

# PLOD ESSAY: THE HOSPITAL GARDEN PARTY

The Wonthaggi Hospital Garden Party must have been ‘Something’ in this town. To the delight of the Centenary Committee, the whole town seems to have rallied to make the memory of that annual event live again. So far there are sixty groups wanting to march or man floats in the parade and fifty stalls organised at the Hospital. The count seems to be rising with each passing hour. Jenny Churchill is gob-smacked and pleased as punch.

According to Sam Gatto, whose much anticipated book on the extraordinary history of our hospital is due to be launched in September of this Centenary year, the Garden Parties began in the early 1950s as a funding exercise to supplement the



monies that had always been raised since 1910 by the Hospital Ball. The idea was to start with a parade and end with a kind of gentrified fete. The date for the event was set for a sun-shiny day in March, something that rarely eventuated, as year after year the chosen day – never the same – turned dark and thundery. It seems that the people of Wonthaggi don't remember the bad weather for in their memories the Garden Party was glorious.

The people were smart to start off the party with a parade, or ‘Procession’, as they called it. From the very beginning of the town, Wonthaggians loved a parade.



There is a lovely picture from the *Sentinel* of a float from Kongwak going past the Caledonia Hotel in 1913 as part of the Labour Day (or Eight-Hours Day) Parade. Also the mining unions took part in the May Day Parade in Melbourne each year with their banners. And the brass band and some of the pit ponies, and

whole caravans of people in their Tin Lizzies wound their way along the Bass Coast Road (or track as it seemed) to the Kilcunda Picnic, which felt kind of like a parade.

But when the Hospital Garden Party began, the Procession, was elaborate. According to a program from the museum archive dated 23 March 1968, the floats assembled at the Tech School at 12:30 pm and at 1pm ‘sharp!’ the parade began. After the last float got to the hospital ground, the wheelbarrow race started, the course being Graham St, McKenzie St, White Rd, South Dudley Rd. Whew! While the race was proceeding, the Wonthaggi Marching Girls put on a display. Remember when girls marched?



After the finish of the wheelbarrow race, which they judged would take 45 minutes, winners of the Procession were announced – best group entry, best local entry, most original entry, best traditional costume, best and most original juvenile entry – and prizes were presented.

This was followed by a fashion parade organised by the Wonthaggi CWA and then a “Go-Go” Girls Competition (this was 1968!). Finally, at 4:15, the highlight of the day was the judging of the Misses Garden Party: Miss Tiny Tot, Miss Junior, Miss Garden Party, Garden Party Matron and Grand-Matron were chosen and lauded.

The Victorian Railways Band and the Wonthaggi Citizens Band played throughout. And don't forget afternoon tea, merry-go-round and spinning wheel. Admission to this delightful event was 20¢ (children free).



**What a day!**

(Pam Allen, Miss Garden Party 1959, raised \$2530 for Hospital.)