

A Custodian of Cobden

ALMA MacDONALD

“Yes, there is much yet to be done, so I keep on doing while I am able.”

These inspirational words of Alma MacDonald should encourage us mere mortals to do what we can while we can.

Alma has spent much of her 84 years serving the community. Apart from her hours of toil on the family farm at “Bonvue” on Cross Forest Road, Alma’s commitment to volunteer work began at age 13 when she was a plane-spotter during World War 2.

“I did a Saturday afternoon shift with an adult lady. We used to watch the sky from the golf club rooms for any aircraft. The powers-that-be thought we were going to be invaded from the southern ocean so we were to watch for suspicious aircraft and log them,” Alma recalls. “I don’t remember seeing any.”

From there, Alma left no stone unturned, compiling an impressive list of community involvements that takes your breath away. Among others . . .

- Cobden Swimming Pool committee of management for 66 years,
- Cobden’s first guide leader in 1956,
- Pipe band, church youth group – “everything my kids were in including the kindergarten”,
- Cobden and District Historical Society,
- Cobden Chamber of Commerce,
- Cobden Spring Festival committee,
- Heytesbury Shire’s first elected female councillor and the last president of the Shire before its amalgamation with Hampden Shire,
- A Corangamite Shire councillor and deputy mayor,
- Cobden Bush Nursing Hospital board member and treasurer,
- Cobden Health Services board member, and life member,
- Cobden Airstrip committee since inception,
- Sherbrook River Guide Camp committee,
- Timboon Arthritis Group,

- Racecourse Development Plan member,
- Cobden Senior Citizens including various executive positions,
- Accredited Warm Water Exercises co-ordinator,
- Town Appearance and Tourism Action Group member,
- CDHS charity shop,
- Meals on Wheels.

Proudest personal and professional achievements? Alma quickly put her family on top of the list.

Pressed harder, she thought long and hard before offering, almost apologetically, “I guess my Australia Day Citizen of the Year award and things like the roses on Victoria Street, Tandarook Park, the terraced hill at the swimming pool, the CDHS charity shop and the Warm Water exercise pool . . . all of which would not have been achieved without support from other volunteers to help carry out ideas.

Clearly, family is special. Alma’s parents – Hope Wilson and Molly Winchcombe – were both from local Cobden families. She is the third surviving child, having had two brothers and three sisters.

“My mother lost her first two daughters at birth, something which was a common event in those days,” she said.

“We helped with the farm and household tasks, hand-milking the cows before and after school. We walked 2¼ miles to school but we were not alone in this manner of living because most farm kids assisted at home.” Home was where Greg and Wendy Sambell now live.

Born on July 29th in 1930 at Dr A. H. Barrett’s private hospital in Parrott Street, Alma attended Cobden State School No 864 from September 1935 to December 1943.

“I obtained my merit certificate when I was 12 years of age - in those days 13 years was the earliest leaving age,” she said.



One of Alma’s passions: Tandarook Park



“My last year at school consisted of me ‘helping’ the preps in the mornings. In the afternoons, Mr Jobling gave me advanced English and arithmetic. My parents could not afford to send me to high school as there were no free buses in those days. “I loved school - both lessons and playtime.”

Swimming has been the great joy of Alma’s life. She believes it most important in teaching and participation. She also played basketball and table tennis.

Other interests have included the Cobden pipe band, attending local dances, involvement in girl guides, travel, reading, card playing and, of course, her passion for Cobden’s history.

Alma’s husband Bill was a Scottish migrant who she met at the Cobden Butter Factory office where she had taken up her first full-time job. “We were both involved in the pipe band, he as the drum major while I played a side drum,” she recalled.

“We were married in 1957 and Bill passed away in January 1990.

“Bill and I had three children – Alistair, Craig and Ellen who, I am happy to say, are all residing and working in our area. I have three children-in-law – Jo and Sharon MacDonald and Chris Meade – and four grandchildren – Lachlan and Rebecca MacDonald, and Callum and Darcy Meade.

Surprisingly, Alma still found time for a busy and rewarding working life. Supremely motivated, after leaving school she studied book-keeping and accounting by correspondence and learnt typing and shorthand privately.

“After part-time shop work at a fruiterer, cake and pie shop, I began work at the factory in 1944, at age 14. In 1954, I obtained ‘leave of absence’ from the factory and travelled to London where I worked in an import dairy produce company for 15 months. A wonderful experience,” she mused.

“That’s why I encourage my family to travel. It broadens the mind. I was so pleased when Callum announced he was off to England.

“I remember returning home with two pounds to my name. Luckily, I was able to go back to work straight away.”

Continuing to broaden her own experience, Alma and her husband later share-farmed in the Otways for six years. “I then worked for 15 years in the legal firm of Arthur E George & Sons where my employer David Manuel encouraged advancement and learning. I also worked for several years at the Timboon AB Co-operative,” she said.

Alma remembers with great pleasure her journey overseas in 1954 when she took the opportunity to ride a camel from Aden to Cairo, an experience

she will not forget. She marvelled at the Pyramids and wondered how they could have been so well-engineered and constructed in ancient times.

Other holiday highlights have been an outback air-trip through western New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia, a diving and snorkelling trip to the Solomon Islands, and visits to the war cemetery near the bridge over the River Kwai, Changi Prison in Singapore and the Canadian Rockies.

Alma has not been one to let grass grow under her feet. Even now, she is determined to keep herself as busy as possible “allowing for my ageing body and mind”.

“I try not to dwell on things I cannot change. I try to do my best at what I can assist with,” she said.

Alma appreciates the fact that she was born and reared in an area which has given opportunity for free and healthy living. “I have had a couple of close shaves with my heart but, by good fortune and/or modern science, I’m still on the right side of the grass,” she smiled with the famous twinkle evident.

Done with talking about herself, Alma was keen to return to what she enjoys doing most – “my kids and grandies, playing cards, the warm water pool, travelling, the charity shop, my garden and reading.” All in one day, we suspect!

But, before leaving, she couldn’t resist one final piece of advice: “We have a very strong community in Cobden. Be proud of what we have and remember we are all here as caretakers so take care of what we have to offer the future.”

Who are we to argue with one of the great custodians of Cobden?

GUIDING THE GUIDES

Alma started the guide company in Cobden in 1956 because “... there was nothing for children to do and there was a big need for it. I had 24 children and a waiting list of eight.”

She still maintains her guiding interest as a member and current treasurer of the Sherbrook River Guide Camp committee.

Alma enjoyed taking the girls camping in the local bush and is pictured below (kneeling), at a campfire.



COBDEN CALENDAR

Tuesday 25th February
Saturday 1st March

Monday 3rd March
Friday 7th March
Tuesday 11th March

Monday 17th March

7.30am CBN breakfast meeting at Cobden Golf Club.
1.30pm Hoy afternoon, Senior Citizens’ Hall. **Also: Bowls 1pm every Monday and cards 1pm every Monday, Thursday and Saturday.**
7.30pm Progressing Cobden meeting, Heytesbury Room.
7pm World Day of Prayer service, Cobden Uniting Church.
10.30am Pancake Day, Cobden Uniting Church. \$2.50 per pancake. Phone 5595 1765 for orders and/or deliveries.
7.30pm CopRice Cobden Spring Festival meeting, Heytesbury Room.

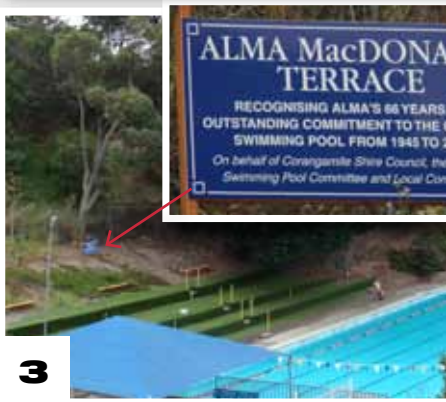
ALMA’S COBDEN



1



2



3



4

1. Kayla Loving pours a cuppa for Alma at the Cobden Kindergarten. Alma was president when the kindergarten was opened.
2. Making history! An invaluable Tourism Action Group member, Alma will be contributing much to the ‘Cobden Story’ project.
3. The Alma MacDonald Terrace with sign (inset) at the Cobden Swimming Pool. Opened in 2011, the terrace recognises Alma’s 66 years of involvement.
4. The Rodney Grove Community Aquatic Centre - another of Alma’s passions.