
 <p>Tasmanian Government</p>	<p>Heritage Lilydale An association under The Lilydale Progress Association, Tasmania</p>	 <p>City of LAUNCESTON</p>
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Speech for the exhibition opening on 24 April at Lilydale

EXHIBITION

Fighting our Cousins: Lilydale in World War One

Lilydale Memorial Hall
Saturday 25 April - Sunday 3 May
10am - 4 pm daily

I make this speech in honour of all those men and women of Lilydale who have fought and died in war and also of those who loved them, including that passionate local historian **Marita Bardenhagen**, lost too early to her family and friends at the end of 2012.

The Heritage Lilydale committee asked me to give this opening address, knowing that was a dangerous thing to do. I am the great grandson of Harry Mahnken who protested vehemently against the Conscription Referenda in 1916 and 1917 and it was he who said “it would be like shooting at your cousins.” When someone upbraided him for disloyalty, he said: “My mother is Irish and my father was German and I’m proud of both of them.” Now one hundred years later I am proud of him and his firm moral stand **against** war.

That does not mean I scorn or do not mourn the deaths of those men of Lilydale district and the whole 60 000 who did not return to Australia. Not to mention the remainder of the 300 000 Anzacs who went and came back traumatised and maimed.

I have a cousin on my grandmother’s side John O’Reilly who at age 86 guides visitors on tours of the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne. He agrees with me that it is fitting to honour always the memory of those young men lost to us in warfare. That is not glorifying the carnage and the waste of life; it should inspire us – every citizen - to prevent the terrible political blunders, economic greed or misunderstanding between cultures that bring about war.

I used to hear the expression in my father’s yarns: “left the district”. Oh, that family left the district, looking for an easier living in the big smoke or went to the other side. Where are these Johnstons and McGaugheys, McConnors, Mundys and Dolbeys that populated my father’s tales of olden days?

It occurred to me recently that many family names “left the district” because their sons were lost in the Great War. If there were girls, they married into other families and the **name** is not preserved although the genes go on. Look on the Exhibition lists of Lilydale district soldiers and read the *names of families who lost their son, husbands and fathers to the war*. Victor Chick is the only one left to

represent that name now in this district and his family sent three off to fight. I have been privileged to know closely Marita Bardenhagen one of the granddaughters of Peter Chick and a dedicated historian of the history of Lilydale's German Legacy and its attitudes in World War 1. Anne Youl, the hardworking President of Heritage Lilydale, is another of his granddaughters. We know that Cliff Chick made it home only to die in 1921 in a motorcycle accident. Their brother Charley Chick wrote hundreds of letters to his Mother from the Western Front between 1916 and 1918 and was twice wounded and then killed **nine months** before the Armistice. I have been privileged to read quite a few of Charley Chick's letters which passed to the sister Jane Chick and then to her son Charley Macdonald. Those letters are the words of exciting experience, of missing home and planning for the future. Of bravery and "giving Fritsy a warm time of it". And then, **on 27 March 1918**, a bullet ended all Charley's dreams of returning to the paddocks here at Lilydale and marrying and enjoying a long life. He was **27** years of age.

We also know that many of the returned soldiers from that war and all subsequent wars had a shocking time living with the horrors they experienced. Some died all too young or never made old bones. Some jumped at the sound of a car behind them and some drank and who can blame them? And some did get on with life like Bill Wilson who was remembered as the most dedicated civil servant the town could wish for – awarded the OBE in 1953 - but also a sombre and serious man who chain smoked on the job and off. Who knows what thoughts haunted him all his days?

Pat told me that old digger from North Lilydale Bill Mathewson said he'd been a fool. Allen Mathewson said his father always said "the big heads start the wars and the little heads have to finish it. And if you are going to be a soldier, be a soldier. Don't play at being a soldier." That's the quickest way to get killed.

You can read on a banner there how Bill only once in four years thought it was worthwhile.

We are lucky in the Lilydale district to have great talkers and story tellers and quite a lot of people interested in recording the thoughts, yarns, experiences, photos and artefacts of generations past and passing. Our past is certainly not only war, it is so much more than that, it is work in paddocks and bush, in homes and businesses. It is bearing children and schooling them, beating disease and accident. It is sport and leisure activities, communicating with each other, and tragedy enough at home without mentioning wars. And it is **knowing who you are and remembering those who shaped you**, whether they came from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, or Germany as did many Lilydale families or from Sardinia like John Manzoni or Spain like the Garcias and Rumania like the Gerzalias.

We are lucky the district produced the brilliant author Betty Viney (nee Arnold) and all the other quiet historians like Kathy Hawes, Suzanne Griffin, David Brown, Helen Chick, Dorothea Gibbons, Jack Glover to name a few. These are people who want to understand what became of those migrant Germans and Scots pioneers and all the others who made Lilydale. We want to understand what made Germans in Lilydale willing to fight and **kill their cousins** in World War One.

Richard Flanagan the Tasmanian writer in his latest book *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* has his lead character, a prisoner of war building the Japanese Thai-Burma railway, say (page 254-5):

Nothing endures. Not empires, not memories. We remember nothing. Maybe for a year or two. Maybe most of a life, if we live. Maybe. But then we will die, and who will ever remember any of this? And maybe we remember nothing most of all when we put our hands on our hearts and carry on about not forgetting.

Yet Richard Flanagan wrote that novel, through five drafts, so that we would not forget.

My nephew Rick reckons he hopes to be a slightly improved version of his father as a farmer who he reckons was probably a slightly improved version of his father. Rick cannot do that without knowing closely what his father did, remembering fondly his quirky ways and habits, and admitting that some of it was not best practice. The same applies to everything we do, including how we let our politicians behave, how we get involved in wars. We need to know what happened. Not forget. We need to study our own forebears and not forget. We need our school kids to love the history of their district and their state and nation and not forget and do better than we did.

I pay tribute to Cath Hamilton Hon Sec, Heritage Lilydale, who is not Lilydale born but who wrote to me that Underwood and Lilydale were popular with her family on Sunday afternoon drives. She has worked tirelessly on this project. She has given us her curiosity and interest, her organisational, research, writing, IT and reporting skills and so much time and energy.

For which we thank her. We also thank

- the Lilydale Progress Association
- Lilydale RSL who, through their Launceston City Council Community grant has supported this exhibition.
- Arts Tasmania's Small Museums and Collections program and Roving Curators for providing funds and assistance for the project
- Arts Tasmania roving curators Melissa Smith and Veronica Macno who have guided Heritage Lilydale through the rigors of developing a coherent organisation capable of mounting an exhibition like this
- Designer Louise Thrush for her immense patience and skill

We thank all involved in bringing us this wonderful important exhibition which is **just the beginning** of the Anzac Centenary 1914-1918. It is intended to stage exhibitions in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Many wonderful materials provided have not been used in the 2015 exhibition and Heritage Lilydale hopes to receive, collect or record more stories, images, letters and artefacts over the coming years. And not to forget.

Dr Phillip Mahnken

24 April 2015

More information: email heritagelilydale@gmail.com or call Anne Youl: 6395 1223

Visit the website: <http://heritage.lilydale.weebly.com>

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