

# OUR STORY

*Golden Square Pool – a part of the community for over 100 years*

## Earliest History

Golden Square is on the traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung Peoples of the Kulin Nation. Djaara (Dja Dja Wurrung People) have lived on their traditional lands and cared for djandak (Country) over many thousands of years.

In the 1800s, prior to white settlement, Bendigo Creek was described by Thomas Dungey as “the loveliest spot on Earth, with waterholes with water in them as clear as crystal, kingfisher birds flitting about in the silver wattle, whose lovely foliage almost hid the banks of the creek.”<sup>i</sup>

The area was dotted with shady gums, green grass and the chain of waterholes contained sweet, clear water.

In 1851, not more than 100 metres from this spot, Margaret Kennedy and Julia Farrell struck gold in the chain of ponds known as the Bendigo Creek and so began the rush to the Bendigo diggings.

Within months there were more than 10,000 people working the Bendigo diggings. Within a few years, all trees had been cut down for use by the miners, the goldfield dug out and the creek reduced to oozing sludge

Over the next few decades, ordered streets, grand public buildings, houses, parks and businesses gradually replaced the chaos.<sup>iiii</sup>



*Bendigo Creek in August 1852 by the artist S.T. Gill*

## Campaign for baths in Golden Square

In 1877, engineer Joseph Martin Brady’s innovative Coliban Water Scheme, a system of open water channels, aqueducts and reservoirs was completed in Bendigo. This ensured that residents were no

longer dependent on filthy pools of water, muddy creeks or precarious rainwater collections for clean, plentiful water.

In 1877 the first call was made for Golden Square to have baths to manage the dangerous practice of people swimming in dams and ponds and to limit the “troops of men and boys bathing or running naked, much to the annoyance of respectable people”. A correspondent to the Bendigo Advertiser signed as ‘Censor’, claimed that “no justification can be shown for the refusal”.<sup>iv</sup>

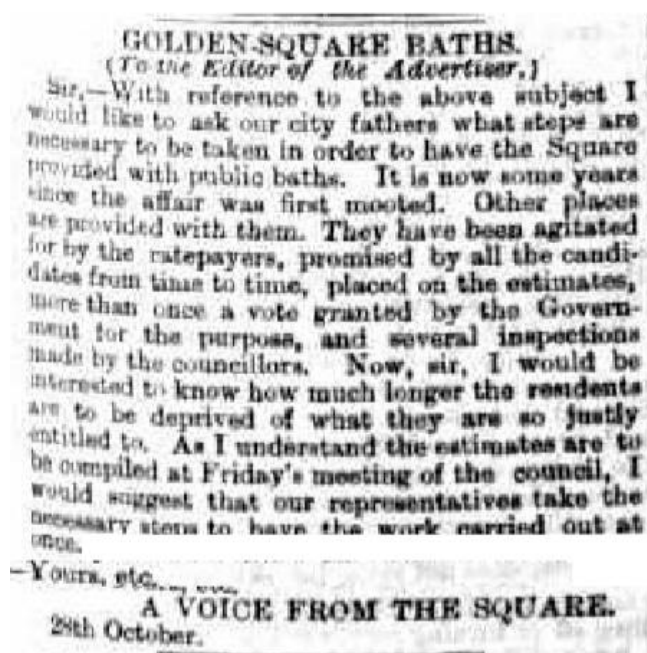
A petition of 20 signatures was presented to the Mayor and Councillors of the City of Sandhurst in 1883:

*To the Mayor and Councillors of the City of Sandhurst*

*Sir and Gentlemen,*

*We the undersigned residents of Golden Square seeing that the season is advancing urgently request that immediate action should be taken to commence erections of the Baths so long promised in this locality.*

Over the following years, the issue was brought before Council many times and was a frequent topic of Letters to the Editor. The Bendigo Advertiser reported that year after year the residents of Golden Square had been put off by the Council, while arguments went back and forth about the cost, a suitable position and who would pay for it.



*Bendigo Advertiser 1884*

In 1886 a deputation from the residents of Golden Square requested that Bendigo City Council set aside £500 to build public baths. They claimed it was “absolutely necessary” for the children of Golden Square to learn to swim and that economic considerations should not outweigh the social and public benefit.<sup>vi</sup>

A second petition was put to Council in 1890 with 52 signatures, and a third petition in 1895 had 236 signatures.



*Petitions on display at the Bendigo Library 2017 "Swim Exhibition"*

In 1908, the newly formed Golden Square Progress Association began to apply pressure to the Sutton Ward councillors, with many residents believing that Golden Square was being deliberately neglected. The baths, along with rubbish, road construction and street lighting, were hot issues at the council elections. In 1913, the Golden Square School Improvement Committee added another voice to the discussion, arguing the importance of children learning to swim in their local area.

Later that year, Cr Andrew moved that the scheme of providing baths at Golden Square be put to the Finance Committee for consideration and this motion was seconded by Cr Ross.

The Golden Square Progress Association continued to push for the baths, and in 1914 when Maurice Hamburger was elected to the Sutton Ward, he joined Cr Ross and Cr Andrew to apply pressure to the other councillors to choose a site and develop the project.

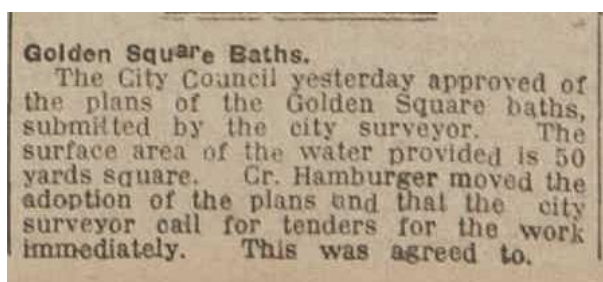
Gradually a number of plans and sites were considered, including near the Golden Gully Creek on Belle Vue Road and in Maple Street.

In 1915, all three members for Sutton Ward, Councillors Ross, Andrew and Hamburger recommended that the site in Maple Street between Wade and Booth Streets was the most suitable for the baths. They asked that the city surveyor be instructed to submit an estimate of the proposed cost to council.

More obstacles were the cost and the supply of water. In 1916, the Sutton Ward councillors pushed ahead with a scheme to reduce the cost of the plan at Maple Street. To save money, a deal was made with the Water Supply department for council to be supplied water free of charge with the stipulation that admission to the baths be free. This was a turning point where finally plans were drawn up by the City Surveyor and costed.

Finally in May 1916, new plans were unveiled for the Maple Street site with the proposal of the construction of an unfenced basin, 50 yards square ranging from 2 feet at the shallow end to 7 feet at the deep end. The bottom was to be covered with 6 inches of clean washed fine gravel, the same as in the City Baths, Upper Reserve. An enclosed dressing room with showers and toilets was to be included. The cost would be £400.

The plans were adopted in September 1916 after Cr Hamburger moved the motion.<sup>vii</sup>



*15 September 1916 – Council approved the plans for the Golden Square Baths at Maple Street*

Excavation of the basin began in January 1917 and was filled with water in March. A swimming club was formed in April and the dressing shed and springboard installed. In October the baths were considered ready for use. Meanwhile, the area nearby which fronts Mackenzie Street was approved by council to be developed into a recreational reserve.



*Horse team excavating for the Golden Square Baths. Bendigo Creek is in the background.*<sup>ix</sup>

### Success after 35 years

On Saturday 8 December 1917, the first carnival was held at the baths and included races, duck hunts (where the winner could keep the duck), a cork scramble and other interesting events. A few days later, the *Bendigo Independent* reported that the new baths at Golden Square were “greatly

appreciated by the residents". The sand head on one side provided a great attraction for children and the swimming club proposed to hold regular carnivals.<sup>x</sup>

An official opening in the form of a swimming carnival was held on Saturday 2 February 1918, attended by the Mayor Cr Abbott. The event was enthusiastically reported by all local newspapers

*"No function held at Golden-square for many years has proved so attractive as did the swimming carnival", it was reported. "Long before 3 o'clock the trams from the city, bound for Golden Square, were packed with passengers, whilst hundreds of patrons journeyed to the carnival on foot."*

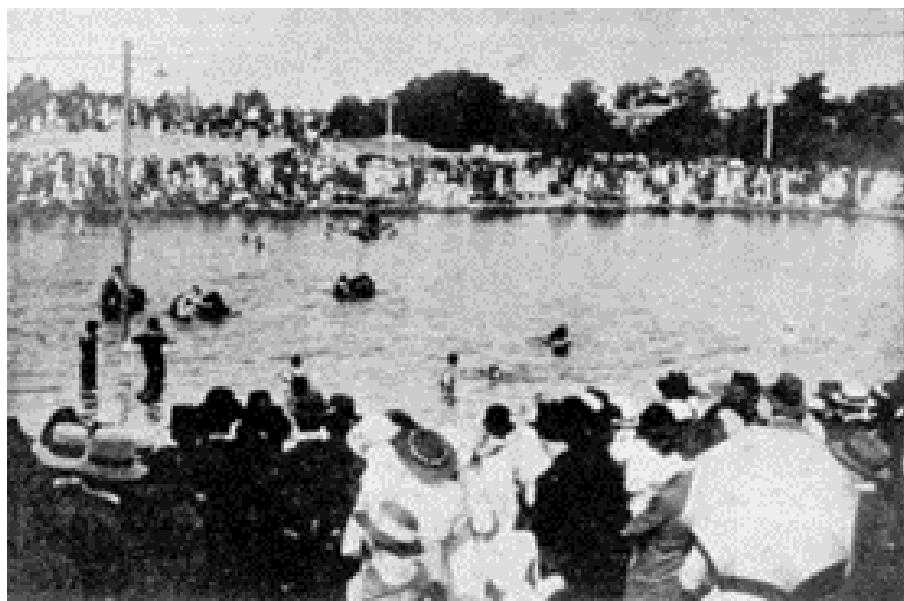
Cr Abbott said it was pleasure to see such a large crowd at the baths, and to take part in the official opening.

The programme of the day included championship races and entertainment. There were funny acts by characters in costume, Hopetoun's Brass Band and musical numbers featuring violin and a piano loaned by Wertheim's. A spinning wheel, chocolate wheel, afternoon tea, ice cream, drinks, lollies, and fruit stalls were all provided. Funds raised throughout the Carnival were in aid of the Worn-Out Miners' Fund.

The carnival was opened at 3pm, in the presence of around 2000 people, by Cr Holland who was also the president of the Swimming Club. In declaring the baths open Cr Holland spoke in detail about the advantages and benefits of swimming and the importance of learning to swim.

Cr Andrew and former councillors Hamburger and Ross were thanked for the substantial role they played in ensuring that the Golden Square Baths project was completed. The carnival continued into the night when the gathering was estimated to run into the thousands. It was claimed that the tramways had never needed to run so many trams to Golden Square before.

Significantly, the Golden Square Baths drew considerable attention for having successfully introduced "mixed bathing" which was quickly adopted by the Upper Reserve and other bathing facilities in Bendigo and surrounding areas.<sup>xi</sup>



*"Carnival at the Golden Square Baths"*

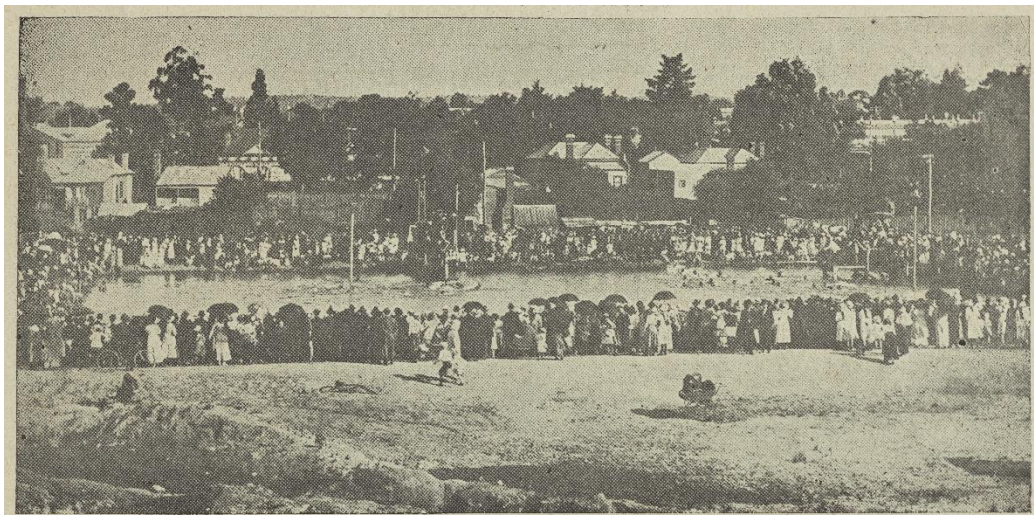


xiii

*“A spot of great interest in the hot weather”*

In August 1918, the *Bendigo Independent* reported on the installation of the new mayor to the Bendigo City Council, Cr Dunstan, and reflected on the term just completed by Mayor Abbott:

*“Not the least notable event of the year was the opening of the Golden Square Baths, where a fine pool with accessories has been provided, affording unequalled facilities for free bathing by the residents in this specially favored suburb. The fact that ladies participate in this and what is known as mixed bathing has been carried on during the hot summer weather, with every regard to propriety attracting hundreds of onlookers makes a new departure in every way satisfactory to a progressive community.”<sup>xiv</sup>*



A VIEW OF THE GOLDEN-SQUARE BATHS DURING A SWIMMING CARNIVAL.

Photo by W. H. Robinson. xv

*“A view of the Golden Square Baths during a swimming carnival” December 1918*

## Fighting for its future



*Digging out the pool for a concrete upgrade*

Swimming grew in popularity across Australia in the mid twentieth century following the success of Dawn Fraser and Murray Rose in the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. At some time after that, Golden Square Pool was upgraded to the more formal structure known today. However, the development of the baths at Upper Reserve to be an Olympic Swimming Pool, complete with diving towers, had an impact on the popularity of other pools. In the late 1960s Council began to apply pressure to close the Golden Square Pool, citing the high costs of upkeep.



*Circa 1966, the northeast corner of the 50-metre pool looking towards Maple Street*

The community of Golden Square, including the school councils, persuaded the Bendigo City Council to allow a Committee of Management to run the pool. The committee then successfully ran the pool using volunteers to keep the costs associated with maintenance and compliance down. Alex Pianta was a notable committee member who steered the COM for 25 years. Another long-serving committee member, Andrew Penna was instrumental in later saving and helping to run the Golden Square Pool.

Slowly, a decline in committee members led Council to hand management of the pool to the YMCA in early 2000s. The closure of Golden Square Secondary College in 2008 was another major blow to the pool with a noticeable drop in patronage as a result.

In November 2012, City of Greater Bendigo councillors voted to close the Golden Square Pool, citing rising costs and falling attendances. An aquatic strategy adopted earlier in the year declared an 'over-provision of aquatic facilities' in the city and planned for the construction of a new indoor aquatic facility and wellbeing centre in Kangaroo Flat.



*"Save our pool" campaign 2012*

Following this announcement, a groundswell of community support by dedicated locals, led by Golden Square residents Ken Hamilton and Linda Howell, forced the decision back to council. Despite protests, a petition and constant lobbying, council backed their decision in February but then overturned it in March 2013 to much celebration.

On 1 May 2013, a delighted Committee of Management led by Ken Hamilton took control of the Golden Square Pool and began a fundraising and maintenance program, joined by dozens of locals. The pool was officially opened under community management on 30 November 2013. Many community members – too many to name individually, contributed time, money and energy to this immense achievement, one which many didn't think was possible.



*Opening Day 2013*



In September 2014, the committee was handed a three-year lease after a successful first season when more than 12,000 people passed through the gates.

In the following seasons, the pool became a thriving centre of community life in Golden square. As well as a place to swim and catch up with friends, the pool hosted events including Australia Day celebrations, Music by the Pool and celebrated its centenary in 2018.



*Champion diver, Pearl Heenan helped the pool celebrate its centenary in 2018*



*Inaugural Music by the Pool, 2018*

Despite its success, the pool was again threatened with closure in February 2018. The motion was again before council to close the pool now that the new aquatic centre at Kangaroo Flat was ready to open. Once again, the community rallied around the pool and an intense campaign by the committee and supporters of the pool, including local primary schools saved the pool from closure. This time, council voted for a reprieve until June 2020 to gauge whether the Golden Square Pool would remain popular after the opening of the new centre.



*Outside the council meeting in 2018 "Let's Keep it Open"*

In March 2020, despite an extraordinary increase in patronage, volunteer numbers and memberships, the council again considered a motion to close the pool. Once again, the community rallied to save the pool. This time the campaign largely took place on social media due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. In July 2020, in a tense meeting, council voted on a version of the Golden Square Recreation Reserve Master Plan that included the Golden Square Pool – providing ongoing operation under community management, with the responsibility for maintenance and upgrades on the committee.



*Campaign to save the pool “Here to Stay” in 2020*

In 2022, the organisation stands in a strong position with a robust team of volunteers, solid leadership and has its own masterplan of upgrades and future improvements. Since gaining community management in 2013, the Golden Square Pool has had over 140,000 patrons pass through the gates and celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> season during the 2022/2023 summer. Everyone who has played a role should be very proud of this incredible achievement.

For the past ten years the people involved with the Golden Square Pool have demonstrated the same tenacity and community spirit that inspired our forebears to fight for this little piece of paradise. Everyday people have worked together to make this community a better place - a safe place for children to learn to swim, a place for families to enjoy and for friendships to be made. The beating heart of Golden Square.

### **Now and into the future**

Since regaining community management in 2013, the Golden Square Pool has had more than 150,000 patrons through the gates and celebrated its 10th season during the 2022/2023 summer.

In just ten years, hundreds of volunteers have transformed a tired facility into a popular, inclusive and meaningful community space for all, with both a contemporary vibe and old-world charm. Just as the original supporters dreamed, it’s a place for community connection, a safe place for children to learn to swim and a place for families to enjoy and friendships to be made.

### **Achievements since gaining community management in 2013 include:**

- More than 150,000 visitors through the gates
- Implementation of health and wellbeing programs, including water aerobics, yoga and Healthy Golden Square for kids

- The fourth largest provider for outdoor VicSwim programs, helping kids to learn to swim and be safe around water
- Winner of the Innovation Award at the 2019 Volunteering Victoria State Awards for the Junior Volunteer Team Program
- Winner of the 2019 Community Group Award in the Victorian Regional Achievement & Community Awards
- Over \$220,000 in grant funding for projects such as new shade, community programs and entry steps to enhance all-abilities access
- Establishment of the multicultural swimming programs SwimAware and SwimAware Kids, helping those who hadn't previously had the opportunity to learn to swim and be safe around water
- Implementation of many community development projects, including murals, community garden and off-season social events to connect our community
- Participant in the 2019 Bendigo Easter Fair Gala Parade
- Providing many fun community events including Music by the Pool, movie nights, Holi, Dog Days and Australia Day celebrations
- Development of a strong team of volunteers, solid leadership and operating structures as well as a masterplan for future improvements



## Councillors who helped establish the baths



**David Andrew** was a civil engineer and auctioneer. He was elected to Bendigo City Council in 1904 and served as mayor in 1909, 1913 and 1920. In 1925 he was elected to the Australian Senate as a Country Party senator for Victoria. He retired from politics in 1928 and died shortly after.



**Harry Astwood Ross** was an auctioneer and real estate agent. He came to Bendigo from Ballarat and was elected to council in 1906, taking the seat from the popular Cr J H Curnow. Cr Ross served as mayor in 1912 and reinstated the mayoral ball. He left council in 1918 to follow business interests and his legacy is the bluestone curbing in the older residential streets of Bendigo.

**Maurice Emanuel Hamburger** was elected to the Sutton Ward in 1914 and served until 1917. He was born in Ballarat to English and Polish parents. He was an optician with a practice in Mitchell Street and was also known as a talented performer who specialised in conjuring. In later years he was also known as Maurice Hamilton.

## Community leaders who helped save the pool

### Ken Hamilton



The Golden Square Pool community owes a huge debt of gratitude to Ken Hamilton. Ken started the 'Save the Golden Square Pool' action group in 2012 in response to the council decision to decommission the pool. He led the original campaign to lobby council to revoke their decision. Once the committee of management was granted the lease to the pool, Ken became the first President and oversaw the fundraising, maintenance and planning process to open the pool in November 2013. He served as President until 2016 when he left Bendigo to manage pools in remote indigenous community. Ken passed away in 2020.

### Bernadette Wright



Bernadette took over from Ken Hamilton as President in 2016. She led the organisation through a period of consolidation, including the development of a strong community and online presence and established the pool as a central part of the Golden Square summer. She successfully led the committee through the 2018 campaign to save the pool again.

## Sam Kane



Sam Kane became President of Golden Square Pool in 2018, while a full-time university student. He had been involved in the fight to save the pool since 2012. His leadership has seen the pool characterised by many new initiatives designed to enhance its position in the community and guarantee long-term sustainability. Collectively, Sam's tenure has seen volunteers expand the pool's community engagement, introduce health and wellbeing programs, murals, the community garden, grow the volunteer program and develop the strategic future of the organisation. Sam's work at Golden Square Pool led to his recognition as the 2019 City of Greater Bendigo Young Citizen of the Year and as a 2020 national ABC Heywire winner. In 2020, Sam led the successful campaign to gain the pool ongoing operation, while navigating the impacts of COVID-19

## Acknowledgements

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Images and information sourced from *The Bendigo Advertiser* and *The Bendigonian*, *The Bendigo Independent* courtesy National Library of Australia and photos sourced from the State Library of Victoria, Museums Victoria and private collections.

Golden Square Pool gratefully acknowledges the Local History Grants Program and Public Record Office Victoria, supported by the Victorian Government through the Community Support Fund



<sup>i</sup> <https://victoriancollections.net.au/stories/mapping-great-change>

<sup>iii</sup> IMAGE: Bendigo Creek in August 1852 by the artist S.T. Gill. By NLA, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=91745574>

<sup>iv</sup> "BATHS FOR THE PEOPLE." *Bendigo Advertiser* (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) 1 December 1877: 1 (Supplement to The Bendigo Advertiser.). Web. 5 Sep 2022 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article88208964>

<sup>v</sup> "BATHS AT GOLDEN-SQUARE." *Bendigo Advertiser* (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) 21 October 1882: 2 (Supplement to The Bendigo Advertiser). Web. 5 Sep 2022 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article88577359>

<sup>vi</sup> "BATHS FOR GOLDEN-SQUARE." *Bendigo Advertiser* (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) 14 August 1886: 2. Web. 8 Sep 2022 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article88913341>

<sup>vii</sup> "Golden Square Baths." *The Bendigo Independent* (Vic. : 1891 - 1918) 15 September 1916: 4. Web. 5 Sep 2022 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article219793988>

<sup>viii</sup> Horse teams excavating the Golden Square baths, 1916. Bendigo Creek is in the background.

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(Source: Museums Victoria 1916, Item MM 4011)

<sup>ix</sup> Museums Victoria Collections <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/769614>

<sup>x</sup> "AT GOLDEN SQUARE." The Bendigo Independent (Vic. : 1891 - 1918) 10 December 1917: 2. Web. 5 Sep 2022 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article219836061>

<sup>xi</sup> "GOLDEN-SQUARE BATHS." Bendigonian (Bendigo, Vic. : 1914 - 1918) 7 February 1918: 9. Web. 5 Sep 2022 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article89090640>

<sup>xii</sup> Bendigonian (Bendigo, Vic. : 1914 - 1918) 7 February 1918: 17. Web. 5 Sep 2022 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page8556120>

<sup>xiii</sup> Bendigonian (Bendigo, Vic. : 1914 - 1918) 31 January 1918: 16. Web. 5 Sep 2022 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page8556087>

<sup>xiv</sup> "BENDIGO CITY COUNCIL." The Bendigo Independent (Vic. : 1891 - 1918) 27 August 1918: 6. Web. 5 Sep 2022 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article219774969>

<sup>xv</sup> "A VIEW OF THE GOLDEN-SQUARE BATHS DURING A SWIMMING CARNIVAL." Bendigonian (Bendigo, Vic. : 1914 - 1918) 27 December 1918: 12. Web. 7 Sep 2022 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article89093082>