

BYGONE DAYS: Geelong - 100 years ago

Week 9: *February 27th to March 5th, 1923*

Fun, Jazz, and greater freedom were all features of the period we call the “*Roarin’ Twenties*”. Depressive clouds of World War I were still evident in the visible injuries to returned soldiers, and hidden mental grief was silently and secretly present. Many Geelong citizens had also lost family to the Spanish Influenza epidemic. Despite these depressing periods of recent history, there was a renewed optimism in society and advances in technology.

Geelong in the *twenties* was a busy and industrious city as the photograph by Charles Pratt discloses.¹



The ‘Roarin Twenties’ was also a time of greater freedom. Greater opportunities for women were becoming available, because the work they performed during World War I had changed the way society saw their role and skills. In the article *Learn-to -Swim Week* the opportunities are shown, but so too are the societal restrictions that still bound them to domestic life. Change was happening to traditional roles and opportunities, but it was slow.

Ninety girls registered for the program that was organised by the newly founded Blue Triangle Committee .

“A great many all of them have learned to swim at least a few strokes, and the percentage of swimmers at the end of this week gives every promise of being high.”

A novice race at a forthcoming swimming carnival on Saturday had many entries.

“Open Bathing” was challenging the old order of segregated bathing.

“Bathing in the open seems to be gaining in popularity, not only at Rippleside, but on the Eastern Beach. On Sunday morning several ladies and gentlemen dipped between the Ladie’s Baths and the Springs and a serviceable tent was

noticed to be erected for a while. If the beach was properly cleaned up - a matter of no great difficulty - there should be quite a future before this 'industry'".

A scheme of Universal Military Training began in Australia in 1909 that required men aged between 18 and 60 to train for military service. The only exemptions were: those who lived more than five miles (eight kilometres) from the nearest training site; those passed medically unfit; resident aliens; and theological students. Between 1911 and 1915, 34,000 prosecutions were issued to those who didn't attend, and 7000 men were gaoled.²

This form of training should **not** be confused by the attempt to introduce conscription on October 16th, 1916. The attempt, by Prime Minister Billy Hughes to mandate military service, was narrowly defeated.

Despite being unpopular, the scheme still continued until 1929. The experience of the Great War probably made the scheme more valued, important and relevant.

The Geelong Advertiser was careful to remind parents of young boys that:

"Parents all male children born in the year 1909 are reminded that the date of registration for military service is about to close. Any who have so far failed to comply with the regulations, are advised to do so within seven days. After that date they will be liable to prosecution. Cadets of the local area will be pleased to learn that by a recent decision of the defence department they are to be issued, in the course of a few weeks, with Commonwealth pattern uniforms. The object of the alteration is to have all trainees in the military forces clothed uniformly..."

Commonwealth rifle competitions were scheduled to be conducted in July and it was anticipated local cadets would perform well.

"On Saturday, 60 cadets fired over the 100 yards range at Limeburner's Point and about 80% passed in grouping. This evidences the interest that is being manifested by the lads in regard to their training."

Fire broke out at the Royal Mail Hotel in Yarra Street on Sunday night. Residents at the hotel were alerted to the danger by boys who were playing nearby. Residents extinguished the blaze with buckets.

"It appears that some hot ashes had been deposited in the corner of the yard, and these were fanned into flame and ignited the fence. The city fire brigade turned out, but their services were not required."

"Counterfeit florins (two shilling coins) were being circulated by counterfeiters in the area. The Geelong Advertiser reporter had received a coin himself. Although it looked genuine, the coin could be easily bent with his teeth. One businessman in Moorabool Street received no less than six of the bad two shilling pieces in one day... Until Geelong is cleared of the bad coins, caution should be the watchword. Examine every florin closely. Test the ring and submit the florin to a searching examination."

In the late 1800s, Melbourne was given the nickname "Smellbourne", because of rubbish in the streets and the poor disposal of human sanitation. A Royal Commission report in 1888 resulted in the construction of Melbourne's Western Treatment Plant at Werribee.

Geelong's Barwon River was not immune to offensive sewage odours in 1923. Local and visiting rowers on the Barwon were able to judge the quality of Barwon River water up close at the Barwon Regatta.

"With the installation of sewers on the banks of the Barwon it was thought that the offensive smells from the river would be at an end. Although the sewerage scheme is almost completed, visitors at the Barwon Regatta on Saturday had good reason to believe that the sewers were not in use, as the constant stirring up of the water of the river by the oarsmen made conditions uncomfortable, but for the fact that there was a north wind, which carried the odours away from the reserve, measures would have been more unpleasant.The stench was 'abominable' said one visitor, disgustedly."

Tramways continued expanding their routes to Geelong's ever spreading suburbs and surrounding local government areas. One hiccup was the Belmont line, because of the new Barwon Bridge construction on Moorabool Street. North Geelong became the beneficiary of this delay.

"The order originally was Belmont first and North Geelong next, but owing to the delay referred to, the positions would required to be reversed. The construction of the North Geelong line necessitates the usual application by the councils to the government for an order in council covering the construction of the tramways... The root of the proposed tram line is through Mercer Street, Beach Road, Glenleith Avenue, Melbourne Road to Separation Street."

As well as the North Geelong extension, there was a duplication of the line planned between Moorabool Street and Latrobe Terrace.



Lights of vehicles were enforced as part of the City by Laws, but not until in late February

"All by-laws dealing with lights on vehicles have been superseded by the Police Offences Act, which has been amended to include such breaches against the traffic regulations. Power to deal with these offences now passes from the civic to the police authorities. Under the old system, a certain amount of laxity existed, and probably on account of the alarming increase in the traffic accidents the change has been made in order to tighten up matters and to give the police wider scope in the efforts to bring the offenders to book."

References

1 Photograph Charles Pratt, State Library Victoria

2 <https://www.naa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/fs-160-universal-military-training-in-australia-1911-29.pdf>

3 In the 19th century, Melbourne was nicknamed 'Smellbourne'. The solution lay in the Western Treatment Plant
By [Margaret Paul](#) ABC News Fri 26 Nov 2021