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BENGA BROADCAST

The Newsletter of the Friends of Benga Oral History Centre and Historic Garden

April 1991 Issue 5

DANDENONG MARKET 125TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



GUEST EDITORIAL THE LITTLE COUNTRY HEART

Since coming to Benga I have learnt a lot about the Dandenong Market just from listening to the interviews I transcribed. In all the things I have heard about the market one thing stands out clearly. The market is very important to the history of Dandenong and its present character. It has become a local tradition for everybody living in and around Dandenong to come to town to go to the market.

What can I say about the Dandenong market that everyone in Dandenong doesn't already know? All those I talk to about the market say the same thing. They all say how wonderful it is. And how different it is now. Everybody has a story to tell of an event or a character at the market that stands out in their memory.

Most people mention that "it was not where it is now", and "the stock market and produce market used to be together". But they forget when the changes occurred. The market, both produce and stock, was first on the

main street - on the corner of MacCrae and Lonsdale Streets. In 1926 it was moved to the produce market's present location on the corner of Clow and Cleeland Streets. The stock market moved to Cheltenham Road in 1958.

Until the late fifties Dandenong was a country town. It has since grown into a large industrial city. And yet, even now, in the middle of a big booming city is a little country heart - the market. I believe it makes Dandenong what it is today. The market brings people to Dandenong, just as it always has.

Should Dandenong ever lose its market then, in the words of the *Journal*, "It would be a sorry day." (22 December 1965)

For the feature transcript in this edition of the Benga Broadcast I have combined a few stories from different people, telling of their experiences of the market, the changes they have seen over the years, and what the market means to them.

Michelle Johnson
Benga Transcriber

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BERWICK SECONDARY COLLEGE

VERTICAL FILE

FROM THE CO-ORDINATOR

Senior Citizen's Week

What runs through a projector twenty-four frames per second, has sound and is bright pink? *The Dandenong Story*. This short colour documentary (which now only survives in a shade of magenta due to the deterioration of the film emulsion) was made in the 1950s by the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Even with the passage of time (almost forty years), this eleven minute glimpse of the then Shire of Dandenong remains a hymn to the community's market and farming heritage and its booming industrial economy. The film brought back a lot of memories for those attending the Senior Citizen's Film Day organised by the Friends of Benga and the Centre staff.

The Dandenong Story was first located in the Dandenong and District Historical Society's archive, but this version had deteriorated beyond projection. Fortunately, another copy was discovered in the State Film Library thanks to the investigative team of Helen and John Crichton. We are still looking for a further copy rumoured to be in existence.

The documentary was presented as part of a double feature which included the early Australian silent film, *The Sentimental Bloke*. The film's plot and titles are taken directly from the writer, C.J. Dennis's popular poem of the same name. The film's titles read like an Australian dictionary of slang and would need to be translated to most contemporary Australians. There was great interest in the films and the Friends of Benga are hoping to organise a similar event in the future. We were also pleased that individuals from Tamara Lodge, Azalea Lodge and Thuruna were able to attend with transport provided by the Friends.

On the Monday of Senior Citizen's Week, we had an open day at the Dandenong Historic Precinct with support by members of the Early Retirement Association. It was a lovely day. Tours were run throughout the Precinct and Lola Marsh, a Friend of Benga presented the history of St James Anglican Church, Laurel Lodge was staffed by the Dandenong and District Historical Society.

Local Teacher's Historic Ramble

The weather could not have been finer for a historic ramble throughout the Precinct. The Ramble was led by

actress Wilma Farrow in a 19th century mantle and cap in the role of Miss Matilda Shaw, a one-time teacher and resident of Laurel Lodge; visiting teachers were subjected to a series of entertaining disciplinary measures and a taste of Dandenong's history. The group was later led back to Benga for a small presentation by the Co-ordinator about the educational potential of the Centre, its archives and the Historic Precinct. Representatives came from over eight different schools and we hope to further involve teachers in a local history support group.

Dandenong South Primary School

Education is the key word at the Centre for the moment as we are currently discussing a three term oral history project with Dandenong South Primary School. This will involve students in regular classes to learn about research, local history, oral history and transcription. Students will be co-ordinated to record the recollections of members of the Russian Community for a final exhibition. Many of the students at the school have family members or friends from the Russian community. It is anticipated that the collected tapes and transcripts will be donated to the Centre to form part of our permanent archive.

Youth Victoria Grant

A successful grant application was made by the Centre to Youth Victoria. A thousand dollars has been allocated for an oral history project between Cleeland Secondary College and the Dandenong TAFE Art Department which will result in an audio-visual on the history of Dandenong using oral history and visual material collected by the Cleeland Secondary College students. This original material will then be compiled and edited by the Dandenong TAFE Art and Design Students into a final presentation. The resulting audio-visual will be used by Benga to promote the Centre and its activities. The Centre will co-ordinate the project beginning in early April.

Listening Room

The garage nearest to the house is currently being transformed into a Listening Room. Every weekend over the last month, members of the Lion's Club have been hard at work laying cement or sound proofing windows and walls. After two years of negotiation and persistence of Mr Bill Gale and the other members of the Lions Club are to be congratulated on bringing this wonderful concept to fruition.

RESEARCHING DANDENONG MARKET

by Jenny Ferguson

Dandenong has always been known as a market town, and more recently a market city, yet no detailed historical research had ever been carried out on the market itself. I was keen to select a topic of local interest for my Bachelor of Arts Honours thesis in 1986, and the market seemed the obvious choice.

I began by reading local histories of the area to establish some framework for my research, What surprised me was the lack of detailed information they contained about the market and the fact that the local histories did not agree with the entries in the Victorian Government Gazettes of the 1860s. It seemed that hearsay had been taken as fact and not ever verified.

My primary sources consisted mainly of the Shire of Dandenong minute books and the *South Bourke and Mornington Journals*. My difficulty was with establishing how, when and where the market began. The primary sources did not go back for enough. The Shire of Dandenong began in 1873 and the interests of the Dandenong District Road Board prior to this concentrated only on such matters as bridges, tolls, drains and roads. Although the Journal began in 1865, sadly no issues remained from before 1877.

The early history of the market seemed to elude me. Where was its first site? Was it in Robinson Street as the local history said, or on the corner of McCrae and Lonsdale Streets as indicated by the Victorian Government Gazette? Did it begin in 1664, or later?

Eventually I located a Lands Department file from the Public Records Office which consisted of all correspondence, memorandums, and other documents concerning the market site. It was a very exciting moment for me. Here was proof positive! I now knew that the site for the public market was on the corner of McCrae and Lonsdale Streets, the other site being reserved for a market but later used for the first Dandenong Showgrounds.

I also discovered that the market did not open until 1866. In January 1855, Henry Powis wrote to the Lands Department, unsuccessfully, in the hope of obtaining the Crown Grant for the market site. Without the Grant it was impossible for the new Market Commissioners to borrow money from a bank, so that suitable buildings could be erected and the market started. Some more pieces of the jigsaw had been found.

The market was a fascinating topic and in researching it, I was also researching the story of Dandenong itself. The market throughout its development always reflected changes occurring in the town. For example, the produce and stock markets separated, and began operating on different sites soon after Dandenong township severed from the rest of the more rural Shire of Dandenong in 1955.

Looking back, I believe the thesis achieved two things. Firstly it made me a more confident member of the Dandenong and District Historical Society. (Having only lived in Dandenong since late 1973, my knowledge of its history could not equal that of those members who had lived here all their lives.) Secondly, I had begun the research that others could build on in the future.

MARKET REMINISCENCES

The market means different things to different people. Some people have noted major changes in the market. Others have found the market has stayed the same. But for all these people the market has been an important part of their lives.

MRS LOLA MARSH local resident recalls:

We came just to do the shopping on market day, on Tuesdays. And it was very busy, the market was just a wonderful place when it was established on the corner of Cleeland and Clow, because it had everything in it. The clothes would hang right up to the ceiling on hangers and there was fruit. And they also had the cattle there, and the sheep and the pigs and the bull ring. That was all part and parcel of the market. Even when I was married and we lived in here [Ann Street] this was the stock route, they used to bring their cattle through, and sometimes you'd go out and find a great cow in your drive-way, with huge horns and it'd be a bit of a job to get it out again.

MRS MAVIS GILES when living in Dandenong remembers:

The cattle market was not where it is now. It's where the actual [produce] market is. They had horses there and they would bring the horses to market and when the market was over they'd madly gallop up Cleeland Street. If you happened to be there you had to leap into a garden and shut the gate, because there was no way of stopping them.

And I particularly remember one time when my young daughter who was only five, was on her way home from school and these horses came charging up. My first inkling of what was occurring was to hear some absolutely blood thirsty screams. My husband much to his surprise had leapt over the fence, an ordinary five foot, or five foot six paling fence, he rushed across through some trees to see what was happening. And she'd been caught on the road with the horses galloping up; she was on the footpath and she was absolutely petrified.

So it was a good job she had a loud voice so that we were able to hear because they really used to gallop madly up there. Complaints went from the residents because you couldn't always tell where you were going to be or exactly what time that these horses were going to charge up there.

CR MAURIE JARVIS M.B.E. J.P recalls:

I think I was 12 when I got a stall in the Dandenong Market. It was a Saturday morning market. And I'd grown the vegetables and flowers after school and before school in the morning. And I sold all my produce there. I had to come from where Grenda's bus depot is now, near the station. And the only method of getting my produce to the market, as my father was away in his truck, was to push it in a big barrow with tiers on it to take a very high load. It was a long push for an 12 year old kid from down the station up to the market. But I assure you in the depression days, when wages were only about 3 pound odd a week, that I could make a man's wages myself by working in the morning and after school, and selling on the Saturday morning.

MR ERIC LAWRENCE describes:

Well I've been a dealer all my life, ever since I've been ten years old; just buying horses, buying one here, taking it home and breaking them in. The first horse I ever bought was in Chelsea Pound, horse saddle and bridle for 7/6 or ten bob in them days. It was in the pound and I rode it home to Carrum Downs, a big chestnut thoroughbred horse. I reckon he could have been a steeple chaser. That would be about Tuesday and I kept him to Saturday and rode him into Dandenong Market, the old market up opposite the old showgrounds. And I sold him there for 22/6. I thought it was a good pick-up. That means I'd sold the horse for 22/6 and I still had the saddle and the bridle to sell.

Market Reminiscences continued on p.5

MR REX NEWTON tells of the 'chook' market:

Going to the market was better than going to school. I always had a few show poultry in the back yard and I went down there because one of the chaps I bought stuff from said, "You want to come down to the market and have a look at the stuff that's down there, you get the odd bargain." So I started 'chuffing' off down there. Alright there was the odd bargain, some of it was very expensive but the variety of stuff in one area was probably the thing that blew my mind. I had never seen such a variety of poultry and bits and pieces of you name it. And it sort of got me intrigued so I'd just go back each week to see what was new and what was different, it just sort of snowballed from there. I'd go down, pick up the pen and start booking in stuff in the docket books, to save somebody a bit of time.

MRS EVELYN MAY MITCHELL lived in her father's shop on the main street of Dandenong and recalls:

I remember the stalls all along the other side of the street. They sold vegetables, fruit and I mostly remember one fellow, I think he must have been there for twenty or thirty years selling honeycomb toffee. He was an institution at the market. When I was grown up and had children of my own I'm sure he was still there.

MR RON PAYNE remembers:

It was a pretty full day droving. And of course that was all the go then. There were a few trucks about. We used to have a few fellas carting. But the trucks then weren't like they are today. They were only small trucks and any bulk cattle off the farms were brought in by the drovers. But, I say you don't see drovers nowadays they sort of - I suppose with the traffic and that, they just can't do it.

MR JACK AND MRS DOT LAWRENCE describe their family's experience of the market:

DOT: My little fella used to go with Jack to the market from the time he was three years old. He'd go every Tuesday. If that truck went out of the yard without him, there'd be hell to pay. He'd just go to the market, drop off his cattle and Alan would hop out and away he'd go. He'd sit on the rail with the auctioneer and he'd be taking the bids too. He always had a stick in his hand.

JACK: He used to help load the trucks - load the cows. He used to like whacking the calves. I wouldn't see him until five o'clock at night.

DOT: Alan would sort of know round about what time was time to go home, and he'd always head for the lolly lady because she'd always give him something. You could imagine today letting a little boy of three roam the market like that, well you just wouldn't do it.

MR JOE CRISARA whose family sells fruit in the market says:

Today there is a large variety of people coming to the market at Dandenong. Most of them we find are Aussies. But you've got your Italians, your Greeks and you've got your Turks and your Lebanese and you've got your White Russians too.

MRS BERYL CLARK has, for 37 years made children's clothes, selling them at her stall at the market. She comments:

Dandenong Market hasn't changed much, you seemed to meet the same people. I love Dandenong market. People who come from many many miles, even if they don't come to buy come to see me. From up Warrigul and those places, they say, "We haven't come to buy, but we've come to see you." I've met many many nice friends. I have quite a lot of letters from different parts of the world saying how people appreciate my hand work. Dandenong market means a lot to me.

FROM THE ORAL HISTORIAN - NEW EXHIBITIONS

You may receive this newsletter in time to catch our Heritage Week exhibition *PART OF OUR LIFE WAS THE FLOODS*, on display at the Dandenong Regional Library from 8 to 19 April. The theme for Heritage Week this year is "Water and Wetlands". Our exhibition focuses on water as a disaster. It shows how locals viewed frequent floods as part of life in the district, until the pressure of urbanisation brought about a solution to the flood problem, in the form of the Dandenong Valley Authority. The exhibition is based on oral history interviews in which people talk about their memories of floods in the Dandenong district. The story is illustrated by photographs, maps and other graphic material. Considerable interest has been shown in the exhibition.

An aural version of *PART OF OUR LIFE WAS THE FLOODS* is one of the stories to be presented in our new Listening Room. Other new themes currently being developed for exhibitions at Benga include life in the 1930s, housekeeping and immigration.

We have had a good response to our recent article in the *Dandenong Journal* seeking people willing to help us with our programs on the 1930s. Several people came forward to be interviewed and we now have a good range of taped stories of personal experiences in the Great Depression. Other people have donated artefacts for our 1930s kitchen display. We have also had some help from volunteers. Ned Keighery has been a valuable research assistant, uncovering all sorts of items on the Depression from the *Dandenong Journal*. Josiane Gonthier is assisting with research on immigration and is also helping with administration work at Benga.

It is good to see the growing level of community interest in Benga. I am sure much of this interest is stimulated by the interviews we conduct. As many interviewees become aware of our work and aims they enjoy are pleased to make their contribution and look forward to the result. They appreciate what we are doing to preserve Dandenong's heritage. If you have an interesting story about any aspect of life in Dandenong and you would like to be interviewed, please contact me on 793 4152.

Lesley Alves

FRIENDS OF BENGA FEBRUARY '91

Everyone needs a friend; and lucky Benga now has twenty-three of them.

In November we helped celebrate the second birthday of our Oral History Centre with dancing in the garden, history tours, Devonshire teas and a craft display.

Our Christmas carol evening in December was a happy family night under the trees at Laurel Lodge, where everyone joined in the singing and the fun. We then shared a Christmas feast with the staff.

During 1991 we hope to make the general public more aware of our oral history centre. If you would like to help then why not become a Benga Friend yourself; just fill out the form on page 7 and send it to Benga. If there are any enquiries please ring the Co-ordinator on 793 4152.

*Helen Crichton
Secretary*