

Foundation Day Speech by Legatee Ian Harrison 22 November 2022

THE LEGACY OF SIR STANLEY GEORGE SAVIGE

As this organisation approaches its 100 years of service I believe that it is timely and appropriate to reflect on the life and legacy of its founder, Sir Stanley George Savige.

Stan Savige combined outstanding leadership skill with genuine concern for the welfare of others and in particular children.

He applied his broad range of skills to build rapport through comradeship and inspire commitment from others, to help successfully establish and sustain the Melbourne Legacy Club. He personally played a lead role in developing the legacy cause as one of significant value and helped spread its reach throughout Victoria, Australia and London.

Stan Savige served as Melbourne Club President in 1929-30 and was Legacy Co-ordinating Council Chairman, which today is Legacy Inc. between 1937-48. He continued to serve as an active Legatee for 31 years until his death at the age of 64 years in 1954.

He was appointed as a Knight Commander of the order of the British Empire (Military Division) in the King's Birthday Honours on the 8th of June 1950.

In 1953 he travelled to London, to represent Legacy at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

Stan was an army officer and was born on 26 June 1890 at Morwell Victoria. He was the eldest of eight children. He left Korumburra State School at the age of 12 to work as a blacksmith's striker and held various other jobs before being employed in drapery.

Showing an interest in soldiering and community work, he served as a senior cadet between 1907 and 09 and was a scoutmaster for 5 years between 1910 and 1915.

On 6 March 1915, Stan enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force and was posted to the 24th Battalion that landed at Gallipoli in September of that year. A series of promotions culminated in him being commissioned at Lone Pine on November 9. In the following month he commanded one of the rearguard parties during the evacuation at Gallipoli.

This was the beginning of a long dangerous and distinguished military career, spanning both world wars, with him fighting and commanding in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific during World War II.

A great friendship between Major General Sir John Gellibrand and Stan Savige commenced at Armentieres in 1916. Gellibrand was brigade commander and Savige was attached to 6th Infantry Brigade headquarters, as a trainee brigade intelligence officer.

After taking part in operations at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm, he was promoted to the rank of Captain. He was wounded and spent time in hospital with influenza and when he returned to his battalion he became adjutant.

For his consistent good work and devotion to duty in the fighting at Warlencourt, Grevilliers and Bullecourt, he was awarded the Military Cross.

Volunteering for special service, he was sent to Persia in March 1918 as part of Dunsterforce, an Allied military force established in 1917 and named after its commander, Major General Lionel Dunsterville.

Captain Stan Savige, 5 officers and 15 Non Commissioned Officers were caught up in the exodus of about 80,000 Assyrians fleeing from the Ottoman army and Kurds, and he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for protecting these refugees, whilst under fire.

When he returned from service overseas, he was not flush with funds. His network of contacts was limited and at the first opportunity in 1920, he joined the militia again, but the battalion employment was not even that of part-time. In 1921, financial matters became critical and at 30 years of age he joined the lines of ex-diggers and others, tramping the streets of cities and large towns looking for work.

After a month of rejections from 20 companies he was offered a job at Patterson, Laing & Bruce, a textile, clothing and footwear importer. In September 1923, an officer acquaintance suggested that he apply for a position with the newly created Returned Soldiers & Sailors Woolen & Worsted Mill Co-operative, at Geelong. He was successful with this application and became their sole selling agent.

Between 1920 and 24, Stan served in the militia under Gellibrand who commanded the 3rd Division and after the war Gellibrand came to Melbourne from Hobart, to serve as the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police.

Over the ensuing years the two ex-soldiers discussed several issues, foremost among them was the reputation of the returned diggers. Many had not fitted back into society and The Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League (today's RSL), was not ready to deal with image problems.

Gellibrand helped form the 1st Australian Rotary Club, which encouraged its businessmen to do good works for society. This led to the creation of the Hobart Remembrance Club in 1923, after he had returned to his home in Tasmania.

Stan went to Hobart to acquaint himself with the Remembrance Club and their charter to help rehabilitate ex-servicemen and to improve their public image, mainly through involvement in worthy projects, and to formally remember fallen comrades at parades and on special days. The club lunches would also perpetuate the mateship so vital during the war and broken apart when war ended.

Another strong motivator that was beginning to alarm Stan was the mounting number of suicides within the former 1st AIF fraternity.

Back in Melbourne, Stan used the opportunity to bring up the idea of a club similar to Gellibrand's Remembrance Club, when members of the 24th Battalion assembled at a Hotel to bid farewell to an ex-service man, who was leaving for England.

After several informal meetings that were held at the old Anzac House on the corner of Collins and Russell Streets, the Melbourne Club's inaugural meeting was held on the 25th of September 1923, and draft rules and regulations were provisionally adopted.

At the second meeting of the club, the movement received its name from Frank Selleck who said, *'Legacy is the name with its meaning in reverse to serve and to give without receiving anything in return'*.

Legacy began with the same aims as Gellibrand's club, to help ex-soldiers who for whatever reason, had fallen through the cracks.

In August 1925, Stan was having a post dinner drinking session at ANZAC House with a few other men, including Legacy administrator Frank Doolan.

"Have you fellows ever thought about the greatest wish of dying diggers?" Doolan asked with some emotion. *"What was that?"* Stan asked. Doolan replied, *"You know that someone would look after the missus and kids."*

The notion struck an imaginative chord with Stan, who had spent his innocent pre-war years looking after children in a Sunday School and as a Scoutmaster. The idea raised his paternal and humanitarian instincts.

His resolve from then on was to focus more on providing assistance to widows and children of deceased servicemen. He wanted to organise the large numbers of children without fathers, into camps and sporting events.

But first the idea had to be sold to the women of Legacy, who would be entrusting the care of their sons (and later their daughters) to others, for weekends and vacations.

Stan was at his persuasive best, but could not tell if his argument was getting through, when one of the mothers said, *"You can have my little beggar; I cant do anything with him."* That comment led to spontaneous laughter, and every woman present gave her support to the bold new initiative.

In late 1925, Stan bought land at Somers on Western Port Bay, with the aim of creating the first camp for Legacy boys. He was always conscious of the bush upbringing he'd had and how it had begun to prepare him for war.

He wanted these boys to go through the same toughening-up process and he would often say, *"A boy does not become a man until he has fallen out of a tree and eaten a pound of dirt."*

He also made it clear that he did not want boys pushing each other from high branches, he wanted them to learn teamwork and he tried to foster the concept of doing things for your mates. He wanted development beyond physical rough and tumble, so music, debating and literacy clubs also commenced.

Hundreds of children had become involved by 1926.

Stan Savige could provide his own daughter Gwen with wonderful opportunities, but the female offspring of most deceased soldiers would not be as fortunate, but with his usual enthusiasm and dedication he decided to change things.

While Legacy had moved forward with teaching and tutoring boys, the attitude towards girls was different. Legacy had not yet gained enough of a reputation for mothers to let their daughters go away on camps, certainly not without female supervision.

Legacy's first important female supporter was Miss Gertie Anderson, who was one of the Victorian State Education Department's physical culture staff. She was a well-known community-minded individual who had fought for women's rights, and she knew of Stan's mother's efforts to gain the vote for women and she agreed to take charge of any Legacy program for girls.

With that support secured, Stan fronted the Legacy committee but received stiff opposition. Nonetheless, he argued passionately in favour of programs for girls.

The clinching argument came when he mentioned that Gertie Anderson was right behind Legacy. It swayed the committee. Sub committees went into action and young girls were admitted as Junior Legatees.

In May 1927, the Junior Legacy Club for Girls commenced and classes had an emphasis on ballet type exercises, speech training, grace and grooming. These classes were held in the premises of Market Street Melbourne, and later transferred here to Legacy House, once this property was purchased.

In March 1928, the 1st Annual Demonstration of Physical Culture and Eurhythmics was held at the Melbourne Town Hall.

Miss Enez Domec-Carre joined Melbourne Legacy in 1932 and became the chief instructress of Girls Physical Education and continued in this role until her retirement in 1973. One of her proudest moments was a display by 1000 Junior Legatees on the MCG, to welcome the Queen to Melbourne in 1954.

The room to my right is named after Enez as an on-going tribute to her outstanding contribution of service to Legacy.

Later demonstrations were also held at what was then the Olympic Swimming Pool in Swan St Richmond, a few years after the 1956 Olympics had been held.

The Annual Demonstrations involving both boys and girls continued until the 1970's, when the numbers of Legacy children were in decline, because of their age and disinterest in these types of organised activities.

The next group which came up for consideration, were those who had grown too old for junior classes and in 1929, the Intermediate Legacy Club was formed. Not all Junior Legatees became Intermediates when they turned 18, but those who did displayed a fine attitude to life and service and were willing to turn a hand to any Legacy activity.

The Great Depression

The 1930s was a time of hardship for many people in Australia. By 1932, about 30% of Australian workers were unemployed. The high unemployment and poverty during this period had a great social impact, with many families being affected.

Single parents as well as many married couples struggled to support and provide for their children.

In terms of children in 'care', the Depression increased the demand for places in orphanages. Child Welfare Departments also found it more difficult to find suitable homes in which to 'board out' children.

Once again Legacy had found its feet just in time. Faced with the problems of needy ex-servicemen as well as its major responsibility to dependants of deceased soldiers, several committees were established to deal with the issues arising.

In the first 6 months of 1928, 246 applications had been lodged for relief. In the following year, 650 cases were handled by the Distress and Problems Committee and the Unemployment Committee had placed 376 in jobs.

In 1931, the Vocational Placement & Employment Committee was established to assist Junior Legatees obtain work.

The depression also gave special purpose to camps as the only hope of a holiday for many Junior Legatees and Stan made his property at Somers available for the development of a camp with permanent buildings. This site was later leased during the school year to the Victorian Department of Education.

By 1935, Junior Legatees from as far as Mildura, Ararat, and Canberra were coming to the camp and camps for city Junior Legatees were later replaced by holidays in the country, whereby they were billeted with country families.

WWII 1939-45

Over 30,000 Australian Servicemen were taken prisoner in WW11 and 39,000 gave their lives, hence, Legacy experienced a new generation of families requiring their help.

By 1955, Melbourne Legacy was operating four residences for children of deceased ex-servicemen, or children of ex-servicemen and women, who had been wards of the state.

- Blamey House in Beaumaris: accommodated children aged between 5 and 9 years of age and from the mid-1970s, boys aged 14 years and older.
- Holmbush, Kew: accommodated children between the ages of 9 and 14.
- Stanhope, Kew: accommodated young people in tertiary education and from the mid-1970s, girls 14 years of age and older.
- Harelands, Kew: accommodated young people in employment transitioning to independence and from the mid 1970s, boys and girls between 6 and 14 years of age.

During the 1960s and 70s, the numbers of children needing accommodation in the Legacy residences decreased and the numbers of young people needing auxiliary accommodation in private homes and guest houses increased. By 1977, Legacy

operated only two homes. Blamey House in Burke Road was closed and Stanhope closed in 1982.

Many of the young men who were Legatees were in business in the city and had families of their own to look after. With their Legacy commitments and obligations they also became known as the 'Tuesday and Friday night fathers', to the girls attending Girls classes.

If you speak with today's older generation of Junior Legatees, I am sure that you will hear of many stories of how these Legatees looked after them.

One such Legatee was Legatee Phil Schofield, who was the manager of the ANZ Bank on the corner of Bourke and King streets in Melbourne. Legatee Schofield gave several young Legacy girls their first job in the bank as junior trainees.

One of these young girls was Derithe and when we decided to become engaged, I was invited into his office, to be checked out as to my intentions. After our engagement, Legatee Schofield was transferred to Sydney, but he and his wife Vi came to Melbourne to give Derithe away on our wedding day. Legatee Schofield and his wife Vi continued to take an interest in our growing family and each time that we visited Sydney or they came to Melbourne we would spend time together, until his passing.

The number of children attending Legacy activities peaked in 1967 and rapidly declined between 1967 and 1973. The number of children under 10 years of age halved, and those between the ages of 10 and 16 years fell by over 25%.

Declining attendance at Junior Legacy Clubs in the early 60s were attributed to a growing disinterest in organised activities, particularly by teenagers, and the arrival of television.

With the declining numbers of children, the role of Legatees focused on the increasing numbers of widows and their needs.

The numbers of widows that Legacy currently looks after is also in decline due to their age.

Greater attention is rightly being given to the 'post 1990 veteran family', where in many instances both parents are living. This situation poses other challenges for Legacy and our role with families.

When I was President a young mother commented to me saying, '*Do not appoint a male Legatee to my family as my husband will think that he is being replaced as the father figure*'.

Legacy is once again facing challenges and the need to change its mode of operations. As mentioned, the numbers of widows and Legatees are in decline as both groups age.

In many respects the wheel has turned full cycle and Legacy is being faced with the need to address similar issues to those which it first faced in its formative years, when it aimed to help ex-soldiers, who for whatever reason had fallen through the cracks.

Consequently, I believe that the challenge for Legacy going forward is how best to engage with today's generation and have them carry the torch and committing to support their mates and their families, when and as required in the years ahead.

It is incumbent upon the organisation to recruit from this cohort of people who are best able to understand and assist their generation of service members. Here in Melbourne this task has already commenced with several of this generation being employed as case managers within the numbers of staff.

To our founder and all past Legatees let us say, "Fear not you have died for nought, the torch you threw to us we caught and now our hands will hold it high, It's glorious light will never die. We'll not break faith with you who lie in many a field".