

A HISTORY OF V.S.D.A. STATE CONVENTIONS

by Marion Brown

The first three conventions were held at Warburton Chalet from 1970, with all facilities under one roof - eating, sleeping and dancing. This was a great introduction to State conventions. A fire at the Chalet four days before the 4th convention forced a move to Geelong. Accommodation was at one location, dancing and meals were at the Railway Institute Hall.

At the 5th, again in Geelong, our convention badge "The Map of Victoria" was introduced, with year bars being part of the registration package. Following publicity with demonstrations in the mall, a club started in Geelong.

Street demonstrations were held on Saturday morning at most conventions. Also, a tour of the district was arranged for Sunday.

We moved to Shepparton for the 6th, 7th and 8th, with an active club in Shepparton. The Friday night trail-in dance was held at the local club. On Sunday evening following the dancing, a film session showing V.S.D.A. functions and previous conventions was held.

We moved to Ballarat for the 9th and 10th. During the 9th, we were to gain publicity with radio and TV interviews. At the 10th, a special supper was held following dancing on the Saturday night.

We went back to Shepparton for the 11th. We welcomed our first overseas caller, Chuck Jordan. It was also Warwick Butcher's final convention after 11 years, leaving behind a very good foundation.

From the 12th to the 21st, Gary Brown became convenor. Gary had worked with Warwick on previous conventions. The 12th to the 14th were held in Geelong.

We moved to Morwell for the 15th, 16th and 17th. At this venue we were able to divide the hall during the afternoon sessions, with rounds in one hall and squares in the other. During this period at Morwell, providing the evening meals became more difficult so this unfortunately was discontinued. Those who did attend enjoyed the chance to socialize away from the dance floor.

In 1987, with the national being held in Geelong, we held our only convention (at that stage) in Melbourne at Wantirna. We returned to Shepparton for the 19th and 20th. Our committee endorsed the words of praise spoken by the Mayor at the opening with regard to the help Alma Matthers willingly gave.

Our 21st Birthday was held at Wodonga. In appreciation of his attendance at many conventions, Jeff Seidel was invited to call for the dressed sets. Seven dancers received a special badge in honour of having attended 21 conventions. On the Sunday between the afternoon and evening sessions, a "snags and champs" 21st party was available to registered dancers in the courtyard at the Civic Centre. This was the year that coloured ribbons replaced the name tags. A large cake on the floor in front of the stage was "cut" by the president at the close of the convention.

At the 22nd, with Ian Williamson as Convenor, we returned to Shepparton with the theme "V.S.D.A. Movieland".

We moved to Echuca for the 23rd. The venue at the sports stadium was very cold but the calling and dancing were fine.

Then it was back to Morwell for the 24th.

In 1994 the big weekend arrived for our 25th, with Ross Urquhart as convenor. The convention lived up to expectations with the largest attendance. Dancing was cosy. On Sunday night 5 dancers who had attended all 25 conventions were presented with a special bar "1970 - 1994". A supper was held at the finish of the Sunday night session.

We went back to Morwell with Ian Williamson again as convenor for the 26th. It was decided to have dancers/callers to be official guests who opened the convention. Warwick Butcher, our first convenor, was given this honour. This system continues today.

For the 27th we returned to Echuca in March, where the stadium was very hot.

Ray Deamer was convenor for the 28th at Wodonga. It followed the theme "Friendship". Dancers were asked to submit a short poem or verse on friendship. These were then displayed around the hall.

The following year for the 29th with Ray Deamer as Convenor, we headed to Ballarat at Easter. There was a banner parade of past and present clubs. The decorations related to gold mining.

The 30th was at Wodonga, with Adrian Brown as convenor. Decorations were shells for a "pearl" convention. A special certificate was presented to Peg Stevenson and Marion Brown for attending all 30 conventions.

For the 31st, we went to Bendigo and for the first time it was a short weekend following closely on the National held in Victoria. Chris Goffin was convenor and being mid-winter, we had a "Winter Olympics" theme with ski ramp etc.

The 32nd moved to Sale. It was a very popular venue. This was to be the first of many for Kevin Thomas as convenor. The theme for Sunday night was "Australiana".

It was back to Wodonga for the 3rd, with a "carnival" theme.

For the 34th and 35th we returned to Sale.

In 2003 the theme was the "Roaring Twenties" and for 2004 the "Grand Prix" with both being very enjoyable. Also, the 35th saw a revival of "The Penguins" set who first demonstrated at the Melbourne National in 1975. It was great to see and brought back memories to the oldies.

We went to San Remo for the 36th following the National at Warrnambool during Easter. This was only the second convention held on a regular weekend and included the V.S.D.A. A.G.M. It was a good venue and plenty to see at Phillip Island.

We returned to Sale for the 37th in June for a "Winter Wonderland". We received great assistance from Stradbroke Squares, especially Jim who made us proud with decorations to transform the hall into a winter wonderland, saving the convention committee a lot of work. The Stradbroke club was formed as a result of publicity during previous conventions held in Sale.

The 38th had "Go West to Wodonga" as the theme, with western decorations and a large participation by dancers on Sunday night.

We returned to Geelong for the 39th with the theme "Around the World". Once again Kevin and his committee did a wonderful job.

Addendum (Kevin Thomas):

Marian Brown compiled the Archives for all V.S.D.A. State conventions until 2009. In February 2011 Marion Brown passed away after a long health battle. Her dedication to keeping a record of State Conventions is appreciated and will be missed.

In 2009 we celebrated our 40th Convention with a "Ruby" theme. This was held in Melbourne at the Springvale Town hall, with Kevin Thomas as Convenor. The Guest of honour was Gary Brown. Owing to the Black Saturday Bushfires where Gary lost his son and his family he was unable to attend. The Convenor Kevin Thomas read out a speech and opened the Convention on Gary's behalf. Kevin responded by saying that this was perhaps the hardest thing he had had to do in his life.

Marion Brown was given a plaque to commemorate her attendance at all 40 V.S.D.A. State Conventions. For the first time "Child-care" was not offered at a State convention.

In 2010 we travelled again back to Sale. This was perhaps one of the best venues that we have used, it has a good floor, great sound and plenty of room. The Convenor was James Fellows. While being new to Conventions in Victoria, James brought with him some experience gained from the National in Newcastle. The theme was "Glamour for All at the Sale Hall"

In 2011 It was back to Bendigo, the same venue as 2000. This time we had another "New Convenor" - Mark Kelly. Mark had worked on several Conventions leading up to this and was well equipped to handle the task. The theme was "Dance in the Golden Triangle", being reference to the Gold Mining activities in the region. The Highlight being the Big Chinese Dragon at the Opening of the Convention.

2012 saw us return to Morwell, a venue not visited since 1995, the Convenor was Carmel Sinclair. The Theme was "Venice Comes to Morwell". This was depicted so well by a large backdrop of the buildings and canals in Venice. It was a "True Masterpiece". It was great to see several sets of young dancers really enjoying themselves, especially to the fast numbers called by Howard Cockburn and Colin Dandridge. For their service to Square Dancing in Victoria, Janette and Alan Temple were presented with a well-deserved "Dancer Service Award" by the V.S.D.A. President, Alan Curtis. Trainee Callers Laurina Collyer and Emily Fry called at their first State Convention.

2013 saw a return to Geelong and the venue the South Barwon Hall with James Fellows again as the Convenor. This venue has been used successfully in the past as the second Hall for the 2000 Australian National Square Dance Convention. It is a great hall for Square Dancing and it has a beautiful sprung floor. The Theme was "Bedazzled".

2014 will see Carmel Sinclair return as Convenor, after her superb job as Convenor of the 2012 Morwell Convention.

For information regarding more recent State Conventions, please look under the "EVENTS" tab at the page titled "Past State Conventions".