

October
2008

NEWSLETTER

MAU 00809

The October Meeting of the Moorabbin Historical Society is on Sunday 26th at 1pm
This Meeting incorporates the AGM, so we look forward to as many of our members attending as possible.

THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Author: Tom Sheehy.

Taken from the City of Moorabbin Historical Society Newsletter October 1963

NB. (This article also makes reference back to the 19th Century)

CITY OF MOORABBIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The East Brighton Hall, on Centre Road, (now known as East Bentleigh), was built during the depression of 1894 by the local community members, who formed a company and raised the necessary funds. At this time the very social life of the area was being threatened with extinction, simply because the only existing local hall, St Peter's, built in 1862, could not cater for the greatly increased population.

However, by 1903 life had gone to the other extreme, and the East Brighton Hall, (now East Bentleigh), had become the centre of gaiety in the Shire of Moorabbin. Now there was a certain enchantment about the atmosphere, with the twitching, wavering flicker of flames in the street gaslights, and the hall lanterns beckoning the population to "come to the dance".

The younger ones needed no further encouragement. They hurried on foot, over the stringy-rooted sand strips to the hall. On entry, they received a small book and pencil, and quickly set about booking their dance partners for the

night. Gracious young ladies in long dresses, consented to the requests of mustached gentlemen's "May I?" for the sixth, eighth, tenth, or whatever numeral corresponded to the blank line in their book.

The younger "marrieds", with their offspring securely tucked into their high wicker perambulators with the thirty-inch wheels, dropped in for a while, and the older members went along also, to enjoy a game of "forty-five" cards. Sometimes the card game was temporarily abandoned as some players, who had started the original East Brighton Dance in 1862, joined in the dancing.

Initially in 1862 the East Brighton Dance was held in St Peter's Church Hall located in Quinn's Paddock. Life had been very different in 1862, with no small percentage of parents firmly fixed in their religious beliefs that dancing in any shape or form, was immoral, to say the least of it. Perhaps it was just as well too, because the tiny St Peter's Hall could only handle *eight* sets of dancers

at a time, and there were always many sets ready to take part. The new East Brighton Hall could now handle eight times as many !

There *were* other halls in the area. A new St Peter's hall was being built, also on Centre Road, just East of Boundary Road, and would be ready for opening in 1903, but this did not affect the status of the East Brighton Hall being thought of as the unofficial 'town hall'.

The official Moorabbin Shire Hall, built in 1867, offered no competition at all, and besides, it was completely occupied by the business of running a shire. There was also the Mechanics Institute at Cheltenham, (built in 1887), that had had a new front and additional rooms added to it in recent years, as well as a solid brick hall, (owned by the Moorabbin Shire Council), at Beaumaris, (on Tramway Parade). But, unlike the East Brighton Hall, none of these halls had the distinction of being owned by the citizens as a company.

How "South Brighton" became known as Moorabbin:

The presence of this and many other smaller halls was creating a greater degree of civic pride amongst the local people, and from this pride, progress associations began to develop. Miss Lillian White, in her memoirs, told of the first Moorabbin progress group and a Mr Clayton who was "vocal" in his lack of desire to retain "all these Brightons" in the Shire of Moorabbin. Said Clayton, "*The name of the shire is Moorabbin,; we have a Moorabbin Shire hall, yet that Shire Hall is located in "South Brighton". I move that the council be asked to change the name of South Brighton to that of Moorabbin.*"

In December 1906 the request was answered, and Percival White, (the blacksmith), Barrie

Gregg, (the hotel-keeper), and Dr Joyce Fleming, along with other business and professional people of the day, pulled down the "South Brighton" signs and replaced them with "Moorabbin".

Donation

Last month Mrs Pam Seymour-Gough visited 'Box Cottage', and kindly donated quite a few of her hand-made soaps to our society. She also passed on the following interesting information about how soap was made in the early pioneering days.

Method:

The ashes were saved from the fire. Fat was also saved from cooking. Then water was poured through the ashes, and formed a brown liquid, high in potash. Then the boiled fat, and potash liquid were mixed together and poured into a hessian-lined tin box, or similar. When the resulting grayish coloured mixture had set, it was cut into blocks, then left for some time, until it had dried very hard. This old-fashioned soap did **froth** when used.

Editors comment: You do have to wonder how this early soap smelt !!

P.S. I'm also pleased to report that Pam's donated soap was *not* made by this method.

As this is the last Newsletter for 2008 I would like to say a big **Thank You** to all the members who by volunteering for a myriad of tasks allow us to maintain 'Box Cottage' as a legacy for the community.