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SHORT HISTORY OF NUNAWADING

Early Settlement

When Melbourne was settled in 1834 most of the newcomers went westwards towards good open grazing lands, ignoring the heavily timbered hilly country rising towards mountains in the east. Some gradually worked their way eastwards and bought land up to Middleborough Road. Others pushed up the Yarra Valley and found suitable land near Lilydale. A few tracks wound through forest towards the mountains, but most settlement was along the Yarra, particularly after gold was found at Warrandyte, and towards Dandenong.

The area which is now Nunawading began to develop in 1854 when White Horse Road was surveyed as a likely road through mountain valleys to Gippsland, which was isolated by great swamps and dense forests. As soon as the road was marked out the area was divided into allotments for farms and most were sold by auction in 1854 and 1855. Among the first buyers were Holland, Williams and Clisby. Most of them paid £1 an acre. Other buyers were Riley and Polak, who were looking for opportunities to sell at a profit. Generally speaking, settlers moved into the area from Burwood, along Canterbury Road.

In 1861 the speculators thought it was time to sell. Several allotments were sub-divided into the building blocks and small farms of villages, such as Springfield, at the corner of White Horse and Springvale Roads, Nunawading; Norwich, on Morack Road, Vermont; New Brunswick in Mitcham; East Kew and East Hawthorn a little further east. It was too soon for this and none was successful, but some farmers did buy land, such as August Schwerkolt. They had a hard time for several years because there were too many trees for them to farm properly. Most built themselves bark or slab huts from the trees they had to fell. They could not grow anything to sell, but as the trees were cut down they were able to cart them into Melbourne for sale as firewood, or else burnt them in pits under banks of earth to make charcoal, which was also sold. As space became cleared they began to keep fowls, then cows, taking eggs and butter to Hawthorn for sale. The women often walked all the way, carrying the produce. Gradually they made enough room to grow fruit and berries. Some found they had good stone on their land and opened quarries. There was not much sale for stone at first, until the local council could find enough money to make roads. Some land-owners, such as Schwerkolt and Dr. L.L. Smith, who had land at Vermont, planted vines and experimented with wine-making, but all the vines were later killed by Phyloxera.

Agricultural Development

Progress was very slow until about 1868, when a number of new families came into the district, taking up nearly all the land that was still vacant. Among them were Abraham Rooks, David Boyle, Sergeant, Matters and Ainger. Nearly all came from farming in nearby areas and all quickly made good small farms with dairies, poultry, pigs, fruit and berry patches and some wheat and oats.

After a lot of experimentation they found that apples grew well all through the district, so there were many orchards among the small mixed farms. In the south, around East Burwood there were also many market gardens.

Another man named Slater arrived about the same time. He had been used to growing perfume plants and medicinal herbs in England and brought roots and cuttings with him. He bought land on Koonung Creek, on Blackburn Road, where he grew his herbs and fruit, extracted perfumes, prepared drug extracts, distilled eucalyptus oil (which he exported to America), and experimented with drying fruit.

Industries

One disadvantage of farming in Nunawading was that the soil, which is a heavy clay, was not suited for agriculture. It is very good for making bricks and tiles, but without good roads or railways it was hard to bring in the firewood or coal needed for the kilns or to take out the products. Some men started to make bricks, one of the first being near the corner of Springfield and Middleborough Roads. It has been working continuously ever since, under various owners, and is now conducted by Vitclay.

A new stage in the development of Nunawading began in 1880 when White Horse Road, which had not been much more than a track, was made. This gave carters a better chance to carry goods to and from Nunawading. Two years later the railway from Hawthorn to Lilydale was built. Immediately new brick and tile makers and potteries were opened. There were new brick works at Blackburn, and potteries at Mitcham and Nunawading. One of them was Australian Tesselated Brick and Tile Co., beside Mitcham station. It grew into one of the biggest of its kind and made more different kinds of tiles, clay pipes, bricks and similar articles than any other in the world.

Residential Development

Towards the end of the 1880's many men in Melbourne were speculating in land, buying up farms, dividing them into building blocks and selling. Some thought Blackburn, with its new railway, would make a good living area. They formed a company which bought more than twenty farms, at a cost of £250,000, but could raise only £25,000. What was known as the Land Boom then burst and no more money could be found or land sold. For many years the district remained country land with orchards and small farms, as liquidators of the Land Boom companies tried to sell off the land they had bought. Blackburn Lake is said to have been made by the Land Boomers, to make the district more interesting for people looking for land in pleasant surroundings.

Sales of land were slow until about 1920, when they began to succeed, as land was sub-divided and sold around the railway stations. In 1925 what is now the City of Nunawading was separated from Box Hill, which had been almost all built on and become purely residential. The whole area from Union Road to Heatherdale Road had been the Shire of Nunawading. It then became the Borough (later City) of Box Hill and the Shire of Blackburn and Mitcham. Gradually our area was sub-divided further and further away from railway stations and houses were built until in 1945, just as the war ended, it qualified for the status of City of Nunawading.

Since then many industries have come here, orchards and farms have been sub-divided and built on until there is little open space left, except in the city's parks and reserves. The last of the apple orchards are now going.

Place Names

The name Nunawading was first given to the whole area of the original Shire of Nunawading. It is of native origin but its meaning is uncertain. Some interpretations are: "Place of Many Waters", "Ceremonial Ground", "Tribal Meeting Place" or "Young Man on the Way". As it was on the boundary of the territories of the Westernport and Yarra tribes, "Ceremonial Ground" or "Tribal Meeting Place" seem most likely.

Many of the people who pioneered Nunawading had come from Britain and the names they gave were British: Mitcham and Tunstall can be found on a map of Britain. Mitcham takes its name from a town in Surrey in England, recorded in the Domesday Book as Mickelan. It is near this town, where Mr. Slater worked before coming to the Port Phillip District in 1865, that Potter & Moore had their lavender fields and perfume factory. Blackburn was named after Gerard Blackburn, a railway engineer and surveyor, who made the original survey of the line between Box Hill and Lilydale. Tunstall was named after a town in England of the same name because of the similarity of its clay. This name is no longer used. It has been replaced by the name Nunawading. Vermont, a simplified form of the French for "Green Hill", is believed to have been named by Baron Von Mueller.

Churches

The Wesleyans, a branch of the Methodist Church, was the strongest religious group until 1880. Their first church was the Mt. Pleasant Chapel in Canterbury Road, built in 1865 with the help of a loan from Dr. L.L. Smith. The Fisherites, followers of James Fisher, were a numerous body who had a chapel in Canterbury Road in 1868. It was burnt down in 1894. Other early churches were: Congregational - Mitcham, built 1867; Roman Catholic - Mitcham, built 1872; Church of England - Mitcham, built 1888; Methodist Church - Blackburn and Mitcham, built 1888; and Church of England - Blackburn, built 1890.

Schools

Before 1872 education depended entirely upon local initiative, supported by government grants. It was not compulsory, and all children had to pay a weekly tuition fee. Before 1862 there were two types of schools; Denominational, which were run by local churches and National, controlled by local committees without church attachments. The first school in our area was a National School at Harkaway, in the grounds of the present 'Tally Ho' Boys' Home. It seems to have started in 1859, but did not become established until 1861. Later it was moved and became the present East Burwood State School. A second school began at the Mt. Pleasant Methodist Wesleyan Chapel in 1865, when the Denominational and National Schools had been amalgamated as Common Schools. For various reasons it did not flourish until a school was built at the corner of Canterbury and Mitcham Roads in 1869, where it still stands. Another school was opened at Heatherdale in 1872, where

the Mitcham Special School now stands. Others have been opened as they were needed, but the first High School had to wait until 1955.

Institutions

Nunawading has a number of interesting institutions. Among the oldest are:

'Tayylo Ho' Boys' Home began about 1900, when Mr. & Mrs. Hoadley, the confectionery manufacturers, gave the Methodist Church a farm they owned to provide a home and training place for homeless boys from Melbourne. As conditions have changed it has developed into a home and training school for delinquent boys.

'Inala' Old People's Homes, in Middleborough Road, had developed from an Old Men's Home established by the Salvation Army in 1910. It has become a village of its own, providing accommodation of various types for all kinds of old people.

Open Air School in Gardenia Street, Blackburn, began in 1915 to improve the health of sickly or under-nourished children from the inner suburbs. It continued until 1964 and the site is now used by the Department's Speech Therapy Section.

'Lakeside Lodge' for Deaf and Dumb, has descended from a flower farm which the Adult Deaf and Dumb Society had on land near Blackburn Lake. About 1910 it was giving healthy employment to people who could not do normal work because of deafness or inability to speak. The farm ceased in 1920, but a residential property for them has been continued.

There are many other such institutions, such as the Kindergarten Union Holiday Home in Forest Hill and the Tailwaggers Club home for dogs in Burwood Road. Others are of more recent origin, but we would like to know the histories of them all, so that we can preserve a good record of what has been done in our district.

Hotels

The first hotels were all very small. The Harkaway Inn, in the grounds of the 'Tally Ho' Boys' Home, opened in 1858. In White Horse Road there was the King George Hotel on Blackburn Creek, opened in 1868, and the Travellers Rest, near the site of the present Blackburn Hotel. In Mitcham, William McGlone turned the front room of his house into a parlour to make the Harvest Home Hotel in the 1870's.

What We Want to Find Out

We know the general history of the district, but there are many things which may be forgotten. If you know of any diaries or papers kept by early residents, or can trace them through street names, cemetery headstones, newspaper references, the Nunawading Historical Society would like to know. History is not a dead thing, it is going on all the time and unless we keep investigating and preserving records, both old and new, we shall never understand how our community has developed.

If you can help let the Secretary know. He is Mr. C. Tilson, 8 Peacedale Grove, Nunawading.