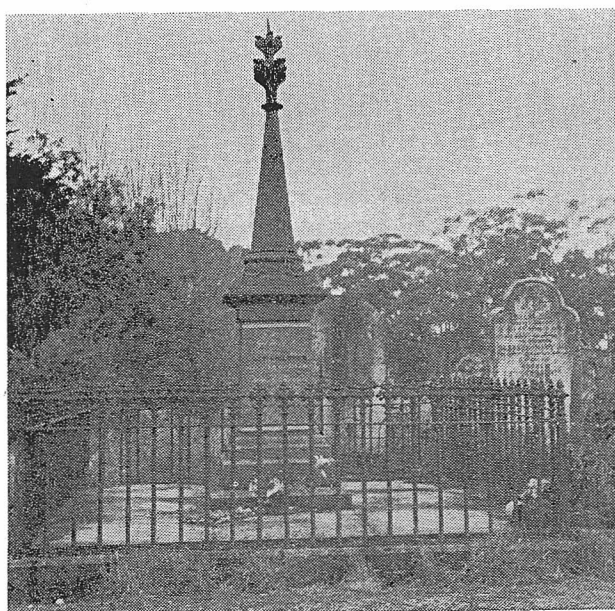


CENTENARY

# **"The Three Lost Children"**

1867 --- 1967



MEMORIAL IN DAYLESFORD CEMETERY.  
erected by Public Subscription in 1868.

Compiled for the  
Daylesford and District Historical Society  
by  
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In writing the account of this touching and human story of 1867 it is recognised that many interesting details must have been omitted simply because of the lack of information available. An appeal is therefore made by the author to anyone who has any information of interest re the tragic event, or concerning anyone connected with the event, or who planted the three box trees, to forward a statement to him care of the Daylesford "Advocate" Office.

## *The Story of the*

# *"Three Lost Children"*

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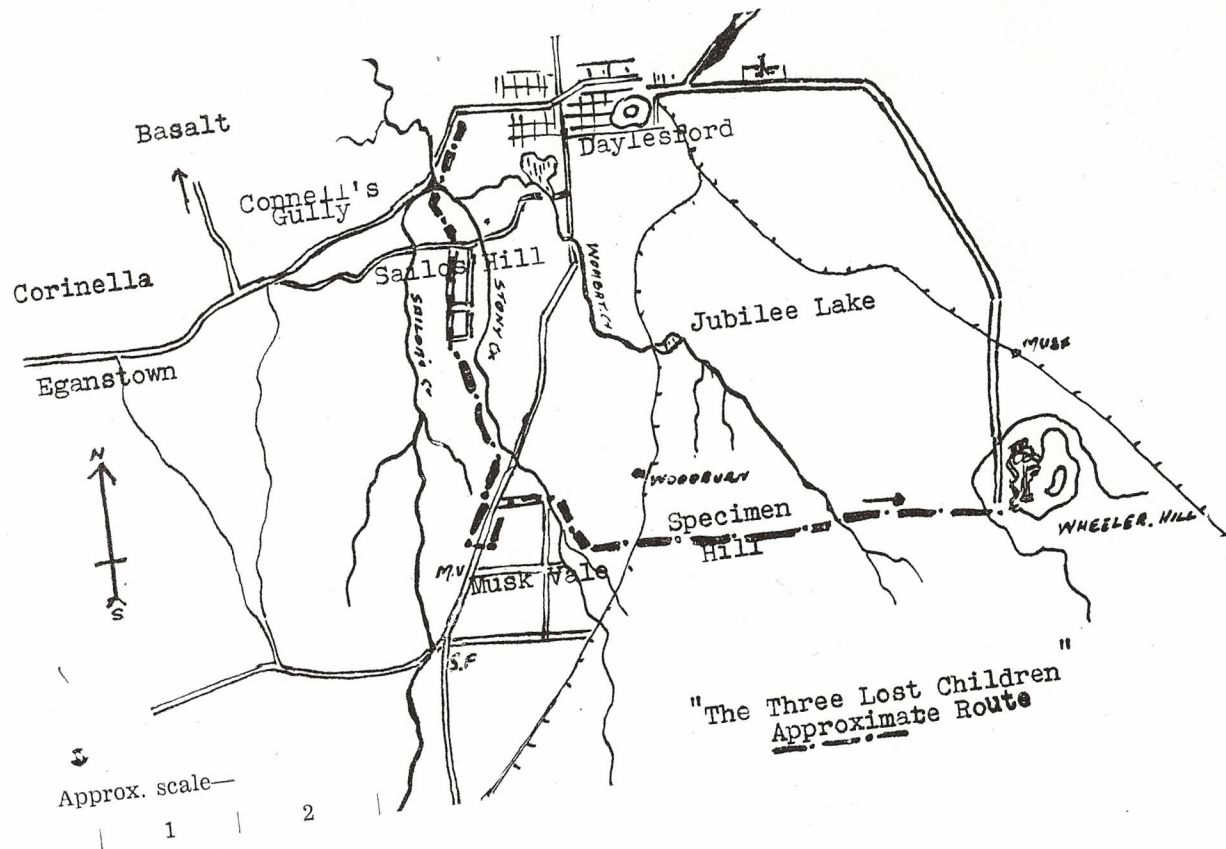
In the history of the Daylesford District no event has so stirred the hearts and minds of the people and built up so fine a community spirit as that relating to the "Three Lost Children." An epic story illustrating self sacrifice, devotion, courage and public spiritedness of the highest order. In order to assist in the centenary commemorations of the occasion this booklet sets out, to briefly recount the main facts of the tragic story.

It was Sunday morning, June 30th 1867 at approximately 9.30 a.m. and the young children of the Graham, Burman and Griffiths families were happily playing on familiar haunts surrounding their homes at Connell's Gully near Table Hill, which is about one mile west from the Daylesford Post Office. The ages of the children were: William Graham 6 years 6 months, his brother Thomas Graham 4 years 3 months, Alfred Herbert Burman 5 years, and ——— Griffiths 5 years. In their play they wandered over the familiar shallow gold diggings near their homes. It has been suggested that the motive of their games on that morning was to chase wild goats, of which there would have been many in the neighbourhood.

As the boys walked towards the junction of the Wombat and Sailor's Creeks, the boy Griffiths had a quarrel with the others and returned home. Possibly failing in their venture to find any wild goats, the boys fell a prey to the call of adventure, crossed the Wombat Creek near the junction, scrambled up the south bank of Sailor's Creek and moved towards where the William Tell Mine was later situated. An hotel, approximately 100 yards west of the mine site and now marked by an apple tree and daffodils, in the springtime, would have been on the right of the boys' route. The surrounding area today is thickly timbered; but, in 1867 it was more like open parklands. The boys would then have crossed the Daylesford-Creswick road and proceeded easily and leisurely to the summit of the Sailor's Hill settlement (possibly following a rough track). As the fencing of properties was not complete and barb wire was not then in use, the little boys would have had little difficulty to wander on their way along the rough bush track, which would bring them to the Daylesford-Ballan Road. Today's the Sailor's Hill road which passes the Daylesford Quarrying Company's stone quarries indicates the approximate route taken.

The weather records state that there had been a severe frost and the morning was very cold. It can therefore reasonably be surmised, that the day was sunny and the conditions pleasantly invigorating as the boys walked on, happily interested in their new surroundings.

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At between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. they were seen by Mr. Mutch, storekeeper, on the Daylesford-Ballan road, approximately three miles from Daylesford. On enquiring from the boys, Mr. Mutch learned that they had come from Connell's Gully near Daylesford and wanted to return there. As they were heading towards Sailor's Falls, he took them back along the road for a quarter of a mile and told them to follow the telegraph line along the road and that it would bring them to Daylesford. The eldest boys said "the wires" and Mr. Mutch said "yes." The telegraph line had only recently been erected and was a striking new feature along the road side.

Had the boys followed out the instructions of Mr. Mutch they would have reached Daylesford safely. Mr. Mutch was not aware the children were lost, their self assurance and calm manner had misled him. No doubt the boys themselves did not realise that they were lost. They apparently retraced their steps to the Fall's Hotel at Stony Creek and then instead of continuing to follow the telegraph line deviated off the road a mile from where they had received instructions of the way from Mr. Mutch, and followed a track leading to the Specimen Hill Gold Mine. As it was Sunday, the mine (which employed fifty men) was not working. The boys passed by the mine and towards dusk were seen and spoken to by John Quinn, the son of Michael Quinn, as they passed Quinn's home.

John Quinn tried to tell the boys that they were lost, he took hold of the eldest boy, William Graham, and tried to turn him back; but "he persisted on his way." John Quinn then went and told Mr. Franklin, a neighbour, of the happening; but by the time Mr. Franklin arrived, the boys had gone out of sight into the dusk and shadows of the well nigh impenetrable forest.

John, who could not write, further testified that he told his mother about what had happened; but she did not recognise the significance of his story. From this point the boys' whereabouts vanished into mystery. Neither Mr. Mutch, nor the Quinns, nor Mr. Franklin did anything further about the incident that night, not realising that the boys were hopelessly lost. The boys themselves gave no indication that they were afraid or that they were lost, they just walked on into the gloom and their last earthly sleep.

A sudden change had come over the weather towards evening, the wind blew in gale force from the north and heavy rain began to fall. Subsequently the weather again cleared and the severest frost of the season was recorded.

In the meanwhile the alarm had been raised at the homes of the parents and friends at Connell's Gully, and surely and sadly all concerned began to realise that the three boys were lost and faced a bitterly cold night without having had their usual midday and evening meals. The situation was a grim one.

When the boys had not come home for lunch, the fathers of the boys, Messrs. Graham and Burman, immediately went out looking for their children. They searched the surrounding country near the Wombat—Stony and Sailor's Creek junction until 9 p.m.; but without finding any clues. They then reported to the police that the boys were missing, and with their assistance continued the search until 1 a.m.



## ORGANISED SEARCHES BEGIN

On Monday, July 1st 1867, at the first light of day, the fathers, their immediate friends and the police renewed the search in ever widening circles; but again without any success. However, the news that the three children were lost, quickly spread throughout the district and, as a result, Mr. Mutch had reason to report his meeting with the boys on the previous afternoon. The search was then quickly switched to and localised in the Specimen Hill region. The Manager of the Specimen Hill G.M.C. promptly closed the mine and sent out his fifty men to join the search. A large party of pedestrians and horsemen soon joined the search party under the leadership of four mounted police constables, and thoroughly probed the area of thick bush until nightfall.

The Bullarook Forest which extended to the east of the area presented an almost impenetrable barrier for further search, in fact many of the searchers themselves became bewildered in the difficult terrain, and the search for the day had to end with the growing dusk and without success.

On Tuesday, July 2nd 1867, the sympathy for the children and their distressed parents was so great and widespread that more than 100 horsemen and hundreds of men assembled near the Specimen Hill Gold Mine, in order to continue the search. They scoured the countryside for miles around the place where the children had last been seen. The only result for the massive effort and untiring zeal of the searchers was to find two small footprints near the Wombat Creek. They had faced up to inclement weather and hard going in the trackless thick bush country.

## THE MAYOR ACTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIGHEST TRADITIONS OF HIS OFFICE

A great gloom and solemn sadness came over the district; but this was quickly countered by a great display of public determination to respond enthusiastically to the challenge to find the children dead or alive. The Mayor, Cr. Bleakly, sensing the position called a public meeting to resolve on a maximum effort (for the next day, Wednesday, 3rd July 1867) to find the children. The Town bellman went through the streets of Daylesford ringing his bell to summon the burgesses to the public meeting. The famous fire bell installed in 1863 tolled long and solemnly to advise the people that a special meeting of great importance was to be held that night. The meeting was held at Jamison's Hotel hall and was packed to the doors. The atmosphere was tense and full of excitement. It would seem as if everyone in Daylesford had lost a loved one, all were so deeply stirred.

It was agreed solemnly and unanimously that everything possible must be done to solve the tragic mystery of the Three Lost Children, that all business places would close on Wednesday, July 3rd 1867, and that the Captain and all members of the Fire Brigade would attend the search on the morrow.

The police advised that two black trackers had been applied for. Mr. Joseph Parker promised to bring two trackers who could follow any trail. All the workmen at the Corinella Mine, Blanket Flat four miles away, promised to be at the search

assembly point at 8 a.m. The Specimen Hill G.M.C. would sound the mine whistle at regular intervals until after night fall, to act as a guide to any searcher who may get lost. The fire bell would be tolled at 6 a.m. until 8 a.m. as a call to the volunteers. Searchers were advised to carry wine and bread and, should they find the boys, to approach them cautiously. Eleven captains were appointed and their area of search defined.

It was a grim, determined and solemn meeting. It broke up quietly. The people of Daylesford were intensely stirred and united. Next morning, Wednesday July 3rd 1867, at 8 a.m., more than 100 horsemen and between 500 and 600 pedestrians under their captains assembled at Specimen Hill ready for the take-off. Gold miners, wood cutters, splitters, saw millers, townsmen and all classes were numbered in the great assemblage. The day was extremely cold, strong gale winds were blowing: hail, rain and fog occurred; but no one was deterred. Relentlessly the search parties plodded on without any glimmer of success.

The black trackers were severely handicapped by the trappings of horses feet as well as those of the pedestrians. They were unable to follow the footprints seen the day before.

At dusk the search had to be called off, men returned to the mine wet and cold and disappointed. They had willingly responded to the call for action, they had not faltered under the trying conditions; but their hearts were saddened as they thought of the fate of the three little boys.

Another public meeting was held that night; it was resolved to renew the search and that the shops should again close. A reward of £100 was offered for the finding of the boys alive and a lesser amount for the finding of the bodies. A collection taken up at the meeting realised £72/19/0 towards the Reward Fund. A Government reward of £200 was also announced. For the next search, the men were asked to bring their dogs.

Next morning, Thursday July 4th 1867, the fire bell again tolled, the searchers assembled in their hundreds. Two hundred dogs were also joined in the search. The Daylesford streets were deserted and silent for the third day in succession.

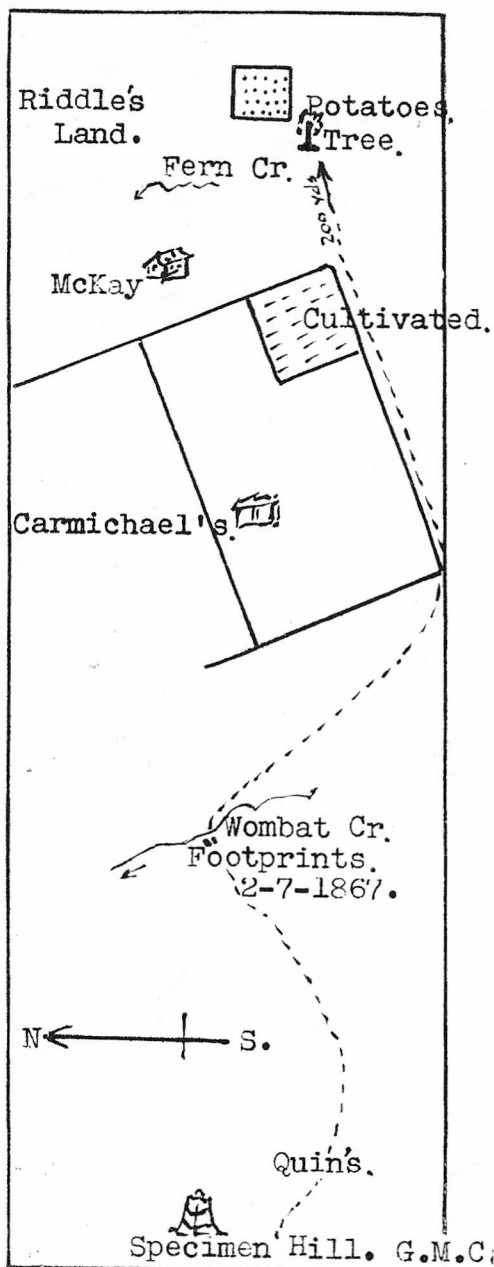
The heavy rains and the previous movements of the searchers made the task of the black trackers hopeless. The searchers spread out deeply into the hinterland and were amazed to find settlers, prospectors and bush workers living in such isolation that the news of the three lost children had not sifted through to them.

It, of course, was 1867 and not 1967 with its daily papers, radio etc.

The result of Thursday's search was nil.

Another great public meeting was held that night and another enthusiastic search was made on Friday, July 5th. Every mine shaft in the area searched had been dragged.

At the fourth successive public meeting held on Friday, July 5th a change in the public demeanour was noticeable. Conflicting rumours were voiced, such as "the children had been sighted at Deep Creek," that "a traveller had heard



LOCALITY PLAN.  
The last stage of the  
wanderings of the  
"THREE LOST  
CHILDREN"  
1867.



children crying near the roadside" — as late as July 23rd a rumour was announced that "three children had been seen with two tramps at Glengower." — This latter rumour like all the other rumours, when traced to its source, proved false. A visitor from Western Australia restored confidence and balance to the meeting by describing how some children lost in Western Australia endured for a longer period than the three lost boys had so far suffered. Further search parties were organised; but with no result.

At the eighth public meeting held on Tuesday, July 8th a heartfelt vote of thanks to his Worship the Mayor, Cr. Bleakly, for "his indefatigable exertions in presiding over the meetings," was carried most enthusiastically. The searches were continued by groups of people until July 25th, when the last search was made. It was agreed that volunteer parties would continue to make a search every Sunday.

It thus appeared that the tragedy of the "Three Lost Children" might never be solved.

On July 16th Messrs. Graham and Burman expressed their sincere thanks to the people of the Daylesford district in a touching letter to the local newspapers. In the letter they wrote:—

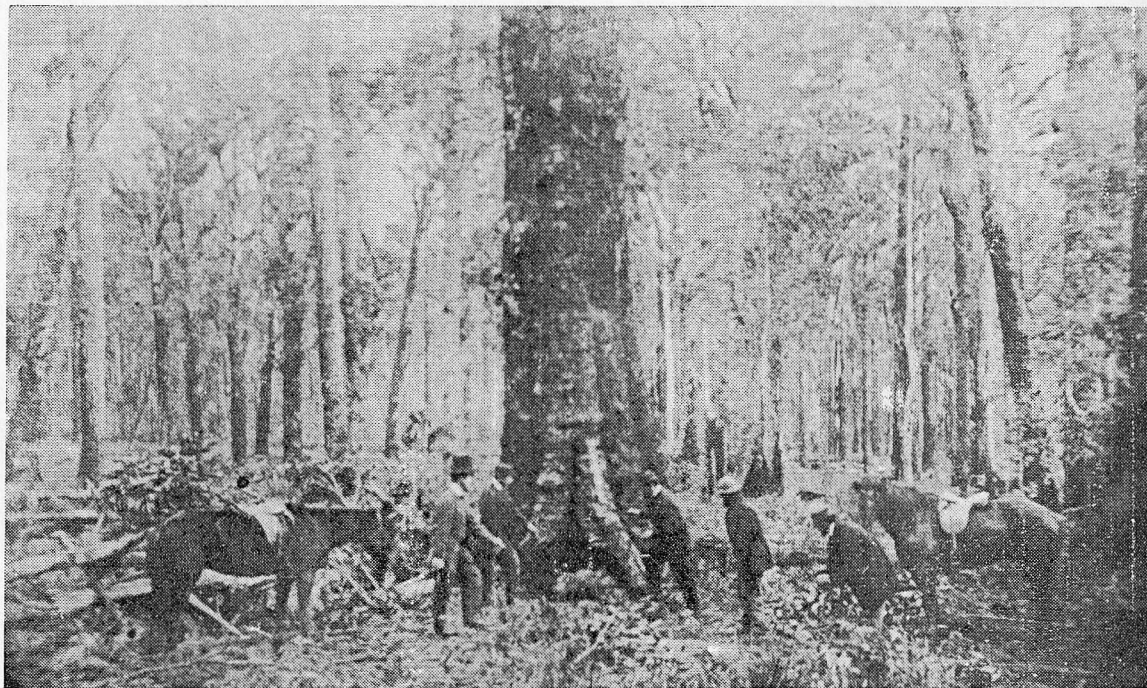
"When we have returned home night after night to tell the same tale of our want of success and we have recounted to them the deeds of endurance, energy and the real sacrifices of time and money this community has suffered — their tears have been dried and are assured that all human aid possible has been done."

The tragic story had made a deep impression on the public mind of Daylesford and district. It had been amply reported in the Melbourne and Sydney newspapers and had received a mention in some overseas papers. Public excitement during August was now at rest and it was commonly felt that: "After all that human energy, sympathy and generosity could do or accomplish was done to restore the human remains to their agonised parents. It was finally left to Providence to clear up the mystery that had baffled the enterprise and intelligence of man." The parents, the families the friends and the people now waited sorrowfully and patiently for the final act in this human story.

#### THE SORROWFUL DISCOVERY

On Friday, September 13th the final act in the discovery of the fate of the children was presented. It was on this day at about noon that Mr. Michael McKay, residing in Wombat Forest, noticed that his dog had in its mouth a small boot with a child's foot in it. Again at 2 o'clock he saw his dog with a child's skull in its mouth. With his neighbours Mr. W. S. Riddle and Mr. Stewart they went on a further search and found a second boot. The search was discontinued at dusk. It was then planned to have a more intensive search made next morning.

With his neighbours W. S. Riddle, J. H. Wheeler, D. Bryan and N. Bryan joining with him in the search, the bodies of the three little boys were soon discovered — September 14th 1867.



This is a photograph taken at a "re-enactment" of the finding of the bodies of the three boys.

From left: J. H. Wheeler, N. Bryan, D. Bryan, M. McKay, Wm. Riddell.

The remains of the elder boy and his clothing were found near a large tree and the remains of the other two boys in the hollow of the tree. The tree was a very tall one and had a cavity eight or ten feet in diameter and five or six feet in height. The tree was surrounded by dense undergrowth, grass and fallen timber, and the opening in the tree could not be easily seen by passers-by. It would appear that as the boys settled down for what was their last earthly sleep the younger Graham was placed innermost in the cavity and was sheltered by Burman. The elder Graham took up the outer position to give some protection to his companions. The depredations by dogs etc. which followed had left a harrowing scene.

The cause of death was exposure and want of nourishment. From all the evidence available it would appear that the boys reached their final destination on the evening of the first day of their wanderings. They must have been exhausted and glad to obtain the shelter of the hollow tree. They would have walked eight or ten miles at least, and would have been on the road for nearly eight hours. As the night had been intensely cold, the tired un nourished bodies had no resistance left, and life slowly and peacefully passed away. The bodies were removed to Philip Farmers' Arms Hotel, where the inquest was held by D. McNicoll, J.P. and a jury of twelve. The verdict given was that the children had "died from exposure and want." Two stanzas from an anonymous poet of the time relate the story briefly—

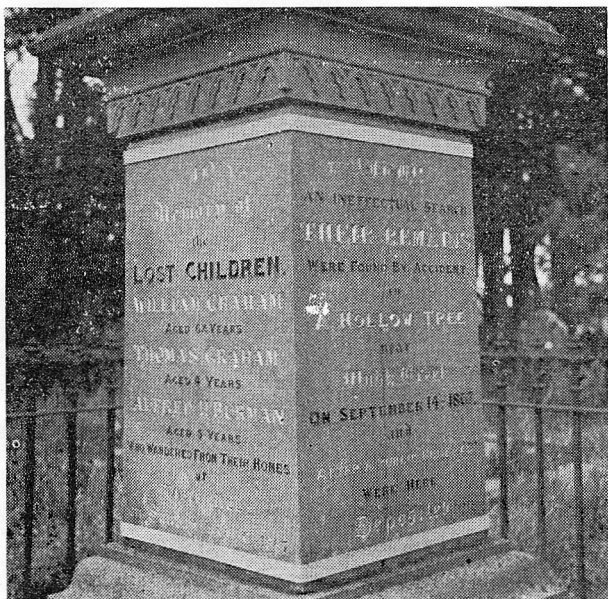
At length, exhausted, worn out, weak,  
They reached a tall and aged tree.  
And in its caverned hollow seek  
A shelter from their misery.

The darkening shades of evening fell,  
Across the forests dusky glade,  
Where through a long and winding dell,  
Three hapless children wildly strayed.

### THE LAST RITES

The closing scene of this sad event was in keeping with the self sacrificing spirit, revealed by the people of Daylesford, during the eleven weeks of its occurrence. The funeral cortege moved from the Farmers' Arms Hotel down Raglan Street via Camp Street, Victoria Street, Vincent Street, stopped at the Town Hall, where the relatives and Town Councillors joined the cortege. Thence it moved to Howe Street, Raglan Street and went on to the Daylesford Cemetery. It was estimated that there were 1,000 people at the Town Hall, another 1,000 people assembled at the Cemetery and 600 people walked in the funeral procession from the Town Hall to the Cemetery. Rev. W. Main conducted the burial service before a subdued and deeply thoughtful assemblage of mourners. The 90th Psalm, 15th Chapter of Corinthians and 7th Chapter of Revelations were the readings chosen.

An impressive headstone, provided from public subscriptions now marks the last resting place of the "Three Lost Children."



#### IN RETROSPECT

It would appear that someone returned to the home site of the three children early in this century and planted three "box" trees. These memorial trees grew distinctively until cut down by an unsuspecting boy or boys. The trees made a recovery and stand today near the first cairn to be unveiled on 17th September, 1967.

In reviewing, in the year 1967, the route taken by the children in 1867, many allowances must be made. Today the route is overgrown in many places with rather dense young forest trees and scrub. Blackberry and cape broom clumps are common, these are exotic plants brought to Australia from overseas. There are also many small gold mining prospecting holes and alluvial sluiced out areas which disfigure the surface of the landscape. The density of the forest and scrub, particularly in the area near the Specimen Hill Gold Mine, does not give any clear picture of the land surface aspect of the terrain as it was in 1867 when a few great giants of the forest, thirty or forty feet apart, were the distinguishing feature of the area.

The boys would have little real hindrance as they wandered forward through the "open" forest grassland country.

After crossing the Wombat Creek and entering the Wombat or Bullarook Forest, the density of the vegetation would increase as the soil improved towards Musk Creek district. The open cultivated farm lands to be seen today—1967—at the Cairn

placed at the boys' journeys-end, was in 1867 mostly a forest of stately trees and undergrowth except for a few cleared plots of ground planted with potatoes or oat crops by pioneer farmer settlers.

The discovery of the bodies of the lost children was sensational news for Melbourne residents, and those unacquainted with the Australian bush could not understand why the discovery was not made sooner.

A proposal to plot out the approximate route of the boys' wanderings, though costly, would provide an unique tourist attraction. As a walk from Daylesford and back it would be nearly sixteen miles and would provide an interesting, exhilarating, and beneficial experience. It would at least demonstrate what the 4, 5 and 6 year olds could do in 1867.

#### THE STORY HAS A PLACE IN THE LIFE AND PROGRESS OF DAYLESFORD

In later years Mr. Graham further showed his appreciation for what the people of Daylesford had done for his family by presenting a scholarship to the State School for the best pupils—boy and girl—each year. It was known as the Graham Dux Prize. The scholarship has also proved to be a wonderful reminder of the tragic story of the Three Lost Children. To win the scholarship has always been regarded as a great honour.

Qualities of leadership and citizenship, as well as scholastic ability, are considered in making the awards. In many instances these characteristics have been evident in later public life.



THE LOST CHILDREN'S TREE,  
photographed shortly after it fell, in the early 1950's.