

The Building Of Moorabbin Hospital; An Example Of People-Power:

Yesterday, as I was driving past the now Moorabbin Campus of Monash Medical Centre, in Centre Road, East Bentleigh I thought it would be of interest to remember the many highs and lows of those local residents, (many now long gone), who dreamed and never gave up the fight for over 26 years, to ensure that a hospital for Moorabbin became a reality. Greatful thanks go to the Leader Newspaper for much of the following information from the *Souvenir Edition of the City of Moorabbin News - Pictorial, Sunday, October 19th 1975*, as well as personal notes from Mr H. Smith's estate.

In Moorabbin the 1940s was a frightening time. A Polio epidemic swept the then City of Moorabbin and schools were closed, and children quarantined in their own homes, were schooled by correspondence. In this climate of fear, residents became acutely aware of the need for their own local hospital. In 1949 the *Moorabbin Hospital Society* was set up with the aim of building a hospital for the district.

In 1949 seventeen acres were purchased on the corner of Centre and Gardiner's Road, East Bentleigh, for the sum of \$32,548. This site was thought to be ideal for a Moorabbin Community Hospital as it was located far enough away from the then bustling Bentleigh shopping centre, yet had access by public transport. The cost of the land was shared equally by the City of Moorabbin and the Hospital and Charities Commission. **BUT** the "sticking point", over many years was proved to be, that *no firm date was given for construction!*

Meanwhile, Mr Fred Newry Porter was one citizen who enthusiastically embraced the dream of a hospital for Moorabbin. The Porter family had arrived by sailing ship in the 1850s from County Armagh, Northern Ireland. (The well known McGuinness family of East Bentleigh were their shipmates). Fred's second name "Newry" seems to indicate that was the name of their home town in County Armagh, near the Mountains of Mourne. Mary Jane Porter, a spinster and Fred's only sister was for many years owner and proprietress of the Boundary Hotel in East Bentleigh. Two other brothers, James and William, also bachelors, lived with Fred and Jane at the hotel. Another brother, Robert, was married and lived in Queensland. But, there were no descendants.

Fred is believed to have been born around 1865. A bachelor like his brothers, he had inherited the East Boundary Hotel from his sister, Mary Jane Porter. Harry Smith, (1899—1988), recalled that Fred Porter was a large man, pleasantly spoken and quick in repartee. Fred described himself for business purposes as a "Licensed Dealer". The "dealing" mainly concerned trading cattle and sheep, but also extended to anything that could be turned to a profit. Fred often drove a pony and jinker towing a cow or heifer at the rear. Harry remembered that he also delighted in the use of school-boy slang such as "Oscar Ashe" for "cash". It seemed that the worry of raising the money to build a new hospital was over when Fred Porter generously gave, under his 'Last Will and Testament', the whole of his substantial estate of \$94,792 towards the building of a Moorabbin community hospital. (Circa 1951, when Fred passed away in his eighties). The bequest was subject under the Terms of his Will, to the commencement of building within ten years of his death. Had the building of the hospital commenced within this time, the customary government subsidy of \$3 for every \$1 donated would have been sufficient to build a hospital. **But**, the government failed to subsidize the Porter bequest within the ten years limitation, this failure was a bitter repudiation of its promise. **Instead**, Fred's money was distributed to other hospitals outside the City of Moorabbin! A time of despair degenerated into community apathy.

To quiet the unrest, in the 1950s the government "gifted" \$28,000 to build a new maternity wing onto the old 'Anne Street' Hospital, situated at 1 Anne Street, McKinnon. Whilst the Anne Street Hospital was a gracious looking property, unfortunately it was also old and small, with just a few beds that were used mainly for local midwifery patients, and minor surgery. The government's "gift" increased the Anne Street beds to a total of 28. Hardly enough to satisfy the needs of the large Moorabbin municipality. Whilst the Anne Street Hospital's nursing care was good, even in the 1950s it lacked the refinements and equipment of a modern hospital. One midwifery patient still recalls the time that the legs of her bed-head actually fell through the old floor!!

The residents of Moorabbin hopes were dashed further when, with the establishment of the new teaching Hospital at Monash University, Clayton, representatives of the of the Charities and Hospitals Commission met with the Moorabbin Council to explain the change of policy and encouraged the