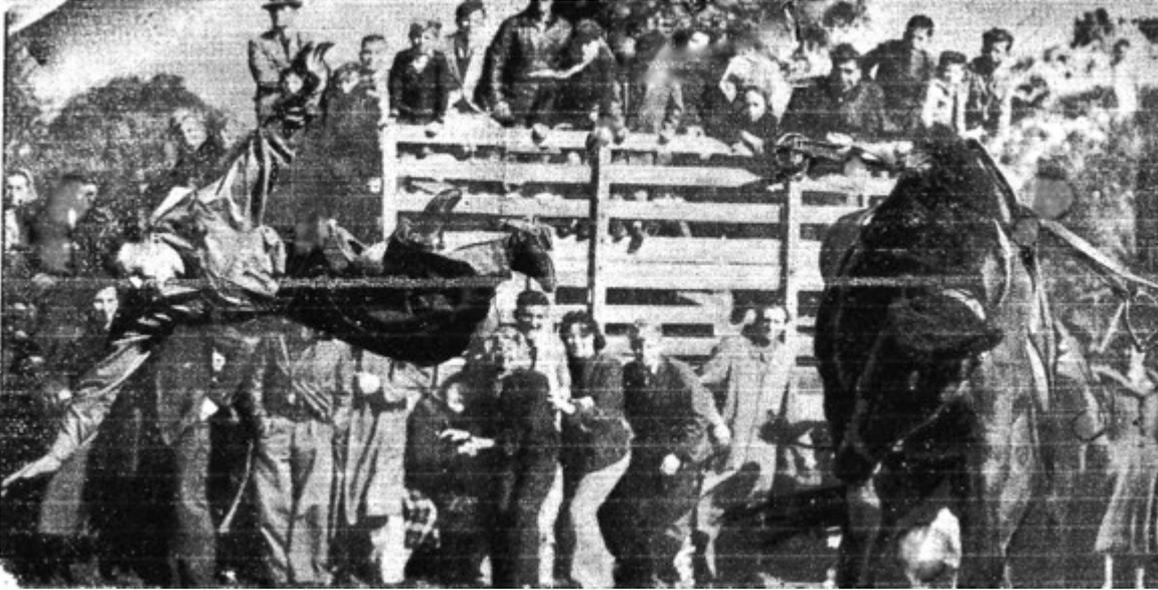


PLOD ESSAY:

Lance Creek Rodeo 1952



One day in January (2014) Brian McKenzie walked into the Railway Museum carrying a gold-plated trophy that he wanted to show someone, thinking that the history behind it might be of interest to the Historical Society.

The trophy was a classically shaped goblet on a carved wooden base (not plastic as it would be today) and engraved on it was: "Lance Creek Sports & Rodeo, Won by W. H. A. McKenzie, Steer Riding, 1952".

Brian said that a woman from Queensland had found it amongst her mother's things after she had recently died. She took the time to trace the McKenzie family to Wonthaggi and sent the trophy to Brian out of the blue. Those of us there at the museum that day were certainly interested.

Did anyone remember the Lance Creek Rodeo?

Who was W.H.A. McKenzie?

And, who was the woman?



*Jim & Brian
with trophy*

Jim Quilford had come into the museum with Brian. He knew about the rodeo, although he was only three when it happened. He thought there was only one rodeo ever run, but when we did a search in

the newspapers of the day, it seems it was run in 1951 and 1952. His memory was correct when he said that the committee from St George's, the Church of England, decided to run a rodeo and gymkhana. Some of the "dignitaries" on that committee were: a) Jim's father, Arthur, who was secretary; b) Fred Reiter, who ran the abattoirs at Lance Creek; and c) Kingsley (George) Atkinson, who owned one of the bigger farms in the St Clair area and who had donated a corner of his farm to the St George's Scout Group for their camping ground. With these heavyweights on the committee, the rodeo would be held nowhere else but Lance Creek.

They decided to use the yards at the abattoirs where only a few adjustments were needed to add a crush gate for the day. The yards were connected to a large yard where all the excitement of buckjumping and steer riding would take place.

The first rodeo in 1951 seems to have been practice for a much grander event in 1952, when George Atkinson, who knew Norm Cakebread, the major rodeo contractor at the time, got Norm to agree to supply the second event with buckjumpers for £2 each time they were used, as long as he could agist them until he needed them again – which it turned out would not be until the Lang Lang Rodeo at Easter – five months later.

Jim Quilford knew the buckjumpers and bulls were brought to Wonthaggi on the train. "They herded them up," he said, "and took them to Lance Creek. They were quiet. Buckjump horses are quiet. They are trained to jump only if the strap is on them."

The Powlett Express tells a different story in an article headlined, "The Wild Horses were Really

Wild!" It explained that Atkinson "had the unenviable task last Sunday of driving the Cakebread outlaw horses to be used [in the rodeo on Saturday] from the Wonthaggi railway line to Fred Reiter's property... Galloping madly along the Korumburra Road, the Footscray neddies broke off up side roads and proved more than Atkinson and his stock pony could handle." Finally, North Wonthaggi farmer, Tom Beard, used his motorbike to head off the stampede and slow the rodeo horses sufficiently "to permit their being driven in something resembling and orderly fashion."

The wilder the better it seems. The papers said of the Cakebread stock that because they were registered with the Australian Rough Riders Association, the second annual rodeo would benefit greatly in that such registration would add prestige and "focus the attention of the state's best riders". The *Express* noted that, "Secretary Arthur Quilford...has made many contacts in rodeo and horse riding circles with the result that an attractive, well-prized programme has been set down for decision."

Jim remembers that Ray Crawford came to compete. "He was the best buckjumping rider in Australia." Jim reckons he rode Cloudbuster – or was it Cream Puff? – a mare that could "buck your skin off."

Another famous rider was Texas Lil, a 19-year-old Beaumaris girl (whose real name was Ray Mattei), who was Australian yodelling champion, and had finished 4th in the Australian Ladies buckjump championships. Texas Lil's Mum had taught her about horses. Her mum was also a country songwriter and had written many a tune for Tex Morton. It was Tex Morton and the equally famous Smokey Dawson on his horse, Flash, who taught Texas Lil to yodel. Lil became the President of the Hillbilly Hollow Log Club.

With the rodeo stars, horses and bulls, plus the abattoir's steers, the rodeo was set to be a success. Jim remembers they had buckjumping, bull riding, roping and tying, and gymkhana events like bending races. It was a full and exciting day.

Locals were encouraged to try their luck along with the cowboy stars.

That's where Wonthaggi-born farm boy, W.H.A. McKenzie, comes in. His nephew, Brian, thinks Wally was just a young kid at the Lance Creek Rodeo when he won his trophy steer riding. Brian is too young to remember Lance Creek in 1952, but he does remember that there was a cabinet in Wally's house that was full of trophies. He knows that Wally

rode at Lang Lang a fair bit and that he spent his early years, after the Lance Creek win, pursuing a career in rodeo riding before he settled down. Because all the other trophies have disappeared, Brian reckons that the cup Wally won at Lance Creek was special and that it may have counted in the National Registry.

He also reckons that the old woman, who had kept the cup for more than sixty years, must have been Wally's sweetheart. Her daughter came across the cup in the attic of her mother's house and knew it was too good to throw out. Brian says, "Her daughter knew that back in the early days her mother was living down here and she thought Wally and her mother must have had fling and that's how come I got the trophy." One can only imagine that the relationship between Wally and the girl was more than just a fling to at least one of the participants.

Jim Quilford remembers that the 1952 Rodeo was the last one at Lance Creek. This may be because there were some serious accidents that day: one competitor broke his ankle, another had a nasty cut above his eye, Arthur Quilford got his head caught in a crush and had to be rushed to hospital. Texas Lil just escaped serious injury when her horse turned out to be a spinner rather than a jumper and fell on her.



Texas Lil under her horse

Jim remembers that even if they didn't repeat the Lance Creek experience, buck jump contests were held at Rec 3 throughout the 1950s but were pushed out by the circus and then there were "Shoot'em Up Shows" at St Joe's Hall. "The cowboys would come and would be shooting blanks. All the school kids used to go. They'd have lassoing and whips and the fellas would be dressed up like Roy Rogers. We all loved it."