represented the Society at a History Fair staged by year-10 students at St Pauls' College on 10 September. The Fair was organised by History teacher, Ms Chloe Slocum and required students to select a person or event which they thought had been most influential in shaping our modern world. They were able to use multi-media: printed text, photographic images, sound and video as well as a short oral presentation to support their choice. Students from other classes at the college visited the Fair.

We were impressed by the presentations; the originality and innovation employed. Most of all we were impressed by the choices made: Who or what was the most significant influence in the shaping of the modern world? Was it 9/11 and the war on terror; was it Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement; the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand which precipitated WWI, or the Holocaust in WWII? Was it the Wright Brothers and powered flight, or the Mickey Mouse animated film with accompanying music score, or perhaps the Shearers' Strike and the rise of the Labor movement in Australia, or one of the dozen others? We three A&DHS members, together with Walla identity Merv Wegener, contributed our opinions as to the best presentation and the methods used and were able to present the prizes. It was a rewarding excursion. Ms Slocum and the Year 10 students are to be congratulated on their effort.

## **BETHANGA BRIDGE – HERITAGE RECOGNITION CEREMONY**

Join Engineering Heritage Victoria and the NSW Roads & Maritime Services in recognising the significance of Bethanga Bridge with an Engineering Heritage Marker on Saturday 10 October 2015 at 2:45 pm at the approach to the bridge on the NSW side of Lake Hume. All are welcome to attend. Attendance is free. This is an Engineers Australia outreach event.

## JOURNEYING THROUGH THE JOURNALS

1. Liverpool Genealogy Society Inc. ( Links 'n' Chains) - June 2015 No. 110
2. Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society June 2015 Volume 101 Part 1.
3. Magazine of the Royal Australian Historical Society June 2015 Number 124.
4. Ances - Tree Journal of the Burwood & District Family History Group- July 2015 Volume 28 No. 2
5. The Argyle Bulletin - Goulburn and District Historical and Family History Societies.
6. Wagga Wagga and District Historical June - July 2015 Newsletter
7. Placenames Australia- Newsletter of the Australian Placenames Survey June 2015

**PLEASE SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR XMAS GATHERING  
FRIDAY DECEMBER 11TH AT THE COMMERCIAL CLUB  
\$40 PER HEAD.**

**(IT IS POSSIBLE TO PAY THIS OFF MONTHLY.  
CONTACT THE TREASURER: RON HABERFIELD)**



## THEN FILM NIGHT

The Two-State History Education Network (THEN) marked History Week 2015 with a film night in conjunction with Regent Cinemas Albury on Wednesday 9 September. The selection of short films which reflected the theme of History Week included: War, Nationalism & Identity, included Wodonga's WWI stories, a film made by local filmmaker Helen Newman; the Australia rug knitted by Upper Murray identity Jim Campbell while a POW in WWII; a Department of Immigration film about Post-War migrants at Bonegilla, the Railway at Wodonga, the greetings from the Mayor of Noreuil in France first screened at the 'Trumpet Call' Exhibition at Albury LibraryMuseum in April and the most recent short film in which Cr Kevin Mack Mayor of Albury responds to the people of Noreuil.

## CORRECTION

Leighton Passant has pointed out that Ernie & Carol McAlpine were in the MacWhite Hotel, not the Boomerang as stated in the Dr Harry Brewer story last month. Ernest McAlpine was listed as the licensee there in 1958. Although the spelling is different he was the Mac with R.B. White. Ernie McAlpine was running the Gala Lounge in the T&G Building in 1954. The MacWhite Hotel became the Garrison and is now Northside. Originally it was the Continental when opened by Gavan Sarsfield O'Shaughnessy in 1938 and later became Sars Hotel.

## **REMINDER**

**Annual subscriptions for the year 2015-2016 are now due.  
If you have not already done so, please forward your subscription to the Treasurer at:  
PO Box 822 Albury 2640.**

**A&DHS account details are:  
BSB 640 000 Acc No 111097776 (Albury & District Historical Society Inc)  
Please use your SURNAME as the Reference.  
Individual: \$25.00 Family: \$33.00 Corporate: \$50.00**

**You can now find the Albury District Historical Society on Facebook!  
It is not necessary to sign up for Facebook to view the page. To have a look please go to  
<https://www.facebook.com/Albury.DHS>**

