

Merbein all set for event of the century

By LISA COOPER

The streets of Merbein will come alive in August when the township celebrates 100 years as an irrigation settlement.

The Merbein Centenary will be held from August 14-23, and packed with events and activities in what the Merbein Centenary Committee is calling "a significant, one-off event."

Merbein was one of the first State-owned pumped irrigation settlements in Victoria.

Originally set up for dairying, the arid climate and the considerable distance from markets saw the settlement change to the area it is known for today - valuable crops of vine and citrus fruits.

Formally known as the 'White Cliffs Irrigation Settlement Parish of Merbein' by the State Rivers & Water Supply Commission, which managed the settlement, the Lands Department referred to it simply as Merbein.

Locals preferred to spell the name as 'Merbein', the same as on surveyor's notes, but the current-day spelling was adopted after being incorrectly transferred to maps of the day. Chairman of the Merbein Centenary Committee, Leon Wagner, says the centenary celebration has been years in the planning.

"At the time, five years away felt like a long time, but it has come around quite quickly," he said. "The calendar of events will have something for everyone."

The celebrations will begin with a 'meet and greet' afternoon, sponsored by Lower Murray Water, at the Merbein Hotel on Friday, August 14 from 1pm. The official opening, sponsored by Mildura Irrigation, will be held the following day, starting at 10am. This will include the presentation of 'Land Allocation Certificates' to the descendants of Merbein's original settlers, and cutting of the Centenary Cake.

Sport will play a big part, and the last home game of 2009, between Merbein and Red Cliffs, will be a highlight. Merbein Bowls Club day as well, and a 'settler's picnic' at Kenny Park, hosted by the Whiting family, will bring back one of the early traditions of yesteryear.

The first Merbein picnic was held on New Year's Day, 1911. By 1922, it had grown significantly, held adjacent to the Merbein pumps, and attracting 6500 people.

The Sunday night entertainment will be a 'must see' with a display by world-recognised wildlife photographer, Lindsay Cupper. Lindsay will be showing a collage of bird films, as well as his exhibi-

will also be holding its Centenary Bowls Event.

The 'Merbein Community Bank Centenary Concert' will be held from 7.30pm on the Saturday night at the new Mercy Theatre located at 11th Street and Riverside Avenue, and the following day, church services will be held by the United, Anglican, and Catholic Churches in Merbein, with accompanying displays of memorabilia.

The Merbein Market will be on between 9am and 1pm in Commercial Street, Merbein on the Sun-



Centenary Celebrations 14 - 23 August 2009

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tion 'Imaginature' - Images of Nature, at the Merbein Citizens Club starting at 7.30pm.

Tuesday the 18th will include a 'Historic Cliffside Walk', led by Bert Curtis, to the historic Blandowski campsite of 1857, starting at 9.45am. The following day, Julian Raudino from DSE will take a historic walk through the Merbein Common, starting at 9.30am.

Merbein Golf Club will hold its 'Past Presidents' Centenary Event between 1pm-4pm. Other planned



• FLASHBACK: One of the township's first vehicles parked outside the then State Savings Bank.

sporting events are yet to be confirmed.

There will be a Country Music Concert held at the Merbein Citizens' Club on the Thursday night, and Friday will feature the Fishers Supermarket Street Parade, starting at Kenny Park at 2.15pm, and ending with a huge sausage sizzle at Chaffey Park near Pump Hill.

The theme of this year's event, 'Old and New', will represent the

early days of manual labour right through to today's modern technologies in farming and day-to-day living. Environmental sustainability and local sporting heroes will also be recognised.

The evening will be a family fun night of entertainment, ending with a bang with the 'Merbein Sawmills Centenary Fireworks' at 7pm.

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Saturday the 22nd will include a morning brunch from 9.30am at the O'Bryan Street Park adjacent to the Merbein and District Historical Society rooms, with the society opening its doors to the public.

The Merbein Boat Ramp will be a hive of activity from 1pm, with a boat flotilla and cruises, when members of the public can enjoy a four-kilometre return boat trip along the river, taking in the magnificent white cliffs of Merbein, Chaffey Landing, the Merbein Pumping Station and the Blandowski campsite.

That night will see the long-awaited return of local band 'Bushfire', playing at the Wakefield Transport Settlers Bush Dance at its Main Avenue depot, the same location as the 1959 bush dance. People will be encouraged to dress up "from the past."

Among other highlights will be Cupper Transport's daily memorabilia display, and a display of the historic 1857 Blandowski Expedition at Hill Corner Reception. Lower Murray Water Pumping Station will also be open on the Monday and Thursday from 10am till noon, and on the Wednesday from 2-4pm.

There will also be winery tours, and a National Australia Bank Merbein 'Faces and Places' Photographic Competition in Commercial Street Merbein.

The celebrations will end on Sunday, August 23, with an Inter-Denominational Church Service starting at 10am at the Kenny Park Rotunda. Following the service, a tree-planting ceremony will be held at the Kenny Park Memorial, before a Farewell Sunday Lunch.

Throughout the centenary celebrations, the doors of the Merbein RSL sub-branch will be opened to the public, with an extensive photographic collection of local ex-servicemen and women proudly on display. Merbein and District Historical Society will also open its doors,



• BYGONE AGE: A big occasion was the planting of the township's first palm tree, INSET, and ABOVE, the old picture theatre, The Royal, later destroyed by fire.

and various historical walks will be organised. Local schools will be heavily involved, already getting entries ready for the street parade, and various exhibitions, as well as teaching children more of the history of the settlement.

The Centenary Committee is asking for community support to assist in the celebrations.

Mr Wagner said initial support had been encouraging, but the committee was still seeking sponsorship to help with costs.

The committee is also seeking the assistance of more volunteers to help with various activities leading up to the event. Volunteers will be needed at many of the events and displays, such as the Meet and Greet Registration and the Centenary information office throughout the 10 days.

People can visit the Centenary website at www.merbeincentenary.com.au to add their names to the list of volunteers, via the "contact us" tab. Additionally, people are welcome to register with the website to receive

information leading up to the Centenary, with 137 people doing just that so far.

The Merbein Centenary Message Board and Guest Book can be viewed on the website, developed by mso.net. It is hoped will provide people with the opportunity to make contact with each other leading up to the event.

More information on the centenary is available from Richard and Bernadette Wells 5025 2288, or Leon and Kay Wagner, 5025 2585.