

THE WHITE CANE: A BRIEF HISTORY

Today, October the 15th - white Cane Safety Day - is a fitting occasion to look back briefly on the history of the White Cane.

From earliest times, people with poor vision and these without sight at all, have relied upon a trusty safe, stick or cane to assist them in getting about. The blind pirate in "treasure Island" found his way to the Admiral Banbow Inn with the aid of the tapping cane. In the years following the First World War, blind ex-servicemen began using walking sticks painted white and visually handicapped civilians followed their example. This practice spread to the United States.

In December, 1930, the first White Cane Law was enacted. In city fathers of Poria, Illinois, USA placed on their statute books, a law which officially recognised the White Cane as the symbol of a blind person and accorded a White Cane user local protection in public thoroughfares.

In 1931, an International Lions Convention in Toronto, Canada resolved to adopt the White Cane as the international symbol of visually handicapped people. The Lions Club adopted the promotion of White Canes for the blind as a national programme - undertook programmes to promote its use. In this action, the Lions were strongly supported by the blind people themselves through their various organisations. It is significant that each of the fifty American States has enacted a White Cane Law to protect its blind citizens. *Some White Cane Laws are very comprehensive and incorporate several the only State in Australian which has a White Cane Law. The late Doctor Jacobus Ten Broek, President of the National Federation of the Blind, once said that the White cane symbolised a blind person's equality and independence. ← inset.

The White Cane has been in use in Australia for nearly thirty years, and when the Lions Movement was founded in this country in 1949, it also embraced support of the White cane as the symbol of visual handicap. Lions Clubs in Queensland and in Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba and Gold Coast areas in particular have given practical encouragement to the publicising of the White Cane as the symbol of the visually handicapped. Brisbane is the only Australian city where an annual white Cane Dinner is held and Queensland as a State has given much publicity to the White Cane on white Cane Safety Day, a day which was inaugurated in the United States in October, 1964 when President Lynden B Johnson issued the first White Cane Safety Day Proclamation. Each year, the Queensland Premier issued a personal White Cane Safety Day Proclamation.

The white Cane whether it be long or short, metal or wooden, rigid or collapsible, is an important aid to a blind person's mobility. Let us all respect it for what it is worth.