

Traralgon and District Historical Society Incorporated

ABN 83 077 806 233



21 March 2022

Ms Judith Smart
Co-Editor Victorian Historical Journal

Nomination for Award of Merit

Name: John Power

The Traralgon & District Historical Society Inc. would like to nominate our member John Power for an Award of Merit.

John Power has contributed to the appreciation and understanding of history in Gippsland for 40 years, having joined the Traralgon & District Historical Society and its committee in 1982. He was elected President in 1986, John stewardship of the Society for the next 9 years. He reflected the Statement of Purposes which the Society adopted in that year as it became an incorporated association.

In particular the first three purposes are:

- To foster historical interests and knowledge particularly but not exclusively within the area of Traralgon and its surrounding districts in the State of Victoria;
- To collect and preserve historical interest;
- To compile and keep historical records of the district.

These were demonstrated through his leadership and actions. The outcome was increased community awareness of the town's history through:

- The facilitation of the eventual return to Traralgon and the towns people of the 1902 Oldsmobile, originally gifted to the Society in 1970 by Roland Hill. The history of the gift and the car's location had been given no consideration for many years. When John became aware of the car's presence and the gifting of it to the Society he set about facilitating its return and display in Traralgon.
- The restoration of George Bolton Eagle's grave, the earliest post settlement grave known to exist in the district.
- Participation in the discussions that led to the restoration of Traralgon's oldest building the Star Hotel (today a much loved and utilised eatery beside the Traralgon Creek known as Stellina's).

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- Numerous articles and talks to the Society that were reflective of the strong oral history tradition that John had experienced within his family's culture and readily shared with the community.
- The transition of the Society's collection from a heap of old boxes tucked away in shed, to the beginnings of an ordered collection made available to the public in a space that was gifted to the Society on a peppercorn lease during the local government amalgamation in the early 1990's.
- The production of a Heritage Trail Brochure of Traralgon to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of its status as a city and the introduction of heritage walks.

In addition to his work with the Society, in 1987, John co-ordinated the co-operative research on the Wright family, descended from Joseph Wright and Eleanor Gott, convicts who arrived on the second fleet. John authored the book *Two Hundred Years on the Wright Side* in 1988. The book traces the family's journeys from England in the 1780's and 1790 to Sydney, Windsor, Tasmania, Burra in South Australia, Ballarat gold fields and their eventual arrival in Gippsland in 1871. The book is still sought after and is well regarded reference for local history buffs.

At this time John was also serving the Traralgon RSL as Secretary and actively engaged others in war history of the town's local service men.

In 1995 John suffered severe Meniere's Disease and consequently lost his hearing, causing his retirement from the role of President of the Society, although not from fulfilling the purposes of the Society. Over the next 20 years John continued to contribute to the Society and the community's knowledge of Gippsland history through research and writing. When his hearing was restored through an implant, he resumed talks to community organisations and local primary schools. He won praise for his ability to engage students and recite history in a manner that connected to the young students. John is widely read and his knowledge and ability to recall readily the things that many of us don't even realise we have forgotten endears him to many.

In 2015 John was introduced to the wonders of social media, he was 83 at the time and he began to participate in the conversations on the Gippsland History Facebook page sharing his knowledge and recollections of Gippsland. John and his wife Shirley's family had lived and worked in Gippsland since the earliest days of white settlement and his knowledge of the region and its early days of settlement are expansive. He is generous in sharing his time and resources with the many people who call upon him, visit or contact him by letter or telephone. He has embraced the power of research in the digital age and at 90 is still widely respected and appreciated as a community elder and keeper of stores of the early days of settlement.

History is a genuine passion for John and he has for 40 years shared his passion freely in his local and the broader Gippsland community.

Regards



Barbara Johnson
President
Traralgon & District Historical Society Inc.