



Article #1 - In the beginning

Seventy-five years after the Ocean Grove Surf Life Saving Club's formation, we need to look back at the year 1948 and the people who made the bold step to start an important service for the township that has subsequently grown into a world class lifesaving service.

Three of the club's original members have given an insight into the town, and the beach at the time.

Peter Davies describes the town as *"Shops consisted of general store and PO, Do Duck Inn, the milk bar type of Smiths and Wray's and butchers' corner of Hodgson and Orton St. The "No Shooting in Township" sign was still in centre of shopping area. Never knew the name of the streets for although surveyed were still completely timbered. The main beach area was just sand dunes with brick changing room and Ray's kiosk which opened over Xmas season. You could hire surfboards (flat planks with upturned end about 5/4 length) for 1/- (?) per hour."*



Ocean Grove Beach 1949

Jack Rabbas remembers *"From the scout camp we had to walk through 'the desert' to get to the beach. All the low area where WynnDean is we used to call 'the desert', it was nothing but sand and ti-tree and dirt tracks and I practised a lot of golf in and out of the whole area."*



Ray's Beach Kiosk

Doug Yensch recalls *"Businesses in the area consisted of Ray's General Store and Geelong Daily Transport at the bottom of the hill. East of this was Smith's Store, then going up the hill we had Kath-kin Guest House which was then surrounded by a beautiful veranda. At the top of the hill was Skinner's General Store and Post Office and Mrs Mitchell's Milk Bar Do Duck Inn and further along was the Chalet Guest House. To my knowledge the only other business in town was a Sly Grog Shop at the bottom of Dare Street."*

Events Leading up to the Formation of the Club

Doug Yensch gives his account of the event *"In the Spring of 1948 I was instrumental in saving a small girl from being swept out to sea (at Ocean Grove) – this was no heroics as I didn't need to go out above my waist. After returning the child to her mother I was approached by Claude Williams, the local Headmaster who had witnessed the rescue and we had our first discussion on the feasibility of forming a local surf life saving club. We both attended the next meeting of the Ocean Grove Progress Association and discussed the possibility with Mr Lorimer, the President. The Association agreed to back us."*

At this stage, surf life saving in Victoria was very young with only a hand full of clubs formed; Torquay 1946, Portland, Warrnambool and Point Lonsdale 1947, Lorne and Sorrento/Portsea 1948. The Victoria Centre of the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia (later the Victorian State Centre and then Life Saving Victoria) was only formed in January 1947.



To establish the Ocean Grove club it involved "snail" mail correspondence which was hampered by confusion when initial enquiries were sent to the Royal Life Saving Society. After finding the Victorian Centre, a meeting was set up between interested locals and Victorian surf life saving officials to occur on the **18th of November 1948** at the Ocean Grove Fire Brigade Hall (after it was established that electricity was available).

So it was at this meeting that the club was formed.

Claude Williams (pictured on the right in 1957) was elected president with Doug Yensch elected Club Captain, Secretary, Treasurer and Chief Instructor! The club's colours were decided as dark blue, light blue, white and gold. Shortly after the white was dropped to leave us with the club's present colours.



Off to a Flying Start



The Eve Rocker "resuscitator".

offered to transport it from Geelong for free and store it in his beach kiosk. An Eve Rocker "resuscitator", first aid kit, stretcher and a March Past pennant were also purchased.

The newly formed club wasted no time in getting itself prepared to patrol the beach. Fundraising commenced in earnest with dances, raffles and approaches to local businesses for donations; many gave willingly.

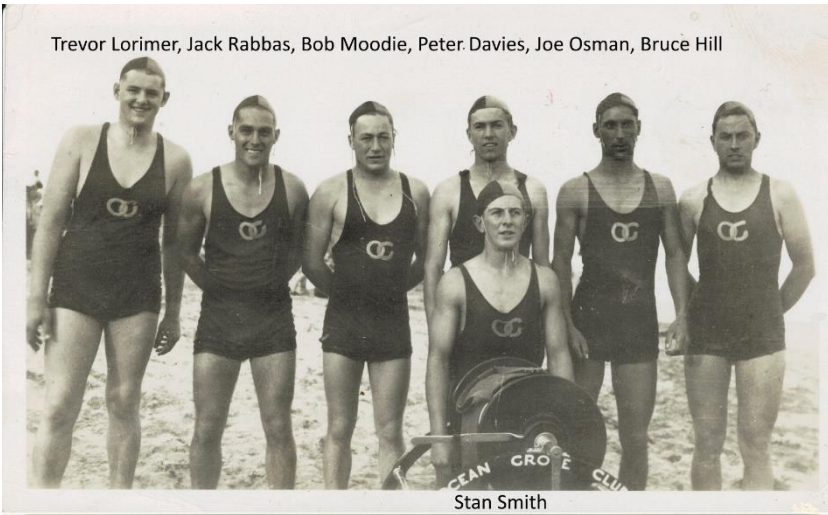
A new reel, line and belt was ordered only 7 days after the formation meeting and Alan Ray

PARTICULARS		Weight	Remarks
1 only	Life Saving Reel with package attached	80	
Rail to Geelong. Alan Ray Alan Ray carrier to Ocean Grove			

Received the above - Signature (in full).....

On the 21st of November 1948, a large group of keen members assembled on the main beach for training.

Trevor Lorimer, Jack Rabbas, Bob Moodie, Peter Davies, Joe Osman, Bruce Hill



Stan Smith

Trevor Lorimer, Stan Smith, Colin Monroe, Bob Moodie, Bruce Hill



Doug Yensch

But an issue was suitable members. Local boys were good footballers, but not strong swimmers according to Doug. Jack mentioned that *“Not many people were confident in the sea”*. Peter recalls *“It was the swimming that let most (i.e., the locals) down because we never did have any practise swims. Also no one ever went much beyond their depth in the surf - we weren't encouraged to swim by parents - and the surfboards of the day that we had were only for riding to the shore.”*

Doug Yensch himself was a strong swimmer and a (Royal Life Saving) Bronze holder and instructor with the Eastern Beach (Royal) Life Saving Club. Doug and Colin Monroe gained their Surf Bronze with a squad at Torquay on the 18th January 1949. Two or three members were hoping to join Point Lonsdale members for a Surf Bronze examination in late

January 1949 but the Point Lonsdale squad had its full 6 members. No other members gained their Surf Bronze award during seasons 1948/49 or 1949/50.



The club's first bathers (above) were black with the OG letters hand cut and sewn onto the bathers.

Left is a reproduction of the bather logo.

Ocean Grove's First Carnival.

The newly formed club was keen to host a carnival with the Victorian Centre approving a demonstration carnival held at Ocean Grove on the 6th February 1949.

It was by all accounts a huge success with many locals visiting the beach to take in the spectacle. Clubs which participated were Point Lonsdale, and Torquay.



Peter Davies recalls *“We took part in the R&R with a little bit of judical juggling of the team so that the qualified members did the swim. That day seemed to be a success from the spectator's point of view - nearly all the Township turned out.”*

The club also participated at carnivals at Torquay, Warrnambool, Point Lonsdale and Portland. At the Victorian State Titles at Warrnambool in February 1949, Doug Yensch won the club's first state titles medal with a bronze in the Senior Surf Race.

The Beginning of the End

At the conclusion of the 1948/49 summer, Doug Yensch moved away from Ocean Grove for work reasons. The loss of his experience and driving force were the catalyst for a poor 1949/50 season where no new recruits were gained, and membership was waning.

The final blow came on 26th February 1950 when club member Joe Osman drowned while swimming at the Barwon River mouth with three friends. He was unable to be rescued and his body was recovered from the river by police the following day. In an area where the locals were already wary of swimming in the surf (or anywhere), this was the final blow for the club and it went into a hiatus. There are no records of the club folding, only that it was unable to patrol the beach due to a lack of members.

Peter Davies summed up the situation:

This start to the club was a real struggle-

- *Very few locals in the age group.*
- *Lack of - or limited surf skills.*
- *Difficult transport for others to come. Torquay club was expanding at this time and transport there was easier.*
- *No clubhouse at this stage and difficulty to get permission to build on foreshore land.*

BARWON HEADS TRAGEDY.
At Barwon Heads, 14 miles from Geelong, Judeah Osman (21), of Ocean Grove, a member of the Ocean Grove Life Saving Club, was drowned when trying to cross a channel at the mouth of the Barwon River.
Osman, with three companions, Douglas Napier (19), George Maloney (25), and Keith Ford (19), was returning from a sand bank 100 yards from the shore when he was attacked by a cramp. About 50 yards from the shore he called out for help, but when his friends tried to aid him they were themselves dragged under. After several rescue attempts Osman sank. His friends dived repeatedly but could not locate the body because of the muddy water. Barwon Heads police dragged unsuccessfully for several hours for Osman's body.

Cairns Post Monday 27th February 1950



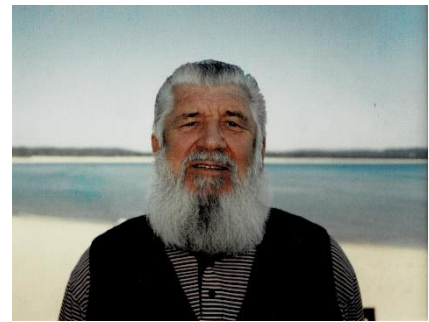
Ocean Grove main beach 1949. Ray's kiosk (left) and change rooms.

If You Are Wanting a Bit More

Listen to the establishment of the club from its co-founder, Doug Yensch.

This recording was made in 1994; click [here](#).

Doug Yensch in 1994



The following pages are the complete short memoirs of the three club formation members mentioned in this issue.

Doug Yensch

Peter Davies

Jack Rabbas

Some more pictures of 1940s Ocean Grove.



Doug YENCH Recollections

*Doug Yench has been described as the driving force behind the formation of the club during the 1940,s He now lives at Sawtell in Northern NSW.
Date of birth 18.2.31*

"My family shifted from Geelong to Ocean Grove in approximately 1945. Before that I was an active member of Eastern Beach Life Saving Club and when we moved to Ocean Grove, the same as at Geelong I spent more time in the water than I did out of it. Ocean Grove in the early years after the war was a sleepy little town, a typical little seaside resort with lots of little houses in amongst the tea-tree and very small population except for around the holiday periods. Business in the area consisted mainly of one camping ground, then Alan Ray's store at the bottom of the hill, Smith's a little bit over from it, Cathkin Guest House, up the top Skinner's store on the corner of the main street and also next to that, I think owned by a Mrs Mitchell, was the Doo Duck Inn. Along from that was the Chalet and that covered most of the general business of the area.

One Sunday morning in 1946 I was down enjoying a few lovely waves, quite good body shoots as a matter of fact, when I noticed a little girl in water wings drifting away quite happily and nobody had noticed it. This was in a current that used to cross and probably still does, laterally along the beach. There was no problem, I merely grabbed the girl and took her back to her mother before she knew anything that had happened. On returning to the shore, Claude Williams, who was a local schoolteacher came up to me. He had witnessed the little no drama rescue and we started to discuss the point that what we needed in the area was a definite surf life saving club and a patrol for the beach. As I mentioned, Ocean Grove was a quiet little town and we even discussed the fact that we were going to be rather short of members. At that stage of the game there were seven local boys in their mid to late teens and seven local girls in their mid to late teens. This was going to be a rather large problem because at that stage of the game girls were only allowed to make sandwiches, sell raffle tickets and sweep the floor after the dance. It is wonderful today to see them take a far more active, and I believe full part of all that goes on within the surf club itself. We started to ask around and finally got the address of the Victorian Centre and we contacted Sprint Walker and his staff there and they said they would come down and put on an evening for us. This was arranged and they did this with the help of the Progress Association and I think at that stage Trevor Lorimer was in fact President of the Ocean Grove Progress Association. It was a most successful night.

We were given all the prices of equipment, where to get it from and everything like that and we started to then find some way of organising things and Trevor Lorimer allowed us to go to his home for our very, very first meeting. At this first meeting Claude Williams was elected as President, I was elected as the club captain, the club instructor, the secretary and the treasurer. We then found out just how short we were of swimmers. Most of the local boys were weak or actually non-swimmers and we had to try and find people from afar, Eastern Beach and places like that to come along and help us and we were able to field a reasonable team but could not in fact put in an R and R team in the first year.

The second scarce resource of course was money and equipment was not cheap in those days so we decided to run some raffles and to canvass the local business people. This was most successful and within six weeks we had our basic equipment, a brand new reel, an excellent first aid kit and the resuscitation equipment of the day, the Eve Rocker. The next problem to solve of course was where were we going to store it near the beach without a clubhouse. And Alan Ray,

who had the local transport as well as the local store down at the bottom also had the kiosk at the beach and he allowed us to have keys to the kiosk and in fact that's where the equipment was stored for all the time in which I was associated with the club. We started the training program and not much longer after that, I think it was at Torquay I got my own Bronze and we also recruited a couple of others who were qualified, the names escape me now, and we were able to in fact patrol the beach most of that first year. Also in that first year, buoyed up with the success of getting our equipment and getting things organised we then decided that we'd try a carnival and in fact with the aid of Sprint Walker and his team from Melbourne we were able to put up a nice little carnival which was an absolute, resounding success. You have the photograph of the march past team in that carnival. Alan Ray with his little kiosk made quite a lot of money out of the extra crowd on the beach so we in fact got a nice little extra donation from him as well as the use of the kiosk.

When we are talking nearly 50 years back of course it's very hard for me to give you any dates so I wouldn't know if this was late '46 or '47. Also during that year the club was represented at carnivals at Point Lonsdale, Torquay, Warrnambool and Portland. I won a couple of places in either the belt race or the surf race.

The end of this year marked the finish of my association with the club. It was necessary for me to go well away from the surf up to Cobar in NSW and work with my brothers on their properties between Cobar and Wilcannia and I only got back to Ocean Grove I think probably 2 or 3 times for a couple of weeks for the next couple of years before my mother in fact moved back into Geelong.

There may be a few things that are not deadily accurate and there may be a few things I have missed. Please pass my regards on to any of the old members that you may strike and I do hope that the club is now most successful and continues to be into the future."

(Tape recording by Brenton McGee, August 1994)

History of the Ocean Grove S.L.S.C – Peter Davies 1948/49

Typed from the handwritten notes of Peter Davies by Ralf Harries.

This is a personal recollection by Peter Davies of the club's first two years of existence following the club's formation. Some information may be incomplete or conflict with known facts.

No corrections have been made to grammar, punctuation, or wording. Some paragraph formatting made for easier reading.

Peter Davies born Geelong 1930. Lived in Ocean Grove from 1945 to 1954.

Township 1947.

Shops consisted of general store and PO, Do Duck Inn, the milk bar type of Smiths and Wray's and butchers corner of Hodgson and Orton St. The "No Shooting in Township" sign was still in centre of shopping area.

We lived in Asbury St East - one of the last places back in the "bush" except for Mitchell's dairy well back Presidents Ave (never knew the name of the streets for although surveyed were still completely timbered).

The main beach area was just sand dunes with brick changing room and Ray's kiosk which opened over Xmas season. You could hire surfboards (flat planks with upturned end about 5/4 length) for 1/- (?) per hour.

Surf Club.

I was approached to join the club in its initial stages in the winter of 47 or was it 48? Claude Williams must have been the initial driving force as school headmaster he was in all the local groups – Foreshore, Hall Committee etc. We met in the old army hut in the Methodist campgrounds in the evenings and practised the required drills for the Bronze Certificate. The group was enthusiastic but not very proficient (I'm sure there was a Dutchman in that first group Con?). There was pressure to get a qualified group for the coming summer season but we never did get a full squad ready. It was the swimming that let most (i.e. the locals) down because we never did have any practise swims in the surf (if there were sessions I don't remember going) and it was suggested we train at the Eastern Beach pool. Also no one ever went much beyond their depth in the surf - we weren't encouraged to swim by parents - and the surfboards of the day that we had were only for riding to the shore.

I didn't qualify for the above reasons being poor swimmer and also my real sport was tennis which was very much a community activity at the time (the courts were diagonally opposite the Uniting Church). The squad was ready for the first carnival at Ocean Grove. We took part in the R&R with a little bit of judicial juggling of the team so that the qualified members did the swim. That day seemed to be a success from the spectator's point of view - nearly all the Township turned out.

In February 49 we competed at Portland (was that the Port Fairy as mentioned by Jack Rabbas). The same conditions applied as above.

That year I started at Melbourne Teachers College and followed on to Uni work. So I really moved away from the Ocean Grove community. Transport was not easy - few cars and public transport back to Melbourne on Sunday almost non-existent.

Jack RABBAS
(Interview with Brenton McGee
June 1998)

Jack Rabbas was born in Geelong and has lived there all his life. In 1947 at the age of 15 he became one of the founder members of the first Ocean Grove Surf Life Saving Club. He worked as a motor mechanic but is now retired. He still lives in East Geelong and his main recreational interest is golf.

"I was a member of the Western Beach swimming club which was situated in the bay just along from where Lewmarine now stands and I was also well in with the scouts. Each summer a group of us would camp at the Diggers Own scout camp which was on a block at the corner where Orton St and Field St South now cross. It was one of several scout camps in the area.

We would ride our bikes out from Geelong or if we were a bit flush we would catch the bus. We mixed in pretty well with the local boys and used to go dances with them, in the Grove and at Pt Lonsdale. One of them who also joined the surf club was Joe Osman who later drowned in the river at Barwon Heads. The Osman family lived in Tuckfield St in a little old house on the corner of what is now Watkin St. I think the house is still there. Not many people were confident in the sea although there was one bloke, I think he was a cook up at Cathkin guest house, used to swim right out to sea off the bluff. You could only see his head bobbing up and down in the distance. I never knew his real name. We all called him "Sharkbait".

In 1947 we heard they were forming a surf life saving club and being a swimmer I thought it sounded like a good thing to be in. I would have been about 15 at the time. From the scout camp we had to walk through 'the desert' to get to the beach. All the low area where Wynndean is we used to call 'the desert', it was nothing but sand and ti-tree and dirt tracks and I practised a lot of golf in and out of the whole area.

The club patrolled the beach during the summer holidays. There was no club rooms and we used to change in the old brick shelter shed. The patrol was set up probably 100 to 200 yards westwards from the reef, the patrol uniform was a pair of the old cotton speedos with the O.G. initials at the top right. I'm not 100 % sure but I think Doug Yench was the captain. The president was Claude Williams who was the principal at the primary school at the time.

Doug and Colin Monro got their Bronze medallions at Torquay with a group over there. I never got mine but I was quite capable of getting it. I competed in the swim events at carnivals and also the beach relays. They were rough in those days, lots of kicking and other rough tactics. One year we went down to Port Fairy in a Trans Otway coach, each row of seats across the bus had its own door on the side, the latest thing in luxury. They were supposed to have our accommodation all arranged but we ended up sleeping on the floor in a shed.

I believe I was the first person to surf at Ocean Grove with one of those old plywood wave skis. It must have been about 12 or 14 feet long and I remember a photo of me on the beach with the ski standing up beside me, I wasn't much above 5 feet. It was very difficult to transport so I was offered the chance to leave it at Dr Giles' home. His house was further up the hill from the scout camp and was on stilts so I could store the ski underneath and use it whenever I wanted. After 3 or 4 years we got older and got jobs and some of us met girls and got engaged and married and we all drifted away. When the Eumerella scout camp opened near Anglesea all the camps at Ocean Grove closed down. Because it had been the same group of us every summer and we had not recruited any new members there was no one to replace us and the club eventually disbanded."