

Browsing

ROZ GREENWOOD

A noted photographer, Richard Crawley, was given an assignment stretching over an eighteen-month period. The Myers family – with a mixture of vision and philanthropy – commissioned him to create a book about Dunkeld and its surrounding countryside. Now, the landscape happens to be spectacular; the town being overshadowed by Mount Sturgeon and Mount Abrupt at the southern end of the Grampians range. So, the book – which was launched during the ‘Back-to-Dunkeld’ weekend coinciding with the town’s 150th anniversary – is spectacular. However, Crawley’s evocative and sometimes robust work captures the various moods of the town and its people. Many of those who have been captured in the book are entranced but some have been outraged at how they appear.

The book has been beautifully designed and bound in hardback yet for its quality it is modestly priced at \$100 and has been snapped up by locals and a wider community of interested people. It is an excellent addition to a rather meager collection of books dealing with Victoria’s western districts. The photographer – in his pixie-like presence – popped up in different places over the period of the commission. One Sunday morning, he organized a large gathering of townsfolk and people from the surrounding countryside and took a shot from above looking down. It was a difficult-to-achieve shot but gave the anniversary an historical image. The cover shot – a silvery ribbon of wet road leading to the eye of a brooding Mount Abrupt revealed through a break in the rain clouds – captures another mood.

Entitled *Dunkeld: A Portfolio* and published by Dunkeld Pastoral Company in association with Richard Crawley Publishing, it includes reproductions of silver gelatin photographs that were processed with traditional methods. A real collector’s item!

At the other end of my experience as a dealer in old books, I recently came across two that intrigued me. The first, entitled *From Pioneers to Presidents*, published by the Shire of Bannockburn prior to its amalgamation into the Geelong area, not only served to give rate-payers information on services provided but included a well-researched history of the area and interesting photographs

of people and properties. So the Shire used its money to present a report to the ratepayers and, in the process, presented them all with a good account of their history. What a useful addition to the archives this is and what a clever way of disseminating history. It is a sixty-three page, cardboard-covered, edition with a sketch of the Shire offices on the cover.

The second, similar, book I uncovered was issued by the Shire of Kowree and sold in bookshops and through the Shire office for \$2.10. Although it is undated, it appears to emanate from the 1970s. It is an A3-size paperback with a cloth strip at the spine and is a reprint of the charming work *Pioneering Days in Western Victoria* written by J.C. Hamilton in 1913. There is a detached page forward in the form of a letter commending the publication written by the Shire Secretary. Hamilton was seventy-six when he wrote this work on the major experiences of his life and it remains a classic of the experiences of the early pioneers.

Coming across these two books made me think of all the paper trails that our Shires create today. By comparison, here are two good, readable, works of history that were provided to ratepayers at a minimal cost. I commend the idea to our current administrators.

Roz Greenwood runs and Old and Rare Books shop in Dunkeld and is president of the Jamilton Art Gallery and the Hamilton Club Library.