

WARRNAMBOOL PIONEERS BOARD

Brief History

The creation of a permanent memorial honouring Warrnambool's pioneer men was the inspiration of Edward Alexander Vidler, who was instrumental in reviving interest in the Warrnambool and District Progress League and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He invited descendants of the early pioneers who had settled in the district before 1860 to send in images of their pioneer ancestors to commemorate the 1907 Diamond Jubilee of Warrnambool's foundation in 1847. A charge of £1 for each image was set.

Unfortunately, Vidler left Warrnambool in 1907 leaving the Pioneers Honour Board expenses unpaid. The Progress League refused to take responsibility for the debt and the Board remained with Foyle's Studio for 17 years. In 1922 further subscriptions were called for and £43 16s 6d was acknowledged. After a final determined effort was made in 1924, £100 was collected and Mr Charles Foyle, Lilian's brother, accepted settlement of the debt. On 2 May 1924, the Board was moved from Foyle's Studio to the Art Gallery, then adjacent to the municipal offices in Liebig Street. During an unveiling ceremony on 10 July 1924 the Board was presented to the Mayor of Warrnambool, Cr Martin Carter.

The Pioneers Honour Board and its elaborate frame measures approximately three metres by two metres and holds 204 images of early Warrnambool pioneers.

The Pioneers Honour Board for many years remained in the old Warrnambool Art Gallery, Library and Museum, in Liebig Street. When this facility was demolished in 1975, the Board was moved to the Art Gallery that was in temporary premises situated at the north east corner of Kepler and Timor Streets. The Director of the Art Gallery at the time was Mr John A. Welsh, who restored, numbered, compiled an alphabetical index, photographed each image and filed a negative of each photograph making copies of the negatives available to the public.

For some time the images were stored under a protective cover in the Art Gallery. Later they were moved to *Murweh*, on the corner of Liebig and Princess Streets when the council owned that property. The Pioneers Honour Board was stored in an empty front room and the dismantled frame stored in a *Murweh* outbuilding. An undated letter (possibly approx. 1979) from Bruce Morris (editor of *The Warrnambool Standard*) states the Board 'is now in Ballarat for restoration'.

By 1982 the Pioneers Honour Board was in the foyer of the City Council Offices. During the renovations of the interior of the council offices in 1997, the Board was moved into position in the current library. The Board was relocated to HeritageWorks in March 2014 where it receives much interest.

The 2018 conservation of the 1907 Warrnambool Pioneers Honour Board is in line with the recommendations of the significance assessment prepared by Museum consultant Elizabeth Triarico in 2016.

The Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation at The University of Melbourne has been engaged to undertake the laboratory work. The CCMC project involves removing and copying the images; mounting replica images in the original mount; housing the original images in copy sleeves and archival albums and mounting and boxing the original landscapes using archival materials and techniques.

Professional Art Movers (a specialist art removal firm) will deframe the board on site, pack and transport it to Melbourne. The frame will remain in Warrnambool. The images and watercolours will be taken from the mount and the hinges removed. The images and the watercolours will be dry cleaned as required.

The Pioneers Honour Board is owned by the Warrnambool City Council but is in the custodianship of Warrnambool & District Historical Society and Warrnambool Family History Group. Hanging in the meeting room of HeritageWorks, the home of the two history groups, the Board is viewed and researched every day of the week.

Over the past decade researchers have compiled a biography of each of the men depicted and also on Lilian Foyle the artist and photographer involved. A professional publication will be available when all of this important work has been completed.

We must ensure that the Pioneers Honour Board continues to be well conserved, admired and researched into the future. It is a valuable community asset that encourages the stories of the early days of our region to be told.