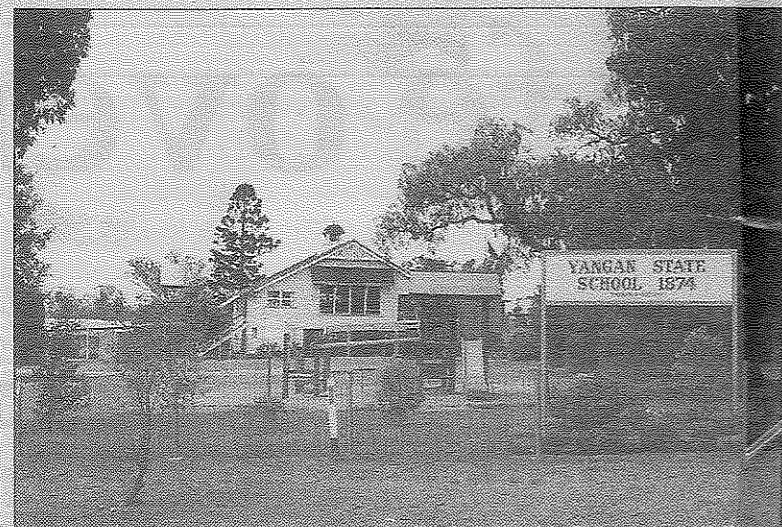


Weekend

Features

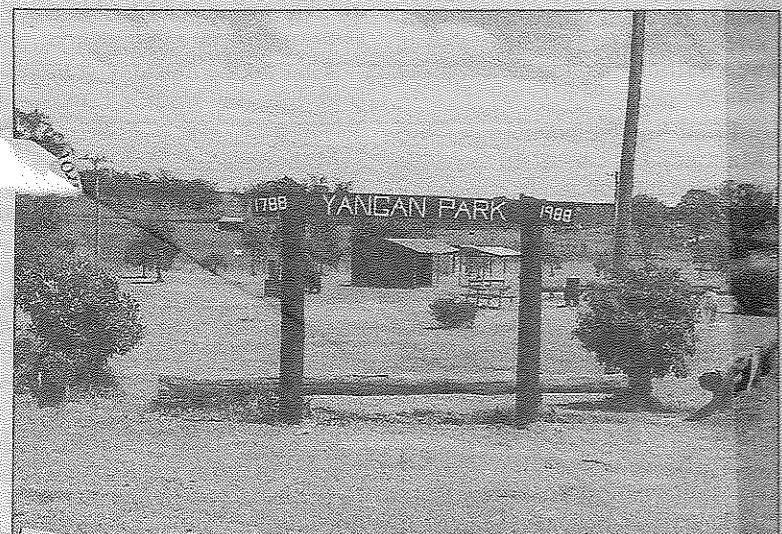
The boy from Yangan



SMALL BEGINNINGS: The Yangan State School where Charley Thelander began his education with such conspicuous success is still in use today.



SCHOOL OF ARTS: The Yangan School of Arts still graces the township today.



Charley Thelander was the archetypal "boy makes good" when he left the little community of Yangan, bound for school, university and a distinguished career in medicine. GEOFF HARDING traces the history of a family which migrated to Australia more than 100 years ago and which has now published a biography of the remarkable man who is part of that dynasty.

ON OCTOBER 16, 1878, nearly 120 years ago, the fully-rigged sailing ship "Friedeburg" of 739 tons, sailed into the Brisbane River after a four-month voyage from Hamburg carrying German and Scandinavian immigrants.

The voyage had been very traumatic. First there had been a very fierce storm in the Southern Ocean after the ship rounded Cape Horn, and the vessel was in real danger of sinking, and then, off the coast of Chile, the ship's carpenter went berserk and destroyed the water distiller.

Sickness on board was rife and by the time Brisbane was reached 23 people had died including many children.

But among those who stepped ashore safely were Elias and Karna Thelander with their two children, Oskar and Augusta, who were to become some of the first settlers at Yangan on the Darling Downs and a family destined to leave their mark in the history of Queensland. Along with other Scandinavians, the Thelanders took up a selection at Upper Swan Creek, later to be called Yangan, and by dint of incredibly hard work Elias established a family farm, while over the next 13 years a further seven children were born.

In 1883 Charles August was born, destined to establish the Thelander dynasty as one associated with the medical profession in Queensland right down to the present day.

And now this medical connection has been admirably chronicled in a most handsome volume, *Footprints, The Life and Times of Charles Thelander MB, CHB (Edin), FRACS (1883-1959)*, written and published by his daughter Betty Newell and his grandson, Dr Rodney Thelander. The story of Charley Thelander, as he was always known, the son of hard-working migrants, is the inspiring account of a man from quite humble beginnings determined to succeed.

"He was one of the world's achievers. This does not necessarily imply being a winner, so far as a winner may just be lucky. An achiever is not always so, but in attaining a goal deserves respect, perhaps even admiration," as the book observes.

The Yangan State School had been opened only 14 years when Charley Thelander began his education, soon showing that he had exceptional intelligence.

This was noticed by one of his neighbours James Kemp, who had several children at the school, and who himself was a man of considerable learning. He had emigrated from Scotland 12 years before the Thelanders.

James Kemp had done one year at Edinburgh University as a medical student before he had to leave to take over the family farms and subsequently come to Australia. This well-educated gentleman, who could speak both Hebrew and Greek, befriended the young Charley Thelander and encouraged him in his education, and may well have been one of the major influences in his career.

In 1896 Charley did exceptionally well in the examination for a Grammar School scholarship — could many primary school children today explain, "accidence, syntax, parsing, analysis of sentences, composition, sentence, diphthong, etymology, declension and root?" — and gained a three-year scholarship at the then still-fledgling Toowoomba Grammar School.

The young student soon collected many prizes, and three years later managed to get a transfer to Brisbane Grammar School. Many years later one of his fellow students was to say, "The reason Thelander had to leave Toowoomba Grammar School was because he knew more than the teachers."

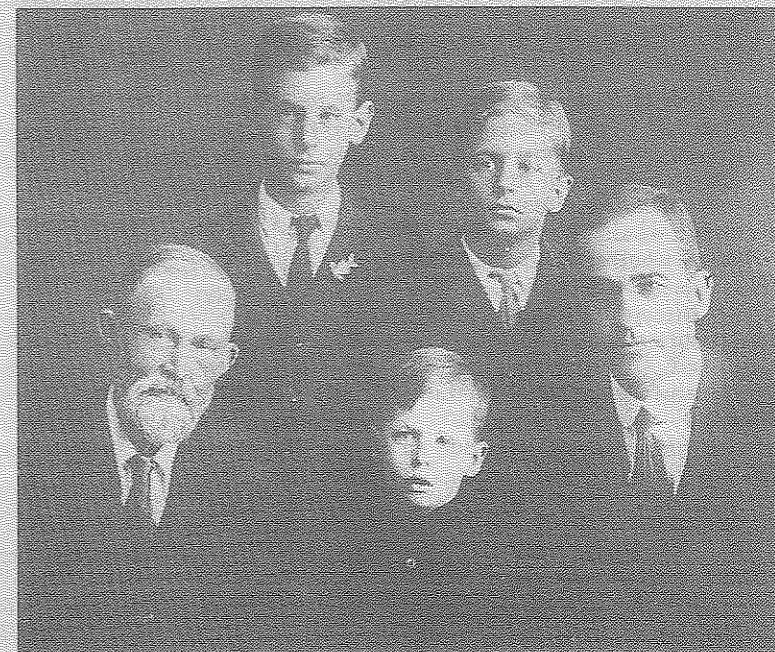
Going to Brisbane posed serious financial problems, but Charley's father made many sacrifices for his son, and his enthusiastic mentor James Kemp also lent his help.

Charley justified their support by winning a scholarship to the prestigious medical school at Edinburgh University.

Charley arrived in Edinburgh in 1902 not only with the best wishes and full support of his family and James Kemp but of the people of Yangan who also helped him financially.

In 1907 Charley was one of seven from 119 graduates who received First Class Honours. After further academic awards, and an internship at Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary, and then offers of working with two of the leading surgeons, Charley made the decision to return to Queensland because he felt that he had to repay a debt to the Queenslanders who had helped him so much during his education.

Meanwhile, Charley's father Elias had sold the farm and bought the bakery in Yangan and then in 1906 he also became the licensee of the Commercial Hotel. But in 1909 just after Charley's first visit to Yangan after graduating, the family returned to the land and to a farm at Wondai, where



DYNASTIC PORTRAIT: Three generations of Thelanders, Elias, left and Charley right, with Charley's three sons, Charles, who died in the "Centaur", Paul and Digger.

they lived and worked for a number of years.

In Brisbane Charley became a brilliant, if often unorthodox, surgeon who worked tirelessly and with wonderful success right up until the time when the onset of Parkinson's Disease made further work impossible.

In 1935 Charley was appointed chairman of the Royal Commission to inquire into Sister Kenny's method of treating poliomyelitis, and it is most interesting to read, 60 years later, the detailed appraisal of her work, in view of the popular support Sister Kenny received. But although so successful, Charley's life had its measure of tragedy. His first wife, Swiss-born Helene, died in child birth and then his doctor son,

Charles, was one of those tragically lost on the "Centaur" when it was torpedoed off Caloundra during the Second World War.

Betty Newell and Rodney Thelander have written an inspiring account of the life and work of this son of Yangan. It is a story not only of one man's dedication and his compassion for his legion of patients, but also a fascinating account of the development of medical services over almost 70 years from before the First World War until well after the end of the Second, and would grace any bookshelf with distinction.

Footprints—The Life and Times of Charles Thelander is available from major bookshops in Toowoomba or by ringing 35 2684.



PERSONAL EFFECTS: A fascinating collection of Charley Thelander's medical and personal memorabilia.