

The Show Must Go On!

Blue Mountains Performance and Entertainment

Occasional Papers No. 3



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Blue Mountains Performance and Entertainment





*The text of talks presented at the Blue Mountains History
Conference, held at The Carrington Hotel, Katoomba
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INTRODUCTION TO *THE SHOW MUST GO ON!*

Graeme Coss, Master of Ceremonies

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Good morning everyone, my name is Graeme Coss and I'll be your MC today. More importantly, I would like to introduce Ms Patsy Moppett, president of the Blue Mountains Association of Cultural Heritage Organisations, to formally open the conference.

WELCOME

Patsy Moppett, BMACHO President

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Historian and heritage consultant

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and the elders from other communities who may be here today.

Welcome to the town of Katoomba and the beautiful Ballroom of The Carrington Hotel. If anyone stayed last night, they would have had a chance to experience this wonderful building and perhaps had a chance to explore.

So just a bit of housekeeping before we start, toilets, emergency assembly area, etc. Morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea will be served on the verandah and can be brought back to your table in the Ballroom.

Welcome everybody to our conference *The Show Must Go On! – Blue Mountains Performance and Entertainment*. I hope you enjoy the day!

Graeme Coss, Master of Ceremonies

Thank you, Patsy.

So, you may be wondering who I am, and what is my connection to today's conference. I confess that my 'history connection' is perhaps tenuous. The history of the second world war, the inter war years, and the first world war, is a passion of mine, and I'm a voracious reader. But my career was as a lecturer in criminal law at the University of Sydney. My teaching philosophy was simple: 'I'm here to have a good time, and I hope to take as many of you as possible along for the ride.' I believe that 'entertainment' is a vital ingredient of education. And it is apposite that entertainment is a core focus of today's conference. I should also mention that I moved to Leura in 2019 and joined the Blue Mountains Radio Players last year. A group of my fellow Radio Players will be performing after lunch.

It's lovely to be here in the historic Carrington Hotel, as Patsy noted. I well remember my parents informing me when I was young, that the Carrington was the place couples came to for weddings and honeymoons. Then they would slightly lower their voices and tell me that the Hydro Majestic was where people went for 'dirty weekends'. I would have nodded knowingly, although in fact I was a naïve child and had no idea what a dirty weekend was, but reckoned that, if it involved no bathing, it was the place for me.

Before we begin, I ask everyone to check that his or her mobile phone is on silent. I subscribe to concerts of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and I'm convinced that the mobile phone announcement in the Opera House is taken by some as an invitation to turn their phones on! Please ensure yours is silent. Thank you.

I contacted each of today's presenters some weeks ago. I felt that it would be pointless, in my introduction to each speaker, to merely replicate information already provided to attendees in the official documentation - other than an essential point or two.

Given the conference focus on 'entertainment', I asked each person to provide some extra 'unusual' information about themselves.

Here are the questions I asked:

1. What is your favourite film? (please limit to one, or, if you must, a maximum of three)
- It might be Picnic at Hanging Rock, or Citizen Kane, or Star Wars, or Barbie, or ...
2. What is your favourite piece of music? (again, one please, or three if you must)
- It might be a pop song, a symphony, an opera, a musical, a jazz riff, or ...
3. What is your favourite holiday destination? - other than the Blue Mountains!
- It might be a country, a city, a lake, a mountain, or ...
4. What 'career' do you wish you had undertaken, besides the one that you did?
- It might be marine biologist, astronaut, teacher, Hollywood star, or ...
5. Any other light-hearted bit of information about yourself that you are willing to share?

Now, I'd like some moments today to be interactive, so I might pounce on conference delegates to remind us, for example, what was the favourite film of presenter X – so be prepared! [You sir, in the white shirt, what subject did I teach at Sydney University?] And I'll certainly seek a show of hands if a presenter's choice corresponds with your own – perhaps a less threatening requirement.

Now, to the Ian Jack Address, and today's keynote speaker, Richard White:

RICHARD WHITE

I must emphasise at the outset that our Richard White is not the tech billionaire facing allegations of sexual misconduct, who features almost daily in news items. Our Richard White is a retired Associate Professor of Australian History at the University of Sydney and is a Councillor of the Royal Australian Historical Society. Richard has taught, researched, and published on a broad range of aspects of Australian history, especially Australian identity, tourism, and Australian icons.

I must confess that Richard is a personal friend and neighbour of mine. He is also very persuasive. Over too many glasses of red wine one evening, he convinced me to join him and his partner Dr Catherine Bishop in New York and London last October to attend book launches of Cath's latest publication.

Now to learn a bit more about Richard:

Favourite Film?

- Richard's tastes are broad. The classic 50s French comedy of Jacques Tati, 'Mon Oncle' – a show of hands of acknowledgement? The 60s Academy Award winner from Czechoslovakia, 'Closely Watched Trains' – anyone? and the 80s Hollywood blockbuster 'The Princess Bride' – ah yes, several nodding in recognition.

Favourite Music?

- Again, one can't pigeon-hole Richard. Bob Dylan, 'Like a Rolling Stone' – I see several nodding enthusiastically; and Puccini, 'La Boheme' – I confess one of my favourites as well – and yes, several hands are raised. Thank you.

Favourite Holiday Destination?

- Perhaps a surprise here from an Australian history professor, Richard nominated Lake Como in Italy.

Other Career?

- Architect or Postman. I think I can picture Richard zipping around the streets of Leura on a motor scooter.

And lastly, other Light-Hearted Information?

- To which Richard cheekily replied, 'Nothing light-hearted about me'. Well, I can supply some extra information about him. He is a master maker of gin and tonics, a baker extraordinaire, and a gardener extraordinaire.

Please welcome Richard White, whose keynote address topic today is: *'The Playful Crowd Comes to the Mountains'*.

THE PLAYFUL CROWD COMES TO THE MOUNTAINS

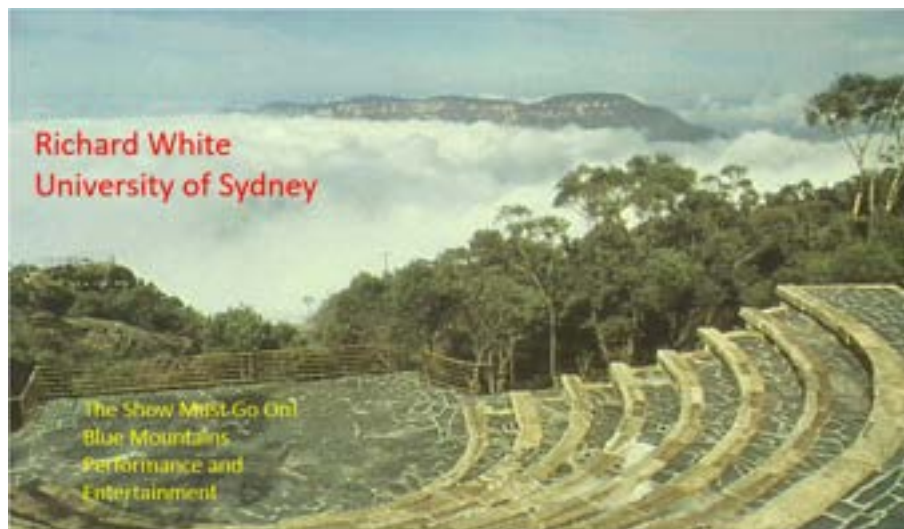
Richard White: Keynote Speaker

Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Sydney

richard.white@sydney.edu.au

Delivering The Ian Jack Address:

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, the Dharug and Gundungurra peoples, and pay my respects to their elders past and present.



I was very touched to be asked to give the Ian Jack Address. Ian was a colleague in the history department at the University of Sydney. When I arrived as a young lecturer, I was in awe of him: not because he was intimidating – he was a charmer as many of you know – but because he was such an impressive representative of a great tradition of academics with a rounded life. He was one of that disappearing breed, an academic with interests ranging well beyond the university, beyond his own specific research concerns in medieval history, and beyond climbing the career ladder; a head of department who came from an age before the university sank into managerialism. His contribution to the Blue Mountains Association of Cultural Heritage Organisations (BMACHO) is itself testament to that breadth of interests. He was also himself a consummate entertainer – not just a wonderful speaker but a pianist, so it is particularly fitting that Colin Semmler will be discussing pianos and pianists.

What I want to do is give some context to those pianos and all the other forms of entertainment we find in the Mountains, from roller-skating to fancy dress balls. I certainly can't pretend to be any sort of expert on the history of the Mountains, and I acknowledge those who know far more and have done so much to dig into our local history: John Low, Andy Macqueen, Robyne Ridge and Jim Smith to mention a few. I simply want to draw out some broader themes.

When we think about the subject of the 2025 conference – The Show Must Go On! Blue Mountains Performance and Entertainment – and even when we simply look around the very elegant room it was held in, we come face to face with a paradox. Why does this part of the world, renowned for the quiet contemplation of the wonders of nature, also produce chic nightspots, sparkling entertainment and frenetic performances? How can the Blue Mountains contain both solitude and the bubbly crowd, both silence and hubbub, both serenity and hullabaloo?

One of humanity's most profound dichotomies is that between nature and culture, so-called 'wilderness' and so-called 'civilisation'. There was a point, in the long history of human interaction with nature, that the realisation dawned – sometime probably in the early nineteenth century – that, rather than humankind needing to be protected from nature, nature needed to be protected from humankind. Perhaps it was the first glimmer of the coming of the Anthropocene, when human activity would become the most significant influence, for better or worse, on the environment.

At the same time, Romantic poets, artists and composers were celebrating the natural world in their work, elaborating those contrasts between nature and culture. It was no coincidence. Reacting against what they saw as the over-civilisation and ultra-rationalism of the Enlightenment, the Romantics celebrated the wild over the ordered, passion over reason, the sublime over the decorative, individuality over the crowd, freedom over constraint, individual expression over social convention.



Figure 1: Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*

Consider Felix Mendelssohn's 'Hebrides' overture of 1830, with its evocation of wild seas and the dramatic rock formations of Fingal's Cave. Or that classic pictorial representation of the Romantic vision, Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog) from about 1818. Familiar from prints, T-

shirts and mugs, it is 'an image so deeply embedded in our cultural landscape that we may no longer see it as art' [fig. 1].¹ It celebrates the individual, standing alone, immersed in idealised nature, a world of dramatic cliffs, clouds, wild fabulous vistas, waterfalls, nature at its most sublime, the antithesis of civilisation, crowds, the rush and bustle of everyday life. And then there were the poets. The great Romantic, William Wordsworth, celebrated that power of nature as a teacher of spiritual awareness in 1798.

One impulse from a vernal wood,
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can. (The Tables Turned)

It was only in nature that he could hear 'the still, sad music of humanity.'² That was the cultural context in which the Blue Mountains first came to be appreciated by Europeans. Their attractions were recognised – and forged – at the height of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Even in 1815, as Lachlan Macquarie travelled the new Cox's road over the mountains, all the language of the Romantic movement had become cliché: he admired 'a very extensive deep romantic Glen, full of very Picturesque and wild Scenery', 'the grand and sublime scenery', 'a variety of sublime and grand objects', the 'awful grandeur' of a waterfall.³

Twenty years later Charles Darwin found the view at Wentworth Falls 'extremely magnificent' and that at Govett's Leap 'even more stupendous', despite the 'never-failing Eucalyptus' being 'exceedingly monotonous'.⁴ And then by 1896, the popular writer Nat Gould could extol the 'scenery full of wild grandeur'. By then its tourist potential had been recognised: 'The traveller looks upon it with a feeling akin to awe as he realises its vastness, and also the fact that the hand of man has nothing to do with it.'⁵

Of course, we need to place a caveat on that concept of wilderness, particularly in settler colonial societies, where national parks first appeared.⁶ Their 'new world' concept of wilderness left out a crucial fact: those empty spaces, untouched by 'the

¹ Gianluca Didino 'Out of the Fog', <https://aeon.co/essays/why-caspar-david-friedrichs-wanderer-is-a-failed-painting>, accessed online 4 June 2025.

² William Wordsworth, 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' (1798).

³ Lachlan Macquarie, *Journal of a Tour of the Newly Discovered Country West of the Blue Mountains*. 25 April 1815 - 19 May 1815, 28 April 1815, 17 May 1815. Mitchell Library, Sydney. Available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/macquarie-archive/lema/1815/1815april.html>, accessed 4 June 2025.

⁴ Charles Darwin, *Journal*, 17-18 January 1836, available at <https://www.literature.org/authors/darwin-charles/the-voyage-of-the-beagle/chapter-19.html>, accessed 4 June 2025.

⁵ Nat Gould, *Town and Bush: Stray Notes on Australia* (London: Routledge, 1896), pp.213-14.

⁶ Melissa Harper & Richard White 'How Transnational were the First National Parks? Comparative perspectives from the British settler societies' in Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, Patrick Kupper (eds), *Civilising Nature: National Parks in global historical perspective* (Munich: Berghahn Books, 2012), pp.50-67.

hand of man', were in fact populated and cared for by indigenous peoples. The settler colonial enthusiasm for wilderness usually entailed an imaginative dispossession.⁷

The Blue Mountains also attracted their romantic poets and composers and artists who used the same language of the sublime. In about 1880, Henry Kendall wrote of our 'haughty heights' and 'cliffs austere', though he was more intent on accentuating the challenges faced by the 'intrepid' explorers of 1813.⁸ Sally Greenaway composed her lush 2010 'aubade and nocturne', described as a 'miniature "landscape painting"', very much in a Romantic tradition.⁹ As that quotation suggests, it would be artists who were predominantly responsible for seeing the Mountains through a Romantic lens.



Figure 2: *Weatherboard Creek Falls*, von Guérard

Friedrich's Wanderer was gazing over the Gamrig, a rock formation near Dresden, but we can almost imagine it is the Three Sisters. Possibly the most influential Romantic depiction of the Blue Mountains is Eugen von Guérard's *Weatherboard Falls* (1862) with its typical vista of wilderness stretching to the horizon [fig. 2].¹⁰ A human presence in such work gives a sense of proportion (often exaggerated) but also intensifies the sense,

⁷ Tracey Banivanua Mar, 'Carving Wilderness: Queensland's National Parks and the Unsettling of Emptied Lands, 1890–1910', in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspective on Race, Place and Identity*, eds. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 73–94.

⁸ Josh Woodward argues that much of the reason for the continuing emphasis on the Blue Mountains' sublimity was to emphasise the challenges facing the explorers, in part a way of imaginatively dispossessing the original inhabitants. See Josh Woodward, 'Pioneers, progress and the sublime: Blue Mountains tourist promotion, 1885–1894', *History Australia* 2023, 20 (1), pp.73-5. He probably understates the extent to which Australians shared in European Romanticism.

⁹ Sally Greenaway, 'The Blue Mountains', available at <https://sallygreenaway.com.au/catalogue/work/blue-mountains/bluemountains>, accessed 4 June, 2025.

¹⁰ For an extended discussion of this work and other versions see Martin Thomas *The Artificial Horizon: Imagining the Blue Mountains* MUP Melbourne 2003, pp. 73–82.

as Edmund Burke defined the sublime intending to do, of humanity's insignificance in the awe-inspiring presence of majestic natural productions.¹¹ The fact that von Guérard's human figure was Aboriginal bolsters the impression of alien, 'primitive' wilderness awaiting conquest, although another reading might be that here is some recognition of prior ownership – or at least that the imagined wilderness was in fact inhabited.



Figure 3: von Guérard

Over the next few decades however, that wildness was subdued, and the human presence mutated. In 1863, von Guérard produced another smaller version which kept an Aboriginal figure, but five years later, in a coloured lithograph of the same painting [fig. 3], he had two pairs of Europeans providing the perspective and marvelling at the scene.



Figure 4: The Valley of the Grose, Pignatelli

¹¹ Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of the Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, (London: J. Dodsley, 1757), Part II, Sections VII-VIII.

Another Romantic, the Australian-born W C Piguenit, depicted the sublimity of the Blue Mountains with similar techniques [fig. 4]. He had camped in the Grose Valley in 1875 with Eccleston du Faur, who was on a mission to promote its attractions. Piguenit again added some tiny European figures in an attitude of awe as they communed with nature at its most sublime.¹²

Just 12 years later A H Fullwood painted a similarly sublime landscape [fig. 5] you can see it becoming a more touristed space: the very presence of white women a sure (and purposeful) indication that the wilderness was being tamed!¹³



Figure 5: *Prince Rupert's Glen*, A H Fullwood

By the 1890s, in the work of the Heidelberg School we can see figures cavorting in the bush naked [fig. 6 and 7]. And indeed, perhaps the ultimate Romantic immersion of the self in nature was the propensity of some to do their bushwalking in the nude. John Le Gay Brereton, a great fan of Thoreau, Fisher, librarian and professor of English, wandered in the mountains wearing nothing but a pair of sandals, letting the branches sweep across his body 'causing indescribable thrills of love'. He wanted to

¹² John Low, *Blue Mountains Byways* (Leura: Second Back Row Press, 2021) p. 75; Andy Macqueen, *Back from the Brink: Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness* (2nd ed) Andy Macqueen, Wentworth Falls, 2007, ch. 14.

¹³ Gary Werskey, *Picturing a Nation: The Art and Life of A. H. Fullwood*, NewSouth, Sydney, 2021, p.105.

know nature, he said, ‘as a lover; if we would be uplifted with the joy of her kisses, then we must strip off these artificial hindrances and become as naked as she.’¹⁴



Figures 6 & 7: Heidelberg School works

But I’m digressing……

It was Wordsworth who recognised, in concluding his Guide to his beloved Lakes District in 1835, that such Romantic landscapes needed protection. He made what is often seen as the first argument for national parks, protecting wild nature as ‘a sort of national property’, one that would be available to people of ‘pure taste’, and ‘in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy.’¹⁵

His arguments for the value of wilderness and the need to protect it were taken up in the newer settler societies. Nineteenth-century American Transcendentalists – Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman – exclaimed ‘We need the tonic of wildness ... We can never have enough of Nature.’¹⁶ Too much nature was barely enough.¹⁷ They were laying the groundwork for the first national park, Yellowstone in 1872, soon to be followed by others in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Despite Wordsworth, no national park would be proclaimed in Europe until the twentieth century.¹⁸

¹⁴ Melissa Harper, *The Ways of the Bushwalker: On Foot in Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2020, 2nd ed), p.97.

¹⁵ William Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes*. Ernest de Sélincourt, ed. (London: Francis Lincoln, 2004), p. 93. See also Melanie Hall ‘American Tourists in Wordsworthshire: from “National Property” to “National Park”’ in John K. Walton and Jason Wood, eds. *The Making of a Cultural Landscape: The English Lake District as Tourist Destination, 1750–2010*. (Farnham, Sussex, UK: Ashgate, 2013, pp.87-109.

¹⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: or Life in the Woods* (Boston: Ticknow, Reed and Fields, 1854) p.138.

¹⁷ *With apologies to Roy and H G.*

¹⁸ Harper and White, p.50.

The search for transcendence, or the pursuit of wonder (in Julia Horne's evocative phrase),¹⁹ was a solitary business. Wordsworth wandered lonely as a cloud – now another Romantic cliché. The daffodils sustained him in a pensive mood, giving himself up to the 'inward eye' that is 'the bliss of solitude'.²⁰ Even tourist guides to the Blue Mountains recommended them for 'solitude and solemnity' and 'silent awe and wonder'.²¹ In making their arguments for national parks Romantic advocates drew an implicit contrast between the contemplative solitude offered by nature and the vapid entertainments of the crowd. Sometimes it was explicit. In his famously tetchy letters to the *Morning Post* in 1845 denouncing the proposed railway line to Windermere for tourists, Wordsworth insisted you need 'a mind disposed to peace' for the quiet contemplation and spiritual reverie that the appreciation of nature required: 'Go to a pantomime, a farce, or a puppet show, if you want noisy pleasure.'²² A century later, the 'Wilderness Letter' by the American nature writer, Wallace Stegner, seen as instrumental in the passing of US 1964 Wilderness Act, also argued 'we need the spiritual refreshment' of nature 'where the fun houses, the bulldozers, and the pavement of our civilization are shut out'.²³

So how is it that, in the Blue Mountains that owe their popularity to that Romantic promise of quiet contemplative solitude, we can paradoxically have a conference devoted to the noisy pleasures of pantomimes, puppet shows and fun houses?

That is also the paradox of tourism, or at least of tourism based around experiences of nature. The essence of tourist attractions like the Blue Mountains lies in their rejuvenating wildness, yet so often as they develop their tourist offerings, they provide their exact antithesis, Stegner's fun-houses and Wordsworth's pantomimes and puppet shows. What does the Mountains' awe-inspiring wildness have to do with piano playing in Carrington, radio plays in the Palais Royale, the pictures at the Victory Theatre, singalongs at Rosedale in Hazelbrook, the carryings on at the Hydro, the subjects covered at the conference?

We have a wonderful graphic representation of that paradox in the much-reproduced advertising poster for the Hydro-Majestic Hotel created by Charles Henry Hunt in about 1920 [fig. 8]. The contradictions are stark, between the idealised 'pursuit of wonder' in untrammelled nature and the demand of the tourist that they be entertained with pleasurable amusement. At the centre is the Hydro's sublime setting looking over the Megalong Valley. But look at what else it offers: tennis, golf, fancy dress balls, dance bands, picnics, billiards, car trips and the famous (or notorious) sun bath walk. There is no sense of solitary transcendence here: it is all about socialising.

¹⁹ Julia Horne *The Pursuit of Wonder: How Australia's Landscape was Explored, Nature Discovered and Tourism Unleashed* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2005).

²⁰ William Wordsworth, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' (1804).

²¹ Cited in Woodward, pp. 70, 80.

²² William Wordsworth, *Kendal and Windermere Railway: Two Letters Re-printed from the Morning Post*, (Kendal: R Branthwaite and Son, 1845).

²³ Wallace Stegner, 'Wilderness Letter', 3 December 1960, available at https://psych.utah.edu/resources/documents/psych4130/Stenger_W.pdf accessed 4 June, 2025.



Figure 8: Hydro poster



Figure 9: Katoomba poster

A promotional booklet published by Penfold's in the mid-1930s used a similar format which again emphasised socialising over communion with nature [fig. 9]. While the Three Sisters, which by then had become central to Blue Mountains iconography, are

featured at the centre – nature the reason for being there after all – the prospective tourist is also offered bathing, golf, tennis, bowls, group hikes, children’s play areas, motor ‘touring’ and dancing. In addition, there are the ‘enhanced’ experiences of nature provided by the extended look-out at Echo Point, and the floodlighting of cascades and waterfalls (both dating from 1932).

Nevertheless, while tourism promoters were celebrating sociability, and presumably many tourists were enjoying those sociable offerings, the ideal remained – and remains today – that the wilderness is best appreciated away from the excitement of crowds, with a quiet individual response to nature. Certainly, crowds were not conducive to a naked bushwalk. In particular, the postcards bought by tourists, produced perhaps in their millions by enterprising photographers like Harry Phillips, almost always emphasised peace, repose, transcendence and the individual. Most did their best to eliminate any suggestion that the Blue Mountains experience might be noisy, crowded, rushed, hectic or sociable [fig. 10].²⁴



Figure 10: Harry Phillips at Ruined Castle, & his family over the Jamison Valley

It all seems quite contradictory. So, what is going on with this paradoxical proliferation of entertainments? Why is there this seeming imperative that a landscape famed of its capacity to offer solitude and communion with the natural world as epitomised in Romantic literature, music and art should also attract the noisy pleasures that would seem to be its antithesis? I think we can consider three factors: economic imperatives, technological transformations and the quest for social distinction.

1. The Katoomba Landlady

One of the first serious historical studies of tourism, John Walton’s classic, *The Blackpool Landlady* (1978), analysed the industry’s economics at a local level. The natural wonders of the Blue Mountains, as with those of Blackpool, demanded accommodation, sustenance, transport and other amenities. They were often provided

²⁴ Despite playing a crucial role in tourist promotion, Harry Phillips had an almost mystical view of the Mountains: Low, p. 29-31. Horne (p. 225) argues the Burkean sublime gave way to what William Cronon called the ‘domesticated sublime’; Woodward (p.69) argues at least in much of the late nineteenth-century promotional guides, the promise of experiencing a sublime Burkean ‘existential anguish’ survived.

by women, the Katoomba landlady rivalling her Blackpool counterpart as a legendary figure in the tourist imagination. As a commercial tourism industry emerged and then inexorably expanded, it sought to keep tourists captive as long as possible and to have them returning regularly. And that meant providing additional entertainments.

Richard Butler provided a classic (if overly schematic) framework for analysing the 'life cycle' of a tourist area. His six stages consisted of the 'exploration' of a new area by a few intrepid tourists, followed by local 'involvement' in providing basic facilities such as guest houses and pressuring authorities for better transport. Then came the 'development' phase of tourism with a well-defined tourism district, extensive advertising, high numbers of tourists and, importantly, existing attractions becoming increasingly artificial (as, for example, floodlighting natural features). The apotheosis of the evolution came with the 'consolidation' stage, when the economy, led largely by non-local entrepreneurs, was tied to tourism, with more sophisticated attractions bearing little or no connection to the area's original natural charm. Blackpool is a famous, iconic example. Tourism at that point provoked increasing discontent among many locals. Butler's final two stages, ominously, were 'stagnation' and then 'decline', though he also recognised there was the possibility of 'rejuvenation'.²⁵

Butler's own position was that stagnation was best avoided by ensuring the integrity of the attractiveness of a region was not compromised, an early argument for sustainable management.²⁶ And of course the Romanticism underpinning so much nature tourism had always hated commercialisation and unlimited growth. Criticism of the tourist industry according to Butler was part and parcel of his 'development' stage. With the establishment of national parks in Australia, there was already an understanding that commercialism had all but ruined natural attractions like Niagara Falls. The antagonism to profit, exploitation and commercialisation runs deep and justifiably in the Romantic celebration of national parks and wilderness places. When the (Royal) National Park was established south of Sydney in 1879 – the world's second – the trustees railed with uncharacteristic virulence against 'the modern abomination of advertising', at least in their national park: 'Nature's beauties can be enjoyed without notifications concerning So-and-so's soap, or Somebody's Embrocation, or Otherman's Pills vulgarising everything.' National parks were to be 'safe beyond the reach of plunder, safe from the machinations of ambitious schemers, and secured to the people of this country.'²⁷

²⁵ The original version appeared in R.W. Butler, 'The Concept of a Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution: Implications for Management of Resources' *Canadian Geographies*, 24 (1), 1980, pp. 5-12; the most recent elaboration is R W Butler (ed), *The tourism area life cycle: Review, Relevance and Revision* (Bristol: Channelview Publications, 2024); a useful historiographical survey is Richard Butler 'Tourism destination development: the tourism area life cycle model' *Tourism Geographies*, 2025, 27 (3-4), 599-607.

²⁶ Butler 2025, p.601.

²⁷ Richard White, 'The recreational rationale in NSW national parks' in Richard White and Caroline Ford (eds), *Playing in the bush: recreation and national parks in NSW* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2012), p.26.



Figure 11 & 12: Progress Committee 1890

The early development of the Blue Mountains had its fair share of ‘ambitious schemers’. Local politics were originally dominated by a cabal of local businessmen – ‘Shop owners, estate agents, stationers and souvenir vendors’,²⁸ tourism entrepreneurs who reigned over the Katoomba Council, the Blackheath Progress Committee, the Katoomba and Leura Tourist Association and so on [fig. 11 and 12]. They did a lot of positive work promoting tourism, building tracks, lookouts and shelter sheds from the 1880s, making the wilderness more accessible. But then, conforming to Butler’s ‘consolidation’ phase, the Mountains also acquired tennis courts, a bowling green, swimming baths, a golf club and a skating rink all before World War I. And we have the non-local entrepreneur *par excellence*, Sir Joynton Smith, twice-divorced reformed gambler, hotelier, racecourse owner, sports and car lover, practical joker and concertina player. He prospered, as Chris Cunneen put it, ‘through his concentration on the pastimes of the people’.²⁹ He saw the potential of the Blue Mountains for tourism and bought the Carrington in 1901, owned the Imperial in Mount Victoria, leased the Hydro-Majestic, and also bought the Empire and the Kings cinemas.³⁰ And the tourists came: 60 000 visitors in 1921, 500 000 by 1928.³¹ The 1930s saw further development with the Echo Point projecting lookout and the floodlighting of falls and cascades in 1932.

²⁸ Anne Burke, ‘Awesome Cliffs, Fairy Dells and Lovers Silhouetted in the Sunset – A Recreation History of the Blue Mountains, 1870-1939’ in Peter Stanbury (ed) *The Blue Mountains: Grand Adventure for All, The Macleay Museum and Second Back Row Press, Leura* (2nd ed) 1988, p.108.

²⁹ Chris Cunneen, ‘Smith, Sir James John Joynton (1858-1943)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/smith-sir-james-john-joynton-8475/text14731>, published first in hardcopy 1988, accessed online 10 July 2025.

³⁰ Burke, p.106.

³¹ Burke, p.114.

For many the commercial tourist development of the Mountains became a tale of innocence corrupted – a paradise lost. For Anne Burke:

'The seeds of decline sown in the 1920s germinated in the 1930s when Katoomba's fresh and unspoilt natural qualities were irrevocably lost ... [becoming] a hardened, pseudo-sophisticated flashy town'.

As Katoomba became the honeymoon capital, it was 'all glamour and Hollywood, the awesome cliffs and fairy dells of yesteryear a delusion of the past'.³² Similarly for Jim Smith, writing in 1985:

*In the latest promotional material on the BM, I see that there are '72 major attractions' here. Nowhere in the leaflet is there a suggestion that a single moment of stillness might be more rewarding than all these 'major attractions' together.*³³

By 1925, perhaps the heyday of tourism in the Blue Mountains, there were 207 hotels and guesthouses, all competing to offer bed and breakfast but also promising something more, to ensure their guests remained entertained.³⁴ They wanted visitors to extend their stay, to return in another season or another year. Even the humblest had a piano.



Figures 13 & 14: The piano

³² Burke, p. 117.

³³ Jim Smith 'Blue Mountains Myths and Realities' in Peter Stanbury (ed) *The Blue Mountains: Grand Adventure for All*, The Macleay Museum and Second Back Row Press, Leura (2nd ed) 1988, p.201.

³⁴ Calculated from the list of accommodation compiled by Gwen Silvey, *Happy Days: Blue Mountains Guesthouses Remembered* (Sydney: Kingsclear Books, 1996), pp. 96-103.

As Humphrey McQueen noted Australians in the Victorian age had passion for pianos.³⁵ John Low tells how the Duncan family managed to get a piano into the Megalong Valley when they moved there in the 1880s, before any real road existed.³⁶ The piano disappeared as an essential feature of Blue Mountains accommodation after the second world war, but in some better establishments it remains a nostalgic reminder of its past glories [fig. 13 and 14].

At the very least a singsong could be got up in any guesthouse. One guest would be a reasonable pianist, another would have taken to heart compliments on her singing, another might take a partner for a dance. They might have found a copy of the 'Blue Mountains Waltz' (c.1893), the 'Katoomba Waltz' (1895), 'The Leura Falls Mazurka' (c.1896) or the 'Beautiful Blue Mountains Waltz' (1922) – compositions presumably written with an eye to just that guest house market.³⁷ In addition, even modest guesthouses offered a parlour or drawing room where after dinner there might be cards, games and perhaps a lantern slide show.³⁸ By 1900 many guesthouses also had a tennis court and might also offer croquet, quoits and bowls [fig. 15].



Figure 15: Quoits at the Katoomba Coffee Palace 1906

As we move up the scale, somewhere like Coopers Grand Hotel in Mt Victoria, with its own private golf course and coaches to Jenolan Caves, offered musical entertainments that included daughter Emily, talented enough to perform in Sydney.³⁹ The Ritz, Sans Souci, California, Palais Royale and Homesdale guest houses all advertised

³⁵ Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia: An Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism and Nationalism* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1970), ch. 9.

³⁶ Low, p.102.

³⁷ Thanks to Julia Russoniello for these references.

³⁸ Horne, p.128.

³⁹ Silvey, p.29, Low, p.120.

ballrooms.⁴⁰ At the top of the scale there was the grandeur of the Carrington and the Hydro-Majestic, offering professional dance bands [fig. 16].



Figure 16: *Dance band*

Sans Souci had a ballroom and orchestra, billiard table, and two tennis courts.⁴¹ By the 1920s the cinema had taken off and later the basement of the Kings cinema was cleared for roller-skating [fig. 17].



Figure 17: *Roller skating*

Then there were what seemed to be ubiquitous fancy dress competitions surviving well into the 1950s [fig. 18-23]. Wallace (Wal) Green, who had opened Green's Souvenirs in 1938, was almost always there to take the photos when the fervour for fancy dress took hold: and of course, to sell them later. He himself was also a nightclub entertainer playing his Cordovox accordion. Green presents an interesting contrast to Harry Phillips, focusing on tourists' revelry rather than ensuring tourists did not intrude in his images.

⁴⁰ Silvey, pp.14-15.

⁴¹ Jim Smith *Blue Mountains Photographer Walter Rumble and the Story of 'Sans Souci' Guesthouse at Katoomba* (Hazelbrook: Hazelbrook Cottage Antiques, 2019), p.10.



Figure 18: *Dressing up*



Figure 19: *Dressing up*



Figure 20: *Dressing up Sans Souci 1938*



Figure 21: *Dressing up*



Figure 22: *Dressing up*



Figure 23: *Dressing up*

The entertainments of the first half of the twentieth century were largely home-made: got up by tourists themselves or put on by locals for local as well as tourist consumption, with brass bands [fig. 24],



Figure 24: *Brass band*

the Glenbrook Merrymakers and amateur theatrics, including quite elaborate Gilbert and Sullivan performances into the 1960s. It still tended to be a culture that was made rather than consumed. But as the twentieth century wore on, as the piano was replaced by the gramophone, as the amateur play was replaced by the cinema, entertainments and performances were being transformed, commercialised, turned into commodities for sale. As with tourism itself, the entertainments provided for tourists became increasingly a way of making money.

So, for even modest tourist enterprises to thrive, or even survive, they had to find the means of expanding their services, providing entertainments that went beyond the freely available pursuits offered by nature. There is a clear economic imperative at work to provide entertainment to supplement the attractions of nature. A good deal of research in tourism studies focuses solely on the economics of tourism but another force fundamentally transforming the entertainments available to tourists was technological change.

2. The Railway Crowd

The railway produced a revolutionary shift, turning the tourist's world into 'one big department store of countrysides and cities'.⁴² The Romantics imagined the pursuit of wonder as a solitary pursuit but, much to their dismay, the railway created the crowd. Wordsworth famously campaigned against the railway reaching Windermere and the Lakes (it arrived in 1847), wanting them 'to be safe from the molestation of cheap trains

⁴² Wolfgang Schivelbusch *The Railway Journey: Trains and travel in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p.188.

pouring out their hundreds at a time'.⁴³ For Thoreau the trains spreading across America would 'sprinkle all the restless men and merchandise in the country for seed'.⁴⁴

But inexorably the railway came, bringing its cheap trains and restless men to the Blue Mountains as well as to the Lake District. Railway stations opened at Weatherboard (Wentworth Falls) and Blackheath in 1867, Mount Victoria in 1868, and Crushers (or Katoomba) in 1874 [fig. 31].



Figure 31: Katoomba Station 1888

The railways made the grand hotels possible – the Hotel Imperial in 1878, the Carrington (originally the Great Western) in 1883, the Belgravia in 1891 (becoming the Hydro Majestic in 1904) – along with the mushrooming of more modest guest houses. The railway created the mass holiday. A holiday in the mountains or at the beach became a mass experience, where much of the enjoyment was bound up with the crowd that surrounded you.

Gary Cross and John Walton called it the playful crowd. From the late nineteenth century, holiday entertainment (their examples are Blackpool and Coney Island) became indelibly associated with crowded, noisy, vulgar, unbuttoned, uninhibited enjoyment ... epitomized [by] the suspension of dignity and inhibitions, the reign of gluttony, extravagance, and licentiousness, at once a surrendering and a celebration of self.

The entertainments offered by the Blue Mountains perhaps never reached quite that degree of exhibitionism or vulgarity. They were more middle-class, more restrained, more like the more controlled environments that Cross and Walton see coming to dominate later in the twentieth century. There was nevertheless something of the same

⁴³ Wordsworth, *Kendal and Windermere Railway*.

⁴⁴ Thoreau, *Walden*, p.52.

exuberance. Crucially it was ‘a new collective experience’ and much of the enjoyment came from that sociability.⁴⁵

Epitomising the playful crowd created by the railways was the extraordinary craze for mystery hikes in the 1930s. Thousands of hikers would take a train for two shillings to an unknown destination for a mystery hike. In the second of these, in mid-1932, 2909 hikers boarded the train at Central and were disgorged at Valley Heights; they then hiked 15 kilometres down the road to Penrith, stopping for picnics along the way. Five hundred were treated by ambulance officers for blisters.⁴⁶ Even for a less manic holiday in the Blue Mountains, however, the railway created new experiences. It meant you travelled as part of a crowd; you were generally accommodated as part of a large group and your entertainments – even getting away into the bush – probably involved far more sociability than the Romantic ideal of the solitary wanderer [fig. 32].



Figure 32: Jenolan Caves group

There was another notable feature of these types of entertainment: they were heterosocial, the sexes mingling indiscriminately. These new forms of entertainment represented a significant change from Victorian times when, apart from the constrained environment of church, men and women rarely mixed socially in a random way with people they did not know. In the early twentieth century, dance halls, picnic grounds, amusement parks and cinemas were legitimising new ways of meeting and mingling with the opposite sex – we were on the slippery slope to dating and close dancing later in the century. The fact that such behaviour took place in or at least close to relatively unspoilt nature rather than the tawdry venues of the polluted city seemed to make it more respectable.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Gary S Cross and John K Walton *The Playful Crowd: Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century* Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, p.6. *My emphasis.*

⁴⁶ Robyne Ridge, ‘Blue Mountains Mystery Hikes caused a sensation’, *Blue Mountains Gazette*, 11 September 2017; Harper, *Bushwalker*, pp.159-66.

⁴⁷ Ella Barnett, ‘Flirting with the Picturesque: the Effects of Romanticism and Romance’, in Richard White and Caroline Ford (eds), *Playing in the Bush: Recreation and National Parks in New South Wales*, (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2012), p. 53.

One of Harry Phillips more commercial postcards from the 1930s showed a woman seated on her boyfriend's lap at Orphan Rock, and other couples canoodling behind them, with the caption 'The Orphan Rock(ed) at Katoomba'.⁴⁸ [In the 1930s United States, to 'rock', as in what would become 'rock n roll', had a sexual connotation, though whether that subtext had reached the Blue Mountains then is hard to say.]⁴⁹ The commercial imperative and the playful crowd had even captured Harry Phillips.

3. Social Distinction

The gap between the solitary Romantic and the sociable crowd predictably had a class dimension. When Blue Mountains became a fashionable holiday resort in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was initially the playground of the well-to-do. The railways, offering cheap excursion fares, opened the Mountains to a much broader social range. There were limits, however, at both ends of the social scale. It was significant that when the Hydro Majestic opened in 1904, it was meant to be a very exclusive hydrotherapy spa on European lines but soon had to drop its prices to appeal to a more (still upper) middle-class clientele. On the other hand, even modest guesthouses catered largely for middle- and lower-middle-class guests who could afford regular holidays: generally working people would have trouble finding the time, the money and perhaps the cultural capital for even a weekend in the Mountains, except for the one exception we will come to shortly. The sociable crowd being entertained at Blue Mountains resorts in the first half of the twentieth century was generally a middle class one. But that did not mean there were no class differences. As a major study of Australian cultural distinction concluded, 'every class, every age cohort, each gender uses *whatever material is to hand* as a tool of differentiation and of exclusion'.⁵⁰ Various forms of social distinction were rife in the Mountains.

Adventuring into the bush, like going to the beach, made social difference hard to spot: social status was not necessarily apparent from what people wore. Yet, as Melissa Harper has shown, a serious cultural division, and considerable animosity, could arise on mountain tracks. Above all there was the gap between mere 'hikers' and those starting to regard themselves as 'bushwalkers'. Myles Dunphy, who had coined the term 'bushwalker', derided hikers as 'A crowd of flappers of both sexes' (how witheringly disparaging is that?) straggling through the bush in street attire with ukuleles and hampers to impede their progress, tripping over rocks and vines and leaving scraps of paper lying around to mark their halting places.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Barnett, p. 59.

⁴⁹ Green's Dictionary of Slang, <https://greensdictofslang.com/entry/zlfamhy>, accessed online 10 July, 2025.

⁵⁰ Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow, *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999, p.269. 'Cultural distinction is as complex and social life itself'.

⁵¹ Harper, *Bushwalker*, p.207

Similarly, Marie Byles complained of noisy hikers invading Mount Solitary ‘with their frivolous cooeing and their orange-peel droppings’.⁵² One bushwalking club had a break in their regular meetings to ‘recount jokes about hikers’.⁵³ It was not a difference in wealth but a social and cultural distinction drawing on the dichotomy between the individual and the crowd.

The jokes about hikers were part of a broader phenomenon. By the 1920s many were reacting against the culture of the crowd. ‘Mass’ culture was increasingly disdained by those seeking to distinguish themselves as individual, independent and separate physically and imaginatively from the mob. Working people now had their occasional days off to pursue pleasure, but crowds of them doing the same thing at the same time offended middle-class sensibilities. A derisive stereotype grew up of the Australian crowd at leisure, at the beach or the races – or indeed on a mystery hike. For the elite, private car ownership came to the rescue, offering a new individualism. The motor car became the great symbol of independence from the mob [fig. 33].

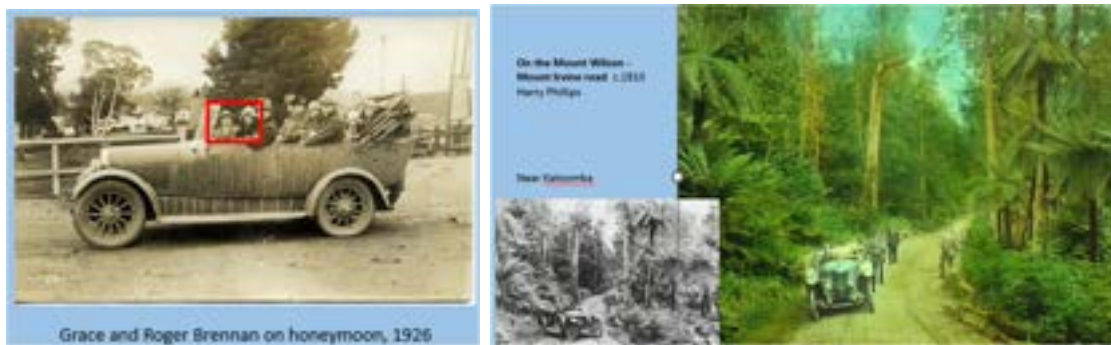


Figure 33: The motor car

It reinvigorated the desire to be alone in nature and made it possible for an elite: cars could go to places trains could not take the crowds to.⁵⁴

The class dimension was also clear in the development of the Blue Mountains as a pre-eminent honeymoon destination. Many working people could afford one once-in-a-lifetime holiday. Karen Dubinsky and Ella Barnett have analysed in some detail the complicated relationship between Romanticism and romance that saw dramatic natural attractions such as the Blue Mountains and Niagara Falls also draw newly-weds.⁵⁵ The high-flown Romantic language of the poets and artists and hermit-philosophers was translated into the romantic vernacular by tourist guides and advertising posters.⁵⁶ What was ‘awe-inspiring’ – the crucial quality of the sublime –

⁵² Barnett, p.32

⁵³ Harper, *Bushwalker*, p.208

⁵⁴ White, *On Holidays*, p.96.

⁵⁵ Karen Dubinsky *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooners, Heterosexuality, and the Tourist Industry at Niagara Falls* Rutgers University Press, 1999; Barnett.

⁵⁶ Barnett, p.47.

became 'awesome'. The ennobling terror of a vast abyss became a cheap thrill. Romantic poetry became popular romance.

Why was it that places known for their spectacular natural scenery, celebrated as they were as landscapes of Romanticism, should also serve as sites of romance? That vital combination of 'romance, sex and danger' created the imaginative geography essential to a honeymoon destination.⁵⁷ The names were scattered around the Mountains – Lover's Nook, Lover's Seat, Lovers' Walk, Bride and Bridegroom's Cave, Honeymoon Point, Honeymoon Look-out, Honeymoon Valley.⁵⁸ Scenery that inspired a Romantic reflection on the inner soul of a solitary observer might well inspire reflection on matters of the heart of a romantically inclined couple. Melissa Harper even suggests the idea of entering moist fern-clad gullies and dark caves might well have had a direct erotic appeal.⁵⁹ In 1910, *The Blue Mountains Echo* explained the district was perfect for honeymooning,

For here, in the sweet solitude of the Mountain glen, the gay and gloriously exhilarating trips of coach and motor car, or the ramble in the sequestered woods and caves, love finds its fill to overflowing.⁶⁰

What is less certain is whether a visit to Echo Point would – as Oscar Wilde said of Niagara Falls – prove to be a newly-wed couple's second greatest disappointment.⁶¹

But as the *Echo* implied, you did not honeymoon in isolation – both your accommodation and many if not all of the available activities made even honeymooning a social occasion [fig. 34 and 35]. Though 'nature' promised an 'inherently private' honeymoon experience,⁶² in fact there would be no escaping other tourists, who would be playing spot the honeymooners (and the more risqué, perhaps, spot the pregnancy). A honeymooning couple could not really avoid surveillance. Whether they found public attention titillating or just downright embarrassing, other people were always a presence – at meals, in charabancs, at the sights, at evening entertainments. And the railway was to blame.

⁵⁷ Dubinsky, p.31.

⁵⁸ Barnett, pp.50, 63; White, *On Holidays*, p. 62.

⁵⁹ Melissa Harper, 'Sensuality in Sandshoes: Representations of the Bush in the Walking and writing of John Le Gay Brereton and Percy Grainger', *Australian Historical Studies*, 31 (115), 2000.

⁶⁰ Richard White (with Sarah-Jane Ballard, Ingrid Bown, Meredith Lake, Patricia Leehy and Lila Oldmeadow), *On Holidays: A History of Getting Away in Australia* (Melbourne: Pluto, 2005), p.62.

⁶¹ Dubinsky, pp. 24, 248.

⁶² Dubinsky, p.25.



Figure 34: A honeymoon



Figure 35: After the honeymoon

4. But how much of a paradox?

Economics, technology and social distinction are some of the forces leading to this apparent paradox: a sublime Romantic landscape in which we want to be merely entertained. But while not downplaying the presence of these elements – they are all there in different ways – we should avoid too rigid a dichotomy. We are after all *both* individuals and social beings. Was there room in the Blue Mountains for both the serious bushwalker and Dunphy’s ukulele-playing flapper? For both solitary communion with nature on a strenuous bushwalk and a sociable sing-song around the piano afterwards? That compromise seems to be evident in the way national parks developed in Australia. Unlike those in America, Australia’s national parks from the start

exhibited more sense of playfulness, an easier compromise between conservation and recreation, an ability to cater for both the individual and the crowd.⁶³

In Britain at Blackpool and Brighton, in America at Atlantic City, Niagara Falls and Coney Island, the entertainments that developed bore no relation to their settings, despite their initial attractions being natural ones, a beach or a waterfall. The proliferation of penny arcades, fairgrounds, dancehalls and casinos was Butler's fourth 'consolidation' stage. But at Australian beaches amusement arcades and fairgrounds did not work as sustainable business models.⁶⁴ Australia never saw the excesses of Blackpool because people went to the beach primarily to swim and there were fewer washed-out days where the tourist needed to be entertained. (At conference in Blackpool on beach culture one English delegate who had experience of Australian beaches complained there was nothing to *do* there.)

This was also the case with the Blue Mountains – despite the entertainments that were developing, the focus was still on the experience of nature, whether a strenuous bushwalk or simply a photo opportunity at Echo Point. Most of the entertainments that arose and survived developed in tandem with the natural environment.

After the second world war, there were attempts by 'ambitious schemers' to move decisively to Butler's fourth 'consolidation' stage, when the economy is dependent on tourism, and tourist activities have little connection to the natural attractions that originally justified their existence, but few survived. Contrary to Butler, in the Mountains local rather than non-local entrepreneurs were often the instigators. Horace 'Horrie' Gates, proprietor of the Homesdale guesthouse, developed a bizarre amusement park in the Gully in Katoomba, with a Ferris wheel, flying horses, a 'giggle house' and, at its centre, a Catalina flying boat stuck in a lake: patrons took a punt to the plane to sit in the cockpit and watch films of Catalinas flying over Sydney. Then the council, hoping to increase tourism, bought Gates' land in 1949 and supported the development of the car racing track that operated from 1961, never very successfully, until 1976 when it closed down.⁶⁵ Then in the 1980s, Harry Hammon built the 'Orphan Rocker' at Scenic World, 876 metres of roller coaster, but, failing to comply with safety standards, it never opened.⁶⁶ These 'unnatural' enterprises all fell by the wayside, albeit as much through incompetence as through good policy.

⁶³ Harper and White, pp. 58-61.

⁶⁴ Caroline Ford, 'A summer fling: the rise and fall of aquariums and fun parks on Sydney's ocean coast 1885-1920', *Journal of Tourism History*, 1(2), 2009, pp. 95-112.

⁶⁵ Thomas, pp.200-4.

⁶⁶ Thomas, p.151.



Figure 36: Australia's Mount Rushmore

Most outrageous of all was Oswald Ziegler's madcap proposal to create Australia's equivalent of Mount Rushmore at Govett's Leap [fig. 36]. In June 1959, Ziegler, a Sydney publisher, gained unanimous council approval to build a grand 600-bed luxury hotel resort, along with a 200-foot tower, skating rink, toboggan slide, music shell, lift to the valley floor and an 'explorers park' with 50 sculptures of Australian explorers, all capped off with a 60-foot high tableau designed by Lyndon Dadswell depicting the explorers, Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson, carved into the cliff-face. The *Australasian Post* approved: the mountain precipices were 'simply screaming for something to give them zip'.⁶⁷ Admittedly Ziegler's scheme came to nothing more because of cost and impracticality than horror at the threat it posed, and the desecration that it would have involved. It is revealing that this proposal was being approved by council not long after the battle to save the Blue Gum Forest had been won and just three months before the Blue Mountains National Park was finally gazetted.⁶⁸

All these attempts to attract tourists went the way of roller-skating in the 1930s and indoor rock-climbing more recently. The Blue Mountains have so far managed to avoid the worst excesses of commercialisation and vulgarisation that can be found in some other parts of the world. Scenic World comes close perhaps, but it is not simply a Luna Park stuck in the Mountains. Its most popular attractions have survived over half a century, admittedly with some refurbishment. Harry Hammon re-worked the disused coal-mine hoist to create the Scenic Railway in 1945 and adapted some old shale

⁶⁷ Peter C Rickwood and Lewis Hodgkinson, 'Grand Visions and Unfulfilled Projects', in Peter C Rickwood and David J West (eds), *Blackheath; Today from Yesterday: the History of a Town in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales*, Blackheath Rotary Club, Blackheath NSW, 2005, pp.221–23.

⁶⁸ Andy Macqueen *Back from the Brink: Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness* (2nd ed) Andy Macqueen, Wentworth Falls, 2007, ch. 21.

mining equipment to build the Scenic Skyway in 1957. They offer cheap thrills, but in a sublime setting. This took the wilderness to the playful crowd, giving them new experiences of the cliffs, the vegetation, the vistas of a vast wild nature. The natural world remains the star.

Arguably an even greater and more insidious threat came in 2008 when the enthusiasm of governments for selling public assets and opening public amenities to private profit was at its height. The NSW Labor government received a report from the Taskforce on Tourism and National Parks, dominated by commercial tourism lobby groups. They saw national parks as a resource, full of money-making potential but locked away from the industry. Their priority was the provision of accommodation, entertainment and facilities for high-end 'comfort in nature' tourists, which they recognised as 'a higher yielding market'; they only grudgingly accepted the notion that the 'quiet enjoyment of undeveloped settings' might be a legitimate motive for visiting a national park. In 2010 the government shelved the report, but no doubt similar 'ambitious schemers' will turn up in the future and the same battles will be fought all over again.⁶⁹

So, in the Blue Mountains, it seems that the dichotomy between wilderness and the playful crowd might be not so dichotomous after all. It has proved possible to combine entertainment with the contemplation of nature. In 1890, the Katoomba Music Society was well established, but it could occasionally go off for a jaunt in the bush [fig. 37]. Similarly, the Leura golf club made a fuss of its natural setting: as the municipal guidebook put it in 1905:



Figure 37: Katoomba Musical Society 1890

⁶⁹ White, 'Recreational rationale', pp.34-6, Harper, *Bushwalker*, p. 281.

It is difficult to conceive of more picturesquely situated links as these ... and certainly there is no more majestic view in Australia than that which opens out in a bold panorama at the third hole.⁷⁰

And perhaps a single image [fig. 38] sums up that compromise between awe and entertainment, between the serious bushwalker and the frivolous hiker. The Leura Forest is at the bottom of a strenuous climb down the Federal Pass. If you look closely, you can see a flapper playing a ukulele.



Figure 38: Leura Forest Federal Pass, Harry Phillips C. 1930

Finally, I began by acknowledging the Dharug and Gundungurra peoples who were always a presence in the Blue Mountains. They too had a long history of entertainment and performance on Country. Their mountains were a long-established meeting place for ceremonial exchange, ritual and performance for a variety of Aboriginal groupings.⁷¹ They saw no contradiction between the deeply spiritual experience of living on Country and simply being entertained. In the face of colonial encroachment, local Indigenous people created a community in the Gully before the first world war. They shared a life that offered, for all its privations, a greater freedom than would have been available under the Aborigines Protection Board – until their community was bulldozed for the racing track in 1957. [Perhaps, as one of Martin Thomas's interviewees put it, part of reasoning behind the raceway had always been to 'clean up this rather embarrassing area'.⁷²]

⁷⁰ Burke, p. 108

⁷¹ Allan Lance *A Heritage Study of the Gully Aboriginal Place, Katoomba, New South Wales*, Department of Environment and Heritage, Sydney, 2005, p.27; Jim Smith 'Katoomba's Fringe Dwellers', in Eugene Stockton (ed) *Blue Mountains Dreaming: The Aboriginal Heritage*, Three Sisters Publications, Winmalee, 1993.

⁷² Thomas, p.204.

Many of the community's entertainments centred on the mission church, dating from 1906: as Allan Lance noted, the attraction was more likely 'the joy of singing' than the missionaries' sermons.⁷³ But equally a lot of the entertainment also centred on two-up circles, out in the bush away from prying eyes.⁷⁴ And of course there was ceremony and lots of storytelling. It could be a place of entertainment but that did not detract from its spiritual significance. In the words of Aunty Dawn Colless, 'it is such a special place – a sacred place, and now the bush is taking it back.'⁷⁵



⁷³ Lance, p.17; Smith, "*Katoomba's Fringe Dwellers*", p.123.

⁷⁴ Lance, p.75.

⁷⁵ Lance, p.101.

Graeme Coss: Our next presenter is Colin Semmler:

COLIN SEMMLER

I think an appropriate title for Colin could well be the Blue Mountains Mr Music. If you have not already done so, I urge you to read the extensive and fascinating information in his Biography in your materials. Colin has played key roles with orchestra, opera, choir, piano, radio ... And plays! In fact, Colin is one of my fellow Blue Mountains Radio Players. He has written plays, adapted plays, and acted in them, and is also frequently our splendid MC. Recently, in this very room, Colin played Dr Chasuble to my Ernest Worthing in Oscar Wilde's 'Importance of Being Earnest'. Ah, thank you, I see that some of you attended, I hope you enjoyed.

Now to learn a bit more about Colin:

- Favourite Film?

Given Colin's rich musical background, an unsurprising choice, 'Amadeus'. And yes, I see a couple of hands being raised.

- Favourite Music?

Another one that doesn't come as a surprise, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.5 the 'Emperor' – and again I see several heads nodding approval.

- Favourite Holiday Destination?

South Australia said Colin. We must explore further, I'm hoping his highlights might include the Barossa, McLaren Vale, Coonawarra. Ah yes, more heads nodding in agreement.

- Other Career?

Journalism. I know that Colin is a highly accomplished researcher, so this choice comes as no surprise to me.

- Other Light-Hearted information?

Colin's own words now: *'I was born on the first day of the astrological calendar for the 2nd half of the 20th century. I am sure this is significant for somebody.*

I am also the youngest son of a youngest son of a youngest son of a youngest son. I am sure this is significant for nobody.'

I'll leave you to challenge Colin further on this one.

A show of hands please! Who has been watching the ABC TV series, 'The Piano'? Good, several of you. Enjoying? OK, that's excellent. And how many of you listen to ABC Classic, and are aware that their Classic 100 this year is, the Piano? Good, thanks for that.

Well, that's a perfect introduction to Colin's topic today: *'The Piano Must Go On'*.

THE PIANO MUST GO ON! – Pianists of the Blue Mountains of NSW

Colin Semmler

Musical Director and musician, singer, radio player and writer

The reason I am here today can be laid at the feet of the president of the Blue Mountains Historical Society, Philip Hammon. In March 2024, Phil asked me if I could do a bit of research on pianists who entertained at Blue Mountains guest houses, pubs etc. My research was to be presented at the BMACHO conference at the Carrington 14 months later.

Before I talk about some of the folk in this book, I will briefly tell you about the research. So, “Where to start”, said I. I opened my bookcase to maybe gain inspiration from my local history shelf and there befell my copy of Gwen Silvey’s superb book, *Happy Days: Blue Mountains Guesthouses remembered*. (I did not have the honour of meeting Gwen, although she did once wander from the top to the end of my street and chatted to my wife who was standing outside. Gwen told my wife that she loved walking in this area as it is “the cradle of Katoomba”.) I can’t imagine the hours of work that Gwen must have put into this book... prior to the days of computerised records and the Trove website.

I started at the very beginning of the index of *Happy Days*, searching each guesthouse on Trove and other sites. I took note of all guesthouses and hotels that had pianos and ballrooms and recorded those places. As there are 588 guesthouses in the index, this took me several months to complete.

There are thousands of articles on Trove that make reference to many of these venues. Unfortunately, many of them mentioned that they had either house or engaged musicians but neglected to mention their names. Where names were mentioned, they were usually easy to find in other newspaper articles. One major problem was the confusion with different names for the same person. Anyone who has done their family history will know that once it was common for people to use their middle name instead of their first name, and in many cases the initial of their first name was used formally and a nickname used in newspapers. So, William James Smith aka Jimmy or Billy might appear as Mr W, J or B Smith.

Then there was an even more difficult puzzle of sorting out the women. Well into the 1950s, a female reported in a newspaper tended to be called Mrs or Miss. Mrs was rarely referred to by her own name or initial, but that of her husband, so Mrs William James Smith aka Jimmy or Billy, could be Mrs W, Mrs J, or Mrs B, or rarely, and if her husband was deceased, as her own initial. Even teenage girls were referred to as Miss, so if you had a gaggle of girls from the same musical family it was almost impossible to sort whom from who. I was complaining about this identity problem to the historical society’s Robyn Ridge, who informed me that sometimes, the eldest girl was referred to as Miss First name Smith, then the younger family members were all just Miss.

That naming problem is just one example of social mores of days gone by. One unfortunate societal trend that emerged was the number of prominent female musicians who disappeared from the scene after they married, never to be piano noted again. There were some exceptions.

This whole project would have been impossible without the use of Trove and ancestry.com. Of the hundreds of pianists I found, almost all were on ancestry. Writing to the people who posted the ancestry information, it was a matter of luck choosing who to contact. The majority responded to requests for help, some had no idea that the person was a musician, and others did not respond at all. There were, however, many respondents who were thrilled that their family member was being historically recorded. One family had a traditional story that grandpa had played in the band at the dance held for Don Bradman in Blackheath in 1931 but had lacked proof. They were thrilled when I found it for them. Ancestry.com was also a great source for electoral rolls, but I was surprised by the number of Blue Mountains residents of days gone by who were not on it. The years of residency as determined by the electoral roll is not always reliable, as people often registered some years after they arrived, or kept their old registration a long time after they had left.

The other important source of information was from locals who are still alive, especially those in their senior years who had been in the upper mountains since birth or childhood. I emailed Phil Hammon with many questions. Phil always replied promptly and if he did not know the answer would usually point me to someone who might. It is fortunate that I did this research in 2024/25, as in 10 or so years from now, many of the knowledgeable folk I spoke with may not be here or of sound mind.

Now to dance bands. I have a whole section in the book about various dance bands, but included them only if they had a piano, as I had to “draw the line somewhere”. Of great help with latter-day bands was Katoomba visual artist and former musician, John Wilson. Unfortunately, John did not get to see the finished product as he died a few weeks after I visited him for an interview. There were many dance bands from Sydney that played at Blue Mountains events. Judging by letters to the editor, this caused some consternation with local musicians. Unless the visiting band was a regular visitor, I have not recorded them.

My book has either a reasonable amount or just a sentence or two on 256 pianists in total, so I have chosen those of prominence or general interest. I add that I did not record anything negative or scandalous about any of these people, but I can reveal some secrets today. One Blue Mountains pianist from the 1920s had a short career as he was jailed for the theft of 800 pounds worth of jewellery and watches from a Sydney jeweller. Another revealed in court that when he was playing a complex piece at a concert, he lost his place because his thoughts kept turning to the picture in his mind of his wife running off with a bloke from Katoomba.

Over the last 100 years or so there have been many music teachers in the Blue Mountains but I have only included those where there was evidence that they played in public.

The following accounts from my book have been edited in order to fit in as many as possible in the limited presentation time. I have not included acknowledgements of contributors or photos as these are recorded in my book.

THE PIANISTS

Frank Abt: Born 1831, Stettin, Germany (now Szczecin Poland): He arrived in New South Wales c1872 and is one of the earliest pianists recorded in Blue Mountains newspapers. Frank Abt was referred to as “Herr Abt”. The *Katoomba Times* 8 Jan. 1892 reported on the Blackheath skating races on New Year’s Eve in the Albert Hall. “The piano was in the masterly hands of Herr Abt, Mr Alf Field ably accompanying him on violin.” It appears that Herr Abt’s stay in Blackheath was a short one as the *Katoomba Times* 26 Aug. 1892 reported that Herr Frank Abt, “our lately esteemed pianist” had “slipped away” without even as much as asking him what his favourite beverage was.” “It is a pleasure to state that he has gone to a good billet at Mr Mark Foy’s place at Rose Bay where we trust he may long remain.” He was not in Blackheath for long, but he played at several community events. Frank Abt died 1904, Rookwood NSW.

Kathleen Alban: Born 1901, England. Kathleen Alban arrived in Brisbane in 1922, married in that year, divorced in 1933 and moved to the Blue Mountains and lived at Bodington, Wentworth Falls with her mother, Kate Alban. In 1936, they moved to Leura. Kath had played piano for the hymns at the 1937 Leura Anzac service. In the same year Kath replaced Mrs Stearn at the piano at the Palais Royale, Katoomba. “Kath Alban and her Magpies” provided music for a Leura Golf Club dance following the ladies’ golfing competition. In 1943, Kath Alban married fellow musician, Werner Augustus Gondolf in Katoomba. She continued her musical activities as Kathleen Gondolf. In 1952 Kath accompanied at talent quests promoted by the Chamber of Commerce at the Katoomba Town Hall. The talents quests were broadcast on Radio 2KA (Katoomba.) In the 1950s Kath led the Kath Gondolf Trio. Kathleen Gondolf died 1976, Wentworth Falls.



Kathleen Alban was a sister to Thomas Frederick William Stead Alban (1887-1978) who lived in Abbey Street, Leura in the 1960s/70s. He was an artist who painted under the name of Tom Alban. He was a finalist in the 1936 Archibald Prize and painted the program cover (depicting Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson) for the Blue Mountains 1963 sesqui-centenary celebrations program booklet, as well as the 5 pence stamp depicting the three explorers.

Gwyn Aldis: Born 1900, as Edna Gwyndoline Aldis, New Zealand: Gwyn Aldis' parents were on the 1913 Katoomba electoral roll, her dad Albert's occupation as "artist." Apparently, the Blue Mountains City Council owns one of his paintings. Gwyn's Katoomba-born brother, Arthur Aldis was a renowned Sydney cellist and they sometimes performed together at Sydney concerts. A 1911 *Blue Mountain Echo* reported on an anonymous donation of 16 pounds 6 shillings to the Katoomba Public School to be shared amongst top students. Gwyn received her share as a 4th grade student. She attended Katoomba's Mt St Mary's Convent where she "gained all her early honours"... A reporter said, "*Though still in her teens, she has few equals as an accompanist.*" As a teenager, Gwyn played piano at a WWI Welcome Home concert for Katoomba soldiers at Katoomba Town Hall. "The popular young pianist played *Boys of the Old Brigade* as the 22 returned soldiers marched to the stage". Gwyn performed at the 1919 official opening of the St Canice's Presbytery. As a young person, Gwyn contributed immensely to the Katoomba music scene to the extent that in 1921 a musical evening was given in honour of Gwyn for "her many unselfish efforts whenever her musical abilities have been called upon." The lines on the programme read "To show our regard, For the labours so hard, Of the best little girl in the world." She was "almost smothered with floral tributes." Mayor Dash spoke of her generosity giving her services most willingly during the war." By 1922 Gwyn was accompanying singers at the NSW conservatorium. She married Arthur Caro in 1928, the event reported in the *Blue Mountain Echo* under the headline, "Mountains Maid Married". Gwyn continued her charity work including for the Red Cross during World War II. The *Sydney Morning Herald* 30 May 1951 noted that Gwyn accompanied a 15-year-old violinist at a function in honour of opera singer, Marjorie Lawrence at Prince's Restaurant. She was also the official accompanist for the *City of Sydney Eisteddfod* for some years. Gwyn Aldis died 1981, Sydney, as Gwyn Wilson.



David Bansept: Born 1947, Royal Tunbridge Wells, England. David's French grandfather was a professional pianist in Paris. David was taught piano at the age of 6 by his grandmother. He attended King Charles the Martyr school where he was a soloist in the choir. After leaving school, David worked as a book keeper for London jewellers, Mappin and Webb, at the same time playing piano in restaurants. By his late teens, he was playing piano on cruise ships that took him all over the world. David arrived in Melbourne in 1969, where he joined the Philharmonic Choir. He moved to Sydney in the early 1970s. He was engaged to play piano at the Gazebo Hotel for seven years, as well as in the foyer of David Jones' city store. While in Sydney, he visited a friend in the Blue Mountains and decided to move permanently. In his time in Katoomba, he played lounge music over a 20-year period at mainly the Rooster Restaurant, Lilianfels, Metropole, Carrington and Victoria & Albert, Mt Victoria. David retired from his piano career in 2021. He died in 2025 in Katoomba and a memorial morning tea was held at the Carrington.



Keith Barry: Born 1896, Parramatta: Keith Barry was a Medical Doctor in Leura where he lived with his wife, Gladys, in the early 1930s. He served in World War I with the British



Army in Egypt. He attended Sydney Grammar School then Sydney University as a student and later, music lecturer. He wrote several books and newspaper columns on music, including *How to Listen to Music*. A *Katoomba Daily* journalist in 1933 was of the opinion that “at half a crown it is within the reach of us all”. He had many musical publications to his credit, piano solos, songs and part songs. *The Methodist*, newspaper in 1934 reported on what, according to the journalist, was “the finest program ever presented in Katoomba” town hall with Dr Barry accompanying renowned singer, Madame Goussenns-Viceroy who gave an

“outstanding performance”. The *Sydney Sun* 1 Sept. 1935 reported on Keith’s musical tour of Germany. He was quoted as saying, “Hitler is a very keen musician, and I was told by one of his closest associates that practically his only recreation is listening to opera.” The “Dear Betty” column of the *Blue Mountains Times* 5 Jan. 1934 noted that Dr and Mrs Barry “are to be transplanted to the cold countries for one year.... Dr Barry will send the fruits of his pen to the newspapers of Sydneyside”. Keith Barry was the inaugural president of the Leura Music Club in 1933 and was a regular performer. He was an adjudicator of the violin section at the Sydney Eisteddfod and had donated first prize. An *ABC Weekly* magazine interview in 1959, said of Keith, “He knows perfectly well that medicine is an intriguing second string for any man to have to his bow” and “He never practised much- earned pocket money as a church organist when he studied medicine”. Dr Keith Barry died 1965, Wollstonecraft NSW.

Hazel Beadman: Born 1909, Casino: Hazel was also known as May. She was a renowned Blue Mountains pianist, best known for her popular dance orchestras, known



as Miss Beadman’s Orchestra, Miss Beadman’s Blackheath Orchestra and Beadman’s Silver Star Orchestra. Her orchestra played at the dance to officially open the Mt Victoria Hall in 1934. From many 1930s newspaper reports it can be seen that Miss Beadman’s Orchestra played for functions from Lithgow to the Penrith district as well as all Blue Mountains towns, particularly Mt Victoria. She often duetted with a musician named Percy Hope. Hazel was a regular player at Rolfe’s Cabaret in Blackheath. Hazel Beadman and Bruce Rolfe provided the dance music for the centenary celebration of

Blackheath’s Gardner’s Inn on 14 July 1931. Hazel married Percy Hope at Penrith in 1942. She died less than a year after marriage aged 34. Percy was born 1903, Rockley NSW, died 2003, Katoomba. Photo: Hazel Beadman and Percy Hope’s wedding, 1942.

Gus Berthold: Born 1844 Balmain: Also known as Dolf, Gus was one of the earliest recorded pianists and singers in the mountains. The 1889 *Nepean Times* critique said of a concert in aid of the Katoomba Congregational Church.... “Mr Berthold, essayed ‘Come into the Garden Maud’, and the audience evidently wished that she had come into the garden some time before he had got to the end of the song”. He played piano at a Blackheath skating carnival held on the Prince of Wales’ birthday in 1889 and was mentioned in 1890 as playing piano at a skating carnival at the Katoomba Oddfellows

Hall... The article also described the clothing... "Some splendid dresses were worn. Dolf often had his dress made of skins of animals he shot below Guiva Falls and was a favourite with the many ladies. After skating, the guests took to dancing and kept the ball rolling gaily until daylight did appear". Gus Berthold was a local correspondent for the *Nepean Times*. Gus Berthold died 1944, Sydney.

BLACK FAMILY:

Nellie Black: Born 1883 Invercargill New Zealand: Nellie, along with her siblings, Elsie and Bert, emigrated to Australia sometime before 1912. They came from a professional musical family, with over 1000 New Zealand newspaper references to their activities. Nellie is recorded on the 1913 electoral roll as a musician living in Bathurst Road Katoomba. There are many Blue Mountains newspaper articles about the family duo, known as **The All Blacks**. Nellie was a pianist, violinist and singer and part of the Katoomba Amusement



Company. Online articles mention that she played mandolin, fairy bells and was a "trick violinist". In 1912 she and her sister, Elsie, performed with the Amusement Company Bijou Orchestra, Nellie on piano and Elsie on flute. A 1912 newspaper report noted that Nellie sang and her brother, Bert, played cornet at a kitchen tea for Dr and Mrs Allan at Katoomba Town Hall. Other Nellie Black events were entertaining at the Katoomba skating rink where she played at the official opening of the music room. A 2012 report noted that she was the director for a concert at Katoomba Town Hall in aid of the "widows and orphans of the unfortunate miners who perished in the Mount Lyell disaster" (Tasmania 22 Sept. 1912). At that concert, Nellie played piano and violin and her "liquid contralto voice was heard". The *Blue Mountain Echo* 3 April 1914 reported on a Katoomba Town Hall farewell to Nellie who was leaving to further her career. The packed house cheered when she was presented with "*a costly gold wristlet watch as a mark of affection and esteem of the townspeople*". She was also given a cheque by the Presbyterian Church where her services as organist and soloist will be sadly missed". A report of 19 June 1914 noted that "Miss Nellie Black, well-known on the Hills, is now in charge of a big orchestra in Melbourne. She sends greeting to all Mountains friends". In 1918, Nellie and Elsie toured India and sent reports of their activities to the *Blue Mountain Echo*. One Indian newspaper described Nellie as "a violinist of distinct ability and a woman of Junoesque appearance" and Elsie as "...who, like Ariel, by comparison with flute and piccolo, might have made Orpheus retire to a gooseberry bush". It would appear that Nellie returned to Katoomba as the *Blue Mountain Echo* 24 Oct. 1919 noted that she sang at a Welcome Home for "*Katoomba's brave boys*" after World War I and secured a vociferous encore with her song, "*Homing*". Nellie was back in Katoomba in 1943 when the *Blue Mountains Advertiser* reported that she was a patient in the Anzac Memorial Hospital. Nellie Black died as Nellie Prentice, 1962, Petersham NSW.

Elsie Black: Born 1888 as Marion Elsie Black, Invercargill, New Zealand: According to reports, Elsie was a "flautist of exceptional brilliancy and charming personality". Online articles note that she was also a pianist, vocalist, violinist and dancer. The *Blue Mountains Advertiser* noted that "Elsie entertained at Farmers, Sydney and with the Williamson Opera Company, N.Z.". Elsie Black died as Elsie Garrett, Sydney 1977.

Bert Black: Born 1884 as Albert in New Zealand: The *Blue Mountain Echo* in 1912 noted that Bert was a “highly capable” cornetist and that as cellist, he was “a painstaking and accomplished leader.” Bert also led the mandolin band. Online articles note that Bert Black was also a basso, violinist and dancer. Bert established a “picture show” known as Black’s Picture Palace in Blackheath Hall. It had a “first class” refreshment room adjoining the theatre. A *Nepean Times* in 1913 noted that Bert Black had opened a picture palace in Springwood. Bert Black died 1920, St Leonards.

Jackie Brooks: Born 1906, Little Bay, as Walter Woodburn John Brooks. Jackie was a grandson of Gundungurra Elder, Old Billy Lynch of Megalong Valley and later, The Gully, Katoomba. Much has been written about Jackie in local and national newspapers. His first exposure to publicity happened when he was six years old and ran into Katoomba to raise the alarm that his two friends had fallen over a cliff. The dramatic story was published in the *Blue Mountains Echo* 29 Nov. 1912. He was awarded a gold medal and 10 pounds. As an adult, Jackie was a champion rugby league footballer, his skills reported in newspapers and Australian Dictionary of Biography. When in Katoomba, he worked at the Hydro Majestic as a butcher and later the Carrington Hotel kitchen. Jackie Brooks played piano, spoons and gum leaf at Katoomba social functions. He was the organist at the Katoomba Mission Church and was reportedly a good singer and fine dancer. Jackie left Katoomba in the late 1950s at the time of the Catalina Race Track construction within The Gully, as his house was demolished. Jackie Brooks died c1968, at Redfern. For many years, there was a memorial concrete tile at the bottom of the Carrington lawn near Katoomba Street. It appears it was removed when the Council re-developed the grassed area into a landscaped garden. Jackie is mentioned on the information boards along Katoomba’s Gully Walk.



Carl Budden-Morris: Born 1887, as Alfred Thomas Carl Morris, Waverly NSW. Carl took his mother’s maiden name as his professional name. (His mother died the day after his birth.) Carl was mentioned in several Blue Mountains newspapers as a visiting pianist of renown. In the 1930s he often visited his aunt, Jessie Walcott, in Kundabar Street, Katoomba. Carl performed at Katoomba’s St Mary’s Convent, Town Hall, Eldon guesthouse and Cooper’s Grand Hotel, Mt Victoria. Social columnist, “Kate Toomba” wrote in 1931 in a promotion for an upcoming concert, that Carl had the patronage of “his Royal Prince Henry of Battenburg” as well as Queen Alexandra and that “he has played in leading orchestral societies on the continent”. He played in London’s Royal Albert Hall in 1917. In 1918 he performed *Xmastide* by Australian composer, Esther Kahn, at Katoomba Town Hall. Vivienne, the social reporter for the *Blue Mountains Times*, wrote in 1933, that “Carl Budden-Morris has played many times by command of our Royal King and Queen and is not one whit affected thereby”. He played for Lord and Lady Gowrie at Admiralty House, Sydney. (Lord Gowrie was Governor General 1936-1945). Carl died 1959, Toukley NSW.



Frank Bull's Orchestra: Frank Bull: Born 1894 Tenterfield: Frank Bull was a pianist, mainly with his orchestra but sometimes providing dance music as a soloist. His orchestra was mentioned or promoted in many Blue Mountains newspapers of the 1930s and would appear to be one of the most popular orchestras of the time. Frank Bull was in Katoomba by 1932 when the electoral roll recorded him living at Hazeldene, Katoomba. By 1936, Frank was living at Sans Souci, Katoomba, where he led the Sans Souci Orchestra. From 1958 to 1968, he recorded his address as Carrington, Katoomba. In those days, picture theatres would put on a ball or dance, themed around the film they were promoting. In the 1930s, Frank Bull played at an *On Our Selection* Movie Ball in Katoomba Town Hall and the *Merry Widow* Movie Ball; His band played for Dr and Mrs Allan's farewell in 1933. Frank Bull died 1969, Katoomba.

Helen Cameron: Born 1903 as Ellen O'Brien, Darlington: Helen began her musical career as a piano and sheet music demonstrator at Palings music store, Sydney. She led



a musical life as a teacher and choir Musical Director in Shanghai, China, where her British Naval husband was appointed prior to World War II. Helen played piano at the Shanghai Club where she also organised and conducted a choir of navy members. At the outbreak of war, Helen and her husband returned to Sydney. As a Katoomba resident, Helen was the pianist for RD and the Melody Makers. She played at the Carrington Hotel until the late 1960s. Helen was reputed as a refined lady, wearing evening dresses accessorised with much jewellery, and for telling jokes. Helen was a regular pianist on Radio

2KA (Katoomba) and was promoted in a 1936 *Katoomba Daily* as the "wizard of the keyboard". In her older years she played at the Ritz Nursing Home, Leura. The 1950s electoral rolls recorded Helen's husband, John Cameron, as an engineer with the council. Helen Cameron died 1996, buried with her husband, Katoomba Cemetery.

CAMPBELL FAMILY:

John Elliot Campbell: Born 1886, Sydney: Known as "Jock" but most references have his name as "Elliot", a carpenter from Hazelbrook. Elliot and his wife moved to Hazelbrook from Marrickville in 1921. By 1926 he had his own Hazelbrook dance band. There are many Blue Mountains newspaper reports on events where Mr Campbell provided music. At one function he was assisted by Lawson Mouth Organ Band. The *Lithgow Mercury* 5 Nov. 1931 reported on the visit to Blackheath cricketer, Don Bradman, stating that J.C. Campbell played piano in the Hazelbrook band that provided music for the cricket match celebration dance in Blackheath Masonic Hall. J. Elliot Campbell died 1962, buried Wentworth Falls Cemetery.

Elizabeth Campbell, was Jock's wife, born 1887, Balmain: She sometimes played piano with her husband's orchestra and as a soloist. Elizabeth and Elliot had four children. Elizabeth died 1961, buried Wentworth Falls Cemetery.

Mary Campbell, second child: Born 1919 Hazelbrook: Mary Campbell was a pianist who sometimes played in her father's orchestra as well as a soloist and accompanist at various functions. Mary Campbell also wrote the *Hazelbrook History: A social history of Hazelbrook and Woodford*, privately published 1989. Mary Campbell died 2004, cremated Leura.

Robert Campbell, third child: Born 1922, Hazelbrook: Generally known as Bobbie or Bob, Robert was a pianist and multi-instrumentalist who sometimes played in his father's orchestra. He played piano, drums, accordion, harmonica, ukulele, banjo, mandolin and guitar. Bob and Mary both played in a stringed instrument band called The Hawaiian Six and did many charity performances. Robert served in World War II. He died in 2000, cremated Leura.

Norman Campbell, eldest child, (1916-2013) was not mentioned as a musician, but with his wife, Olive, OAM was the founder of the Campbell Rhododendron Garden in Blackheath.

Roy Colless: Born 1922 Penrith: Roy Colless was in Katoomba by 1938 when mentioned in the Mt St Mary's Convent piano examination results. After his WWII army service, he played piano at many Blue Mountains functions and clubs. He was the



pianist in a variety of bands, including one that played at Homesdale, Katoomba, specialising in big band music from the Glen Miller/Count Basie era. Roy also had a trio at the Hydro Majestic. He was often called in as a pianist if another needed temporary replacement as he did not need a rehearsal. Roy was highly regarded as a soloist and group pianist. To quote two of his peers, "*He was prolific and*

versatile, the best in the Blue Mountains in his time and one of the best in Sydney" ... "*His dance music was absolutely wonderful.*" Roy and his wife, Dawn, owned the general store on the corner of Camp and Victoria Streets, Katoomba. Customers would sometimes hear Roy practising in a room behind the business area. Dawn Colless who died in 2003 was a Gundungurra elder, after whom the Aunty Dawn Colless cross-highway bridge in Katoomba is named. Roy Colless died 2001, buried Katoomba Cemetery.



Clyde Collins: Born 1914, Sydney: Clyde Collins and his wife, Iris, entertained as pianist and singer for about a year from October 1935 at Felton Woods (Hotel Blue.) In a 1935 *Katoomba Daily* gossip column, Jennifer J. stated "*Mr and Mrs Collins are well-known for their musical talent having frequently been heard from broadcasting stations in the city*". Clyde Collins also offered piano tuition in jazz and other styles at Felton Woods. Clyde went on to further his professional career as a pianist, organist, piano accordionist and radio musician with about 30 years living in

Brisbane. He wrote several songs including *A Little Boy Called Smiley* for the 1958 film, *Smiley*. Clyde died 2003, Maclean NSW.

Shirley Cooke: Born 1894, St Kilda Vic.: There are many newspaper reports from the 1930s to 1950s mentioning Shirley Cooke as a piano soloist, accompanist, singer, actress, comedienne, organiser of musical programmes and member of many



Blackheath social organisations including the Dramatic Club. Most of her musical activities were Blackheath-centred but she travelled as far as Mt Victoria and Katoomba as a soloist and accompanist. Shirley was called upon to play piano at many Blackheath functions. By the time of her death, she had “spooned” fingers from years of thumping the piano. Shirley lived in Shillington Street Blackheath with Leonard Nelson, a comedian and all-round entertainer. Leonard’s life as an entertainer and songwriter is well documented in Australian newspaper articles. Leonard Nelson was born Melbourne c1874 as Leonard Nelson Snell but apparently without a registered birth. He spent some

years in New Zealand before settling in Sydney then later, Blackheath. Leonard Nelson died 1962, buried Blackheath Cemetery. Shirley Cooke died 1964, buried Blackheath Cemetery. Photo: Sheet music cover of song composed by Leonard Nelson 1921. Other Leonard Nelson compositions include *The bonzer boys from good old Aussie*, *Just like a rose*, *Mister Boozer*, *Goodbye Melbourne Town*.

Dora Crichton: Born 1898 as Dora Lineham, New Zealand: Dora Crichton moved to Manly with her parents in 1910, moving to Whitton Street, Katoomba with her husband in 1950. If you live in Jubilee Street Katoomba it was Dora who suggested that name in



honour of Queen Elizabeth’s coronation. Dora was prolific pianist when living in Sydney, regularly staging musical events in her own home. During World War II, she entertained troops around Sydney’s Wynyard Station. Dora’s piano playing and community service continued in the Blue Mountains. She played for weddings, parties and provided dinner music at several guesthouses. She accompanied choirs and soloists as well as playing in dance bands and was a member of several Upper Mountains organisations. A 1953 *Blue Mountains Advertiser* article noted that she had played for the square dancing at the Katoomba C W A Ball. Dora also ran the Katoomba Children’s Library for some years. Dora Crichton died as Dora Purser, 1987, Wentworth Falls.

Marjorie Delaney: Born 1906, Blackheath NSW: Marjory was the youngest child of Blackheath pioneers, Nick and Bertha Delaney. Marjorie played piano, sang and recited poetry. She was a student at Blackheath Convent School and then Mt St Mary’s, Katoomba. Marjorie played the piano for the silent movies in the 1920s at Blackheath Arcadia Theatre, owned by her father. A 1940 *Lithgow Mercury* noted that Marjorie played accordion at Radio 2KA (Katoomba) Radio Service Club. A birthday party for Marjory’s mother, Bertha Delaney was reported in detail in the *Katoomba Daily* 11 Jan. 1934. She had “reached the grand old age of 70” and had a “delightful soprano voice” so performed at her own party. Marjorie Delaney died 1989 as Marjorie Palling, Castle Hill NSW. A memorial plaque was placed on the family grave in Blackheath Cemetery.

Joe Edmunds Orchestra: Born 1913 Molong: Joe Edmunds moved to Rockdale as teenager and attended the Conservatorium of NSW, Sydney where he was the first



student to be awarded 100% in his piano examination. During World War II he was posted to Wagga Wagga where he trained pilots in navigation. He arrived in Katoomba with his family in 1944, as his wife, Molly, had respiratory problems and was advised to move to a mountain climate. Joe was appointed to Katoomba High School as a mathematics teacher, remaining in that position until 1972.

During that time, he led his own dance band providing music at balls and dances in the Blue Mountains. The band was referred to at various times as “Joe Edmunds Band”, “Joe Edmunds Orchestra” and “Joe Edmunds Rhythm Quartet”. Joe played for many charity events, including the children’s library and a Katoomba Bushfire Appeal as well as Katoomba High School dances. He played as a soloist at the Carrington, California, Homesdale, Hydro Majestic and Caves House. He liked to have a glass of beer on the piano as he played. Joe’s piano playing career was eventually curtailed when he suffered from rheumatic fever. Joe Edmunds died 1995, buried Katoomba Cemetery.

Elizabeth Fairfax: Born 1868 as Elizabeth Elcock, Brisbane: A *Blue Mountain Echo* 1910 noted that Elizabeth “presided at the piano” at a Lawson Mechanics’ Institute choral



concert. Mr Fairfax was mentioned in newspaper reports from 1910/11 as the President of the Lawson Choral Society and a soloist at concerts. Herbert John Fairfax was a nephew of John Fairfax, founder of the *Sydney Morning Herald* who built Cooper’s Grand Hotel in Mt Victoria (Hotel Etico in 2025).

Albert G. Fowler: Born 1876, North Sydney: There are many newspaper reports from the early 1900s to 1920s noting “Mr A. G. Fowler” as a pianist and photographer and stationer in Leura Mall. The *Blue Mountain Echo* 9 Oct. 1909 reported that Mr Fowler



was building a new shop in Leura. Albert Fowler was an accompanist and soloist and in 1914 played at a patriotic concert in Leura, where “The raising of the curtain was heralded by a pianoforte overture by Mr A.G. Fowler in his usual manner”. He was involved in several Katoomba and Leura social organisations. The *Echo* 15 July 1921 reported on a fire in Leura Mall that damaged four shops, including that of Mr A.G. Fowler. By about 1925, Mr Fowler had moved to Brisbane where he died in 1930.

E. Harold Geggie: Born 1894, Sydney and raised in the family home, *Ellematta*, Lawson. His parents, John and Charlotte Geggie were Lawson pioneers. They held the first Lawson Congregational Church service in their home. At the age of 14 in 1909, Harold was the organist at the Congregational Church. Harold advertised as a piano teacher in Lawson and Katoomba throughout the 1920/30s. A 1928 *Blue Mountains Advertiser*



noted that “his shingle” had been hanging at his home for about 15 years. Harold accompanied singers at concerts as well as playing at community events and weddings. The *Blue Mountain Echo*, 21st Dec. 1928 reported on a complimentary social given to Mr Geggie at the Shamrock Café, Lawson, to “celebrate the remarkable success achieved by his pupils at the recent examinations”. One of the guest speakers commented that Mr Geggie was “one of the most accomplished pianists that the Mountains- or for that matter, the State of N.S.W. has produced”. Harold Geggie died 1970, in Summer Hill.

Lance Glew: Born 1904, Rylstone: There are several newspaper references to Mr Glew playing extras at dances in the Blue Mountains and Lithgow. The *Blue Mountains Star* 26 July 1930 reported on a dance in the “big room on the upline of the station” at Mt Victoria Railway station refreshment room that featured Mr Glew (piano) and Theo Barker on drums. Theo was a railway employee. The event was a fundraiser to pay for the pianola for the refreshment room. Mr Lyons, Station Master, had “advanced the deposit”. The event was critiqued... “By gum it was great’ said one little waitress from Yorkshire”. Lance had his own band, Glew’s Night Owl Orchestra. Lance Glew died 1973, Burwood.

William Frederick Goyder: Born 1859 St Kilda Vic: William Frederick Goyder, known locally as Willie Goyder or just WF, was the son of Frederick Charles Goyder, owner of Carrington Hotel from 1887 to his death in 1900. WF took over as manager after his father’s death. He was an alderman, mayor and first town clerk on Katoomba Municipal Council. There are several newspaper articles concerning William Goyder’s piano playing and singing. The *Nepean Times* 14 Sept. 1889 praised the accompanying by W.F. Goyder for all the singers at a benefit concert for one Thomas Weaver, whose house had burned. The *Katoomba Times* 17 Aug. 1889 reported on the Thomas Weaver fire.... “The hut was situated in a secluded dell in the gully on the southern side of Katoomba Street between the rear of the English and Wesleyan Churches. The hut had bark walls as well as a wooden chimney”. The aforementioned *Nepean Times* concert report announced that “something like 16 pounds” had been raised. “God Save the Queen having been sung, one of the most successful entertainments ever given in Katoomba was brought to a happy conclusion”. The *Katoomba Times* in 1890 noted that “Mr W.F. Goyder of the Carrington Hotel played the pianoforte at a Rechabite social in the Katoomba Oddfellow’s Hall. He also played at a dance for the Katoomba Lawn Tennis Club”. The *Nepean Times* said, “We cannot too highly commend Mr Goyder’s sweet tenor voice”. William and his brother were involved in Blue Mountains real estate. The family name can still be seen above their business premises at 88 Katoomba Street and is perpetuated with Goyder Avenue, Katoomba. William Goyder died 1940, Mosman NSW.

Arthur Hicks: Born 1881, Kiama: Arthur Hicks was mentioned as an accompanist for the Katoomba Minstrels in 1906 newspapers. The *Blue Mountain Echo* 17 April 1909

reported on a visit from renowned Melbourne singer, Mr Colenso, who “gave an evening’s entertainment as some return for the great benefit to health that he had received from his stay in Katoomba”. Arthur Hicks accompanied Mr Colenso “most tastefully”. Arthur Hicks died three months later. The *Lithgow Mercury* published a short obituary ... “He was a well-known musician and composer of the popular Thora Waltz”. It was noted that Arthur’s father was Captain Henry Hicks of Katoomba. Arthur Hicks died 1909 aged 27, buried Katoomba Cemetery.

Dorothy Hicks: Born 1858 Kiama as Dorothy James: Dorothy was the stepmother of Arthur Hicks. She lived in Katoomba with her husband, Harry, who was a prolific writer of letters on a variety of subjects to newspapers. Dorothy was reported in *Blue Mountain Echo* newspapers of the 19teens as playing piano at many and varied functions in the Upper Blue Mountains. The *Blue Mountain Echo* recorded her as “providing sparkling music which made dancing easy” for Digger’s Dances in Wentworth Falls in 1921. She organised Wednesday dances in the Katoomba Town Hall. The *Echo* in 1925 referred to a band named Hick’s Gloom Chasers with Mrs H. Hicks (piano) and Mrs Gasso (violin.) Other 1925 advertisements in the *Echo* noted the band was the “Best Jazz band obtainable West of the City of Sydney”. The death of Harry’s son, Gordon Hicks, was reported in the *Echo* 13 April 1923. He saw active World War I service and according to the newspaper report, died from “Fritz’s favourite gas playing up with his scant reserves”. Dorothy Hicks died 1948, Ashfield NSW.

Alfred Hill: Born 1869, Richmond, Vic.: Alfred Hill was a renowned Australian/New Zealand music composer with works performed world-wide. In 1913, he was appointed advisor for the establishment of the Conservatorium of NSW, Sydney, becoming its first Professor of Theory and Composition in 1916. For some years from the late 1940s, he and Mrs Mirri Hill had a holiday home in Fitzgerald Street Katoomba. It was in Katoomba that Alfred Hill composed several orchestrations of Aboriginal music. The songs he had played were pure Aboriginal music, transcribed from recordings brought back from Central and Northern Australia.” The *Blue Mountains Advertiser* 29 March 1946 announced that “Australia’s leading composer, Mr Alfred Hill, presented his latest composition ‘The March of a Nation’ to the Katoomba Junior Band and was intending to attend the rehearsals. (The band hall was opened in 1946 within Russell Hawke Park that became the Katoomba railway station commuter car park). Mirri Hill was also a composer. Alfred Hill died 1960, Sydney. Trove, Ancestry. One of Alfred Hill’s granddaughters lived in Katoomba from the 1990s to her death in 2018. Photo: Alfred Hill from the *Sydney Morning Herald* 18 April 1950 article.



Emily Hutchinson-Cooper: Born 1878, Sydney to George Hubbard Cooper and Margaret Hutchinson of Mt Victoria: Emily Hutchinson-Cooper was an accomplished pianist, singer and violinist who performed professionally. The Coopers owned The



Grand guesthouse, also known as Cooper's Grand Hotel, now Hotel Etico in Mt Victoria, so it could be presumed that Emily was the in-house entertainer as entertainments were a feature at the hotel. She was mentioned specifically in the Christmas entertainments. In June 1900, Emily and her sister performed for a vice-regal party on their way to Jenolan Caves. The guest was Lady Mary Lygon who was in Australia to assist her unmarried brother, William Lygon, who, as the 7th Earl of Beauchamp, was Governor of New South Wales. For the next few years, Emily's Sydney concerts were headlined "Under Vice-Regal Patronage."

The *Lithgow Mercury* in 1902 reported on a Mt Victoria benefit concert for Emily in order to further her studies. Emily sang and was accompanied by her sister, Florrie. Emily Married George Roberts in 1908 but continued performing as Hutchinson-Cooper. The *Blue Mountains Star* 10 Jan. 1931 report headed "Famous Australian Pianist" noted that Emily sang at a Katoomba concert accompanied by Carl Budden-Morris. Emily sang or played violin and piano at various concerts in the Blue Mountains and Lithgow, many as charitable fundraisers. She gave many concerts in Sydney, including the Town Hall. For many years there was a chiselled outline of a dancing lady on a boulder along the path to Fairy Bower near the Mt Victoria toll bar cottage. Research by Mt Victoria Museum suggests the figure was Emily Hutchinson-Cooper. Emily died 1947, Artarmon, as Emily Roberts. A brief obituary was published in the *Blue Mountain Advertiser* 31 Oct. 1947 under the heading, "Pioneer Passes". It noted that "many of her songs were recorded and are still heard over the air". Coopers Lane in Mt Victoria is named after her family.

Reginald Hurrell: Born 1903, Bathurst. There are several Bathurst *National Advocate* reports of Reg supplying piano or band music in Bathurst in the 1920s. He was mentioned in a *Blue Mountains Star* report as the pianist at a dance in the Arcadia Theatre, Blackheath in 1929 which is when he began working at the Hydro Majestic. The



1930s electoral rolls gave Reg's address as Hydro Majestic where he was the Hydro's house pianist and band leader. He also played mouth organ. Part of Reg's job was to organise the sport, games, hiking and entertainment at the Hydro. At one dance he gave "an exhibit of Apache dancing which completely brought the house down". There were many fancy-dress balls at the Hydro with the band members often joining in the fun. At one ball, Reg dressed as Shirley Temple. Reg's possible last dance appearance was in Bathurst, reported in *National Advocate* 27 April 1942. Using those dates as a guide, Reg was at the Hydro

Majestic for about 13 years. World War II records show that Reg enlisted in Katoomba on 19 Jan. 1942, shortly before the takeover of the Hydro Majestic as a hospital for American soldiers. On his enrolment form he ticked the box that asked if the enlister could play a band instrument, next to which Reg wrote "piano". Reg was serving with the 12 Advanced Ordnance Depot when he drowned on 22 Feb. 1943 at Cattle Creek near Ingham Qld. His body was never recovered. His army service record shows that an

enquiry found that he met his death, probably by drowning and that he was on military duty at the time. There was no evidence of negligence on the part of Private Hurrell. *Townsville Daily Bulletin* 4 March 1943 reported on Reg's death, "Although a daily day-long search has been kept up of the creek and the vicinity, no trace has been found of the body of Reginald Hurrell, who drowned in Cattle Creek when he stepped off the bridge on the night of February 21st. The creek is full of crocodiles, and it is feared that one of these may have attacked the unfortunate man". According to his service record, Reginald Hurrell is recorded on Panel 4 of the Sydney Memorial, Rookwood Necropolis and Panel 9 of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Phyllis Huthnance: Born 1941 as Phyllis Lough, Katoomba: Phyllis Huthnance has an



historical Katoomba connection through her grandmother, Mrs Flora Godsell who built and managed the Metropole Hotel. Phyllis attended Katoomba Public and High Schools, at that time learning piano from Jose Radeski. As a 10-year-old, Phyllis played the piano for Sunday School and at the age of 13, played the pipe organ for a full worship service and later for a Katoomba Christian Convention.

Phyllis went on to a professional musical career. She was a foundation member of Blue Mountains Musical Society. She was the first official accompanist for the City of Penrith Eisteddfod (1985) and has served on the committee for 40 years. Phyllis performed throughout the Blue Mountains and beyond with pianist, Lily Cowen as "4 Hands on a Grand". Phyllis has accompanied several BM choirs. She is well-known in church circles of the Blue Mountains, leading services on the pipe organ at St Hilda's Katoomba, the Katoomba Uniting Church and St Stephen's Anglican Church, Penrith.

George Robert Hyam: Born 1875, Balmain: George Hyam was the youngest child of Solomon and Sarah Hyam, Solomon being an MLC in the New South Wales parliament. Solomon and Sarah spent their last years at Woodlands in Merriwa Street, Katoomba. The Catholic Church bought Woodlands c1939. The buildings were cleared for St Bernards College, opened 1941, later becoming Katoomba Public School, 1982. Solomon and Sarah's eldest child, Charlotte, known as Lottie (1860-1938) was noted by a journalist as "Sydney's most famous amateur pianist". George was an accomplished pianist and composer. *The Mountaineer* 20 April 1900 noted that "Mr G.R. Hyam played two of his original compositions, *Les Sylphes* and *Tarantella* at a 'high class' concert in Katoomba" and that he "executed in a highly finished manner." The *Lithgow Mercury* 29 May 1900 referred to the Katoomba Minstrel Troupe performing at the Masonic Hall on the "Queen's birthnight", where "Mr Dillon sang the new song *Heroes of the Bush* written by a local composer Mr H. Peckman [Harry] and music by Mr G.R. Hyam". *Heroes of the Bush* was also performed at another Katoomba concert by Mr Peckman and Mr Hyam and was encored as "the audience would not move until it was repeated." He also played at Katoomba Smoke Concerts. Several newspapers of the time mention Hyam's Orchestra. A 1920 *Echo* article referred to the orchestra as "Hyam's Orchestra from Wentworth Falls" when they played for a Katoomba Rifle Club dance. George Hyam died 1944, Wollstonecraft NSW.

Alex Joyce: Born 1925 as Alexander Joyce, Sydney: At the age of 18 years, Alex Joyce enlisted in World War II from Paddington, serving in the army until 1946. The first mention of Alex as a Blue Mountains pianist is in newspaper reports at the Victory



Theatre, Blackheath. A 1950 *Sydney Sun* reported on nightly dances at “one of Katoomba’s leading guesthouses” with a small orchestra led by Alex Joyce. For some time, Alex was leader of the Hydro Majestic Orchestra. From the reminiscences of one Helen Easton, a regular 1940s/50s visitor to the Hydro Majestic published in Jim Smith’s *The Hydro Majestic*, “Every night we danced our feet off to the orchestra, led by Alex Joyce. Alex was Entertainment Officer, organising tennis tournaments, mad hatter nights, fancy dress nights and lots more”. The same publication has a photo of Alex Joyce accompanying singer Dawn Lake in 1952. In the 1950s he produced, directed, costumed and accompanied Gilbert and

Sullivan operettas at Blackheath Victory Theatre for Blackheath Musical Society that he formed in 1952. The society also staged musicals. Alex also staged Gilbert and Sullivans at Stratford Church of England Grammar School, Lawson. The *Blue Mountains Advertiser* of 4 March 1954 reported on the three-hour non-stop Top Town Concert in aid of the Blue Mountains hospital. It was produced by Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* and was broadcast over 26 radio stations and included Alex Joyce on piano. The *Blue Mountains Advertiser* 11 Feb. 1954 reported on “Back to Katoomba Week” where there was a parade of several bands from Waratah Street to the Kingsford Smith Park shell where Alex accompanied the singers. The 1963 electoral roll has Alex living at the Carrington as assistant manager. An interview with Paul Innes and Alex’s widow, Yvonne, revealed that he lived in the old manager’s residence above the City Bank. His obituary published in the *Blue Mountains Advertiser* of 14 Oct. 1965, noted that he also organised Carrington picnics, barbecues, fancy dress balls and entertained the children of guests. Alex and Yvonne were married for four years before he died in 1965 aged 40. He is buried in Katoomba Cemetery. Blackheath Musical Society member, Val Gillmore, said of Alex in her Hydro Majestic recollections recorded in Jim Smith’s book, “He was a man of amazing talent, who could gather together a group of people who had never been on stage before, bring out their talents and produce good shows. His death was a tragedy, such a sad thing that a man who had given so much pleasure to so many through his music, should have such a short life.”

Rita Lancaster: Born c1874, Edinburgh, Scotland: Rita Lancaster arrived in the Blue Mountains in August 1914. An *Echo* article stated, “Miss Rita Lancaster, the Prima Donna, now residing at Mt Victoria, toured Germany for fifteen months prior to coming to Australia”. Rita advertised in the *Blue Mountain Echo* in 1914 and 1915 as a teacher of voice production and singing in Katoomba, Mt Victoria and Lithgow. Rita’s sister, Dorothy Lancaster, later Mrs Larsen of Lithgow, advertised as a singing teacher in Lithgow. From an article in the *Lithgow Mercury* 16 Sept. 1914, it is evident that there must have been some ill-feeling about Rita having arrived from Germany at the time of European hostilities and participating in a concert and ball in aid of the Patriotic Fund... “A feature of the evening was the accompanying of Miss Rita Lancaster, who, for love of the old flag, appeared publicly, despite orders to the contrary”. She was, however, praised for her performance... “Miss Lancaster’s touch and command of the pianoforte

proclaim the finished artiste, and a cordial welcome will always be given that lady by local audiences". Rita was obviously well-accepted by the majority as the *Lithgow Mercury* 19 May 1915 noted that she "presided at the piano" at a Mt Victoria fundraiser concert for the Belgian war effort. Rita had moved to Sydney by 1919. She advertised a studio in George Street in the Sands Directory in 1924. Rita became an opera producer and director as well as orchestra conductor. The *Lithgow Mercury* 13 Oct. 1936 stated, "Miss Lancaster is regarded, even by the superior male musician, as an expert, and she has already proved she can use the conductor's baton with the best". Rita's father was Albert Edward Wilhelm Raineck Von Rainsberg, a professor of languages. An article in the *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate* 22 Feb. 1934 stated that "Miss Lancaster and her sister, Madame Larsen, were the first women to conduct and produce grand opera in Australia. Miss Larsen and her sister have travelled the world and speak several languages". Rita Lancaster died 1956, Darlinghurst NSW.

Thelma Lindeman: Born 1911, Leura NSW. The "Children's Page" of the *Sydney Mail* 1922 published a photo of Thelma, who at the age of 11, had won the piano solo sections for "all-comers" and "Blue Mountains residents" at the Katoomba Eisteddfod. A *Katoomba Daily* 1932 noted that "the Misses Lindeman" played a piano duet at a



Katoomba concert. The other Miss Lindeman would most likely have been Thelma's sister, Marie. The *Katoomba Daily* 1935 reported on a Leura Cricket Club presentation night where a posy was presented to Thelma in appreciation for "her generosity in providing music for their functions." The *Katoomba Daily* 1936 reported that Thelma had provided dance music for a Cricket Club function, assisted by Chas Rands on saxophone and was presented with a pair of love birds. As well as her piano playing, Thelma was on the ladies' committee of the Leura R.S. and S.I.L.A. They presented a

wallet to "each Leura boy who has left to join the fighting force". Thelma Lindeman died as Thelma Hewitt 1991, Parramatta. Lindeman Road in Leura was named after Thelma's grandfather, Charles Henry Edward Lindeman.

Richard Mawson: Born 1901, Parramatta. Richard was called "Rich" in family records but "Dick" in the many newspaper articles about his musical activities. A 1929 *Sydney Sun* noted that Dick Mawson and his Banderos had played in a live broadcast on Radio



2KY. In the early 1930s, Dick arrived in Katoomba where he was the resident band leader and pianist at the Wentworth Cabaret at Homesdale. At various times, he was the house musician at the Carrington. A *Sydney Morning Herald* Carrington promotion stated that "The Carrington Hotel's dining-room pianist, Richard Mawson began his career there playing 'Dream A Little Dream of Me' in

1931." The electoral roll recorded Richard's address as Carrington Hotel from 1934 to 1949. Personal family records have him as house pianist at The Ritz, Leura, from 1949 to 1969. Dick's Wentworth Cabaret orchestra also played at the California. There are many newspaper reports from the 1930/40s mentioning Dick as a band leader, piano soloist accompanist and playing extras at dances. A 1936 *Katoomba Daily* reported that he had provided music for the Happyendo Tennis Club dance at the California and again in 1936 "Mr Dick Mawson kindly played an extra at the piano" at the California's Mid-winter

Whoopee Dance. Dick married in 1950, after which he resided in Leura. An obituary mentioned that "Richard was employed at Leura's Ritz Hotel until its closure in 1969, after which he provided music at the Everglades until his semi-retirement in 1972. Richard was then employed at Lithgow Workmen's Club and the Hydro Majestic". The obituary also stated that Richard had personally selected the Carrington's grand piano in 1937 "to display his artistry". Richard Mawson died 1978, niched Katoomba Cemetery Columbarium. The Hotel Carrington staff formed a guard of honour for Richard at his funeral.

Thelma Mawson: Born 1911 as Thelma Ferrett, Manly: After marriage, Thelma Mawson joined Richard as a singer. She entertained at many charity functions both as a duo with Richard and soloist. Thelma kept many letters of thanks of appreciation received from the organisations for which she and/or Richard entertained. Those letters were donated



to the Local Studies Library, Springwood. One letter from the secretary of the Katoomba Quota Club (1957) stated "You have helped us so often that I am running out of words of thanks." Richard and Thelma staged a concert in aid of Leura Public School equipment fund following the school's destruction in the 1957 bush fires. In 1998 Thelma was awarded the inaugural Central Blue Mountains Rotary Community Service Award by Blue Mountains Mayor, Michael Neall. It

was noted that Thelma had given 50 years of community service and presented with \$1000 to donate to a charity of her choice. It was also noted that Thelma had previously been awarded a British Empire Medal. A 1986 written tribute for Thelma said, "Together with her late husband, the brilliant pianist Richard Mawson, Thelma provided entertainment with her singing for the patients of local nursing homes and various other community groups over many years". Thelma Mawson died 2006, niched Katoomba Cemetery Columbarium.

Rita Mays: Born 1902 as Marguerite Millett, Manly. The *Catholic Press* 10 Jan. 1918 noted Rita Mays was awarded honours and a gold medal at Sydney College of Music. In the Blue Mountains, Rita was a pianist in the 1920s/30s and frequently duetted with



violinist and orchestra leader, Cliff Hardaker. Rita was sometimes publicised as Mrs Archie Mays. Archie Mays was a singer. In 1923 she and Cliff performed at a Katoomba event called "The Peculiars", where local musicians presented their original compositions. The *Bathurst National Advocate* 19 Feb. 1935 noted that Rita was making a welcome re-appearance (with Cliff Hardaker) at the Bathurst City Theatre for the screening of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* and *Babes in the Wood*. The article noted, "This clever pair were personally praised by the Prince of Wales [13 August 1920]. They play

middle brow music.... they will present tunes everybody knows". The *Bathurst National Advocate* in 1935 promoted another visit to the City Theatre by Rita Mays and Cliff Hardaker. "Those two clever performers were favourites during the visit of the Prince of Wales and were mentioned in the book dealing with his visit. H.R.H. personally complimented them on their playing". The electoral rolls from the 1930s to 1960s recorded Archie Mays' occupation as "theatre manager" so it could be presumed that Archie was managing one of the Upper Mountains theatres. *A Katoomba Daily* 1924

report on the Blue Mountains Hospital Ball at the Palais de Danse reported “Mrs Archie Mays did yeoman service at the piano”. The *Blue Mountain Echo* in 1925 reported on a dance for the Katoomba Idlers, held at the Katoomba Masonic Hall where “Mrs Mays provided the music”. The *Katoomba Daily* 4 Dec. 1936 reported that... “Mrs Archie Mays, formerly of the Joynton Smith Trust at the Carrington Hotel, Palais de Danse and Empire Theatre, is just completing a trip on the T.S.S. Katoomba as pianiste in the ship’s orchestra”. The late 1930s electoral rolls show that Rita and Archie moved to Orange from Katoomba, then finally to Manly, the place of their births. Rita Mays died 1977, Manly.

Rene Medlin: Born 1917, Leichhardt: Rene Medlin started playing piano professionally at the age of 15. She became a Blue Mountains resident in the 1930s and was mentioned in several newspaper articles from that time. From a *Katoomba Daily* report



1936... “Miss Medlin, for the past few weeks, has been delighting patrons of the All British Café with her singing and playing and has become quite famous for her rendition of songs of the modern variety”. Rene was the pianist, accordionist and singer in the Keith Collins band. As a singer, she had a deep voice and was compared to USA singer, Sophie Tucker. At the age of 19, an article about Rene was published in the July 1936 edition of *Australian Music Maker and Dance Band News*. The article noted.... “Rene Medlin has had a meteoric career in Danceband-land.... Rene has a solid background

of years of classical study. She certainly makes them ‘stampa da feet’”. Rene left the Blue Mountains after her marriage to Allan Bennett in 1938, living in Five Dock. Rene entertained American troops at the Red Cross Centre during World War II. Rene kept her ties to the Blue Mountains as a visitor to her holiday home in Leura. Rene Medlin died as Rene Bennet 1997, Westmead.

Jim Mills, born 1940, Sydney: Jim Mills attended Sydney Technical High School, sometime after which he moved to Queensland where he played piano in clubs. Jim and his wife, Erol, arrived in Blackheath from Tweed Heads in 2005. From that time on, Jim played piano regularly in the Blue Mountains and beyond. He was an expert in ragtime



music and at least twice, he and Erol attended the Scott Joplin International Ragtime Festival in Missouri USA. Jim stated that he loved ragtime music as a child, so would get his mother to play from sheet music then he would learn by ear. Jim sometimes teamed with Blackheath double bassists, George Gerontakis and cellist David Cox. They played at various functions, including the Blackheath Rhodo Revue. Jim was also a composer and arranger. He recorded his *Raggin’ Around* CD in 2012 with several Blackheath musicians, including Erol. The CD included several of Jim’s compositions,

including *The Blackheath Rag*. The Australian Jazz Museum lists seven of his ragtime compositions. From 2006 until his death, Jim led a ragtime trio, The Elite Syncopators with himself on piano, David Cox and Erol on washboard. If a venue with two pianos could be found, Jim would duet with his friend, Steve Jewel. Jim Mills died 2015, cremated Leura Memorial Gardens. **Erol Mills** often accompanied, thimble-fingered, on washboard in Jim’s ragtime band or duetting with him. Erol Mills died in 2024, Tweed Heads.

John Neate (Junior): Born 1870, Newcastle: John Neate Junior was one of the earliest pianists reported in the Blackheath area. The Neate family moved to Blackheath in 1879 where John Neate Junior ran the Kanimbla Stores. He was a pianist and organist, mainly at Blackheath and Mt Victoria. The *Katoomba Times* 16 Sept. 1892 reported on a birthday social for John Neate that was held in the Albert Hall as “a compliment for his kindness in presiding at the harmonium in the church as well as for his accompaniment at our various concerts and other entertainments.” The *Lithgow Mercury* 1 Nov. 1915 noted that Mr J. Neate Jnr convened a meeting at Blackheath School of Arts to discuss the “ways and means” of welcoming the Coo-ee Marchers. The pipe organ at St Aidan’s Anglican Church was installed in the early 1900s. The money for the organ was raised by the organist, John Neate Jnr. The *Blue Mountains Advertiser* personal column reported 21 July 1916 that “Mr John Neate Junior, who has officiated as honorary organist at St Aidan’s for the past 30 years, has resigned his position, owing to an unfortunate controversy with the powers that be.” John and his daughter, Gwen, often played duets at concerts. *Norwood*, the historic home in Blackheath, was built for the Neate family in 1915. John Neate Jnr died 1931, North Sydney.

Eunice Noad: Born 1899, Scone: Miss Eunice Noad (also known as Una) was a Katoomba teacher of piano and organ. Electoral rolls from the 1930s show that Eunice’s father was Joseph Noad, Station Master. Eunice was the organist at St Hilda’s. The *Katoomba Daily* 9 June 1934 noted that Eunice played for the 21st anniversary celebration of the Katoomba Presbyterian Church. Eunice was also the Musical Director of the St Hilda’s Boys Choir. She married the St Hilda’s minister, The Rev. Robert Hemming, in 1936. There was a farewell to Rev. and Mrs Hemming as they were leaving for Lithgow.... “Mrs Hemming, whose many years of service as organist is well remember by parishioners, was presented with a very handsome wall clock complete with Westminster chimes”. Eunice Noad died as Eunice Hemming, 1986, buried with her husband, Katoomba Cemetery. Photo: Eunice Hemming.



Joseph Claude Papesch: Born 1942, NZ: Claude was principally a pianist and saxophonist. By the late 1950s he was a member of Johnny Devlin’s band. He was the Musical Director for two New Zealand recording companies and in the 1960s, founded the Auckland College of Entertainment where he was head tutor. By the 1970s, Claude was in Sydney playing in jazz combos. He played at The Latin Quarter in Kings Cross as a support to Ricky May. Claude recorded several single-release recordings as well as two LPs (1973 and 1984) where he played Wurlitzer piano, Moog synthesiser, Clavinet and Mellotron. By 1980, Claude was living in the Blue Mountains. In 1981 he was elected to Blue Mountains City Council, becoming Deputy Mayor in 1984. He retired from council owing to ill health in 1985. Claude performed at several Blue Mountains venues and was a popular attraction at the Carrington. He was legally blind. Claude was due to perform at the Carrington one night in 1987 when it was announced to the audience that he had



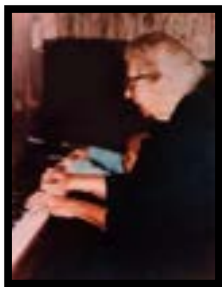
died, aged 45 years. He is buried in Katoomba Cemetery. There are several websites with biographies.

Morris Phillips: Born 1909, Leichhardt: Morris (known as Moss) was given Leichhardt as a middle name, after the place of his birth. He joked that he was pleased he was not born in Lavender Bay. Moss was born into the pioneering Blackheath Phillips family. He was a brother to Cecil (Sandy) Phillips after whom the Blackheath Community Hall is named. Moss's father, George, was a builder who constructed *Glenella* guesthouse as well as the Blackheath Uniting Church in 1924. Moss attended Blackheath Public School then Woodford Academy. He was involved in local music from childhood, performing piano solos as well as accompanying singers at fund-raising events and



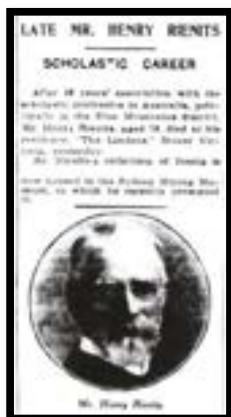
concerts at his extended family's guesthouses, *Calamonda* and *Glenella*. As a teenager, Moss had a paid job playing piano for the silent films at Blackheath's Arcadia Theatre. During the screening of one particular film, he was so engrossed in the action that he stopped playing until someone in the audience yelled at him to "wake up!". Moss' brother, George Phillips had a fine baritone singing voice and was often mentioned in newspaper reports. Moss was the organist at the Blackheath Methodist Church for many years. He assisted with organising the church Christmas concerts as well as staging a cantata almost every Easter during the 1930s. Moss also played for pleasure at Blackheath's hotels. Moss Phillips died 1974 aged 64, buried Blackheath Cemetery. His wife, Laura, died in 2017 aged 100.

Josephine Radeski: Born 1898, Mt Morgan Qld: Although most newspaper reports refer to her as JOSIE, on the plaque that remains on the wall of her Waratah Street house, she is "Jose". She was "a highly accomplished organist in the Rockhampton area. By the



1920s Jose was Brisbane-based and by the 1930s was with her sister in Maroubra and Darlinghurst. In this period, Jose travelled the world as a musician on cruise ships. By 1943, she arrived in Leichhardt Street, Katoomba as a performer and teacher of violin, viola, piano, and harmony. Advertisements of the 1950s show that Jose was at 1/87 Katoomba Street prior to her Waratah Street home/studio. Jose taught many Blue Mountains students, including Leura's professional musician, Bruce Cale, who, in her honour, composed his *Jose Radeski Legacy*, premiered in Katoomba by the Orpheus Strings Orchestra in 2013. The *Blue Mountains Advertiser* 19 Nov. 1943 noted that Jose played piano with the Mount St Mary's school orchestra. Funds raised from her many student concerts went to groups such as the scouts and guides and Katoomba children's library. She played piano at an enormous number of parties and charity concerts in the upper Blue Mountains. The auditorium of St Canice's church and school is named after her. The memorial plaque reads, "In grateful memory of Josephine Radeski whose generosity made this parish hall possible". Jose Radeski died 1992, at Wentworth Falls.

RIENITS FAMILY:



The Rienits Family was prominent in Mount Victoria musical and social circles from the 1890s to the 1920s. There were many reports of their activities published in the *Mountaineer* and *Lithgow Mercury* newspaper over that period.

Henry Rienits: Born 1851, Germany: Although there were no newspaper reports of Henry being a musician, he certainly supported such activities in Mt Victoria. From reports it can be ascertained that Henry was the principal of a Mt Victoria private school for boys, generally called "The School". By 1894 the school had a brass band. Henry was a warden of St Peter's Church of England and involved with Freemasons, Progress Committee and Rifle Club. He was a Mt Victoria Reserve custodian and a geologist.

Henry was behind the move to have an obelisk placed at Mt York to commemorate the centenary of the Blue Mountains crossing. He was also a Justice of the Peace and an acting coroner in the early 1900s. He was regularly the Master of Ceremonies at public functions. Henry Rienits died 1928, buried Mt Victoria Cemetery.

Kate Rienits: Born 1849, as Kate Terry, England: At the time of marriage (1874), Kate was a schoolteacher at Mudgee. The *Lithgow Mercury* 26 Aug. 1902 published a report on a benefit concert for the families of the Mt Kembla coal mine disaster, noting that Mrs Rienits sang a song for which she wrote the words. One of the guest pianists was Emily Hutchinson-Cooper. Kate organised and sang at many local fundraiser concerts, including those to raise money to build the hall and for the Mt York Obelisk. Kate Rienits died 1924, buried Mt Victoria.

Lena Rienits: Born 1881, Mt Victoria: The earliest mention of Lena Rienits as a pianist was 1896 when she duetted with John Neate Junior at a Mt Victoria concert for St Peter's Church. Lena played Chopin's *Impromptu* at the Mt York obelisk fundraiser concert. At the same concert, she played piano in a quartet, with her brother, Oswald, on violin. In the 1890s she accompanied the soloists at Mt Victoria Patriotic Concerts. Lena Rienits died as Lena Macfarlane, 1952 England.

Annie Rienits: Born 1887, Mt Victoria: The earliest mention of Annie Rienits as a pianist was in 1900 when she played at a Mt Victoria concert. A 28 April 1905 benefit concert report noted that she played Liszt's *12th Rhapsody*. A 1907 *Lithgow Mercury* reported on the Empire Day activities of Mt Victoria where Annie Rienits opened the evening concert and was the principal accompanist. Annie Rienits died 1973, England.

Oswald Rienits: Born 1875, Bourke: Oswald Rienits was a singer, instrumentalist and comedian. His earliest recorded performance was for the fundraiser for the Mt York Obelisk project. Oswald also sang at the Mt Victoria St Peter's Church of England organ fund concert in 1901. He too sang at the Mt Kembla mine disaster benefit concert. Oswald Rienits died 1937, buried Mt Victoria Cemetery.

Crystal Rienits: Born 1878 Mudgee. There are several reports of Crystal singing at Mt Victoria concerts. A Blackheath concert given by the Miss Crystal Rienits Concert Company of leading Sydney artists was reported in 1902. It was announced 27 May 1904 that "*Crystal Rienits is now in Paris studying with Mme Marchesi*". (Mme Mathilde Marchesi was the teacher of Dame Nellie Melba). Crystal Rienits died 1942 as Crystal Bates, Burwood NSW.

Percy Roberts: Born 1919, St Peters: Percy Roberts' family arrived in the Blue Mountains in the early 1930s. A 1947 Brisbane *Courier Male* article noted that Percy played the Hammond organ for an ABC National Network Broadcast. He was quoted, "Mother was a pianist... I taught myself organ". The same article stated that Percy played with Jim Davidson's orchestra. (Jim Davidson led the ABC Show Band from 1936 until World War II). From newspaper articles it is evident that Percy performed nation-wide. Much was made in newspaper articles of the fact that Percy was blind and was often referred to as "the blind boy pianist". A 1934 *Katoomba Daily* reported on a Leura Theatre dance where "The famous blind boy pianist of 2BL and Hoyt's Theatre, Sydney" had played. A *Sydney Sun* article 1939 noted that Percy was an accordionist with a blind musician's band. The *Hebrew Standard of Australia* in 1933 called him "The blind genius of the piano". Percy played piano for the 10:30 to midnight session at Katoomba's All British Café. Percy was back in Sydney in the



1940s with his own dance band. Percy returned to Katoomba as a permanent feature at Homesdale where, according to the 1954 electoral roll, he was also a resident. Percy also played a Clavioline. After the death of Percy's father in Katoomba in 1957, Percy moved to Cooma. His wife, Beatrice, died there in 1998. There is no death record for Percy. It is theorised that he may have moved overseas.

David Scheel: Born 1953, Stirling SA: David Scheel graduated from the University of Adelaide with honours in languages and a concert diploma of piano. In 1980, David moved to England where he toured as a concert pianist as well as acting on stage in West End revues and musicals, film and television. His acting rolls include *Sara Dane* and *Bergerac* with the BBC. In Australia, he wrote and presented 40 documentaries on aspects of music for ABC Classic FM. Having over 1000 TV and radio appearances to his name, after 18 years in England, he returned to Australia to live in Mt Victoria. While there, he devised his *Don't shoot me I'm only the piano payer* comedy show that he toured nationally and internationally for 15 years. Critics compared him to a modern Victor Borge.... "He may play a piece by Bach in the right hand and one by Andrew Lloyd Webber in the left at the same time". David is also a composer of note, several of his compositions having been



played locally by the Orpheus Strings Orchestra as well as orchestras overseas. David has entertained in the Blue Mountains with his *Don't shoot me* program and has given concerts at Closeburn House, Mt Victoria, St Hilda's Anglican Church, Blackheath Uniting Church and the Wentworth Falls Conservatorium. He performed in a six-week session at the Clarendon. David has also provided dinner music and piano accompaniments at Yulefest functions. After 25 years in Mount Victoria, David and his wife, Tatiana, left for the Victorian mountains in 2020.

STEHR SISTERS:

Berthold Stehr was a Leura baker in the 1890s/early 1900s. Berthold and his wife, Paulina had ten children. At least three of their daughters were prominent musicians and singers in Leura and Katoomba. As many reports refer to the musicians as just "Miss Stehr" it is difficult to determine which of the sisters was which.

Bertha Stehr: Born 1872, Glebe: In 1901, a Miss Stehr advertised in many editions of the *Mountaineer* as a teacher of piano, singing and theory. She also played mandolin. Her address was Athalie, Blackheath Steet, Leura. A report on the Katoomba Musical Society 1901 mentioned that Miss Stehr had been appointed to the selection committee and was their accompanist. 1903 newspapers advertised Miss Stehr's singing classes for ladies at a cost of 10 shillings and 6 pence per quarter. A 1903 *Blue Mountains Gazette* article mentioned a party where dance music was provided by "Stehr and E. Stehr." E. Stehr was probably either Eva or Ethel, younger sisters to Bertha. Bertha's sister, Lily was also a pianist who was recorded as playing extras at dances. It appears they were all in the Leura Musical Society. Bertha Stehr died 1912 as Bertha West in Springwood. All the sisters attended Katoomba Public School.

Richard Sterling: Born 1926, Dubbo: Richard Sterling was a professional piano soloist, accompanist and astrologer. He and his wife, Joy, moved to the Blue Mountains from Sydney in the early 1970s and established an extensive garden in Katoomba. Although Richard did not play at guesthouses or hotels, he did provide entertainment at many private functions and charity events, some of which were in his own home where he kept three grand pianos. He toured internationally as a concert pianist and accompanist, including to renowned singer, Kathleen McCormack. He also shared a stage with Lee Liberace, who visited Richard and his wife, Joy, at their Leura home and gave a private concert while there. Richard died 2013 at Katoomba. Joy continues with musical Forums in 2026.



ARTHUR STONE AND THE "STONE FAMILY OF MUSICIANS":

Arthur Stone: Born 1898, Marrickville There are several Blue Mountains newspaper references to the Stone family as musicians from Wentworth Falls performing at an assortment of events. Arthur was the pianist in the family. Arthur Stone's father, Gary and sisters were violinists. There were two Stone sisters, Gertrude and Louisa. A 1918 *Blue Mountain Echo* reported on a "successful pop concert" where the Stone Quartet played. A 1923 *Blue Mountain Echo* reported that Mr G. Harry Stone, violinist, composer, director, had just returned from America and was to give a recital and lantern slide lecture in the Wentworth Falls School of Arts. It was a real dinkum digger's entertainment for both are late of the AIF." Arthur Stone served in World War I and was awarded a Military Medal. His brother, Frederick, was Killed in Action in France, 1918. The names of the three Stone men are recorded on the World War I memorial in Wentworth Falls School of Arts. The plaque informs that the board was made and presented to Wentworth Falls Recruiting Association by Mr G.H. Stone. The Stone family moved to Westmead in 1930. Arthur Stone died 1945, Ryde NSW.

Athole Twemlow: Born 1897 as Athole McMah, Qld. Athole Twemlow arrived in Wentworth Falls from Tweed Heads in 1934, as a teacher at Wentworth Falls Public School then Leura, Katoomba (1936). As well as a pianist, Athole was a poet and composer. From the mid-1930s through to mid-1950s, she had approximately 40 poems



published in the *Blue Mountains Advertiser*. A 1937 *The Katoomba Daily* noted that Mrs Twemlow's song, *Katoomba* was on sale at Mr Green's Melody Shop. A 1938 *Katoomba Daily* reported that the Blue Mountains City Council "accepted a number of copies with a view of embodying the song in forthcoming celebrations if proved satisfactory." The Blue Mountains Historical Society has the original manuscript of Athole's song, *Utopia*. Some of her songs were broadcast on Radio 2KA. Athole's daughter, Gwen was also a pianist. Athole's son, Llewellyn was a foundation member of Katoomba Boys'

Band. He was a cornetist and pianist. Lew served in New Guinea in World War II. As a result of his military service, he died 1949 in Concord Repatriation Hospital "after a long and devastating illness". Athole left Katoomba school in 1941 to move to Sydney to be near Lew who is now buried in Katoomba Cemetery in a Commonwealth War Commission grave. After his death, Athole returned to Katoomba until about 1968. One of Athole's compositions that remains alive in 2025 is the school song of Katoomba Public School. Athole Twemlow died 1970, Qld.

John Wilson: Born 1945, Katoomba: A pupil of Katoomba Public School, John Wilson



commenced piano lessons at the age of 7 from Jose Radeski. During his Katoomba High School years, he worked in several amateur rock bands, sometimes playing for high school dances either on piano, saxophone or clarinet. John sometimes joined with Homesdale's Roy Colless band on weekends to play big-band arrangements on his clarinet. In 1965, John formed his own five-piece band named *The New Age*. The singer in the band was John's wife, Meryn Easton who died in 1997. The band was renamed *The Mystics*. They played around Blue Mountains hotels and clubs including Palais Royale, the Wentworth Cabaret, Milroy guesthouse and Hydro Majestic ballroom. While John was playing wind instruments, the pianist was Alan Turner from Lawson. Their first full-time engagement was at the Carrington Hotel Starlight Room. At that time, they were performing six nights per

week, two floor shows per night. After a few years at the Carrington, the band downsized to a trio and moved on to Caesar's Nite Club in Katoomba, owned by Betty and Val Kinley. After two years at Caesar's, John turned the Mystics into a 6-piece band with himself on keyboard. They performed in the Blue Mountains but mostly in Sydney's nightclubs and discos including Miller's Pubs in Sydney, then to Queensland's Gold Coast with residencies in several clubs. When the disco era started to fade, they returned to Sydney, playing at functions for the next eight years, including the Opera House and major hotels. During this time, John played keyboards in a two New Zealand bands, did some session work and had Musical Director positions and played on a cruise ship. John finished his musical career with a trio playing six nights per week at Neil's Starlight Room at the Top of the Town, on the top floor of Parramatta Travel Lodge. He was commissioned to "put down" the string parts for Australia's Eurovision entry.

After that final gig, John retired from music to take up his visual art profession. He went on to become a world-renowned and represented landscape artist with a studio in Katoomba. John Wilson died 2025, cremated Leura.

Colin Semmler (the author): Born 1951, Leeton NSW: Colin was raised on the family farm in the Moombooldool Mallee. From the age of about 9, on Friday afternoons he was taken from his Moombooldool School to Barellan nunnery for piano lessons. Colin



attended Yanco Agricultural High School where he continued his learning from Dawn Beaumont, whose 90th birthday party he attended in Griffith in 2025. Dawn also organised Colin's appearances at several Leeton Eisteddfods in piano, singing and recitation. Colin became a primary school teacher, concluding his career at Katoomba and Blaxland schools. During most of his teaching years, he was involved with school choirs. It was not until retiring from teaching that Colin began playing piano in public, initiated by his son's insisting to the Carrington staff that his father "could play." And so, Colin began at the Carrington for Yulefest in 2010 and has been part of the Carrington team of players since. He also played for Yulefest and other events at Katoomba's Metropole. As a solo pianist, accompanist and organist, Colin has played and sung at many private functions, weddings and parties from Hartley to Glenbrook, including, for many years, Anzac services at Blackheath and Mt Victoria. Colin has researched and/or published several local history, school and family histories.

Katoomba Waltz: Composed by Mary McCarron Maguire in 1895, *Katoomba Waltz* was



dedicated to Sir Frederick Darley (then Lieutenant Governor of New South Wales) and Lady Darley who owned Lilianfels, Katoomba. Mary presented a copy to Lady Darley, who wrote an appreciative note of thanks. The piece was first performed at Government House, Sydney. The *Sydney Morning Herald* pronounced it as "a dashing composition suited to ballroom purposes". Soon after this, the waltz appeared on a variety of programmes at Sydney's Tivoli Theatre and was added to the repertoire of the NSW Artillery's regimental Band. Mary composed two more pieces, *The Antonia Waltz* and *Commonwealth Waltz*. Copies were sent to Queen Victoria. Mary McCarron Maguire was a gently reared young woman of Edgecliff and her family were frequent guests at Admiralty House. Two other Blue Mountains musical compositions dating from the approximate period 1890-1910 are a mazurka, *Leura Falls* by Alicia Nolan and *The Cascade Waltz* by Louise L. Howard.



Graeme Coss: Our next presenter is Kate O'Neill

KATE O'NEILL

As I'm sure many of you know, Kate is a familiar figure in Blue Mountains historical organisations. Kate has degrees in Arts Management, History, Museum & Heritage.

Now to learn a bit more about Kate:

Favourite Film?

- Kate's choice is a fascinating one, 'V for Vendetta', starring our own Hugo Weaving - although he wears a mask throughout the film, his rich tones are unmistakable. Who else is familiar with this film? Well Kate, you, me and one other know this one.

Favourite Music?

- Wonderful choices from Kate. Ravel's Piano Concerto, I presume the one in G – glorious work. Any others? Yes, a few. Next is Morricone's fabulous score to 'Once Upon a Time in the West' – I see a few nodding heads. And lastly, certainly one of my favourites as well, Faure's Requiem, beautiful work – and yes, several hands raised there.

Favourite Holiday Destination?

- Kate chose two not known to me. Dazu District, Chongqing, China; and Stewart Island NZ.

Other Career?

- Kate nominated Train driver – I'm surprised more people didn't list this one, I know I wanted to be one the first time I saw a steam locomotive. And also, Kate fancies being a Librarian at the Unseen University (from Terry Pratchett's Discworld). And if this requires any explanation for any of you, let's wait for the next response.

Other Light-Hearted information?

- Kate's favourite books are Terry Pratchett's Discworld series. Innumerable others around the world would agree with Kate.

Please welcome Kate O'Neill, whose topic today is: 'Rosedale En Fete - Hazelbrook's at Home Entertainment'.

ROSEDALE EN FETE – Hazelbrook’s at Home Entertainment

Kate O’Neill

Museum Director, historian, author



Figure 1: Rosedale balcony looking east – BM Local Studies Collection

This is *Rosedale* cottage on Rosedale Avenue in the Central Mountains village of Hazelbrook. It will feature in this talk on *Blue Mountains Performance and Entertainment* with a particular focus on domestic entertainment of the Central Mountains, and how the residents of the area made their own entertainment through musical recitals, poetry readings, choirs, bands and Tableaux Vivants.

“Social evenings, during which refreshments were served and musical items and recitations rendered.”



Figure 2: Hazelbrook looking to NW, Local Studies

The house with its large balcony, gardens and expansive views was once owned by the Wilson family and it was a centre of the Central Mountains social scene. Besides the professional theatres, cinemas and performers of the Blue Mountains there was a very active amateur set, performing in private homes, at local halls and guesthouses for personal celebrations, or other social occasions. Charity concerts were a frequent form of entertainment, usually arranged by prominent citizens to raise money for public amenities, returned servicemen or to help families in financial difficulties. At these concerts local artists showed off their talents, and every item on the programme was reported in detail in local papers such as the *Blue Mountains Echo* or *The Katoomba Daily*.

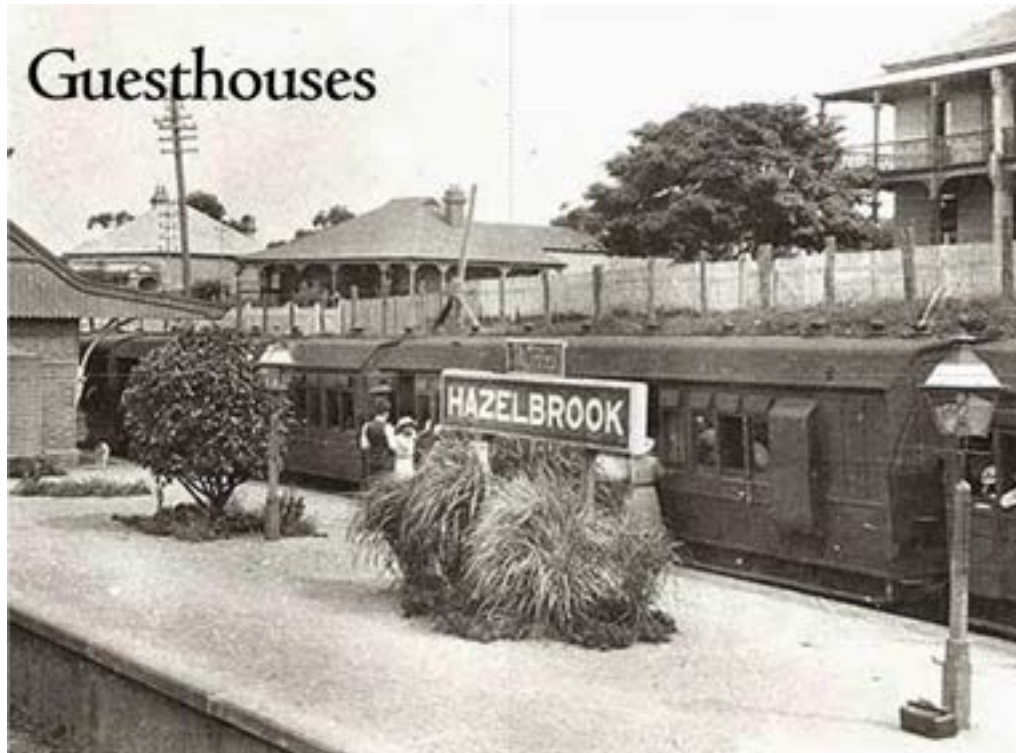


Figure 3: Hazelbrook Station 1920s Hazelbrook House to the right. *Local Studies*

At the turn of the 20th Century the area was predominantly a destination for tourists and holiday makers with the majority of dwellings being used as holidays home or on temporary leases. The few surviving Roadside Inns that once catered to west bound travellers had transitioned, with the advent of rail, to destinations in their own right, promoting the health advantages of the clean air and bushwalking. While some Guesthouses employed live-in entertainers during the holiday seasons guests mostly created their own. Phonographs and Gramophones played the latest tunes and the pastime of singing around the piano still remained popular, especially on Sunday nights when people gathered to sing favourite ballads and sacred songs or recite monologues.

Woodford House: This was inaugurated in 1869 as the first guesthouse in the Blue Mountains and was at its height in the late 19th Century, being internationally feted for its salubrious air. In 1887 a patron noted:

Music, vocal and instrumental, games, and other amusements charmed away the evenings, the genial host and his amiable lady making their house quite homely to all visitors."

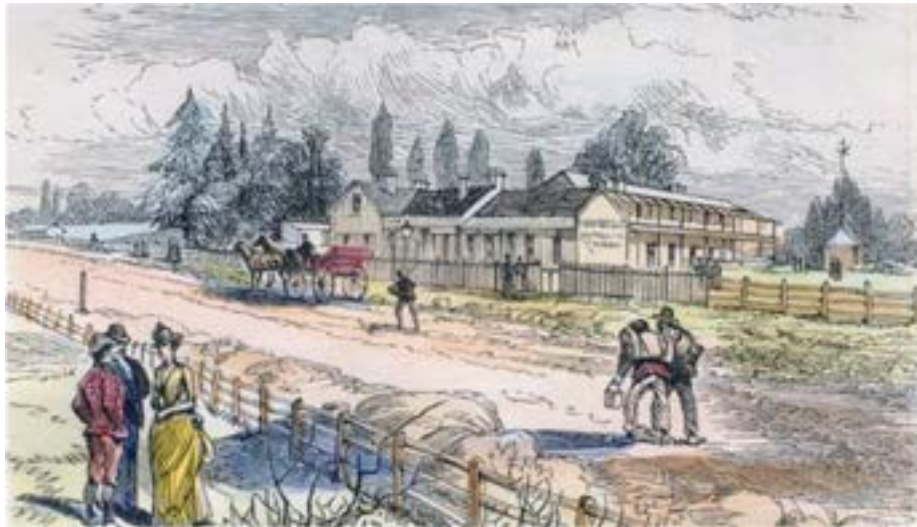


Figure 4: Woodford House Illustrated London News 1889

This continued until the turn of the century and was a feature of the establishment's success:

1900 - *"In the evenings some very successful entertainments were carried out in the Woodford House Concert Hall, (a wooden structure at the back of the building also known as the Ball Room) notably a lecture on the Scottish Highlands by a Sydney visitor, and also a concert interspersed with Tableaux, the latter being most beautifully arranged by the Misses Walker). On Boxing night, a mock trial, a celebrated Breach of Promise case, was carried out with all the details connected with court proceedings. The latter evoked great merriment."*

Hazelbrook House: The first building in the village and the source of the township's name, was built in 1880 by Edward Higgs. Because Lawson already had two well established Pubs, his application for a liquor license was rejected, instead it was run as a 'first class boarding establishment' offering good piano, billiards, and splendid shooting, becoming the centre for local social events for several decades until it was demolished in the 1930s.

1920 - *a ball was given to Mr. and Mrs. Fitz Stubbs and family, in return to one given by them on the previous Friday. There were lady and gentlemen visitors from Lawson and Penrith on the occasion - the party numbering altogether between 40 and 50.*



Figure 5: Hazelbrook House - Local Studies

1911 - Last Saturday afternoon, all Hazelbrook dressed in its Sunday best and wended its way to Hazelbrook House, to bid farewell to the Rev. Croft, who is leaving the parish for Paddington. There was a large and representative gathering of church people from Woodford and Hazelbrook, and a very pleasant afternoon passed all too quickly. A sumptuous tea, provided by the ladies of the "working party" was served in the dining room at 4 p.m. The room was charmingly decorated with silver wattle in full bloom with purple petunias and sprays of asparagus fern. During the afternoon, Mr Croft, contributed several amusing character sketches, also a song of his own composition about the beauties of Lawson and Hazelbrook, and a very good rendering of the old favourite "Billikins".

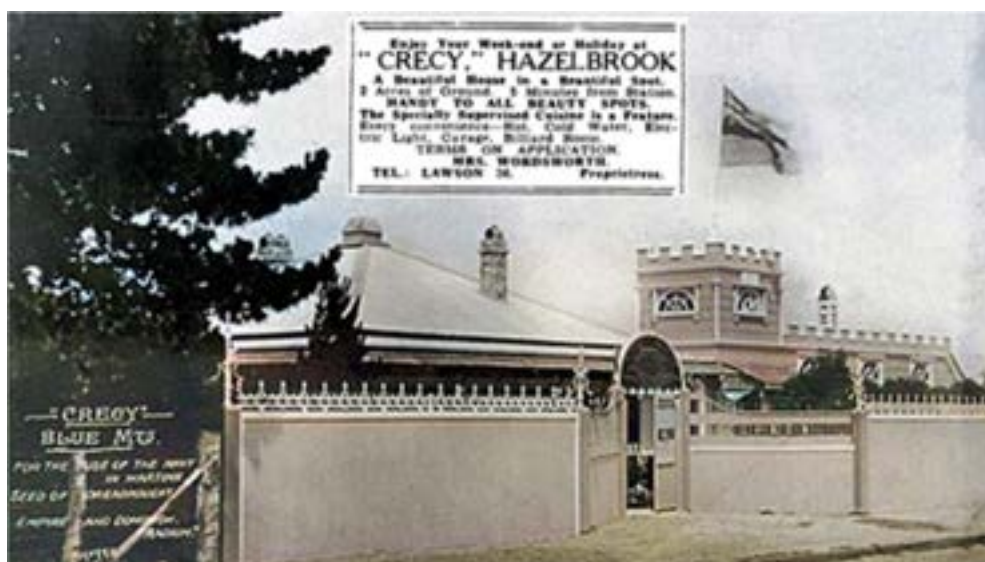


Figure 6: Crecy House - Woodford Academy Collection

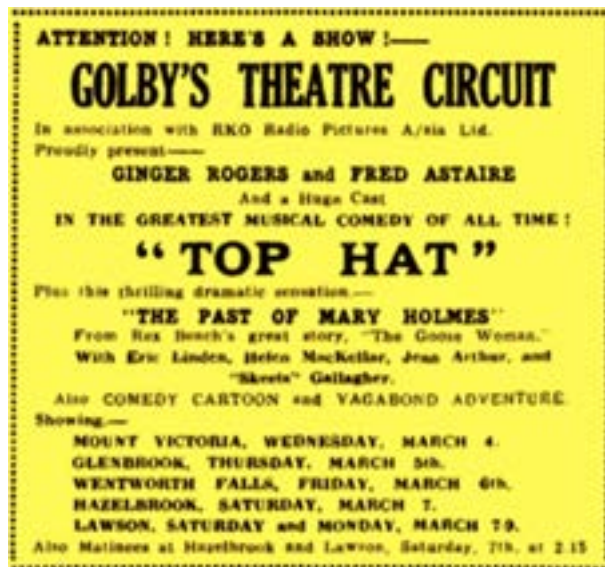
Crecy House: With its turreted stone frontage and large gates, Crecy was named after the 1714 Battle of Crecy by its builder, Henry Goodwin, who publicised his home

as being '*For the use of the Navy in Wartime*', promoting his views on Empire and Dominion. There is no evidence that the house was ever actually used by the Navy and following Goodwin's death in 1914, it remained vacant. In February 1919 Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Oldfield leased the home as a guesthouse, when it became a popular venue for dances, tennis parties and concerts. By 1922 Mrs. Young was the 'genial and popular hostess'.

1920 - *The Waratah Girls' Club held a social at "Crecy" on Monday night last, when games and songs whiled away a pleasant evening.*

1922 Fri 13 - *"An Evening at 'Crecy' A delightful concert and dance were given by Mrs. Young, and it was reported that 'Only those who have visited 'Crecy,' rambled through its spacious grounds, enjoyed the fragrance of its rose-strewn gardens and sat beneath the spreading branches in its picturesque orchard, can appreciate its suitability for such an entertainment.' The cool and lofty billiard room, with its vast floor space, was by no means crowded when about 40 couples took the floor and danced to the delightful strains of a most efficient orchestra, including Mr. Woods (piano), Mr. Adams (cornet), Miss Cutts (violin), and Mr. Clark (drum). The guests included, in addition to those staying at 'Crecy', many visitors to and residents of Hazelbrook, as well as several coach loads of visitors and residents from Lawson. These were received by Mrs. Young and were ushered into the big billiard room, which was neatly decorated with coloured streamers, gum leaves, hydrangeas and roses".*

Cinema: In his detailed history of the area Ken Goodlet notes that Hazelbrook also had one of the earliest Blue Mountains cinemas:



'As far back as 1913 there had been lantern slides in Hazelbrook, used by speakers such as Frank Walker and Professor Edgeworth-David to illustrate their talks. In 1927 permission was granted by the Shire council to construct a scout hall on the corner of the GWH and Oaklands Rd. on the condition that it conformed to the Halls and Theatres Act, meaning it could be used for showing movies.'

While the picture show might have been in existence as early as 1930, it was in 1932 that Reginald Golby, who lived in Winbourne Road, ran a movie organisation called the Reginald Golby Theatre Circuit, showing 'talkies' on a regular basis with the first screened there in 1933. They became a well-remembered feature of Hazelbrook life on Saturday afternoons and evenings. Anthony Bowden, of Woodford recalls:

'Compared to Woodford, Hazelbrook was the height of sophistication: it had a cinema! A big night out was to catch "The Fish" to Hazelbrook, armed with sandwiches, to wait for the curtain to go up on a Hollywood musical then to walk home through the mist, trying to emulate Fred Astaire in the middle of the Great Western Highway!'

Holiday Houses: The early decades of the 20th Century saw the little village of Hazelbrook at its social peak. There was a marked increase in the sale of land and the construction of private houses, predominantly for lease or holiday use. The community was made up of both permanent residents and regular seasonal visitors. In the days when houses were known by name and not numbers, *Waratah*, *Dellwood*, *Beechmont*, and *Hillcrest* were all sites of community entertainment:

'The Girl's Club gave a surprise party to Mrs, Roach, at "Hillcrest", the visit occasioning great pleasure. Games were indulged in on the lawn, and dancing on the verandah, after which a singsong followed in the spacious drawing room. A successful concert in aid of the National Belgian Relief Fund, organised by the members of the Hazelbrook Social Club was held in the grounds of "Waratah" kindly loaned for the occasion by Mr. C. A. Smith, on Saturday night last. The grounds were illuminated with Chinese lanterns, and the stage artistically decorated with flags.'



Figure 7: Rosedale, Local Studies

Rosedale: The most feted of these guesthouses was *Rosedale*. It was built in 1903 by the Fay family of Fay's Shoes in Sydney as a holiday home for the family and a semi-permanent residence for their consumptive daughter. She lived there alone during the week in her well-ventilated bedroom, off the large, north-facing, sun drenched back

verandah, to get the best of the healing benefits of the mountain air. Percy Wilson purchased the house in 1915, and the 'fine wide verandas, with their charming outlook' were transformed to become the entertainment centre of the Mid-Mountains society. The social columns of the Blue Mountains Echo attest to Rosedale's status, reporting in effusive detail the charms of the venue, the guest lists, the names of the artists and the songs they sung or played.

"Rosedale" just being besieged, the spacious verandah 90 ft. x 12 ft., and 15 ft. in places, being taxed to its utmost. Ferns, trees, flags and bright lights decked the verandah, the decorations being the work of the club members, the brilliant illuminations and the merry crowd making it the best night ever held in Hazelbrook'.

Popular songs were sung; ukulele solos, violin solos, spoken monologues, cornet solos, and recitations were performed:

*If you could sing like a Hazelbrook thrush,
Or coo like a Leura dove,
Had your cheeks the tint of the bottlebrush,
Were your eyes like the blue above.
Were your voice as soft as a Mountain mist,
Had you never a sigh or frown,
And your hair the glint of bronze, sun-kissed,
I would never go to town — CUDGEGONG. 1926*

The person who was the perfect host was Percy Wilson, praised for quickening the communal spirit of the people of Hazelbrook and playing a prominent part in pushing the place ahead. He had a printing business in Sydney which published *The Illustrated Tourist Guide* and *Wilson's Street Directory* and was a director of several companies, including the Central Blue Mountains Building Society. After his first wife died in February 1922, he married Claire Kent, a regular attendee at the Rosedale soirees. For almost two decades he was a member of the Blue Mountains Shire Council and was Shire president for several years.

1920 - *"Mr Percy Wilson is a very live resident of Hazelbrook. He is head serang of the Social Club there and has recently been elected to the Presidential chair of the Progress Association. The family reside at 'Rosedale,' a pretty property near the station, and on Tuesday evening they entertained about 70 locals at an 'At home', where hospitality in excelsis was dispensed with lavish hand".*

The Hazelbrook Social Club: This was well established by 1915, meeting regularly in Miss Sampey's tearooms and continuing to meet for many years thereafter. This club was responsible for regular social evenings where members indulged in vocal and instrumental items, recitations, debates and Parlor games. Meetings would regularly attract 30 members. The club formed Hazelbrook's first library with the grand total of 24 books, which number was increased gradually until members considered that the club could almost be called a literary institute. It was a shining example of social unity at 1/6d a quarter:

1916 - *An interesting debate on 'Socialism' was the piece de resistance of the programme of the Social Club at their last meeting. The first part of the evening was devoted to a musical programme, in which M. Geggler contributed a pianoforte selection, Miss Gillham sang "Australia Will be There", Master Lendster recited "The Newsboy's Death", and Mr. Lendster delivered a humorous monologue on the*

subject of dilapidation of our nether garments. Miss McTague sang, "Loves Old Sweet Song" and Mr. Bailey, a Leigh College student, recited "The Newsboy's Death", and Mr. J. Lendster delivered a humorous monologue on the subject of dilapidation of our nether garments.



Figure 8: Miss Sampey's tearooms - Local Studies

Masques or Tableaux Vivants: in addition to the poetry recitations, piano recitals, speeches, and games there was also the very popular pastimes of Masques or Tableaux Vivants. In these performances, men, women and children were arranged into static poses then revealed, portraying classical or biblical scenes, nursery rhymes, sculptures, paintings, etchings, and literary compositions. Even in domestic presentations elaborate scenery, carefully chosen costumes and appropriate make up were used, as well as atmospheric lighting. The silent masquerade was accompanied by music or recitation. Tableaux vivants were extremely popular in commercial theatres such as JC Williamson's Tivoli as well as at local fundraising events and drawing room soirees.



In the more risqué *Pose Plastique* performances men and women wore body suits to represent naked classical figures such as Bacchus, Venus, Adonis, the Dying Gaul or

Hercules but the local fundraisers were more likely to depict more discreet themes such as the *Nine Muses* or *Faith, Hope and Charity*.

Hazelbrook also had its share of colourful entertainers such as Madame Lily Adams, Singer, Whistler, Entertainer and “Souffleuse” (prompter). Madame Adams was known as the “Blue Mountains Nightingale,” and held regular free Sunday Afternoon concerts, in Katoomba Town Hall. She was also the ‘only licensed Lady Real Estate Agent on the Blue Mountains’ offering a ‘sincere selling service’.

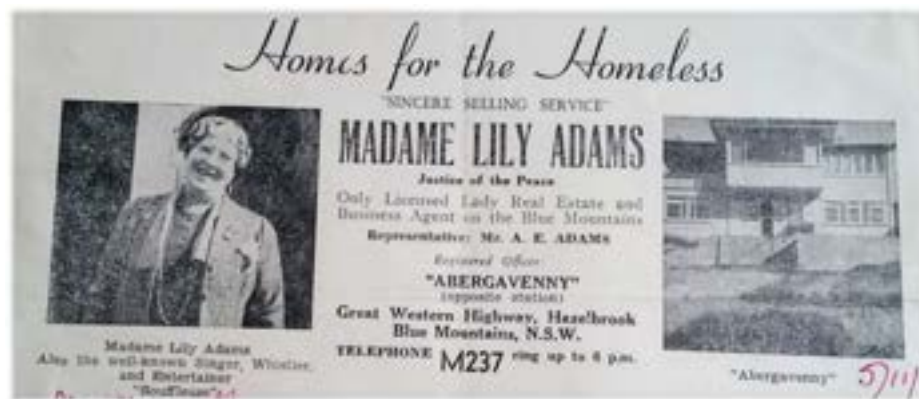


Figure 9: Madame Lily Adams, Woodford Academy Collection

All this goes to show that back in the day the little mid mountains village of Hazelbrook had its share of “Performance and Entertainment” along with many of the other townships along the Great Western Highway. The range of social activities outlined here is some indication of a strong community sense for a town that by 1922 had little more than 500 permanent residents. While much of the credit for the success of these activities can be directed to such community-minded people such as Percy Wilson and Nellie Sampey, it was the participation of the bulk of the populace that ensured the success of the many activities and organisations of this period.

In 1919 the Blue Mountains Echo recognised this participation:

“As compared with many centres on the Blue Mountains, Hazelbrook is but a small place. In point of fact, it is a small place, when estimated by any popular standard of measurement, But, when judged by the calibre of its citizens, it looms large in the scheme of the Hills. It would seem that Hazelbrook has achieved that felicitous spirit of communal harmony, whereby the units of the town sink personal differences, and co-ordinate to advance local interests. Certain it is, that this insignificant speck upon the map is able to conceive and execute public movements, that would be totally impossible of attainment in much more pretentious centres.”



Graeme Coss: *Our next presenter is John Lanser*

JOHN LANSER

As you will have noted, John has a rich background in legal practice, is a member of various historical societies, and is a member of various film societies - he has even written a thesis on film.

Now to learn a bit more about John:

- Favourite Film?

John's choice is one that's often listed amongst the greatest of all time by international film critics, Eisenstein's epic 'Ivan the Terrible'. A show of hands? Yes, a few of you.

- Favourite Music?

A fascinating choice from my perspective, as John has chosen a piece by my favourite composer, Vaughan Williams, namely the adagio from his Symphony No.6. Perhaps more generally, who among you is also a fan of the music of Vaughan Williams? Splendid, I look forward to chatting with you during the break.

- Favourite Holiday Destination?

John has chosen Melbourne. I wonder if it's their wonderful art gallery, the fabulous coffee shops, the buzzing laneways and arcades, or the MCG?

- Other Career?

Given John's passion for film, it's not surprising that he nominated Cinematographer.

- Other Light-Hearted information?

John's response was a short and direct: 'I hate bananas'. I'm lost for words.

A show of hands please. Who attends Mount Vic Flicks? That's great to see, most of you. It's certainly become my favourite cinema. As I tell co-owner Kirsten, I come for her delicious soups and scones, seeing a good film is a bonus.

John may not be focusing on Mount Vic Flicks today, but please welcome him and his topic today: *'Blackheath's Arcadia/Victory Theatre: More a Community Centre than dedicated Picture House'*.

BLACKHEATH'S ARCADIA / VICTORY THEATRE: More a community centre than picture house

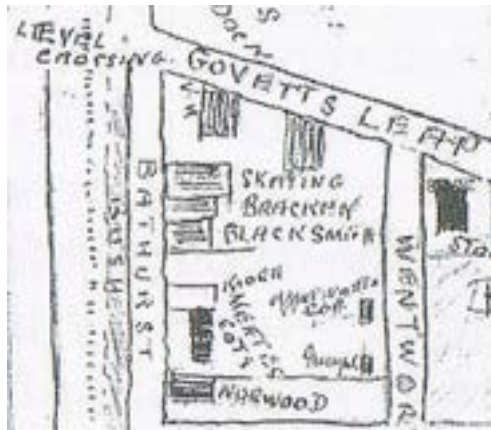
John Lanser

Historian, writer, film buff

In July 1914 a former bootmaker's shop in Govett's Leap Road was acquired by real estate agent (and future Blackheath mayor) Herbert Robert Neate. Neate demolished two shops and had plans prepared by architects Hassall and Stockham for the construction of a hall which, the *Blue Mountain Echo* said, would "vastly improve that part of Blackheath."



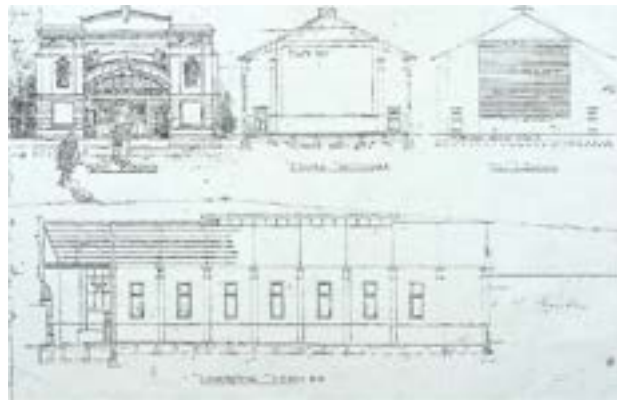
A Significant Site



Early map



H R Neate



Architectural drawings

Little was recorded in the press about building progress, but on 22 January 1915 the *Echo* announced that the *Arcadia Picture Palace* would open the following evening with a "Grand Entertainment". Yet the programme did not include the screening of any films, and, from the outset, the *Arcadia* operated more as a community centre than a dedicated cinema. In May 1915 Belgian Day was celebrated there, in September 1915 it hosted the Delaney/McLean wedding reception and in January 1917 it staged a public meeting to hear candidates in the shire elections. Regular events were concerts for

worthy causes: a permanent memorial to Blackheath lads who have enlisted (March 1917), the Blackheath Soldiers Memorial Fund (April 1917), the Wall Chest Flower Show (January 1918), a plain and fancy dress social (April 1918) and an Empire Day celebration (24 May 1918) for Queen Victoria's birthday.



Victory Theatre



The first report of any screening is an incidental mention, in October 1918, that “at the pictures on Saturday night, presentations were made to Corporal MacDougall and Private Hine on the eve of their departure for the scene of the action.” Nine months later the war was over and for Peace Day celebrations Neate “kindly lent the hall for speeches of the dinkum type and patriotic songs with dancing till midnight.” Use of the theatre for community milestones continued into the 1920s: in 1927 the local headmaster was farewelled there, “having been promoted to Bourke”, (although how relocating from Blackheath to Bourke could be considered ‘promotion’ remained unexplained).

The 1920s

Files of the Board of Fire Commissioners (BFC) and the Chief Secretary’s Department (CSD) helpfully record the early proprietors’ many battles with the bureaucracy. In July 1924 the BFC wrote to Neate recommending improvements to the fire appliances, the installation of oil-lit exit lamps and the clearance of accumulated rubbish, broken chairs, and other flammable material in a space at the rear of the hall. It is unclear if any of this had been attended to when, three months later, Neate sold the theatre to Reginald Delaney, a local butcher, whose father Nicholas displayed in the family shop a sign: “In God we trust – all others pay cash”.

Delaney was an enterprising exhibitor. The trade journal *The Exhibitor* reported that he outlaid a large sum on improvements: two projectors, a stage, tip-up chairs and three fires, coffee and hot pies on sale during the interval. It called the theatre “one of the prettiest on the Western Line” but **the BFC** was interested in more mundane matters, particularly the potential hazard of the three fires. In March 1927 it required installation of a fire hydrant with 50 feet of two-and-a-half-inch hose. Delaney had obviously not acted upon this recommendation by April 1928, when the BFC complained that “nothing has been done to provide a hydrant” but Delaney demurred that the theatre was used for screenings only twice a week in summer and not for stage performances, arguing the risk of fire was small. The BFC was not to be moved, and when Senior Station Officer Grayhurst inspected the theatre in June he found the recommendations

had not been actioned. Delaney again sought a dispensation “because the theatre is only used once a week in winter, the average attendance being 196, and although licensed for 900 there has only been a full house once,” but Grayhurst would have none of this. He rejoined that boxing tournaments were also staged one night each week in winter and screenings were thrice weekly in summer, attendances ranging from 300 to 900; he required that the hydrant proceed. When nothing had been done by November 1928 the BFC demanded that Delaney “comply immediately” and sent Fourth Officer Digby to show Delaney precisely where to install the hydrant. By April 1929 the BFC was gratified to find the hydrant “installed and ready for immediate use”.



The pages of the *Blue Mountain Star* are a testament to how unequal the *Arcadia's* advertising budget was to compete with what the Katoomba *Empire* had at its disposal. The *Arcadia's* 1929 thrice weekly screenings were publicised in a modest three column inches of classified advertising, generally inside on page two. The *Empire's* offerings, on the other hand, were trumpeted in display advertisements which occupied one third of the back page. Yet despite this, the *Arcadia* screened new releases concurrently with, and occasionally ahead of, the *Empire*, fitting them in around roller skating and occasional live performances.

Sound

Almost the entire back page of the *Blue Mountain Star's* 31 December 1929 issue proclaimed "Talkies - the wonder of the age" as sound films arrived at the Katoomba *Empire*. The *Arcadia's* installation of sound however, passed quite unnoticed by the *Star*, so we do not know for sure the date of the first sound film screening. It must have been before November 1930 because an item which appeared that month in the *Blackheath Beacon* noted that “the acoustic properties, which in the past were somewhat defective, have been scientifically attended to.” Like so many theatres designed for the days of silent films, the *Arcadia* apparently had acoustic problems which ensured that healthy echoes were not confined to the vicinity of the Three Sisters.



Victory Theatre Blackheath c. 1932



Following a widespread practice in the cinema industry the Arcadia was rebadged as BLACKHEATH TALKIES and by December 1930 the *Blackheath Bulletin* was doing its best to improve patronage with a weekly advertorial called "Our Picture Show." Gradually more editorial space was given to this column and by January 1931 plot outlines for coming screenings were being provided. In 1933 the simultaneous premiere in Leura and Blackheath of the film *Cavalcade* "placed Leura and Blackheath on the map as far as first run houses [were] concerned".

The 1930s

In June 1935 Delaney's widow sold the building to Michael Gearin, who seems to have operated it for just 18 months, but that was time enough for him to have his turn at being reprimanded by the bureaucracy.



Reg Delaney



Delaney building, Blackheath

In March 1936 District Officer Neville's annual inspection again complained about inflammable trade waste under the stage and one emergency exit door was nailed up. The next inspection took place in April 1937, by which time the lease had been transferred to Katoomba Theatres and the offending rubbish had been removed, but there was now concern about four coke burning stoves resting on loose bricks a few inches above the wood flooring in the auditorium. This was considered "a serious fire hazard owing to the likelihood of hot ashes dropping onto the floor" and a risk of the public receiving burns from coming in contact with the unprotected stoves". The CSD demanded they be replaced by "steam or other suitable heating means". An October

1937 inspection found that two of the offending coke stoves were still there (albeit now resting on asbestos and enclosed within wire netting) while the frame of the projection screen remained non-compliant with fire regulations and the projection box's ports (metal shutters to contain the spread of fire if the volatile nitrate film went up) were malfunctioning. The BFC bluntly declared that if its requirements were not satisfied consideration would be given to cancelling the theatre's licence. This got results: by March 1938 a new sound screen with hardwood frame had been installed, the coke stoves were out, new projection ports were in, the theatre was "in a clean and satisfactory condition" and its licence was renewed.

Screening policy

A police report of 6 February 1938 provides an insight into the screening policy at the theatre, by now called the BLACKHEATH PICTURE PALACE and leased to the Katoomba Savoy theatre. Films were showing four nights weekly, but activities had included community singing for three nights during October 1937. Soon afterwards the licence was again transferred, this time to a Mr Tiller, secretary of the Blackheath Masonic Lodge, and the ink had barely dried when he was required by the CSD to install electric lamps with a battery current supply and magnetic switch in case of failure of general lighting. An inspection in March 1940 found all to be satisfactory. The next battle with the BFC came in 1941, when the curtains and screen masking were found not to have been treated with fire retardant material, but once again there was a change in control, Gearin selling the theatre to Katoomba Theatres in October 1942; not until October 1943 was the theatre generally compliant and about June 1945 there was another name change, to the VICTORY.



1944



Beauty pageant 1953

The 1950s

By February 1951 the Corne family, which already operated the Katoomba Savoy, *Embassy* and *Trocadero* plus the Leura *Liberty*, had acquired the theatre. Approval of the NSW cabinet for this transfer was required because "a greater aggregation of picture palaces in one interest" suggested monopoly of Blue Mountains theatres was occurring.

In 1954, as part of a conversion to accommodate widescreen films, alterations were designed by Guy Crick, who has been described as "the most important designer of cinemas during the second half of the 1930s" and was responsible for the art deco *Kings* circuit. Crick's improvements to the *Victory* included remodelling the vestibule, a

new auditorium ceiling, new pressed metal proscenium splays and raked seating in the auditorium. Extensive as this sounds, the CSD file confirms the refit was a cheap job.

Community use continued. The Blackheath Musical Society presented its initial production, *The Gondoliers*, for Rhododendron week in 1953 and Osborne Ladies College staged classical dancing and drama productions. In February 1960 the *Victory* shared with the *Savoy* the social experiment of screening *Blue Jeans*, marketed as "a motion picture that faces the facts of youth!" Teenagers were exhorted "DON'T MISS IT!!" and parents were challenged "YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO MISS IT!!". The Congregational Church took up the challenge and organised two lectures on sex at which a doctor, a police officer and the Rev T D Carty spoke. Teenage patrons, perhaps hoping for a little hands-on experience in the back rows, were doomed to disappointment; however, the lectures were segregated, fathers and sons one night, mothers and daughters the next.



Bio Box 1996



Stair to projection box

Fade out

The 1954 refurbishment had reduced the seating capacity to 600 but that was not a problem: by the late 1950s all cinemas were yielding to television and the community hall styled *Victory* was a plain sister to Katoomba's art deco *Savoy*, *Trocadero* and *Embassy*. Its once five sessions weekly were down to three nights and one matinee by February 1960, and to Saturdays only, two months later. On Thursday May 5, 1960, the *Blue Mountains Courier*, reported: "Goldberg Footwear Pty Ltd this week decided to buy the Victory Theatre, Blackheath, for their Mountains shoe factory".



Yeoman 1962



The final screening was announced for 21 May 1960, leaving time for one last hurrah, when the *Victory* (again in tandem with the *Savoy*) held the Mountains premiere, on May 6 and 7, of *On the Beach*. The *Blue Mountains Courier* did not even report the theatre's swansong, giving priority, in its "Higher Mountains Highlights" column, to "Prolonged excitement at Blackheath's New Ivanhoe Hotel when the canine pet Scamp had a litter of six puppies". Perhaps conversion of the community's hall into a shoe factory was properly seen as a "lowligh".

The shoe factory never did set foot in the theatre. It remained disused until December 1963, when briefly re-licensed for a New Year's Eve cabaret. It then changed hands twice, bought first by Emu Textiles then by Zenewig Boris, who leased it for small arts and craft stalls, but it made no money and ownership passed to Henry and Lois Collier in November 1977. By 1990 it was operating as a cheap bric-a-brac barn, barely more than an enclosed junk yard, and in 1991 it was damaged by fire.



Hydrant



Antique Centre

Refurbishment, including installation of a gallery level, commenced in mid-1996, and it reopened with yet another name change: the VICTORY THEATRE ANTIQUE CENTRE, where a few mementos of its former life are extant, including exposed sections of the 1954 proscenium splays and ... hidden behind the display at one ground level stall ... that fire hydrant, about which Reginald Delaney went so many rounds with the BFC in the 1920s, can still be seen.



Graeme Coss: Welcome back, I hope you enjoyed your lunch and are feeling refreshed.

Our next presentation is Blue Mountains Radio Players

THE BLUE MOUNTAINS RADIO PLAYERS

The Blue Mountains Radio Players group was formed more than 30 years ago by local resident and historian, Juliette Palmer-Frederick. Their first performance was in this Ballroom and, after that, at various venues. This year the Players have returned here to perform on the last Sunday of each month. Their artistic director is Diana Jeffrey. Over time, the Players have presented radio plays ancient and modern, comic and tragic, by a variety of authors international, Australian and local.

The fact that they have lasted for so many years is a good indication that they stick to the adage... “The show must go on.”

Today’s play is themed on family history, so fits the overall theme of our conference. It was written as a short piece by Colin Semmler, and although he says it is really a lot of nonsense, it does have room for a bit of philosophical food for thought.

So, sit back and relax as Blue Mountains Radio Players present, ‘*A Pair of Genes*’.



Graeme Coss: Our next presenter is Lowell Tarling

LOWELL TARLING

Reading the materials, I think one can summarise the accomplishments of Lowell quite simply: a writer extraordinaire, an editor extraordinaire, and a poetry reciter extraordinaire.

Now to learn a bit more about Lowell:

- Favourite Film?

I confess that Lowell's choice was not familiar to me, namely 'Howl', a 2010 film about the celebrated Allen Ginsburg poem. My first google search of the title brought up a 2015 British horror movie about werewolves attacking a train. I was relieved when I uncovered the reference to the other film.

- Favourite Music?

Lowell has something in common with Richard White, broad musical tastes and a love of Bob Dylan, for Lowell in particular, 'It's Alright Ma, I'm Only Bleeding'; and Lowell also loves Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata – although he adds, 'a bit'. A show of hands for lovers of these works? Thank you.

- Favourite Holiday Destination?

Lowell has chosen Paris – and yes, I see that's a favourite with many of you too.

- Other Career?

Lowell states that, like Keith Richards, he was a former 'failed librarian'.

- Other Light-Hearted information?

Lowell notes he's on the steering committee of Treeline Lurline – an important project to beautify Katoomba's iconic street.

Please welcome Lowell Tarling, whose topic today is: *'Blue Notes'*.

BLUE NOTES

Lowell Tarling

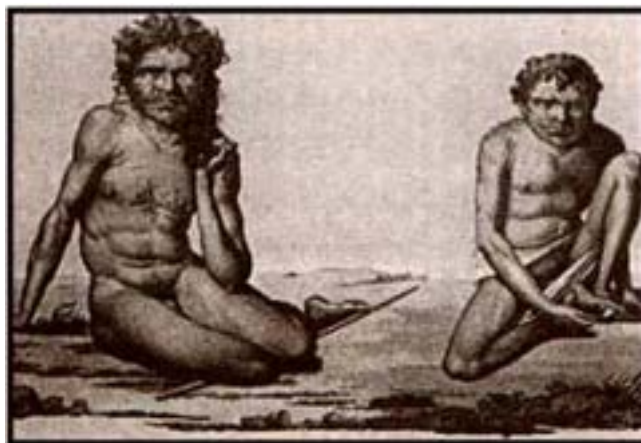
Writer, editor, artist

This is a historical look at artists in the Blue Mountains. It's historical but I'm not a historian, just someone who has collected pictures and poems about the environment in which we live because, as a writer and bit-painter, I'm interested in what has gone before.

I'm following my own curiosities rather than giving most famous the most space. The Charles Darwin Walk, Norman Lindsay Gallery and Varuna handle Darwin, Lindsay and the Darks in penetrating detail. Anyway, the number of Blue Mountains creatives is too long a list for my short talk, but it's a glorious one. One that namechecks Reg Livermore, Grace Cossington Smith, Kylie Tennant and even international musicians.

My most glaring omission are the indigenous artists whose art dates back at least 40,000 years. Many rock engravings and cave paintings are in closely guarded secret locations in order to preserve and protect them.

Pure Aboriginal culture did not survive long in this area after the crossing of the Blue Mountains. Disease is one reason for its disappearance. Another is that they migrated to escape white civilisation, leaving behind many artifacts. I searched for visual representations and found very little. This is a sketch of Hara-o and Karaora (courtesy of BMCC).



Hara-o and Karaora (courtesy of BMCC)

Gundungurra elder, **King Billy Lynch** was a stayer. He was a resident of the Gully, employed by the Police Department as a tracker. King Billy was held in high regard by the community at large. After his death, he was honoured with a poem published in *The Australian Worker* in November 1913. Written by 'RJC' the poem expresses the encroaching white civilisation and the retreat of nature.

You'll find details and images of King Billy on the signage around The Gully walk. This is a painting I did. It is held by his great-great grandson Jay Brooks Lane and Jay's mother Eileen.



The first writers in any area are diarists (like Darwin). Our first Blue Mountains publication would probably be *The Journal of Gregory Blaxland (1813)*.

In an age where people sketched what we'd now photograph, the first painter I could track down is **Elizabeth Macquarie**. I don't have a copy of her watercolour pictures, but we know she painted this area because there are records of her holding up her husband Governor Macquarie's expedition while the party waited for her to complete.

A View Near Grose Head (1809) by surveyor **George William Evans** was the earliest depiction I could find of this area. Evans was commissioned by Governor Macquarie to confirm Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth's 1813 crossing.



A View Near Grose Head – George William Evans 1809

The first professional artist to paint the Blue Mountains was English-born **John William Lewin**. In 1815 he was included in the official inspection party checking out the Mountains and places beyond. Of course, he did some pictures along the way.

The crossing of the Blue Mountains was a perceived act of heroism, celebrated by artists and poets. Never one to miss an opportunity to enhance his legend, in 1823 -

while at Cambridge University - **William Charles Wentworth** penned a poem titled *Australasia* in which he celebrated the event in which he was a major player. The poem was published in *The Sydney Gazette* in 1824. It's the earliest Blue Mountains poem I could track down.



Blue Mountains by John William Lewin 1815

Completed in 1832, the Victoria Pass was seen as something of a marvel. In 1835, Assistant Surveyor-General **William Romaine Govett** painted *Accident on the Road at Victoria Pass*.



Accident on the Road at Victoria Pass by William Romaine Govett

Here are two more paintings of the same area. The first, a watercolour by **Eliza Thurston** is simply titled *Victoria Pass* and painted in 1861.



Victoria Pass by Eliza Thurston

And this is Mount Victoria painted by a shipping agent **TG Sawkins** in 1862.



Mount Victoria by TG Sawkins

This is *Govett's Leap* by solicitor, **George Penkivil Slade** painted in 1868.



Govett's Leap by George Penkivil Slade (1868)

Vienna-born **Eugene von Guerard** grew up with art. His father was a painter of miniatures at the court of Emperor Francis I of Austria. Eugene studied painting at the Dusseldorf Academy and came to Australia in the mid-1850s. By the early 1860s he was recognized as the country's foremost landscape painter.

In 1873 he painted *Govett's Leap and the Grose River Valley*, a masterwork that you would have seen exhibited at the opening exhibition of the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre in 2012.



Govett's Leap and the Grose River Valley by Eugene von Guerard

Australia's foremost poet of the time, **Henry Kendall** was also attracted by the Blue Mountains as gateway to the west.

Like many, the crossing was - in his eyes - a mighty act of bravery. His poem *Blue Mountains Pioneers* was published in the *Sydney Mail* in 1880 and published alongside a lithograph with the same name, by **M Emile Ulm**.



The Blue Mountains Pioneers by M Emile Ulm, 1880

The poem and the lithograph depict reaching the summit of the expedition in full glory. The poet likened the crossing to mighty deeds of the Roman Empire, consciously building on Wentworth's fantasy in which the crossing is likened to the Biblical reaching of Canaan – the Promised Land. The lithograph adopts the same victorious tone.

Sir Henry Parkes was another Blue Mountains poet. Or, at least, a wannabe poet. One might be forgiven for seeing him as a *poet manqué* rather than a successful politician.

In 1885, George Robertson published a volume of Parkes' poems titled *The Beauteous Terrorist and Other Poems* in which he celebrates the Blue Mountains in a poem titled *Solitude*. Parkes lived in Faulconbridge where he is buried.



Sir Henry Parkes and his grave/memorial, Faulconbridge NSW

And then – and much more significantly - came **Henry Lawson** whose writings are down-to-earth and never vainglorious.

Lawson's stature as a national poet seems to override his connection to Mt Victoria-Blackheath-Katoomba. Our shire seems reticent to claim him as one of our own. Notwithstanding Lawson's legendary status as Australia's greatest short story writer, there is no Henry Lawson stone at Echo Point. And the Henry Lawson Walk in Mt Vic is unwelcoming due to the obscuring of the defined path by encroaching residential gardens.

Henry started out in Mt Victoria as a painter: a house painter - working for his father Neils (who is buried in the cemetery at the foot of Mt York). The Kanimbla Valley inspired his earliest poems, among them *The Blue Mountains*, and later the famous *Ghost at the Second Bridge*, about a woman who was murdered at Victoria Pass.

Some people feel that dismissing this victim as just '*a woman*' is offensive. Murdered at 17 near the convict stone bridge at the foot of the Pass, Caroline Collits (née James) is remembered only for being murdered.

Attempting to fill in the gaps, student and writer **Laura Greaves** has written her doctoral thesis about the woman in Lawson's *Ghost at The Second Bridge*. Who killed her? Why is her history so scant? Greaves wanted to give Caroline Collits a life. Her thesis is sometimes speculative but at least it puts flesh on the bones.



Laura Greaves interview by Michelle Rickerby at the Avalon (2000)

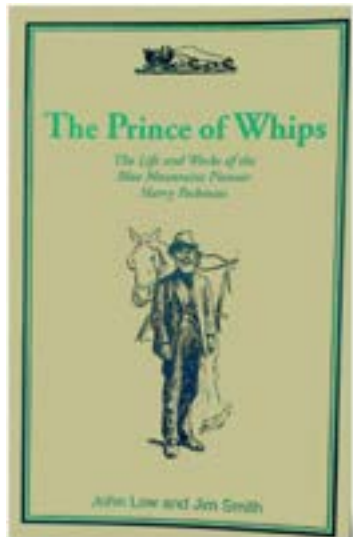
When Henry Lawson wasn't working as a housepainter for dad, he lived with his mum Louisa in Sydney's inner-west where she established Australia's first feminist paper *The Dawn*. She also founded a suffragette group and is acknowledged as Australia's first feminist activist. While living with mum, Henry worked at the Clyde railway yards where he wrote the Arvie Aspinall stories about working for the Grinder Brothers (actually the Hudsons – artist Martin Sharp's ancestors).



Lawson's Cottage, Mt Vic

The book *Henry Lawson by His Mates* has a reminiscence about Henry waking his friends at midnight to accompany him on a walk to Govett's Leap where they sat together, laughed and drank.

Henry was an alcoholic. In a last desperate attempt to dry out, he moved into a boarding house in Leichhardt Street Katoomba in mid-1922. He befriended the local horse-cab driver, **Harry Peckman**, also a poet (whose poems are published in John Low & Jim Smith's biography of Peckman *The Prince of Whips*). Lawson returned to Sydney and died in Abbotsford in the same year. Peckman commemorated his mate in a poem in the book.



The Prince of Whips by John Low and Jim Smith

In the same year as the publication of Lawson's *Ghost at the Second Bridge* (1891) Australian Expressionist painter **Arthur Streeton** came to Sydney from Melbourne where he, Tom Roberts, Charles Conder, Fred McCubbin established the Heidelberg School of Australian art.

Streeton's *Golden Summers* picture was the first painting by an Australian-born artist to be exhibited at London's Royal Academy.

While his fame was spreading overseas, and in the wake of an economic depression in Melbourne, Streeton sailed to Sydney where he continued his *plein air* painting, around the harbour, the Hawkesbury River, and towards the end of that same year Streeton rented a cottage located by the Glenbrook station master's house with the intention of painting a panoramic view of the plain looking east across the Sydney Basin. He painted the masterpiece *Fire's On* instead.

'Fire's On!' was the warning call before a blast as the gang dynamited the Lapstone Tunnel through the hillside. Streeton captured a critical moment in the construction of the western railway line. The picture is on view in the Art Gallery of New South Wales.



Fire's On



Sketch 1891

Born in the 1870s, **Harry Phillips** was an early 20th century professional photographer who lived in Katoomba. He became a postcard photographer with a studio in Katoomba Street where his bread-and-butter tourist work produced nearly 100 view books, souvenirs of royal visits, anniversaries and local occasions. He also took some extraordinary images of clouds and mist.

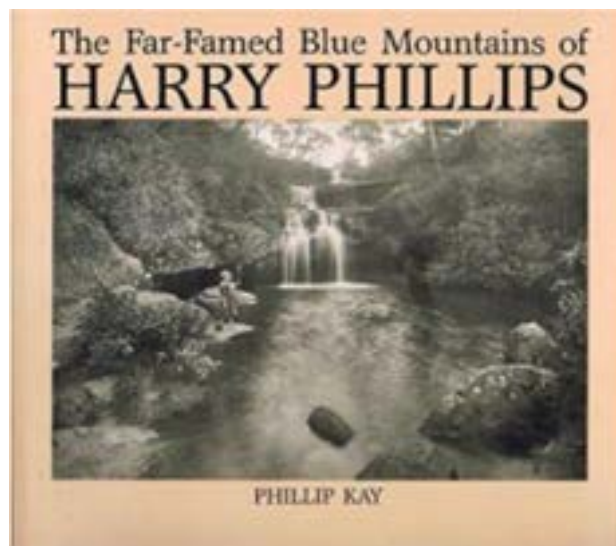
His most famous photo *War Clouds* was taken in 1909. It's a natural image of a sky containing three black clouds in which he discerned the forms of the German Eagle with a woman (Belgium) clutched in its talons. Harry believed the photo was a prophetic indicator of a great war with Germany. He presented the picture to Lord Kitchener, Lord Roberts and King George.



War Clouds by Harry Phillips 1909

A mural based on one of his 'waterfall' photos is deteriorating on the wall of the Commonwealth Bank in Katoomba Street.

Harry Phillips books are well-prized by collectors. If you can find one, buy it. They are scarce but should only cost you around \$50.



The Far-Famed Blue Mountains of Harry Phillips (1985) by Phillip Kay

Published in 1894, *Seven Little Australians* sealed Ethel Turner's legend as a major writer. Her home was on Sydney's North Shore, but she had a second home in Balmoral Avenue Leura. Novelist, journalist and poet, **Zora Cross** of Glenbrook, was among Turner's acolytes. Cross has never been given her due as a significant poet because her work was deemed as erotic:

*There Venus holds Adonis by the hair
And drains his sweetness til he fain would die.*

Norman Lindsay was amongst those who were scandalised, believing that women should never write about sex. Perhaps Zora Cross will gain the recognition she deserves thanks to her recently published biography *The Shelf Life of Zora Cross* (2021) by Cathy Perkins.

Much has been said about Faulconbridge resident Norman Lindsay, less sublime. Like his brother, Lionel was outspoken against Modernism. The five Lindsay siblings seemed to have a stranglehold on Australian art.

Among Lionel's famous friends was the Mayor of Sydney and owner of the Carrington, Sir James Joynton Smith. While visiting his friend, Lionel did the drawing of the Carrington as seen here, in the hallway.

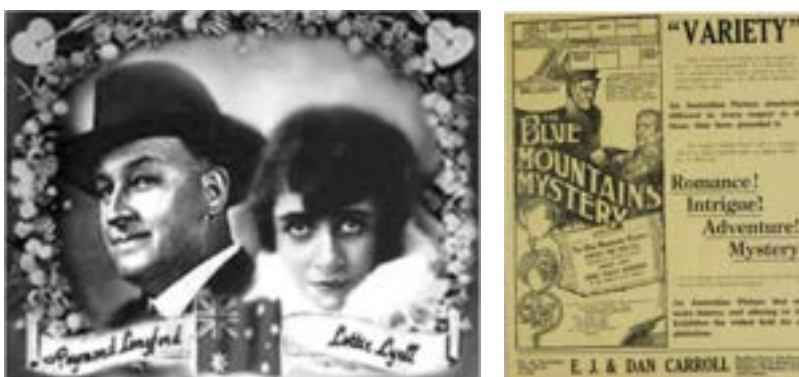


Macaws (1920) and The Carrington by Lionel Lindsay

In the 1910s when the film industry was in its infancy, **Lottie Lyell** was a big star. She debuted in 1911 and her reputation grew and grew. *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919) was one highlight. A centenary screening was held in this room in 2019. Lottie Lyell and her partner Raymond Longford's close association with the Blue Mountains was largely to treat the tuberculosis that killed her by the age of 35.

While convalescing here in 1920, Lottie adapted her next screenplay *The Blue Mountains Mystery* from Harrison Owen's novel, *The Mount Marunga Mystery*, which she and Raymond directed together in 1921, one year before she died. Key scenes were filmed at the Carrington.

Lyell took the female lead in 14 films. She mostly performed her own stunts, co-directed, edited, wrote and co-wrote as many films. But the passing of time has diminished her reputation as a pioneer.



Raymond Longford and Lottie Lyell – ad for *Blue Mountains Mystery*

Many film clips, ads and feature films have been shot in the Blue Mountains, the Carrington and Narrow Neck being so photogenic. *The Coca Cola Kid*, *Tomorrow When the War Began*, Pugsley Buzzard's gangster-styled *Chicago Typewriter*. It's a long list.

Time does not permit me to outline the cavalcade of talent that has spawned since this area, so I'd like to present three favourites.

Beamed to an international audience of two billion people to mark the new millennium, the graffito *Eternity* is indisputably this nation's most enduring visual image. For 35 years, its instigator, **Arthur Stace**, chalked that work some half a million times near railway stations, so people could see it as they commuted to work.



Katoomba *Eternity* by Lowell Tarling (2020)

His biography, *Mr Eternity*, by Roy Williams & Elizabeth Meyers described Stace chalking the word near Katoomba Station, close to a Christian outlet that gave free cups of tea to early-morning travellers. Intrigued, I contacted our local Christian organisations who knew nothing of the event nor the precise location of the Christian tearoom and - wishing to stake a local claim in the *Eternity* story - I painted the picture of Stace writing the word at our railway crossing.

Katoomba has many talented local artists. Too many to list without risking leaving someone out who matters very much. But when Robbie and I moved here we were intrigued by **Malcolm King's** retro-style posters because they captured the spirit of the place with a nod to its past.

You can see his posters in the Carrington loungeroom. They can be purchased in postcard size and other formats at the Cultural Centre. I've not met Malcolm King, but I'm sure several present here today have.



Blue Mountains Travel Posters (1988) Malcolm King

Another artist I have never met is **Roman Grygg**. He sketched the poetic goings-on at what was the *Parakeet Café* (now *Bang Bowls*) but then, a regular meeting place for local poets.

This was the brainchild of poet **Denis Kevans** who is well-remembered today. Kevans' involvement in poetry – especially performance poetry – goes back to the late-1960s when he spoke out against irresponsible development, the destruction of the environment and other issues usually identified with Leftist politics.

Having moved to Katoomba, Kevans approached café-owner Glenda Rice and asked if they might allow regular poetry evenings in their café.

Since Kevans' untimely death, that reading group continues to this day, with *Poets at the Pub* held on the second Sunday of each month at the Family Hotel Katoomba. It has evolved from Bush Poetry to include other forms – all are welcome. The full name of that gathering is the '*Denis Kevans' Poets in the Pub*'.

The core group included Brian Bell, Paddy Cavanagh, Milton Taylor, Wyn Jones, Kevin Campbell, Bill Rummery, Greg North and Glenda's husband Denis Rice.



Poets at the Parakeet Café by Roman Grygg

Another commemoration of Denis is the Saturday Morning Poet's Breakfast at the annual Blue Mountains Music Festival. It is known as the *Denis Kevans' Poets Breakfast* where Wyn Jones invariably reads Kevans' much-loved poem *Concreto*. Denis Kevans has a stone along Echo Point's Writers Walk.



*The Lurline Street building from which
the Blue Mountains Music Festival is organized*

Finally, I'd like to come right up to date with three Blue Mountains art pieces.

'What is this?' I ask people, as I show them a picture on my phone.

'A photo of the Three Sisters,' they reply.

'Wrong,' I laugh, satisfied that they have fallen into my trap. 'It's **Lego**,' (at the Lego Shop in Penrith).



Lego Penrith

During the course of my involvement in the Treeline Lurline project, I have gathered art, poetry and expressions of creativity that emphasise the importance of beautifying Lurline Street.

To my delight, when **Mic Conway** (Captain Matchbox Whoopee Band and the National Junk Band) recently moved here, he volunteered to write what he calls 'a love song to Katoomba'. If you haven't already heard it, you'll find it on our treelinelurline.org website.



'Katoomba' - a song by Mic Conway

As I mentioned towards the start of this talk, Victoria Pass has always been of fascination to regional artists.

A goat – Garry – was recently spotted grazing by the side of the road and became a welcome sight to drivers. Sadly, in 2024 he was struck by a vehicle, rushed to a Hartley Valley vet who could not save him.

Garry's death sparked an outpouring of grief from the local community, one of whom commemorated **Garry the Goat** with this sketch.



Garry the Goat (2024) – Facebook picture

The vet clinic is in discussion with NSW Transport and other stakeholders into erecting a permanent memorial to Garry the Goat as 'an important part of our community'.



Graeme Coss: Our next presenter is Lorraine Corne

LORRAINE CORNE

When you read Lorraine's biographical information, you'll appreciate her distinguished career as a psychologist. And when looking for a history and Blue Mountains link, her strong family connection with Katoomba cinemas becomes apparent.

Now to learn a bit more about Lorraine:

- Favourite Film?

I was moved to note that Lorraine has chosen the film that was also my late wife's favourite, 'Singing in the Rain' – also celebrated film critic David Stratton's favourite film. A show of hands please? Ah yes, many of you.

- Favourite Music?

Again, Lorraine's musical tastes are broad. She nominated 'Grease'; the 'Time Warp' from 'Rocky Horror'; David Bowie's 'China Girl' – I've been noting the number of hands shooting up enthusiastically; and lastly, Puccini's 'Nessun Dorma' from 'Turandot' – and yes, many heads nodding in agreement there.

- Favourite Holiday Destination?

Lorraine has chosen Fiji. Anyone else love Fiji?

- Other Career?

Lorraine will be pleased or perhaps horrified to learn that Acting is also the career I would have chosen.

- Other Light-Hearted information?

Lorraine confessed that she loves dancing, has a wicked sense of humour, enjoys life, and is a bit of an outlier – and I'm sure many of us can identify with most of those.

Please welcome Lorraine Corne whose topic today is: *'Hollywood Comes to the Blue Mountains'*.

HOLLYWOOD COMES TO THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

Lorraine Corne

Psychologist, historian

Hello, my name is Lorraine Corne. I attended Katoomba High School from 1960-1964. I was not remembered for my academic brilliance, my dance skills or my sporting achievements. I became unforgettable for a single act of generosity. At the end of 5th year, I gave each of my teachers a jackpot lottery ticket. To everyone's amazement Mrs. Williams, the French teacher won 1st prize – 30,000 pounds. Mr. Reinhardt and Miss Armstrong both won 500 pounds each, being on either side of the winning ticket. My father, Leslie, had bought the winning ticket the week before and gave it to my mother, Sheila, for her birthday. Two weeks in a row my father bought the winning ticket – unheard of. I featured on the front of the Australian newspaper. And that, more than any talent or skill, is how I am remembered in Katoomba. So, you can say my family and the teachers were lucky. Well, that seems to be the theme running through cinemas – luck-- -- but sometimes it runs out.

I want to give you three gifts today. 1. the historic buildings, 2. the people involved in the cinema business and 3. the beautiful people on the screen. Imagine it is 100 years ago. The streets are quieter; the air is crisp with the scent of eucalyptus. People are dressed in their Sunday best, excited for a night out. The magic of cinema has just begun to sweep across Australia and here in the Blue Mountains these grand picture houses became more than just buildings – they are windows to the world, bringing stories, glamour and adventure to our local communities. Today we will explore the history of these beloved cinemas, their cultural significance and the role they played in shaping life in the Blue Mountains.

Agenda

1. The buildings by age and use
2. The silent movies to the talkies
3. The Corne family
4. Star memories
5. What was done when the customers don't come
6. The Demise and resurrection

Lawson Community Hall

Lawson Community Hall first screened silent movies in the 1910's and first talkies in 1933. It is now heritage listed. It was built around 1900 and was called the Lawson Mechanics Institute. The name was changed to the Lawson Literary Institute in 1911. It was partially used as a cinema for Talkies but then the hall was closed for a year. It reopened after refurbishment in 1934. It closed in 1958 for some 30 years until the name was changed to Lawson Community Centre in the 1980's. It was saved from demolition by a Heritage Listing in 2008. It is still used today as an entertainment venue.



The Most Famous Stars of the Silent Screen

Silent movie stars were larger than life figures who had to rely entirely on their physicality, body language and facial expressions to convey emotion and tell a story. The Golden Age of silent cinema 1910's to late 1920's produced legendary stars such as Charlie Chaplin, who blended comedy and pathos, Mary Pickford, America's little sweetheart, who also co-founded United Artists, Rudolph Valentino, the ultimate romantic leading man, and Lillian Gish, regarded as the 'First Lady of Cinema' who died at 100 in 1993.



Hazelbrook Boy Scouts Hall built 1928

This was designed for group meetings and used as a part-time cinema. It was rented to exhibitor Reginald Golby during the 1930's to form part of his circuit servicing small BM townships. The first talkies were screened there in 1933. The scouts moved premises many years ago. The venue no longer is used as a cinema but is a venue for commercial or retailing functions.



Glenbrook Cinema opened in 1928

The Glenbrook Cinema operated as the School of Arts Hall until early 1950's.

It is located on the corner of the Great Western Highway and Ross Street.

It was opened as a cinema in 1928 with seating for 380. It operated under this name into at least the 1950's. It has now been renamed as The Glenbrook Cinema and operates from 10am to 9pm most days.



Mt Vic Flicks

The Mount Victoria Public Hall opened in 1934. It is a typical example of a country 'picture hall'. There is a paybox at the entrance and no foyer, as once you pass through the doors you are inside the auditorium. Seating is on one level and there is no rake to the floor. The candy counter is located beside the screen and is open prior to the start of the programme. By 1951 it was operating as the Institute Cinema. The cinema was re-established in 1987 and operates as a family-owned single screen, now known as Mt Vic Flicks.



Liberty Theatre Leura 1941-1959

This was built as a Masonic Hall in 1920's. It was originally known as The Civic prior to 1937. It was called the Liberty from 1941 and ran as a cinema until 1959. It was used as a roller-skating rink and for karate classes. It was demolished in 1993, and a cottage has been built on the site.



Riversdale

Riversdale was built in 1912 and was the house that was demolished to make way for the Embassy Theatre, formally known as The Empire Theatre.



The Embassy Theatre Katoomba 1915-1954

Originally opened on 16th January 1915 as the 1000 seat Empire Picture Theatre Palace, it was remodelled in 1936 in an Art Deco style by noted architectural firm, Crick and Furse, who were also working on the Savoy cinema just along the road. It opened as the Embassy Cinema on 17th December 1937.

It was closed during the worst of the winter months. It closed permanently in 1954 soon after the Queen visited Katoomba and Echo Point. I chose to see 'Annie Get Your Gun' showing at the Embassy rather than go with my parents to visit the Queen!



Coles purchased the building and converted the cinema into a retail store. The art deco features gave the building its specialness and the auditorium decorations still exist above the false ceiling which has been inserted.

The Victory Theatre 1917

This was formerly known as THE ARCADIA PICTURE PALACE, shown 2 years after being built, standing in Govetts Leap Road, Blackheath. 2015 marked its centenary. Over time

it has received extensive renovations, including heating, modifications to the washrooms, and a new screen.



The Victory Theatre Blackheath 1915-1960

The theatre was sold to Otto Camphin, Blue Mountains Enterprises Pty Ltd in 1945 and he changed the name of the building to the Victory Theatre, possibly in response to the end of WW2. The company was then sold to the Corne family in 1951. Guy Crick was engaged to design alterations to the theatre, and the foyer was remodelled, a manager's office added, installation of a new auditorium ceiling and the fitting of an outside awning. The works were completed in 1954. Due to declining audiences, the cinema closed at the end of May 1960. Nowadays it operates as a large antiques store, café and art gallery.



The Skating Rink

Here is a photo of the original skating rink built where the Savoy Theatre now stands. The Savoy Theatre Katoomba was built as an amusement hall under the name of the King's Theatre. Its basement was used as a skating rink and powerhouse. The first floor contained the theatre and was used for a variety of entertainments including silent

films. It was leased from Katoomba Amusements by Joynton Smith who owned the Empire Cinema down the road. The King's Theatre was used mostly as a dance hall, installing a manager by the name of Otto Camphin. Otto bought it for £20,000 and altered it in 1922 with shops and a Palais de Dance.



Savoy Cinema 1936-1977, the Trocadero Theatrette 1945-1965

The Olde King's Theatre was demolished in 1935 and became the site of the new Savoy Theatre. It was owned by Otto Camphin's business, Katoomba Theatres Limited. The Gala Opening on 18 December 1936 showed 'Swing Time' with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. A huge neon sign adorned its art deco façade. It was opened by the Mayor of the Blue Mountains, Alderman W Soper. Air conditioning was installed in 1937. In 1945 the Trocadero, seating 225, was built in the basement. The Corne Family purchased the five cinemas that were working viably from Otto Camphin in 1951. They were the Savoy, the Trocadero, the Embassy, the Liberty and the Victory. Soon after the Corne Family took over there was a demonstration at the Savoy. Boos and hisses greeted the appearance of Robert Menzies in a Newsreel.



Film Projectors

Carbon Arc Projectors were used from the 1920's to the 1950's. They were tricky to use because they could suffer problems such as film breakages, heat damage, flickering,

alignment, reel changes, scratches and dust, sound synchronisation issues, bulb failures, film jams and fire hazards.



Savoy Theatre's Main Auditorium

Cinemascope was installed in September 1954. Many Blockbuster Movies and Musicals were shown, all popular until television arrived when locals preferred to stay at home at night.

Before the fire and after the fire in 1982

The cinemas had finally closed their doors 10 years after television arrived. The Savoy and the Trocadero were sold to Theo Morris who also bought The Carrington Hotel.



The Foyer of the Savoy

As luck would have it this beautiful foyer was not burnt. The theatre is listed in the National Trust. The Avalon restaurant occupies the former dress circle.



Clash Over Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

Affiliated enterprises had been formed to conduct a picture circuit at Leura, Lawson, Wentworth Falls and Glenbrook. Otto Camphin had tried to get 'Snow White' for his theatres in Katoomba. He had to accept the terms which would mean he had to charge 10/- per seat. There was a £2,000 damages claim in the Court. Affiliated Enterprises Pty Ltd alleged libel against Otto Camphin of Katoomba Theatres Pty Ltd. As Otto Camphin owned the Katoomba Newspaper, he refused to advertise the film being shown in Leura. As a matter of fact, it stated loudly that the film would not be shown in Leura.



Shirley Temple Photos 1937

Shirley Temple photos were offered in 1937 at the Savoy Theatre as she was the most popular star around at the time and everyone queued to see her. It was a very good promotion.



Cinemascope – 'The Student Prince'

Cinemascope arrived at the Savoy Theatre on 10 October 1954 with the grand opening of 'The Student Prince' starring Ann Blyth and Edmund Purdom.



Movies

- 1952 – Singing in the Rain with Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds
- 1953 – Gentlemen Prefer Blondes with Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell
- 1954 – Calamity Jane with Doris Day
- 1955 – Oklahoma with Shirley Jones
- 1956 – The King and I with Yul Brynner and Deborah Kerr
- 1961 – West Side Story with Natalie Wood and George Chakiris
- 1964 – The Sound of Music with Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer



The Ten Commandments

Katoomba cinemas were packed out to see Charlton Heston in The Ten Commandments In 1956.



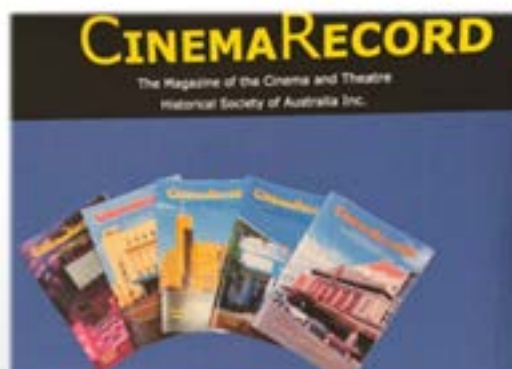
Ben Hur

Ben Hur starring Charlton Heston was sold out in the Trocadero in 1959.



Advertising

This was an example of the type of advertising screenings present. No pictures. No colour. Very plain.



The Corne Family Arrives 1951

Max Corne had a vision for his sons as the UK had food rationing for some time after the war. He had been in the cinema industry since 1933 in the Wales and Monmouth area of the UK. He travelled to South Africa but did not like the Government and Apartheid, so he came to Australia. The cinemas were doing so well that no one in Sydney would sell to him. Finally, Otto Camphin agreed to sell his five cinemas in the Blue Mountains. On returning to Cardiff, Wales, he sent my father out to run them, accompanied by three of his brothers.



The Corne Family Christmas 1953



Gerald Corne (1926-2023) and wife, Sybil

Gerald was the architect who designed the Katoomba St Rotary clock.

GERALD CORNE (1926-2023) AND WIFE, SYBIL.



Elizabeth Taylor 1932-2011

Due to Leslie Corne's contacts in the movie industry, when he and Sheila travelled to Hollywood in Los Angeles and Pinewood Studios in London they were introduced to Elizabeth Taylor, Gregory Peck, Agnes Moorhead, Dean Martin and Charlton Heston.



Dean Martin 1917 - 1995

Dean debuted in films in 1949 with Jerry Lewis.



Agnes Moorhead 1900 - 1974

Agnes was a character actress best known for her role in 'Bewitched'.



Gregory Peck 1916 - 2003

He was best known for his role in 'To Kill a Mocking Bird'.



Charlton Heston 1923 -2008 – an autographed photo

(No notes)



Brigitte Bardot

Brigitte Bardot brought a collective intake of breath at the Savoy theatre when she stepped into a bath naked in the film 'And God Created Woman'.

The Historic Epic 'Quo Vadis'

Filmed in Technicolor, first screened in 1951. It was sold out at the Savoy Theatre in 1952. A themed ball was held at the Trocadero.



Quo Vadis Ball at the Trocadero in 1952

A themed ball was a very exciting night, everyone dressing as Romans.



The Rotary Golden Ball was held in the Trocadero Theatre 1953

Pictured are Sheila and Leslie Corne, the Browns and the Colless's.



Bobby Limb's 'Sound of Music'

As luck would have it, the Savoy Theatre was built with a deep stage, so my father brought up acts like Bobby Limb and the 'Sound of Music'. He had to earn an income, and customers were not coming so he tried live theatre.



Johnny O'Connor

One of the first rock and roll singers on television performed at the Savoy Theatre. He often performed with the Bobby Limb Band.



Ray Hoff and the 'Off Beats'

Ray Hoff and the Off Beats were a rock and roll group and scored a hit with their 'Bama Lama Bama Loo'.



Buster Fiddess, Comedian

Buster Fiddess was an Australian actor who appeared in films 'Wake in Fright', 'Homicide' and 'Spyforce'. He worked as a comedian on the Bobby Lim Show with Dawn Lake and the Delltones.



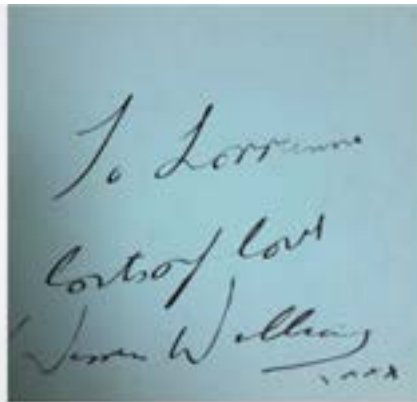
The Crescents 1958

The Crescents were another rock and roll group from 1950-1965 who reached the top ten with their single 'Mr Blue'.



Warren Williams and 'The Squares'

Warren Williams was a prolific song writer in the 1950s. He went on to have a solo career.



The Vienna Boys Choir

The Vienna Boys Choir performed at the Savoy Theatre in the 1960s.



Leslie & Sheila Corne, Mayor & Mayoress of the Blue Mountains 1960

Leslie was elected Mayor of the Blue Mountains Council at age 39. He was the youngest Mayor on record at the time.



The Skyrider Motel built 1960

1960 was a busy year for Leslie and Sheila. They were just building the Sky Rider Motel on the corner of the Great Western Highway and Narrow Neck Road, Katoomba. As the cinemas were doing so badly, they sold their house to obtain the deposit to start building a business that was not in the industry. They leased the front of the property to Caltex for a service station. They had luck with the motel as it was practically 100% occupied from the day it opened. They sold it to move to Sydney to enable me to study at university.



Cinema's demise and resurgence

We need to remember the cinemas today more than ever because of the changes in society, e.g. fragmentation of community, streaming on demand and individuals without community. The cinemas demise was on the one hand gradual and on the other very sudden.



You had to be very lucky to succeed. However, being involved with the iconic buildings, the beautiful people on the screen and having sufficient income kept the owners going. Due to the introduction of television, the inclement weather keeping people at home and the opening of drive ins in Penrith and Blacktown, appealing to the younger generation, the bell was tolling for the traditional cinema of old. We need to remember this moment in time because it was not just entertainment, it was romantic, and it was fun. We will never forget that.



Graeme Coss: Our final presenter today is Robyne Ridge

ROBYNE RIDGE

Robyne's career was involved in schooling, and, as many of you will appreciate, she is a well-known and respected figure in Blue Mountains history circles.

Now to learn a bit more about Robyne:

- Favourite Film?

Rather than films, Robyne chose to nominate the following TV series: *Slow Horses*, *Vera*, and *Midsomer Murders* – and yes, I can see that most of you are with Robyne on these choices.

- Favourite Music?

Hands up Gershwin fans? Thank you. Well, Robyne is with you, nominating his *Rhapsody in Blue*, and his *Concerto in F*.

- Favourite Holiday Destination?

When I saw Robyne's choices, I thought, Wow, this woman has travelled. In Australia Robyne nominated Noosa. In Europe she chose London and Barcelona. And for more exotic destinations, Robyne acknowledges that she loved Tibet and Bhutan. Who's been to Tibet or to Bhutan? Not many!

- Other Career?

Remembering her TV series choices, unsurprisingly Robyne would have liked to be a Policewoman, but laments that she wasn't tall enough!

- Other Light-Hearted information?

I'm pleased to say that Robyne truly entered into the spirit of this. She loves: reading, though her eyesight is increasingly a challenge; coffees first and last thing; looking at gardens, not working in them (I'm with you there Robyne); immersing herself in Trove; and surprising shop assistants when paying by tapping her phone. All wonderful!

Please welcome Robyne Ridge. Her topic today is: *'The Night Katoomba Partied'*.

THE NIGHT KATOOMBA PARTIED – New Year’s Eve in Katoomba

ROBYNE RIDGE

(Historian, researcher, writer)

This is an analysis of Trove from the beginnings of Katoomba in the 1870s with the work on the western line, the naming of the area the Crushers in 1874 and the renaming of the area Katoomba in 1877. Trove research ended roughly around 1954 and research via the Mountain Gazette, later the Blue Mountains Gazette, began in 1963. We also have photographs, some from the BMHS Collection, others from BMCC Local Studies and still others via Philip Hammon’s scanning of so many images from Souvenir Snapshots.

What my research has shown is that nothing is really 100% reliable. Photo captions may not be true; at least Souvenir Snapshots have dates written at the time of taking the photos. People’s memories are a bit elastic at times. I am hoping that the conclusions drawn from newspaper reports are not too wildly inaccurate. And even they are affected by Trove’s algorithms.

This is the full text of my research into New Year’s Eve in Katoomba. For the purposes of the Conference on 10 May, I picked highlights from this report to fit into the time limit. My search began with 1887, the earliest date Trove could find mentioning New Year’s Eve and Katoomba, the two search words I used throughout. I did not throw in revels or the Festival of Time, nor Mardi Gras which emerged in 1985.



Figure 1: Essendene 1890s

On New Year’s Eve, 1887, J B North entertained a largish group at his home, Essendene, and many people, including the North guests, attended the watch-night services at St Hilda’s and the other churches. There was no mention of crowds in the streets in these early newspapers. (*Nepean Times Saturday 8 January 1887 - Pages 3 and 6 and Australian Town and Country Journal Saturday 15 January 1887 - Page 35*)

This is indeed the earliest activity in Katoomba on New Year’s Eve that I was able to find in Trove.

In 1888 the attraction was the Carrington. "A most enjoyable social was given here (Katoomba) on New Year's Eve by the ladies of the 'Carrington'. There were thirty couples present. Many of the dresses looked charming." (*Nepean Times Saturday 5 January 1889 - Page 4*):

On New Year's Eve, 1889, a man with an umbrella and a blue swag was the only reference other than watchnight services.

This man was making his way to the Katoomba Railway Station while Constable Hamilton was reading a telegram. The policeman then held up his head and had a look at the man with the swag, tapped him on the shoulder, and told him he was wanted for stealing a bag, a lady's umbrella, and fancy-dress ring. Although the man, William Arthur Paul, had a swag with him, he did not seem at all used to "humping bluey". After detaining the alleged culprit at the railway Station (there being no lockup in Katoomba), Constable Hamilton conveyed his prisoner to Penrith. When brought before the Police Court prisoner trembled so from the effects of drink that he was remanded till next afternoon. He stole the umbrella from Mrs. McAveney, of Katoomba; a bag from Mr. Sewell's bedroom at Mount Victoria, turned over a hawker's outfit; and has a walking stick that does not belong to him. Prisoner was ultimately sentenced to three months in Parramatta Goal and will afterwards be taken to Lithgow to answer other charges. (*Katoomba Times Saturday 4 January 1890*).

A rather dismal New year for Mr Paul and no mention at this stage of any other activities.



Figure 2: 1890s Police Patrol at New Year

In 1892, both Mt Victoria and Blackheath advertised New Year's Eve balls, but Katoomba appeared quieter.

Monday January 1 was a quiet day in Katoomba. New Year's Eve had also passed off very quietly.

1894 was welcomed with a watch-night service at St. Hilda's, Katoomba, on New Year's Eve, when the vicar (Rev. J. H. Maclean) gave a short address being on the occasion. The new year was announced by the singing of Jackson's 'Te Deum'. At the close of the service the celebration of the Holy Communion was administered to a goodly number of communicants. (*The Mountaineer Friday 4 January 1895 - page 2*).

In 1895, Katoomba was a busier place.

The Katoomba Brass Band held a plain and fancy-dress ball on New Year's Eve to procure funds for uniforms. (*The Mountaineer Friday 13 December 1895 - Page 3*). Katoomba was crowded. As the people left the trains and numbers gathered round the station to meet their friends on each arrival on New Year's Eve — the 'Fish' train having run in three divisions — the vicinity of the local station was quite citified, and this was emphasized on New Year's Day which was a very successful day for Katoomba. On New Year's Eve many of the residents assembled in front of Mr B. A. Atwell's chemist shop to witness the ascent of a large paper balloon, measuring 9 feet high and 16 feet in diameter. It was a beautiful sight. Attached to the balloon was a light which gave out many colours. Those who saw the sight were very much pleased and many who did not were disappointed. The balloon went far up into space and the night and took a south-westerly course. It reflected much credit on Mr Atwell. (*The Mountaineer Friday 3 January 1896 - Page 2*)

In 1897, New Year's Eve passed off very quietly. Of course, according to the paper, the usual amusements (?) of upsetting the street-seats, taking gates off their hinges, etc., were indulged in, but no very serious damage was done. The more sober portion of the community spent the last hour of the old year in different places of worship. The Carrington hotel and grounds were brilliantly illuminated with Chinese lanterns, etc; the effect was very pretty and drew a large crowd to admire. There was no amusement of any sort in any of the halls on New Year's Eve or night. (*Lithgow Mercury Friday 7 January 1898 - Page 6*).

1898 may well have been an interesting New Year's Eve. Firstly, there was a little larrikinism in the shape of removing gates and portable articles, but the police kept too sharp a lookout for the idiotic practices to be carried too far. Secondly, the number of visitors for the Christmas holidays was 1603, while for the New Year holidays 1293 arrived, making a total of 2690. (*The Mountaineer Friday 6 January 1899 - Page 2*) Thirdly, several lads were brought up at the Police Court on Wednesday for riotous behaviour on New Year's Eve. They were lectured by the Bench and fined 6s 6d each. (*Lithgow Mercury Friday 13 January 1899 - Page 5*)

1899 was quiet in Katoomba. "The New Year holidays passed off very quietly this year. There were a good number of people but not nearly so many as at Christmas time. On Saturday night (30 December) good business was done in the various stores and hotels which stayed open to 10.00 pm, and the local band enlivened the proceedings somewhat. On Sunday (31 December) the churches were very crowded, and appropriate New Year services were conducted. Watchnight services were held in the several churches, and the new year was ushered in very sedately. The band played round the streets, but there was a total absence of the usual horseplay generally indulged in by the rowdy element. The mountain mist falling at midnight perhaps had a depressing influence. (*Lithgow Mercury Friday 5 January 1900 - Page 3*)

The 1900s were introduced to Katoomba with very peaceful New Year's Eve activities. In fact, although there were many tourists in the mountains throughout these first early years over Christmas and New year, there did not appear to be any large-scale

community activities. Boarding houses and hotels organised their own private functions, such as the Grand Trades' Union who's social was at the masonic hall in Katoomba in 1902. (*Mountaineer, Wednesday 24 December 1902*).

New Year's Eve 1903 - A thick mist with an occasional unpleasant drizzle attended the birth of 1904 at Katoomba. " The town was fairly animated until about 10 p.m., the Katoomba Band playing selections at various points in the principal streets. With the closing of the business houses the streets became to a large extent deserted, only a few remaining out till midnight. The ringing of the church bell, however, drew a good number from their homes later, and moderately large congregations attended the various watchnight services. In the business portion of the town there was an almost entire absence of rowdyism but in the backstreets, things were not quite so undisturbed. A band of about thirty of the local "nan-nans" marched through the outlying streets, yelling and blowing hideous "music" from cheap bugles, and trying to add to the stupidity and inanity with which nature had already endowed them. Gates were removed and thrown into the yards and gardens of the adjoining houses and in some cases large gates were carried off and replaced with very small ones. Street seats were overturned, and on the Bathurst Road one or two were thrown over the railway fence. The land agents' notices came in for special attention and were torn up and placed in front of any house that happened to be handy. The public-school gates were wrenched off and hurled into the roadway, the bell being violently rung the while. Beyond a little horseplay the proceedings were not characterised by anything that could be taken exception to, considering the occasion. (*Blue Mountain Gazette Friday 8 January 1904 - Page 3*)

The Lithgow Mercury (Tuesday 5 January 1904 - Page 3) merely stated that watch-night services were held at the churches on New Year's Eve, appropriate services being rendered by the various ministers.

In 1907, New Year's Eve was celebrated in Katoomba by the visitors in a pretty noisy fashion. Crowds promenaded the main streets, blowing tin whistles and other toys, and keeping things lively until midnight. Watchnight services were held in St. Hilda's by the Rev. J. F. Russell and were largely attended. (*Lithgow Mercury Wednesday 30 December 1908 - Page 3*)

Little changed in 1908 for New Year's Eve passed away in the usual style in Katoomba, but the police had their eyes on the crowd to prevent any unusual rowdyism. Midnight services were held and after the churches were empty there were not many about the streets. (*Lithgow Mercury* (Monday 4 January 1909 - Page 2).

An article in *The Sunday Sun*, Sunday 14 November 1909 - Page 10, called 'Australian Nights' by Cestrius reflects on a previous Australian night, a particular New Year's Eve: 'Let me now hie back to the peacefulness of the "Blue Mountains"— of New South Wales—the sanatorium and summer resort. The time is New Year's Eve, and the hour is sunset on the very topmost point. The sun (blood-red) Is sinking into a sea of wonderful blue mist; there is no blending of sunset colors (sic) or gloaming, only a brief twilight deepening into ashen night, a few particular stars, the glow of bush fires down in distant gullies, and the fragrant smoke-haze from Katoomba way. Then the train makes its descent, past the old "Zig-Zag", on the Bathurst Plains.'

1909 had some good and bad moments for Katoomba. The weather during the holidays turned out to be all that one could desire, and the various resorts were well-patronised by the large number of visitors. After a week's darkness, due to the accident at the gas works on Christmas Eve, the gas was again turned on for New Year's Eve and very much appreciated. The boarding houses especially were very thankful, when they were able to again use the gas stoves. (*The Blue Mountain Echo Saturday 1 January 1910 - Page 4; Lithgow Mercury Monday 3 January 1910 - Page 30*)

On New Year's Eve, an outbreak of fire was discovered at the Methodist parsonage, and the fire brigade were soon on the spot, and extinguished the flames without doing very great damage, but had it not been noticed at the time the whole building would have been destroyed. (*Lithgow Mercury Monday 3 January 1910 - Page 30*)

The publicans did pretty well during New Year's Eve, and the police kept the crowd well in hand. (*Lithgow Mercury Monday 3 January 1910 - Page 30*)

On Friday January 9, 1911, the *Blue Mountain Echo* reported on New Year's Eve 1910 at Katoomba. The paper noted that the New Year was ushered in very quietly at Katoomba, and from all accounts the old and well-known former New Year's Eve customs in Sydney had also passed away. Was this because New Year's Eve was a Saturday?

1911 New Year's Eve was also quiet. The holidays on the mountains passed quietly, according to the *Daily Telegraph* (Thursday 4 January 1912) and the crowd in Katoomba on New Year's Eve was the most orderly ever seen in the town at that season of the year. All the churches were crowded during the special services.



Figure 3: Main Street, Katoomba - site of an early parade 1913

1913 was also quiet; at 1.00 pm there was a procession from Nestle Brae, just below the public school in Park Street, where residents of Mrs Stout's boarding house were farewelling Mr A.E. Clayton. They advanced down Main Street to the railway station, showering Mr Clayton with tons of confetti until he was safely seated on his train. The rest of the evening was even quieter. "Notwithstanding the huge crowd of city and country visitors which mixed with the resident populace, there was no visible sign of

(trouble) and necessity for ...the police who paroled the main thoroughfares with vigilance. They failed to find anyone needing the restraining and guiding hand of the law". However, there were many private and semi-public functions to attract the holiday makers, like the plain and fancy-dress reunion at the palais de danse. (*The Blue Mountain Echo* Friday 9 January 1914 - Page 4)



Figure 4: Main Street & Katoomba Street – centre of NYE activities

1915 was a different New Year's Eve, according to the *Echo* because it was A New Year's Eve of Girls.

Whatever New Year's Eve may have been like in Katoomba in the days before the Great War, this year it surely was a New Year's Eve of girls. The boys are away—the best of them—fighting their way through hell to that elusive goal called victory. But the girls were here to ring out the old year and sing in the new. Through the Mountain mists they flitted, and under the white lights of the shops. Many covered their tears with laughter; many were too young to know tears. So lovely they all were. Dear little things, with eyes like violets and lips that always smile. Stately young queens, with the wonderful curve to the white throat, and that far-away look to their eyes! Babies were there, too, for they are the New Year symbol. How glorious to think that they will not know the full horror of these troublous (sic) times. And mothers, too, we saw, but some were in that fearful black, emblematic of heroes fallen at the Front.

Countless trumpets, with shrieking discord, tried their very best to drive sad thoughts away. "The night is cold", whispered someone, but just then three maids, with lips like scarlet roses, danced out of the mist, and the cold had vanished, and the scene transferred to some super-Arcady. Their costumes were like a brilliant flag of France; perhaps something like the French maids wore in the days when the first mad strains of the "Marseillaise" awakened France to new life. Another wonder girl was there, with skin of lily white and cheeks tinged with delicate pink, such as one may find in the sea-shells of the Corsican bays. The embodiment of perfect joy, this fair maid, with her coloured trumpet to her lips, seemed to stand on the tips of her toes, playing as some happy Grecian boy might have played to his herd of goats in the long ago days before Europe became civilised (?).

O, yes! New Year's Eve in Katoomba was very pleasant, and very pretty, but the boys were not there.

And 1916, what will it bring forth for Australia? Let us hope that it brings her brave boys back again in all their strength and heartiness. And then next New Year's Eve will be

something that will live in the hearts of Australians for ever. (The Blue Mountain Echo (NSW Friday 7 January 1916 - Page 8)

The Town Band was very much in evidence on New Year 's Eve and added much to the Town's amusement. Various sections were visited, and a fine selection of music rendered.

There was a remarkable absence of petty crime in Katoomba on New Year's Eve, and Mr. Chandler, J.P. had only one case to sit in judgment on Saturday morning. The individual, a visitor, was charged with discharging fireworks in Katoomba Street on the night previous and was fined 10s, in default 48 hours imprisonment. (*Lithgow Mercury Wednesday 5 January 1916 - Page 3*)



Figure 5: NYE barbers' float 1915

There is a gap between 1916 and 1923 because little relevant information showed up in Trove.

A.J. Craig joined up in 1916 and sent greetings from the Front in 1917. (*The Blue Mountain Echo Friday 28 January 1916 - Page 3 and The Blue Mountain Echo Friday 5 January 1917 - Page 5*)



Figure 6: Advertisement 1917

The Blue Mountain Echo Friday 4 October 1918 - Page 5 notes Council's meeting at which there was a call for "tenders be called from bands willing to supply music on next

Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, then week-ends (Saturday nights and Sundays) until Easter, then Good Friday, Easter Saturday, Easter Sunday, and Easter Monday”.

The Blue Mountain Echo Friday 20 December 1918 - Page 5 ran an advertisement for a New Year's Eve Cabaret at the King's Theatre commencing at 10.30. There is no mention of any earlier activity on NYE. A later reference (*The Blue Mountain Echo* Friday 17 January 1919 - Page 5) to a possible Easter function mentioned how successful this evening was.



Figure 7: Dave Brown's truck 1920



Figure 8: Typical float early 1920s



Figure 9: Katoomba District Motor Cycle Club NYE float early 1920s

A full front page article in the *Blue Mountain Echo* 5 January 1923 heralded a new way to enjoy New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

The headline and the article concentrate on New Year's Day and the very successful procession and sports carnival that was organised for locals as well as any interested tourists, but it also mentions New Year's Eve:

"Successful as were the sports and procession, the effort did not, by any means, exhaust the resources of the organising committee. On New Year Eve, a grand sacred concert was held in the Town Hall, the mayor, Alderman W J Rumble, presiding. The event was all on its own, consequently, the hall was crowded, and a most enjoyable evening was spent before the crowds dispersed to attend, for the most part, the watch-night services."

According to *The Blue Mountain Echo*, Saturday 5 January 1924 - Page 5, the Weather God was good to Katoomba on New Year's Eve, 1923. The sky was clear of clouds and the stars were shining, a perfect night to bid farewell to 1923. Thousands thronged the main streets of Katoomba. They all seemed to be in joyful mood. They strolled up and down Katoomba Street and Main Street, looking in the shop windows, simply enjoying the evening. Then a group of young men and women appeared. They were dressed in fantastic head dresses, masks and other grotesque garb. They had rattles, throwdowns and other discord making devices and the quiet of the night was broken by a discordant jazz orchestra. Many of these young people carried packets of confetti and soon everyone was showered with confetti. There was so much that the streets were covered with it, muting the sound of footsteps.



Figures 10 & 11: NYE 1924

Not a formally organised procession, but a group of friends or boarding-house visitors getting together to enjoy the evening.

Private celebrations were still popular in 1924's NYE The Leura Golf Club certainly planned a fun evening – they were advertising for two competent waitresses for New Year's Eve in the *Katoomba Daily* on 23 December. And the Palais de Danse was advertising its dancing competition: *An extra special night will be held at the Palais on New Year's Eve, when something unique in special novelties will be introduced.*

On Wednesday 31 December 1924, the *Katoomba Daily* predicted the night ahead:

New Year's Eve. To-night we shall say good bye to Old Father Time and welcome in the latest youngest of the Christmas era, MASTER 1925. The newest addition to the world's family will be accorded a great welcome at midnight by the residents of Katoomba and Leura and according to all accounts a very hectic welcome it will be.

It is understood that all the novelty dealers have made great preparations with streamers, balloons, squeakers (and other heart rending instruments of torture), bon bons, and similar gala night equipments (sic) which will be good for trade and the hilarity of the populace.

A grand show will be given at the Palais de Danse, at all the leading hotels and boarding houses, and of course the pictures (previous to the great revel) at the Empire will be crowded to overflowing.

Then again before all this happens, church services will be held at the various churches where watch night congregations will assemble.

Throughout the district the greatest preparations have been made to welcome Master 1925 right royally; in fact, traders and caterers for entertainment and enjoyment have left no stone unturned to see that the New Year is heralded in quite in accordance with custom. Rumour says that the famous Pyjama Parade will descend from the heights of Sans Souci and the California to the principal thoroughfares, but it is also to be whispered that Sergeant Carter and his merry men will be on the look-out for any delinquents from the decorous side of our otherwise placid life.

No doubt the Mayor, Alderman McBride, and his merry band of aldermen, will be watching to see that the law is rigorously enforced, yet at the same time we are permitted to state that the law of right and wrong will be mostly viewed with that "blind eye" for which Lord Nelson was made so justly famous at the celebrated battle of Trafalgar.

And now it all comes to this. To-night sees the New Year in. Let us realise that it is the time of good-will and good fellowship, and that we must all start off with the greatest of good intentions.

Let us also see to it that these good intentions are faithfully carried out. If so, it will truly be a happy New Year for us all. (The Katoomba Daily Wednesday 31 December 1924 - Page 1)

Again, no centrally organised procession or other activities but emphasis was on enjoying themselves.

The Blue Mountain Echo (Friday 6 January 1928 – page 5) reported on New Year's Eve 1927. "NEW YEAR'S EVE CARNIVAL SPIRIT PREVAILS. Fun without license, jollity without horseplay; those were the dominant characteristics of Katoomba during the New Year period. Once again, though the town was thronged with visitors, the proverbial high standard of conduct was maintained; and, despite that a certain degree of license is inseparable from New Year's Eve, not a single incident was recorded of a regrettable nature.



Figure 12: Stylish young woman dressed for NYE dinner, 1928

The true spirit of carnival prevailed, and parties from numerous boarding establishments, swollen by numbers from private residences, appeared in fancy costume. Sheiks, cowboys, princesses, Turks, and others, mingled in kaleidoscopic array, and even the late lamented Chidley was impersonated by a venturesome damsel. Deluges of confetti greeted those who dared the throng, and 'ticklers' shot in and out of faces with disconcerting frequency. But it was all harmless nonsense; and the few police who stood about the street corners had nothing to do but smile at the fun; and dodge the playful bombardments with confetti, which fell to their lot in common with less august personages. They took it in good part and thoroughly entered into the general spirit of affairs.

The town looked gay in its garb of light festoons; and the shops never shone brighter. Nor were their tempting windows entirely unproductive. Right through to closing time, they plied a thriving business in novelties and popular wares, and many were the smiling faces at the banks on Tuesday morning.

Until the small hours of the morning, the fun continued; and even daylight witnessed a few belated strugglers who not yet had sought their couches. It was a typical Katoomba New Year, carried out in typical Katoomba spirit. More cannot be said."

Reporting of the 1928 New Year's Eve was overshadowed by the death of 18 year old Nola Fowley at Echo Point around 2.00 am on the first. A threat to 'go over the top,' a fight, and a girl's drop to her death as a hand was stretched out — only a foot away — to rescue her..... That story dominated the headlines and enthralled Australia. It was the centre of a tragic New Year celebrations to many.

However, for many it did not spoil the festivities of their moment; only in retrospect, as they read of the tragedy, did it darken their New Year.

For guests at the Carrington, a long way from Echo Point, the evening had begun well. A visitor, Lily, in her letter to Bertie in London, wrote:

Again, the revelry ran high on New Year's Eve, though there were very few fancy dresses. Streamers and confetti lay rolled in a ball in the centre of the ball room or strewn about the piazza, lawns and paths. I love the piazza at the Carrington, from which the residents and boarders throw streamers down to the people who come off the street for the pleasure of catching them. Everybody loves this piazza, for they all talk about it. (Lily's Letter to London, The Commonwealth Home., v.36, no.978, 1929-01-01, p.19)"

In a postscript, Nola's brother died a couple of months after his sister in a car accident. Central organisation begins. The *Blue Mountain Star*, Saturday 16 November 1929 suggested "GETTING READY For New Year's Eve. There was a 'FANCY DRESS SUGGESTION'. A meeting of the Chamber of Commerce was to be held in the Council Chambers on (the following) Monday night. The main business to be dealt with was the proposal that steps be taken to organise the New Year's Eve festivities in Katoomba. The township had gained a reputation for general gaiety on New Year's Eve, and it was felt that in view of the crowds available and the carnival spirit prevailing, with a little organising the fun could be greatly enhanced, with a resulting good advertisement for Katoomba. Suggestions had been made that, as so many already are pleased to appear in fancy dress, prizes be offered for the best fancy dresses, both serious and comical — also possibly for the best group from the different boarding houses. It was hoped to be able to arrange for Katoomba Street to be closed to general traffic during the latter part of the evening, in which case a parade of those in fancy dress could be arranged, also dancing and possibly some comical events and, of course, confetti battles." A further meeting was held on Monday 18 November and reported in *The Blue Mountain Star* (Saturday 23 November 1929 - Page 10). Although a public meeting, attendance was "down" because of bad weather. The meeting decided that permission from Council and police had to be obtained before further planning could proceed. The next meeting was set for December 2.

The Blue Mountain Star (Saturday 30 November 1929 - Page 2) ran the following advertisement: NEW YEAR'S EVE FESTIVITY The Public Meeting proposed to be held on MONDAY NIGHT NEXT is postponed pending the decision of Council re closing of Katoomba Street. Katoomba-Leura Chamber of Commerce.

Everything ended almost successfully:

"NEW YEAR'S EVE CARNIVAL SPOILT BY RAIN. THOUSANDS IN STREET Men in women's clothes, and women in men's clothes! Hundreds of masks! All kinds of whistles! Plenty of confetti, and hundreds of smiling faces. All these could be seen in Main and Katoomba Streets on New Year's Eve. Thousands of people walked the streets on that night waiting for midnight to send out the old year and welcome in the new. Unfortunately, a heavy mist and light rain prevented the real carnival spirit from taking a grip of the people. One was compelled to walk on the footpaths, which gave certain protection against the elements. The general parade up and down Katoomba Street began at about 8.30, and when midnight was close at hand the big crowd gathered at the corner of Katoomba and Main Streets (near the Railway Station) and

here they welcomed in the year 1930. About half an hour previous the festoon lights were put out by mistake, and thus the New Year was ushered in in rather a "dark" manner. Many New Year resolutions were made for 1930, and one would like to know just how long they will last." (*Blue Mountain Star* Saturday 4 January 1930, page 9)

And that simply, was how our first procession was born.



Figure 13: NYE sophisticated 1930s style



Figure 14: Popular entertainers in guest houses of the 1930s

New Year's Eve 1932 was a huge success. The *Katoomba Daily* headlined "Huge Crowds in Merry Mood" on Thursday 5 January 1933, as it continued to describe the success of the festivities on the previous Saturday night. According to the Daily, the crowd was larger than for some years past and its festive manifestations were, as usual, free from vulgarity.

The procession was greatly patronised with many of the boarding-houses participating. Entrants began to assemble at 8 00 pm in Parke Street and moved off to the Katoomba and Waratah Streets corner where, about 9.15, the procession began, led by the Katoomba Municipal Band.

The route up Katoomba street was thickly lined with spectators who watched as "dark-eyed senoritas rubbed shoulders with grass-skirted island belles; prim and proper lasses of the mid-Victorian era looked askance at the abbreviated costumes of the ballet girls; Nero the tyrant whipped his slave girls with callous indifference and left marks of his brutality on snow white shoulders; the male ballet evoked uproarious applause with its alleged high-kicking and general absurdities; white clad three sisters paraded in dignified solemnity; minstrels, gypsies, Scots, swaggies and princes, washerwomen and princesses; horses and dogs, cars and carts: all were in the procession and heading to the seat of judgement, corner of Main and Katoomba streets where Aldermen Freeland and Packer and ex-Aldermen Shaw and Marsh judged all. The Cecil received the Webb Cup, and all others received monetary prizes.

New Year's Eve 1933 looked problematical to the *Katoomba Daily* on Friday 24 November. After all, December 31 was a Sunday. The Daily proposed having the procession on the Saturday night because "many people visit Katoomba solely to participate in New Year's Eve festivities".

The Daily was correct; the Council decided to support the procession on the Saturday night and encouraged the boarding houses to do so as well.

According to the Daily on Thursday 4 January, the Saturday procession was indeed a success. Many of the boarding houses did participate, although others were unable as their guests had not arrived until too late, with the procession being on the Saturday evening and there were the “normal” numbers of people in fancy dress, decorated cars, cycles, scooters and trucks.

The Daily noted that “Sunday observance prevented the usual amount of merry-making in the streets on New Year’s Eve (itself) but all the guesthouses provided fitting entertainment. A number of the guests joined the throng at the Main and Katoomba Street corner to usher in the New Year.”

The Daily also noted that the involvement of so many people, the heavier traffic by rail and the steady recovery in the motor industry surely heralded the end of the Depression?

1933 New Year’s Eve report was published in the “Dear Betty” column of the *Blue Mountains Times* 5 Jan. 1934. Betty summarised the parade contributions of the various guesthouses and the music. The “Scotch Band” played.... *“braw gey Scots wi’ their kilties swaying and the pipes filling the air with the breath of Auld Reekie”*. Betty noted that *“the big boarding houses all had dances”* as well as dancing at the Katoomba Town Hall and La Plaza.

A detailed report of the 1934 parade featured in both the *Katoomba Daily* on the 3 January and the *Blue Mountains Times* on the 5th. There were again various categories, including “best billy-cart” and “best boarding house group”. The Webb Cup for the best boarding house or guesthouse was won again by The Cecil which had won it also in 1933. In 1934 their St George and the Dragon headed the procession. Miss Cassidy of Hampden Villa won the prize in the “landmark” section as “Queen of the Floodlights”.

Special certificates were provided to successful entrants; these were popular and were repeated each year.

Although large, the crowd was well-behaved, A huge number of people assembled at the railway gates to sing “auld lang syne”. Several members of the police force, including Constables L Jones (of Rugby fame) and Wright from Sydney were kissed by many young ladies and chaired in appreciation of the good work and vibrant spirit which had accented the work of Sergeant Muir and his men in the discharge of their duty.

A public Address system was used by Mayor Freeland when he presented the prizes to the winning entrants in the procession. The announcements could be heard from the railway station to the post office (now antique shop in Katoomba Street).

Alderman H. Hodgson and Mr R. Steward were congratulated as organisers in 1934. Mr Sid Foote, of Webbs, was one of the Marshalls for the parade.

The 1935 festivity was broadcast by Radio 2KA (Katoomba) and relayed to 2CH (Sydney). All the organisers were thrilled with this because it was making history – the first

occasion upon which a country station had relayed a programme to city listeners. The procession was partly delayed, according to the first newspaper report, because of the late arrival of some of the entrants.



Figure 15: NYE elves 1935

However, we cannot believe everything we read in the newspapers as the Mayor, Alderman Soper, explained in his thank you report that in fact the delay was caused by the need to time the arrival of the head of the procession at the judges' lorry to the split second, so that the descriptive relay to Station 2CH could commence at 9.30 on the tick of the clock.

On not such a happy note, the 1935 procession was marred by pick-pocketing. Some pockets were picked, some handbags snatched. A well-known railway employee lost £11 while a lady lost £3/10/- *The Katoomba Daily* (Friday 3 January 1936 - Page 2) reported that a young man was arrested, charged and fined £40.

And there was a further unhappy note for this year's procession. The Webb Cup for the best boarding house float was not won by the Cecil this year. Instead, Ye Olde Milroy's H.M.A.S. Milroy, complete with smoking funnels, was the victor. However, as the Council soon found out, and it was reported in the *Katoomba Daily*, Saturday 11 January 1936, Mr Williams, proprietor of The Cecil, refused to return the Cup . . . He considered that, having won it for three years in succession, it had become his property and that he had information in his office which satisfied him that the Cup was his property. Over the next meetings the issue was argued backwards and forwards. Should the police be called in? Finally, it was decided to award Mr Williams a cup to the value of five guineas.

And then, reported in the *Katoomba Daily*, Friday 14 February 1936:

PRESENTATION OF THE WEBB CUP TO YE OLDE MILROY. At a specially organised fancy dress dance at Ye Olde Milroy on Thursday night last the Mayor, Ald. Soper, expressed his pleasure and privilege in having the opportunity of presenting the Webb Cup to Mrs Bailey for Ye Olde Milroy's entry into the New Year's Eve procession. "The Webb Cup is now an institution in Katoomba," said his Worship. "It takes its association from a double source; firstly, it is the practical gift from a prominent business firm to help a great annual event, and, secondly, it is the chief ambition of

NEW YEAR'S EVE CELEBRATIONS		
The Council gratefully acknowledges the following donations towards the 1936 New Year's Eve celebrations:—		
	£	s. d.
Katoomba Municipal Council	10	10 0
Katoomba and Leura Chamber of Commerce	10	10 0
Ald. W. Soper (Mayor)	1	1 0
Soper Bros.	1	1 0
H. Campbell-Cowie	Cup	
Dr. W. F. Craig	Cup	
Katoomba Cycle Club	1	1 0
Emoleum Australia Ltd.	2	2 0
Simos Bros. .. (trophy)	2	2 0
J. D. Alexander	Trophy	
W. C. Penfold & Co. Ltd.	Trophy	
Emu Gravel Co. Ltd.	2	2 0
Blue Metal and Gravel Co. Ltd.	2	2 0

Figure 16: Council regularly encouraged donations to support the celebrations 1936

competitors each New Year's Eve. Carnival celebration has come to stay and gains importance and interest each year. The best boarding-house group is the star attraction of the night. The Webb Cup was won three years in succession by The Cecil, sponsored by the personal enthusiasm of Mr. Williams. The Council has decided to give Mr Williams an exact replica of the Webb Cup, at a cost of five guineas, and it is certainly well deserved. I mention this so everyone will understand that this Cup in going to Mrs Bailey is not depriving anyone else to anything to which they may be entitled. I hope later to be able to present the replica Cup to Mr. Williams. Milroy has always been represented in New Year Carnivals," Ald Soper continued, "but this year Mrs Bailey set out on the wonderful ship, "H.M.S. Milroy" to win it Nobody asked who won. The very excellence of the exhibit settled that point with all".

The Mayor then called on the Deputy-Mayor, Ald. H. Hodgson, who spoke in high terms of the achievement and complimented Mrs Bailey on her civic spirit, and hoped she would be able to win it successively, as did the former holder of the cup. The Mayor apologised for the enforced absence of Ald. Shaw, who was responsible for recognising the great effort made by The Cecil. He then presented the Cup to Mrs Bailey, who, in her response, paid tribute to those who had assisted her to obtain the honor. (sic)

Mrs Bailey entertained the guests to a most delectable supper which was greatly enjoyed by all. The evening was preceded by a fancy dress carnival. There was a fine lot of competitors, great interest being taken by the house guests.

In 1936, at Katoomba and all the other Blue Mountains resorts, the Old Year went out to the accompaniment of showers of confetti and the pandemonium of whistles and toy trumpets (*The Labor Daily Friday 1 January 1937 - Page 5*). *The Katoomba Daily* of 5 Jan. 1937

noted that "a crowd of many thousands assembled at the corner of Katoomba and Main Streets at 10 minutes to 12 and the New Year was greeted boisterously".

The Katoomba Daily Tuesday 5 January 1937 - Page 2 reported that a Record New Year's Eve crowd witnessed Katoomba's best procession. The Webb Cup was again won by Ye Olde Milroy.

One young man had a lucky escape on New Year's Eve, according to the *Katoomba Daily, Tuesday 5 January 1937*. As the procession was passing Leving's Furniture Mart in Main Street, William Ralphs of Station Street attempted to get a better position on the top of the building, but he fell, breaking his nose. He was taken by ambulance to the B.M.D.A.M. Hospital where he was admitted.

The Katoomba Daily Thursday 30 December 1937 - Page 2 reported on shopping hours over the New Year holidays. Shops would close Saturday, open Monday. No "Daily" on January 1. Shops, generally, in Katoomba would keep open till 10 p.m. on New Year's Eve (Friday), close all day Saturday, and open all day Monday. The butchers' shops would be closed all day Saturday and would open till 9.30 a.m. on Monday, when they would close for the remainder of the day. Saturday was a statutory holiday; Monday was declared a public holiday. To shopkeepers it was optional whether they closed but if they remained open, they had to pay double wages for the day.

One of the *Katoomba Daily's* (Friday 31 December 1937 - Page 2) last words in 1937 on the procession contained two warnings: The Mayor, Alderman L. A. White, warned spectators not to climb or stand on the cantilever verandahs to improve their view of the procession. Spectators were also warned that throw-downs were forbidden by law and offenders were liable to prosecution.

However, the end result was disappointing, according to the *Katoomba Daily, Tuesday 4 January 1938*. New Year's Eve Festivities:

RECORD CROWDS, BUT PROCESSION BELOW USUAL STANDARD MIDNIGHT CLIMAX Katoomba's streets were thronged with the biggest New Year's Eve crowds on record; but the opinion is fairly general that the festivities were not the equal of previous years. Something of the customary sparkle seemed to be lacking, while the procession, awaited by so many thousands with the keenest anticipation, did not fulfil expectations. Entries were fewer and the display less spectacular than in preceding years. Ye Old Milroy again won the Webb Cup, with a float named Neptune and The Fresh Food & Ice Coy distributed ice-cream samples, much to the delight of those who were fortunate to secure a bucket. It was noted, too, that this year there was a float from Grace Brothers in the city, and the paper wondered if this were to be a future advertising ploy of the big city stores. Throughout the evening Sergeant Bryant and his men won the esteem of merry-makers, by their, tact and discretion, and thanks was publicly expressed by the official announcer (Mr F. Juergens) after the procession had ended and the prizes had been distributed. The crowd that assembled as midnight approached was easily the largest seen at Katoomba, and the New Year was ushered in to the accompaniment of "Auld Lang Syne," and much rejoicing.

The Katoomba Daily on Thursday 1 December 1938 - Page 1 announced the newest “attraction” for the NYE festival, a Queen of Katoomba. Only girls living in the municipality could apply, there would be no prize, only the glory of the title and applications closed on 10th December with judging on the 15th.

The Katoomba Daily Thursday 1 December 1938 - Page 4 noted that The Police Department had sanctioned the closing of Katoomba and Main Streets. Station 2KA notified that it would broadcast the proceedings; but it could not arrange for amplifiers.

The Queen was announced after final judging at the Paragon (*The Katoomba Daily Saturday 17 December 1938 - Page 2*). Miss Margaret Jackson and Miss Pamela Weston would be the Princesses-in-waiting and Miss Dorothy Smith and Miss Gwen Taylor would act as Maids of Honor. (sic). Her Majesty, the Queen of Katoomba, was Miss Marjorie Lloyd.

The Katoomba Daily Thursday 5 January 1939 - Page 1 announced that -
..... the celebrations which hallmark the birth of a New Year were held in practically every town in the Commonwealth. Katoomba had earned an enviable reputation in this respect and on Saturday night, when 1938 was laid to rest, and 1939 given the glad hand of welcome, Katoomba presented its most successful and inspiring evening of fun and spectacle in its history. No procession had equalled that which paraded — no more jovial and happy crowd had thronged its streets— and the much-debated and discussed Queen Competition was an overwhelming success, and this part of the night's programme would undoubtedly become a fixture.

The Sydney Morning Herald (NSW: 1842 - 1954) Monday 2 January 1939 - Page 7 reported that there were 90,000 AT KATOOMBA On NYE 1938. A record crowd, reliably estimated at 90,000, thronged the streets of Katoomba for the New Year's Eve celebrations. Amplifiers were placed at six points, and announcers kept the crowd entertained with community singing. The procession was described to the thousands who were unable to obtain a clear view.

1939 was one of those years which were less popular with all organisers of NYE revels: December 31 was a Sunday.

A party of about 40 travelled by bus from Corrimall for the all the New Year's Eve activities. (*Illawarra Mercury, Friday 5 January 1940, page 8*). Were they disappointed? Or had the paper misjudged the date, and they actually came up for the procession on the Saturday?

The Sun Sunday 31 December 1939 - Page 1 reported:

Thousands of holiday makers sang and danced in the streets to-night in a New Year revel not surpassed in enthusiasm for many years. The night was beautifully clear and fine for the procession, which was followed by gay scenes in the main streets of the town. Revellers, who came in large numbers from Sydney and west of the Mountains, wore carnival hats and joined in rousing choruses. The revels will be resumed tomorrow night at the close of the church services. Katoomba anticipates the gayest New Year's Eve in its history.

The Sydney Morning Herald, The Lithgow Mercury and the Maitland Mercury all reported that 80 000 people lined the streets of Katoomba for the 1940 procession, with 21 police to clear the procession route, led by the Katoomba Boys' Band. Thousands of tourists gathered on the route of the procession before 8 o'clock. A screen at one corner, on which the words of popular choruses were shown, was a feature of the night's festival. (*The Sydney Morning Herald Wednesday 1 January 1941 - Page 5; Lithgow Mercury Thursday 2 January 1941 - Page 2; Maitland Mercury Wednesday 1 January 1941 - Page 1*)

ABANDONED NEW YEAR'S EVE PROCESSION was the daunting headline in *The Blue Mountains Advertiser* (on Friday 19 December 1941 (Page 2)). It then added: *Carnival to Continue.*

The bad news followed:

At a well-attended meeting on Wednesday evening, a letter from the Chief Secretary's Department advised that no bright lights may be shown in places of amusement. As Katoomba Street would definitely be a place of amusement on New Year's Eve, the committee had no alternative but to abandon the procession. Keen disappointment will be felt in many quarters, but it is hoped that those who may have commenced work on a float, or any other entry, will realise the futility of holding a procession in subdued light. Strong in its determination to provide an ambulance, the committee decided that chocolate wheels, 'housie' and treasure hunt should sail merrily on and, unless, another bolt falls from the blue, operations will commence on Tuesday next.

The Mayor is to make representations to the authorities for permission to carry on, under restricted lighting, in the evening; if that cannot be permitted, then things will hum only in the daylight hours. The treasure hunt on Narrow Neck will definitely be held on the 26th and 27th, and 'Miner's Rights' will be on sale very shortly. It behoves each and every one of us to put shoulders to the wheel, or hands to the plough — whichever is preferred — and make the carnival a huge success.

Such news must have been unsettling for all those involved with the organisation for after discussion and public consultation earlier in the year, the council had withdrawn from the organisation of the carnival, a duty which they had adopted nine years previously, according to the *Mountains Advertiser* (Friday 12 September 1941 – page 1). Admittedly, there had been some colourful successes, but increasingly over the past couple of years many people had begun to feel that the procession itself was restricting the free independent merry-making of the people that had been witnessed in pre-procession days.

But they had not rushed into the decision because Katoomba's celebrations were known far and wide and a flop in the festivities could be disastrous, especially as "imitators now seek to capitalise their own New Year's Eve frolics" – and that was a dig at both Blackheath and Lithgow who had run their own evenings quite successfully in the last two years.

It was unanimously agreed that a halt should not be called to the celebrations because of the war. Mayor Freeland claimed that the maintenance of public morale was of high importance.

So, a committee was formed, and it planned a spectacular carnival, one that lasted a week, terminating in the procession, and would entertain everyone, boosting morale and raising money for an ambulance for the A.I.F. By mid-November programmes were ready and the *Blue Mountains Advertiser* (Friday 21 November 1941 – page 2) was exhorting everyone to build a float or a billy cart or wear a fancy costume to prepare for the Procession.

Friday 4 December 1941 – page 2 again saw the *Blue Mountains Advertiser* extolling the need to do something, create something that would make the judges gasp, so that the fun and laughter would spread wide. And then came that 19 December headline: *Abandoned*. So many must have been devastated!

The Advertiser summed it up: (Friday 9 January 1942 page 2)

Katoomba, renowned for the brightness of the illuminations, and the spontaneous gaiety of its New Year's Eve crowds, presented an almost unbelievable picture of gloom and quietness on Wednesday night last. Such an unprecedented state of affairs was not, however, without its lesson, for it helped to emphasise the national peril and that all else must subordinated to the demands of war.

Most businesses had closed in the afternoon, many facing a loss on the customary novelties they had purchased for sale.

The lights in Katoomba and Main Streets were reduced to 60-watt bulbs.

There was a crowd in Katoomba Street, but the street was quiet, no trumpets or other noisemakers, no confetti and no merrymakers.

No one gathered in Railway Square to see the new year in, and the midnight train did not blow its whistle. The weather was perfect which added to the sense of loss.

Looking back, people would realise that the birth of 1942 in Katoomba was merely one of the minor sacrifices required to have been made along the road to victory.

In spite of everything, they did manage to raise money for the ambulance, which was handed over in a ceremony at Victoria Barracks in August 1942. (*The Blue Mountains Advertiser*, Friday 14 August 1942 page 3)

New Year's Eve 1942 at Katoomba was the dullerest on record. The heavy rain kept the streets clear of revellers and there were none of the signs usually associated here with the birth of another year. The old year passed without regret: it must always be regarded as one of the darkest in British military history. (*The Blue Mountains Advertiser* (Katoomba, Friday 8 January 1943 - Page 1)

Katoomba in 1943 attracted people from elsewhere as usual. As Lithgow offered only an austerity new year, on New Year's Eve itself hundreds of Lithgow residents journeyed to Katoomba to participate in the revelry at that centre. Afternoon and evening trains from Lithgow to Sydney were crowded with passengers, the greater majority of whom were en-route to Katoomba. (*Lithgow Mercury* Tuesday 4 January 1944 - Page 2)

In 1944, both the Savoy and Embassy advertised special midnight sessions on New Year's Eve, but the papers did not report on the New Year's Eve festivities that year because of the bushfires surrounding Katoomba.

On New Year's Eve, thousands of holidaymakers on Echo Point watched the Jamison Valley fire being fought. For a time at least 15 houses were menaced, including the mountain homes of Mr. W. J. Baker, Mr. Z. Simos, Dr. Alcorn, and Mr. van de Veldt, but these places, and the La Plaza Cafe at Echo Point were saved after long and strenuous work. (*The Sydney Morning Herald Tuesday 2 January 1945 - Page 3; Goulburn Evening Post Tuesday 2 January 1945 - Page 2*)

War's end in 1945 promised a momentous celebration of New Year at Katoomba. Plans began in early October: floats were organised, and locals invited to start their own private parties after the procession. Everyone knew that "IT (would) be IN again this year, the old grand New Year's Eve Katoomba frivolity, the fame of which was Australia wide." (*Blue Mountains Advertiser, 16 November 1945*)

Special trains would run from Sydney for the event, coal shortages notwithstanding, as they were affecting the community.

All seemed set.

"CANCELLED!" read the headline on Friday 21 December 1945. There would be no official procession in Katoomba that year because of lighting restrictions. The morality of asking for a concession and the granting of more lighting for festivities was heatedly discussed before the New Year's Eve Celebration Committee finally decided that, if a householder could only have one light in his house, and that only until 9.00 pm, then the committee could not expect that "for frivolities a greater leniency may be shown." (*Blue Mountains Advertiser, Friday 21 December 1945*).



Figure 17: Model illustrating a French swimsuit

Katoomba gave 1946 a gloomy welcome, with streets poorly lit, all arrangements cancelled, and no procession held; "visitors and residents alike were in the doldrums" (*Blue Mountains Advertiser, Friday 4 January 1946*). Ironically, the lighting restrictions were lifted a few days before New Year's Eve, too late to re-start Katoomba's celebrations.

Blackheath, however, was jubilant. Their planned events had not been cancelled. The crowds deserted Katoomba, travelling by bus to Blackheath where the street party lasted into the small hours of January 1st. Even the journalists who had come up to

Katoomba for the procession and something titivating for the following day's news spread out, some to Blackheath and others to the morgue in hope of a murder or two. Blackheath certainly won the competition between the villages in 1945.



Figure 18: Miss Eve Competition winners 1946

Reputations and inter-village rivalry spearheaded plans for 1946's New Year's Eve. Katoomba wanted to woo back the crowds it had lost to Blackheath.

The Chamber of Commerce particularly wanted a successful carnival. They took over from Council the running of the carnival in mid-November. Thereafter, every week, the Blue Mountains Advertiser spruiked some aspect of the coming carnival, to involve the locals and keep them interested.

To attract more people, the Katoomba committee decided to hold a "Monster Bathing Beauty Contest" (*BMA, 13 December 1946*). Contestants could wear any style swim suit, including "French Swim Suits" which had recently featured in the Sydney papers. The Mayor, Alderman Freeland, gained fame throughout Australia by stating that all those wanting to act as judges had to produce a written permit signed by their wives. No permit, no officiating!

The resulting publicity brought Katoomba's name to almost everyone throughout Australia.

Lithgow decided to copy Katoomba.

Here they both came undone as the Vice Squad intervened. No French swimsuits! Police from Sydney were sent to both locations to observe the contests.

Everything else went ahead and visitors from all over the state and overseas enjoyed the festivities. Over 65,000 people ignored the rain to celebrate at Katoomba. *The Wellington Times* (Thursday 23 January 1947) reported that Mr and Mrs Nicholas of "Woodhall", Dripstone, witnessed the procession and gaiety on New Year's Eve.



Figure 19: NYE midnight movies were popular in the post war years

Katoomba was ahead of Lithgow and Blackheath welcoming in 1947.

Interestingly, a paragraph appeared in Melbourne's *Argus* on Monday 30 December 1946 - Page 3. It read:

SYDNEY PLANS GAY NEW YEARS EVE. SYDNEY, Sunday: New Year's Eve celebrations in Sydney probably will be the brightest since 1938. King's Cross will be the main centre, but Manly should attract thousands with impromptu concerts and dancing on the Corso. Revels arranged at Katoomba will be the first for seven years. Not true re Katoomba. Perhaps this is where the story that Katoomba did nothing through the war years began?

The organisers for the 1947 New Year's Eve celebrations had to work hard to outdo the success and the publicity of the 1946 event. They secured George Foster, the famous 2GB comedian, to compere the celebrations which were broadcast over 2KA and 2GB. They had two entertainment units, one in Railway Square and the other at the bottom of Katoomba Street, near Waratah, where George Foster run a mini-quiz as part of the entertainment. (*Blue Mountains Advertiser, Friday 5 December 1947 - page 2*).

A record crowd, estimated at 85,000, thronged Katoomba for the New Year Eve revels. The weather was perfect for the first time in six years. A procession of 26 entries took 50 minutes to pass the judges in Railway Square. (*The Sydney Morning Herald Thursday 1 January 1948 - Page 1*)

Only the Savoy seemed to be running a midnight session this year, Esther Williams and Jimmy Durante were starring in "This time for keeps" (*The Blue Mountains Advertiser Wednesday 31 December 1947 - Page 4*)



Figure 20: Certificate for best decorated bike 1948

On Friday 5 November 1948 the Blue Mountains Advertiser reported on the meeting of the New Year's Eve Revels committee.

The New Year's Eve Celebrations Committee will meet in the City Hall, Katoomba, on Friday, November 5, to discuss the plans for the organised procession through the streets of Katoomba on New Year's Eve.

At the meeting of the Blue Mountains City Council, the Mayor, Alderman W. Freeland, in commenting on the holding of the procession said, 'If financial support is not received, we will have to let it drop'.

The Publicity Officer, Mr. R. Gadd, informed the Council that £50 had been set aside for the Celebrations at Katoomba, and £40 was to be divided among the other centres. The only town to make an application so far was Blackheath.

I found this quite interesting as it is the first time Alderman Freeland is making what could be considered a hostile remark about the evening he has long supported – or was it simply a threat to encourage more support?

Mr Bert Pattison was appointed Director of Entertainment in 1948. (Blue Mountains Advertiser 26 Nov.) It was his job to ensure the success of the activities to welcome 1949.

It seems the Council is back partially running the carnival, and a public plea has gone out for donations. Meanwhile, Blackheath and Lawson each received £20 from Council towards trophies for their events.

Because, for Council now, I should be saying Blue Mountains City Council, not Katoomba Municipal Council. So, sponsoring a Katoomba march is much more difficult.

After all the hard work and attempts to gather both money and support, 1948 was really a bit of a fizzer.

Rain during the day caused the cancellation of the procession. Many celebrated indoors.

It fined up in the early evening (can I say, typical Katoomba) so revellers wandered round Katoomba and main streets which were closed to traffic around 7.00 pm.

Large crowds gathered in Railway Square and near Waratah Street.

Police felt there were about 15,000 people in the streets. There was community singing, dance bands played lively tunes and the crowds danced in the streets.

Teenagers did the jitterbug. Streamers snaked through the air and screams were heard as fireworks exploded near groups of girls.

A young man, denied his place in the procession that never occurred, dressed in long underpants and wearing a handlebar moustache, carried a banner bearing the words The Snake Gully Life Saving Club at the head of a group in comical costumes. They were followed by a crowd blowing tin whistles and toy trumpets.

A few minutes before midnight a train passed by with its whistle going at full blast. On the stroke of midnight, the crowds joined hands and sang auld lang syne. Police had an exceptionally quiet night, and no serious accidents were reported, (*The Blue Mountains Advertiser Thursday 6 January 1949 - Page 10*)



Figure 21: Katoomba NYE parade 1940s

So, 1949 had arrived. Its farewell was to follow the same programme that welcomed it, hopefully with the procession going on. It was also decided to hold another bathing beauty contest. (*The Blue Mountains Advertiser Friday 4 November 1949 - Page 11*).

The streets would be closed an hour before the procession - and interesting concept as one of those streets is, of course, the Great Western Highway, and additional police will patrol the streets to maintain order and prevent undue larrickanism (sic).

Because New Year's Eve was a Saturday, the celebrations in the streets ceased at midnight, but numerous house parties which had been arranged were likely, to

continue until the early hours. (*The Blue Mountains Advertiser Thursday 29 December 1949 - Page 1*)

When the day came there was a record-breaking crowd of 85,000 people, making the New Year's Eve celebrations the greatest in the history of Katoomba and the most outstanding in the State. (*The Blue Mountains Advertiser Thursday 5 January 1950 - Page 1*). George Statham had again compered the proceedings.

Frank Walford, the current mayor, said it was the biggest crowd he had ever seen on the streets of Katoomba on New Year's Eve in 30 years. At midnight, train whistles blew, the crowd sang auld lang syne and partied on to around 2.30 pm where they headed home and continued partying until dawn.

1950 was one of the years the organising committee for New Year's Eve did not really like because the 31st fell on a Sunday. The New Year's Eve procession was organised for the Saturday the 30th, as was the custom. The committee planned the usual procession, and bathing beauty contest but they also invited new Australians to participate in the traditional costumes of their homelands. (*The Blue Mountains Advertiser, Thursday 9 November 1950 – page 11 and Thursday 28 December 1950 – page 1.*)

Readers were also promised additional police to patrol the streets to maintain order and to watch for undesirables...not sure how they could differentiate between undesirables and some of the costumes worn by revellers.

But their work was in vain. “*New Year Eve Procession was big Disappointment*” headlined *The Blue Mountains Advertiser on Thursday 4 January 1951 - Page 1*. There had been a big crowd, estimated around 80,000, but a very small procession. The Advertiser marvelled that, despite the number hanging round the streets, there were no casualties or instances of hooliganism.

Obviously, the Advertiser concluded, the 1951 committee would have to do much better to retrieve Katoomba's reputation.

And the 1951 committee took up that challenge. 1951 had been a big year - the re-enactment of the Crossing and the Golden Jubilee of Federation, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Commonwealth of Australia. A New Year's Eve celebration would almost seem easy.

At a meeting at Blue Mountains City Council chambers, reported *the Blue Mountains Advertiser 1 Nov. 1951*, it was agreed to title the celebration, *Festival of Time*. The procession prize money was to be increased, top line radio artists to be engaged, the Town Hall and the Trocadero opened to have free dancing, fireworks and prizes for children in costume as there would even be a children's procession. As well, there was to be a beauty contest, to find the “Eve of New Year's Eve.”

The Mayor, Alderman P. E. Galway, fully supported the combined efforts of the Jubilee committee, the New Year's Eve committee, the chamber of commerce and the council. He became the president of the new committee to plan everything.

Sydney artists were invited to be judges for the beauty contest – Mary Appleby, Emil Mercier, Brodie Mack, George Finey, Wynne Davis and Lorna Nimmo – all famous in their day probably, but the only one I recognise is the Sun cartoonist Emil Mercier.

Again, over 80,000 people crushed into Katoomba and Main streets as Miss Eve was announced – 22 years old Gwen Gough a model of Mortdale. Second place winner was Dawne Cassidy of Concord; Margaret Gardiner of Blackheath was third.

It was another successful year for Katoomba. 32 decorated floats and vehicles were, according to Mayor Galway the best he had seen in 30 years.

The people danced in the streets, the city hall was packed all night with happy dancers, and the three picture theatres and two amusement parks catered for large audiences. 2KA and 2KY broadcast variety items and presentations from the festival, while the ABC broadcast the festivities and community singing at midnight.

The light mist early in the evening did not dampen the carefree spirit of the revellers. The crowd was gay but orderly and the police did a good job in controlling the merry-makers. (*Blue Mountains Advertiser, Thursday 3 January 1952 – page 1.*)

The Blue Mountains Advertiser 18 December 1952 announced that the New Year“street show will be a non-stop variety concert compered by John Barnes of 2UW fame and will include Les Welsh and his eight-piece band, with Pam Johnson, Roberts and Broomhead (two men and a piano)... and piano accordionist, Arthur Wenderling, besides hosts of other entertainers.”

Les Welsh led a popular Sydney-based 1940s/50s band regularly aired on radio.

From the reminiscences of George Mitchell quoted in *Pictorial Memories Blue Mountains John Low 1991*,

“On top of the hill near the Carrington.... They had a big platform, and it was run by comperes from 2KA.... And they’d have community sing there. They used to give prizes for solos. At midnight the trains that were in the station would blow their whistles and everybody would join arms and start singing Auld Lang Syne. It was really terrific.”

The Blue Mountains Advertiser Thursday 8 January 1953 – page 1 headlined that KATOOMBA was THE MECCA FOR DAWN OF 1953. The ABC broadcast with an 8-minute nation-wide hook-up. “Thousands of happy singers with the pipe and brass bands provided a rattling good programme.” Radio 2KA (Katoomba) also broadcast the event.

Again, people travelled from all over for the celebrations. Mist and rain in the preceding 24 hours had not spoilt the fund during the evening it dissipated.

One group came from Bathurst and described their NEW YEARS EVE where Katoomba was the rendezvous of fun for 37 staff members and friends of Western Stores, Bathurst, when they visited that famous mountain resort to see ‘the old year out and the New Year in’. Unfortunately, the crowd was so big that the author was unable to observe any unusual incidents that may have occurred. However, he did notice quite a few staff members in various disguises especially Keith Stivers (poor bloke) who looked like a cross between a camel driver and King Farouk. *Keep that outfit for the next fancy-*

dress ball, Keith, it will surely win a first prize! Not sure I'd have been happy being Keith.
(*National Advocate*, Friday 16 January 1953 - Page 4)



Figure 22: Katoomba NYE parade 1950s



Figure 23: Katoomba NYE parade 1950s



Figure 24: Katoomba NYE parade 1950s



Figure 25: Katoomba NYE parade 1950s

The Blue Mountains Advertiser (Thursday 8 January 1953) noted that Mrs Annie Tulloch of Melbourne had enjoyed her fifth New Year's Eve in Katoomba, staying with family. The paper noted that she was now 92.

This was reported as far away as *Grafton* (*Daily Examiner (Grafton)* Thursday 1 January 1953 - Page 3): Day-long rain at Katoomba kept away thousands of people but 15,000 revellers welcomed in the New Year. In spite of drizzling rain, crowds gathered in Katoomba's streets early in the night. Thousands lining the route of a traditional New Year's Eve

procession showered streamers and confetti on to gaily bedecked floats winding their way along Katoomba's damp streets.



Figure 26: Katoomba NYE parade 1950s

Even the *Daily Telegraph* (Thursday 1 January 1953 - Page 20) reported on Katoomba: *Thousands of people thronged Katoomba's streets to watch a Festival of Time. A procession of about 20 floats, and many people in comical and national costumes, took part in the Festival. A variety concert entertained the crowd. Alderman P. E. Galway, Mayor of the City of the Blue Mountains Council, said: "Tonight's New Year's Eve celebration is one of the greatest ever in Katoomba."*

By the end of the year (1953) Katoomba was again preparing for the festivities. Katoomba people were promised “Bigger and Better New Year Festivities” by *The Katoomba Advertiser*, Thursday 19 November 1953. The year’s concert was to be held near the railway gates and various festivities would continue until the arrival of the Queen on February 12.

The Katoomba Advertiser (Wednesday 30 December 1953 – page 1) reminded its readers that Katoomba had again been selected for the ABC’s nationwide broadcast of New Year’s Eve revels at five minutes to midnight. A procession, dancing in the streets and various performances were all promised. Dancing at the Town Hall would commence at 9.00 pm and continue until exhausted.

Katoomba was lucky on the night – it was one of the few places in the state to have fine weather (*The Blue Mountains Advertiser* Thursday 7 January 1954 - Page 1). The New Year was rung in over the ABC – it was a national broadcast – and thousands were heard singing ‘auld lang syne’.

Blackheath had postponed its procession until New Year’s night as it meant many people and groups could enter floats in two processions, with double the fun.

Publicity for the 1954 revels was constant during December in the *Blue Mountains Advertiser*.

Some of it was positive, spearheaded by the search for an elephant to lead the procession. This search was reported throughout Australia, even reaching Innisfail in Queensland (*Evening Advocate, Wednesday 15 December 1954 page 6*).

There was going to be a big Radio Hook-up (*Blue Mountains Advertiser, Thursday 9 December 1954, page 11*). Three radio stations would feature the celebrations at Katoomba on NYE. The broadcasts were to be heard throughout the Commonwealth and in countries overseas. 2KA was going to broadcast the whole procession, and the ABC and 2GB would broadcast the countdown to midnight, the ABC nationally and 2GB through the Macquarie network.

In that same issue the Advertiser also reported that members of the Old Age and Invalid Pensioners' Association were playing their part towards the success of the NYE revels by cutting up stacks of brightly coloured magazines to provide huge quantities of confetti, which added to the carnival atmosphere of the celebrations.

Store-keepers, according to the *Advertiser, Thursday 16 December 1954 page 6*, were preparing for a spending spree, mainly over Christmas, but the article concluded: *One of the outstanding attractions during the holiday period will be the NYE's revels in the streets of Katoomba.*

On 21 December 1954, page 1, the *Blue Mountains Advertiser* announced the fireworks display that would herald in the New Year. A variety of rockets would be set off from the roof of the Carrington Hotel at midnight. At the same time, the ABC, 2GB and 2KA would be broadcasting the revels from a platform in front of the Carrington grounds.

A goanna running wild in a Lithgow dry cleaner was captured but not released. The avid huntsmen planned to release it the following day, at Katoomba, in the New Year's Eve procession! (*The Sun, Thursday 30 December 1954 – page 3; the Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate, Friday 31 December 1954, page 3*)

The only negative touch occurred early in December, again in the *Blue Mountains Advertiser (Thursday 9 December 1954, page 1)*

The Council was accused of parochialism, basically because it was not supporting the revels as it had done in previous years. After much argument, plans for the evening went ahead and a committee was formed.

What was not mentioned in the article is that the council to which they were referring was the Blue Mountains City Council. What is also not mentioned is the incorporation of the Municipality of Blackheath, the Blue Mountains Shire Council and the City of Katoomba, together with Blue Mountains County Council to become the Blue Mountains City Council on 1 October 1947.

NYE, 1954, was a great success, at least according to the *Blue Mountains Advertiser on Thursday 30 December 1954, page 1*. This article was headlined *Elephant for Katoomba Procession, Plans for Revels Complete*.

The elephant had been acquired and would head the procession. The committee had even taken out special insurance coverage for the elephant. Mr J. H. Hammon was going

to transport the elephant in one of his large trucks. The time of the elephant's arrival was to be kept secret – it would not be seen until the procession.

The rest of the evening's plans were then outlined.

Did the elephant appear? I'd love to say yes but note the date – there is very little in Trove post-1954 and the Gazette did not start until 1963.

The Daily Mirror, Saturday 1 January 1955 describes NYE throughout Sydney and ends with a paragraph about Katoomba: A crowd of 80,000 revellers – the biggest on record – packed Katoomba. No mention of elephants.

A Trove search for elephants and Katoomba reveals some interesting events in earlier decades, but nothing for 1954. *The Argus on Saturday 15 December 1956, page 5* does comment, writing about the 1956 NYE. The headline is “*‘Give Justice to Jumbo,’ cries Katoomba.*” The paper reported that Katoomba would appeal to Mr Downing, Justice Minister, against a police ban on an elephant. The police would not allow an elephant to lead a circus parade through Katoomba streets on NYE because the elephant would cause a traffic hazard. Mr G. Statham, entertainment director of the Blue Mountains Entertainments Committee ended his comments with the statement “*Katoomba Chamber of Commerce and the Blue Mountains Entertainment Committee have been trying for three years to get an elephant to lead the NYE parade.*”

So no, no elephant in 1954.

NYEves 1955 – 1962 – Did they occur? What form did they take? This is a black hole. Very little Trove and no Gazettes.

In Blue Mountains Historical Society files there is an article from the *Sydney Morning Herald* 17 September 1956 headed Carnival Tradition. It opens:

A hundred thousand revellers greet the New Year at Katoomba's traditional annual New Year's Eve Carnival. A procession of floats, bands and pedestrians in fancy dress frolic till dawn. That's all it says about Katoomba. The rest of the article looks at Blackheath's Rhododendron Carnival and Wentworth Falls Halloween Carnival and procession of witches and wizards.



Figure 27: *The Carrington was the place to be on NYE in the 1960s*

I did find something relevant in the *Nepean Times*, Thursday 19 April 1962, page 6. The headline is “*Local Ballet Stars at Blackheath*”. The article is about a St Mary’s group, but it is the first paragraph that I need: *Success of the Bodenweiser Ballet, St. Marys, at the Katoomba NYE Festival has gained the group a repeat performance at the Blackheath Easter Festival on Easter Saturday*. So, yes, a NYE festival in Katoomba in 1961.

Nothing yet found for 1962.

1963 New Year’s Eve – *Mountains Gazette*, Tuesday December 31, 1963. Blue Mountains go gay.



Figure 28: The Carrington was the place to be on NYE in the 1960s

1964 – January. Only reference to NYE 1963 is a paragraph on P. 6 about the Senior Citizens Centre float winning the prize.

But this means that there was a procession as part of the NYE festivities.



Figure 29: Dancing on NYE at the Trocadero and ready for the Parade in 63-64

1964 New Year's Eve – December 22, Tuesday, page 1: "The New Year's Eve Revellers Committee has planned a big night for Katoomba on Thursday December 31. Last year, Katoomba's New Year's Eve celebrations were a great success, and the committee is confident that this year's will be even better.

So, there was the usual festival on NYE 1963, as the Senior Citizens' paragraph suggests.



Figure 30: *The Parade in 63-64*

Former TV personality Chuck Faulkner would compere the 1964 celebrations while other top Sydney artists would provide platform entertainment.

Among the artists were the Missing Links, Jerry J Wilder, Merrill O'Neill and the Sheffields.

Katoomba Street would be closed to traffic at 7.00 pm to allow the grand parade to start at 8.15 pm.



Figure 31: *Group at the Parade in 63-64*

Judging of floats would be done prior to the start of the procession.

Cups, pennants and cash prizes would be awarded for the following section in the float competition:

- Best guest house, motel or hotel float
- most comical float or unit
- Most topical float or unit
- Best youth organisation float or unit
- Best decorated float, any design
- Best decorated cars, cycles etc

Blue Mountains City Council had agreed to the erection of coloured lights, bunting and a platform for entertainment in Katoomba Street.



Figure 32: Souvenir Snapshots 63-64



Figure 33: Souvenir Snapshots 63-64

Extra police had been fostered to handle the huge crowds which were expected to attend the Katoomba Revels.

New Year's Eve celebrations would also be held in Thomas Park, Blaxland.

In its first edition in January 1965, *the Gazette* (January 6) is more concerned about the Australia Day Jazz festival than reporting on the NYE procession but in its second paper for the year (January 13), the New Year's Eve Revels are on page 1. "*Rain Mars Revels*" is the headline, but the article states that, despite light rain and patches of fog, large crowds attended the New Year's Eve Revels at Katoomba. The celebration was an outstanding success and the standard of floats very high. The paper noted that the Katoomba police, assisted by two officers from Penrith, made five arrests, two for drunkenness and three for indecent language.

The Mountains Gazette, on December 22, 1965, headlined "*Katoomba Festive Programme*". Katoomba was to be the centre for two major outdoor festivals over the holidays.

On Christmas Eve, a Christmas Carol Festival would be staged in the car park, Katoomba and on New Year's Eve a "*new look*" revels would be held in Kingsford Smith Park Katoomba.

With the NYE Revels, the main programme would be staged in the Kingsford Smith Park, using the music shell as the stage and with the park floodlit. There was to be a non-stop show commencing at 9 pm and continuing until the NY was heralded at midnight. There was also to be a pre-procession programme of modern music at the bottom of Katoomba Street from 7-8 pm.

1966 - January – first couple of pages missing so no mention of 1965 NYE.

1966 - *The Mountain Gazette Thursday 22 December 1966* - Katoomba revels cancelled. For the first time in at least 30 years, an organised outdoor New Year's Eve Revels has not been arranged for Katoomba.

Despite an all-out effort by the Blue Mountains City Council and a \$200 subsidy towards the cost of staging the popular annual revels, none of the organisations approached this year were in a position to co-operate.

1967 - January. No NYE report.

1967 - *Blue Mountain Gazette Thursday December 7, 1967*. Katoomba's New Year Carnival. Article mainly about the girls competing in the "Queen Quest" but there was to be a parade through the streets at 8.00 pm and the crowning on the entertainment platform in Katoomba Street at 9.30 pm. It was being held on Saturday December 30 as 31st was a Sunday.

1968 - *Blue Mountain Gazette* – no mention of 1967 NYE throughout January but book begins *Vol 7 No 10m Thursday January 18, 1968*. (Three editions of the paper are missing between December 7, 1967, and January 18, 1968).

1968 - *Blue Mountain Gazette* – bad fires in late November, lower mountains. No mention of NYE throughout December.

1969 - Thursday January 9, 1969 - no mention of anything related to NYE 1968.

1969 - December Gazettes - no mention of NYE.

1970 - January Mountain Gazette no mention of NYE.

1970 - December Mountain Gazette no mention of NYE.

Gazettes since 1970 December have not yet been examined for New Year's Eve. Blue Mountains Historical Society's research files reveal that, in 1984, there was a concerted effort to resurrect the New Year's Eve revels, the New Year's Eve Mardi Gras. This was supported by the BM Gazette.

In our files, four clippings have been saved.

In *BM Gazette Wednesday 21 November 1984*, the headline read: "Team revives Revels". The article began: "*Mountain residents will be dancing the streets, this New Year, if Katoomba Mardi gras organisers, Brendan Doyle and Nick Fury have their way*".

The rest of the article described the planned activities, including a procession on the 31st. Planned costs were \$6500, towards which BMCC had promised \$1000. The article was illustrated by the photo of a very old float, satirising medical costs.

On *December 5, 1984*, *BM Gazette* ran the headline: "*New Year will start with a bang!*". The article summarised the help being given so that the procession and festivities would be spectacular and exciting. And it indicated how more donations could be made.

As well as the procession, there would be fireworks at midnight. Souvenir Snapshots would give a giant colour print to the most photogenic float, so there must be more Souvenir Snapshots somewhere.

The Gazette the previous week requested photos of previous "Mardi gras". This article was illustrated with one of the Spoonerisms floats and a certificate. It explains the Spoonerism float in the caption.

"Mrs Marion Broderick of Faulconbridge responded to our request in last week's paper for photos of the old Katoomba Mardi gras. The photo taken in 1936 shows her brother, Mr Trevor Rowsell, and a group from the Balmoral Guest House who were protesting about "spoonerisms". 'A Mr Spooner had complained in Parliament about the brevity of swimming costumes that were being worn at that time', Mrs Broderick recalls. The man in the old policeman's uniform was a Mr Adams who used to lead the procession each year."

The certificate was awarded to Mrs Broderick, as Miss Marion Rowsell, "Member Boarding House Group (Special)".

BM Gazette Wednesday December 19, 1984, there were two articles, one, headed "*1985, here we come*", listed the details for the December 31, including where the floats were to assemble for the procession and also added that Katoomba and Main Streets would

be closed to traffic from 9.00 am, giving stallholders and sideshow operators time to set up.

The second article, headed “*Fond memories of Mardi gras*”, was illustrated with three old photographs.

The central photo was of three women and a girl, under a sign reading New Year’s Eve 54-55 Katoomba. This caption read “Mrs Suzanne Hellwig writes:

This photograph, taken in Katoomba Street on New Year’s Eve 54-55, 30 years ago, shows my three sisters, Dorothy, Maureen, Frances and myself (centre front) Fallon. Our family lived in Bondi and owned a holiday cottage at Leura, ‘Esma’ in Norwood. We attended a couple of these festivities, which were most enjoyable, even though we had no car (cars were not as common as they are today) and we had to walk to everywhere from our home at Leura to attend. The main event I remember from the New Year’s Eve night were the live bands and dancing in the streets.”

The other two photos were both sent in by Miss Corinne Saber of Katoomba. She wrote: *These are just two of the many photos taken throughout the years and treasured by my family.*

The two ‘ladies’, Elsie and Ada, taken on New Year’s Eve of 1952, are my father Noel Saber and grandfather Neville Brest (note the picture of the Three Sisters in the background).

She then described the second photo, but her memories here do not line up for us.

‘The second photo was, I figure, taken about 1966 outside Felton Woods Guesthouse in Lurline Street on the way up to the procession. Again, my father as the Mad Hatter and myself as Alice. We won third prize that night.’

This is proof, if we need it, that we cannot rely on what’s reported in the newspapers alone, or on people’s memories alone.

According to the newspapers, there was no procession in 1966. Perhaps, as she says about 1966, she is remembering 1965?

Her final comments are an interesting summation of NYE:

‘I can remember that night and those like it quite clearly and cherish those memories of the processions and floats and side shows, and all so many crowds of people flocking to Katoomba for the big event, and a finishing touch to the night with everyone down at Kingsford Smith Park to listen to the music provided by the local city band. I was only a child then but am very much looking forward to participating in this year’s Mardi Gras on New Year’s Eve.’

The *Blue Mountains Gazette*, Wednesday January 9, 1985, published photos of the revels. The organisers were elated with the response as thousands of people attended the function. Katoomba’s first NYE festival in 30 years was a success.

Why did the carnival and processions die again? We have only to look at the story of events in the 21st century like the Winter Magic Carnival to understand the pressures placed on organisers of carnivals, processions or any other street activities. Would it be right to suggest that the carnivals and processions belong to an older, simpler time?

