

NO SIGHT - GREAT VISION

A CENTENARY HISTORY
OF THE
ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND

BY
J. W. WILSON AM.

FOREWORD

The Industries Commission has ranked the Association for the Blind among the twenty largest charitable organisations in Australia.

It is a community service organisation founded in 1895 by 8 blind people for blind people. The initial capital was 8/-. During 1994/1995 it provided assistance of various kinds to 15,000 vision impaired Victorians. The expenditure was \$21million.

In December this year the Association for the Blind will celebrate its Centenary. As one reflects on its insignificant beginning and present importance, there is so much one would like to know.

The author, John Wilson, has studied in depth the life of the founder Miss Tilly Aston. He knew the first President, Mr David Robertson, in his later years. He had contact with a number of the early members who were still living in the 1950s. John Wilson served with four Presidents. His accomplishments and those of his staff are almost beyond belief.

When one looks at the new Homes and Buildings from 1953 to 1984 it is very easy to see the thinking of John and his staff. In 1957 both Kelaston in Ballarat and Mirridong in Bendigo were opened. Between 1968 to 1984 the major projects were :- New nursing wing at Elanora, Brighton; Katherine M. Rose Wing at Bendigo; Low Vision Clinic at Kooyong; Illawarra Day Centre at Geelong; Baringa Day Centre at Shepparton; George Vowell Centre at Mt Eliza; Pindari Day Centre at Warragul; Patients Service Wing at Elanora; Woodburn Lodge at Brighton, and purchase of 12 acres of land at Shepparton. There was also the commencement of a range of service programmes. Among the more publicised were the Low Vision service, Radio for the Print Handicapped and Telephone Support. There were many other significant dates. The happenings on those dates during his 32 years as Chief Executive Officer and a summation of major events are set out in Appendix 1.

Who had the knowledge and the ability to write the History of the Association for the Blind? Who else but John W Wilson AM.

He has spent hundreds of hours of writing, researching Minutes of Meetings, Magazines, and Association records. He had to be sure he was correct in names, places and events. He has brought people to life and above all he cares for the Association and for blind people. This is very evident throughout the book.

Hundreds of people are named in this book and each and every one deserves to be mentioned. They make the reading, they contributed to the welfare of our blind friends. All those mentioned have given their love their time and their money. They have received in return a great love, great affection and great friendship from those whom they assisted

John Wicking.

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PREFACE

At the launching of an international initiative against avoidable disablement in New Dehli, India, the keynote speaker was a blind friend of long standing, Dr. Rajendra Vyas of Bombay. He introduced his address on blind welfare with the comment that:-

" The ancient Indian sages when listing the importance of each of the five senses, ranked the sense of sight as the most important of all. The eye could perceive form, adorned the face, was a source of direct knowledge and a guide to avoid wrong deeds; hence the eye was the most important of all the sense organs.

Indeed, some religions had compared the loss of vision with living death, and considered a blind person to be as good as dead. Other religions had even gone to the extent of enjoining upon their followers to utter the same chant on seeing a blind person as one would when seeing a corpse passing by. All this underlined the fact that 'blindness' was synonymous to death and destitution. This was because the sense of sight and its wellbeing was so very crucial to life."

Among blind people in Australia a 100 years ago there resided a sense of fatalism, a feeling of hopelessness. This understandable feeling was magnified, as they were passed by in the fevered rush for material wealth during the boom of the 1880s and the depression when the bubble burst in the 1890s.

The negative, 'It's no good trying', approach to life, has never been characteristic of philanthropic societies and self-help groups. In these, compassion, knowledge, wisdom and faith combine in varying degrees to produce a dream. Such organisations see the invisible, believe the incredible and do the impossible. This may entail venturing beyond known limits and ways, even to the extreme of exhausting the will to hold on. Then in the darkness of despair with faith wavering and hope gone, help does come from some source. The way ahead becomes clear, the dream is realised. Conversely, at other times provision for future help is made before its need is known. This happens with bequests. More often than not a legacy will be received at precisely the right moment. This type of help, providentially sourced, has been received many times by the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, [AAB] later to be known as the Association for the Blind.[AFTB]

"Vision" has a number of meanings. One relates to physical sight; another to foresight or wisdom and a third to imaginative dreams.

In one of her poems, Miss Tilly Aston the blind woman of great vision, faith and courage, who was instrumental in founding the Association for Advancement of the Blind, wrote:

*"I never sought the easy path to tread,
To wait on others for my daily bread;
To toil to strive, to finish and achieve!
This is the faith in which I do believe."*

This verse encapsulates the hard work ethic and the positive approach which benefit ventures undertaken and enhance life, also the courage which triumphs over all adversity. At first sight the sentiment expressed and language used by Miss Aston

may appear somewhat extravagant. Defer judgement until you get to know her, as I hope you will in this book.

Purists postulate a true history must be objective. Reality proclaims no history can be truly objective. Even if the writer aspires to be objective, the material used is biased. Integrity requires the story be told warts and all. At the same time, even if words are written in friendship and love, there is a fine line which may only be crossed at the cost of being hurtful and alienating the goodwill of fine people. Extreme care has been taken at all times to avoid spoken or implied offence of any person mentioned.

The Association for the Blind is not an inanimate lifeless body. It has a physical presence, a brain and mind of its own, a heart and soul. It is a living creation, pulsating with life. Like a human body it has a number of systems which must be functioning properly and in harmony to keep it alive and healthy. These are: the Committee system, the Blind Members system, the Honorary Services system, the Government system, the Staff system and the Finance system.

Each of these systems can be further subdivided. Each is essential. Each has to be taken care of and nourished. All need to be interconnected and communicate with each other. The many channels of interconnected communications must be linked to the brain. In this case the Board of Directors where ultimate responsibility lies. At that level, as with the human brain, there are specific areas of interest and control. Common to the functioning of all systems is the heart - blind and vision impaired people.

Each system is made up of cells, living human beings, thousands of them, who interact as a great extended compatible family with a warm caring spirit. That spirit was present at the birth of the organisation. A courageous spirit defiantly facing and fighting an entrenched enemy of that time, discrimination; a caring spirit seeking out those blind persons with a need and sharing with them what little was possessed of this world's material things; a loving spirit reaching out in an all embracing friendship. This spirit has been refined and purified by maturity. It has been tested and tempered but never broken by adversity.

That spirit which bonded together the women and men who conceived, nurtured and breathed life into the Association is still present. In each system are persons who really care about and for vision impaired people. They are willing to share themselves their time and material possessions in whichever of the numerous spheres of service they participate, direct or indirect.

Self-help, mutual help, caring and sharing were and are key words.

In every human body illness occurs from time to time. It may be minor or major. It may cure itself or it may be diagnosed and treated. Sometimes the treatment may be wrong. For some conditions surgery may be the only answer. In the life of the body which is the Association for the Blind equivalent maladies have occurred and similar remedies have been tried or applied. Such episodes are a sad fact of life. Thankfully, the patient has remained healthy.

The question arises, from the perspective of which system should the story be told?. Each has a different viewpoint and emphasis. There are matters of historical importance which need to be recorded in some detail. These may be boring to some

readers. Conversely there are countless stories of inspirational achievement. A surfeit of these would detract from the book's value as a historical record. There is the enormous contribution of the volunteers and auxiliaries which no one volume could contain. The recipe chosen has been a little bit of this and a little bit of that mixed together, hopefully in a pleasant, readable manner. External elements of the story are told as seen through the eyes of the AAB. Other organisations and government will have a different perspective. This, no doubt, will be particularly so in the sometimes strained relationship between the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind and the Association for Advancement of the Blind as recorded in Part 1 of the story.

The official records of the Association provided the skeleton. The Annual Reports and Committee Minutes were the basic material for the first part. Unfortunately, sometime in the early years, the minute books containing the first 10 years of the records were left on a train and never recovered. Also during WWII records considered to be of no value were thrown out. Such is life! The records available were fleshed out through discussion with blind members whose memories go back to the 1930's. The terminology of the period has been used. The records for Parts 2 and 3 of the book are still on file. There are instances where the reader may wonder at the relevance of an item and why it was included. The answer may appear many chapters later. After all, the story does cover 100 years. There are other cases where the reader may wish a firm conclusion had been drawn or judgement made. The readers are the jury in such cases. They have the responsibility of making their own judgement.

The history divided itself into three natural divisions. The first, from the foundation in December 1895 until incorporation was gazetted in January 1944. The second, from incorporation in 1944 until conversion to a limited company in 1990. The third, operations as a company since 1990. By coincidence, each division ushered in momentous changes.

While tracing the advancement of blind and vision impaired people in Victoria through this century and in lauding them and their great achievements, tribute is also due and paid to the countless sighted friends who contributed to their proud record as achievers.

John Wilson
Melbourne
November 1, 1995.

1. THE GROUND IS PREPARED

Victoria. An honourable name for the young vibrant colony of the 1880s. Queen Victoria after whom it was named ruled a great empire which was reaching its zenith. Her Golden Jubilee in 1887 and Diamond Jubilee in 1897 were triumphant events celebrated with great pageantry.

Victorianism under the revered Queen was a combination of many conflicting elements. Religious observance was expected, there was emphasis on moral rectitude and there were those who mocked all that was good. The young colony of Victoria, populated mainly by a cross section of peoples from the British Isles, inherited these characteristics, good and bad.

The 1880s were years of spectacular development and progress in the young colony. Wool, sheep, grain and gold all poured in their rich harvest. The economy boomed, riches increased, exports grew and banks competed to lend money.

Marvellous Melbourne as it was then called, with a population of nearly 500,000 people out of the one million in Victoria had outstripped Sydney. Only 50 years of age and already one of the 10 largest cities in the empire, it was described as comfortable, elegant and as luxurious as any place outside London and Paris. In the central business district buildings erected only 30 years earlier were demolished. Government buildings, commercial premises, churches, had to be bigger, better, taller, grander and more ornate than anywhere else. For a short time Melbourne claimed the highest skyscraper in the world. Government House was grander than the palace of the Emperor of India, its ballroom larger than that of Buckingham Palace.

Church attendance was high, observance of the sabbath strong. Church members had a large role in the colony's affairs. Imbued with the Victorian work ethic, they became prominent in political, business, church and social life. Male church attenders controlled much of the capital and provided needed entrepreneurial skills.

Alas, a number of politicians and businessmen crossed the fine line between honour and shame. They succumbed to the lure of money and material possessions. They fuelled and fanned speculation and made fortunes in the boom. Suddenly, disaster. The 1890's had arrived. The boom burst like a bubble. The aftermath was very painful and sad.

Recession had also affected Great Britain and the United States. Markets failed. The Victorian Government with a vast deficit could not raise funds overseas. Banks, land companies, building societies foreclosed on mortgages. Private home ownership had been 45 per cent, the highest in the world. Thousands of heart-broken owners lost all. Tenants unable to pay rent were evicted. In Melbourne 14000 homes stood vacant. Only 38 of 70 building societies withstood the disaster. Banks, too, closed their doors, some never to reopen.

Christian ethics, morals and sentiment battled with materialism, greed, corruption, dissent and the joys of sin. Management and labour confronted each other. Militant unions went on strike. Unemployment, poverty, destitution, reached astronomical

proportions. The Salvation Army, Society of St Vincent de Paul and other newly formed benevolent societies did what they could. It was never enough. Through it all the colonies talked and argued Federation.

In the Sydney 'Bulletin', variously termed the voice of Australia and the Peoples Bible passionate views of all shades found expression. Melbourne was christened 'Smellboom', because "its name stank in the other colonies and Britain". In talking of the Federation debate, the 'Bulletin' said "Federation these days would mean treating the continent with Victoria's foulness. Isolation would be the best thing that could happen to the 'cabbage patch' just now."

Republicanism, too, surfaced during the Federation debate. Henry Lawson, a regular contributor to the 'Bulletin' wrote:-

*"Let Britannia rule forever
O'er the waves; but never never
Rule a land that great waves sever
Fifteen thousand miles away."*

The 1880s also saw the emergence of the Women's Suffrage Movement. Throughout the 1890s these early feminists battled through the devastation and disaster. No longer silent and unheard their campaign heated up. No longer prepared to be excommunicated from community and political affairs they collected petitions and lobbied. Bills were submitted to the Legislative Assembly. Parliamentarians were forced to act on their demands, to take sides for or against. The conservative elements of the church, business and society were compelled to listen.

Treated as undesirable second class citizens, blind people as a group were hidden away. They saw no way of changing their lot; no opportunity of improving themselves; no chance of organising and helping themselves. Resigned to their darkness and isolation they lived in hopeless despair.

In the 'cabbage patch' there now sprouted a tender green shoot. Advocating on behalf of blind people there appeared a young blind woman, Tilly Aston. She had a most unlikely dream, a vision of bringing light into the darkness of their lives. She wanted action, but what could she do, where could she start, how could she lead? There is an old saying that little is much when God is in it and this young woman possessed the priceless assets of youth and an unquenchable faith.

The year 1895 began with the six colonial Premiers meeting in Hobart to discuss Federation and make decisions. It ended with eight insignificant unknown blind people led by Tilly Aston meeting to discuss the future of blind people and make decisions. Not in their wildest dreams could either group have imagined the outcome.

Who was this Tilly Aston? Where did she come from? What was her background ?

Edward Aston and Ann Lee Howell were humble English people. Edward was a bootmaker, Ann an untaught country girl who learned to read from the Bible at Sunday School. They came, as a newly married couple, to Kapunda, South Australia, in 1855. Gripped by the gold fever they accepted an invitation from an uncle of Edward's to settle in Victoria. In 1857, with their sick, year-old daughter Eliza, they travelled by steamer from Adelaide to Sandridge [Port Melbourne]. Their onward journey to

Carisbrook more than 100 miles away in the Golden Triangle of central Victoria was by bullock wagon.

The jolting over the rough bush track was too much for frail little Eliza. Taking turns the parents walked all the way carrying the baby in their arms. In the tent which was their first home in Carisbrook, Eliza died. The gold proved elusive. They settled down in a house in the township. Edward pursued his trade as a bootmaker. Six other children were born. As a four-year-old their second son George was drowned in a nearby creek. Their last child Matilda Ann Aston was born on December 11, 1873. Known as Tilly, she was the youngest by nearly eight years and the favourite of the family.

Worried about her inflamed eyes, Tilly's father carried her in his arms to see the local doctor. After testing the child's eyes Dr Howell gave his verdict. "No sight in the right eye. Will probably lose the sight of the left". Edward and Ann resolved that Tilly should have as many of life's advantages as their limited means could provide.

Who better to tell the story of those early years than Tilly herself through extracts from her memoirs:

"So I started out in my family loved and guarded with my childish talents cherished and fostered to the utmost. As he sat at his bench father would fill my mind with rhymes and tales, songs and tales. He sang well but not as well as mother who included in her repertoire quite a list of ballads and folk songs.

"I learned to sing before I could talk properly and to declaim the moral songs of Isaac Watts as he held up for the edification of children the bad images of the sluggard and the good ways of the tiny ant, not to mention those about little birds who agree in the nest and put to shame quarrelsome sisters and brothers.

"I was taught to take notice of the things about me, natural objects, astral phenomena, the calls of the birds. One chilly morning in the small hours my father carried me out of bed to look at a magnificent comet. I bless him for the memory of that radiant vision. I saw the earth and sky, sunlight and moonlight and the twinkle of the stars. I was encouraged to make simple playthings for myself, to run wild in the bush with other children, to prowl and investigate the surroundings of the old mines. The independence acquired then has been one of my chief assets.

"There were four flourishing churches each a social centre as well as a spiritual lighthouse. Apart from a little bigotry we all met as neighbours and the general effect was always upwards and towards better things. We had local minstrel shows, a brass band and dances. The dances were the chief joy of all the young girls who were allowed to attend. Some, like my older sisters, had puritan parents who frowned on such worldly frolicking. We had to be content to display our finery at the Sunday School anniversary. In the Wesleyan Chapel opposite our home we learned to know God and follow His way. As a family we took our pleasure around the old harmonium singing revival hymns and minstrel songs."

The formal education of Tilly Aston began in a small private school run by the Misses Anne and Nelly Cook. Although so young, the love of singing, music, poetry and God had already been planted and watered in good soil. Now Tilly learned to read from

large print books, to write, and to memorise poetry. The arithmetic tables she had already learned from her father.

Her eldest brother Will, by then an employee of the Postal Department in Melbourne, sent her a pair of goldseeker earrings for her sixth birthday. At the time there was a belief that piercing the ears could help the eyes. Tilly submitted to this fashionable remedy, not from hope but because her mother had promised her a fourpenny bit if she did not cry when her ears were pierced.

By her seventh birthday she was totally blind. She had been shielding her eyes from strong sunlight, reaching out and using her hands as feelers as her sight deteriorated. Now, like a mist from the sea there came firstly a thin fog then a heavier pall making surroundings appear indistinct. Then came a day when Tilly's mother held out a bunch of red anemones asked, " what have I got for my little pet?" Tilly's childish hands went out to feel. The mother clutched Tilly to her breast kissing her over and over again and crying through her bitter weeping. "Oh my baby! My baby is blind! She will never see the flowers any more".

The gradual fading of sight seemed to make little difference to Tilly's way of life. She still cavorted with the other children, played around the creek, went exploring in the bush and ran errands for her mother. Years later she did express her feelings in verse.

*"Blindness is never sweet:
It shuts day's windows, and outspreads a pall
Of dim indefiniteness over all
Material things; like horrid nightmare chains
It binds the feet, the eager hand restrains.
Vast distances diminish to a sphere
Whose dull walls lower perpetually near;
The only shafts that pierce the ambient grey
Are sounds, with their slow-beating vibrant ray,
Rolling, but never flashing to the heart
Of him whose soul in blindness sits apart".*

One event did make a difference. Her father who had been ill died a year later in October, 1881. Her mother, who had been giving voluntary service as a midwife turned nursing into a paid job to support her family. She outlived her husband by 30 years.

Many years later in a pilgrimage to the little country cemetery where her parents rested, Tilly knelt on the graveside kerb, recalled the past and reflected on her heritage. What did she owe them? They had never gathered wealth. They did not have the money gathering talent. The answer was possessions far more precious than money. A good healthy body. To the best of the parents' abilities, a widely based education. A respect for moral law A man's word was his bond, a handshake sealed a deal, a promise was inviolable. Truth must be spoken and lived out. To cheat, trick or defraud was dishonest. At her parents knees Tilly learned to revere God, to delight in the beauties of His creation and to love His ways.

If that was tyranny wrote Tilly, then thank God for our parents. " For my spiritual foundation I honour my parents' memories. As the world classes my father and

mother, they were nobodies. Who will blame me that I rested my face on the earth that covered them and lifted up to God a grateful heart because I had once known the love and guidance of two such splendid people."

The summer after her father's death was difficult. Tilly mourned and missed his companionship. She missed her mother who was working most of the time. She missed the day-long contact of her school friends for she no longer attended school. The household chores she could do did not fill her time. Playing with toys did not satisfy. For the first time life seemed purposeless and aimless. She experienced loneliness.

But salvation was at hand. An interesting stranger, a harbinger of light, came to the door one day. . Thomas James was a Home Teacher of the Blind, employed by the small Mission to the Outdoor Blind.

Mr James was a picturesque figure "tall and sturdy, loud voiced and sociable with a broad Cornish accent". He had lost both eyes and an arm in a mine explosion. This rugged old missionary, accompanied by his dog Fido travelled all over the country. He stopped at homes where he had heard a blind person lived. It mattered not whether the non-sighted person was a child or octogenarian or the need was an embossed alphabet or the comfort of an understanding friend.

At the Aston home his Braille material was seized by Tilly. Here was a heaven sent opportunity to satisfy her hunger and thirst for knowledge and develop her mind. Mr James departed the next day after praying with earnest voice that her blindness should prove a source of love and joy rather than a burden and heartache.

By a fortuitous coincidence a few months later the choir from the Asylum and School for the Blind in Melbourne visited Carisbrook to give a concert. The choir was accompanied by the Superintendent of the Asylum, the Rev. William Moss, who urged Mrs Aston to send Tilly to the school without delay.

In June, 1882, eight year old Tilly Aston left behind her protected childhood. A spoilt self confident little girl, an active young daredevil, an intellectually bright and ambitious lass whose mind stimulated from infancy by learning soaked up knowledge. Underneath was a loving, flowering, sensitive heart opening to beauty, music and poetry.

Mrs. Aston was filled with all a mother's fears and misgivings and Tilly with a sense of excitement as they boarded the train for Melbourne. In future Tilly would only return home for the long summer vacation. Then, after happy reunions and joyous days spent with childhood friends, she looked forward to returning to school. Her horizons were now so much wider, her weaning complete.

The Asylum and School for the Blind, later to be known as the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind [RVIB] had been founded in 1866 in Prahran. Two years later it moved to the premises it still occupies on St Kilda Rd. Melbourne. At the time more than 200 adults and children were assisted. The children were provided with a residential school, the adults with a factory which manufactured among other items, mats, baskets and brooms.

The Rev. Moss had been in charge of the Asylum since 1878. He had served as a Committee Member and Secretary before his appointment as Superintendent. His approach was benevolent. His views in some areas were ahead of his time. He believed in the ability of the children, fostered their independence and took a sincere interest in their welfare.

Boarding-school life was little different from that experienced a hundred years later. At first Tilly found the large cold comfortless building and the fact she was now just one of the many, hard to take. She had to learn to give and take, accept the rigours of discipline and share the work load allocated to all. The "buddy system" operated and she was grateful to the two older girls who cared for her and guarded her from mistakes. There were unhappy moments but soon Tilly was too busy to fret as she found satisfaction in the small achievements of her daily life and the companionship of the other blind students.

Subjects taught included reading, writing, history, geography, music, handcrafts and religious studies. Music studies, [singing, piano, violin] were important for ability had to be demonstrated in public concerts and church services. Handcraft products were sold. The students competed with each other. Tilly made good progress in all areas of activity. She felt her hope of finding a career and a chance to earn a living was increasing.

In the residential wing food was generally plain and uninteresting. There were troubles with Matron over midnight feasts. There was lots of boy talk.

The annual train journey home was an adventure, with fellow sighted travellers often providing amusement and entertainment. On one occasion several of the girls were in the train when an elderly couple boarded. After settling down the old lady surveyed her fellow passengers.

Some blind children! Dear, dear! Her heart welled up in kindly feeling.
"Oh, Ned, they are blind! Poor dears!. How terrible! They would be better in their graves!"
Ned made no reply and we giggled quietly. It was so strange that miserable blind children should be laughing. It puzzled the old lady. Presently she sidled along the seat to Clara and cleared her throat;
"Are you blind?", she bawled into Clara's ear.
" Yes Ma'am" was the meek reply.
" They are blind Ned. Ain't it awful!"
Turning again to Clara she yelled: "Can you feed and dress yourselves.?"
" Yes Ma'am", was the same meek response.
The questioner informed her husband. "They are quite tidy, too," she added with a sigh.
The next interrogation rose above the roar of the train.
"Are you deaf and dumb too?"
" Yes Ma'am".
" Oh! How dreadful. Ned! She is deaf and dumb too."
At this Ned exploded; "Aht, you old fool. How could she hear and answer if she was deaf and dumb."

Each year the music students did a brief country tour to give a series of concerts. The railways allocated a carriage which was shunted off at each town where they performed. Accommodation was arranged in advance in local homes. These concerts were a major event in a country town. Led by the local brass band the children marched through the streets to the pick-up point. Here they were met by their hostesses. Tilly was participating in these events by the time she was eleven years.

The children involved enjoyed these occasions. The tours widened their knowledge and experience. They met interesting and important people. Those not musically gifted remained at school and envied their fellow students. Members of the music group in common with blind people of every era had humiliating and embarrassing experiences with the sighted.

Arriving at one town Tilly and a friend were taken over by a charming woman and her daughter. They were paraded through the streets to their allotted home. Once inside they were immediately dumped into chairs, their hats removed and their faces washed with flannels. Then they were led to the dining room and seated. Mama and daughter tucked napkins in. Said mama to daughter;" You feed that one and I'll feed this one".

That incident amused the girls, however it was difficult to keep smiling in the face of remarks such as; "Blind people should not be allowed on the street in case their physical defect affects pregnant women," or, "Blind people do not need much money for clothes because they cannot see what they are wearing."

Sighted ignorance and consequent offensiveness persisted well into this century. The attitudes of many blind people remained anti-sighted as recently as the 1960s. Tilly was able to rise above such remarks and even express admiration of the courage of sighted people, who although so ignorant and uninformed were prepared, indeed delighted, to welcome blind children into their homes.

There were moments of fun when the youngsters had their revenge. On one tour young Wally told an Old Timer he could distinguish the colour of a horse on the road by its trot. This was a gift he had. The Old Timer was of course sceptical but decided to test him. Wally was consistently right. The Old Timer spread his fame throughout the town to the merriment of the children. The Old Timer never did discover Wally had some residual vision.

The 1888 Centennial Exhibition in Melbourne had a major impact on Tilly's life. The Asylum was an exhibitor. The blind children attended and demonstrated their work. Exhibitors permitted them to touch and handle art and science artefacts. This opened new doors to their minds. The concerts conducted by Sir Frederick Cowan were a major highlight of the musical life of the colony and transported Tilly into another world.

She was so inspired that she aspired to explore the wider world beyond the school curriculum. Mr Moss arranged for her to study for the matriculation examination, promising a teaching job if she passed. She passed in 1889.

Her ambition was further fired through reading of the achievements of great blind men. An important stimulus was a local source. A Mr and Mrs.Connolly had settled in Melbourne and established a college for sighted girls. Mr.Connolly, totally blind

and a graduate of an English University, was the head teacher. When the couple visited the Asylum school, they thought they saw university material in Tilly and were generous in their encouragement.

In the meantime Tilly's brother Steve had moved to Melbourne and her mother lived with him. Tilly now moved in with them. Her faith in herself and inordinate ambition, worried them. They protested at her aims for self-realisation and independence. She wanted to 'move too many mountains'. They pleaded their love and care and willingness to support her. At times there were tensions, but love triumphed. With the arrogance of the young Tilly knew that above all things she had to be true to herself. She would not desist. They accepted the situation.

Tilly's success in the matriculation exam and her university ambitions received newspaper publicity. Neither her family nor the Asylum could afford to fund her. The Austral Salon, a leading upper-class women's club, took up her cause. A matinee performance was arranged. Leading actors and artists donated their services. Tilly was presented to the audience. A substantial sum of money was raised. The Austral Club also produced a tutor, Miss Mary Doyle, to work with Tilly at the University. Her scholastic career was under way.

Tilly found the first year of her Arts course difficult. Instead of the small familiar circle of friends she was a nobody in a strange environment. Lack of material in Braille was a major handicap. She passed but the effort took its toll. She commenced the second year study

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2. THE SEED IS SOWN

Consider the mustard seed. It is the smallest of all seeds planted in a field but becomes the largest of plants and grows into a tree. The birds make nests and shelter safely in its branches. I tell you the truth. If you had faith even as small as a tiny mustard seed you could say to this mountain "Move" and it would go far away. Nothing would be impossible to you.

-Jesus, in the Gospels.

Oh! the disappointment of defeat, the frustration of failure, the sorrow of shattered dreams.

Tilly Aston, the first blind girl to attend the University of Melbourne had carried a heavy burden of responsibility. Watched by the press, admired by the women's suffrage movement and blazing a trail for young blind women, success was so important.

In her second year she broke down mentally and physically. Stunned and ashamed she could not find comfort. Her questioning 'why' as she probed the darkness could not find a purpose in her failure. She even doubted if there was a kind heavenly Father. The feeling that she had hurt her tutor, let down her sponsors and disappointed her supporting friends added to her depression and misery. Full of youthful confidence she had tried to achieve what, at that time, really was impossible even to a person of such outstanding ability and strong faith.

The lack of braille material in particular could not be overcome. Many decades would pass before the first blind girl graduated. Later, Tilly could write "I don't know whether I took my gigantic task too lightly or whether both teacher and pupil failed to realise the special difficulties confronting a blind girl at that time."

Tilly's depression lasted until she was invited to visit the Turner family in Colac a year later. She had become friendly with this family during the concert tours. Mr Turner, a chemist, prescribed for her. This, together with the care of his wife, happy home atmosphere and the change of climate, restored her health and spirit.

Again she looked to the future determined not to let her mind atrophy or gifts rust. She would build up her mind and acquire knowledge, so that, even without a university degree, she would be an educated woman.

This was also a period when she reflected on the affairs of the heart. Both blind and sighted suitors had sought her hand in marriage. A blind man she felt could not provide her with what she was seeking from life. She gave her love to several sighted men and believed they loved her. Either their mothers said 'no' or they retreated before the reality of marriage.

Tilly who believed love overcame all obstacles was disillusioned. It was acceptable for a blind man to marry a sighted girl but not for a blind girl to marry a sighted man. The depths of her feelings, her love for children and her resignation to the realities of public opinion were expressed in her poems. She felt a sense of shame at having revealed her heart and made a conscious decision not to love a man again. In the years ahead she had many fine male friends whom she admired and respected. She kept her

word. No further indications of romantic interest appeared in her writings or were known to her friends.

Tilly had joined the Punt Road Methodist Church while still at school. She worshipped regularly and actively participated in the church programme. Humbled by what she had been through, she wrote that in the church atmosphere, she fully grasped the great truth that it was not in satisfying personal ambitions but in service to others that full development took place. In nature the seed has to die before it can burst into new life. Tilly now died to selfish self will. Service before self became her aim. This did not mean that her character changed. Neither did she sacrifice ambition or lose determination. It did mean she redirected them towards a different goal.

In 1893, at the age of 20 years, inexperienced, poor, with a living to earn and still with a sense of defeat she sought a niche in which she could serve.

The Rev. William Moss had died unexpectedly during her second year at university. The Asylum had also changed its name to the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind. [RVIB] The new management was strongly opposed to the concept of a blind teacher. There was no job for Tilly. She advertised herself as a teacher of singing and music and a tutor of blind children whom the parents did not wish to send to the Institute School. Continuing but fluctuating work resulted.

Victorian Association of Braille Writers 1894.

The needs of blind people began to weigh heavily on Tilly's mind. She knew something had to be done but no brilliant thought illuminated her mind. Then as she expressed it, 'her first call came'.

She occasionally visited the home of a school friend, David Blakely. During conversation she lamented to his sister Mary about the absence of books in braille and the disastrous effect this had on her own career. Tilly pointed out that she had to find people to slowly read the text books to her while she transcribed them into Braille. This task took so long and was so tedious she was left with no time to study. " If we had only known, " said Mary, "some of us could have learned Braille and transcribed for you."

They co-operated in producing a paper titled 'Books for the Blind'. At a meeting of the Stenographers' Association of which she was a member, Mary Blakely read the paper and Tilly demonstrated the use of Braille. The paper pointed out that in England the practice of sighted people transcribing books and educational material for the blind was well established.

Louis Braille had invented the raised dot system in 1829. The Paris School for the Blind adopted it in 1854, two years after his death. Its use slowly spread throughout the world. Introduced into Australia about 1868, years passed before it was generally accepted into institutions for the blind. The home of Louis Braille at Coupvray on the outskirts of Paris was later to become a museum maintained by donations from organisations of the blind throughout the world.

Present at the meeting was Mrs. May Harrison whose husband worked in the same legal office as Mary Blakely. Mrs. Harrison offered to learn Braille and transcribe

books. Two men present Messrs. MacLellan and Mitchell undertook to call a public meeting in the Prahran Town Hall.

The Victorian Association of Braille Writers was formed at this public meeting which was Chaired by the Mayor of Prahran Cr Thomas Luxton, and held on September 27, 1894. Cr. Luxton was appointed President, Mr. J.T. Hogarth, Vice President and Mrs May Harrison Hon. Secretary. The committee members were Misses Blakely, Aston and Messrs MacLellan, Mitchell and Church. At the time Cr. Luxton was also President and Mr. Hogarth a later Superintendent of the RVIB. A spirit of co-operation was present.

Sufficient funds were raised through newspaper appeals to buy the necessary writing frames and paper to make a small start.

Tilly taught the Braille system to Miss Blakely and Mrs. Harrison. They in turn conducted training classes. In the first seven months 93 people enrolled. Of these 85 continued with the course. with 35 becoming proficient and volunteering as transcribers.

There became an immediate need for a Braille Library for the storage of transcribed materials. In the interim the library and its activities were located in Mrs Harrison's home in St Kilda. Mrs Harrison was appointed Librarian. Tilly attended each Wednesday to meet the pupils and correct exercises. On Wednesday evenings blind readers came to collect such books as were ready for lending. Much discussion on blind affairs took place in this social atmosphere.

The aim of the Victorian Association of Braille Writers was to enlighten the blind, keep a good standard and offer "only the purest and best literature". A Braille Literary Sub Committee was formed. There was no clear selection policy. It preferred as far as possible "to obtain books from sources which did not involve financial outlay." The lack of policy meant the Committee had a continuing problem in striking a proper balance, satisfying all readers and avoiding the charge of censorship. This was not always possible. There was friction when blind readers felt the library was making available what it thought was good for them and morally uplifting. They wanted the range and choice of books available to the general public, swear words, sex and all. This was a perpetual battleground. Although by today's standards the books were doubtless quite mild, some of the ladies were not prepared to transcribe them.

Because the braille books were so bulky a larger home was required within two years. A move was made to the home of Mrs Dickinson at Charlotte Place, St Kilda. Within five years the volunteers had transcribed 360 titles into more than 1200 volumes. An approach was made to the Australian Natives Association, another relatively young body for help. The Council of this body through its branches organised fund raising functions. Tilly Aston assisted at a number of musical soirees as a singer. Through this she met many influential men, leading artists and musicians.

A large room was rented in the Block Arcade and became the headquarters of the Braille Library. Although the Braille Library was a service of the Victorian Association of Braille Writers, the term Braille Library soon became the common

form of address. The name was formally changed to 'Braille Library' in 1958 and to 'Braille and Talking Book Library' in 1972.

Mrs May Harrison made the welfare of the blind her life's work and continued as Librarian until her death in 1912. In 1913 the organisations working for the blind combined to establish a Memorial Fund to perpetuate the memory of Mrs Harrison. A tablet was placed in the Braille Library and a marble cross erected at her grave. Her niece Miss Minnie Crabbe, who often helped her, was appointed Librarian and remained until retirement in 1944. Miss Crabbe continued her involvement for a further 10 years on the Social and Entertainment Committee. Miss Crabbe was appointed a Life Governor of the Association for Advancement of the Blind in 1956.

Cartage of Braille Books. From the outset the Library Committee desired to make the service free to readers. In 1897 following representations in which Miss Aston was a driving force, the Railways agreed to carry Braille books at half the normal rate. In 1899 this was extended to free cartage. News of this benefit was conveyed worldwide through Miss Aston's extensive correspondence circle. Blind people in the other states and overseas then sought and ultimately gained a similar benefit. Readers were responsible for transportation costs from station to home. In 1918 in an agreement with the carriers, Mayne Nickless, the Braille Library undertook to meet road transport costs from railway station to home. Rail and carrier transportation of boxes or hampers remained the main means of delivery until after WWII. Extended postal concessions then enabled books to be posted in specially made canvas bags.

From 1895 a monthly chatty Braille paper was introduced. It was edited by Dr. Samuel McBurney Mus. Doc. and brailled by hand. This continued to be an interest of Dr McBurney who met the braille paper cost, until his death in 1910.

Quite early in the history of the Braille Writers Association specialist areas were developed. A number of the transcribers were Roman Catholic ladies. They felt there was a need for religious material applicable to their own church. A leader of this group was Miss Louisa Fawkner who was partially blind. She persuaded Father Barry of St Mary's East St Kilda to inaugurate formally the Catholic Braille Writers Association in 1907. This branch severed its connection with the Braille Library in 1938 when the Villa Maria Hostel opened two years after Bro.O'Neill became President of the Catholic Braille Writers Association.

The original efforts, agitation and advice of Miss Fawkner had a major impact, leading to the creation of the Villa Maria Society some 20 years after her death. Her work was carried on by many grand people including Mr. James Pendlebury, President of the Catholic Braille Writers Association, and later Mr Frank Plumstead who gave a lifetime of service and was revered by the blind and sighted people of all the agencies serving the non-sighted. Miss Fawkner died in 1915. The death of this 'active and esteemed member' is recorded in the 1915 annual report of the Association for the Advancement of the Blind.

Braille Music was another specialist area. Selection was made by Mrs. Harrison assisted by Tilly Aston. Further material was added as demand increased. An active user of the musical material was Mr David Palmer a widely admired blind person who became Director of Music at the RVIB School. Mr Palmer left his collection of music

to the Braille Library This formed the nucleus of the David Palmer Music Library which was established in 1963.

Tilly Aston was Secretary of two other groups. The first studied Esperanto. Interest in this group waned. Tilly, however, maintained a life long correspondence with Esperantists around the world. Through this she gained much knowledge of services for the blind overseas and established friendships with many notable blind and sighted world figures. The second was a Braille Correspondence Club. This club was successful and continued for many years.

In addition to books in Braille the Library maintained a collection in Moon. Moon was a raised embossed type consisting of simplified letters. Many newly blind persons and the older blind people found this easier to read. Moon type could only be produced by a special printing press. This meant importation of books from a publisher in England. The expense involved limited the collection.

Tilly Aston, for reasons she does not explain although probably to enable concentration on the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, ceased to be actively involved in the management of the Braille Library shortly after its move to the city. She did continue to be an active member and reader.

Four Great Ladies. A notable feature of this time is the picture of four Melbourne girls, who, in hindsight, were truly great ladies. They belonged to the same small group, worked together and each sowed a mustard seed to help blind people. Mrs May Harrison saw hers grow and flourish before she died. Miss Louisa Fawcner saw hers sprout but not blossom before she died. Miss Tilly Aston saw hers grow and spread beyond the boundaries of her faith and vision and then, sadly, in her last years when troubled by ill health, feared it was withering. In Western Australia, Miss Mary Blakely under her married name Mary McGregor, formed the Braille Society of WA in 1913. Learning from her Victorian experience Mary McGregor incorporated a Braille Library, Accommodation and Welfare Services into the one organisation. It became the major agency for the blind in West Australia.. From the 1950's a very close relationship existed between the Braille Society of W.A. and the Association for the Blind in Victoria even though at that time knowledge of the connection had been lost.

Some years after the establishment of the Braille Library, a friend, Mrs Hunt asked Tilly to spend three months with her in Launceston and help in organising a society of Braille Writers. She did this and then moved on to Hobart where she repeated the exercise.

Providing books for the blind highlighted other pressing needs. The RVIB would only assist those children who had gone to its school. At 16 years a number returned home to their families. Those with musical abilities received assistance to specialise in that field. This programme produced some fine piano tuners, musicians and church organists. For the majority there was work training in the factory. Trades taught were mat making, brush and broom making and basketry. Those who could not meet the required standard were returned to their families or admitted to a benevolent home. The workers received a nominal payment plus free board and lodging. The more skilful workers were classified as tradesmen and lived with their families or in lodgings close to the workshop.

The change in management following the death of the Rev. Moss together with the name change from Asylum to RVIB after 25 years of service provided an excellent opportunity for the RVIB to review and liberalise policy. This was not done. The formation of the independent Victorian Braille Writers Association and Library was one consequence. Another followed soon after.

Association for the Advancement of the Blind [AAB]. 1895. The 1891 Census recorded 1097 blind people in Victoria. Only about a quarter were known and most of these through connection with the RVIB. For those people who lost sight after 16 years there were no services, no assistance, no pensions and no hope. Blind people of working age begged in the streets. The older blind, both male and female, were 'hidden away'. Many relatives felt shame or guilt. The 'who had sinned' and punishment syndrome was strong. Frequently not even the next door neighbours were aware of the blind person's existence. These 'shut in' blind had no social contacts, few friends and little encouragement to help themselves.

The resigned acceptance of the majority to their fate both burdened and aggravated Tilly Aston. Superior in education, intellect and leadership abilities her thinking was by now penetrating the mists. She realised some had to be jolted out of their lethargy, the attitudes of others changed and in general self esteem built up. She concluded action would have to be initiated by the blind themselves and that only they could handle their affairs in the proper spirit. This determination that the blind could, and should, manage their own affairs never wavered.

With the support of a few friends Tilly called a meeting. and 40 invitations were sent out. Full of enthusiasm, she felt her brother's house was too small and took advantage of Mrs. Blakely's offer of the use of her parlour. Only eight people turned up. In part, this was no doubt due to the prevailing defeatist attitude and an inbuilt resentment that an 'uppity' young woman was exercising leadership.

Despite disappointment at the small number, so strong was the spirit and will of those present, the Association for the Advancement of the Blind was formed. The date was December 8, 1895, three days before Tilly's 22nd birthday.

The membership fee was determined at 1/-. Each contributed. Mr David Robertson was elected President, Miss Tilly Aston, Honorary Secretary and Miss Janet Robertson, Treasurer. Mary Blakely was Minute Secretary. Two other friends Messrs Will Hall, and Charlie Taylor apologised for their inability to attend. However they joined at the next meeting. These 10 were the nucleus of the organisation.

The mustard seed had been planted. The event went unheralded and unsung. There was no fanfare in the media. Yet that mustard seed, sown in faith and hope, took root and grew into a great tree. Commonly called the AAB until the name was abbreviated in 1960 to the Association for the Blind, its branches would cover Victoria. Blind people would find needed shelter in its shade. The benefits of its achievements would flow to blind people throughout Australia. Indirectly its influence would impact on the lives and affairs of blind people world-wide.

The eight foundation members were:

David [Dave] Robertson. Educated at the RVIB. Trained as a basket maker. At the age of 19 years he established his own business specialising in basket coverings for large wine and vinegar demijohns. Described as a quiet average type man with initiative. he was President till 1900 and again in 1913. He attended a party given in his honour at Kooyong to celebrate his 90th birthday. David Robertson was outlived by his wife who lost her sight and was admitted to the Brighton Home for the Blind where she died in 1968. The couples house in Albert Park was left to the Association.

Miss Matilda Ann [Tilly] Aston. Hon. Secretary and Treasurer.

Miss Janet [Janie] Robertson. Dave's sister. was the Association Welfare Officer. She did the hard slogging foot work in the city and country giving extraordinary service in a voluntary capacity. Janet Robertson kept house for her brother until he married, then moved into Windsor Hostel. When her health began to fail moved back to her brother and his wife. Miss Robertson died in 1948.

David Blakely. Was not particularly active. His sister Mary Blakely moved to Western Australia, possibly in 1900. He joined her later.

Miss Katherine McDougall. was Vice President on four occasions. She was the Country Collector from 1924-26. and Suburban Collector at the time of her death in 1927. A quiet person who did much work for the organisation.

Tom Marks. was educated at the RVIB. A fine musician. he was self employed. A kindly man, well spoken and immaculately dressed, he wore a fob watch which chimed. He served as as President in 1900, Secretary from 1904 to 1927 and as President from 1935-37 when he was over eighty years of age.

George Cobain, a self employed chair caner. was also a cornet player in a dance band.

Harry Lee. was President on four occasions, the last in 1919.. He also served four times as Vice. President.

With the exception of Tilly Aston no records pertaining to the founding members remain.

The original thinking of Tilly Aston had been to start a Literary and Debating Club for the blind. The aspirations of the group reached out to a wider and more practical target.

The Constitution of the Association for the Advancement of the Blind drawn up by the founders, defined the objective as "the improvement and assistance of the blind in any way possible". In practice this was subdivided into two categories. Employment and Amusement. Employment was seen as self employment, blind men setting themselves up in small operations. The possibility of their being employed in open industry was beyond the realms of thought. Amusement consisted of lectures, debates, musical treats, socials and the annual picnic. Lecturers and essayists were not to talk for more than an hour, that being considered the attention time span. Religious and political subjects were banned. The Society would be non-sectarian and non-political.

Membership was restricted to 'blind people and those persons with such defective vision as shall be deemed essential for membership'. The term "defective vision" enabled members to argue to their hearts content over the admission of some applicants.

The Constitution was democratic in the extreme. Even the powers of Office Bearers and Committee were limited to 'discussing and arranging matters to be presented to ordinary meetings of members'. Although ordinary and committee meetings were referred to in the Constitution no provision was made for them.

All work done by the Committee and later Sub-Committees had to be approved by members in ordinary meeting. This was a perpetual and fruitful source of discord. Members held 'approve' meant the Committee could only recommend and no action could be taken or money spent without their prior say so. The Committee held 'approve' meant endorse the action it had taken. Changes to the Constitution could only take place at Annual Meetings on the vote of the members. The Constitution was changed many times but members would not alter this clause. Neither did they care a hoot for legal opinion. 'Approve' meant what the members said it meant.

Detailed rules for the conduct of business meetings were prepared. These were necessary. The blind members were, to use a farming term, starting to feel their oats. A successful meeting was one which generated so much heat that order was lost. They did distinguish between the healthy heat of a good argument which dissipated pent up feelings and the unhealthy heat of discord which was destructive.

A blind member described one meeting as "so rowdy the only possible thing to do was close it and adjourn until there had been a cooling off period." This 'scrapping' was seen as a sign of creative life. It was a thousand times better than being tucked away out of sight. The blind people thrived on it."

Tilly Aston exercised a major role in the preparation of the Rules and By Laws. She was vocal in public on the ability of the blind to run their own affairs. That said, being a strong character, she liked to run things her own way. She led, cajoled, goaded and moulded the blind members. Rules were needed for them. Rules only held her back. Her thoughts were well expressed in verse.

*"O Brothers in the dark!
I have another song for you! Arise!
Above are the illimitable skies,
And out beyond are boundless widths of space,
Where you can run and win your mortal race.
'Tis shame to dream and loiter in the Sun
Of ease and progress by another won,
To take of everything and nothing give!
Beat down the bars and cry, "Oh let me live as others
Let me toil and take my fill of all life's best".
Brothers, you can - and will!"*

A question asked frequently over the years was, "Why, with so many people common to both the Braille Library and the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, were separate organisations formed.?" The answer was that the Braille Transcribers

were a group of sighted people providing a service for blind people while the AAB was a self- help society of the blind.

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Talk by Leah Rappeport to AAB members,1960.

3. THE TENDER SHOOT

Did the first Committee of the Association for the Advancement of the Blind know it possessed remarkable attributes?

The answer surely, is 'No'. Members were all blind. Not one had business background, marketing experience or accounting skills at a management level. A closer look reveals an all wise providence had assembled together the qualities needed for success. The charismatic leader with vision and foresight in Miss Tilly Aston. The level-headed wise peacemaker in David Robertson. Tom Marks, older, more experienced, with good contacts and a reputation for being good at using people with more knowledge than himself. The hard-working labour force, particularly Janie Robertson and Katie McDougall. These were precious assets. Aggressive leader and loyal followers; workers as well as visionaries; doers as well as talkers.

There was more. As with so many of the great Australian hospitals and welfare organisations established last century, the founders saw their service as a Christian duty, if not a privilege. From the birth of the AAB, a distinctive warmth was part of its spirit.

Early years. Miss Aston's remark years earlier that the Rev Moss had been 'a true friend and father to her' now takes on a new significance. The Rev. William Moss [1828-1891], a Congregational minister, was a remarkable man. He was Pastor of the Independent Chapel in Prahran which gave its name to Chapel St. He helped to form the Prahran Mechanics Institute, the South Yarra Ladies' Benevolent Society and the Prahran Town Mission. He was a founder of the Deaf and Dumb Institution in 1861-62 and the Adult Deaf and Dumb Mission in 1883-85 besides being so deeply involved with the Blind Asylum.

His ability to attract members of parliament and prominent people into supporting his charities and his method of organisation would have been seen and absorbed by the young Tilly. She knew the advantages of a high profile, publicity and good public relations. She knew that to successfully market the organisation some early successes were necessary. She knew that a power base and funds were needed. Through her membership of the Australian Literature Society, Debating Society, Esperanto Club and the Church, she was well known to many members of parliament, influential business men and leading musical artists. Her wide spectrum of knowledge was now put to work and the help of her contacts obtained.

The Committee realised the first task was to locate and list the support of blind people and gather information. Numbers meant strength and power. Information would provide the statistics required by various authorities.

Miss Aston had 9000 circulars printed. These advertised the AAB and drew attention to the availability of blind professionals and tradesmen.

She wrote to country clergymen, schoolmasters and local authorities asking for the names of blind persons. Very few answers were received but the name of the organisation was publicised.

Within the city personal visitation was undertaken. A laborious door-knocking operation followed up every lead. Transport difficulties, distance, foot slogging, inclement weather, it mattered not. To Janie Robertson it was a labour of love.

Committee members, too, were all expected to ferret out non sighted persons. They had a powerful motive. As the first Annual Report stated, they were 'anxious to have the cause of their own class brought prominently under notice and to further their improvement mentally and materially.' By 1900 there were 120 members.

Meetings of members were held twice a month. As numbers grew a private house was too small. Miss Theckla Thorne, proprietress of a girls school in South. Yarra offered a school room. Numbers continued to grow. Dr. Samuel McBurney, Principal of Oberwyl College St Kilda, offered a larger room. The first sighted helper was Miss Mary Blakely who became sighted Minute Secretary, typed circulars and correspondence.

The organisation continued to grow. Katie McDougall obtained the use of the hall at the Presbyterian Church, Punt Road, South. Yarra. The AAB. settled there very happily for a number of years. As the increasing membership spread away from the Prahran area to the other side of the city, an office and more central meeting place became desirable.

In 1904 with a membership of 150, a small office was obtained in Oxford Chambers, 481 Bourke St., Melbourne. The rent was two shillings a week. After nine years as Honorary Secretary Miss Aston was feeling the strain. The increasing age of her mother meant additional home responsibilities. This, added to her job as a music teacher, made heavy demands on her energies. Mr Tom Marks was now appointed part time paid Secretary at a salary of 10/- a week. The office was open on Tuesday and Friday from 10 am. till 4 pm. His daughter, later Mrs. Barkley, worked as his guide and clerical assistant. Her salary was one shilling a week. The blind members felt not too much money should go into one household. Miss Aston began a year's term as President, a position which was to rotate annually for the next 15 years. The responsibility of Treasurer had been passed to Janie Robertson in 1900.

Arrangements were made for the fortnightly meetings of members to be held in the Collins St Baptist Church hall.

Sighted friends. Although determined to run its own affairs the Committee had already realised the help of sighted friends was indispensable both in operations and in an advisory capacity. These friends were many. Five original friends gave such outstanding lifetime service they require special mention.

Dr. Samuel McBurney had the unique distinction of working for the three organisations serving blind people. He taught music to a number of the pupils at the RVIB School; produced the Braille magazine 'Odds and Ends' for the Library and was a fund raiser and Trustee for the AAB.

He was a man of medium height with white hair and a pointed beard. He travelled by tricycle. When conducting a concert or choir he usually dressed in a black robe and wore a red cap.

Dr McBurney and his wife were friendly and approachable and did many unobtrusive acts of kindness. He was the first person to be appointed a Life Governor of the AAB. His service to the Association continued until his death in 1910.

Miss Elsie Tait was a daughter of the Presbyterian Manse in Punt Road, South. Yarra. The RVIB School was part of her father's charge. Groups of students were regularly invited to the manse. Elsie and her sisters would read to them. This interaction gave her an understanding of blindness and captured her interest.

Elsie Tait took over as Honorary Minute and Assistant Secretary when Mary Blakely went to Western Australia. She fulfilled this task from 1900 to 1922. In addition she acted as Honorary Secretary of the Brighton Home Committee from 1910 to 1923.

She worked in a solicitor's office, liked tailored clothes, wore her hair straight back in a bun and was regarded as 'more interested in doing good than looking good'.

Miss Tait married Mr. Herbert Lawrence, a partially sighted man, in 1917. He was a country collector. Tall, handsome, with a jovial nature, he was an excellent master of ceremonies at the Association's social functions. He was also noted for encouraging the younger blind people to achieve and be independent. A great couple.

In the 1921 Annual Report of the Brighton Home Committee, the Chairman, Mr Charles Monteath wrote, 'Mrs Lawrence reads to the inmates, relieves the Matron when she is out and does anything and everything that is possible to help in a practical way; in fact she lives her life in the service of the blind'.

Miss Aston wrote; 'When there is sickness in any of the homes of our people, if a helping hand is needed at a social gathering, if somebody is lonely and sad or must make journeys to doctors or hospitals, a call for Mrs. Lawrence brings the dear efficient woman to share the burdens and straighten out the tangles. Such precious souls as hers are a gift from God'.

When blind people spoke of Mrs Lawrence the universal thought and feeling was, 'She gave herself to them'.

Mr. William Henry Paterson. 18 years of age and a junior public servant in the Titles Office, was the Organising Secretary of a picnic for the blind given by Miss Theckla Thorne. This picnic originated in 1891 and was the first social event in the colony open to all blind people. When responsibility for the picnic, which had become an annual event, was passed over to the AAB in 1897, Mr Paterson and Miss Thorne moved with it.

In maturity Mr Paterson was short and slight in stature. He wore gold-rimmed spectacles usually perched on the tip of his nose. His eyes looked over them intense and piercing. His receding hair was light in colour. In general he was a gruff, dour Presbyterian of Scots extraction, stubborn, strong-willed, tenacious. In his own home he was an attentive excellent host.

Mr Paterson was the prototype of personal and business rectitude. The one exception was the affairs of blind people. In their interests he was transformed into a devious wheeler dealer. He wanted the best for them. So did Methodist puritan Tilly Aston,

so later did Irish Catholic Rev. Bro. P.G.O'Neill. Their views on what was best did not always coincide. That three such diverse, stubborn, self willed people, could work and pull together so strongly in harness, demonstrated the depth of their commitment and the tremendous strength underpinning the cause of blind people.

Mr Paterson was frequently at loggerheads with the blind members. He often saw them as recalcitrant children who did not know what was best for them, yet they respected and admired him. They knew that he desired neither power nor honour for himself, that he was their true and utterly devoted friend. 'Once seized with an idea he held on like a ferret till he achieved his object', was the comment of one blind person.

He was always 'Mr. Paterson'. No one, however senior or important, presumed to address him as 'Will'. This was the measure of his standing and the respect accorded him. The only person known to address him by his first name was his wife May.

Mrs May Paterson was a real sweetie who had never heard of the word 'nasty'. A tall gracious lady tending to stoop, she was loved by everyone. She exercised a softening influence on Mr. Paterson who adored her. Not blessed with children, the blind were their family. They were inseparable and sat on committees together. Wily Mr. Paterson well knew and played on the fact that he could get away with a lot at committee level because members would not make adverse comments that would upset Mrs. Paterson.

Mr. Paterson was President from 1948 until 1952. He will appear frequently in this story.

George Arnot Maxwell gave freely of his friendship and legal talents to blind persons. He also handled the legal affairs of the AAB. He was born in Scotland. The family migrated in 1875 when his father was called to minister at the Punt Road Presbyterian Church. Elsie Tait's father later served the same congregation. He was a sickly child who was strengthened by a period working as a jackaroo near Broken Hill. On his return he taught at Toorak College and Caulfield Grammar School. During this time he studied law at the University of Melbourne. He was always kind to the blind people of the district, even in his student years and continued to take an interest in the group.

George Maxwell was admitted to the bar in 1891 at the age of 32 years. Within four years he was well known as a criminal lawyer and by the 1920's was one of Victoria's great criminal lawyers. Sir Robert Menzies in his book "The Measure of the Years", wrote that George Maxwell was the greatest criminal advocate he ever heard. "He had the capacity to persuade a jury that its members must be as astute to find excuses and doubts on behalf of the accused as they would be on their own case 'on the dread day of judgment itself."

George Maxwell stood unsuccessfully for the seat of Prahran in 1897 for the colonial legislature. In 1917 he won the Federal seat of Fawkner. He had a strong social conscience, was sincere and earnest and motivated by his religious convictions.

Tall, straight and dark with a prominent nose and a fine Scots burr on his tongue, he was a fine figure of a man who always carried a walking stick. Retinal detachment caused the loss of sight in one eye in 1920. Nine years later he was totally blind.

Even when he rose to power he was never too exalted to lend a hand or use his influence on behalf of non-sighted people. George Maxwell was a humble man. He looked forward to attending the annual picnic, 'because on that day he was just one man among the rest of his blind friends and could enjoy himself like anyone else'.

Mr. Maxwell served as President from 1920 to 1935. Blind members' meetings which so often were noisy and rowdy were strangely quiet when he was in the chair.

Mr Charles Monteath was the proprietor of an iron foundry in South Melbourne which bore his name. One of his products, well known to older generations and found in the kitchens of most houses, was the one fire stove carrying the brand 'Monteath.'

Mr Monteath was a friend of an old seafaring man who had lost his sight. Hearing of the work of the AAB in helping blind people, he took his friend, Capt. Watson, to see Miss Aston. He was so delighted with the change in, and the progress made by, Capt. Watson, he offered to assist the organisation.

Mr Monteath's expertise was in the business and financial areas. His business associations were of considerable assistance in raising funds. He was appointed a Trustee on the death of Dr. McBurney. When the Brighton Home for the blind was established it became his special interest. He was Chairman of the Home Committee from 1910 to 1929. As such he was the first sighted man to hold executive office in the AAB.

Mr Paterson, Mr Monteath and Miss Tait joined Dr. McBurney as early Honorary Life Members. Mr Maxwell was appointed a Patron. Again one has to question if mere chance brought these persons of such distinction and specialist gifts together, at a critical period in the life of the young organisation.

Blind friends. Four early blind friends of distinction, now require introduction:

Mrs. Margaret Bartlett lost much of her sight as a result of measles at the age of five years. She was totally blind by the age of 14.. At 15 she came to Melbourne and attended the RVIB school. She had a very good soprano voice. While still very young she toured New Zealand as a member of a blind concert party. This was followed by a tour of Australia. South Africa came next. While touring there the Boer War broke out. The concert party returned home. The touring party broke up after 20 years. On her return to Melbourne in 1907 she became interested in the AAB. So outstanding were her talents she was elected to the General Committee in 1911. She served continually in various capacities till 1956.

When the AAB began its concert party, Mrs Bartlett acted as advance agent, arranging hall bookings, advertising, accommodation and any other requirement. If they were short of a singer she filled in.

From 1923 to 1929 she was country collector enlisting many annual subscribers for the AAB. When money was urgently needed in the late 1930s and early 1940s, she came out of retirement to reorganise the work. Mrs Bartlett was then over 70 years of age.

Mrs Bartlett, a devout Catholic, was also a foundation member of the Catholic Braille Writers' Association. She spent her declining years as a resident in the Villa Maria Society where she celebrated her 90th birthday.

Miss Caroline [Carrie] Hansen was blind from birth and also lacked one of the usual layers of skin. She always wore a gossamer veil. Of German descent she was brought up to be useful and could sew and cook. A cheerful tiny lady, her bright disposition and practical qualifications suited her to the task of home visiting and teaching. She acted as the liaison between blind persons requiring assistance and the Committee. A woman of independent means she was known to help blind people from her own resources. Her sister Mrs Wanke was her guide. Miss Hansen died suddenly in 1931.

Mrs Letitia. Hutchinson had a long and distinguished record as a blind member. As Miss Letitia Crawford of Harrowden, Lyndhurst, she is listed in the early Annual Reports as a tea agent and later as a certified masseuse. Elected to the Committee in 1902 she continued on various committees until 1958. She possessed a good intellect, was strong minded and held firm opinions which she was not backward in voicing. She was recognised and respected as a fighter for what she saw as right. On the other hand if, God forbid, she was wrong, she was always ready to apologise. She was heart and soul for the AAB, always helping and serving and never thinking of advantage for herself.

Excellent in the performance of home duties she was asked frequently to assist with difficult cases. This often entailed taking them into her own home for rehabilitation. Her daughter Grace acted as her guide and even when a young girl performed the same duty for Mrs. Bartlett on some of her country trips. Later, as Mrs. Henning, Grace continued to assist her mother. With the unfailing support of husband George and son Keith she was a pillar of the programme which was developed when the Kooyong Clubhouse was built. Sadness was genuine and the loss great when the family moved to N.S.W. after her mothers death.

Patrick O'Neill was born in Tipperary in March 1886. His eyesight was defective. He determined to be a Christian Brother and was received into the novitiate in 1901. In fulfilment of his vow he arrived in Melbourne in 1906. He sometimes upset his Superiors by his insistence they get moving on whatever his pet project happened to be. In 1926 he realised his sight was failing rapidly. By 1927 he was totally blind. He relinquished his position as Superior at St Vincent de Paul's Orphanage in South Melbourne but continued to make it his home.

He learned Braille in 1928 and joined the Catholic Braille Writers Association. When the President Mr. James Pendlebury died in 1931 Bro.O'Neill was chosen to succeed him. At the following meeting he, too, started sowing seed, raising the possibility of securing a hostel for the Catholic blind. In due time the Villa Maria Society and St Paul's School became the answer.

Bro.O'Neill was supported by a wonderful, dedicated and influential group of volunteers and staff. Some originated as volunteers in the army sense. Supported by his good friend Archbishop Mannix and the power of the church, it was a case of 'you, you and you'. Bro.O'Neill had a sublime faith. He never worried about money. The others had to worry for him and worry they did. The Villa Maria published history describes him as, "stubborn to the point of mulishness, suspicious of outside control,

hypersensitive to what people were saying and doing, yet a man of vision and foresight, humble, compassionate and exuding charm".

Bro. O'Neill also became a member of the AAB when he lost his sight. He soon became a person of influence . He served on the General Committee and various other committees. The Villa Maria description was found to be apt.

Finance. The 8/- capital was soon spent. The problem of adequate finance was just as big a mountain to the founders as it was to all their successors, through to the present Comiittee 100 years later.

The first public appearance of the AAB was in April, 1896, when Mr. Henry Wright gave a lecture on Louis Braille and demonstrated transcribing. This was supported by musical items. Some funds were raised. Dr. McBurney then gave a series of eight concerts spread over the two years. These raised £38.. Concerts given by choral and other musical societies also assisted as did membership fees. Even so, income in 1900 only reached £93.

Miss Aston's experience with the RVIB school concert party, her musical interests and Dr McBurney's activities in the same direction led to an attempt in 1900 to form a concert party of blind people as a means of raising funds. Three concerts were staged in the Western District. They were not successful. In 1911 a further attempt was made with a short tour of the Bacchus Marsh area. This time a biograph machine, an early form of moving pictures, was part of the entertainment. The tour was successful. The following year a larger tour was undertaken in the Northern Central District from the Goulburn Valley to the Murray River. This also was profitable. Country concerts then became a regular fund raising feature.

The high profile of the Association's musical interests was reflected in the response to approaches made to leading theatrical and concert managers in Melbourne. J & N Tait, J C Williamson Ltd and other entrepreneurs made free tickets available. This opened up to blind members first class entertainment previously beyond their means and those of the AAB

After the turn of the century income began to increase. Mr Monteath's business contacts, increasing publicity, the ability to attract the support of community leaders and the appointment of collectors started to show results. Income increased from £220 in 1902 to £1000.in 1910. Donors in that year included His Excellency the Governor General the Earl of Dudley, then resident in Government House and Lady Gibson Carmichael, wife of the Governor of Victoria, living in Stonnington.

Expenditure increased correspondingly. Under the expenditure heading were small interest free loans to assist selected blind people to become self employed and grants for those in dire necessitous circumstances. Some loans were repaid at the rate of sixpence a week.

The main sources of income in the early days were musical entertainments, concerts and door-to-door collections. From the latter a pool of annual subscribers was slowly built up. The income received was used to fund daily activities. Capital income for buildings was raised by separate appeal.

Finance for all purposes was in perpetual short supply yet its absence did not prevent the organisation from developing. A notable feature, carried through to the present day, was the prudent exercise of financial stewardship. The principle that money was a tool to be used to help blind people and its acquisition not an end in itself was followed consistently.

Employment. The work of Janie Robertson, Carrie Hansen and other visitors revealed a pool of unemployed blind who desired either full or part time work. Basket makers, piano tuners, music teachers and knitters were wasting their time and talent in idleness. Circulars were printed stating the aims of the AAB, together with the names, addresses and occupations of those seeking employment. Minimal work resulted.

A stall was taken at the Prahran Market. Goods made by blind people were offered for sale. The maker received the sale price, the Association met the costs. This venture proved reasonably successful. After a few months a shop was rented but the limited types of products and the shortage of supplies for full time trade made it unprofitable. The business was closed.

For those who lost sight in adulthood and had not received training in blind crafts a tea agency was started. Tea was purchased in bulk, packaged and sold door to door. The number of tea agents grew from nine in 1897 to twenty in 1906 when 10,000 lbs. of tea were sold. Tea was shipped to Tasmania to one agent. For most agents tea sales provided a partial income only. Hawking as a business did not have a good reputation, blind people did not like it, neither were they good sales people.

The RVIB widened its policy around 1910 and began admitting to the workshop adult blind who had not been through the school. This move eased the pressure on the AAB, which gradually accepted employment was a specialist service in which the RVIB was far more skilled. The tea agency went into a gradual decline and finally ceased operation in the 1930s.

One of the last surviving tea agents was Miss Bella Smart. Diagnosed as having a terminal illness, she was admitted to Mirridong Home for the Blind, Bendigo in 1958. The care and attention received in this AAB nursing home partially restored her health. Her cheerful disposition and loving personality ensured she became one of the home's most popular residents. To staff, committee and visitors she was affectionately known as Aunt Bella. She died late in 1964 at the age of 88.

Voting. "Voters must be able to write their names with a pen." This law was rigidly enforced. Only those who had been able to write before losing sight had this capacity. The discrimination angered blind people and was one of the first issues addressed by the AAB.

Approaches to the Electoral Registrar and Members of Parliament were futile. The colony was faced with far greater and more grievous problems. Changing an important Act for the benefit of a few blind people did not make sense.

Miss Aston turned to the AAB Patron and friend, Mr. George Maxwell, then building a formidable reputation with the legal firm of Strongman and Crouch. This firm established in 1892 was appointed honorary legal adviser to the AAB in 1898. One of the partners, Mr A. R. Crouch, was elected the first member for the seat of Corio in the

new Federal House of Representatives. He was the youngest member in the House. Mr Crouch had an association with Miss Aston going back to the early days of the Australia Natives Association [ANA] when the help of that young body was sought in establishing the Braille Library.

In 1902 when the Bill enacting Federal Voting Laws was under consideration, Mr Crouch had a clause slipped into the Bill enabling blind persons to vote in Commonwealth elections. This provision applied to all blind persons in Australia. This benefit obtained through the endeavours of the AAB was a world first. Other countries followed.

Still the Victorian Government did nothing. Another ANA contact was Mr Donald Mackinnon, President of the Prahran Branch. A pastoralist and politician he was also the state member for Prahran. Mr Mackinnon had shown a friendly interest in the AAB. Through his efforts success came in 1909. A blind voter was permitted ask the Returning Officer to assist in casting a vote. A second amendment which later followed allowed a companion to accompany the blind voter into the polling booth and mark the ballot paper at his direction.

Pensions. In 1897 a Royal Commission was set up to enquire into the subject of Old Age Pensions. The AAB asked for and received a hearing. Miss Tilly Aston presented the case for blind people.

Miss Aston sought the pension for all blind people, not just the elderly. She submitted as reasons the facts that blind people rarely lived to be as old as the sighted; that they were confined to their homes partly through poverty and that those who lost sight after 40 years had no means of becoming industrious, being regarded as too old to learn a trade. Miss Aston further stated only two persons out of 1200 without sight were receiving a small pension; and that the present system of begging in the streets was degrading not only to blind people but to the community at large.

Miss Aston was asked to explain how the AAB operated. Finally there came the Victorian era question displaying the then worthy versus unworthy attitude to charity. "Do you find blind people a respectable thrifty class of people?" Answer. "Yes, I consider blind people as a whole are thrifty. They live respectably on very small incomes. We have our disreputable ones the same as any other class. That can only be expected when men are reduced to begging."

Miss Aston considered she had been given a sympathetic hearing, but, nothing was done. The Commission felt that if the blind were given special favours, every other type of disability and all other invalids would make similar claims.

Only those elderly blind persons who met the age and means test criteria received the pension when it became law.

Those blind persons unable to secure employment or with disabling illnesses continued to be a drag on their families or had to seek admission to a benevolent institution. There were many sad stories of husband and wife separation and broken families.

Agitation continued to have blind people declared invalids for pension purposes. George Maxwell mustered his political and legal friends to this end. In 1907 another organised approach to Federal Members was made. Success came in 1910. The Invalid and Old Age Pensions Act declared the pension was available to "every person above the age of 16 years who is permanently incapacitated for work by reason of an accident or of his being an invalid or who is permanently blind and who is not receiving an old age pension." The means test criteria applied.

So it came about that blind people throughout Australia benefited from the continuing intense efforts and progressive policies of the self help group of blind people, the AAB.

This set a goal for the blind, worldwide. At that time most countries had not even given thought to the subject.

Travel. The early law makers of the colonies were intent on protecting their patch of territory from an influx of 'unsuitable' immigrants. They feared these would become a charge on the public purse or private charity. Blind people were placed in the undesirable category.

A blind person wishing to enter another territory had to find a bondsman. As a measure against possible indigence a bond of £400. was required to enter Victoria. This was applied in a harsh manner whether coming or going. Ships would not carry blind passengers. Humiliating scenes with immigration officers occurred at border crossings. Even border hopping across the Murray River for a few hours to visit friends was unacceptable.

The AAB campaigned with some success during its first few years and the Regulation was amended. A signed statement to the effect the traveller would be returning at a specified time replaced the bond. Federation in 1901 nullified existing laws and swept away all restrictions. Interstate travel was henceforth free and unhindered. Some bureaucrats took years to grasp this reality.

At the local level most non-sighted people were unable to travel without a guide. When they wished to attend the meetings and socials of the AAB, members were disadvantaged because they had to pay their own fare and that of a guide. Many found the cost prohibitive.

The members concluded a concession should be sought enabling the guide to travel free on the blind person's ticket. Yet another campaign was commenced. An introduction to the Lord Mayor, Sir Malcolm McEachern, was secured. Miss Aston was invited to see him. He had been well briefed. Within a few minutes he gave assurance the privilege sought would be granted on metropolitan trains. From 1901 individual annual permits covering the concession were issued. In 1921 the concession was reversed. Thereafter the blind person travelled free and a fare was paid for any accompanying guide.

The Lord Mayor did more. A number of separate tramway companies were operating. He arranged for and supported a deputation to the Tramways Commissioners. The response was not favourable. The concession was not granted until 1915 on

metropolitan trams and 1918 on suburban trams. In 1921 the tramways fell into line with the railways.

Postage. A constant topic of the early days was the cost of sending embossed material through the mail. Miss Aston subscribed to a number of overseas braille magazines which were circulated among blind members via the postal service. This form of literature was devoured eagerly. With no income the exchange of reading matter was beyond the means of many. Miss Aston was also a prolific braille letter writer. This involved her in considerable cost. AAB correspondence was also increasing.

Two recent newly blind recruits were Mr A.W.Holgate, an accountant, and Mr. Frank Barber. Both lived in Richmond and were full of zest. Mr Holgate had been elected a Vice President. They asked their new Federal Member, Mr Frank Tudor for help. A friendly man, Mr. Tudor had been a hatter in Richmond and a one time President of the Trades Hall Council. He later joined the blind members at picnics and socials and came to understand their needs and aspirations. He also introduced a fellow Parliamentarian Mr. Robert [Bob] Solly who in due course became a member of the Brighton Home Committee. Mr. Tudor considered free postage for the blind would cost the country no more than a penny per head a year. After conferring with the AAB Committee a short Bill was drafted. It passed through Parliament unopposed in 1902.

Once again blind people throughout the nation reaped the benefit. Australia was the first country in the world to give this privilege. Miss Aston was full of praise saying the benefit reached adult and child, all ages and classes and opened up new horizons.

The Postmaster General reported this concession to the World Conference of Postal Authorities. In time it was adopted universally.

While the turn of the century and Federation turned out to be a most propitious time for change, this does not detract from the remarkable successes of the AAB. Indeed it enhances them. It was not just capricious chance that Tilly Aston failed at the University, that the AAB was born five years before Federation, that the Committee immediately initiated a plan of action, for the advancement of blind people.

Throughout this century other disability groups have complained of favouritism shown to blind people. Not so. The benefits won and still enjoyed were fought for by blind people. A hundred years later they are fighting equally hard to retain them. Blind people in Victoria showed greater foresight, were better led and self organised before other disability groups. They planned, persuaded, persevered and produced results. In so doing they acquired personal dignity and self esteem and won public respect. A significant part of that respect was due to the acceptable social manner in which their leaders conducted themselves and presented the issues.

Speaking of the early days Miss Aston wrote: "They were happy days full of enterprise and hopeful toil bringing alleviations for my handicapped family."

- 1894 Motivating the formation of the Braille Writers Association and Library.
- 1895 Formation of the Association for Advancement of the Blind.
- 1896 Home Visitation Programme initiated.
- 1896 Establishment of a Tea Agency to employ blind people.
- 1897 Introduction and circulation of overseas Braille Magazines.

- 1897 Appearance before the Royal Commission on Old Age Pensions.
- 1898 Introduced Financial Assistance for blind people through Loans and Grants.
- 1898 Amendment of restrictive regulations on interstate travel.
- 1899 Concession travel granted on Railways.
- 1902 Free postage introduced for Braille and Moon literature.
- 1902 Right to Vote granted at Federal Elections.
- 1904 First City Office opened with paid Secretary.
- 1904 Braille Correspondence Club commenced.
- 1907 Submission for Pension for incapacitated Blind. Granted in 1910.
- 1909 Right to Vote granted at State Elections.
- 1909 Home for Adult Blind founded at Brighton.
- 1911 Country Concert Tours introduced.
- 1911 Country Collector [blind] appointed.

4. BRIGHTON HOME - THE FIRST BRANCH

The living conditions of many blind people were deplorable. By 1900 Janie Robertson was no longer doing the visiting alone. The metropolitan area had been divided into 12 regions. A blind member had been appointed as official visitor in each. That year 180 visits were made to 90 people. The cost was 9/-. Each visitor told the same story.

As the reports came in over the next few years the magnitude of the home care problem became clear. Blind people were living a prisoner-like existence. Many were locked away in a room or outside shed. They were cut off from social enjoyment. They were not permitted a say in their own affairs, not even on the clothes they would wear. Women appeared to be worse off than men, particularly those without relatives or whose people were unwilling to give them a home.

Mr Will Hall spoke up at a Committee Meeting: "We will just have to take a house and look after those in the most desperate situations." Every member concurred. The benefits of such a home being on the seafront were expressed. Many purposes for such a home were envisaged and talked about in the following years. It was variously seen as a refuge for the oppressed, a home for the indigent, a rest home for the sick, a convalescent home, a place where a blind person could go while the carers had a break, temporary accommodation and permanent accommodation. The uses were unlimited. They had no money but they had a dream, a goal. The Committee advised its sighted friends of its decision.

Tom Marks in his profession as a musician was often employed at parties in the home of the wealthy. One such home was that of the Hon. F.S. Grimwade MHR and Mrs Grimwade. Mr and Mrs Grimwade were already supporters of the AAB. He decided to speak to Mrs Grimwade. She listened patiently as he presented the case and promised to see what could be done.

The result was a very successful gymkhana at the Glaciarium in 1906. Mr Paterson was Hon Secretary, Mr Grimwade, Treasurer, and Mrs Grimwade organised the attendance of her friends. The sum of £223. was raised and became the nucleus of the building fund. The event did more than raise money. The Hon. F S Grimwade and Mrs Grimwade who had previously been Patrons, now became lifelong friends and supporters of the AAB. A number of their friends became regular contributors.

The appointment of Trustees now became necessary. The persons selected were Miss Aston, Mr. Paterson and Dr. McBurney. On the death of the latter in 1910 Mr Monteath was appointed.

On a pleasant Sunday afternoon in 1909 Mr Paterson and his mother were strolling along the cliff top on the Hampton side of the Brighton Beach sea water baths. Looking across the railway line to an area still largely undeveloped, he noticed, facing the sea, a long veranda fronted grey stone house with a slate roof. "That's it", he exclaimed, "that's the house we need for the blind." Leaving his mother on a cliff top seat, he walked across to 'Woodburn' in Mair St

As he knocked on the door Mr Paterson saw the property was called 'Woodburn'. An elderly lady answered his knock. Doffing his hat Mr. Paterson introduced himself, adding "I want to buy your home for blind people". The lady appeared scandalised.

What impertinence. They had not been correctly introduced. Even worse he was talking business on the Lord's day. "This is the home of my sister and myself", she replied frigidly, "and we have no intention of selling. Good day to you Sir". Politely raising his hat in farewell Mr Paterson responded confidently, "you will sell. Here is the address where I can be contacted." He returned to his mother and to await developments.

Mr Paterson was contacted some months later. One of the sisters had died unexpectedly. The remaining sister found she could not cope on her own but did not wish to sell the house at that point. Mr Paterson conferred with Mr Monteath and the Committee. Agreement was reached that the AAB would lease the property with an option to purchase. The AAB took possession on the December 1, 1909. To the Committee of blind members the size of the venture was daunting.

Mr Monteath and Miss Aston visited furnishing houses soliciting gifts of suitable items. The response was generous. Mr Paterson undertook the laying of the linoleum and the general tidying of the house and grounds. Among the donations was a cabinet organ from Mrs Grimwade and a cow from Mr. R Short. The Committee deliberated and concluded that fodder for the cow was a legitimate charge against operating costs. The cow again attracted notice in 1913. She was sold with calf for £9.14.

Miss Aston also approached the Victorian Treasurer seeking financial assistance. Her plea was unsuccessful. However the Treasurer, Mr. W.A.Watt, later to be Premier and at another time, acting Prime Minister in the Federal Parliament for eighteen months, was an acquaintance of many years who had married one of her sighted girl friends. He asked many questions about services to blind people and expressed surprise at the limited role of the RVIB. It was shortly after this discussion some liberalisation in RVIB policies occurred. Her friendship with Mr Watt was of tremendous value to the AAB and the Braille Library in future years.

The willingness of the AAB to seek government funding at that time is intriguing. For the next forty five years any such suggestion was vigorously opposed by the Committee

The Home for the Blind was officially opened by Lady Carmichael, wife of the Governor of Victoria on July 3, 1910. The cost of the opening was £22. Donations collected totalled £11. A dozen people could be accommodated. The original intention was to take women only. The pressing need of a blind man caused the policy to be abandoned before it was ever implemented. Many of the inmates were short-term placements for various reasons. Others resided for the remainder of their lives. This became the general pattern.

Although Miss Aston and her colleagues were adamant that the blind should run their own affairs, they had the wisdom to perceive there were limitations to this desire and had the grace to accept that in some areas sighted assistance was needed. This requirement ranged from the helpful to the essential. Mr Paterson and Mr Monteath agreed with the principle that it was right and proper for blind people to have a say in their own affairs and felt the AAB was giving them this chance. They saw themselves as standing back ready to fill in any gaps caused by lack of sight. However, both sides recognised a partnership was the answer to the management and conduct of the Home.

An equal number of blind and sighted persons were appointed to the Home Committee.

Members of the first Committee were: Miss Aston, President AAB, Misses McDougall, Hansen, Munce, Tait. Mr and Mrs Paterson, Messrs Monteath, Norton, Campbell, Monks and Lee. Mr Monteath was elected Chairman, a position he held until 1928.

An early visitor to the Home for the Blind was the Premier, the Hon. J. Murray. He commented favourably on the Home and its economic management. From the start applications for admission far outnumbered available beds. The Hon. W. H. Edgar, Minister for Public Works arranged for a path, stairs and rail to be built from the cliff top opposite the Home, down to the sand. Mrs Edgar suggested an endeavour be made to purchase the Home.

Mrs Edgar introduced Miss Aston and Miss Munce to the Lady Mayoress of Melbourne, Mrs T.J. Davey. She in turn called together the Mayoresses of the other municipalities. Miss Aston outlined the purpose and needs of the Home. A strong Committee was formed to raise a 'Shilling Fund' in the metropolitan area. The Lord Mayor consented to be Treasurer. Miss Munce, who had been introduced to the AAB by Mr Monteath, was Hon. Secretary. The appeal was successful. The amount of £2000. was raised. The Home was purchased in 1912 for £1200. and £800. was left for extensions and renovations. Mr Paterson began immediately to prepare plans for both.

Miss Munce, who had given outstanding service, now became seriously ill and resigned. She was replaced by Mr. Bob Solly, another friend of Miss Aston's. He was MLA for Carlton from 1908-32 and had been a bootmaker, trade unionist and one time President of the Trades Hall Council. He was an excellent worker and participated in a number of the social activities of the AAB. He remained on the Committee until 1917.

The new wing was opened by Lady Denman on the March 22, 1914. The RVIB orchestra entertained the guests with musical selections. The Home could now accommodate 20 inmates.

The extension had cost more than anticipated. A debt of £300. remained. The Police, Military and Fire Brigade combined to hold a monster carnival at Luna Park. The amount raised was sufficient to discharge the debt. The Home was then valued at £3000.

Through the years neighbours of the Home gave grand support. Those who assisted included; Mesdames Duigan, Evans, Garland, Hardinge, Madsen, Collis, Misses Chase, Campbell, Cole, Evans, Price, Mr & Mrs Francis and Mr A'Beckett. In February 1932, Mr A'Beckett died as the result of an accident. This happened when he was returning home after reading to the inmates. Other friends invited the blind residents into their own homes. Prominent in this respect were Mrs Lawrence, Mrs Butler, Mrs Kewley, Mrs Price and Mrs Evans. Lady Munro Ferguson visited the Home in September 1914. After this she visited informally several times a year, endearing herself to all. On one occasion she turned up on Christmas Eve, spoke to all the inmates and left a Christmas cake. In 1920 she provided transport to take those

who were able to Government House for afternoon tea. Before to returning to England at the end of that year she called in to say goodbye.

Entertainment in and outside the Home was extensive. Regular performers were the Brighton Orchestra and the RVIB Choir and Orchestra. Among other groups were those organised by Mr. McMichael, Mr Walder, Mr Prescott, Mr Waxman and Miss Isaacs. Miss Baird who later went to South Africa to be married, took those so desiring to lectures and concerts. The Automobile Clubs took them out for car trips and picnics. Mr Herring and friends took them on a sail down the Bay in the P.S. Weeroona.

The churches went into action. Hampton Methodist was the first to assist in 1910. It kept on helping. St Leonard's Presbyterian, St Peter's Anglican, Brighton Baptist and Hampton Church of Christ followed. Most conducted services. The Committee found the inmates suffered from 'religious constipation' due to a surfeit of services on a Sunday. A roster was introduced. The entire congregation of one church attended accompanied by a horde of children and innumerable dogs. It was requested to reduce numbers. The Hon. W.H.Edgar introduced a hymn singing session on Sunday evenings. This continued for decades. Mr and Mrs Griffiths of the Hampton Church of Christ continued the practice. When her husband died Mrs Griffiths continued to visit the residents and completed fifty years of service prior to her death. Miss Cullen took the inmates out to church. This custom is still continued by members of various churches.

Miss Kate McDougall organised the first Garden Fete in 1914. It raised £30., a considerable sum.

In 1915, when seriously wounded soldiers started returning from the Dardenelles, the Brighton Home Committee wrote to the Minister for Defence, Senator Pearce, asking to be told if it could assist the blinded soldiers.

A Garden Party at the Home in 1917 celebrated 21 years of service by the AAB. A number of early blind members were present. A short historical sketch of the vicissitudes and triumphs of the AAB was issued to commemorate the event. The same year saw the death of Mr. Will Hall, the founding committee member who proposed the establishment of a Home.

In 1918 the Home was fully occupied and a tent was erected on the lawn to take the overflow. The demand for accommodation could not be met. The Committee decided to plan a new kitchen and new bedrooms. Mr Paterson prepared plans. The lowest tender was in excess of the funds available. The project was deferred. A shortage of building materials and increases in prices after the War added to the delay.

The Committee also expressed its sympathy to Mr Paterson following the death of his mother. An Honorary Life Member and Brighton resident, Mrs G.W.Paterson " had been actively associated with all that concerned the Home from its inception".

The influenza epidemic of 1919 was thought to have contributed to six of the eight deaths which occurred. This emphasised the need for a detached sick ward. Medical Services were honorary. The Oculist was Dr. E.L. Gault; Physicians Drs. Gray and Aitchinson; Dentist Dr Dudley Cole. Dr Gray left for war service in 1915. He was

welcomed back after four years active service at a Home function. Present were the Mayor of Brighton, district medical practitioners and many Brighton dignitaries. A dinner was also held to celebrate the Declaration of Peace.

The Home Committee started with an idealistic outlook. Members were providing a worthwhile and needed service. They expected the blind people admitted would be thankful and happy in their pleasant Home. Most were appreciative but, alas, the Committee had no experience in running a Home or knowledge of the behavioral problems which inevitably occur when people with different outlooks and standards are corralled together in a permanent situation. They learned from 'hands on' experience.

With applications for admission always exceeding beds available an eligibility measure was required. This was defined as " Blind in indigent circumstances and blind who require restoration of strength only air, good food, rest and kind treatment can give." An Annual Report later stated: "the sea air with the care and attention inmates receive from Matron and staff appears to have a very beneficial effect on their health. Convalescent cases have left the Home greatly benefited by their sojourn."

Rules were developed for the conduct of the Home. Some reflected the circumstances of that time. Others remain applicable today.

- Each inmate on entering the home is required to be clean. The Matron is empowered to enforce cleanliness in the person and clothing.
- Inmates shall not leave the grounds without Matrons permission.
- As a suitable diet is provided, no article of food or drink may be taken into the Home without the permission of Matron.
- All perishable foods shall be handed to Matron for storage.
- The inmates shall be present at all meals unless excused by Matron.
- Any inmate frequenting hotels or being under the influence of intoxicating liquor or bringing intoxicating liquor into the Home will be liable to dismissal.
- Visitors shall not bring intoxicating liquor into the Home.
- The inmates shall not receive any outside medical treatment without the consent of the Committee.
- Those physically capable shall help Matron on any needful duties of the Home and specially in rendering assistance to other inmates.
- Discussions of a religious or political nature are prohibited.
- Any infringement of the rules may be followed by dismissal from the Home.

The visiting hours were Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday from 3pm till 5pm.

The Home Committee appointed from among its members three house visitors. These rotated each month. Their task was to talk to the inmates, Matron, inspect the cleanliness of the Home and report complaints and needs to the Home Committee.

The complaints were many. The test for admission in the early years was inadequate. Some of the blind people admitted were unsuitable. They were either discharged, transferred to Cheltenham Benevolent Home or to Mont Park Asylum. Others could not relate to the persons in their room. Room movement was frequent. Some permanent residents strove to be top of the pecking order and rule the roost. The

inmates complained about the Matron and staff. Matron and staff complained about the inmates and each other. Complaints about food were constant. - not the adequacy but the monotony. Depending on the incident, individual inmate, matron or staff member, was summoned before the Home Committee and justice,-as Committee Members saw it,- was administered.

In 1920 Mr A.V. Worrall, Mrs Collis and Mrs Hardinge were appointed to the Home Committee.

The cost of operating the Home cannot be determined accurately. By 1920 the accounts show the cost was approximately £1000 a year with the inmates contributing £500. The unknown factor was the value of gifts in kind. The local people were most generous in providing a wide assortment of consumables. Eighty five dozen eggs were donated to one appeal. Shopkeepers donated left-overs. Mrs Hardinge donated breakfast for the inmates every Sunday. One friend gave a donation of one ton of mallee roots each winter. After the War the Defence Department donated blankets, overcoats and other surplus supplies.

In 1922 the General Committee instructed that plans for the long awaited extension to be prepared. Mr P.A.Oakley of Oakley and Parkes, Architects, was commissioned. Mr Paterson naturally assisted. The project included a new kitchen, larger dining room additional lounge and a mens' wing of 17 single bedrooms. At that time single rooms were well ahead of current thinking. The official opening took place on May 27, 1924. His Excellency, the Governor, the Earl of Stradbroke officiated. The cost was £6000. The bank was owed £1300 when the accounts were settled. While the men addicted to nicotine could go outside for their smoke in the summer, winter was a different proposition. A Smoke Room was added for them in 1927. This was opened on December 9 by the Lord Mayor, Sir Stephen Morell.

An important event in 1928 was the formation of the Brighton Auxiliary. The Mayoress, Mrs. E. Flanagan, was elected President. Two long time volunteers and now committee members, Miss Evans and Mrs Norman, were elected Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer respectively. The objectives of the Auxiliary were to provide comforts, entertainment and social activities for the inmates. In a very short time it had one hundred and fifty enthusiastic members. Miss Evans became ill and was succeeded by Mrs Mace in 1932. She in turn was followed by Mrs Anderson in 1936. Mrs Flanagan continued as President. In 1929 an Auxiliary was formed in Sandringham and another in Caulfield in 1930. Both merged into the Brighton Auxiliary.

Throughout the following twenty five years the Auxiliary was essential to the functioning of the Home. Members raised the funds needed for furnishings, linen, crockery and items of equipment. They met the cost of special functions and arranged an abundance of entertainment.

In 1928 Mr Worrall assumed the responsibility of Chairman. Mr Monteath retired the following year. Prior to his retirement the Lord Mayor, Cr. Harold Luxton, visited the Home and unveiled photographs of the three Trustees; Miss Aston, Mr. Paterson and Mr. Monteath. Seven of the pioneer members of the AAB visited Mr Monteath in his home and presented him with a Letter of Appreciation of his untiring service over more than 30 years.

The 1929 Annual Report reports the appointment of two Honorary Physicians, Dr Gerald Weigall and the first lady doctor, Dr. Barbara Cameron. In the latter appointment the Committee was far ahead of contemporary society.

Mrs Hardinge a long-time, faithful volunteer died in 1926, leaving a legacy to the Home. This was received in 1928 and amounted to more than £2000. The bequest enabled the Elizabeth Hardinge infirmary wing, consisting of two three bed wards and two single rooms, to be built in 1930. The Brighton Auxiliary equipped the infirmary with 'furnishings of the best quality and in excellent taste'. The opening ceremony was performed by His Excellency, the Governor, Lord Somers, on July 23, 1930.

The 1930s saw a number of changes to the Home Committee. Sighted ladies included Mesdames Green, Holden, Madsen, Collis, Johnstone, Paterson, Dillon, Norman and Miss Dowsley. The principal male members were Mr Worrall, Mr Norton and Mr Paterson. Representatives from the blind members who served for varying terms were, Mrs Bartlett, Mrs Hutchinson, Mrs Barkel, Miss Hirst, Miss Boyce later to be Mrs. Nothling and Miss McClelland.

On rare occasions the blind representatives showed a lack of compassion, even for their close friends. Miss Carrie Hansen, who had given more than thirty years of devoted service, was seriously ill. An application had been made on her behalf for admission to the infirmary. Because some trifling detail had not been filled in, admission was deferred. They would not show favouritism. She was admitted but died soon after in January 1931. A memorial service was held at Kooyong.

A House Committee of sighted ladies supervised the staff and domestic affairs. Official Visitors, mainly the blind representatives, made contact with the inmates each month.

The 1930s and 1940s were troubled years. An episode with Matron Secomb in 1936 conveys the general picture. Questioned about the staff and related matters, Matron responded: that there was not a certificated nurse on the staff as it was most difficult to get a trained woman to do chronic duties; that only rarely was the cook in charge and that was when she was short staffed; that the attitude of some staff members was not severe and dominating as alleged; that staff did not interfere with readers and sewers; inmates were not scolded when they lost their way nor were they victimised when they made complaints. If the official visitors went around badgering the inmates for complaints, the inmates would feel obligated to produce some if only to please the visitors. Staff were not forbidden to be friendly with the inmates but they were asked to keep out of their bedrooms and the dining room when they were off duty. The Home Committee felt the frequent changes in staff indicated general unrest and lack of supervision. Matron felt this charge was particularly hurtful as all changes of staff had been done through the Home Committee. The discussion led to more Rules, which, hoped the Home Committee, would result in closer and better relationships.

The key person in the detailed day-to-day operations was Mrs Norman. As a visitor to the Home and a voluntary reader for many years she knew it inside out. She had a modern outlook. As early as 1925 she obtained a wireless for the inmates. The committee minutes record the fifteen year saga which followed. The speaker was too loud or it was too soft. The signal was too weak. The earphones were not working.

'Why did 'she' always get the programme 'she' wanted when I wanted something else'? 'Why was it in that room and not this room'? 'Why did the women have it and not the men'? 'Why can't I have my own'? 'Why can't I have a crystal set'? The people in the Hostel are allowed to have them, 'why can't we'?

The Committee would not budge. There would only be one wireless in the home. As WWII approached the rule was partially relaxed. An appeal was made for a wireless for the infirmary and another for the mens' smoke room.

Knowing the need for some form of food preservation, Mrs Norman took matters into her own hands in 1930 and sought donations to purchase a 'complete electric cool storage unit', to wit, a refrigerator.

In 1937 she arranged for a Hoover automatic electric floor polishing machine costing £18. to be demonstrated. The Committee saw nothing wrong with the existing hands and knees procedure and resolved no action be taken. It finally relented in 1940 when staff could not be obtained. That same year she obtained a donation of £20. from the Yarra Falls Social Club towards the purchase of a washing machine. The Committee decided to lend its electric auto tray to a service hostel for the duration of the war. This gave her the chance to push for electric fans for the infirmary. The operating cost would be balanced by the power saved on the auto-tray

The House Committee under Mrs Norman looked after food purchase and service. They studied the usage of various items and investigated in detail any excess. They played suppliers in Hampton and Brighton against each other purchasing from the cheapest source. They maintained the cost of food supplies for forty people plus staff at fifty pounds a month throughout the 1930s. Patients kept complaining about the monotony of the meals. The menu was investigated. Enquiries showed it had been largely standardised.

Breakfast: Porridge and toast.

Morning Tea: Soup.

Dinner:-	Monday.	Stewed chops. Jam Tart.
	Tuesday	Minced steak. Milk pudding.
	Wednesday	Roast leg of mutton. Steam pudding.
	Thursday	Steak and Kidney pie. Milk pudding.
	Friday	Corned beef or Fish. Lemon Sago.
	Saturday	Sausages. Milk pudding.
	Sunday	Roast beef. Fruit and Custard.
Tea.		Bread and butter. Cheese, Scones. Raisin bread once a week.

All residents, one breakfast per month of bacon and eggs supplied by the Auxiliary.

A dietitian was engaged to develop a more varied and suitable diet. Success was qualified. Such cooks as were available, arrived and departed with great rapidity. Their competence, if any, was limited to the simplest cooking.

This, no doubt, was one of the reasons for the welcome extended to visitors who brought in dainty little snacks. These were stored in wardrobes and dressing tables contrary to the Rules. Guerilla warfare on this matter was constant between the inmates on one side and the Matron and House Committee on the other.

The invading rats loved the situation. They had a major drain nearby, ample protection and a lovely sea view from the scrub along the foreshore. They also had, if they so desired after a feast, a refuge under the floor of the Home extensions, which the building cost conscious Mr Paterson had sitting very close to the ground.

The Committee knew food storage capacity was inadequate. Mrs Norman had complained she could not buy groceries wholesale because of it. The Committee occasionally brought in pest exterminators. Two leading companies refused the work. They maintained the situation was beyond salvaging and to tackle it would only ruin their reputation. The home general duties man was instructed, 'kill the rats'.

Finally, Matron was fed up. She accused the man of not doing his job effectively. She told him that if he could not do better he should get a shanghai, sit up at night and take pot shots at them. That did it. The two were summoned before the Committee. The handyman accused Matron of humiliating him in front of the staff. The Committee terminated the services of both. The rats, unperturbed, remained.

Patient problems continued to add to the Committee burden. The basic charge was 16/- a week. However, this was varied according to means or nursing load to between 10/- and 22/-. The inmates talked. Arguments followed. 'Why should I pay more than her'? Every few years there would be an accusation of minor theft. Did this really occur or was it the state of the inmate's mind?. The Committee never could find out.

A couple became engaged. This was really serious. A deputation of Committee members talked to them, warning that if they behaved in an unseemly manner or married they would have to leave the Home. The engagement was broken off. This incident made the Committee doubt if it had been exercising the proper moral responsibility. A new Rule was issued. Men were not to go into the women's corridors or sitting room. Women were not to go to the men's area.

Sometimes a Committee member initiated embarrassment. One blind members' representative, Mrs Emily Barkel, after her official visit, reported to the Committee with considerable concern that inmates were being bathed during the day. 'This was known to be dangerous to health'. Matron was summoned to the meeting and invited to respond.

What an opportunity! It was hard, she said, to get some of the inmates to bathe at any time. Inadequate numbers of staff meant the inmates had to be bathed as opportunity occurred. The hot water supply was so poor, after the evening washing up there was little hot water for baths. However if the lady could prove bathing in the daylight was an injurious procedure, the system would be changed somehow. End of story.

Rev. Bro O'Neill was elected a blind members' representative to the Home Committee in 1932. He soon went into action. He could see no reason why political discussion should be forbidden. Surely this was an infringement of the inmates rights? The Home Committee felt the maintenance of harmony was more important. The Rule would stay.

The custom was to say grace before meals. Bro. O'Neill intimated that in having a general grace, members of the Catholic faith were being compelled to take part in an act of devotion contrary to the teaching of their Church. The Home Committee agreed to dispense with grace and to have a minute's silence in which each inmate could, if so desired, say his or her own grace. With Mr Paterson on the General Committee, the response was quick and final; 'Grace must be said before meals as has been the Rule'.

In 1938 Mrs Martha Anderson joined the Home Committee. Cr. Orr was added the following year. The Home Committee was exceptionally strong at the commencement of the World War II.

However, a competent Committee did not mean peaceful relationships within the Home. The AAB Secretary, George Fowler attended the Home Committee Meetings, compiled the minutes, listed the complaints and transmitted them to the General Committee. On his pre-advised visits to the Home sweet reason temporarily prevailed. He did not involve himself in squabbles and contentious matters pointing out he was merely the secretary and liaison officer, not the manager. His undoubted wisdom was not appreciated. At one General Committee Meeting the President, Miss Aston, said he could do more to keep the peace. He was instructed to pay irregular visits. He visited the Home the very next morning and encountered two nurses working together. "Hello", said one, "this is not your usual day". "What, haven't you heard yet"?, asked the other. "he has been told to pay surprise visits and try and catch us out".

In his following report to the General Committee Mr Fowler wrote: "Although Committee decisions are never a secret to the staff of the Hostel and Home, I had felt that as such detailed arrangements had been made for making my visits surprise ones I could count on the co-operation of members of the Committee in implementing their own ideas." The custom of blind committee members ringing their friends in the Home and Hostel after Committee Meetings, discussing all that had taken place and determining their attitude to various matters persisted until the late 1950s.

With the exceptions of Matrons Cox and Kelly staff turnover had been constant. The staff 'lived in'. Their rooms were located along the patients. Wages paid were low, conditions not attractive. Domestic staff received 25/-, Seniors 27/6 and Matron 60/- a week. The legal position on salaries and wages had been investigated. In 1932 the Department of Labour advised, that as the AAB was a charitable organisation and no grant was received from the Government there were no constraints. In 1936 it was informed wages had to be paid to domestic staff in accordance with the provisions of the Hospital and Benevolent Asylum Award. The AAB obtained legal opinion which said this was not so. The existing rates and conditions were continued.

In 1938 it was advised the provisions of the Hospital Nurses Award had to be observed in respect of trained staff. The Inspector of Charities was contacted to clarify the Home's classification. He responded it could no longer be regarded as a 'Convalescent Home' and was in fact a 'Benevolent Home'. By this time WWII had begun.

A number of staff members joined the Defence Services. There was a shortage of trained nurses. The Committee resolved to use semi trained nurses and indeed untrained staff. In a period of 10 months, 73 people were employed to maintain a staff

establishment of 10 persons. Wages which had been £50. a month through the 1930s rose to £100. in 1940.

The staff situation became so serious the Director of Manpower and the Women's Employment Office were approached for help. The wages of the general duties man rose progressively from 30/- to 60/-. One of the more capable male inmates was paid 25/- a week and permitted to have a crystal set, in return for cleaning the mens wing. The women residents were asked to give greater assistance. After some splashes and spills, the Committee instructed the Matron to tell them the task of emptying what were politely and euphemistically called 'bedroom vessels,' would remain a staff responsibility.

In 1942 Cr Orr accepted responsibility for organising the air raid precautions. A House Warden was appointed. Each evening at dusk his duty was:

- To ensure all blinds were drawn and shutters adjusted;
- To place stirrup pumps and hoses in position;
- To bring in the step ladders and position them ready for use. [access to ceiling fires caused by bombing.]; and
- To check and fill the hurricane lamps.

War Risk insurance was taken out on the buildings and contents. In 1944 the air raid shelters in the passages were dismantled.

National rationing was introduced. The Commonwealth was asked to approve the purchase of a 60ft garden hose. The Home was restricted to three tons of briquettes every six months. Lack of co-operation led the Committee to issue an edict that staff would not receive their pay until they handed over their tea, sugar, and butter coupons. The Secretary was asked to try and arrange a ration of cigarettes and tobacco for the men. He succeeded.

In 1942 the men were engaged in making camouflage nets and the women in knitting. The weekly inmates fee was raised to 25/-. The Committee opened a Patients Trust Account for the protection of their funds.

Early in 1943 Mr Paterson applied to the MMBW for an 1½ inch water service for the few feet between the water main in the street and the meter just inside the fence in order to improve the hot water service. The MMBW refused. Hot water services were not classified as essential. Mr Paterson thought hard. An invitation was issued through the newspapers for volunteers to come and transform the spare land at the rear of the Home into a vegetable garden. This was an essential service. He fiddled with the water pipes, closed them, cut and joined them and installed new ones finally getting a dribble of water to the vegetable garden. He then applied to the MMBW for a 2 inch service, additional to the existing service which was inadequate for an essential service. The Permit was refused.

Finally in 1945 approval was received for the original inch and a half service. Mr Paterson could afford to smile. The Collis property next door 11-13 Mair St had been purchased. The Home had its two supply points, joined up in another maze of plumbing. The MMBW finally caught up many years later when the various property titles were consolidated. By then the Home was hooked into six water meters.

Mid 1944 the Home Committee acting on the Matrons advice closed the infirmary due to lack of staff. Present at the meeting was Mr Mackenzie who acquiesced in the decision. There would be no more admissions. When the decision was reported to the General Committee meeting, Mr Mackenzie, who was present, moved that the infirmary be reopened. The General committee agreed. The infirmary was reopened before it had time to close. The visiting hours which had remained unchanged since 1910 were now amended to 10am to noon, 2pm to 5pm, 6.30pm to 8pm daily.

With the war drawing to a close the General Committee resolved that the wages and conditions of the various awards be observed. The move was long overdue. Staff at both the Home and Hostel had complained to their respective unions, the Charities Board and the Labour Department about hours worked, overtime with no pay, and wages paid. In most instances a settlement was negotiated. One case was taken to court, lost, then won on appeal. The 40 hour week was introduced, the manpower situation eased and staff numbers increased. This created a new set of problems which had the Hon Treasurer of the Association, Mr A.W.Ness, telling the Committees that costs, particularly wages, were too high. A special committee was formed to examine and reduce expenditure.

In 1946 after 33 years of extraordinary service Mrs Norman resigned to move to NSW. A farewell function was arranged and presentations made. Blind and sighted friends expressed both their appreciation of her service and regret at her departure. Mrs Martha Anderson took over her role.

The Silver Jubilee of the Association was celebrated in 1947. Dame Enid Lyons M.P. planted a Queensland Box tree at the Brighton Home in memory of the pioneers. A plaque inscribed with the names of the eight founders was placed at the base of the tree. This tree and the plaque were removed 30 years later to allow the building of a new nursing wing.

The 1947 Annual Report stated the number of applications for admission was again far in excess of capacity and emphasised the urgent need for new Homes. The state of many applicants was not only pitiable but actually desperate. A serious contributing factor was the acute housing shortage following the discharge of WWII veterans.. In some cases members had been evicted. One such person was Miss Alice McClelland, a reviser on the Braille Library staff and an active blind member. Miss McClelland approached the Hostel Committee and asked if she could have her meals at the Hostel if a 'room only' was all she could find. The Committee agreed, adding that if desired, she could also have a bath from time to time.

To partially relieve the situation, the Collis house at 11 Mair St was converted to an annexe with accommodation for 10 ladies. It was opened in 1950.

Mr Worrall attended and chaired the August 1952 Committee Meeting in good health. Two weeks later he was dead. He had been spending most of his time at the Home unofficially acting as Manager, trying to maintain peace and retain staff. He had given 32 years of conscientious service and was greatly missed.

This chapter is a reflection of the era. A mix of conquest and complaint. A microcosm of the wider community which had endured a financial crash, war, great depression and war. The majority of the inmates had been blind from birth. They had

traumatic experiences. They had participated in few social activities. The staff, restricted in educational development by the need to work from between 12 and 14 years of age, had limited potential.

Conversely there was the more favoured section of the community which voluntarily accepted heavy responsibility. For 40 years the Home Committee had done a magnificent job in a 'make do' situation. It never had sufficient money, staff or facilities, yet it managed. Harassed by problems, it did not quit. Burdened with responsibilities, it rose above them. Never once in all those long years could it be said that through a failure of staff or committee an inmate had died. Indeed, the restoration to health of those who resided for various lengths of time for convalescence and the longevity of the permanent residents were a tribute to the care given.

The confidence displayed by the General Committee and Blind Members in the Home and its leadership; the high standing of the Home in the district; the wide local support given and the consistent involvement of the neighbours, was a measurement of the success of Home Committee and a memorial to the humanity, faithfulness and service of the committee members.

5. GARDEN OF TEARS - FIELD OF JOYS

Rejection. Miss Aston considered the years prior to her 39th birthday in 1912 were most enjoyable. She was fully occupied with her work for blind people, literary interests, church duties and pupils.

In 1912 an advertisement inserted in the daily press by the Education Department invited applications for the position of head teacher at the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind. Aware of the traditional belief that blind persons did not have the capacity to teach blind children, she showed little interest. Mr Monteath did not agree and persuaded her to apply. Her application was successful.

Elation turned to dismay when informed by the Chief Inspector of the Education Department that the RVIB management refused to let her into the school. The grounds were that she was 'quarrelsome', a 'trouble maker'; that they had no confidence in a blind teacher and were 'not prepared to sacrifice the children'. The top standard at the time was fourth grade. There was a view that too much education would raise the disabled above their status in life, give them inappropriate ideas and make them dissatisfied.

As the RVIB school was a private school supported by charitable donations, which paid the salary of the Principal and all other teachers, the objection had to be taken seriously. Miss Aston offered to withdraw her application. The Education Department refused. She was given a four month trial in a sighted school. The reports were favourable. The Department insisted that she be accepted. This was done reluctantly with the proviso that she withdraw from public connection with other organisations serving blind people.

In 1913, Miss Aston's brother Steve married and her mother died of cancer. She moved to her own cottage in Windsor where she lived with a housekeeper companion.

The school staff aware of management feelings made her life a misery. Years of trials and stress followed. These were counterbalanced by the joy and satisfaction of teaching, stimulating student ambitions and lifting their horizons. Only her faith, determination and belief that she was blazing a trail for other blind people kept her going. Her hope was not misplaced. Standards improved. One student, Donald Forbes went through university and returned to the RVIB as a Department teacher. Another young pupil, George Findlay, went on to take a Bachelor of Music degree and become one of Melbourne's most respected choirmasters and church organists. In time non sighted teachers came to be accepted as staff members.

Although Miss Aston felt her treatment had almost amounted to persecution, in later years she took pride in having a part in laying the foundation of what had become an outstanding school with an enviable record of educational achievement.

What hurt most and nearly broke her heart after being appointed a teacher, was the reaction of the blind members of the AAB. The deep wounds, inflicted by those she thought were her friends, were devastating. Her seventeen years of unceasing devoted service counted for nothing. A section of the membership called her as a betrayer, traitor, deserter. This hostility, so unexpected, was shattering to her. Certainly the RVIB was not popular with the workers, but it was hypocritical that those persons

loudest in proclaiming her guilt were themselves employed in the RVIB Workshop and depended on that organisation for their livelihood.

Stirred up by the aggressive fury of the workers' group the blind membership made her position clear. She was no longer wanted in or out of meetings. When she sought to speak she was refused a hearing.

Despite her distress Miss Aston's heart was still with the Association. She was determined to continue helping. She continued as a Trustee. This meant some involvement. Loyal members too, continued to visit her for a chat and to discuss any matter of importance. Her influence behind the scene continued to be very real.

As is so often the case with malcontents, some appear like whirlwinds, create havoc and then vanish to create mischief elsewhere. Others quieten down. A few remain thorns in the flesh. Active in Miss Aston's removal and frequently appearing as opposition members until the late 1950's were Mr. and Mrs. Fred Barkel. Typical of many blind people of the time, they were poorly educated. They were also energetic, willing and hard workers, immensely loyal to the AAB, always battling for more money for individual blind members, quite unafraid to express their opinions, but were not always able to foresee the consequences of their actions.

Not even her sorrow could take away from Miss Aston the satisfaction at having been a leading figure in a remarkable record of achievements in a minimum of time:

New Braille Library. An announcement of major importance for the blind people of Victoria was made in 1918. The AAB with its many Braille readers was an interested observer.

At the Annual Meeting of the Victorian Braille Writers Association in April that year the Trustees of the Edward Wilson Estate announced the gift of a new Braille Library to cost some £4000. The tragic casualties of World War 1 had swelled the constituency of blind and vision impaired people. At the time 27 blinded servicemen had returned to Victoria from St Dunstons Training Centre England. When laying the Foundation Stone in October 1918, Sir Edward Mitchell, a Trustee, said their decision had been strongly influenced by the fact it would benefit soldiers who had lost their sight in the war. "We who enjoy sight should never forget how much we owe to them," he said. The building was completed in six months. It was opened on April 26, 1919 by Sir George Fairbairn, another Trustee, who handed over the key to Miss Aston. This was a moment of great joy for her.

Behind the scenes there had been dissension. Land facing Commercial Rd., South. Yarra had been purchased by the Braille Writers Association in 1917. Hearing of the Trustees intention the RVIB had sought to dissuade them, saying the library for the blind should be in its hands. The Trustees finally arranged a meeting to resolve the matter. Miss Aston, then employed at the RVIB School, was asked to speak on behalf of the readers. She submitted that recreation activities should be kept separate from the work atmosphere. Further, the happy personal relationships found in the Library could not be duplicated in an institution exercising the discipline of education and controlling the working life and wages of so many of the blind readers. This public

appearance did not endear her to the RVIB. The Trustees found in favour of the Braille Writers.

The RVIB action was an indication of disturbance at the rapid growth of Library services and the programme of the AAB. Both were attracting increasing public attention. They were now seen as threatening the service monopoly and fund-raising activities of the RVIB.

A custom designed Braille Library had been an urgent need for years. Storage of Braille volumes was a massive problem. The average paperback alone became some six to eight volumes, each about the size of a metropolitan telephone directory. The initial stock of the library was hand copied braille volumes. Eight volumes were in use the first year. At the end of five years there were 1247 volumes representing 360 titles. The output of the voluntary transcribers steadily increased each year reaching 528 volumes in 1915. The Mission for the Outdoor Blind had merged with the Braille Library in 1907. The Library then took over the responsibility of teaching the adult blind state-wide to read and write Braille or Moon.

The opening of the new Library was followed by a rapid increase in transcribed books. An average of 550 volumes were added every year thereafter until the 1960s. By then the Library had become the largest of its kind in the Commonwealth and the third largest in the world. A great effort for a little mustard seed. The ranks of braille readers was also swelling. As the level of education at the RVIB School rose so did the number of students who continued reading. Blinded ex servicemen added to the number.

The Home Teaching Service of the Library, a very successful activity which operated throughout the State until 1974, also fed in a stream of new readers. The teachers were, Mr. George Benson who served for 40 years and was widely revered and regarded as the successor to Thomas James of the previous century. Mr. Ivan Molloy who served for 18 years. Ivan, a recognised leader among the blind, made major contributions in the braille, welfare and sporting areas. Mr. Peter Sumner, a younger man, left the library service to serve full time in the work of the Christian Foundation for the Blind which he had founded. Peter was supported by his wife and partner, Pearl and Ivan by his wife Lorraine. All were active members of the AAB. The competence, knowledge and experience of these blind teachers was so extensive they were able to incorporate welfare and rehabilitation counselling and practice into their schedules.

Notable among the blind staff members within the Library who checked the work of the sighted transcribers were Miss Alice McClelland, a reviser for 55 years and Geoffrey Wilson a reviser for 34 years.

Further land was purchased at the rear of the Library in 1923. A further allocation from the Edward Wilson Trustees and a bequest from Richard Gibson enabled the Braille Hall to be erected in 1927. With a seating capacity of 300 Braille Hall was in constant use for entertainment purposes. Extensive renovations and alterations were made to both buildings in the following decades but plans for further building did not come to fruition.

The Charities Board registered the Victorian Association of Braille Writers in 1924. In 1950 it was registered by the Hospitals and Charities Commission. A more important change took place in 1962 when it was incorporated under the Companies Act.

Although the Braille Library was happy to be funded by subscriptions and donations the Committee felt the State Government should make a contribution. A number of approaches failed. Success came when Mr W.A.Watt became Premier and Treasurer. In 1913 a small grant was received. By 1917 it had increased to £270 a year. The annual amount fluctuated thereafter until a new funding arrangement in 1975.

After WWI the Library felt much had been accomplished in literary education. A lack continued in respect of higher education. The Committee established the first scholarship in Australia for a blind person. The Education Department agreed to provide a place for the scholarship student. In 1920 two students sat for the ordinary scholarship paper with the exception of drawing and geometry. As both students were successful two scholarships were awarded. The two boys, John Byrne and George Findlay had been educated at the RVIB school, tutored by Tilly Aston and attended Gardiner High School in open competition with the sighted. George Findlay went on to pass the Senior Public Examination with Honours, gain a musical exhibition and a scholarship at the Conservatorium of Music.

The volume of work in transcribing study materials increased as more students enrolled in higher studies. A number of transcribers was engaged solely on students work. In the 1950s the Library turned to Pentridge Gaol for assistance. A number of prisoners learned Braille and transcribed many volumes. A few specialised in student material. The student service was further extended in 1960 when several transcribers started reading material to blind students either at the university or in their own homes. Despite these efforts the Braille Library could not keep pace with student educational demands. The position was further aggravated by the failure of the Education Department. to make the reading lists for each year available until the last moment leaving little time for transcribing. The RVIB and St Paul's School had, of necessity, to produce much of their student materials. The braille barriers which stopped Tilly Aston's progress at the university had now been removed.

Miss Aston resigns as teacher.

In her 12th year as a teacher Miss Aston had a slight stroke and a fall in the class room which permanently injured her back. She applied for sick leave without pay. As her illness lingered the possibility of a return to work faded and the prospect of losing her home increased. Some friends offered to assist financially. They pointed out Miss Aston had always professed faith in God, that the Father of all did not rain down pound notes from the clouds but preferred to use his willing children to deliver them when necessary. A giver not a taker, Miss Aston found yielding humiliating and hard. Her illness led to her retirement from the Education Department in 1925.

At the time a blind person was not considered an acceptable risk for superannuation purposes. However the Education Department to its credit paid her a weekly allowance of £2, on which, with care, she managed to live. The AAB urged her to accept their offer of financial help. Miss Aston appreciated the gesture but could not do so. This was not because of petty pride, she said, but because of a strong revulsion to using for her own benefit funds which even indirectly she had been associated with

raising. She did, however, appreciate the help of her fellow blind in selling one of her books. The proceeds helped to relieve her lack of finance.

Some fifteen months after her retirement while still confined to bed, she received a visit from the Matron and Superintendent of the RVIB. Speaking on behalf of the Committee they told her she had been outstanding as a teacher and an inspiration to the children. She was then presented with a Life Governor's Certificate.

A few years later she was present at a function addressed by the retired Chief Inspector of the Education Department. He noticed her in the audience. In his introductory remarks he praised her as a teacher of superlative quality, an inspiration to her handicapped children and a source of inspiration to himself.

These two events and knowledge that suitable blind children were being encouraged to progress to higher education, gave assurance that her years as a teacher had been a success.

Being 'shut in' for some years as a consequence of her back injury, Miss Aston returned to her literary pursuits. One of her books of poems, 'Songs of Light' received a good press in England. She received a letter from Queen Mary's secretary. Her greatest gratification came from prominent English author and critic Douglas Sladen. He wrote: *"the most brilliant blind woman in the world, who in the seven years of childhood during which sight was vouches to her learned of mankind what others learned in a lifetime. She knows nature and human nature as well as if she saw them with her own eyes and has a most delightful way of expressing her opinions to those who see with their eyes. She is a beautiful poet and a faithful writer of stories"*.

Helen Keller, with whom Miss Aston had been in correspondence for many years, wrote on receiving Songs of Light: *"I trust you will accept my grateful thanks for the joy you have given me. It is a joy like the exquisite fragrance of the petal shower falling upon the child's hair in your poem. I cannot realise that darkness encompasses you about as a nest when your songs sparkle through my fingers in dots of light. Indeed there are many lines in which my heart beats a sympathetic chime with your own"*.

Miss Aston's literary efforts led to her becoming widely known as Australia's blind poet. The Commonwealth Government awarded her a Commonwealth Literary Fellowship in 1935 which carried with it a grant of £1 a week.

6. FLOURISHING GROWTH

The eight years from 1912 to 1920, following the withdrawal of Miss Aston from office in the AAB was a period of consolidation. The War years 1914 to 1918 in particular restricted thoughts of expansion.

Existing services continued to grow. The metropolitan Home Visitation Service continued with Miss Carrie Hansen and Mrs Bartlett as the principal Visitors. Country areas received renewed attention after the War. Mr Marks visited Ballarat in 1918. Mr A.W.Robinson followed up in 1920 and also visited Geelong. Miss Robertson visited Bendigo in 1920. Mrs Bartlett retired in 1929. At the time she was the Country Collector, a position she had held since 1923. The blind membership increased from 300 in 1910 to 550 in 1930.

Culture remained important with attendance at musical events and lectures arranged by the Committee. The lectures included such topics as 'Aboriginal Life', the 'Australian Constitution', 'Astronomy', 'The Effect of the War on the Civilised World', 'Likely Post War Problems', 'Aeronautics', 'Radio', and, inevitably, 'Temperance'.

Self employment and home industries loomed large in Committee thinking. Classes were conducted in handcrafts, boot repairing, french polishing and bark plaiting. A knitting machine was purchased from overseas. Knitting flourished in the war years. A typewriter was purchased to enable blind girls to learn. The classes were held in a variety of locations including the office, private homes, ANA clubrooms and church halls.

In 1913 the Blind Country Concert Party was established as a regular part of the fund raising programme. For two decades the Concert Party operating in both the city and country raised a large proportion of AAB funds, provided income for the blind artists and advanced recognition of the abilities of blind people. In 1916 a trial course for the practice of massage was conducted. Qualified instructors were engaged and six students enrolled. A room was made available by the South. Yarra Branch of the A.N.A. Two students qualified. One was George Benson. He was elected Treasurer of the AAB the following year.

Social Activities featured largely in the lives of blind people. These were a means of generating interest, keeping the blind people together, checking on their general wellbeing and giving them a tasty supper. They were held at various venues in the city and inner eastern suburbs. An annual social was held at St Jude's Anglican Church, Carlton, for the blind of the northern suburbs. This was continued until the late 1950s. An annual Christmas function was also held at the Cheltenham Benevolent Home. The AAB provided a special tea for the blind inmates. This was followed by a concert to which all patients were invited.

With Miss Aston, the vibrant prime mover no longer present, the remaining Committee Members though not influential gained in experience and wisdom. They recognised they did not have entree as peers into the business and philanthropic community and later that stagnation was beginning to be manifest as they played musical chairs with the official positions. They also realised that their sighted friends were bearing a heavy burden in fund-raising and the Brighton Home management.

Blind - Sighted Partnership. Changed thinking led to a special meeting in 1920 when amendments to the Constitution were tabled and carried. These amendments were a major departure from the original policy of the Society. They opened the way for the appointment of a sighted President, Treasurer and three members of the Committee. In this manner the concept of partnership was legalised.

Although the blind members still controlled the organisation this change was seen by some blind activists as another betrayal. 'Only the blind understood the blind'; 'Only the blind could speak for the blind'; 'The blind could manage their own affairs'; were common slogans.

Mr Maxwell was invited to accept appointment as President. He occupied the office until 1934. Mr Clive Norton, treasurer of the Brighton Home was nominated as Treasurer. He served in that position until 1937. Mr.W.C Willmott J.P. Mr A.V.Worrall and Mr W.H.Paterson became members of the Committee.

Mr Maxwell had just assumed office when he lost the sight of one eye due to a detachment of the retina. His other eye was also affected. A letter written by him at the time was used extensively.

"My Dear Friends,

You Men and Women who enjoy the gift of sight ought to thank God every day of your lives for such an inestimable blessing, and never miss an opportunity of lending a helping hand to those who walk in darkness. Life at best is no easy thing for those in full enjoyment of all their faculties; how difficult it is for the sightless I now know.

In shouldering my own burden I have been sustained by a wealth of affectionate sympathy, which has made the task of bearing it comparatively easy. But there are many others less favourably situated - obscure and lonely souls who are bravely and uncomplainingly carrying their heavy load. It is for such that I plead.

The keynote of the work of the Association for Advancement of the Blind, of which I have the honour to be President is "self help" The Association aims at fostering in its members a spirit of independence and self reliance and has in the past been the means of rendering invaluable assistance to many a blind person who otherwise would have been compelled to give up the unequal struggle and to become the recipient of mere casual charity. There is in the Association a fine spirit, not only of self help, but also mutual help, the more gifted and more favoured members sparing no pains in their efforts to be of service to their less gifted fellows.

Our Association requires considerable funds in order to efficiently overtake the work that lies to its hand, and it is because I know from experience the splendid generosity of the people, that I confidently make this appeal for help. If you, my friends could only feel the need there is for your help as I feel and know it, I believe the result of our appeal would be beyond all doubt. Your reward will lie in the fact that your generosity has helped to make life a bit easier for some blind brother or sister.

*I remain, Yours faithfully,
G.A.Maxwell. "*

Silver Anniversary. The Christmas Social in 1920 was turned into a 25th Anniversary Celebration. Mr. Maxwell was in the chair. After tea there was a concert. A change had, by this time, occurred in the prevailing influences. This was shown by the presentation of a silver coffee service to Miss Aston. In his speech Mr Maxwell said the gift was "a mark of the esteem and kindly regard in which the pioneer of the society was held by her fellow members. A gift of cutlery was also made to Mr. Paterson to remind him of the "kindly feelings he had awakened by his thoughtful provision for his blind friends in the past".

Hostels. The Committee changes rejuvenated the AAB and a decade of exciting progress ensued. The Committee had noted a number of persons seeking accommodation were in an 'intermediate living situation'. They were not completely independent but they did not require the supportive assistance of the Home at Brighton. A decision was made to meet this need.

Mr Willmott found a suitable brick villa in Lara St South. Yarra with accommodation for seven people. It was purchased for £900. and opened as a Hostel for women on August 4,1921. The residents in the Hostel were called boarders, those in the Home were still termed inmates. The Hostel was filled from the waiting list as were two sleep outs, with the grand name of 'chalets' erected in the backyard.

The accommodation provided was still short of the need. In 1926, a suitable property 'Egremont' at 54 The Avenue, Windsor, came on the market. The price was £2650. Lack of funds to purchase seemed an insurmountable barrier. With assistance from the Trustees of the Edward Wilson Estate and the Felton Bequest a deposit of £650 was raised. In a huge step of faith the Committee took out a mortgage of £2000. The interest on the mortgage and its repayments weighed heavily on the Committee.

Country development. By 1925 an Auxiliary was established at Bendigo. Work in the area expanded rapidly. Before the next year had passed a Home had been purchased and opened.

An Auxiliary was established at Ballarat in 1926. The Auxiliary accepted responsibility for services to blind people in the region. Within a year 20 blind people had been located.

Kooyong. 1926 also saw Mr Paterson purchase 3 acres of land at Kooyong for a Sportsground for the Blind. Rapid action followed. A Clubhouse was erected in 1928 and opened in 1929.

These major initiatives receive detailed attention under separate headings.

AAB Registration. Registration under the Charities Board in 1926 was a further step forward. This gave increased standing but also meant a higher standard of accountability. Over the next four years a number of changes were made to the Constitution. Two require specific mention.

Tom Marks had indicated his wish to retire as Secretary from the June 30, 1928. The Committee in a further far seeing decision, promoted an amendment to the constitution permitting the appointment of a sighted Secretary. Mr.T.H.McVilly was appointed and commenced duty in December 1927. Mr. McVilly served with distinction for 10 years.

In 1930 a further amendment was passed giving the General Committee power to authorise the payment of accounts. Previously these were recommended for payment to a full business meeting of members. The General Committee was also given increased powers with respect to the appointment of sub-committees. These moves helped to bring the AAB into line with the business practice of that day.

These changes both followed and gave rise to a large falling off in numbers attending blind members' meetings. The syllabus of lectures was discontinued and the blind members' business meeting reduced to once a quarter. A vast change from the fortnightly meetings early in the century. The May 1929 minutes record that although 400 invitations were sent to members only 15 attended the quarterly meeting. Tom Marks complained that the blind generally were not giving the AAB the support that should be accorded. The decision was made to hold all committee meetings at the Kooyong Clubhouse.

Snippets from the Minutes of those years are interesting. For the first time the issue of defining 'partial blindness' was raised. The Secretary was asked to contact overseas organisations and obtain information. The cost of a funeral in Melbourne which the AAB paid was £9. A blind member receiving a monthly grant of £2. was alleged to be using it to operate as a money lender. The Committee agreed that if his explanation was not satisfactory his grant be stopped. The Committee resolved that all blind workers who had been employed consecutively for 15 years be granted a pension of 10/- a week on retirement. The Secretary was thanked for negotiating Workers Compensation Insurance. The presiding officer at any meeting was instructed to uphold the dignity of the Chair and the AAB whenever objectionable language was used.

By 1930, 70 blind persons were being accommodated. A further 170 were being assisted financially and in other ways. Home visitation was constantly expanding. The Concerts provided work for 20 blind people and were an excellent advertisement for the AAB. Income and Expenditure had both reached £14000. Total assets were £13000 less combined mortgage and overdraft of £3000.

7. THE HOSTELS - SECOND BRANCH

The Hostels were jointly managed by one sub committee on a similar basis to the Home in Brighton. Mr. Willmott was appointed Chairman.

The Committee was elected at the Annual Meeting of Blind Members and held office for a year. A small core of blind members was regularly re-elected year after year. Others were chosen according to their standing in the group that particular year. Sighted members remained static except when a rare resignation required a replacement.

The Hostel Committee had wide powers. It dealt with admissions, fees and the conduct of boarders; with staff numbers, appointments, wages and conditions, rosters and leave. It determined sources of supply of goods, authorised purchase and approved payment of invoices. It was responsible for maintenance and repairs, furnishings and equipment. Only on rare occasions did the General Committee countermand a decision.

The Committee met monthly. At each meeting it appointed three members as the Official Visitors for the coming month. Two of these visitors were blind, one was sighted. The visitors inspected the premises monthly, listened to the complaints of the boarders and housekeeper, acted as a peace-keeping force and a liaison with the Committee. Like the members of the Brighton Home Committee those serving on the Hostel Committee were truly grand persons. They were so very patient, long suffering, enduring. The one thing they lacked was money. That meant a constant shortage of resources of all kinds and numberless tensions.

Lara St The Lara Street Hostel was not an ideal purchase. The building turned out to be in poor condition, the need for repairs constant, the facilities inadequate. Lara Street became the men's hostel in 1926 when 'Egremont' was purchased and developed as a women's hostel. Repairs to Lara St were so costly the Committee proposed its sale in 1936. The sale was vetoed by the blind members. The alternative was a complete refurbishment. This was carried out at a cost of £1062.

On completion of the renovations an appeal was made by Charlie Vaude on his 3DB programme for a piano. This was donated by a kind listener.

The only staff member at Lara St was the Housekeeper, Mrs Stumbles. She held the record for length of service in either the Home or Hostels until the 1950s.

Mrs. Stumbles served for nine years and resigned in July, 1940. The following month a major explosion occurred in the hot water boiler. The unit needed to be replaced and the water service pipes renewed. No money was available for this job. Le Couilliards, the plumbers constantly called to one or the other of the hostels to fix something, patched it up once again.

Serious discussions now took place on the future of the men's hostel. The number of boarders had fallen to five. Advertising accommodation for working blind men had not brought results. A successor to Mrs Stumbles could not be found. The decision was made to close the Hostel and rent it for a year at £3/5/- a week, furnished. It

remained leased during WWII. and was sold in 1948. The average occupancy during the 20 years of operation was seven persons.

The blind committee members were sure the old furniture was valuable. An antique dealer was brought in. After one look he expressed his opinion. "You couldn't even give it away. You will have to pay to have it carted to the tip". That was not the Committee's way. It gave the best of a bad lot to the Brighton Home, an old ice chest to the Bendigo Home, and the rest to the State Relief Committee.

The Avenue, as Egremont was commonly termed, was also a seven roomed house. Mr Paterson and the Architect, Mr Parkes of Oakley and Parkes, immediately began planning an extension. Fourteen single bedrooms were added. They were filled from the Waiting List.

A Windsor Auxiliary was formed and worked to reduce the mortgage of £2000. An active programme of dances, card evenings, theatre nights and the like took place under the leadership of Mrs. Robertson. The Auxiliary also took an interest in the boarders, arranging entertainment and social activity. £1500. was still owed in 1930.

A few of the original rooms were very large and accommodated three or four women. The demand for the single rooms was intense. These were allocated on the basis of length of residence. Furniture was in such short supply in the multiple bedded rooms, women had to share wardrobes in the early years. There was not even a bed available when Miss Filby was admitted. Mrs. Hutchinson provided one from her own home. Her daughter and son-in-law carried it by hand through the streets of Windsor to the Hostel. On another occasion a boarder went into her bedroom to find another just about to make off with the mattress. The reason - this was a better mattress than hers and she was going to swap them over.

Boarders in single rooms demanded their privacy be respected and locked their bedroom doors. The blind committee members supported the boarders right to do so. Sighted committee members opposed locked doors because of the ever present fire risk and possible inability of rescue or escape. A compromise was reached. Boarders would keep their doors unlocked when they were in their rooms except when they were dressing. They could lock them when they went out.

One boarder stipulated she must have breakfast in bed. That was out of the question. Harmony was restored when she was given permission to place a wardrobe and easy chair in her bedroom - at her own expense, of course.

As late as 1935, the staff were sharing the boarders' bathroom and conveniences. The Hostel Committee asked Mr Paterson to obtain a price for installing a bath for the staff in the laundry. Mr.Parkes, the Architect, said this was just not possible because of lack of space. Staff bedrooms were interspersed with those of the boarders. The thinking was that staff would be immediately available in the event of an emergency.

Grace at meals was not permitted. Neither were religious services. A number of churches did provide entertainment by way of concerts. The Committee noted these soon developed into church services and testimony meetings. They were reminded the practice was forbidden. Religious services did creep in from the time of WWII without protest.

Wirelesses were permitted. Bedrooms in the original home did not have power points. Electric cords for wirelesses were draped from the central ceiling light. Multiple wirelesses in these rooms were a source of annoyance. As each woman tried to hear her own programme the volume was turned up higher and higher. One boarder would be an owl and keep her wireless on late at night; another, a lark, would switch her's on at the break of day

Such matters were sorted out by the Official Visitors. Their acumen was displayed in the problem of a particularly loud and annoying wireless. Against her will the owner was urged to visit the Doctor. After the wax was syringed from hers ears, she found to her surprise that she was not deaf after all.

The Hostel Committee resolved it would not charge for the power used by the wireless sets. That decision, not made lightly, was not to be taken as a sign of weakness. Some boarders wanted radiators. This was permitted provided the boarder purchased the radiator, paid for the installation of the power point and agreed to a charge of a penny an hour for electricity. Some wanted electric jugs to make themselves cups of tea. These too were permitted on the same conditions except for the electricity charge which was set at 1/- a week. When the boarders' power needs were met, there was a twofold consequence. The power supply was overloaded, fuses were for ever blowing and the electricity account by Hostel Committee standards was astronomical. Electric jugs were then banned and the use of radiators rationed.

Nothing illustrated the shortage of funds and the frugality of the Hostel Committee more than the 'hot water bottle affair'. The Committee issued a directive that the boarders had to queue up to fill their hot water bottles in the evening. . The reason - to save hot water and, as a direct result, money. If the boarders filled their hot water bottles at different times the water in the pipe cooled off. Water then had to be drained off at the tap before it was again sufficiently hot to use. Gas was needed to heat the water inflow and gas cost money.

The Hostel Committee too was subject to constraints. Time after time it submitted the case for a telephone at the hostel. This was either refused by the General Committee or vetoed by the Blind Members. Success came in 1936. It created a new set of problems. Who would answer the phone? Everybody's job was nobody's job. Outward calls were different. The housekeeper complained the phone was always occupied when she wanted to order supplies. The boarders complained about each other talking too long and 'not getting a fair go'. Just another problem for the Committee to sort out.

On another occasion the Hostel Committee wished to raise fees 1/- a week. The General Committee deferred the matter indefinitely. The Hostel Committee persisted but was consistently defeated. After many months the General Committee realised finances were so bad the fees would now have to be raised 2/- a week. The Blind Members meeting now played its part and vetoed such a large increase. The blind members would not approve more than 1/- . The fee was increased from 22/- to 23/- a week.

In September 1936 following the departure of Mr. Willmott, Mr Ness was appointed Chairman. At the same time the Official Visitors in conjunction with the Housekeeper

were given authority to dismiss staff. The Official Visitors were also 'clothed with authority' to inspect every room.

At the time the staff consisted of a Housekeeper/cook and two Maids for 24 boarders. The Housekeeper received £2. a week, the Maids £1/5/-each.

The current Housekeeper had held the position for a number of years. While she was on leave in 1937, the Official Visitors inspected her room and then called a special meeting of the Hostel Committee. They complained that although the rest of the Hostel rooms were in excellent condition, hers was indescribable and reeked with tobacco smoke. Mrs Hutchinson, following her official inspection, said the kitchen cupboards were a disgrace, the shelves were horribly dirty and the maids reported the Housekeeper was dirty in her cooking. Mrs Hutchinson then moved that the housekeeper be asked to resign forthwith. There was no seconder. The Hostel Committee did agree she should be reprimanded.

The Secretary conveyed a reprimand. The Housekeeper asked to be permitted to speak to the Hostel Committee at its next meeting. She admitted cheerfully that she was a bit of a muddler but had a good explanation for the kitchen complaints. Attack being the best form of offence, at the following month's meeting the Hostel Committee was faced with her application for a 5/- a week increase in wages. The Hostel Committee decided there would be no increase at that stage and retaliated by informing her it was of the opinion that she could buy better both as to price and quality. To this she responded in her next Report, that it was the Committee who decided where she could buy and what she could spend.

Confusion remains as to what happened at and after the next Hostel Committee meeting. A resolution that her wages be increased by 5/- a week was defeated four votes to three. The men voted for, the ladies against. However, the Secretary's letter to her conveying the Committee's decisions, said the purchasing was now satisfactory and her wages had been increased by 5/-.

It didn't really matter. The housekeeper resigned. The Committee was then quite upset at losing such a good, long serving housekeeper and minuted its regret.

Another Housekeeper was appointed. The Committee ladies complained that too many of her relatives visited her and stayed too late at night. She left. A sighted Committee member then filled in for a couple of months. The Secretary complained that advertising costs each week for staff exceeded a staff members wages. The Committee then advertised under a nom de plume for a 'Gentlewoman, knowledge of cooking, housekeeping and home nursing'. This attracted some replies. A single lady was appointed.

Directives were issued to her in a continuing stream, as the minutes record. 'Sunday dinner would now be at 1 pm'. 'Sweets to be served as the first course finishes'. 'Tables to be set as for sighted people'. 'Boarders will use Hostel crockery not their own'. 'The wireless in the lounge may remain on till 10pm'. 'The Housekeeper will stock take the linen every six months'. 'The Housekeeper was responsible for boarders' cleanliness'. 'Mrs. Hutchinson would arrange for the sheets to be repaired at a cost of 3d and 4d each'. 'Six small dining tables would be purchased'. 'One of the old tables would be given to Miss Gladys Schleter, a maid, as a wedding present'. 'The

Committee would also present her with a £1/1/-'. 'As staff were difficult to secure, Miss Schleter would be granted one weeks wages in lieu of honeymoon leave'.

On the November 1, 1940, the Hostel Committee recommended a part time kitchen maid be appointed. The Official Visitors and Secretary to make the best deal possible. This was done. A girl was engaged.

A special Hostel Committee meeting was called on the November 22. The General Committee had rejected the recommendation. Mr Ness said he had thought the recommendation unanimous but Mrs. Hutchinson had opposed it at the General Committee and a decision had been deferred. The final outcome was dramatic. Both the Committee and Staff resigned en masse.

As this coincided with the closure of the men's hostel and Messrs O'Neill, Ness and Paterson no longer wished to serve on the Hostel Committee, a smaller Committee of five ladies was appointed. Mrs Paterson was elected Chairman. She continued in that office for the next 18 years, supported throughout by Mrs. Hutchinson, until the Hostel was closed. Staff troubles continued for years. Boarders, particularly Miss Collett and Miss O'Geary, were used extensively to help with domestic duties. They each received 5/- a week for their services.

This chapter does not recount mighty deeds, great decisions, visionary developments. It is a record of ordinary people, struggling against and overcoming the harsh realities of life in those days. In the case of the boarders it showed an inner strength and ability, despite frustrations and limitations, to get on with the job of living.

The final years of the Hostel were easier and happier as the following article taken from the March 1957 issue of 'Courage', the Association journal, shows.

"Blind Women Show Way."

"Can women live together in harmony?. Mere males, of course, know the answer.

That makes the atmosphere at the Blind Womens Hostel, 54 The Avenue, Windsor, where 22 blind folk and 4 staff live in peace and harmony, the more remarkable.

There are difficulties of course. One perhaps hard of hearing wants a wireless on at full blast while others are trying to write or read or sleep. There are misunderstandings because the twinkle in an eye, the smile on a face, which takes the sting out of an otherwise hurtful remark, cannot be seen. There are, on occasions, the unavoidable clashes of different personalities and temperaments. There is the problem of cooking to everyone's satisfaction.

Occasional occurrences such as these ripple the surface as a puff of wind does the sea, adding interest and zest, yet not disturbing the deeper harmony of community living.

In actual fact, the term 'Hostel' is now a misnomer. Opened in 1926 as a hostel for the younger blind group, it has, over the years become their permanent home. Many are now in the vicinity of 80 years of age and a number should be in the Brighton Home receiving nursing attention. As one grows older however, change becomes less

palatable. This applies in far greater degree to a blind person who must laboriously learn to find her way about strange rooms and corridors and accurately memorise the location of furniture.

On the other hand the shortage of our accommodation is emphasised by the case of Miss Celia Filby. A resident of the Hostel since 1927 and an octogenarian, Miss Filby asked for a transfer to Brighton three years ago so that she could get to know the Home before she got old. Each time the opportunity has occurred to make the transfer, some person in desperate circumstances requiring medical and nursing attention has required immediate admission.

Like most of the residents at the Hostel, Miss Filby finds her time fully occupied. Her day commences at 7.30am. when the rising bell rings. Breakfast is at 8 o'clock. After breakfast, in common with the majority of the residents, she makes her bed and tidies up ready for the staff to clean the room. Morning tea follows at 10am. after which a volunteer reads the newspapers. A hot dinner - the main meal of the day - follows. In the afternoon there is a walk or perhaps some shopping to do. The bright hour at the local Methodist Church is extremely popular. Friends visit frequently or perhaps a quiet rest is desired. Tea is at 5.30pm. Most of the residents retire to bed fairly early and spend the evening listening to their radios.

Among the devoted members of the Hostel Committee is the Chairman , Mrs Paterson, a saintly and gracious lady, who like her late husband has given her life to the interests and welfare of blind people and Mrs L Hutchinson a non sighted member who has been intimately connected with the Association since its earliest days.

Matron for the past three years has been Miss Alice Webster. This period has been one of the happiest in the history of the Hostel. In no small degree this has been due to the outstanding service given by Miss Webster and the other staff members who give much of their time for the benefit of the residents and who regard their responsibilities not as a job but a vocation."

8. MORE BRANCHES SPROUT - BENDIGO AND BALLARAT

The Foundation Members were not restricted by tunnel vision. Miss Aston knew from personal experience the handicap imposed on vision impaired country children through ignorance of the services available. She knew from travelling with the RVIB school concert party, the knowledge vacuum and isolation in which older blind country residents lived. So it was, that even in the infancy of the organisation, Miss Janet Robertson travelled extensively in the country seeking out blind people.

However, a tender seedling does not have the strength of a mature plant or a young sapling that of a strongly rooted tree. The concentration of effort was, in the early days, wisely confined to the metropolitan area. Contact with country areas was maintained through the appointment of a country collector [blind] in 1911 and the country concerts from 1913.

As World War.1. neared its end serious thought was given to an expansion programme. In 1918 Ballarat and Bendigo were targeted. Mr. Tom Marks visited both towns. He arranged for travel concessions for blind people similar to those enjoyed in the city. These visits resulted in ten new members. Referring to his visit to Ballarat the Annual Report recorded:

"One man was lifted from a helpless state of inertia to take a manly place in the world. We introduced him to the Braille Writers' Association who taught him to read and supplied him with books in Braille, then, as an agent for our Tea he rapidly succeeded in contributing largely to his own support. One such case is sufficient justification for a considerable expenditure of time and money on our part, if a fellow being rejoices in his individual effort, after a period devoid of all initiative and in a state of complete dependence".

The next year because of the influenza epidemic and prevailing strikes, country visitation was halted. It resumed in 1920 with Mr A.W.Robinson visiting Ballarat and Geelong and Miss Robertson, Bendigo.

The work of the AAB. in the metropolitan area and in the two provincial cities of Bendigo and Ballarat developed along distinct and different lines. In Melbourne any initiative by the sighted required the approval of the blind members. From its inception the Bendigo Committee enjoyed an intelligent and welcome input from one blind member, Miss Ackland. In Ballarat the work was in the hands of sighted people. In Bendigo, the Committee because of local circumstances, became an accommodation provider and raised funds to maintain its work.. Ballarat on the other hand, developed as a fqund raising Auxiliary which helped blind people in their own homes.

Bendigo development. In 1923 Mr. Marks organised an Appeal Concert in Bendigo. The Mayoress, Mrs Guidice, convened a public meeting and a Committee was formed. Cr. D. Andrew was Hon. Secretary. The considerable sum of £112 was raised.

In 1924 discussions took place with the United Charities League of Bendigo. These were followed in 1925 with the formation of an Auxiliary of the Association for the Advancement of the Blind. An offshoot of the United Charities League, the

Committee was composed of nominated members of the various churches. Meetings were held in the vestry of Wesley Church, Forrest Street.

The Committee Chairman was Mrs Madsen formerly of the Brighton Home Committee. The treasurer was Mrs Guidice and the secretary, Mrs Holt. Members were Miss Hobson and Miss Ackland. Miss Hobson became Secretary two years later and held the position for thirty two years.

Miss Ackland was short, dark, totally blind, a Methodist lay preacher, well known throughout the district. She travelled around by herself and was the natural choice as honorary visitor. In no time she was visiting 18 blind people in Bendigo and 6 in Castlemaine. A year later this had increased to 28 blind people in Bendigo and 10 in Castlemaine.

Miss Ackland's work was appreciated by the Committee. She made the cause of the Association known throughout the area leading to many donations. She also kept the Committee aware of the needs of blind people. One person to whom she drew attention was a young, blind, crippled lady. The Chairman and Secretary visited her and asked how they could help. She expressed her great desire for a wireless set which would keep her in touch with the world. One was purchased for her.

What could this small group of five ladies really achieve? Within a month they were faced with a number of blind people in desperate need and approved their first grants totalling one and a half guineas for food and wood. Their expenditure for the year was £30.

An elderly blind lady, living alone, was dead for two days before her body was discovered. This was the catalyst. A challenge of a nature not visualised. It had the elements which attracted the news media. There were other blind people in the community living at risk. Didn't this new Committee claim to be looking after the blind? What were they going to do about it?.

The ladies took stock of the situation, themselves and the needs of the local blind people. Mrs Madsen wrote to the General Committee, convinced Melbourne of the need to establish a Home without delay and obtained approval to proceed. They located a large rambling house in Bennett St Long Gully, which was available for rent with an option to buy for £800. They secured the interest of a number of leading Bendigo ladies and began fund raising. Mr Willmott and Mr Marks travelled to Bendigo. They recommended to the General Committee that the option to purchase be taken up. The Mayor supported an Appeal for £1500. The citizens of the district responded as they were to do so generously and often in future years.

The ladies of the Committee agonised over the furnishings. Should they have 2'6" beds at 29/6 each or 3' beds at 33/6 each?. Hygienic wool mattresses for the 2'6" beds would cost 18/6 and for the 3' beds 20/6each. They could not make up their minds and canvassed the opinion of their friends. The result was a flood of donations. A multitude of beds and mattresses of various sizes and in varying conditions. Furniture was also freely given and the pantry well filled with home cooked jams and bottled fruit. The residents' fees required much deliberation. Only a brave man would dare to say that discrimination was shown in charging men 15/- and women 14/6 a week. The

Home had accommodation for eight persons. All beds were filled within the first few weeks with four ladies and four men.

Mrs Madsen returned to Melbourne in 1928 and was succeeded by Mrs T.R.Nicholls. The Bendigo Community took the Home for the Blind to its heart. By 1932 it was self supporting. Its first legacy came in the same year under the will of the late James Grafton.

In 1934 the Bendigo Committee was considering extending the Home. Mr Paterson and Mr Parkes after inspection decided this was impracticable. In 1935 Mr Paterson negotiated the purchase of a property selected by the ladies. It was located in Inglewood Road in a sewered area. After necessary alterations the Home was opened on the February 29, 1936, by Lt. Col. Lansell. A large representative gathering was present. This included Miss Aston, Mr Marks, Mr Willmott and Mr and Mrs Paterson. Donations of £150. were collected at the opening.

The cost of alterations exceeded the £900. estimated by Mr. Paterson. This was more than the £700. cost of the house. The Treasurer in Melbourne Mr Clive Norton, refused to pay the accounts until Mr Paterson, expressing penitence, explained the reason. The sale of the Long Gully home was expected to bring £700. and balance the purchase cost of Inglewood road. It only raised £350. If Melbourne was expected to find the balance, where was it coming from asked Mr Norton?. From Bendigo Miss Hobson replied haughtily Melbourne was not being asked to pay.

The Home 'contained many modern conveniences and comforts' and accommodated 10 residents. The total cost of £1500. was raised by the Bendigo Committee.

The death of Miss Ackland in March 1936 from a long, painful illness was a sad loss felt in Melbourne as well as locally. Four ladies who were to play a leading role in future activities joined the Committee at this time. These were Miss Balmer and Mrs Vicki Pattison each of whom was to serve as Chairman, Mrs Bayne, whose large bequest to the Home, saved its life on many occasions and Mrs Fox, who was to serve as treasurer for a number of years.

In 1939, newly married Katharine Margaret Rose and husband George moved to Bendigo for business reasons. Her mother had written to an old friend, Margery Balmer asking her to keep an eye on young Kitty.

Miss Balmer was Chairman of the Home for the Blind that year. She looked after Kitty Rose by installing her as a reader at the Home, to 'occupy her time and keep her out of mischief'. A few months later, seemingly having passed an unsuspected test, Miss Balmer informed her they were going out that afternoon. Correctly dressed for the occasion with hat and gloves, she accompanied Miss Balmer, similarly dressed to, surprise, surprise, the Blind Home.

There she sat in a poorly lighted room amid a group of, to her, elderly ladies of grave countenance and demeanour also wearing hats and gloves as they solemnly addressed the business of the Home, respectfully referring to each other by their correct title of Mrs. or Miss. By the end of the meeting Kitty had worked out that without being asked, let alone with her approval, she had become a member of that august body. In

this manner Mrs Katharine Rose began 50 years of magnificent honorary service to blind people

On a visit to Melbourne, the Bendigo Treasurer, Mrs Fox, had dinner with Mr and Mrs Paterson. Hamish Mackenzie was present. Mr Paterson produced plans for extensions to the Bendigo Home. The response was completely unexpected. "No", said Mrs Fox. She explained that dust from the mullock heap across the road blanketed the Home every time a strong wind blew from a certain direction. This caused distress to both patients and staff and created much work cleaning up.

A delegation from Melbourne visited Bendigo in May 1945. The situation with the Inglewood Rd. property was discussed and a decision made against any alterations or extensions. The secretary Miss Hobson was left with the responsibility of locating a suitable site for a modern new home when restrictions were lifted and funds available. A property in Hargreaves St consisting of a house on one block with an adjacent vacant block was purchased for £2300. After the war the area was developed industrially, traffic was heavy and noisy and there was realisation the site was too small.

A country sub division on McIvor Rd., Strathfieldsaye Shire just outside the City of Bendigo boundary, came on the market in November 1948. Mr Paterson and the Secretary attended with authority to spend up to £2500. They purchased 11 blocks for £2625. On this wise far sighted purchase, regarded as foolish by many, Mirridong was erected eight years later.

The General Committee was offered £3000. for the Hargreaves St property. It refused the offer. Eighteen months later the property was sold for £4000.

In 1950 the Bendigo Committee held a function to recognise 21 years of service as Hon. Secretary by Miss Hobson. Considering her hard work, devotion and achievements of those years this should have been a happy time for her. However, by virtue of length of service, commitment, depth of knowledge and strength of character, Miss Hobson was inclined to want to go her own way. Differences of opinion were not unknown.

At the time she was feuding with the Secretary at Head Office who objected to the way she made decisions without reference to the General Committee, leaving him to be castigated. He also objected to her allegedly selling locally, the idea that the Bendigo Home was a self contained unit with no connection with Melbourne, established and run by Winnie Hobson. Earlier she had been offside with the Bendigo Auxiliary formed in 1941, with forty members. The Auxiliary was organising substantial fund raising events. One Golf Club rang Miss Hobson seeking assurance the money raised would not go to Melbourne.

'Send it direct to me and it won't', Winnie said.

'That's not on', the Auxiliary replied. 'We did the work and we want the money to go through our books'.

At Christmas time the Auxiliary organised a Ball while Miss Hobson and the Home Committee collected donations for Christmas Cheer for the residents. The community was not pleased at being approached twice. It told the Home Committee and Auxiliary members to get their act together and co-operate.

Representatives from Melbourne then met with Bendigo Committee and Auxiliary Office Bearers at the Shamrock Hotel to define spheres of operation. Although guidelines were drawn up, they were not by themselves the answer. As the Association expanded and new branches developed, operational difficulties were inevitable and did sometimes arise between Branch Committees, local Auxiliaries and Head Office. Great understanding, sensitivity and restraint was required by all the parties involved.

Ballarat development. In 1925 Mr Marks again visited Ballarat. He contacted the Mayor, Cr. A.E. Nicholson, who convened a public meeting. An Auxiliary was formed with the Mayoress, Mrs Nicholson as President and Treasurer and Mrs. Jennie Cole J.P. as Hon. Secretary. Two of the original auxiliary members were Mrs McClure and Mrs Trahar. Representatives of the third generation of these families continue to serve on the Branch Committee and Auxiliaries.

At the end of 1926, 20 blind people were known to the Auxiliary. This number had increased to 30 by 1930. Again the importance of wireless was demonstrated. The first efforts of the Auxiliary were directed to providing sets to those who could not afford them. The Auxiliary also began the practice of organising a Christmas social which was held at the Wattle Tea Rooms, a premier Ballarat establishment frequented by ladies. The Auxiliary also rendered such assistance as was needed with food, clothing, bedding, fuel and medicine. It established a visiting system and provided transport for essential needs.

During the 1930s Mrs Duncan and Mrs Curtis J.P. became members. In 1941 Mrs Bennett joined. The same year Mrs Duncan became Vice President and the next year, President. They were joined by Mrs Cutts as Hon. Secretary in 1947 and Mrs Nunn as Treasurer in 1949. The stature, competence and confidence of the ladies grew as the work progressed.

In May 1945 the Auxiliary stressed the need for a Home in Ballarat. A delegation under the leadership of Mr Paterson visited the city, had discussion with the Mayor and were interviewed by the 'Ballarat Courier'. By that time seventy blind persons were known in the local community. The Mayor and local dignitaries gave assurance of strong local support.

In January 1946 the Executive of the Auxiliary urged strongly the immediate purchase of a suitable site for a Home. The ladies informed the General Committee that all public and voluntary organisations were preparing for their future needs and the best sites would soon be gone. The response was prompt. In March, a two acre block of land facing Howitt St, Wendouree, and described as ideal in every way, unexpectedly became available and was purchased for £1000.

Many of the blind members were now in the 'frail aged' category. Mr. Keith Mackay, manager of the large Ballarat Benevolent Home, with whom the auxiliary had a close relationship also advised he had a number of patients better suited to a Home for blind people. Realising that a purpose built Home was years away, the Auxiliary advocated the purchase of temporary premises.

At the same time the Auxiliary voiced its concern at the trend towards nationalisation shown by both the Commonwealth and State Governments. Members wanted assurance that if a Home was purchased a Government would not take it over. Mr. C. McVilly, then Chairman of the new Hospitals and Charities Commission, advised that whatever happened, he believed there would always be a niche for voluntary organisations.

At the beginning of 1950, a property in Pleasant St Ballarat, close to the Benevolent Home was purchased for £4500. Building materials for alterations were still hard to procure and it was not until April 30, 1952 that it was opened by Sir John Medley. Total cost with furnishings and commercial equipment was £10,000. The cost of furnishing and equipping the Home was met by the Auxiliary. The Home had a 14 bed capacity and was filled by the end of the year. Mr. E.G. Cutts now assumed the duties of Secretary for which he received a small honorarium.

The self sacrificial efforts of the local auxiliaries in raising funds and initiating these two homes is a demonstration of the community spirit, local pride and commitment to the needs of the less fortunate which still characterises country towns. This spirit is an important factor in Australian life.

9. ANOTHER BRANCH GERMINATES - KOOYONG

Sportsground. "We want a cricket ground." The Victorian Blind Cricket Association, formed in 1922 was having difficulty in finding a permanent playing ground. For three years it had played wherever it could obtain the use of a cricket pitch. Now a delegation approached Mr Paterson for advice and help. Mr Paterson accepted the need as a personal challenge. A lesser man would have listed all he was already doing for the blind and told them to try someone else.

At the time the Malvern City Council with wisdom and foresight was acquiring land it did not already own along Gardiners Creek. Far sighted Councillors anticipated the present parklands and sports areas. Part of the area along the creek bank was flood and marsh land, known by its aboriginal name 'Kooyong', meaning a home for feathered fowls. Mr Paterson was by then a Senior Officer in the Titles Office.

What happened next is the subject of some speculation. However, in 1926, Mr Paterson emerged as the owner of three acres of desirable land in an ideal position fronting Glenferrie Rd., a main road and with adjacent transport to the city by tram or train. This land was in the area of Malvern Council interest. Now the Council was not amused, but as has always been the case, was sympathetic to the needs of blind people. It did not protest Mr Paterson's purchase but did impose two conditions. First, if the land ceased to be used as a sportsground and recreation centre for the blind, the Council had the right to purchase it at the price Mr Paterson paid, namely, £250. Secondly, that the Town Clerk of Malvern be one of the Trustees.

Mr and Mrs Paterson raised the money for the land by letter appeal and personally door knocking in the area. They also appealed through the newspapers. The AAB was not asked for help for two reasons. One, the AAB was already deeply in debt. Two, being astute, he realised that if the land was in the name of the AAB, the Blind Members would be the masters and control would be lost. The Sportsground for the Blind was established as a Trust with Mr Maxwell, Mr Paterson and Mr Crosbie Gould the Town Clerk of Malvern, as the Trustees.

Mr Paterson then set out to fill and level the land and prepare the playing field. The first cricket ball was bowled on April 7, 1928 when the Victorian Association of Blind Cricketers met interstate teams in a competition.

Clubhouse. With his customary foresight Mr Paterson realised a clubhouse was essential. At great personal sacrifice Mr and Mrs Paterson loaned, interest free, their savings for an eagerly anticipated overseas trip to Britain. An auxiliary was formed to raise money to repay the loan. It was not fully repaid until the 1950's, well over twenty years later. The Patersons never did get their overseas trip. By that time they were too old and frail to travel. In 1938 when there was a need for more funds Mr. Paterson excised from the land and sold two house blocks facing the front or Glenferrie Road. A right of way to the clubhouse was established between the two blocks.

The Clubhouse was opened by the Lieut. Governor Sir William Irvine on Saturday May 19, 1929. It contained a social hall, multi purpose room, kitchen, dressing rooms and an outside veranda where spectators could sit and watch the cricket. The 'Age' reported, 'every facility has been provided to enable blind men and women to enjoy

both indoor and outdoor games under the best possible conditions and under their own management'.

The first function held at the clubhouse was the 21st birthday party of Grace Hutchinson, daughter of Mrs Hutchinson.

Trust Agreement. In 1930 the Trustees and the AAB entered into a Management Agreement. This was known as the Trust Deed. The principal clauses were;-

- The Association shall manage the grounds and buildings erected thereon for the benefit of the blind of Victoria, using the same for recreational and social purposes, including indoor and outdoor games, picnics, concerts, lectures, dances and other social purposes.
- The Association may peacefully and quietly enjoy the use and management of the said Ground and Clubhouse free from any payment whatsoever, so long as it does not amalgamate with any other organisation.
- The Association shall appoint a Committee of Management which shall manage and control the Clubhouse and Grounds.
- The Trustees shall have the right to appoint one of their number or some other person, a member of the Committee of Management.
- The Association may let the Grounds and Clubhouse for Social purposes. The rents obtained from same must be used for the maintenance of the Grounds and Clubhouse except otherwise arranged with the Trustees.
- The Association shall not allow the use of intoxicating liquors at any gatherings of the blind in the Clubhouse or Grounds.
- The Association shall, during the cricket season, allow the members of the Clubs comprising the Victorian Association of Blind Cricketers, to use the cricket field for cricket purposes on Saturday afternoons, on such dates as may be fixed by the said Association of Blind Cricketers, such dates to be submitted to the Association before the commencement of the season. The Association shall also allow the said members the use of the field for practice.

A Clubhouse Management Committee was formed in 1931. Subject to the General Committee, its responsibilities were:-

- To raise funds for the upkeep of the clubhouse and grounds;
- To control the clubhouse and grounds and keep them in order;
- To control the games and card evenings, community singing sessions and social functions held at the clubhouse; and
To pay all money received to the Association and recommend the payment or otherwise of all expenditure incurred.

With the Trustees and two Committees having an interest in Kooyong, ample scope was presented for keen debate on who should pay for what. The big flood of 1934 left

the grounds covered with debris. The Clubhouse Committee saw the flood as an Act of God, the consequence of Government and bureaucratic incompetence or a combination of both. As such, cleaning up was outside its scope of responsibility for the upkeep of the grounds. The General Committee, quoting the Trust Agreement, saw its responsibility as peacefully and quietly enjoying the use and management free from any payment whatsoever. The Trustees were direct and to the point; "We have no funds. If the AAB wanted the debris cleaned up, it better do it". It did. There was one far reaching consequence which impacted more than thirty years later. The Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works set its sewerage installation level above that flood level.

Blind cricket. The Victorian Association of Blind Cricketers had the use of the grounds and clubhouse during the cricket season. This game was suited to blind persons. A code of rules was developed to suit the special circumstances. There were four teams in the competition. Two represented the RVIB, one the Braille Library and one the AAB. Competition was fierce. These teams played on two cricket pitches.

The interest spread to other states who in time fielded teams. This enabled a national competition to be held. The important part cricket played in developing and unifying blind people was not fully recognised at the time.

A notable feature in the cricket competition for a number of years was the womens cricket team. Captained by Isobel Ransome [sighted] it included young sportswomen such as Doris Nothling and Peg Sitlington. Another sighted player worthy of special mention was Mrs Essie Smith. The mother of Geoff Smith, a blind member who years later was to serve on the General Committee, Essie and her husband Albert were tremendous workers and stalwarts of the Kooyong programme. Albert's fascinating hobby was collecting bottles and for a number of years the Bottle Collectors Society held an annual display in the Clubhouse to raise funds for the Blind Members Auxiliary.

The two most contentious issues between the Cricketers, Association and Trustees were use of the grounds and alcohol.

Each year the ground was made available to the Lawn Tennis Association for car parking during the Australian championships and Davis Cup. This was requested by the Malvern Council and the various authorities involved. The rent received helped to maintain the grounds. The Blind Cricketers claimed it was an infringement of their rights and discrimination in favour of the sighted. They did have a legitimate complaint. Games had to be re-scheduled and when the weather was wet the parking of motor vehicles turned the ground into a rutted quagmire.

The Trust Deed expressly prohibited the use of alcohol at functions of blind people. This was a sore point with the blind members generally and a cancerous ulcer with the cricketers. Unfortunately a few cricketers were addicted to alcohol and used it excessively.. This may have been understandable but was not acceptable in that setting, quite apart from the condition included in the Trust Deed..

The majority of the cricketers were fine sportsmen and temperate in their social drinking after a match. A fine cricketer, leader and good influence was Charlie Bradley. Charlie made the cane cricket balls used in the games. His wife Hazel was

active in both cricket and AAB social activities. A sighted man who gave faithful devoted service as an umpire and peacemaker for many years was Bert Brumby. A difficult person who gave the impression of being anti the AAB was the secretary, Arthur Lilley.

The problem centered on a few players and some hangers on, who saw after match conviviality as an opportunity for a drunken binge, display of uncouth habits and loutish behaviour. Neighbours in Talbot Crescent, local residents in Glenferrie Road., train and tram travellers complained frequently via the telephone and by letter. Although most of the cricketers were associated with the RVIB, the local perception was, quite rightly, that the AAB was responsible for activities on its premises. The situation reflected adversely on the image and standing of the AAB and blind people.

Just as hurtful to the AAB was the reaction of parents of blind boys wishing to play cricket. After attending a match as observers, they often expressed disgust, saying they would not allow their sons to associate with such people. The pain to Mr Paterson must have been great. Indeed, his disappointment at this and some other situations was such, he and Mrs Paterson submitted their resignations from the Clubhouse Committee in June 1939. The Committee, wisely, refused to accept them.

Although the attitude of the Association was more liberal from the 1950's the issue continued to raise its head in various guises. The construction of separate Clubrooms for the Cricketers in 1987 resolved the problem.

Efforts were made to establish blind soccer and rowing in the 1930's. These did not meet with success.

Picnic. For the majority of blind people the Annual Picnic held on Melbourne Cup Day at the Caulfield Racecourse, was the big event of the year. Attendance increased with the opening of the Clubhouse. In 1929, 522 people attended. These comprised, Blind members 260; Guides 200; Children under 15 years numbered 45; Young people over 15 years numbered 17. Blind people were admitted free. Guides paid 1/-. Children of blind people, under 15 years, were admitted free. Those over 15 years were charged 1/6. Helpers had the privilege of bringing their spouses and children free. Catering was put out to tender. The successful tenderer provided two meals for a charge of 2/6 a head.

Someone always brought a crystal set and later a wireless. The race results were followed avidly. The hand of Mr Paterson was seen in the General Committee directive that no General Committee member or staff member was to participate in the organising of a Melbourne Cup Sweep. Entry fee was sixpence. This was an exciting picnic event and the once a year gamble for most present.

Games played at all annual picnics were enjoyed greatly. For the ladies there were the usual running races [in roped lanes], string winding, bowling a cricket ball at the wicket and skipping. There were prizes of 3/-, 2/- and 1/- for all events.

After the evening meal the younger members trundled their way by tram back to the Clubhouse, where they finished off the day with a dance. Supper was made up of the left overs from the two meals.

The Annual Cup Day Picnics were held at the Caulfield Racecourse by courtesy of the Racing Club from 1897 until 1939. The Army took over the Racecourse from 1940 until 1944 as a Recruit Reception Centre. The Association held a Basket Picnic at Kooyong on ANA Day each January during these years and returned to Caulfield in 1945. The pattern and practices which had served so well were re-established. Attendances began to dwindle as the range of activities for blind people broadened. The picnic returned to Kooyong in 1956 and became the responsibility of Mr Bryan Sitlington and the Social Activities Committee.

Travel hazards. The safety of blind people attending the Clubhouse was a continuing concern.

The tram stop was on the south side of the railway line near the bottom of a steep hill. This meant danger on alighting, danger when crossing the railway line, and danger crossing the main road. The risks were increased by the refusal of most to use white walking sticks. Tram drivers and conductors, with the good intention of being helpful, adopted the unofficial practice of stopping outside the Clubhouse entrance. - not a recognised stop.

In November 1934, Mr Tilley was killed and Mrs Driscoll and Miss Stephens injured in an accident outside the entrance. The next year a conductor was injured while escorting a blind person from a tram to the Clubhouse entrance. The Committee stressed to the Tramways Board the danger inherent in stopping between stops. No action was taken. The Committee then tried to have the Clubhouse entrance declared an official stop. This move also failed.

Train travel, too, presented hazards. At Kooyong railway station there were occasions, fortunately rare, when a blind person stepped out on the wrong side, landed heavily and sustained injuries.

The Annual Reports of all the agencies were always unanimous in paying tribute to the police, tram and railway staff for the help given and consideration shown.

Choir. At a meeting in May 1934 Mr Fred Barkel moved that a choir be formed. The choir was formed. His wife, Emily proclaimed herself the leading soprano. He, too, was a member. During its life of twenty five years the choir had as many ups and downs as a keyboard has notes. Fred and Emily revelled in it all. There were arguments as to who should be allowed to join. There were complaints that 'she sings out of tune'; if 'she is let in, I get out' and debate as to what the choir dress should be; what pieces should be sung; and what and when singers should be paid. Emily would not sing unless the piano tuner was changed. Although his tuning suited everyone else, it displeased the prima donna. Anything that could be argued about, was argued about. At one point the General Committee passed a resolution saying that no member under the influence of liquor was allowed to appear with the choir.

A more settled period followed from December 1938 when Mr George Findlay was appointed Conductor. In September 1941 he resigned. The RVIB had noticed his success and made him an employment offer he could not refuse. Even Miss Aston made a personal plea to him not to leave. This was of no avail. His appointment contained a provision which prevented him from continuing with the choir. He joined the RVIB School musical staff. Mr Hugh Jeffrey had just completed his degree

studies in music and was also teaching music part time at the RVIB. George Findlay had been his tutor and was his friend. Mr Stan Hedger, the Superintendent, had come up with the idea that the RVIB would receive wonderful publicity if it could advertise it was employing the only two blind people in the southern hemisphere with degrees in music.

The internal squabbles did not prevent the choir from making a worthwhile acceptable contribution. It gave concerts at the Austin Hospital, the Cheltenham Benevolent Home, the Braille Library and the Home at Brighton. It made many appearances at Kooyong functions and at fund raising concerts for the AAB at the Melbourne Town Hall. It even appeared on ABC radio station 3AR - once. During WWII it took part in fund raising efforts for the Red Cross, Australian Comforts Fund and other patriotic organisations. Overall it had a very busy programme.

With the choir established successfully, the indefatigable Fred Barkel moved a harmonica band be started. Mr Paterson accepted the responsibility. There was little harmony. Over a period of two years it was formed, functioned, fizzled out, reformed and finally faded out.

War use. The clubhouse and grounds were extensively used during the second world war. The AAB programme was continued with limitations. The Area Warden used it as his meeting Headquarters. The RAAF used it in the middle of the day, for recreational activities for WAAF members attached to the unit based in Malvern. Wesley College used it each morning and from 3pm until dusk, for sports. In February 1943, the Army took it over for a month as a Rest and Recreational Centre for 9th Div.A.I.F. troops returning from the Middle East. After the war the Kooyong R.S.L. used it one evening a month for meetings.

Social activity. From its inception the Clubhouse was the heart of the AAB in Melbourne and used extensively for meetings and socials. Mr Paterson could not possibly have foreseen the impact and benefits it would have on the lives of blind people. It was common and neutral ground on which all blind people irrespective of the faction or group to which they belonged, could meet, form friendships, discuss common interests, take part in a variety of activities and in so doing raise the status and advance the cause of blind people. In relating with them as friends on their own ground, sighted people gained increased insight and better understanding of the feelings, frustations and hopes of vision impaired people. Some activities were curtailed during the polio epidemic of the thirties.

The Kooyong Clubhouse was also the centre where romance flowered. Young blind people found restrictions as to privacy and limitations to travel made friendship with members of the opposite sex difficult to establish. Kooyong was one answer. Bryan and Peg Sitlington recall there were times of fierce competition when a number of girls lobbed their affections on the same boy or vice versa. Incidentally it was at Kooyong romance blossomed for Doris Nothling and Peg Sitlington. as it did for many others.

In this regard one of the situations which disturbed Mr Paterson was the behavior of certain young couples who shall be nameless but who, as time passed, became examples of exemplary conduct. The dances offered the young people a rare opportunity to fraternise. Some couples sneaked off to the back of the cricket scoring

box at the far end of the ground for a kiss and cuddle. This behaviour was not appreciated by Mr Paterson. Powerful torch in hand, he kept going backwards and forwards chasing them back into the dance hall.

The usual Saturday afternoon entertainment consisted of community singing or games.

At the regular Saturday social evenings, the prize money for cards and bagatelle was 5/- First prize 3/-, second prize 2/-. An allowance of 5/- was allocated for the pianist. When a violinist was provided to assist the dancing, his fee was 10/6. Small amounts of prize money were awarded for many activities. This was seen as an indirect way of augmenting the meagre income of some blind people.

The pianist was Fred Alderton who with great gusto played with one hand while singing through a megaphone held in the other. When funds permitted the violinist was Bert Harris. On the occasion of the big flood in 1934 Fred was marooned and slept on top of his beloved piano. Comperes included Herbert Lawrence, Wally Giles and Bryan Sitlington.

In summer the cricketers and their followers attended. There was always plenty to argue about. Half the dancers said the floor was 'too fast'. The other half said it was 'too slow' and 'full of splinters'. The card players, mainly older persons, said the dancers made too much noise and the music was too loud. The dancers said the card players occupied space they needed. The dances rotated between the RVIB's Ormond Hall, the Braille Hall and the Kooyong Clubhouse.

Such was the poverty in those days. that any left over sugar, tea, soap and toilet paper disappeared after each function.

In February 1939 a complimentary social was tendered to Mr. and Mrs. Paterson to mark his fifty years of service to the blind. Mr Lightfoot was appointed the organising Chairman. Miss Theckla Thorne who first involved him in the work and was then living in Geelong attended, as did representatives from Ballarat and Bendigo. The function was described as 'enthusiastic'.

In March 1947, the first post war fete at Kooyong was opened by the Hon.R.G.Menzies. He was introduced by Miss Aston. Apart from being the local Federal Member of Parliament, Sir Robert Menzies, later Prime Minister, had a good knowledge of the AAB through his legal friendship with Mr Iaxwell.

Self Aid Society. Early in 1940, the clubhouse saw the formation of a new group with the grand name of the "Blind Self Aid Society of Australia" The President was Mr Jack Murphy, Secretary of the Blind Workers Union and of the Federal Council of Organisations of the Blind. He and Mr Stan Hedger Superintendent of the RVIB were not, what could be termed, close friends.

Key members of this new Self Aid group were two young people, Miss Phyllis Lawson who was totally blind and Mr. Harold Gratton partially blind. The assistance of the AAB was requested.

Discussions over a period of months resulted in agreement. The Self Aid Society would have two purposes. Firstly, the investigation and placement of blind persons in new avenues of employment. Secondly, it would establish an employment agency which would be regarded as a department of the AAB. Mr Stan Hedger, Superintendent of the RVIB, who had been watching developments closely, now approached Mr Murphy with a very favourable offer to organise a similar campaign for the RVIB as a staff member. In accepting, he harmed his standing and reputation within the AAB. Thirty five years later, retired and living in Mildura, he became a very active member of the Day Centre. Miss Lawson was appointed Convenor of the Committee.

At this time Mr Paterson was impressed with Miss Lawson. He saw her as the next generation Tilly Aston. In April 1940, he moved that she and Mr Gration be appointed to a new committee for the purpose of establishing a young peoples' section within the AAB. She was also appointed to a vacancy on the General Committee the same month. In May she was appointed to the Brighton Home Committee and later elected to the Hostel Committee. In August she was elected a Vice President. Thereafter she chaired a number of General Committee Meetings.

Miss Lawson married Harold Gration in 1941. A strong character, gifted intellectually, Mrs Gration possessed some personality traits which were not acceptable to all. She soon resigned from the various Committees but remained an active agitator among the blind members. Neither the young persons' section nor the Self Aid Society flowered.

Guild of Professional Blind. The RVIB School was evacuated to Olinda during the danger period of WWII. Off the record stories indicate quite a number of the boys and girls, now respected senior citizens were young rascals. One senior student, Dorothy Nuske, now Hamilton and a cheerful grandmother, recalled the constant difficulty in obtaining a house mother. Women wanted to be part of the action in the city. At that time Olinda was far away in the country. The children, of necessity, became self reliant and independent.

The head teacher was Mr Geoff Green, ex Brighton Grammar school. Hugh Jeffrey was a part time music teacher. Don Forbes and Neil Westh were teachers. Mr Green stimulated the imagination of these blind teachers in the direction of employment in the sighted area. A number of young blind students were by now progressing through university but their knowledge of what fields of professional employment could be open to them was limited. George Findlay brought Dorothy Nuske, Joan Ryan and other non sighted aspiring professionals into the discussions. The result was the formation of the Guild of Professional Blind, later the Guild of Business and Professional Blind. The Guild made Kooyong its home. It helped to establish a higher level of thinking and broader concepts of employment. Mrs Elaine Leahy, now a Director of the Association for the Blind was one of the members and for many years Secretary. Hugh Jeffrey was President.

This chapter has majored on the social activities and interaction of the various age groups. Not realised in the 1990's is the extent to which the various streams of blind people of that era knew each other, the closeness of their relationships. They had been to school together as boarders; they had grown up together as teen agers; they had worked together in the RVIB factory or retained their bonds through the Guild of

Business and Professional Blind. They played sport together and all met together at clubhouse functions.

Although they had the normal disagreements with each other they were united against any real or imagined slight by sighted persons. In some mysterious way a sighted person, after a non defined time and having passed an unknown test would be accepted as sincere and a friend. This friendship was a privilege valued highly. Interestingly, it also bonded together those sighted persons admitted to this relationship.

A number of the future non sighted leaders in the blind welfare field developed their leadership potential and rose to prominence in clubhouse-based activities.

10. ATTEMPTED GRAFTING RETARDS GROWTH

The relationship between the AAB and RVIB in the 1930s. is the principal subject of this chapter. The events of those years had a dramatic impact on the future. They dominated and coloured the thinking of both organisations and influenced the attitudes of committees, blind members and senior staff for many years thereafter. For these reasons the topic is given considerable. coverage.

The fledging Association for Advancement of the Blind held the first conference of its blind members in 1897. Carried away by the euphoria of the occasion, one member had the temerity to prophesy a future when blind people from throughout Australia would meet to discuss matters of mutual interest. This mustard seed also took root and would have a major impact in the future. The AAB was the only organisation of blind people then in existence.

Federal Council of Organisations of the Blind.. In January 1913 the first interstate conference of organisations of blind people took place in Melbourne. It was hosted by the AAB. Dave Robertson was elected conference Chairman. Queensland and South Australia sent two delegates. N.S.W. and Victoria had four delegates. A decision was made to continue the meetings. From this start came the Federal Council of Organisations of the Blind. The cardinal requirement for membership was that the management and control of the organisation be in the hands of blind people.

The Federal Council saw as its responsibility the consideration of all matters affecting blind people in Australia and making recommendations to its constituent bodies. On some matters it lobbied directly with the Commonwealth Government. The Honorary Secretary was located in Sydney. Conferences, which were held every three years, were rotated between the States. The Secretary submitted a quarterly report to each member body. Prior to each conference, agenda items were submitted to the Secretary who consolidated and circulated them.

The quarterly reports were read at the blind members meetings of the AAB. The conference agenda was read and discussed item by item. Delegates were given voting instructions on each item. These were either, 'Yes', 'No', or 'Discretion permitted'.

Matters of concern fell into three main categories, namely, benefits for blind people; education and employment. The first area included, free wireless licences, telephone rental concessions, liberalisation of the means test on pensions and a pension for all blind people as a compensation for blindness. Under education were demands for the free and compulsory education of all blind children; that the education standards for blind children be raised; that blind children be educated separately from deaf children; that education be removed from the charitable bodies and run by the respective state education systems; that a national library of educational material be established.

The third category, employment, was the focus of the greatest attention. As Blind Workers Associations were formed progressively in each State, the Federal Council provided a national outlet for the outpouring of all their frustrations. Workers wanted state control of Industrial Institutions in preference to charitable control; reduced working hours; new occupations; higher wages; protective tariffs; direct monopolies of certain goods. They wanted blind workers to have representation on Boards of

Management and Appeal Boards for grievances or claims. These and other matters were raised frequently.

The two AAB delegates to the Federal Council were selected by the blind members, were usually members of the General Committee, had been or were Vice Presidents, and were likely to work in the RVIB factory.

Amalgamation proposals. A number of the more thoughtful blind members of the AAB began to fear where the Federal Council was heading. They were concerned at the emphasis on industrial matters, an increasing lean towards the Labour Party and Trades Hall Council and the effect these might have on perceptions of AAB impartiality. They moved that the AAB disaffiliate from the Federal Council. The many blind workers who were also members of the AAB voted against the motion which was defeated.

This result, plus the fact the AAB was the leading member of the Federal Council, added flame to a perception held by the Superintendent of the RVIB, Mr Stan Hedger, that the AAB was deliberately undermining his organisation.

The Educational and Industrial Institutions, doing their best in very difficult times were upset by the increasing criticism from the Federal Council. The Tasmanian Institute for the Deaf and Blind went so far as to circulate a letter suggesting a conference of Industrial Institutions and Educational facilities working for blind people in order that appropriate action could be taken. This conference ultimately took place in 1952 and contributed to the birth of the Australian National Council for the Blind.

The 1920s had seen the three Victorian organisations serving blind people step up their appeals for funds. The RVIB had continued its paternal conservative policy, maintaining it was doing all that was needed for blind people. The flourishing growth of the two young mustard seeds, the Braille Library and AAB, gave lie to the claim.

In 1925 the RVIB initiated a proposal to amalgamate the Victorian Association of Braille Writers and the Association for Advancement of the Blind into the RVIB. The RVIB believed "there was a great deal of overlapping and leakage in connection with the different institutions and associations dealing with the blind. It considered that if an amalgamation would bring about a more economical state of affairs it was in the interests of the blind to adopt it".¹

Both Societies opposed the suggestion. They knew that underlying the word 'amalgamation' was the unspoken word 'takeover'.² Each maintained it had its own definite sphere of activity and that their common objective of the welfare of the blind would not necessarily be advanced. The Victorian Braille Writers Association made the point that when the idea of a Braille Library was first mooted and offered to the RVIB the concept had been rejected. The Charities Board also opposed amalgamation in 1925, stating that no good purpose could possibly be served.³

¹The Braille and Talking Book Library by Beverley J Johnson. 1980.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

The possibility of amalgamation was again canvassed in 1928. This followed the revelation that the expenditure of the RVIB in that year was £6,000. greater than income.⁴ The blind mendicant menace had also reappeared in 1927-28 as the depression began to bite. These facts foreshadowed still more intense appeals to the public.

The Institute expressed its desire to see blind beggars removed from the streets, as there was no need for any blind person in Victoria "to be in distressed circumstances".⁵

The Argus editorialised;

"One distressing thing is still noticeable in the city. I mean the unfortunate sufferers from blindness begging in the streets. In many other cities this is a thing of the past. The presence of blind mendicants in the streets is a blot upon the city. They might be objects of pity if it were not that there was no need for them to parade their disability at the kerbstone. There are excellent institutions for the care of the blind and they are properly assisted. All blind persons in need of help from the community may find a haven there. When blind beggars are found in the streets it may be assumed either that they have been rejected by institutions for good reasons, such as refusal to do the work they are able to do, or that they find street mendicancy more profitable".⁶

This elicited a reply from T.H. McVilly, Secretary of the AAB;

"My Association exists specially to care for those blind who are incapable of industrial effort, whether it be through age or infirmity. We have been successful in removing several blind from the streets, but we have failed with others. We encourage self help by giving light work to those blind capable of some effort, yet not industrially employable. To those beyond all help our homes are open".

Not to be outdone the Institute made its own position clear;

"This Institute is concerned only with the training of blind persons in occupations at which they may earn sufficient, with the Institute's special bonus, to keep them and to provide employment for those who have learned trades. It is not able in view of its financial position, to accept responsibility for the care of blind persons who are incapable, either by age or infirmity, of doing productive work".⁷

The RVIB then condemned the Charities Board saying it had not been given a fair hearing in recent years. It said it was time to amalgamate the appeals of the three organisations.⁸ The Superintendent, Mr. Stan Hedger, said, his Board 'was unanimous that something would have to be done to end the competition in ticket selling and canvassing by the different blind organisations. The public was being

⁴The Sun Nov.14, 1928

⁵The Argus Nov.20, 1928

⁶The Argus Jan. 1,1929

⁷The Argus Jan. 21,1929

⁸The Herald April 3,1929

irritated beyond measure'. Since the AAB spent only £2,000. a year in comparison to the Institute's £16,000., 'it should not have power to employ collectors for such a small body'.⁹ In saying this Mr Hedger was not telling the truth in respect of AAB expenditure..

Two areas of fundraising were causing particular unrest. These were concerts and collections. Both the RVIB and the AAB had concert parties in the country and metropolitan areas. From time to time the ticket sellers operated in the same town at the same time. The RVIB had the state's largest, finest and most effective force of some 120 Auxiliaries. One of their regular efforts was a door-to-door collection. The AAB also had a substantial list of regular donors on whom its collectors called. In particular, AAB Committees at Ballarat and Bendigo who were providing direct services to the blind people of their district resented the intrusion of RVIB fundraisers. Conversely, Geelong which was a RVIB stronghold, resented the intrusion of AAB competition.

The RVIB now published the following statement at the foot of its letterhead:

"The Institute is twice the size of any society for the blind in the southern hemisphere and is carrying on more activities than any organisation for the blind in the world. The Institute's expenditure is exceeding its income by six thousand pounds per annum but the board adopts the policy that it is far better for the Institute to be in need of support than that any blind person in the state should be denied assistance".

In August, 1929, the Secretary of the Lord Mayor's Fund claimed in the press that the work of his fund was being impeded, because of paid collectors who were working on commission for certain hospitals and public institutions. The allegation was that the collectors were licking up the cream to the detriment of the charities. A general outcry followed with several items in the press. The Cabinet and Premier became involved.

Financial Agreement. Also in August 1929, following a personal conversation, the Hon Treasurer of the RVIB, the Hon. W.H.Edgar, a long time friend of the AAB, wrote to the Hon. George Maxwell MHR., President of the AAB. His letter suggested the interests of the blind of Victoria would be best served by a financial amalgamation. Continuance of the present situation, he wrote, would undoubtedly alienate the sympathy of an ever generous public.

Mr Edgar's proposal was;

- The RVIB should finance the AAB on the basis of its present annual expenditure;
- The RVIB in making its combined appeal should employ the blind people working for the AAB;
- The Charities Board should be asked from time to time to determine the additional financial needs of the AAB;
- The AAB accept an office at the RVIB for its administrative work;
- The Executives of the two societies meet from time to time to discuss their mutual interests, and
- That the Hon. G.A. Maxwell join the board of the RVIB.

⁹The Age April 4, 1929

The Blind Members of the AAB felt the RVIB had been trying to get a stranglehold on them for a number of years and that indirect pressure was being placed upon them for total amalgamation. This they would not accept. However, in the interests of eliminating overlapping in certain areas of fundraising, they would, with reservations and if their interests were protected, agree to participation in a general appeal and consider an ongoing Financial Agreement.

Overnight the need for Tom Marks to fret over lack of support at blind members meetings, evaporated. Attendances surged, averaging 60 to 80 members each meeting. On one occasion 120 were present. Meetings were scheduled to close at 10 pm. More often than not extensions of time were granted till 11 pm. Prominent among the protagonists were Fred and Emily Barkel.

The combined meeting took place in Mr Maxwell's office in March, 1930. Representing the AAB were Messrs Maxwell, Willmott, Paterson, Norton, Marks and McVilly. Delegates from the RVIB were Mr J.L.Carnegie, President. The Hon. W.H.Edgar and Mr S.W.Hedger, the Superintendent.

Mr Maxwell said the proposals as submitted were not acceptable to the AAB. Discussion was cordial. There was agreement a sub committee of two from each body meet and bring recommendations to the full group. Mr Willmott and Mr McVilly were appointed AAB representatives.

The AAB recommendations were approved at a special meeting of the General Committee in May 1930. Each clause was moved and seconded by a blind Committee Member. Three of the basics were: that the principle of a financial agreement was acceptable; that the management and control of each Society remain as it existed; and that the agreement remain in force for three years.

The detailed proposal was, understandingly, not acceptable to the RVIB. The responding proposal of the RVIB was unacceptable to the AAB. The matter was placed before the Charities Board. The final outcome was:

- The RVIB to receive 80 per cent of the money raised; the AAB 20 per cent.
- The RVIB to continue to form Auxiliaries;
- Country Collectors to be withdrawn from areas where Auxiliaries were operating;
- All Association collectors to be withdrawn from the city and suburbs. The RVIB to retain theirs;
- Money from AAB subscribers in the country to be handed to Auxiliaries.
- The RVIB concert party to continue but its tickets to mention the AAB.
- The AAB not to raise money by public entertainments.
- The AAB home in Bendigo was to receive 50 per cent of moneys raised locally. The Auxiliary in Ballarat was to receive 30 per cent of local moneys.
- Should the AAB share of 20 per cent not reach £1300 the RVIB to guarantee this minimum.

These conditions were very unfair to the AAB.

In addition the Charities Board granted permission for a Special Public Appeal for the Blind during February- April 1931. The three agencies were invited to participate.

The Victorian Association of Braille Writers declined to take part. The conditions then laid down by the Charities Board required the Appeal to be in the names of both the RVIB and the AAB. The RVIB was to receive 80 per cent of the proceeds, the AAB 20 per cent..

Mr Stan Hedger wrote to the AAB saying he would control the Special Public Appeal and that he "expected every assistance and co-operation". The AAB replied saying "No, the Sub Committee would control the appeal". It accepted he would be Organiser which included the duties of Publicity Officer and Secretary. The effect was the same.

This was the period of the Hedger dynasty in blind affairs. Mr Hedger senior ruled as Superintendent of the Royal Blind Society of NSW. His son Stan headed up the RVIB in Melbourne. Stan had a mixed reputation. On the one hand he was seen as autocratic, and did not like opposition. On the other, he did want the best for the children and could be generous to that end. He had an outstanding flair for publicity and used the children to that end believing the end justified the means. The children hated being exploited for fund raising purposes. Their resentment found expression in their attitude as adults to the RVIB.

.The Appeal was opened at Government House by Lord Somers. The target was, for then, the huge sum of £50,000 A total of £38,000 was raised. This was a notable effort. The AAB received £7500. Some of the appeal funds had been invested in short term bonds. Two thousand pounds of these bonds were allocated to the AAB. The AAB said it would prefer cash. The RVIB said it would help out by purchasing £1000 of the bonds for £900 cash. This action did not advance friendship.

The Blind Members fears were realised in the publicity. The RVIB Lighthouse and slogan 'from the cradle to the grave' was used on the letterhead. The AAB name and publicity was minimised. Mr Hedger and the RVIB were promoted. The press cuttings of the appeal covered 540 column inches. Of these over 200 inches were devoted to the RVIB and fewer than 20 inches to the AAB. The impression conveyed, very successfully, was that the AAB was a section of the RVIB. Despite strenuous efforts to correct the picture that view is still widely held. What could have been a healthy unifying exercise served to increase tension.

In view of the negative Special Appeal experience, the willingness of the AAB to enter a Financial Agreement is hard to understand. Pressures which remain unknown must have been brought to bear. This Agreement, scheduled to run for three years, began operating following the wind up of the Special Appeal. In 1932 the RVIB having taken over choice AAB fund raising activities sought to cancel the Agreement. The AAB took the issue to the Charities Board. Leaders of the delegation were Mr Tom Marks and Bro O'Neill. As a result the Agreement was renewed for a year. In 1934 the two parties again took their grievances to the Charities Board. By this time the Charities Board was becoming tired of them and refused to arbitrate. Amid much bickering the Financial Agreement continued to be renewed with various amendments and for varying periods during the following five years.

Brighton, Bendigo and Ballarat Auxiliaries were included in the Financial Agreement. The Brighton Auxiliary refused to co-operate. It was working for the Home and that

was that. It was exempt. Mr Willmott visited the two country branches and explained the situation. They agreed to co-operate.

The Financial Agreement required the Bendigo and Ballarat Auxiliaries to contribute a percentage of their fundraising to the RVIB, to change their names to the Auxiliary for the blind children and adults of Victoria; to consider themselves as members of the RVIB Council of Auxiliaries but under the control of the AAB as far as property was concerned. If either auxiliary failed to raise the sum mentioned, the RVIB reserved the right to form its own auxiliaries in the two centres.

This, according to the *Bendigo Advertiser*, March 9, 1932, meant:

" Our Committee becomes the sole local authority in all matters affecting the blind of this district, thus extending our sphere of work and responsibilities. Our Committee will be responsible for raising the district quota of revenue and will supervise all local expenditure. Thus our appeal will be greater and we believe the public will welcome the scheme as it concentrates the appeal for relief of the blind and places control locally".

There are no records as to the working of the scheme. There is some evidence to suggest the country committees divided their fundraising into two categories - general funds and local purposes. Both centres remained extremely loyal to the AAB. Presumably they did forward the required amount to the RVIB through the AAB office, as no opposition auxiliaries were formed. However they did not have direct contact with the RVIB, did not change their names, were not visited by the RVIB Auxiliaries Organiser, and remained with the AAB when the Agreement ended. Presumably too, the local community belief and recriminations that plagued the AAB for long years thereafter, namely that Ballarat and Bendigo people were subsidising the work in Melbourne, had their origin in those years.

During these years two broad clarifying clauses were accepted. First, that the functions of the RVIB were Industrial and Educational and those of the AAB were the care of the Aged, Infirm and Unemployable Blind. Second, each Society agreed not to overlap the special functions of the other and to co-operate on all common matters.

Later Agreements included clauses that either party had the right to withdraw on three months' notice and that in the event of Australia becoming involved in a war, the agreement automatically lapsed. The noose that the blind members had sensed, was being tightened gradually.

Publicity remained a constant source of irritation to the AAB. Two aspects disturbed the blind members. First, the way in which blind people were presented. Second, misrepresentation of facts and plain lies. Extracts from an article in the *Listener In*, July 13, 1935, illustrate these points:

"Bereft of their sight, they are for ever striving to overcome their terrible affliction by training the remaining senses to function more effectively than normal folk. Their hands become their eyes; they feel rather than see; they go through life seen but not seeing.

That quite a few have pierced the forbidding gloom that is always about them to grasp success is wholly due to the organisation that shelters them as children, educates and

trains them as men and women, and cares for them in old age. The RVIB perseveres with every blind person entrusted to its care until it is able to turn the halting footsteps into a purposeful stride towards a definite goal.

The Superintendent of the Institute, Mr.S.W.Hedger, has travelled the world to study closely the conditions under which the blind people are trained in every country. From this experience and from his own knowledge he has evolved the most successful methods of operation anywhere in the world today. He has given his life to the advancement of the blind, and is, without doubt, the eyes of the sightless in Victoria.

In casting around for a more convenient yet reliable adjunct to teaching than Braille, The RVIB has turned to radio. Every blind person in the state has been given an up-to-date radio receiver. It is installed and maintained by the Institute free of charge. Radio for the blind is a necessity rather than a luxury. With radio they lose temporarily at least, that gnawing hunger for sight."

A sad episode. Early in 1932 the sighted Vice President of the AAB, Mr W.C.Willmott, accepted an invitation to join the Board of the RVIB. This invitation had originally been extended to the President, Mr George Maxwell. At the next meeting of the Blind Members, which Mr Willmott, as was the custom, was chairing, Mrs. Hutchinson opened a barrage. The shots came thick and fast:-

"Was it true the sighted Vice President had accepted a seat on the Board of the RVIB? If so had he consulted the Committee?"

Mr Willmott responded he had accepted appointment as a private citizen and had not consulted the Committee.

"Was it correct for a Trustee to be on the RVIB board?"

"Was it legal for a Trustee to be on the RVIB board?"

"Was it consistent for a Vice President of the AAB to be a member of the RVIB board?"

A motion was then tabled 'that the sighted Vice President be asked to resign'. After further discussion this was amended to 'reconsider the position'. Mr Willmott later responded in a letter that he considered his action was in the best interest of blind people and he saw no reason to change his opinion.

The General Committee passed a vote of confidence in Mr. Willmott. At the next Annual Meeting [1932] the group of disenchanted blind members nominated a candidate to oppose Mr Willmott. The person was soundly defeated.

At the meeting of the Blind Members following the annual meeting, Mr Barkel moved that, 'no Officer of the AAB shall hold office on the Board of any other society for the blind'. The Chairman, Mr Willmott, ruled the motion out of order. The meeting upheld the Chairman's ruling.

The skirmishing continued until 1935, when an Order of Business at the Annual Meeting was a notice of motion from Mr Barkel, 'that no official member of the AAB shall occupy a position on the Board of Management of the RVIB'. After a long discussion including, to use a modern political cliché, a frank and robust exchange of views, the motion was carried. Paradoxically, Mr Willmott was then elected Vice President, unopposed.

The General Committee did not support the resolution. At the following General Committee meeting Bro. O'Neill moved that legal opinion be obtained as to its effectiveness. The answer being that it had legal force, a Special Meeting was called and the Constitution amended. The amendment read, "any person sighted or blind occupying an official position at or in connection with the RVIB shall not be eligible for election to any office of the AAB".

This was clever wording in that it included sighted and blind but did not debar workers in the RVIB factory from holding official positions in the AAB which a number did.

So it was, that after fifteen years of loyal, devoted, distinguished service, Mr and Mrs Willmott departed. Four other members of the General Committee resigned in support. A Committee Member since 1920, Mr Willmott had served as sighted Vice President since 1924. From that date the AAB had functioned with both a President and a Chairman. Mr. Willmott had chaired continuously the General Committee, Hostel Committee, Social Committee and Blind Members meetings. He had visited the Ballarat and Bendigo Auxiliaries. He and Mrs Willmott had travelled throughout the state extolling the virtues of the AAB in public meetings. Mrs Willmott had served beside him on the General Committee and was Hon. Secretary of the Hostel and Social Committees on which she also served.

The last meeting chaired by Mr Willmott was the Hostel Meeting in August 1936. On that occasion Mr. Marks said he was the person who had first asked Mr Willmott for assistance. He had given wonderful service to the AAB and been a faithful friend throughout. Mrs Hutchinson who had initiated the whole sad episode, endorsed Mr Marks' comments.

Mr Willmott replied that he said goodbye with a great deal of regret at the turn of events. His object in joining the Board of the RVIB was to serve the whole of the Blind. He did not feel his action had been detrimental to the interests of the AAB. He would always have the same feelings towards his blind friends of the AAB.

Mr Willmott's original decision, made with the best of intentions, was too idealistic for the prevailing circumstances. Some members saw it as betrayal. The episode highlights the intensity of the blind members' feelings

Financial Agreement cancelled. On May 30, 1939 the AAB received three months' notice of termination of the Agreement. The Finance Committee recommended acceptance of cancellation of the Agreement and an approach to the Charities Board seeking assurance it would not oppose the separate activity of the AAB. A Sub Committee consisting of Miss Aston and Messrs Paterson, Lightfoot, Ness and Fowler was appointed to take such steps as were necessary to prepare for independence.

The Letter of Termination said among other things: "*Since the Agreement was finalised, appeals for funds have been inaugurated by at least two other organisations, viz - the Roman Catholic Hostel for the Blind, the President of which is a member of your Committee and the Blind Workers Association, the President of which is a Vice President of your Association.*"

"Although your Association is supposed to be non-political we understand it is affiliated with Blind Unions in the Commonwealth who are affiliated with their respective Trades Halls. It also undertook to manage the Kooyong Sports Ground for the Blind, [another separate organisation which appeals for funds.] Another Company has also suggested an appeal of £8,000 to provide guide dogs for the Blind.

"To quote from a speech made by the Secretary of the Blind Workers Association, 'it is inevitable a certain amount of support will be withdrawn'. These words were used when referring to the possible effects of the Union's campaign on the Institute's revenue.

"The Secretary of the Blind Workers Association also issued the following statement. Of the 1,100 blind persons in the State 168 are employed at the Institution, leaving 962 to exist on miserable compassionate allowances, the charity of friends and relations, and what they can pick up canvassing from door to door or cadging in the streets. The Pension of £1 a week, even though combined with limited assistance available is grossly inadequate to provide for the needs of the Blind and their families.

"As your Association is controlled by some of the 1,100 persons referred to and has existed for 44 years in caring for a large section of the Blind, my Board feels it should not subscribe to it, as apart from the other matters mentioned, it allows such statements to be circulated by an Association it is indirectly connected with.

"Whenever the authorities who are directly or indirectly in charge of the various charitable movements for the Blind may see fit to consider the above matters, my board would be quite willing to discuss the unification of collections to prevent overlapping of appeals for the Blind".

Representatives of the two bodies met at the Charities Board on July 24, 1939. Messrs Willmott and Hedger for the RVIB. Messrs Paterson, Lightfoot, Ness and Fowler for the AAB.

Further correspondence took place between the three parties. The differences could not be reconciled.

The Charities Board, keen on some form of amalgamation, asked Mr. W.A.Watt to enquire into and report on the matter. His Report which was accepted, recommended against a compulsory takeover by the RVIB and advocated the AAB be given the opportunity to proceed by itself. The Agreement ended on August 31, 1939. The outbreak of war on September 2, would have invalidated it in any case.

Financially the AAB received £1,350 the first year of the Agreement rising to £2,500 in 1938. In the same period, due to the Financial Agreement, income had decreased from £14,000 to £9,500. Two years later despite the loss of the funds received under the Agreement, income had climbed to £11,000.

The uneasy Agreement lasted for nine years. During this period the AAB ceased to advertise its work and its needs publicly. The RVIB skilfully presented itself as the body serving all the blind and the AAB, when mentioned, was as a section of its work. The adverse effects of the agreement were felt by the AAB for many years.

11. ON THE ROAD TO INCORPORATION

As the General Committee and blind members sought to grow and pursue a normal lifestyle through the 1930s, stormy winds battered the organisation. Finally, in tempestuous fury, they sought to uproot the mustard tree.

Blind Workers Union. The RVIB workers had frequently used the AAB as a front to take up issues of concern to them. Other blind members maintained it was time the workers formed their own society. This had been done in a number of States. In 1932 the Association of Blind Workers was formed.

Two immediate repercussions followed. The AAB asked the new organisation to change the word 'Association' in its title in order to avoid confusion. It refused. Sniping continued for a number of years. The name was then changed to the Blind Workers Association. On becoming affiliated with the Trades Hall Council, adoption of the name Blind Workers Union, satisfied AAB members.

At a meeting of AAB blind members, a motion was tabled that the AAB endorse the action of the Blind Workers in forming an Association to protect their interests and that it form an Auxiliary to assist the general interests of the Workers Association. The meeting Chairman was Mr Willmott who had recently joined the RVIB board which was opposed to the workers action. Mr Willmott ruled the motion out of order as the meeting did not have a list of the interests before it and the AAB could not form an Auxiliary to raise funds for another body. While Mr. Willmott's ruling was correct in the minds of the less knowledgeable the seed of doubt as to his loyalty had been sown.

Having taken what in the circumstances was a bold step, the Association of Blind Workers became militant. A notice was placed in the *Herald* to the effect that the Workers planned a deputation to the Minister asking that the RVIB be placed under state control. The General Committee of the AAB asked its members not to make press statements. At the meeting of blind members Fred Barkel moved that two delegates be appointed to support the delegation. His motion was defeated.

The suggestion was also made, that if the AAB asked the Education Dept. to take over the RVIB school, the Teachers Union would support the move. The Committee refused to listen.

At another blind members' meeting Mr Barkel moved that a delegation from the AAB wait on the Charities Board and protest at the victimisation of the partially blind workers at the RVIB. The motion was carried unanimously. The General Committee appointed three blind members to look into the matter quietly. Their investigation failed to disclose one shred of evidence to support the allegation. .

The conduct of the Committee of the AAB in these matters compares with the action of Mr Hedger who took police action against Mrs Bartlett for the alleged unauthorised collection of a donation of 5/-. His charge was that the donation was intended for the RVIB and that Mrs Bartlett was either stealing or obtaining money under false pretenses. Mrs Bartlett had been collecting donations towards the cost of the annual picnic for close to twenty years. This particular year she had collected a regular donation of 5/- before receiving her written authority from the AAB. The resulting

furor involved lawyers, including Mr Maxwell, the Charities Board and Parliamentary Ministers before the Police dropped the matter

Health Insurance. As early as 1903 proposals had been made within the AAB for the establishment of a Sickness Provident Scheme. At the time no benefit society would accept blind persons as members. They were seen as an unacceptable risk. No progress was made. Now, in 1934, taking as examples doctors who gave honorary service in hospitals and others who gave honorary service in AAB Homes, the Committee saw no reason why the concept could not be extended to blind members living privately.

Mrs Bartlett visited doctors in the suburbs most heavily populated by blind members. Many Doctors were prepared to provide an honorary service to local blind members. She also established a list of chemists willing to supply medicines for a fee of 10/- a year. The AAB paid this fee. Within three months of the system being introduced 120 blind members were participating. When the British Medical Association [BMA] heard of the scheme it forbade its doctor members from participating. They must charge for their services. Thereafter the AAB paid a fee of £3. for a man and £2. for a woman per annum. This system continued until the Commonwealth scheme commenced.

Concurrent with this, Dr Charles Bennett, later long time President of the RVIB, was appointed Honorary Physician to the Hostels which he visited frequently. In the quaint reasoning of the B.M.A. it was quite acceptable to visit 20 people in a hostel on an honorary basis but not to visit one in his or her home.

Wireless Licence Fee Concession. The miracle of the crystal set was now being superseded by the even greater wonders of the wireless. This service opened up new worlds to visually impaired people. Paying the annual licence fee was a real financial burden for many.

The AAB tried to obtain free listeners licences for blind people. only to be told . that if the blind were exempt from the fee every other society and disability would want the same benefit.

The Blinded Soldiers' Association asked for AAB support in another attempt. A letter was sent to the Director of Posts and Telegraphs requesting that he receive a deputation. He replied: *"The Department has given much consideration to the question and has received many representations on the subject. Although the matter has been viewed in the most sympathetic manner it has not been found practicable to grant the concession. Your President, Hon G.A.Maxwell MP, has taken a personal interest in the subject and has discussed it with me at length. It does not appear any benefit would arise from sending a further deputation"*.

The Federal Council of Organisations of the Blind then co-ordinated a national approach to politicians. Free wireless licences were granted within a year. This concession became effective on January 1, 1934.

Definition of Blindness. There was no local standard of vision for certification of blindness. The AAB sought a definition from the Charities Board. It scurried around looking for one and wrote back, " The Board has considered the matter and suggests

as a general guide the principles set forth in the Report of the Prevention of Blindness Committee, England, 1931 should be adopted."

Now, with the introduction of free wireless licences an approved national definition was required. Notification was received that the Victorian Branch of the B.M.A., the Charities Board, and the P.M.G's Dept. had agreed on a Standard of Sight as set out on the Application Form for a Wireless Licence and that this standard was being accepted throughout the Commonwealth.

The standard was generous by world measurements. A person was accepted as blind when an ophthalmologist certified that sight was so impaired that he or she could not see with either eye with corrective devices at six metres [twenty feet], what a person with normal vision could see at sixty metres [two hundred feet].

Traffic Regulations. Each municipality still had its own local council regulations pertaining to motor traffic and trams. The Secretary was instructed to take action in an endeavour to have uniform regulations introduced. He was able to report back that a Bill was being prepared for uniform motor traffic regulations throughout the state.

White Canes. White walking sticks were now being used by a few blind people. Their value was the source of much debate. A meeting of blind members voted strongly against their use. In 1935 Mr Marks introduced Mr. Alfred Pearce, a solicitor who had recently lost his sight. In replying to his welcome, Mr Pearce mentioned the help the white walking stick had been in giving him independence. This raised Bro.O'Neill's ire. He interjected that in common with most blind people he objected to being 'branded'. Bro. O'Neill would not accept that walking along behind a person with a hand on his shoulder, or holding on to the arm of a guide was also an indication of blindness.

The following year an article was read which said a law had been introduced in California which gave the white cane user right of way on the streets and in traffic. It was all to no avail . The same year a dog trainer offered to give a lecture on Companion Dogs. Members were not interested. Kodak showed a film on Leader Dogs. Members remained uninterested.

Current events. In September 1934 the blind members recommended a vantage point be secured in St.Kilda Road from which they could watch the passing procession of the Duke of Gloucester as it travelled to Government House. The choir was to be present and entertain the spectators while they waited. On learning a minimum of a 100 people was required to book a group site and the cost £27, the idea was dropped. The AAB did not have that sort of money.

The Jubilee of King George V the following year was marked by the presentation of the Jubilee Medal to Miss Aston, Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Marks. Two years later the Coronation Medal was presented to Miss Aston, Mr. Robertson and Mr. Marks.

Two important visitors in 1934 were Sir Ian Fraser of St.Dunstan's, England and Sir Clutha McKenzie of the New Zealand Institution for the Blind. Both men had been blinded in WWI. Sir Ian, later Lord Fraser, was a founder of St Dunstans the world renowned Rehabilitation Centre in the UK. These inspirational men were a tonic to the local scene.

Funeral Benefits. In contrast to these joyful occasions was the purchase of graves at most metropolitan cemeteries. The AAB felt strongly that no blind member should be buried in a pauper's grave because of the Depression.

Another first initiated by the AAB was a Funeral Benefits Fund with Rayboulds the Undertakers, as funeral directors were then known. For a payment of 6d a week, a blind member was entitled after three months membership, to a free burial. This included coffin, advertising and clergyman's fee. This fund was still operating in the 1950s.

Villa Maria Society. In April 1937, Bro.O'Neill informed the Committee that St Mary's Braille Writers Association had been given a property at No 1 Donald St Prahran. A Hostel with accommodation for 10 people would be established. This would enable the aged Catholic blind to receive the benefits of their faith in their declining years. There was no thought of competition with the AAB. Bro. O'Neill was thanked for the information.

A year earlier Mr. T.McVilly had been asked to attend the office of Mr. C. McVilly, Inspector of Charities. He was told the St Mary's Braille Writers Association had given notice of its intention to apply for registration as a charitable organisation for the blind and to establish a hostel for the Catholic blind. The view of the AAB was requested.

Mr T McVilly said that in his opinion because of the furore already caused by the multiplicity of organisations serving blind people and the RVIB-AAB financial agreement on public collections, the establishment of another organisation and appeal would have to be opposed. He suggested such a hostel could operate under AAB auspices but admit only members of the Roman Catholic faith. This would avoid overlapping and demonstrate the willingness of the AAB to be both flexible and co-operative.

In September 1937 when the Villa Maria Hostel was being readied, the Charities Board responding to a letter from Bro. O'Neill, suggested negotiations with the AAB. There is no record of any negotiations. The only irritation throughout was caused by newspaper articles which described Villa Maria as "the first building of its kind in Australia " and " the only home of its kind in Australia". No doubt the references applied to the Catholic Church but the sensitive atmosphere of the time exaggerated them into a wider context. Bro.O'Neill continued to enjoy full confidence as a prominent AAB negotiator with the RVIB at the Charities Board, while at the same time opposing AAB proposals in relation to Villa Maria at the Charities Board.

Personnel. Major changes took place in both the Committee and Staff during the decade. Herbert Lawrence, husband of Elsie Tait died on June 22,1935. President George Maxwell died on June 25. The AAB Memorial Service for both men was held at the Kooyong Clubhouse. Some 250 blind members and friends attended. The speakers were Miss Aston, Mr. Marks, Mr. Willmott and Mr. Paterson. The choir led the singing. The soloist was Emily Barkel .

Mr Willmott resigned soon afterwards. Mr. Marks was appointed President as a stop gap measure. His 80th birthday was celebrated while he was in office. Miss Aston

was asked to permit herself to be nominated as President. She said this was not a good thing. Her back still troubled her and she was 63 years of age. The response was that the position would be titular. Others would do the bulk of the work. She agreed against her better judgment.

Mr. Marks now retired from all activities. Mr A.V.Worrall replaced Mr. Willmott as a Trustee. Mr Pearce was elected a Vice President. Mr Paterson introduced three new sighted members, Cr. Milton Gray J.P, of Malvern, as sighted Vice President, Mr Andrew Ness as Treasurer replacing Mr Clive Norton who had died and Mr. H.M.[Pat] Lightfoot whom he saw as his successor.

Major staff changes occurred. Miss Elsie Henderson was appointed metropolitan visitor for the women in 1934. Mr Doug Campbell commenced in June 1936 as the men's visitor. Mr Hamish Mackenzie, a Social Work student losing his sight from glaucoma was given the part time task of organising the appeal for the Queen of the Blind in the annual competition held in those days. He was elected to the General Committee in 1936. He was then permitted by the Social Work Council to do his field training with the AAB. Mr Mackenzie was the first blind graduate to qualify for the Diploma in Social Studies. He was appointed Welfare Officer in 1938.

This led to the AAB. being approved as a Social Work Training Centre and Miss Aston's appointment to the Social Work Council. When successfully established, the Social Studies course was incorporated into the University of Melbourne. The AAB assisted financially with a donation of £3/3/- a year for three years.

The continuous strain of the past ten years had affected the health of Mr. McVilly. After a private discussion with Miss Aston he tendered his resignation as Secretary in July 1938. Mr. Ness doubted if a more efficient officer could be found. In the hope that he would return after a break, Mr Ness recommended that Miss Date, the office assistant, be appointed Acting Secretary. Mr. McVilly did not return.

Mr George Fowler was selected from among nearly eighty applicants for the position of Secretary. He commenced duty at the end of March 1939. Mr Fowler was a pleasant, middle aged man, tall, white-haired, who carried himself well.

Mr Fowler introduced a number of innovations. One, most pleasing, was the introduction of the term 'resident' to replace 'inmate' and 'boarder'.

At the end of 1941 with the war fears at a high pitch, the Committee instructed Mr Paterson and Mr Fowler to go through all the records and destroy those which were non-essential. Very few were retained.

Growing discord. On a number of occasions over the years some blind members had protested at certain rights enjoyed by blind staff members. They did not think it right that staff members should be members of management committees and vote on matters in which they had a direct interest. Moves for a change were always defeated by the total membership. What the blind membership saw as a key right, enshrined in the Constitution, was the right of all financial blind members to stand for and hold office and be entitled to vote.

On the appointment of Mr Fowler, the Committee, in its wisdom, or lack thereof, divided office duties into two streams. Mr Fowler, responsible for administration and secretarial duties answered to the General Committee. Mr Mackenzie, responsible for the visitors, blind members affairs and fundraising answered to the Finance Committee.

Mr Mackenzie was also a member of most committees. Because of the failing health of Miss Aston and Mr. Pearce, Mr Mackenzie as the second Vice President, chaired the General Committee and blind members meetings between August 1941 and May 1943.

Meeting standards deteriorated, squabbles increased, trivia triumphed. For example, much of the time at one blind members' meeting was devoted to debating who should and who should not, sit on the platform at the forthcoming annual meeting.

The divided office responsibility, which gave rise to internal management conflict, exacerbated the situation.

No Confidence. Matters came to a head after the blind members meeting in March 1943. Mr Jack Murphy, Secretary of the Federal Council of Organisations of the Blind, supported by Mrs Gration introduced a Bill which he had drafted and termed, 'The Blind Persons Social Security Bill'. Mr A.W.Robinson and Mr. E.J.Hanlon, later to be President of the RVIB, moved that the AAB hold a conference in the week commencing the 14th June to consider this Bill. The motion was carried.

The General Committee responded it would co-operate if the Federal Council of Organisations of the Blind concurred. The purpose of the Bill was to establish a Department of Blind Affairs under the Federal Minister for Social Security. The concept and drafting were amateurish and born to failure.

However, before a conference could be arranged, a Requisition was served on the Secretary for a Special Meeting. The Meeting was to be held at the Clubhouse, Kooyong on Thursday, June 10, 1943. The purpose, to move a vote of no confidence in:-

- The President, Miss Aston, on the grounds of inability to participate actively in affairs;
- Vice President, Mr Pearce, on the grounds of inability to carry out the duties of Vice President because of ill health.
- Vice President, Mr. Mackenzie, on the grounds of incompetence;
- The General Committee on the grounds of incompetence;
- To nominate and elect persons to fill any vacancies which occurred.

The promoters of this takeover bid were a combination of 'young turks' including Jack Murphy, Harold and Phyllis Gration and Ted Hanlon together with some of the 'old guard' including Fred and Emily Barkel, Mrs Hutchinson and Miss Eva Fisher. These persons were among the nineteen who signed the Requisition.

During the early 1940s changes to the Constitution had been discussed at no less than five Annual or Special Meetings. The aim of the opposition blind members was to restore the pre 1920 constitution and total control to the blind. Failing that, to ensure blind members had the majority voice on all committees.

Sighted friends had been taking more responsibility in the organisation as the quality of blind representation and consequently leadership fell away. This was resented by some blind people and another reason for the vote of no confidence.

Miss Aston and the Committee rallied their forces. One hundred and thirty two members attended. One of those present said that blind members who had never taken any interest decided it was time to act. One even arrived in a wheel-chair. The Clubhouse was packed. When the nineteen arrived in a group the rest were enjoying community singing. Miss Aston, after opening the meeting, asked for the appointment of an independent Chairman. She would then retire and wait on the outcome. Mr A.W. Robinson was elected Chairman.

Each motion was discussed at length, put to the vote and overwhelmingly defeated. One crisis was over. Another, of equally grave potential, had also suddenly surfaced with explosive force. It had now to be faced.

Incorporation. Miss Aston returned to the meeting room, exercised her authority as President and called an Emergency Meeting of those present. She informed the meeting that under the provisions of the Charities Act, it was within the power of twenty five contributors to present a petition to the Charities Board seeking the Incorporation of the Association under the Act. Such a petition had been presented by the requisite number of contributors. This information had been conveyed to her verbally, that day, by the Inspector of Charities. She desired some member to move and the meeting to adopt without discussion, the following motion.

'That the President, Miss Aston, Vice Presidents, Messrs Pearce and Mackenzie and Messrs Lightfoot, Ness and Paterson be appointed a Committee with power to add to their number, to consider the implications of the action taken and the possibility of conserving the interests of the blind'.

Mrs Bartlett moved the motion which was carried without discussion. Miss Aston's fire and vigour had returned to safeguard her precious child. In the few hours since being advised of the petition for incorporation she must have obtained excellent advice.

Had the petitioners move for incorporation proceeded unchallenged the consequence would have been a Committee of sighted persons without the voice of the blind. As it was a goodly number of blind members felt the petition had cost them their organisation and their autonomy. They never forgave those who signed it. On the other hand many sighted members and friends had been distressed by the deteriorating situation. They conveyed their concern to the Secretary, George Fowler. Having studied the past history and being aware of the current intrigue, he concluded the blind members were in a self destruct mode. He saw Incorporation as the only way of saving the AAB. He knew that any open move to this end would not succeed. He collected the required signatures, taking care not to involve General Committee members.

That incorporation was the right move, was beyond doubt. That Mr Fowlers' employment with the AAB continued was a tacit admission by the sighted leaders of this fact. However, when his involvement became generally known, his reputation within the Association was tarnished.

Mr Lightfoot was appointed Secretary of the Special Committee. It reported back to the meeting of members on October 7, 1943:-

"As announced by the President several months ago, this Special Committee is convinced the Association must become incorporated under the Charities Act. In making their decision, the Committee members considered it most necessary that the Association itself and not a body of contributors who had signed a petition, should carry on the necessary negotiations with the Charities Board. As you know this has now been done.

"You are reminded that the main reasons for supporting incorporation are:

- 1. The prestige of the Association will be enhanced.*
- 2. The strength and solidity of the Association will be increased.*
- 3. The Trustees and Committee generally will receive protection.*
- 4. Incorporation provides a much better basis for permanency of the Association.*
- 5. The full support of the Charities Board can be enlisted.*

"In their negotiations with the Charities Board, the Committee has been at great pains to preserve as far as possible the existing rights of members and a set of by-laws has been drawn up in conjunction with Mr. McVilly and Mr. John Adam of the firm of solicitors, Weigall and Crowther, who are experienced in this work. These by-laws depart substantially from the standard laid down by the Charities Board, but that body has been most helpful to us, and ready to interpret the Act on the most generous basis to enable Members of the Association to obtain the maximum advantage.

"The changes which are of vital interest to Members are, briefly:-

- 1 The Association becomes a corporate body consisting of contributors and honorary life governors. [This includes our life members and honorary life members]*
- 2 A General Committee will be formed consisting of fifteen members. Eight sighted will be elected by the contributors and life governors, and seven will be appointed by blind financial members of the Association. This Committee will appoint sub-committees as in the past which will remain substantially the same as formerly.*
- 3 Blind financial members representing the active membership of the Association will continue to have their own meetings.*

"The activities of the blind financial members will be governed by a set of rules based on the previous rules of the Association. There will be no substantial alterations, but those rules relating to the appointment of sub-committees, office bearers, conduct of Annual Meetings etc., will be deleted.

"You may rest assured the committee has worked hard and faithfully on this matter. There have been numerous conferences with legal advisers and officials of the Charities Board. We confidently believe that the by-laws being tabled tonight represent the best possible basis for incorporation that could be obtained. We feel the interests of Members have been fully conserved, and we recommend your acceptance

with confidence it is the right thing to do and only good will accrue to the Association by immediate action.

"The Committee is convinced that unless incorporation is agreed upon by Members of the Association, it will be forced upon us. If that were to take place it is more than likely that the conditions would not nearly be so favourable as the plan submitted to you tonight."

The meeting received and adopted the report of the Special Committee and authorised it to complete the Incorporation. Sixty seven members voted in favour and three abstained from voting.

The date of Incorporation was December 1, 1943. Miss Aston addressed the contributors on that day:-

"Ladies and Gentlemen: This Meeting of the contributors of the AAB has been summoned to consider a scheme for incorporation under the Charities Act and, as the scheme differs in many ways from the one you aimed at, it is advisable that its consideration should be prefaced with some explanations. The incorporation sought by twenty five of you, when you lodged a petition with the Charities Board, was such that it would have excluded from any voice in the management every blind person including myself, and would have wrested from us who have managed its affairs every right and all assets we have won over a period of forty-eight years.

"This petition of yours was a shock to us, for no protest had come from you, no complaint that you were not satisfied with the conditions of spending the money which you gave for the good of the blind. The first intimation we had of the petition was from the Inspector of Charities, who, knowing the peculiar constitution and make-up of our organisation felt that we blind people had rights as well as you. I do not know what inducement was offered to bring about your action, but the lodging of this petition behind our backs, so as to speak, seemed to carry with it an implication that we blind people had been mismanaging your funds, and doing you an injustice by not giving you a share in the control.

"This implication has been a cruel blow to the spirit of our blind people, the repercussions of which I view with the deepest sorrow. In this Association we had found a way of realising our citizenship in service to others - a service to a class about which we know infinitely more than the best informed of you, and to deprive us of this chance of a fuller life would be a graver injustice than any of you imagine has been done to you. Let me remind you of the origins of this work.

"Forty-eight years ago I called together a few blind friends to talk over the needs of our class, and we felt there was indeed, a great deal to be done, so we formed the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, and I have led it ever since. I need not go into details, but we started it with our personal shillings - eight of them in all - and we have gradually built up this very fine organisation, which is now to be incorporated.

"Through the years we have had harmony save for one or two family squabbles, and the best of the blind have always been lined up with us to help. Among those have been many who started and ran good businesses of their own, such as Mr. David

Robertson, who is with us today as he was at the foundation meeting; Mr Blake, a successful grocer in Carlton, and others too numerous to mention. There were also retired business men who had lost their sight, such as Mr. T. Lowe, father of Justice Lowe; Mr. Holgate, accountant of a leading wool broking firm; old Mr Isaacs, of the distinguished family of that name, and Mr. Campbell, the sound and wise old Scot, who was President, if I remember rightly, of the Union of Engineers. Then there was George Maxwell M.L.A. who even before his blindness was our friend, and later became our blind president. We still have Mr. Alfred Pearce who, in spite of his loss of sight, goes on with his practice as a solicitor in the city. It was with the aid of such brains we were able to go on building.

"But we were not so stupid as to imagine that we could run big finance, and conduct homes and hostels, without the aid of the sighted. All along the march of progress we have had a host of outstanding sighted men and women, who were only too glad to help us run this work, asking nothing for themselves, and rejoicing with us in our aspirations after self help in service. Let me mention a few of them. First was Miss Elsie Tait, now Mrs Lawrence, who as a young girl, stepped in to be our assistant secretary, and is still one of our best loved friends. There was Robert Solly, Frank Tudor, G.R. Snowball, and W.H. Edgar, all public men and in our Parliaments; Sir Malcolm McEachern who helped me in negotiation for concessions on the tramways; there was Charles Monteath, a member of the foundry firm in South Melbourne; Dr. S. McBurney and most loyal of all our friends, Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Paterson.

"These, and a host besides, of good seeing folk, stood by us and helped to realise our ideals, and so we kept on building and growing.

"I want to take this final opportunity of assuring you that at no time in the forty-eight years of our history has the public money been in danger of misuse. Always, at least from the time we launched out in a bigger way, we had ample guards for the funds - a sighted business man as our treasurer, a vigilant committee, qualified auditors. Intense economy was effected because the blind themselves did much of the work without remuneration.

"But today we desire to lay aside reproaches and protests, and to bind together our forces into a solid block for the sake of the cause. Mr. Adam who has been our legal adviser throughout, is here today to help us if necessary, so we submit the plan with confidence, believing you will accept it for the sake of the forty-eight years in which we blind people have carried on the work. We need your co-operation now as much as we ever needed our sighted friends, but we are certain you also need ours, if the best results are to follow this change of policy, since we bring to the work that equipment born of experience as fellows and brothers of those whom we desire to comfort and bless. So, ladies and gentlemen, we present the new by-laws for your adoption.

Tilly Aston, President"

The Incorporation was published in the Government Gazette on January 14, 1944. Major changes resulted. One was the transfer of power and authority from the meeting of blind members to the General Committee. Blind members meetings could recommend. They no longer had power to veto. As one member expressed the

situation:- 'In the early days the Meeting decided everything, now we have no power to decide anything'. This rankled in the hearts of some. Attendance at the blind members meetings again dropped off.

The second major change was the election of sighted representation by the contributors and not the blind members. From a theoretical viewpoint the General Committee was evenly balanced with seven blind and seven sighted members and an additional independent sighted person as Chairman. From a legal aspect the Act required a minimum of eight and a maximum of fifteen contributors. In practical terms the Chairman or President was to become the driving force besides maintaining a balance between not only the blind and sighted but the many other facets of the growing organisation. A further change was the commencement of a mellowing of the previously hard attitude towards the RVIB.

At this point the first 'the' was also dropped from the title Association for the Advancement of the Blind.

Mrs Gration now tendered her resignation as a blind member. The resignation was received as were those of Fred and Emily Barkel.

The root system of the Mustard Tree had been disturbed. Caring attention was needed.

12. FALLING LEAVES - FLOWING SAP

The years of the second world war changed Australia. In 1940 and 1941 a feeling of pride and a fear of sacrifice dominated life as the choice young men of the nation enlisted in the armed services. In 1942 and 1943 apprehension and disillusionment became reality. In 1944 and 1945 there followed burn out and a longing for a return to normality. But what would normality be? The old days and ways had gone forever. Just as Federation changed the face of Australia, so did two World Wars in thirty years.

The discharge of thousands of disciplined young service people into the undisciplined pattern of civilian life was traumatic. The changeover from war production to civilian manufacturing was dramatic. Commodity restrictions continued for years. The business community competed, not always honourably, to reap the financial rewards of exploding civilian needs. The black market flourished. The race for the quick dollar was on.

Against this background the struggling Association was disadvantaged as it entered the new era. The General Committee members were such decent people. They had felt stranded at the end of the Financial Agreement, been shattered by the rebellion and attempted take over coup and sold out by the incorporation. Most were ageing and weary after long, mentally and physically tiring years of devoted service. They faced a future of increased knowledge, new ideas, higher standards and different concepts of services flowing on from war time experience. Yet, they were the roots of the Association. They had to take a firm grasp of the situation and keep the sap of life flowing.

H.M. [Pat] Lightfoot. A nucleus of the pre-war Committee remained at Incorporation. The key persons who would contribute in the next few years numbered eight, paralleling the eight foundation members. They were Miss Aston, Bro.O'Neill and Mrs Bartlett, representing blind members. Messrs Paterson, Lightfoot, Ness, Worrall and Cr. Milton Gray representing the sighted. Mr Lightfoot in his early forties was the youngster. All now looked to him for leadership, guidance and drive.

Annual Operational Income and Expenditure approximated £12,000. This was still less than fourteen years earlier. Assets totalled £20,000. On Mr Lightfoot's shoulders rested a heavy load. Like the key sighted friends fifty years earlier, he was the right person in the right place at the right time. He was not there by capricious chance.

Mr.Lightfoot had lost his father at an early age and did not have an easy boyhood financially. As a youth he began working in the Nicholas [Aspro] office, studied accountancy and worked his way up to the position of accountant. Raised in the Methodist tradition, he had a desire to transfer to social welfare work. After listening to advice, he decided to continue in the business stream and contribute to the welfare scene financially and through voluntary service. At the time of incorporation he was Manager of Nicholas Pty Ltd. He would later advance to Managing Director and Chairman. Mr Lightfoot was one of life's givers, friendly, approachable and highly regarded by business colleagues. His style was consensus management and he was an exceptional communicator. His commitment and devotion to the service of blind people was tested at the time of incorporation. He won their trust and his worth was

recognised. He was now revered in his own right and acknowledged as the successor to Mr Paterson.

New offices. The offices occupied by the Association at 118 Queen St, were requisitioned by the Commonwealth Government in 1944 for the expansion of the Department of Social Services. New offices were secured at 10-12 Queen St as sub tenants of the Naval Attache of the Republic of China. The rent was £17/10/- a month for a twelve month lease. From 1955 the Landlord sought vacant possession. The Association remained in occupation until the move to Brighton in 1959.

Looking forward. Following incorporation, despite its weariness, the General Committee did look ahead. Internally it saw the aftermath of the disturbance as a time to build bridges and restore relationships. It kept operational changes between itself, the sub committees and the blind members to a minimum. This move, wise at the time, made later changes more difficult as sub committees were by then set in their ways.

Externally, it saw the task as twofold. First, to secure funding for existing operations. Second, to lay the foundations for future growth. No fund raising effort was too small. Used stamps were collected and sold to help pay back the longstanding Kooyong debt to Mr Paterson. No effort was too great. A decision was made to hold a Public Appeal to mark the Jubilee of the Association in 1945.

The Blind Members celebrated this Jubilee with a social function at Kooyong on December 15, 1945. The minutes state. "a better supper than usual was served including ham sandwiches, cakes and fruit salad with ice cream". Suitable gifts were presented to the remaining three founders, Miss Aston, Miss Robertson and Mr Robertson.

Called the 'Light at Eventide' appeal, the Jubilee effort was held in 1946. The target was £75,000. The Director was Mr Robert Dodson seconded from the staff of the Lord Mayor's Fund for the purpose. The objective was to build new homes for the blind. The Appeal was launched in the Melbourne Town Hall by the Lord Mayor. Much hard work had gone into the project. All the right things had been done but expectations were not realised. Mr. Fowler reported to the Committee, "Two hundred and thirty invitations were sent out to the Official Opening. In response three people attended. The other thirty present comprised our own Committee and staff. Not one person of social prominence was present. We were forcibly reminded how unknown the Association and its work is and the need to break the long silence by a vigorous and continuous publicity campaign." The amount raised by the appeal was small.

A number of efforts were made to establish a continuing fund raising programme. The most successful were the development of a regular annual subscribers list and variety concerts held in the Melbourne Town Hall. The latter were held quarterly. Work was provided for some twenty blind men who sold tickets from door to door. Leading artists appeared. Attempts by Development Officers to establish new methods failed. After a three month trial, one said in her letter of resignation: "The strain of combating the generally accepted belief in the country that the RVIB cares for all the blind in the state has affected my health".

Better fortune attended the efforts of Miss Grace Robertson, appointed Auxiliaries Organiser in 1948. Miss Robertson had worked previously with the Red Cross. In six months she successfully formed four Auxiliaries. She then left to get married. An event she said, "not anticipated when she accepted the position". Mr Fowler had recommended a car be purchased for her use. The Committee could not see why she could not use trains and trams and hire a car when really necessary. After all, that is what the blind members did. Mrs J Stanley Smith whose husband was manager of Scotts Hotel was an excellent choice as Miss Robertson's successor. This time Mr Lightfoot had his way and the first motor vehicle was purchased.

For a small office, staff turnover was higher than desirable. Deserving of mention is Miss Date who resigned in 1943 to be married. Miss Date gave 19 years of very fine service and had been a source of strength throughout. She was replaced by Miss Shirley Howell. A young man, Ralph Skilbeck was appointed in 1944 with the express purpose of training as Mr. Fowler's deputy. He moved to the Alfred Hospital in 1947. He was replaced by Miss Judith Baird who gave five years of service before leaving to be married. Her mother, Celeste Baird was the Choirmistress. Judith also helped as a valued volunteer in the social activities programme. Mr Fowler's wife died in 1944. He married Miss Shirley Howell in 1949 who continued working in the office.

The Committee was disheartened by the failure of the Jubilee, 'Light at Eventide' appeal but not beaten. The remarkable resilience and faith which characterised the Association was shown in a series of property deals. Properties purchased during the 1940s secured the future accommodation requirements of the Association. These were:-

11 Mair St, Brighton	£3,000	Additional accommodation for residents.
21 New St, Brighton	£4,500	for sick ward. Later sold for £5,250.
Howitt St, Ballarat	£1,000	Future Home site, 2 acres in area.
34 Pleasant St, Ballarat	£4,500	for temporary Home.
Hargreaves St, Bendigo	£2,500	Site for Home. Too small. Later sold for £4,000.
McIvor Rd, Bendigo	£2,625	Future Home site, 2 acres in area.

Mr Paterson revelled in his involvement in these purchases. The adverse side was the neglect of maintenance and repairs to the Homes, Hostel and Kooyong Clubhouse.

Council of Social Services. During October 1946, Lady Herring invited representatives of welfare organisations to attend a meeting in the Melbourne Town Hall. Miss Aston and Mr Fowler represented the Association. The meeting affirmed the principle of forming a Victorian Council of Social Services. A Committee, of which Mr Fowler was a member, was chosen to draft a Constitution. The Council was formally constituted on December 5, 1946. Mr Fowler was asked to accept the office of Honorary Secretary.

The Association was a founding member. The Committee approved the use of the Association's office as the official address of the Council. In the early 1950s the Council was able to afford the services of a part time Executive Officer. This was Miss Margaret Kelley who occupied an office in the Association's suite. In her absence the Association answered the telephone and handled enquiries. The Victorian

Council of Social Services was instrumental in forming the Australian Council of Social Service, with headquarters now in Canberra. It has developed into possibly the most powerful social and welfare co-ordinating body in the nation.

The Association had always been interested in the development of home industries and handcrafts as occupations for blind people. It was also interested in suitable handcrafts as a hobby or pastime for older blind people. Handcraft training was a subject of recurring discussion. Interest was further stimulated when an article was published in the 'New Beacon' in November 1943. This related the success attending the Training and Placement of Blind Telephonists in the U.K. Manpower shortages had opened up new avenues of employment for blind people as indeed, to a certain extent, was the case in Australia.

Handcrafts. The Association proposed to the RVIB that joint discussions be held with the object of introducing training in handcrafts. The RVIB agreed provided it was credited with taking the initiative. To this the Association replied, saying it was not concerned with priority of initiative but in doing a job for blind people. No action eventuated.

Association staff then discussed the subject with the Victorian Division of the Australian Red Cross Society. The Red Cross Society had a particular interest from the rehabilitation aspect of assisting ex servicemen. . The Association Committee agreed to involvement in a combined project provided ten blind people enrolled. This interest was not shown. In addition to teaching handcrafts, the Red Cross established a Handcraft Training Course for Instructors. This won wide acclaim. Many fine young ladies undertook the course. Their talents were welcomed and used to advantage throughout the rehabilitation and social welfare fields. Some years later Association became a major employer of the graduates. The introduction of the Diploma of Occupational Therapy reduced the need for the Red Cross course which was then discontinued.

In the late 1930s the Blinded Soldiers Association had initiated discussions on the establishment of a Central Talking Book Library. The Talking Books were heavy machines like a gramophone and played records. They were available from the U.S. and the U.K. Miss Aston and Mr Pearce attended the discussion. One was purchased by the Association for trial purposes. As a postwar contribution the Red Cross established such a library for the use of blind ex servicemen. The machines were expensive and not popular with the general blind population. They were the forerunner of the modern Talking Book.

Death of Tilly Aston. Many older friends, members and contributors who had given notable service were, like autumn leaves, gently falling one by one to the claims of nature. Among them were Mrs. Mary Madsen, Brighton and Bendigo Committees; Mrs Flanagan, President of the Brighton Home Auxiliary; Mrs. Violet Darling, a foundation member of the Ballarat Committee who had served both as President and Treasurer; Miss Theckla Thorne who involved Mr Paterson in the work. Messrs Norton, Willmott and Ness [sighted] and Messrs Marks, Clarke and Robinson [blind]. Particular sadness was evident at the deaths of two of the remaining three Foundation Members. Miss Janet [Janie] Robertson, the first Treasurer and voluntary visitor, in August, 1947 and Miss Tilly Aston on November 1, 1947. Miss Aston was seventy-four years of age.

Miss Aston had chaired her last Committee Meeting in August, 1947. The pain and ravages of cancer were already being felt. The words of one of her poems written many years earlier were prophetic:-

*Amid the death like hush of starry night
There stood the bed on which a suffering woman lay.
Her sightless eyes upon the window gazed
Waiting for the breaking of the day.*

Miss Aston was laid to rest in the St Kilda cemetery. Lines from her poem, 'Leaves', say it all:-

*Another leaf from life's wide spreading tree
Has fluttered down in search of endless rest.
It did not fall until its work was done
Until the living sap had ceased to come.
And since the leaf could no more service render
Its life force gone it sank in slumber tender.
Caressed by earth's brown mantle, the sun's rays in its face,
It waited with serenity, the mystic imprint of eternity.*

Homage was paid to Miss Aston at all Committee Meetings. The Blind Members established a fund for a memorial. They decided on a grandfather clock which was placed in the Brighton Home. In 1966 when the new wing was added to the Clubhouse at Kooyong they initiated the Tilly Aston Memorial Garden in front of this building.

The 75th anniversary of the founding of the Association was celebrated in 1970. On Sunday, October 25, a simple ceremony took place at the side of the Pyrenees Highway, Carisbrook. Under the direction of the Midland Historical Society a bluestone cairn seven feet high had been erected. Attached to it was a plaque honouring Miss Aston. The Association was involved both financially and in the organising. Its delegates were Mrs Essie Smith, Secretary of the Blind Members Auxiliary and Mr Bob Pearson. Mr E. Ault, a grandnephew unveiled the plaque. Mr Lightfoot spoke on behalf of the Association and Mr Neil Westh on behalf of the children taught by Miss Aston.

In 1982 the Canberra National Memorials Committee asked the Association to nominate as worthy of commemoration, one of its members who had contributed in some way to social reform and Australia's growth as a nation. Miss Aston's name was submitted. A street in the Canberra suburb of Oxley now bears her name as does a Federal electorate in the east of Melbourne.

The Committee of the Association later honoured and perpetuated her name in the Tilly Aston Award. This is a medallion presented to honorary workers in recognition of fifteen years of service.

Helen Keller. An event of great importance to both blind and deaf people throughout Australia was the visit of Miss Helen Keller in May, 1948. Miss Keller was brought to Australia by the Royal Blind Society of NSW. Among her visits in Melbourne were the Brighton Home, Windsor Hostel and Ballarat. A sad note was the fact that Miss

Aston, with whom she had corresponded for many years, had died six months earlier. They had never met.

Presidential moves New members to join the Committee were Mr Bruce Small in 1944 and Mr Stan Horsfall, in 1947. Both were to make notable contributions.

Although the health of Mr Paterson was deteriorating the Committee and particularly Mr Lightfoot, thought the proper thing to do was elect him President in succession to Miss Aston. The two had been friends and associates for more than fifty years. In the past Mr Paterson had refused to accept the Presidency, maintaining his task was a supportive role. Under the new incorporated Constitution members felt he could and should be so recognised and honoured. He was elected President in 1948.

On March 24, 1949, the Committee hosted a grand social evening in the Malvern Town Hall to honour sixty years of voluntary service to blind people by Mr Paterson. The Committee thought, as Mr Paterson spoke frequently of retiring, he would only occupy the position of President for a year. When Mr Paterson heard of this function, he reacted as the Committee had hoped and said he would use the occasion to announce his retirement.

On the night some four hundred and fifty guests were present. Many congratulatory messages were read. The speakers overwhelmed Mr Paterson with their praise. In particular, Mr C. L. McVilly the first Chairman of the recently formed Hospitals and Charities Commission, spoke in glowing terms of his service. A letter was also read from the Hon Tom Holloway, Premier of Victoria eulogising his self sacrificing labours. Mr. Paterson was deeply touched.

In responding, Mr Paterson said his intention had been to announce his retirement. However, he had not realised the high regard in which he was held or that he meant so much to the members and the organisation. There was just no way he could now put his own selfish interests first and let everyone down. He would continue to serve. Mr Paterson had been given a new lease of life. Committee Members sat stunned.

At each annual election thereafter, Mr Paterson was re-elected. Mr Lightfoot, who had a deep appreciation of what he had done and for his feelings, was not prepared to see him hurt. However, enough was enough. At the Committee Meeting in September 1952 the Committee over-ruled Mr Lightfoot and nominated him for the position of President. He was elected unopposed. Mr Paterson was elected Vice President.

Without Miss Aston and Mr Paterson who were rightly regarded as legendary figures, it is doubtful if the Association could have survived. Although they do not always practice the axiom, governing bodies of all kinds acknowledge the wisdom of the saying, that to persuade a person to remain in office too long in any organisation can be an error of judgment and an act of misplaced benevolence. Such a move may embarrass colleagues, damage the reputation of the person concerned and harm the cause to which such person is devoted.

Conversely within the Association years of involvement were required to absorb all the strands and deep feelings of the body. The blind people too, preferred long relationships and felt more comfortable with leaders they had known for years, understood and trusted. There were rare occasions when Committees and Auxiliaries

did have to grapple with sensitive human issues and feelings and the best interests of the organisation in a delicate balancing act. The people oriented philosophy of the Association meant a loving spirit in harness with tolerance and graciousness, was the basis for response and action.

13. NEW LIFE.

Management changes. Mr Lightfoot was elected President of the Association for the Blind in September, 1952. He brought modern business thinking, and a professional approach to the position. There was much he wished to see changed. He thought management and control was weak. Mr Fowler questioned how it could be otherwise with responsibilities so fragmented. A dispute at the Brighton Home which required Mr Lightfoot's personal attention brought matters to a head. He had discussions with the Matron, Housekeeper, Staff, Auxiliary and Home Committee.

Supported by Mr Small and Mr Horsfall he conveyed his requirements to the General Committee. The Senior Officer of the Association would, in future, be both Secretary and Manager. Committees and Auxiliaries would no longer have the power to appoint, dismiss, instruct or interfere with staff members in the performance of their duties. In matters relating to the Homes only items which had been first considered by the Home Committee, and appeared as an agenda item, would be dealt with by the General Committee. General Committee members were not to raise as items of business at meetings, gossip relayed to them by friends. All correspondence with the Homes would in future be through the Secretary.

Mr Lightfoot was not enthused by the office situation. He saw internal weakness with so much reliance placed on a husband-and-wife team. He outlined to Mr Fowler the duties and responsibilities of the Manager and Secretary as he wished them performed and advised his intention of appointing an assistant secretary. Mr Fowler said his wife had been fulfilling that role and wished to be officially confirmed in it. One of Mr Lightfoot's fears as to what might happen, did happen. Mrs Fowler indicated that if she did not get the position she would leave. Mr. Fowler said that in such circumstances he would feel obliged to support his wife and also resign.. To their surprise and chagrin Mr Lightfoot expressed sympathetic understanding of their position. Their resignations were accepted.

John Wilson, the new Secretary, climbed the stairs and entered the Office at 10 Queen St Melbourne in January 1953. Mr. Fowler greeted him kindly, Mrs. Fowler coldly. For a week they told him how difficult the job was. The more he gave the impression of dismay, the greater the detail he was given. Their object was to frighten him off. What they had given him was an excellent briefing.

Not only were they leaving at the end of the week, they had persuaded Miss Nancy Stride, who combined the functions of administrative and appeals officer and office secretary, to leave at the same time. Miss Stride was a superb person, with a complete grasp of the office procedures. The receptionist, too, was leaving in a few weeks to prepare for the arrival of her babe. Hamish Mackenzie sat in his office, an interested bystander enjoying the crisis.

John Wilson needed all his faith as he returned to the office after the weekend. To his great joy Nancy Stride was sitting on the stairs. "My conscience would not let me do it", she said. "If you will have me back I am ready for work". She made a major contribution in the following five years and was the forerunner of the clever coterie of cheerful young ladies who in future years would contribute greatly to the effective administration, management, prestige and public perceptions of the organisation.

Mr and Mrs Fowler leased an office at 118 Queen St Under the Business Names Act, they registered the name of the Agency for the Blind and Disabled. They commenced quarterly variety concerts in the Melbourne Town Hall, had tickets printed the same size and colour as the Association's, charged the same price, sold them from door-to-door with blind and disabled ticket sellers some of whom they poached from the Association, engaged the same artists and added to the general confusion which existed in the community. The RVIB and Villa Maria Society were also selling concert tickets door-to-door. Complaints from many quarters resulted in Parliament amending the Business Names Act to prohibit the use of naies of handicaps in business names. The Fowlers changed the name to the Friendly Hand Society.

Mr Lightfoot told John Wilson he did not wish to prejudice his thinking by commenting on any persons or aspects of the work. He wanted to see a new start without preconceived ideas. Once Mr Wilson had found his feet and made his own judgments they would talk. He did ask Mr Wilson to show patience and understanding towards the older members and honorary workers who had given so many years of devoted service.

Impressions imprinted on John Wilson's mind during the early familiarisation days were:

- The fatigue of General Committee members;
- The decrepit state of the properties;
- The personalities of some strong women;
- The antagonism of a small but influential section of the blind members;
- The funding problem;
- The lack of assistance for people with major vision impairment.

The fatigue of General Committee members. The Committee was tired out. The normal bright optimism Mr Lightfoot displayed covered mental weariness and physical tiredness when he took over the Presidency. Both on the Committee and elsewhere any wish he expressed was accepted as an instruction. That was the trouble. "Leave it to Pat" or "Whatever you say Pat" were standard phrases. Help and input from most members was limited.

The Blind Members' representatives were good people. Their traditional contribution and expertise was in the Homes and Kooyong programmes. The business and political aspects were outside their knowledge. The exception was Bro. O'Neill who was ageing and whose over-riding interest was now the Villa Maria Society. The oldest member was Mrs Margaret Bartlett, the youngest Mrs Doris Nothling nee Boyce. Doris Boyce started to lose her sight when quite young, was educated at the RVIB school, partly in Tilly Aston's time and had worked in open industry and the Braille Library. She was an excellent housekeeper, gardener and sportswoman. She was one of the youngest girls ever elected to the General Committee, served on various Committees for over thirty years and believed blind members of greater talent were now becoming available for Committee work.

On the sighted side, Mr Paterson as a Vice President maintained his interest but his fire was reduced to smouldering embers one of which occasionally flared up. The second Vice President was Bruce Small whose main community service at the time was through Rotary and with the YMCA of which he was Treasurer. He left the

running of the Association to Mr Lightfoot. Always impatient for action he would say, "Look Pat, you will never get anywhere until you clear the deck and get a new Committee".

The first ray of light came in mid 1953 when the then Treasurer resigned and Mr Stan Horsfall was appointed. He and Mr Lightfoot had worked for the Toc H movement during the war and Mr Lightfoot had brought him on to the Committee. A Committee member for seven years he had good background knowledge. He was a chartered accountant, an honourable compassionate man and co-operative colleague. Possessing a fine mind, he saw clearly and agreed with what had to be done and then invariably brought matters to a dead end with the accountant's qualification, 'but there is no money'. His first action was to install a new, first class accounting system. This was designed to provide maximum internal information and control for the Committee, minimum published information for the public and a headache for the staff.

The 1953 Annual Meeting was held in the Independent Church Hall. There were 28 people present. All were Committee, Blind or Staff members. Following this meeting Mr Lightfoot proceeded to Europe and the U.K. on a business trip. On his return in February, 1954 his health was not good. He had worked long hours on the factory floor of the Nicholas organisation among the chemicals, particularly atebirin, during the war years.. The delayed effect was now being felt and added to the burden imposed by the Association. On his doctor's advice he resigned from the Presidency and the Committee in May, 1954. The Committee kept postponing acceptance of his resignation until March, 1955. During this time of drift many exciting events took place.

Bruce Small. These events stimulated the interest of Bruce Small, later Sir Bruce, and he was persuaded to accept the Presidency. He immediately took a firm grasp of the reins. Mr Small was short in stature, medium in build, a dynamo of concentrated energy with an unquenchable spirit.

Bruce Small was born into a Salvation Army family. He absorbed and faithfully followed their principles. Always keen on music and possessing a fine singing voice, some of his happiest early memories were of singing and playing the cornet at street corner meetings in an army band with his father. His youthful years were hard. His father died while he was still at school and young Bruce had to go to work to support the family. He trapped and sold rabbits, bought tea in bulk, packed it in small bags and sold it door to door to help the family finances and earn some pocket money. The experience developed in him a quick wit, a razor sharp mind and the skills of a gambler.

In the business world Mr Small had a mixed standing. The establishment was inclined to regard him as an entrepreneurial maverick. He was. Such is the mark of many great achievers. He had a reputation in some circles of being hard and sharp. He did see business life as a game of Australian Rules football. You were in it to win. You took the blows and you dished them out but you always came up smiling. 'If you bleat and whine and get trodden underfoot then you shouldn't be playing in that league, you were out of your class'. He believed strongly in always giving the public what they paid for and were entitled to expect. Those people who understood him relished his friendship and company, children adored him and the blind members found him a true friend.

An early move was to bring in his great friend Oppy as Vice President. To see the two of them operating in harness was an unforgettable experience. Bruce might say on the quiet, "What I am going to say may upset someone. Be prepared." Sure enough, diplomatic Oppy would gently smooth any injured feelings and restore calm.

Mr Opperman, OBE., later Sir Hubert Opperman, was a remarkable man. Known to all as 'Oppy', he was for many years the world's number one cyclist. Despite fame and adulation he remained a quiet humble friendly person. Drafted to stand for Parliament in a seat held by the opposition party and regarded as unassailable, he won and held it for over seventeen years. Even his most prominent electoral adversary, later to be Prime Minister, could not win the seat back and moved elsewhere to easier pickings. Oppy served as Chief Government Whip, Minister for Shipping and Transport, Minister for Immigration and finally High Commissioner in Malta. His integrity and moral standing commanded universal respect. The assistance he gave to the Association's development was notable. In particular he made a major contribution in the public relations and political areas. At one Committee Meeting the agenda item seemed simple and the answer obvious. After its many ramifications were discussed, he exclaimed, "Goodness me, I did not know what politics was till I became involved with the blind".

Mr Lightfoot, Mr Small and Mr Opperman had the never failing support of their wives Beth, Lillian and Mavys.

The Committee which had not been previously to Mr. Small's liking was now greatly to his liking. An individualist, he payed lip service to Committee responsibility and did his own thing. Real guided democracy. A combined effort was required to brake his Churchillian-like adventurism.

Committee members. Mrs Anderson retired in 1954, Mr Paterson in 1955, Bro. O'Neill and Mrs Bartlett in 1956. Appointments were Mr H.R. Phillips, a bank officer who retired early because of sight impairment and served on the Finance Committee and Mr Ken McDowell who later became Chairman of the Brighton Committee. Both men also visited the Country Branches.

New blind representatives were Mrs Wyn Christian and Mr Fred Tolstrup. Both had been sighted people. Both gave notable service. In the following few years Mrs. Ann Docherty, Mrs May Palmer, Mrs Ada Sharpe and Mrs Belle McIntyre were also added to the Committee. These ladies, too, had been sighted. All were representative of the new generation of blind people. They had not been through or been part of the blindness system. All were excellent housewives. With help from Miss Henderson they had adjusted to their vision impairment and were in turn used to help and give leadership to other newly blind women. The policy of blind people helping blind people, inherited from the earlier generation, was continually expanded.

Two exceptional professional blind men, both teachers, were also selected by the blind members in the 1960's. Hugh Jeffrey and Neil Westh had both come through the system. The advancement of blind people was a driving force in their lives. Hugh who had a political bent, on one occasion standing for a seat in parliament, exercised a strong influence in both the local and national scenes and later became a recognised leader in international affairs of the blind.

In 1972 he introduced John Wilson to the international scene by asking him to be his guide when he attended Executive Meetings of the International Federation of the Blind and World Council for the Blind in Paris and Moscow respectively. These activities in addition to his employment as a teacher at Kingswood College were a full work load and led to his resignation from the Association Committee. Neil Westh resigned when he accepted a senior teaching position at the RVIB school. To the regret of all in the field he died at an early age.

The major organisations serving blind people were now observing an unwritten understanding that neither staff or board members should hold positions on the boards of sister organisations. The reason was to avoid conflict of interests.

A partially sighted person who came to the forefront in this era was Mr Bryan Sitlington. Also a product of the system Bryan had worked in open industry at tradesman level. His particular interests were Kooyong and the blind members welfare. He later transferred to the staff where he filled a number of roles, including a long term as Chairman of the Blind Members Council. His wife Peg was an office bearer in a number of Kooyong groups. Both were deeply involved in the social activities and fundraising at Kooyong and provided continuing leadership. They remain active volunteers. They were later joined by another couple who also became a source of strength, Neil and Elizabeth Maxwell. Both were active in fundraising, social activities and as volunteers. Elizabeth worked at Kooyong for a time as Hostess. Neil, a diligent worker with a broad knowledge, gravitated to committee work and was elected to the General Committee.

The decrepit state of the properties

The Ballarat Home, accommodating 14 residents and opened in 1952, was in good order, with an excellent Committee. It functioned efficiently and happily under Sister Dreher. The Bendigo Home accommodating nine residents needed attention. Its major problem was the location directly across the road from an old mining mullock heap. Cleaning up the dust that blew in was a never ending task. In a store shed at the back were some fine items of furniture which had been bequeathed or gifted but could not be used.

The Windsor Hostel with 22 beds had well passed its 'use by' date.

The Brighton Home, accommodating 55 residents was in a general state of disrepair. Part of the roof was of galvanised iron which had rusted through. Part was of slates which had powdered and were crumbling. Both problems were due to the action of the salty sea air. The veranda floor and posts were rotten. The whole external complex needed painting. The various buildings erected during the past forty years had in recent times been joined by a series of covered ways using differing materials and flooring. This action emphasised the variation in the floor levels of the buildings which had not been built to a constant. As projects proceeded in the following decades efforts were made to rectify this fault. It would not be finally overcome until the centenary building programme in 1996. Joining the buildings had enclosed the kitchen in a cul de sac affecting the air flow. Very hot unpleasant working conditions in the kitchen resulted. An inadequate quantity of hot water was still being supplied from the original cantankerous boiler.

The Clubhouse and Sportsground at Kooyong had its own set of problems. The concrete roof tiles were porous and leaked. Toilet facilities were antiquated and insufficient. Dark 8ft high mahogany stained veneer panels covered the internal walls of the Clubhouse - they did not show the dirt. The lighting was poor. The Sportsground required fencing, drainage was inadequate, the oval required re-turfing. Cricket and other sports materials were stored under the Clubhouse between the floor stumps. Nevertheless, the success of the many programmes based on the centre proved that attractive facilities, although desirable, were not essential.

Personalities of strong women. Three ladies of strong character and firm views chaired the Home Committees. Good church ladies, tremendous workers, totally devoted. Products of the earlier generation they saw clearly the distinction between right and wrong, deserving and undeserving. What wonderful ladies they were! At Brighton there was Mrs Martha Anderson, at Ballarat Mrs Merline Duncan and at Bendigo Miss Winnie Hobson. Inclined to be satisfied with what had been, they looked askance at change. Their strength of purpose had been powerful influences in maintaining the services.

Miss Hobson was actually the Secretary but dominated proceedings at Bendigo. Chairpersons came and went and, although quite capable, deferred to her length of service and experience. Miss Hobson, exercising the privilege of long friendship had been in the habit of ringing Mr Paterson direct. She did not like this new fangled idea of working through the office. It was with her that John Wilson had his introductory joust. One of the items in the Home, an old ice chest was giving trouble. At a Committee Meeting, being the only man present, he was asked to look at it. He did not know it was a valued heirloom, the antique ice chest from the defunct Men's Hostel, donated to Bendigo thirteen years earlier. He told the ladies it could not be fixed. Pointing out they had funds in their bank account, he said he would speak to the General Committee on their behalf regarding the purchase of a refrigerator. Miss Hobson was horrified. The ice chest had been perfectly satisfactory for years as had a Coolgardie safe before that. Later she complained to the other committee members about the interfering young 'whipper-snapper'. 'Making do', a combination of Association poverty and war time shortages was deeply ingrained in the Association psyche.

A few months later there was a serious incident at Bendigo. which received considerable media coverage. A male resident who exercised by walking up and down on the footpath outside the Home, was involved in an accident with a car reversing out of an adjacent driveway, and died.. The Coroner at the inquest said the Home should not let a blind man out into the street. This angered many in the Association. Miss Hobson was all for giving the Coroner and newspaper a piece of her mind. Wiser counsel prevailed. While ill informed comments from members of the public were still being heard in the 1950s, better was expected from a Coroner.

The antagonism of a small but influential section of the blind members.

John Wilson met the older blind members at their monthly meeting at Kooyong. After he was introduced by the Chairman, Hamish Mackenzie, Mrs Hutchinson led the attack:-

"You can't be any good or you would not be working for the blind".

"Couldn't you get a job among your own kind"?

"I hope you realise its our money raised for our use that's paying your salary".

"You know you are taking food out of the mouths of the blind."

"How much are they paying you to do what we could do ourselves"?

Although relationships between the blind and sighted were again, if not outstanding at least reasonable, among a few old timers antagonism remained.

That first year in an endeavour to give some brightness to the Blind Members' Christmas Party, Eunice and John Wilson decorated the Clqbhouse. This had not been done before. It was the wrong thing.

"What have we got to be happy and cheerful about"?

"What use are decorations to us. You know we can't see them".

"What right did you have to waste our money"? Fortunately they had used their own.

Having learned their lesson they did not repeat the mistake the next year.

It was the wrong thing.

"Don't you think we have feelings like everyone else"?

"Don't you think we are worth a little effort"?

"Don't you think we sense the atmosphere"?

Relationships improved as understanding flowered.

The funding problem. The funding problem never ceased to exist. Whenever fund raising efforts looked like meeting the need, some new development of even more costly proportions took off. There were to be times in later years when the bank said enough was enough; when the accountant, Murray Mountain, sat with piles of signed cheques on his desk, waiting for the money to come from somewhere to enable the accounts to be paid. Despite this, no resident ever went hungry or a staff member without pay. The funding problem never lessened and is even greater as the end of the century approaches.

Bruce Small had great confidence in and kept referring to the 'Bank of Faith'. It had exhaustless unseen resources which would be made available at the time of real need. Mr Small, as had Pat Lightfoot and as did future Presidents, relied heavily on the 'Bank of Faith' which, harnessed to wisdom and hard work, did prove to be an unbeatable combination. The fine line between faith and foolishness was always a live issue.

The financial position in 1953 was Residents 100, Staff 40, Income £34,000, Expenditure £40,000, Assets £66,000, Overdraft £15,000.

The lack of assistance for people with major vision impairment. The end of the road was reached when an ophthalmologist certified a vision impaired person as legally blind. Only the few doctors closely connected with the agencies referred the older newly blind. The reason given was that the agencies did not provide professional services. Association Social Worker Hamish Mackenzie was the only qualified medical ancillary worker employed by any agency for the blind in Australia for many years. Not even imagined at the time, were the many technological and service developments and accompanying specialists, who would become available in the

following two decades to assist vision impaired people. The initiative of the Association in pioneering and promoting these new ideas and services was to attract international attention.

14. CHANGING PERCEPTIONS.

Income support. The Free of Means Test Blind Pension was introduced by the Menzies Government in the 1952 Commonwealth Budget. This legislation entitled every blind person over the age of 16, single or married, employed or unemployed to a pension equal in monetary value to the Aged Pension. This unique and enlightened act transformed the lives of the blind people of Australia. It heralded release from darkness and an important step into the light of normal community living.

The friendship between Mr Menzies and Mr George Maxwell is a matter of public record. The Sportsground and Clubhouse was in Mr Menzies electorate of Kooyong. He and Mrs Menzies knew it well. While these factors would not be permitted to affect his judgment or actions the question remains: Was he sub consciously influenced by what he saw of the work of the Association?

The blind pension was an important factor in the emancipation of blind people. The move towards community integration began many years earlier when the RVIB school commenced teaching pupils to be independent. It gathered strength as able young blind students moved into sighted schools for their secondary education and then proceeded to university.

The second World War offered an opportunity for capable skilled working age blind people to move into open employment.

The transition from a sheltered life to open community living was not easy for either of these groups, but they persevered bravely and established a pattern. The importance of the excellent support services provided by the RVIB to both groups cannot be over estimated.

The pension offered a third and very large group, the non employed, particularly women, the opportunity of greater freedom and equality This group was a prominent part of the Association's interest.

The beneficial effects of the pension were soon evident. More money going into a household meant an improved economic position, better self care, higher morale, greater self esteem and the ability to participate in social and community activities. Blind people began to find a new identity. No longer were they second class citizens, stigmatised by stereotypes and imprisoned by behavioural patterns imposed by the sighted community. The agencies developed programmes to assist in the transformation and the public perception of blindness with all its negative inferences began to change.

The Association also felt the benefits of the pension. The necessity to arrange funerals for the destitute and homeless ended. There was no longer a need to maintain a stock of donated second hand clothing. The issue of grocery orders ceased and an arrangement with the State Relief Committee for furniture and bedding was no longer required. Tea, sugar, toilet rolls and other commodities used at Kooyong ceased to disappear at the conclusion of each function.

At first there was some confusion as to the rights of working blind people. Some employers argued the pension was a reflection of the work and value of a non sighted

employee as compared with a sighted employee and wished to reduce their wages by the amount of the pension. Blind people argued it was compensation for the extra expenses incurred.

In situations where blind people worked along side other disabled people there was some bitterness. Why should the blind receive the benefit and not the rest of them? To this was developed the reply that the blind people being limited in number and well organised were being used as a test case and in due course the benefit would flow on to other disabled groups. This was expected to happen but did not. A number of disabled people then protested at what they saw as the preferential treatment being given to blind people. If they did not receive such a pension neither should the blind. Their protests were heard in Canberra.

Fortunately the two peak bodies, the Australian National Council for the Blind and the Australian Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled worked closely together. They agreed their combined effort should be to raise the benefits of other disabilities to the same level as those received by the non sighted and not pull back the latter to a lower standard.. The greater benefit never was extended and remained a source of envy to other disability groups. Periodic proposals for the removal of the blind free of means test pension continue to surface at three levels - disability, bureaucratic and political.

Definition of blindness. In every day talk the term "blind" meant without sight. In work for the blind the term also applied to sighted people whose vision was seriously impaired. The requirement was to construct or adopt a definition of blindness for purposes of the pension. This was far more important than the earlier definition for a wireless licence. The responsibility rested with government and was complex. Dr. Charles Hedvquist, President of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind, stated he personally knew of more than forty definitions of blindness and more than seventy definitions of partial blindness. In a number of countries the definition of blindness as it applied to children differed to that applied to adults. In some countries government departments dispensed benefits on their own particular definition. This could differ from department to department.

The definition most often used was developed by a German, Herman Snellen in 1868. This was "central visual acuity of 20/200 in the better eye with correcting lenses or more than 20/200 if the peripheral field had contracted" [tunnel vision]. This was an optical or form definition based on a chart of letters, normally in nine lines and of gradually diminishing size. In Australia the metric equivalent of 6/60 used for purposes of the Wireless Licence was used to define blindness.

Australia had many excellent ophthalmologists. The primary interest of ophthalmologists was and is diseases of the eye. When despite their fine care vision deteriorated to the 6/60 mark the patient was classified as blind. As recent as the 1950s that was the end of the road for the patient. Ophthalmologists did not consider anything more could be done. Wishing to be helpful, some ophthalmologists even told their patients the remaining vision was a hazard, that they better begin to view themselves as blind and learn to function as a blind person. Their second difficulty was Optometrists whose field of interest was the scientific measurement and use of vision. The profession of ophthalmology was opposed to them.

There was fairly widespread criticism of the Snellen optical definition of blindness as simplistic. It neglected many standards of investigation, did not consider other ocular aspects such as contrast sensitivity and ignored day and night variations in acuity. There was also the issue of functional vision as compared to optical vision. A person may have a visual acuity greater than 6/60 but because of poor intelligence, lack of concentration or brain damage, function for practical purposes as a blind person. On the other hand a person with only 3/60 vision coupled with good ability and a positive outlook may give the impression of being sighted.

With the advent of the free of means test pension the Commonwealth Government felt a second opinion was necessary. The Government wrote to the Secretary General of the United Nations and received the following response:

"The need for an internationally accepted definition in the programme for the welfare of the blind has long been recognised. In 1954 the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind adopted the following minimum definition which was also adopted by the Conference of World Organisations interested in the handicapped, and endorsed by the United Nations Technical Working Group on the Rehabilitation of the Handicapped.

MINIMUM DEFINITION OF BLINDNESS

1. *Total absence of sight;*
2. *Visual acuity not exceeding 3/60 or 10/200[Snellen] in the better eye with correcting lenses;*
3. *Such limitation of the field of vision that the angle of vision does not exceed 20 degrees."*

To its everlasting credit the Commonwealth Government permitted the 6/60 level earlier approved for the wireless licence benefit to remain. This standard was generous compared to the amount of sight generally permitted elsewhere at the time. The decision was wise and compassionate. In a world governed and run by the sighted for the sighted, blindness was a major handicap. Its effects were physically and psychologically disturbing. The enlightenment and knowledge gained by the Association during this period, of the wide range of varying visual conditions between total blindness and legal blindness, as it became known, was stored in the memory bank and contributed to the later establishment of the Low Vision Service. Also from this time, following the world trend, terms like 'severe visual impairment' began to supersede the generic term 'blind' in appropriate circumstances.

Sight and mind Miss Aston's statement that 'blindness is never sweet' was borne out in 1954 when Mr Joe Lederer, a lecturer at the Melbourne School of Optometry, pioneered beyond the then normal parameters of magnification, in developing a lens which was of assistance to some low vision people. This lens received widespread media coverage. Although numbers of people blind from birth or a young age proclaimed they managed perfectly well without sight, their private cry to the office of the AAB, "Will this lens help me?", revealed the deep longing which lay behind many a brave face.

The blind members who attended Kooyong fell into two main categories. The congenitally blind, that is those persons blind from birth and the adventitiously blind, that is those persons who had sight but lost it. Each group could be further divided

into totally blind and severely visually impaired. Most of the adventitiously blind were in the older age group and had lost their sight later in life. Because of improved medical skills and treatment, the majority retained a little sight ranging from perception of light to useful vision. Nevertheless the effects of the loss of sight were psychologically disturbing and potentially permanently harmful. They also had the additional ailments associated with age and found the task of learning new ways extremely difficult.

The situation faced the Association with a number of issues. As increased knowledge of eye conditions was disseminated, both blind and vision impaired patients wanted to know more detail about the cause of their own blindness. A common complaint was that the ophthalmologist did not tell them the cause, or if he did, it was in terms they did not understand. By default, explanation became an agency responsibility. At the time Hamish Mackenzie, was the only person able to do so with some degree of competence.

The totally blind members attending Kooyong meetings maintained the Association was their organisation and the vision impaired should start their own group. The argument had substance. In a number of countries under various names there were organisations for the partially sighted. In addition sighted people who lost the major portion of their sight as adults remained sighted people with a visual disability whereas persons with no vision, particularly if the condition was present from birth or an early age were classical blind persons.

Sighted people who lost the major portion of their vision in their later years had little in common with young blind people who had graduated through the blindness system. In particular, the older vision impaired people disassociated themselves from the strongly propounded, sincerely held claim of young blind activists, that they alone understood and were qualified to speak for all blind people.

Blind authoress Mary Mitchell who lived at Kalorama had this to say of the onset of blindness in her book *Uncharted Country* which was published at this time. "I lived through a period of fear and horror and misery such as I had never envisaged. --- Dominating everything was the sense of being trapped, of not knowing where to turn or how to set about even trying to grapple with the situation."

Miss Mitchell also wrote of the effect on personality, of the sense of isolation, of loneliness, of frustration, of rebellion.. A sighted person imagining his or her feelings in a similar position could to a limited extent appreciate such distress. A young, congenitally blind person brought up to be independent and extremely capable did not understand the feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and the fears of the enveloping darkness.. In addition overseas studies of persons who lost sight at a very young age and had it restored as adults had revealed that the shape of an object conveyed to the mind through feel could be different to the reality conveyed by sight. Persons with restored sight, shown for the first time familiar objects such as a cup, were not able to identify them until they had felt them.

The difference between the thinking, understanding and reactions of the diverse groups of blind or vision impaired persons was considerable. One of the Association's great unrecognised achievements was its success in managing to integrate successfully the various groupings and develop appropriate programmes.

Mr Hamish Mackenzie the Association Social Worker tutored sighted Committee and Staff members. They had sight, they must also have insight. The first tortured cry from the newly blind was always, "Why me?" The medical explanation may be understood and intellectually accepted. Expressed or not the unanswered question was still there. "Why did this happen to me?" This was a period of grieving and rebellion which had to be worked through. Then came the issue of acceptance. With this adjustment came the dangers of over emphasising or under emphasising the consequences of blindness. Arriving at the right balance was not easy. It was attained only after a period of intense mental and emotional distress following repeated trials and errors. This was the snakes and ladders period.

When sight was lost the other senses gradually took over the job of providing information. Blind people did not have a special gift. The mind paid more attention to the sensations received through the senses of hearing smell, touch and the presence of objects. and made more intelligent use of the information. Using these senses continually, required a high degree of concentration which led to fatigue, frustration and irritability.

Two negative traits most were likely to develop were suspicion and envy. These arose from the feeling that society was animated by the doctrine of self first. As sight was the medium through which the world obtained the bulk of its information and impressions , blind persons knew they were at a disadvantage. Consequently they had to guard against the tendency to suspect associates' motives and envy their advantages.

The sighted person should not show pity but cultivate a sympathetic understanding of the problems and pressures to which a blind person was subject and help unobtrusively, not directing attention to the disability.

Although knowledge, both academic and practical increased and was codified in the years ahead, to Mr Mackenzie and Miss Henderson go the honour of laying the foundation. Interestingly, no matter how often they were asked, neither was prepared to put their vast accumulated knowledge to paper. It would have been invaluable to the Association. Mr Mackenzie expressed their feeling in this way. "Knowledge is power. While we keep our knowledge in our heads we are needed. If we commit it to paper we have lost our employment security."

15. THE NURSING HOMES BLOSSOM.

In his 1953 Presidential Address to the Annual Meeting, Mr Lightfoot said the Association had three priorities. These were additional accommodation; an expansion of welfare and visiting services and a need for increased fund raising efforts. This statement was the guiding light for the next stage of development.

Until the early 1950s aged persons voluntary care organisations had been working in isolation. They had no government guidelines, no knowledge of the activities of similar organisations nor of the field as a whole. The organisations combined to form the Victorian Association of Homes and Hospitals for the Aged. This organisation carried out surveys and issued warnings to the Victorian Government of the approaching dramatic increase in the numbers of elderly people in the community. Indeed the approaching crisis was so clearly foreseen a number of representations were made to the Minister for Health for a fourth representative on the Hospitals and Charities Commission to look specifically after the interests of the aged. While the submission was rejected a Geriatrics Section was established within the Commission with Miss Eva Johnston in charge.

The general need was emphasised in the 1952 Report of the Hospitals and Charities Commission which stated the accommodation position of the aged was:

In Government Institutions	2,961 beds
In Church and Voluntary Organisations	1,132 beds
In Private Hospitals	750 beds
A total of	4,853 beds

The report went on to make the revealing statement that there was a shortage of almost 5,000 beds for elderly people to be overcome. The Committee of the AAB already knew from its own waiting list for admission that there was a need for more beds. Conscious of its financial weakness the Committee was not sure of the direction to take or priorities to allocate to projects.

During this period the Bendigo Committee had been pressing strongly, its claim for more beds. Agreement was reached this would have first priority when funds became available.

From 1948 Mr Fowler had been pointing out an increasing number of applicants required nursing care. The Committee had ruled this out on the basis of additional cost. Mr Paterson, however, took note of Mr Fowler's point and thereafter included nursing beds in his many plans. Three of these were to build a nursing ward at Brighton, convert the Windsor Hostel to a nursing home or purchase a large property. Mr Parkes, the Architect, who had drawn up many plans, always honorary and mostly to no purpose was provoked into saying: "Mr Paterson, don't you think the Committee ought to have a real master plan and a real proposal before any more plans are prepared?"

By 1953 need for nursing beds within the Association had become acute. Because of their long waiting lists the large government Homes and Hospitals for the Aged were now referring blind applicants to the Association. Neither were they able to accept nursing cases from the Association as had been the case in earlier years. To staff

advocacy for nursing beds the Committee with business justification again said "No". The Home was neither equipped or staffed to handle nursing cases. Suitable staff were unobtainable, the cost of upkeep would be higher, the financial situation was deteriorating. As the situation was either empty beds or nursing cases, John Wilson quietly admitted nursing cases to the Brighton Home while continuing to work for a change in policy.

In 1954, fate, providence, call it what you will, then took a hand in Association affairs. This, combined with General Committee decisions gave the entire organisation new vision and renewed faith. It never looked back.

In June 1954 the Ballarat Auxiliary of the Association for Advancement of the Blind received advice it was a beneficiary under the Will of Catherine Stewart. The Will stated the bequest was to be used *"in the erection of a ward or hall in memory of my late husband Alex Stewart as part of the proposed building to be erected by it in Ballarat"*. The bequest was a farm property expected to realise some £6,000. Two bidders competed. It sold for £20,000. Three Association parties had a keen interest. The Auxiliary as the direct beneficiary. The Ballarat Branch Committee as the local authority. The General Committee as the parent body of both. The auxiliary ladies had a variety of ideas as to what should be done. Although the limited land area precluded extension, the Home Committee wanted the existing home extended. The General Committee wanted a new start. These competing interests were a fertile ground for dissent.

Ballarat now took priority over Bendigo. In July, 1954, applying the 'Bank of Faith' principle, the Committee commissioned Mr Parkes to begin preparing plans. The accompanying letter said, *"As this is the first new Home construction undertaken by the Association, the desire is to incorporate the best of modern thought and experience so that it will not be outmoded in a few years. At the same time, as stewards of public money our policy does not envisage needless extravagance"*.

The issue of blind people requiring nursing care was settled by a Resolution passed at the August 1954 Committee Meeting. This read: *"Members were unanimous that the fact an applicant for admission to the Home was bed-ridden or suffering from some other affliction such as deafness, should not debar such person but rather emphasise the need for admission"*. The AAB had lifted its vision to a new level of service.

That same month, August, 1954, the Federal Budget announced the introduction of the far sighted Aged Persons Homes Act to be administered by the Dept. of Social Security. Its purpose was to encourage and assist the provision of suitable accommodation so that aged persons could reside in conditions approaching as nearly as possible ordinary domestic life. The Act provided a £1 for £1 subsidy to a fixed limit, to approved organisations for the building of Homes for aged people. Within a couple of years it was amended to permit one third of the beds to be registered as nursing home beds and later again the grant was increased to £2 for £1. It was a magnificent Act which had spectacular success, even though organisations were later to protest at the way the Canberra bureaucrats hedged it with restrictions.

In the Free of Means Test Blind Pension and the Aged Persons Homes Act, the Menzies Government shared with and extended the prosperity of the nation to two groups of people who would have missed out. The Aged Persons Homes Act 1954 set

the scene for the modern concept of aged care. At the time of its introduction many workers in the aged care field speculated that Mrs Menzies initiated the concept.

The 1965 Report of the Hospitals and Charities Commission showed the marked change in the accommodation situation for the aged in the first ten years of its operation.

In Government Institutions	3,832 beds
In Church and Voluntary Organisations	4,725 beds
In Country Hospitals	312 beds
In Private Hospitals	3,151 beds
A total of	12,020 beds

Soon after the announcement of the Aged Persons Homes Act, Dr Charles Bennett, President of the RVIB spoke to Mr Small suggesting that representatives of the two organisations meet to discuss co-operation.. The Committee agreed provided the approach was cautious. Mr Small and Mr Wilson were appointed as the delegation.

The RVIB was represented by a powerful group of four. The President, an ex Premier, one of Melbourne's leading architects and a prominent figure in the financial scene. This challenge added to Bruce Small's enjoyment.

Both parties agreed there was far too much fragmentation among agencies serving the blind, that there were too many agencies, that blind people were the ones to suffer. At the time there were eight major or minor organisations. The RVIB saw closer co-operation between the Association and RVIB as the first step. Bruce Small agreed this was important. However, he understood it had been tried in the past on a number of occasions with little success. Why, he asked, not a complete amalgamation or a take over by the RVIB?. Totally taken aback, the minds of the RVIB delegation ticked over looking for the catch. Was this one of Bruce Small's sharp deals?

At length Dr. Bennett enquired "and what would the Association bring to any such deal?".

"Well, you know that here in Melbourne alone we have a number of valuable assets The Windsor Hostel and Brighton Homes are examples. Oh! We do have a small overdraft of some £20,000. but that would not be a problem to your organisation."

"Perhaps not", replied Dr. Bennett "but I also know your Windsor and Brighton properties are just about falling down. The Association would only be a financial liability to us".

Very subtly Bruce Small changed direction. John Wilson sat mesmerised not believing what he was hearing. A member of the RVIB delegation abruptly declared the discussion at an end

Some weeks later Bruce Small spoke to John Wilson with delight. One of his friends had been talking to the RVIB member who stopped the discussion. The RVIB member told him Bruce Small's presentation was so logical and sensible he was carrying them with him. Suddenly, the end objective of the discussion had hit him. He stopped it quickly. Another five minutes and the Association would have taken over the RVIB.

Building plans. While returning to the city by car following the meeting, Bruce Small spoke after a period of quietness. Quoting his oft used couplet "Two men looked through prison bars. one saw mud the other stars", he added, "we will aim for the stars. At the next Committee Meeting I want on one sheet of paper what you want in the way of accommodation, why, and the estimated cost".

The plan submitted submitted to the Committee called for three new homes in five years. Homes of between 24 - 30 beds at Ballarat and Bendigo and a new wing of 50 beds at Brighton. The cost £200,000. Although what was needed appeared an impossible dream, it was a positive goal. The Committee accepted the proposal.

Details of the Aged Persons Homes Act were finalised by the end of 1954. The President, Treasurer and Secretary met with Department officers in January, 1955. Yes the Ballarat project would come within the guidelines. Yes, a similar project at Bendigo would receive favourable consideration. The Association officers then called on the Hospitals and Charities Commission. Yes, the Association could count on a grant of £10,000 towards the cost of furnishings for each of the two projects.

The impossible dream was beginning to look not quite so impossible. At the following Committee Meeting Mr Horsfall, previously a leading advocate of proposals to sell all available land and reduce the bank overdraft, stated the Association had a unique opportunity such as had not occurred in its sixty years history of taking positive progressive action. Although normally cautious he considered the opportunity presented should be grasped. Mr Small said that if the Committee had the necessary vision and courage he was confident that with Government financial assistance the two Homes could be built in the immediate future. The Committee so resolved. Members must have been carried away with euphoria for they asked, "Why not concurrently?"

The Ballarat and Bendigo Committees were each invited to nominate a person for appointment to the General Committee to represent their interests. Mr Russell White MLA agreed to represent Ballarat. During the following years he gave valuable service in the political area. At Bendigo the Chairman, Mrs Simpson had died and had been succeeded by Mrs Kitty Rose. A number of local residents were opposed to the erection of a Blind Home in their locality claiming it would cause a depreciation in the value of their properties. Dr A.L.Beischer, a leading Bendigo dentist who had a lovely property close by held this view. He was also a Councillor for the ward in which the land was situated and an influential community figure. Mrs Rose persuaded the Committee to let her approach Dr. Beischer and ask him to join the Committee.. He did. This ensured local support. The garden of the Bendigo Home which became a widely publicised and cherished local feature was one product of Dr.Beischer's initiative.

Public Appeal. In Melbourne, Lt Colonel George Sutton, who conducted a successful radio programme for dog owners known as the Tail Waggers Club, was appointed Director of the Public Appeal to be held at the end of 1955 to raise funds for the building programme. This appeal, known as "Our Plea for the Aging Blind" raised a disappointing £11,000.

Ballarat. The detailed specifications and detailed working drawings took much longer to prepare than anticipated. This annoyed the Ballarat Committee but had the advantage of permitting minor adjustments in anticipation of the registration of some

beds as hospital beds. It was not until February 1956 that tenders were called for the Ballarat project. The successful tenderer was S.J. Weir Pty Ltd a local company. The first sod was turned on Monday, March, 12, by Cr C.E. Brown, President of the Ballarat Shire in the presence of the Acting President Mr H. Opperman and a large representative gathering.

Earlier on the same day Mr Opperman had led the Begonia Festival procession through Ballarat on a tandem bike. Riding with 'Oppy' was his ten year old son Ian. Afterwards Ian complained with family candour, "Gee, it was tough. I had to push Dad all the way. I didn't think I would ever get him up the Stqrt St hill". Not until the 1990s did Sir Hubert, at the insistence of Lady Opperman, put a full stop to his bike riding.

The Home was opened on Sunday, May, 26,1957 in the presence of over 400 visitors. The President, Mr Bruce Small presided. In laying the Foundation Plaque, Committee Chairman Mrs Merline Duncan paid particular tribute to the Ballarat Auxiliary which had looked forward to such a day for thirty years. Senator Ivy Wedgwood, performed the opening ceremony. Mrs N. Mackay, President of the Ballarat Auxiliary, named the main wing the Alex and Catherine Stewart Wing. Cr A.W.Nicholson J.P., President of the Ballarat Branch of the YMCA read the Prayer of Dedication. Cr Nicholson's wife was the inaugural President of the Auxiliary in 1925. The Choir of the Association opened and closed proceedings. The day was one of happiness and rejoicing.

The total cost was in the vicinity of £80,000. The Federal Government under the Aged Persons Homes Act made a grant of £28,000. The State Government through the Hospitals and Charities Commission provided £10,000. The Catherine Stewart Bequest provided £20,000. The remainder came from donations and Association sources.

The following month Mrs Duncan was made a Member of the British Empire in the Queen's Birthday Honours in recognition of her services to blind people.

The Amendment to the Aged Persons Homes Act went through the same year. This permitted eight of the twenty four beds to be registered for Hospital Benefit purposes. The additional 20/- per day for each of these beds was of great help as a number of the people seeking admission required nursing attention.

To share the increased responsibility a number of men were invited to join the Committee. Members of the Committee over the next few years were Mesdames Duncan MBE, Bennett, Curtis MBE. JP., Cutts and Nunn, Messrs Brown, Conaughton, Davies, Gunn Ludbrook, Moverley and Jim John. Mrs Duncan stepped down as Chairman in favour of Cr Brown in 1959. She resigned from the Committee in 1967 after forty-three years service.

Mr Lindsay Gunn was appointed Treasurer and served with distinction until 1971 when he retired. He was meticulous in the control of funds but did hold a common country view with respect to government paperwork. He operated a successful business with a turnover many times greater than that of the Home and kept pointing out his accounting system was much easier and more efficient. On his desk were two metal spike files. When invoices were received they were spiked on one. When they

were paid they were spiked on the other. The butt of the cheque book provided a running cash balance. What more did you need?.

For a short time Mr E Cutts continued to fill the position of part time Secretary which he held at the Pleasant St Home. When he retired a full time Administrator, Mr Slyth was appointed. A few weeks later while on the way to the Bendigo Home for training, he was killed in a tragic car accident. Mr. T.L.[Bud] Foley was appointed in 1959 and was succeeded by Mr Jim Gower in 1965. They were assisted by Miss Chris Buckley in the office. Mr Gower resigned in 1979 to accept an appointment in private enterprise.

Matrons proved to be a headache. Six came and went in a period of two years. The situation was only stabilised by the return of Matron McLeod from Brighton at the end of 1958.

A Bequest from the Estate of Mr Morgan John, brother of Committee Member Mr Jim John, together with support from the M.B. John Employees Charity Group, enabled two independent living units to be added in 1961 under the auspices of the Aged Persons Homes Act. The first large legacy received after the establishment of the the Home was the A.O. Charles Bequest. This legacy of £20,000. was to be invested in perpetuity and the interest used for the purposes of the home.

Bendigo. Once construction was under way at Ballarat, Mr Parkes was commissioned to prepare plans for a 30 bed Home on the Bendigo site. In February, 1956 Dr Beischer arranged a meeting on the Home site with all the local authorities involved. The proposal and sketch plans received their blessing.

The Hon Hugh Robertson, Minister of Social Services announced a grant of £35,000 for the Bendigo project in August, 1956

At the time, a Lions Club was being formed in Bendigo. Mr George Rose, a grand person, was a member. The Club was looking for a major project with which to establish itself. "George", said Mrs. Rose, "bring our project to their attention." George did. After some discussions the Club committed its support.

At a Luncheon in Bendigo in November, 1956, Mr Bruce Small announced tenders had been called. Always fond of puns, as he looked around the table at which sat two Lions members, Mr Cess Jeffrey a master baker and Mr Frank Nancarrow a bank manager, he added, "I already feel among the dough". Among the dough was not the case in Melbourne as reserves disappeared, bonds were cashed, surplus assets sold and the bank overdraft increased alarmingly. Normally co-operative, as he now looked at what the Association had and what it wanted, Mr Scott, the Bank Manager, said firmly, "My directors will not accept faith as a substitute for facts and figures. Faith won't balance my accounts." He and succeeding managers were often to repeat this statement It was frequently touch and go but they were always proved wrong.

The Lions Club appointed Mr Edward Conn, Chairman of a ten member fund raising sub-committee. The principal effort was by direct approach in May, 1957. The Hon. Hugh Robertson visited Bendigo to support the Appeal. He was accorded a civic welcome by the Mayor Cr A.S. Craig. During a Luncheon at the Shamrock Hotel he presented a cheque for £20,000 being part of the Commonwealth contribution. Mr J

Stanistreet MLA announced a State Government grant of £10,000. The same day a radio appeal was held over station 3BO and raised £1,600. The *Advertiser* also gave full hearted support. Thirty donors each gave £100 to furnish a bedroom. In total the Lions raised £7,000. They also provided the labour force for the transfer of the residents and equipment from the old Home and for the official opening of the new Home. The effort of the Lions and their ladies not only bonded the club, it established a wonderful spirit of friendship with the Association and the blind residents.

Landy Constructions, a local company and the successful tenderer completed the building in time for an Official Opening on Sunday, November 24, 1957. The Hon E.P. Cameron MLC, Minister for Health performed the ceremony. A wing of the Home was named in memory of Miss Amy Bayne, an early Committee Member who left the interest on part of her substantial estate to the Blind Home in perpetuity. Another wing was named in honour of Miss Winnie Hobson, whose health was declining. The Hon Hubert Opperman MHR unveiled a plaque honouring the Lions Club of Bendigo.

The cost of the Home and ancillary works was £85,000. The funding break up was Commonwealth £36,000; State Govt. £10,000; Association £39,000.

As with Ballarat a number of business men were added to the Committee. Early membership was, Chairman, Mrs G.R. Rose; Hon Secretary, Miss N. Young; Treasurer, Mr C.H. Jeffrey; Members were Mrs A.R. Pattison, Miss W. Hobson, Miss B Marsh, Mrs J. Marwick, Dr A.L. Beischer, Messrs Conn, Tandy and Moors.

Miss Hobson died on January 3, 1961 at the age of 78 years. She gave thirty years of enduring irreplaceable service. Mrs Vicki Pattison who had served a term as Chairman and office bearer in the old Home, resigned shortly after the Home was opened, lost her sight many years later and died as a patient in the Home in the 1980s

Mrs Lois Burrows who had been appointed Office Secretary at the old Home in anticipation of the expansion programme, became Administrative Officer. Her friendly helpful service was appreciated by all persons and groups connected with the Home.

Brighton. With the Brighton Home maintenance programme costing tens of thousands of pounds and Committee approval to admit nursing care patients, a substantial increase in income became essential. Introduced to the Hospital and Charities Commissioners and Staff by the Chief Inspector, Mr Ray Ham with whom he had served during the war and the Accountant, Mr John Campbell whom he had also known previously, John Wilson was able to explore the possibility of having the Home registered for Commonwealth Hospital Benefits. As Mr Paterson grew older his opposition to government aid had weakened and the Committee by then was willing to accept funds, as Bruce Small said, "from the devil himself". Registration as a Private Hospital was achieved as from April 1, 1955.

This action resulted in a change of thinking. As the projected new building would now be for ambulant residents there was a possibility it could be built under the Aged Persons Homes Act. The Federal Budget in August 1957 increased the subsidy to £2. for £1. In October 1957 the Committee decided to build a 50 bed hostel wing plus staff quarters and office at Brighton. It also resolved to close and sell the Windsor Hostel and 21 New St Brighton and allocate the proceeds of both to the new project.

There was a waiting list for admission of 60 persons early in 1958 when a preliminary application was made for a grant in the following year. This was approved. The Windsor Hostel was then sold for £16,475. Windsor residents were given the choice of transfer to Ballarat, Bendigo or Brighton. The General Committee decided to hold its meetings at Kooyong 21 New St Brighton was sold for £7250 with vacant possession when the new wing was ready for occupancy. Mr Ken McDowell, Chairman of the Brighton Committee secured the lease of a nearby large house enabling transfer of staff from the annexe 11 Mair St where they were by then located. This enabled the annexe to be demolished to provide a site for the new wing.

Tenders were called in December 1958. The successful tenderer Messrs H.F. Yuncken Pty Ltd commenced building in January 1959. Fund Raising now became an urgent local priority. Mr Bob Pearson who had joined the Association as Accountant in December 1958 found himself seconded to this task. He called on prominent local dignitaries. A Fund Raising Committee was established under the Chairmanship of Mr John Rossiter MLA. Mr Phil Case, Manager of the State Savings Bank Hampton, was Treasurer and Bob Pearson Secretary. A local door knock was among the events conducted. A total of £6,000. was raised. This effort had two important consequences. A number of the men continued to work for the Home under the name 'Lamplighters'. The wives of the members formed themselves into an Auxiliary which they titled 'Elanora' meaning Home by the sea. A further important development of continuing benefit was the significant co-operation and support of the local Councillors and Members of Parliament.

The Governor, Sir Dallas Brooks, opened the new wing on December 9, 1959.

There was no room for stiff formality with Bruce Small. In the lounge, during the tour of the Home, an 87 year old resident, Miss Thomas, previously a piano teacher was playing. In no time he, Oppy, Mr Justice Joske MHR, John Rossiter MLA and Cr Bert Ward Mayor of Brighton were rendering an item. In the dining room where most of the residents had gathered to meet Sir Dallas and Lady Brooks Miss Lillian Thomas was prevailed upon to play again, as the Governor conducted the residents and official party in singing Waltzing Matilda.

Miss Lillian Thomas was a local identity. Her parents settled in Brighton on land which is now occupied by Firbank Girls' School. There were four daughters none of whom married. Miss Fairy, the eldest was a school teacher. Miss Emily was an artist. Miss Lilly was a pianist and Miss Isabella the youngest kept house. In the early days the Misses Thomas' often entertained at the Home as members of concert parties. When Firbank was built Miss Lilly became the first music teacher. Miss Lillian Thomas died in 1962.

Seventy-six elderly blind people were waiting for admission to the new 50 bed Wing. Six of these were over ninety years and thirty between eighty and ninety years. Most had ailments additional to blindness. The first admissions included six retired nursing sisters.

The project cost £120,000 to build and furnish. The Commonwealth Government provided £70,000, the State Government £10,000, and the Association £40,000.

Success. Starting from nothing with nothing, in a period of five years three projects with a total value of £285,000 had been successfully completed at a cost to the Association of £99,000. During the same time frame operating costs of services had increased by £50,000 per annum. The audited financial accounts provide the mechanical details and proof. They do not detail the vital human factor, the tremendous support given by all facets of the Association and the host of supportive friends.

16. BEHIND THE SCENES

Brighton Home. At the time the post war building programme commenced there stood along the front of the Brighton Home a sixteen foot high cypress hedge. Its purpose was to break the cold sea wind. It also hid the building from the street. Uninformed gossip speculated as to what really went on in the gloomy interior of the building. Rare experiences and unusual events did occur in those days. A few are shared in this chapter to give some background to the period.

The major exterior maintenance programme was commenced in 1953. The inside decor also needed attention. The corridors were covered with heavy grade railway station brown linoleum. The walls were painted dark green gloss to the guide rail which for some reason was shoulder height above the floor. Above the guide rail the paint colour was light stone. The materials had been purchased at a railways disposal sale. They were excellent quality. However the big advantage to the Committee was the labour saving factor - they did not show the dirt. The bedroom floorboards were either natural pine or stained hardwood.

The ladies sitting room alone was carpeted. A wide variety of easy, uncomfortable chairs were placed around the walls. Each lady had laid permanent claim to one and woe betide anyone else who sat in it. Next to the wireless sat Mrs Scarborough, as she had since December, 1929. Ever vigilant, she had her walking stick at the ready, and was prepared to deal summarily with any venturesome soul who tried to sit in her chair or change the programme to which she was listening. The Committee maintained a continuing correspondence warning her that if she did not mend her ways she would be discharged. Matron read these letters to her. Her invariable reply was a snort.

The furnishings in the Home were also of questionable value. A variety of donated iron and wooden beds of various designs and ages. Grey army style blankets predominated. The ladies of the Brighton Auxiliary made up the sheets and pillow slips from strong white calico they purchased by the roll. Those made by the competent sewers and machinists were quite satisfactory. Others varied in both shape and size. The sick bay had proper hospital beds and the pick of the sheets and blankets. The Auxiliary ladies also made up the curtains and drapes from material of their own choice for which the Auxiliary paid. Naturally tastes differed, so did materials and patterns, so did their measurement calculations. The completed efforts were inclined to be sensational.

The wardrobes were passed down from resident to resident. Some were good quality while others were riddled with borer. More often than not the latter were gifted as acts of benevolence on the condition that the Association meet the transport cost. This saved the donor the cost of cartage to the tip and was a form of blackmail. If the offer was refused the story was broadcast that the furniture was in excellent condition, the Association was ungrateful, it did not deserve help.

A number of the bedrooms were large and contained four beds, one in each corner. Lighting was a single globe in the centre of the room hanging on an electric light cord dropped from the high ceiling. Many residents had a nail hammered into the top of their wardrobe from which was attached a strong string to the electric light cord. Over this was thrown a blanket which afforded a little privacy. With the exception of those

fortunate enough to have a bedside locker, underneath each bed fully exposed to public view was the 'gozunda', the ubiquitous bedroom utensil. These ranged from chipped white enamel to china with pretty roses. Cooking, musty and body odours, permeated the building.

The men were located in the newest wing. They had single rooms 10 feet by 8 feet. The majority congregated in their Smoke Room. They, too, sat around the walls. Cigarette and pipe smoke created a permanent choking haze. A seven pound jam tin at a leg of each chair was an ideal spittoon. No matter how frequently the walls were washed down or painted, within a matter of weeks they were again discoloured. The men sat silent, endlessly puffing away. Occasionally an isolated statement and a grunt broke the contemplation. They had a window and a door out to a veranda. The window was rarely opened, the door rarely used. It was as if fresh air was injurious. The spark of life glowed each morning when Mr Albury, the voluntary reader arrived. He was an educated, sensitive non smoking gentle man for whom they had deep admiration and affection. Those two hours were the highlight of their day but in that smoky atmosphere, was purgatory for him.

At night the Home was eerie. The corridors were long. Small wattage globes in the few lights failed to pierce the darkness. Somewhere in the gloom would be heard the tap tap tap of a stick on the floor or the shuffle of feet as a residents indicated they were on the move. In the quietness would come the startling rattle of a chain and a loud noise as an old fashioned toilet was flushed. From the bedrooms, snores would break the silence of the night, voices would call for attention. Night staff would not stay. Burglars kept well away.

The ladies of the local churches rendered an invaluable service. Each church was on a weekly roster to provide and serve the afternoon tea. The idea had originated with Mrs Gray of St Leonards Church during an acute staff shortage. By mid afternoon the hot water service had recovered from the luncheon wash up and the staff time made available was used to bath some of the patients. It was an efficient and economical procedure which had worked well since early in WWII. Employment of an unpleasant English wardsman brought the system to an end. His Union threatened industrial action on the grounds the church ladies were taking jobs away from their members. There was general rejoicing when that wardsman left.

On Sunday, August 23, 1953, a memorial tablet was unveiled to commemorate Mr Worrall's service. Only two original members of the Auxiliary remained. These were Mrs. Anderson, who was both Chairman of the Home Committee and President of the Auxiliary, and Mrs Worrall. Mrs Worrall poured out her heart to one visitor, complaining everything was wrong. Nothing had been the same since her Albert died. This new man, she claimed, was upsetting everyone with his changes. At length she asked, "And who are you?" "Oh", was the reply, "I am the new man's wife".

Mrs Worrall was at least partly right. The Committee and Auxiliary had good reason to be proud of their achievements and service record. Despite the earlier remarks, by the standards of its time the Home was quite modern, its facilities good and its policies enlightened. It is understandable that there were those steeped in tradition who resisted and resented change until the beneficial effects were seen. The Home did compare more than favourably with some of the large government homes which were still relics of the Victorian era institutions for the poor.

Changing times do require new ways. The levels soon to be set by the Commonwealth for Aged Persons Homes and Hostels, upgraded the standard of accommodation for the elderly.

Committee. The Brighton Committee had by now recognised the importance of the late Mr Worrall's daily peacemaking visits to the Home. In December 1953 it recommended that the Secretary Manager reside adjacent to the Home so he would be instantly available at all times. Co-inciding with this recommendation 21 New St again came on to the market. The Committee recommended its re-purchase. The house was then divided into two flats. The Wilson's occupied one, nurses the other.

The Committee was strengthened by the addition of Mr. Ken McDowell, a retired business man who resided at 17 New St, Mr. Harold Jackson, a retired Chief Stipendiary Magistrate, and Mr Arch. Williams, proprietor of a hardware store in Hampton. The first two were keen members of the Brighton Beach Bowling Club. Arch Williams was a sighted member of and later conductor of the Blind Members Choir.

Ken McDowell was elected Chairman. A good, kind man he attracted friends to the Home and talked to all the staff. He was also very active. His time was divided between Association affairs and the Bowling Club. At one Committee meeting Ken was missing. The suggestion was made; 'Ring the bowling club'. Yes, he was there. Could we speak to him? Horror at the thought was evident in the negative reply. He was out on the 'holy ground'. As penance Ken and his bowling partner voluntary undertook to erect 200 feet of paling fencing at the Home. This took two weeks in the hot sun. He did not transgress again.

Ken McDowell was playing bowls with Harold Jackson early in December 1958 when he collapsed and died from a heart attack. As the cortege left his home after a private service, the nursing staff lined the street as a mark of their respect.

By 1957 painting and maintenance at the Brighton Home was completed and the interior decor acceptable. The General Committee with considerable pride held the Annual Meeting at the Home and thereafter emphasised its use for publicity purposes. Also at that time the custom was inaugurated, which continues to this day, of having a Committee luncheon before to the Annual Meeting,

Staff. Conflict was perpetual between the ever changing sisters and housekeepers. Staff members only stayed until they could find another job - an average of six weeks.

Brighton like Ballarat and Bendigo had some interesting experiences with Matrons before that particular problem was solved. There was, for example, the one who had worked in the prison service for many years. Her mannerisms created tension. Security conscious, she marched around the Home with a great bunch of keys on her belt locking every possible door. This was to keep the patients from escaping. Patients and staff alike wanted her locked out. Then there was the large, good natured Matron who huffed and puffed as she shuffled around the corridors accompanied by her fat lazy black dog. The dog would sprawl across the corridor, an unmovable object. Staff and visitors either had to step over the animal or walk around it. What intrigued everyone was the fact that somehow or other it knew when a person was blind and always moved out of the way.

The Matron problem was solved when Miss Effie McLeod, a member of the original Ballarat Home Committee and a First World War Sister, agreed to accept the position.. Miss McLeod was tall, grey and frail in appearance. On duty, or indeed at any time, she never became flustered, never raised her voice. She was universally loved and set the standard against which her successors were measured.

Each day she did her rounds, accompanied by, as soon as she could walk, little Jan Wilson also dressed in a nurse's uniform. The patients loved this human touch. In the evening after the cook had left she would be found in the kitchen preparing tempting little delicacies for patients who were seriously ill. She would sneak in a little nightcap of whisky or brandy to those who were used to it or those she thought would benefit. These purchases mainly out of petty cash were hidden from the Committee under the headings of food supplies, medicines or sundries.

Her WW1 experiences remained with her. She would never permit a patient to die alone and sat beside the bed holding a hand through many a long dreary hour day and night. She was a Matron in the old fashioned sense, not a Director of Nursing. Her breed is almost extinct in the Western world as are her equally grand old fashioned colleagues, the family doctor, pastoral clergyman and family lawyer. Not all change is good.

The 1950s was a decade of massive immigration. People of all ages poured in from the Displaced Peoples Camps of Europe. The national policy was 'assimilation'. Migrants were expected to fit into the traditional Australian way of life. Confronted with a general labour shortage and an unwillingness of Australians to accept the task of nursing and caring for the elderly blind, the Association turned to this new source of labour. The experiment proved difficult but exciting. The outcome a triumph. Through Mr. Stan Jackson, a neighbour and Senior Officer in the Immigration Dept. and the Hon Hubert Opperman, who for a period was Minister for Immigration, migration officers in a number of European cities were asked to select suitable nursing assistants. In Melbourne contact was made with the World Council of Churches and the Migrant Reception Camps. A condition of immigration was that migrants remain two years at the job to which they were posted.

During this trying period it seemed doubtful if order would ever come out of the chaos. Some staff members were from countries which had been at war with each other a few years earlier. There was a clash of national temperaments, an extraordinary variety of personalities, some had not received any education, some had university degrees. There was no common language. The principal languages used were Russian, German, Italian, Yugoslav, Greek and Arabic. At one stage when giving instructions to a White Russian refugee, the message was translated from English to Arabic to Greek to Russian. A government sponsored language class was set up at the Home and two nights a week migrant staff struggled to learn English.

The difficulties seemed insurmountable and tried to the utmost the great heart of Matron McLeod. For reasons unknown, conflict would flare up and a number of screaming gesticulating girls would troop to Matrons office or flat. It was impossible to determine the contentious point or reason with them. Matron discovered the unfailing solution. When fever pitch was reached, she would say quietly: "It seems

that I cannot do my job and you are not happy with me. I better go and give my resignation to Mr Wilson".

When this message penetrated an immediate transformation occurred. Hugging and kissing her they would say, "Don't do that dear Matron, what would we do?" "Well then you had all better go back to your work", she would say, and they did.

For practical commonsense teaching and example the Home was fortunate to have by this time Miss Pat Plunket, later succeeded by Mrs Iris Chapman, as Housekeeper, Mrs. Leila Bye as Dining Room Supervisor and Mr. Lou Milsom as gardener. They were later joined by Mr. Ron Nugent as Manager. Their patience and perseverance was rewarded with affection, respect and tremendous loyalty.

Some migrants who were supposed to be cooks occasionally caused consternation. One tried to roast the corned beef. Another placed the garden salads in the oven to warm up. Two of the early migrant staff were a brother and sister, Vincent and Teresa Spalazzi. A gifted couple, in one desperate situation they volunteered to do the cooking as a temporary measure. This did not please the 'pig man' who carted away the swill each morning. He protested loudly that there had to be a change, that his livelihood was being threatened, that his pigs would starve. Enquiries revealed their Italian style cooking was being enjoyed so much there were no left overs and consequently no swill. Vince and Teresa became invaluable, widely respected staff members and remained at the Home until they retired in the 1980's. The 'pig man' died in the early 1990's. He left his estate to the Home.

The saying, that if you want something badly enough and set your mind on it you will get it, was true in the case of Maria. A middle aged working class Italian with a husband, family and very little English, Maria was a member of the local Hampton Italian community most of whom seemed to be related. Over some months she pestered Mr Nugent constantly for a job. She was, of course, known to the Italian domestic staff members.

On commencing duty one morning Leila Bye found Maria working away happily in the dining room. Leila, who had lost a female staff member the day before thought she was getting real good service this time. Speaking to Maria she asked, "Did Mrs Chapman employ you"? "Yes, yes", said Maria happily and went on setting the breakfast tables.. Now they had agreed the maximum number of non English speaking staff was already employed. Leila a placid person, shrugged her shoulders. Evidently Iris Chapman had let her heart rule her head.

A short time later Iris saw Maria and then encountered Leila. Simultaneously they asked, "Did you put Maria on". Neither had. Mr Nugent must have forgotten to tell me, thought Iris. Perhaps he was ashamed of being soft hearted and employing her.

Later in the morning Mr Nugent entered the dining room and saw Maria. He was astonished and thought, "Well, isn't that typical of women. Despite all they have said about being unable to cope with any more non English speakers they have employed one".

Maria's work was satisfactory. She lined up happily for her first pay. There was none. What an uproar! When calm was restored came the realisation that with the

connivance of the Italian staff she had employed herself. She remained on the staff for the remainder of her working life.

Slowly, unconsciously the hurdles were crossed. . First came understanding. Australians learned many of their new colleagues had lived with fear and insecurity. They had lost parents and relatives in the cauldron of war. They had known loneliness and hunger. They no longer felt able to trust. They had to be shown their Australian work mates liked them, cared for them, that they were wanted. This was not always easy for not all Australians did want them.

The new Australians could see the blind patients relied on them, needed them. To be needed was a wonderful feeling. The love which had been so deeply buried was poured on the patients, who responded. The migrants began to regard the Home as their own home and talked of it as such. Barriers were broken down at all levels. Real friendships developed. Few girls left when their two year contract was up. Most remained until they were married.

The attractiveness of the girls drew the attention of men. There was a large surplus of men among the migrants. Superficial sophistication often concealed ignorance. Countries of origin often had diametrically opposed moral codes. At one extreme, free love was quite acceptable. At the other no nice girl would be permitted to go out unchaperoned. In many European social classes, arranged marriages were the custom. Some girls were at a loss when left to their own resources

Wedding customs, also differed. Many nationalities had both a civil and church wedding. Dressed in street clothes they were married in the registry office. For one reason or another months might pass before the church wedding took place. Then the girl in bridal white and soon to be a mother marched down the aisle. Patients, staff and management were all involved in the romances and marriages.

These migrants worked hard, saved and purchased homes. Many of their children went on to university and successful careers.

And so out of the hazardous experiment came triple benefits. Happier patients, improved standards, a stable staff. The Association in the endeavour to improve its care of blind residents had been a source of help to many needy, desperate people and in a small way contributed to the overall development of the nation.

Patients. Among the patients the unexpected was always likely to happen.

One lady died a few days after Christmas. Her sister had given her a nice nightdress as a Christmas present. Matron contacted the sister while the nurses respectfully prepared the body for burial. The sister arrived at the Home before the funeral director and saw the body beautifully prepared in her new nightie. "I'll have that nightie. It's no good wasting it on her. Any old thing will do to bury her in", she said Her remarks may have been logical but they showed a singular lack of affection and respect for her deceased sister. The nurses were shocked.

Hamish Mackenzie was out assessing what turned out to be a blind but farseeing lady, for admission to the Brighton Home. He rang John Wilson. "I have received an unusual request from this lady and I don't know how to answer".

"What is it?"

"She wants to bring her coffin with her."

"Now pull the other leg."

"I'm serious. A funeral director who was closing his premises in Chapel St, Prahran, had a star bargain sale of his left over coffins. She bought one. She wants to keep it under her bed so she can try it from time to time to make sure it still fits."

"No Mac, I think we have to draw the line at that."

A pause while Mac spoke to her and then, "Can she stand it up in her room, put in some shelves and use it as a wardrobe?"

"No"

"Well what can she do? She insists it comes with her."

"We will put it in the furniture store and she can try it out as often as she likes."

The lady was satisfied.

Friendly visitors were always welcome provided they first brought any complaints back to the Matron or Manager for attention. Some did not, with serious consequences.

A policeman approached Reception. "I believe you have a Mr.A here as a patient. I wish to see him" He took a statement from Mr.A and interviewed the Wardsman.

He then spoke to the Manager and Matron. "Mr A states he had the winning number in the last Tatts draw. He could even quote the number. He says he gave it to the Wardsman to put away in his drawer and now it is missing. He accuses the Wardsman of stealing it. The Wardsman denies the story. I have checked and the ticket has not yet been presented."

Management and staff believed in the Wardsman's innocence and supported him. The next few days were unpleasant for all. The Wardsman remained under police suspicion until the winner who had been away on holidays returned, collected the prize and could prove where he purchased the ticket.

The policeman approached reception and asked for Matron.

"I have a statement in which it is alleged the evening nurse, Nurse B, tried to murder Mrs C. last night. What do you know about it?"

"Nothing."

"Mrs. C claims that when Nurse B was bathing her, she placed a wooden board along her body and stood on it trying to force her under the water. Had she succeeded the drowning would have appeared accidental."

Fortunately Nurse B had been on her evening off and the patient records showed Mrs C suffered from senile delusions.

The police were always particularly careful, indeed suspicious, of the sighted when a blind person was involved. Incidents such as these demonstrated the importance of good management and staff relationships. Management had to know and have confidence in the staff and staff were entitled to expect the support of management. Unfortunately there was the odd occasion when a staff member did not measure up to expectation and the assistance of the police was necessary.

Good management and patient relationships with mutual confidence were also essential to happiness within a home. Blind patients and residents, because of natural feelings of insecurity, were not always convinced by the assurances of staff.

Take Charlie Gee, an elderly man with a little residual vision, as an example. Always cheerful and busily helping he was regarded as a treasure in the Brighton Home.. All rejoiced for him when word was received he was to receive a corneal graft. The Matron and Social Worker both assured him he would not have to leave the Home if the operation was a success. Charlie seemed to have mixed feelings about the whole affair. The operation was a success but Charlie said he could not see. The ophthalmologist said he should see. Matron and staff could not discover why he could not see. The Social Worker could not discover what, if anything, was troubling him.

During this time Charlie was becoming increasingly distressed to the extent his general health was deteriorating. Charlie was, of course, well known to the members of the Wilson family. John Wilson finally mentioned the concern at home. Up spoke young son David. "I can tell you why he cannot see".

"Oh, why?"

"He is afraid he will be put out of the home and he will have to look for somewhere to live and he is distressed because he is not being truthful."

John Wilson made a point of running into Charlie in a corridor. He commiserated on the seeming failure of the operation, adding casually, " Of course you know Charlie that this is your lifetime home. Even if your sight returns the choice as to whether or not you leave will be entirely up to you." Charlie's sight and health improved rapidly.

For a number of years a popular resident was Mr Frank Benson who had a little sight. Each pension day saw Frank sneak out the back door and make his way to the Brighton Beach Hotel. Arriving back he would take great care to dodge the staff while off loading his precious cargo bottle by bottle to various men.. No beer ever tasted as good as that illicitly brought in once a fortnight. Little did the residents know that the staff and management were quite aware of what was happening and not only turned a blind eye but actually conspired to make the adventure more exciting for them.

In later years, during the reign of Mrs Hart as Director of Nursing and Mrs Ruby Hair as Housekeeper when funds were not just so tight, a regular happy half hour was introduced before lunch on Sunday. This meant much to older people who were cut off from so many of the social niceties and enjoyments to which they had been accustomed.

Blind Members. The blind members also wanted to contribute to this new Australia, to be givers as well as receivers.

In 1956 Mrs Ira Bankovsky and her blind son Sergius, aged 16, stepped off a train at Spencer St Station in Melbourne. Sergius and his mother were White Russians who had lived in Harbin, North Russia. The communist Russians marched into Harbin in 1945 after the second world war when Serge was five years old. His father was taken away as forced labour. They never heard from him again. From then on he and his mother were never free of hunger pangs. Serge often went fishing for something to eat. This entailed using an explosive lime mixture in a corked bottle. When he was ten years old a bottle exploded in his hand. Some of the lime mixture entered his eyes. As a result sight was limited to hand movements at eighteen inches.

At Spencer St station Serge and his mother were met by the Placement Officer from the World Council of Churches. They could not speak English. The placement officer could not find work for them. She turned to the Association. Mrs Bankovsky was employed as a Wardsmaid. Serge did odd jobs for his board and pocket money. Later he worked at the RVIB.

When they first arrived the quantity and variety of food served at meals was as a continuing miracle to them. They could not believe the wonderful supply of food would not run out.

After he learned to speak English, the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital came to the aid of Serge. A corneal graft was performed which partly restored his sight. He then obtained outside employment, saved and soon purchased a home for his mother.

In 1958 as part of the World Refugee effort, an endeavour was made to re-settle some 8000 White Russians from North China who were being persecuted by the Russian communists. The humanitarian attitude of the Association was by this time widely recognised. Would it take a 23 year old totally blind man?

The matter was raised at a General Committee meeting. Nothing was known about him - his state of health, his customs and habits, his intellectual capacity, his employment qualifications, if any. It was a big gamble yet the blind members representatives with a unanimous voice said, "Yes". A meeting of blind members confirmed this decision. They felt they were so fortunate, had received so much and this was an opportunity to reach out with the wider community and be givers and sharers.

Alex Momot travelled by himself 2500 miles from Harbin to Hong Kong by train and then by ship to Melbourne. In Australia he was free. Free from fear, free from want and he had freedom to worship. His first priority was accomplished the next day. Alex travelled by himself by train from Brighton Beach to the City, found his way to the Russian Orthodox Church and thanked God for his deliverance.

On the following Monday Carole Opperman began teaching him English. He studied to be an osteopath, married an Australian nurse and set himself up interstate in private practice. Within a few years he was a wealthy man.

The Ballarat and Bendigo Homes also took their share of new settlers and had their own experiences and triumphs. Just as in two world wars the blind members had contributed in their own way to the need of the nation and its fighting men so in the time of peace, of this great human need, they extended a helping hand to displaced persons both blind and sighted. That, surely, is a proud part of the Association's history.

The old Australians felt their horizons had been broadened, their knowledge increased, their circle of friends widened. In helping others their own lives had been enriched.

17. THE KOOYONG STORY

The Minister for Health , Hon Ewan Cameron, in discussion with Mr Small towards the end of 1955, said the Association should be able to benefit under the recently introduced Home Help and Elderly Citizens Club Legislation.

Under these two Acts up to four fifths of salary costs were met and capital assistance was available for building Elderly Citizens buildings, including Supervisors accommodation . Projects required the approval of and payments would be made through local Councils. Both Acts were pieces of fine, farsighted State Government legislation. As a follow up and complementary to the Aged Persons Homes Act they had the potential to be of immeasurable help to the voluntary welfare sector.

The Committee resolved to make such adjustments as were necessary, to both remodel the Home Visitation service to meet the criteria of the Home Help Act and bring Kooyong into the Elderly Citizens category.

The Malvern, Prahran and Brighton Councils were approached for assistance to have the Kooyong Clubhouse recognised as an Elderly Citizens Club. Each agreed to submit financial operating claims on behalf of the Association. The Malvern Council agreed to support the building of a Supervisor's flat as an attachment to the Clubhouse. Positive discussions were also held with the Health Department.

These efforts came to nothing when the Department of Health bureaucrats issued their guidelines. Specialist voluntary organisations were excluded. The services must be operated by the Councils, be answerable to the Councils, be available to all elderly persons and be limited to Council boundaries.

The experience emphasised one of the subtle changes taking place - the redefining of powers as between Parliament, Cabinet and the Bureaucracy. The latter were in the ascendancy in day-to-day operations. They exercised a prominent role in interpreting the legislation, issued regulations and guidelines and to a substantial degree influenced the disbursement of the Department financial allocation. When protests were made the bureaucrats always had an excuse. "Parliament had not allocated sufficient money and they had to apply restrictions." The principle that the Minister would support his Department Head unless the circumstances were exceptional, was also well established.

Although help was not obtained under either Act the exercise did add to the momentum for development.

Craft classes commence An unsought opportunity for development soon arose. At the end of 1955 Mr. Harold Gratton, who had just completed successfully a two year course in Arts and Crafts at Swinburne Technical College. approached John Wilson with a proposal that craft classes be started at Kooyong with himself as instructor. With recollections of the past in mind and a feeling that efforts were being made to do too much too quickly with inadequate resources, the Committee was not enthusiastic.

However, after consideration it agreed that if five persons showed an interest, a class could be commenced one day a week. It also agreed part of the Clubhouse veranda could be closed off for a class room and equipment purchased to a total cost of £800.

The class opened on February 27, 1956 with 20 blind members attending over the week. The response by the blind members had far exceeded expectations. Within a few months the number attending had doubled and classes had expanded into the main hall. Attendance had to be rationed. The first Association Elderly Citizens Club, Day Centre, Activities Group, the names were interchangeable, had been established.

Miss Edna Wilson and her brother Don, whose other brother Arthur was a blind member, were particularly hardworking, devoted volunteers. Edna set up a sewing class, raising the money to purchase a machine. This section, too, surpassed all expectations and soon required the support of half a dozen sighted volunteers. It taught both hand and machine sewing. Younger blind women learned to repair and make up clothes for their children. Others were taught to let out and take up or lower the hems of dresses. Older blind women were retrained and undertook refresher courses.

The Kooyong experience indicated hand crafts could be a purposeful activity for the mobile residents of the Brighton Home. The Moorabbin Apex Club undertook as a project the building of a free standing craft room for the Home. This second centre was soon in operation taking Brighton patients and a number of blind members from the southern suburbs. Miss Mollie McDowell, daughter of the Brighton Home Committee Chairman, joined the staff with the responsibility of organising transport, ordering materials, selling manufactured items and general supervision. Within a short time items made by the blind members were carrying off prizes at the Royal Melbourne Show. Competition between Kooyong and Brighton members was keen.

The Association continued to develop the service to meet the expressed needs of blind people, free of imposed government restrictions.

Home visitation. The Committee considered the Home Help Act covered the Association programme and was disappointed government conditions prevented it from participating. Starting as a friendly home visiting service sixty years earlier the programme had now added counselling, welfare, home help and rehabilitation and was becoming ever more professional.

At the time Miss Henderson had 300 women on her visiting list. Accompanied by her guide and travelling by public transport she could visit three or four persons daily. As it was not possible to visit each person frequently, preference was given to the newly blind who needed intense training and counselling, those who lived alone and those in poor health or needy circumstances. A normal visit lasted up to two hours.

While Miss Henderson taught or talked with the blind lady, her guide would note the conditions in and around the house enabling a profile to be built up. If the person was in poor health the guide would do any necessary housework, ironing, mending, shopping. Miss Henderson would give lessons on personal care, organising the kitchen, cooking, identification of clothes, and other aspects of home management.

Part of her genius was the ability to use the simplest of non-technical teaching methods. For example she may say: "Come on, its time you learned to pour a cup of tea. Let's go to the kitchen sink so that if we make a mess it won't matter. Now let's start off with cold water so we will not burn ourselves. Hold the cup steady with your

thumb and middle finger and put the tip of your forefinger over the lip of the cup. When you pour the water in count to yourself. When the water touches the tip of your finger, stop. Now you know that after counting to five or six, as the case may be, the cup is getting full and its time to slow down and when the water touches your finger it is full". After repeating the process a few times she would say "now its time to try with hot water". She was quickly involved with her pupils and before they realised the fact, they were able to complete tasks previously thought impossible. She also taught them to code mark their clothes and footwear. If she felt a person needed more intensive encouragement she would take her to her cottage in the Dandenongs for a week end. With the commencement of the Kooyong programme newly blind ladies were increasingly directed to the centre.

Mrs Wyn Christian was one of hundreds of ladies helped by Miss Henderson. Later to become an influential member of the Committee, Mrs Christian told her own story which was representative of many:

" I was feeling so tired and for a few moments rested my head in my hands and shut my eyes. When I lifted my head to recommence work I could not see out of one eye. Later the sight in the other went. My world was very dark.

My consultant surgeon gave his final verdict. Nothing more could be done. I was facing a future of near blindness. In his wisdom he suggested to my family they should contact the Association.

Shortly afterwards I was visited by Mr. Mackenzie. This stimulating, optimistic knowledgeable man had himself faced the problems of blindness in a practical way and left me with a clear picture of my needs. He also suggested I get in touch with the Braille Library. The unfailing kindness and understanding of this organisation in teaching me Braille cannot be over emphasised.

A few weeks later a quietly spoken person knocked at my door. This was my introduction to Miss Elsie Henderson. Little did I know this gentle kind blind woman would change my whole approach to the problems of my future life.

Her first visit was not long, just a little chat while she knitted. Perhaps, she suggested, on her next visit I would like to learn to sew and most certainly she would teach me to boil the kettle and make a cup of tea. I felt really excited and when I had finally learned to do these things felt joyously independent. This was the ultimate; I could not expect to go further. Little did I know Miss Henderson.

Some weeks later I received an invitation to join her for a few days at her cottage in the hills. This was an honour but I felt I had neither the courage nor the confidence to undertake a stay of so long away from familiar surroundings. Politely but firmly I refused. Nevertheless, shortly after, I found myself walking along country lanes, picking blackberries and listening to the bellbirds.

Again came an invitation, this time to a social function at the Kooyong Clubhouse. I was frankly terrified, shy and bewildered at the mere thought

of meeting so many strangers. Once again I found myself enjoying a new experience.

And so step by step, almost against my will, I found my way back to a full life. I have learned to accept my disability and its limitations with a sense of humour to carry me over the pitfalls and to look forward to the future.

Above all, I have found that 'Courage', the motto of the Association is not an empty word but a way of life.

Reprinted from 'Courage' August 1958.

On the men's side Doug Campbell provided an equally effective service. Totally blind , he travelled alone by public transport. The attitude of the men was in some respects different to that of the women. They preferred to 'tough it out' rather than seek assistance. In 1956 after twenty years service, Doug was involved in a motor accident. His injuries forced his retirement. He was replaced by yet another Scot, Donald McLeod, an ex navy shipwright with a little sight in one eye and an artificial eye. Don was a no-nonsense man, with, as was to be expected, a robust vocabulary. He related extremely well with the men and was a first rate operator even though his approach broke every rule of social work. He was the source of many good stories.

Now it so happened a recently referred case was an ex Wing Commander RAF., a rather posh speaking English Gentleman. His wife, a lovely lady, had been in touch with Hamish Mackenzie a number of times. She was desperate. Her husband was depressed, would not accept he was blind, would not leave the house, would not see anyone. Everyone and everything was wrong except him. "Look," Hamish said to her, "we will just have to make a surprise visit and see what happens." He sent Don to visit the Wingco without giving him a briefing.

Late in the afternoon the lady rang, almost hysterical. "I don't know what has happened," she said. "My husband called out to me he was going down to the pub for a drink. I heard the door bang and saw the pair of them going off arm in arm. He hasn't returned. Do you think he is all right? What will I do?" "Just wait".

On his next visit to the office Don was asked how he got on with the Wingco.

"Fine. He is not a bad fellow when you get to know him."

"What happened?"

"His wife showed me into the room where he was, introduced me and disappeared. We manoeuvred around for a while. His superior manner and posh talk began to get to me. I found out he had been stationed in the south of England during the War so I got stuck into him. "So you are one of those bastards who were never there when you were needed. Grogging it up in your Mess when we were out in the Channel getting blown to hell by torpedoes and bombs. He was not amused and we started yelling at one another. At one point he was so mad, he said that if he was not blind he would give me a thrashing. I said 'there you are again, using blindness as an excuse this time'. He wouldn't stand for that, so I said 'look, there must be a pub somewhere around, lets find one and sort it all out over a beer'. He was so angry he forgot all the things he thought he couldn't do. We found a pub, had a few beers, got into conversation with some other fellows and in the end I had trouble getting him to go home."

From that day the Wing Commander was a changed man.. Don was always a welcome visitor at his home.

Don was not so successful on another of his visits. Checking on a blind man whom the Association had not heard of for some time, he called at what was understood to be the last known address. The conversation with the lady of the house was illuminating. "Good morning. Does Mr Joe Smith live here?" enquired Don in his best Scots brogue.

"Sometimes he does and sometimes he doesn't",replied the lady of the house.

"Is he here now?" asked Mr McLeod

"No he ain't and I dont know when he'll be back".

Mr McLeod, somewhat puzzled: said, "The man I am looking for is blind. Are we talking of the same person?"

"Could be. He's blind drunk as often as not".

Mr McLeod feeling desperate: "Look, could you tell me where I might find him?"

Lady: "Yes, but still don't think you'll see him".

Mr McLeod: "Why not?"

Lady: "He's in Pentridge".

Don was succeeded by Arthur Nothling. Arthur was a strong, well built authoritarian man who, when on the job, dressed impeccably and wore a white straw hat. He, also, was a direct action man. Each Friday he came in to the Social Work Dept., discussed his cases with Gordon Merry and obtained the names and addresses of the new referrals for his next week's visits. Early each Monday morning a volunteer with a street directory called at Arthur's home. The address of each referral was studied, the nearest tram line and train station ascertained and street references committed to memory.

Arthur would then set off by public transport, find the street and feel along the fences for the house number. In this way he located Geoff Braim, a newly blind business man. Geoff was totally defeated when he answered the door. In no time Arthur had told him what he needed to do was join the Kooyong programme.

"But how would I get there ?" asked Geoff.

"By public transport", was the reply.

"That's impossible," said Geoff.

"Don't be ridiculous. It's only two stations along and a short walk down Glenferrie Rd. Come on, I'll take you now ,but after that you are on your own."

Geoff overcame his mind fears and became a valued member of the Kooyong and General Committees.

Paterson Hall. Following the death of Mr Paterson on February 19,1957, the Victorian Association of Blind Cricketers, mindful of what they owed to him, requested his name be commemorated at Kooyong. The Cricketers arranged a function at the Clubhouse on the 22nd October. Mrs Paterson unveiled a commemorative plaque. The Committee was pleased to officially name the Clubhouse the W.H.Paterson Hall.

Christmas cards. In 1957 Mr Gration advocated the sale of Christmas Cards as a means of raising funds for the Craft Centre. A trial run of 2000 were sold from Kooyong without difficulty. The sale of Christmas cards then became an annual event.

Conflict of interest. In September 1960 blind members attending the Kooyong Classes complained that Mr Gration was using his position to solicit donations for the Lady Nell Seeing Eye Dog School which had just been commenced by Mrs Gration. The Committee decided the practice of a staff member collecting from blind clients for another organisation of the blind while they were participating in an Association programme which was provided free, was not ethical. It felt the situation was aggravated in that a staff member was the offender during his hours of employment. Endeavours to resolve the issue were not successful. Finally, with considerable regret, after more than six years of excellent service the resignation of Mr Gration was accepted.

Space problems. The introduction of daytime handcraft, social and recreational activities temporarily relieved some pressure on the home visiting programme but taxed the facilities of Paterson Hall beyond their capacity.

An extensive survey of the wishes of all blind people with respect to programme activities was carried out by the blind members of the Committee. This showed further expansion was desired. The findings coincided with Committee and Management conclusions. The return of Mr Lightfoot, whose health had improved, to the General Committee in 1958, added strength and impetus to the pressure for development.

The name of the unit was changed to Blind Citizens Community Centre [BCCC] in 1960. Mr Colin Trumble a prominent Melbourne solicitor and a Senior Partner in the large legal firm of Mallesons, accepted appointment as Chairman of a Building Committee. He was joined by a friend, Mr Brian Sargood, whose grandfather had been the Association's first Patron; Mr Dudley Lucas, Town Clerk of Malvern and a Trustee; Mr Ken Dowling, City Engineer of Malvern; Mr Ian Turner an architect and Mr Bill O'Donnell a builder. Oakley and Parkes were the Architects. By this time Mr Parkes was thinking of retirement and his partner Mr Kevin Knight was looking after the Association's work. This Building Committee later became the Branch Committee.

The survey had clearly shown older blind people did not like leaving the security of their homes for prolonged periods. That ruled out residential rehabilitation. A two storey Wing was therefore designed with a dual purpose. Firstly, provision of rehabilitation services required to restore confidence, teach the skills of daily living and home management. Secondly, provision of facilities which in conjunction with Paterson Hall were adequate for recreational, socialisation and cultural programmes. The maximum number of persons envisaged as participating in the daily rehabilitation programme was 24, with a total centre usage of 500 persons a week.

The theory was that the rehabilitation programme would be for ambulant blind people only. This decision was reinforced by three factors. The cost of installing a lift was beyond the Association resources; the Department of Labour and Industry would not grant approval for a lift in any case, as the base and part of the electrics would have been below the 1934 flood level; thirdly, the old generation of wheel chairs were heavy, clumsy, did not fold, occupied much space and were not suitable for transportation. The intention was that housebound and wheelchair members would be assisted at home. However, to provide for emergencies an external ramp to the lower floor was included.

Fund raising. Cr. E.W.Best, later to be Lord Mayor of Melbourne, accepted the position of Chairman of the Fundraising Committee with a target of \$120,000 to renovate Paterson Hall and build a new wing. Cr Best involved Mr John Wicking and Mr George Bond in the appeal. Cr. Best and Mr. Ian Ramsey accepted an invitation to join the Branch Committee when this task was completed.

The project received tremendous support. In 1961 Mrs Joanne Trumble, wife of Mr Colin Trumble, was instrumental in the formation of the Springfield Auxiliary. This group of ladies took their name from Springfield Ave, Toorak, in which Mrs Trumble lived. They brought a new dimension to fundraising activities and introduced a prominent and influential section of the community to the work. Among many other events the Auxiliary pioneered the Annual Fair at Kooyong. This became one of the largest and most successful in Melbourne. It also continued and developed an Art Show initiated by Shirley Campigli as a staff appeal project. This became an annual and notable social occasion raising many thousands of dollars each year.

Although the personnel changed over the years the Auxiliary retained its underlying strength. The contribution and influence of this Auxiliary remains a significant part of the Kooyong service. Its contribution is recognised by a plaque in the entrance foyer of Paterson Hall and in the naming of the Springfield Plaza in the Vision Resource Centre.

The Blind Members Auxiliary, which had been working for another hostel, saw this was not a prospect in the foreseeable future and gave wholehearted support to Kooyong. This Auxiliary had a chequered career of ups and downs. Many loyal workers and long serving volunteers had been office bearers. These included Mrs Paterson who was noted for her Lily of the Valley contributions.

Local organisations, Rotary, Lions, Apex and the Hawthorn Community Chest all assisted. Approaches were made by Committee Members to leading Charitable Trusts such as the William Buckland Trust, Collier Charitable Fund, and the Hecht Trust. All gave valuable assistance. The State Government through the Hospitals and Charities Commission gave \$20,000.

The inability of the MMBW to make up its mind where the South East Freeway would be sited delayed the commencement of the building. The MMBW also objected to the floor level of the building being below the level of the great 1934 flood mark. Pressure resulted in approval, with the condition that no toilet facilities be installed in the lower floor.

The extension opened. The Governor, Major General Sir Rohan Delacombe, opened the new two storey building attached to Paterson Hall on September 30, 1966 in the presence of 350 guests. It was named the M.M.Lightfoot Centre. In this manner the names of two great men of the Association who had worked together for long years were perpetuated side by side.

The opening of the centre coincided with an era of development in the welfare and rehabilitation fields. New technology and the output from more widely based professional courses was impacting on the scene. The fact that physiotherapy and occupational therapy could benefit a wider clientele than the physically disabled, did

not necessarily require the supervision of a medical officer and could be used in other than a hospital setting was being accepted.

As knowledge of the Kooyong programme spread, pressure for inclusion exerted by the wheelchair homebound supported by their Welfare Officers was enormous. The determination and courage of the group had been underestimated. This 'people power' overturned the 'ambulant only' theory of participation, increased the daily attendance beyond design capacity and created a transport and wheelchair problem. The volunteer drivers were wonderful. At the pick up point they assisted the blind person from the wheelchair into the car. At Kooyong staff waited with another wheelchair as the driver assisted the blind person from the car. This was heavy work and the risk of back injury was ever present. It was also the only time many of the housebound had any social contact and they just lived for their day at Kooyong. The attendance was so beneficial no one dared refuse. During the following thirty years many ideas for rectifying the design problems thus created were considered and discarded. The faults will not be overcome until a new building is erected as a result of the Centenary Appeal.

Property purchases. The overall effect was to push services beyond previously accepted boundaries and, within a year the new building beyond its capacity. Through the generosity of the Wm. Buckland Trust one of the two blocks of flats in front of the Centre facing Glenferrie Road was purchased in 1967. The four individual flats were used to expand services and as a caretaker's residence. Continuing growth necessitated the purchase of the second block in 1970. Financial assistance was received from the Hecht Trust for this purpose.

The absence of statistics as to the extent of blindness was felt as the programme at the BCCC developed a life of its own. Referrals multiplied. Blind people wishing to attend continued to exceed the space available and the decentralisation of metropolitan services became a subject of consideration.

Volunteer service. The program required the rapid expansion of the volunteer service. Apart from the Red Cross, little information was available at the time on the operation of a large volunteer force. After discussion with the Red Cross the Association developed its own system of organisation and control. Lieut. Colonel Frances Shippen RRC., recently retired as Principal Matron, Southern Army Command and a one time Matron of the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, agreed to accept the position as Honorary Director. Sectional Leaders were Mrs. Beth Lightfoot, who had been organising drivers for Miss Henderson since 1958. Mrs Muriel Downie, Mrs Billee Fitzgerald, and Mrs Joyce Tomlins. Mrs Leila Burke, a member of the Elanora Committee accepted responsibility as sectional leader at Brighton.

Mrs Shippen recruited volunteers, army style. Mrs Jean Parry, one of her WWII army nurses says it was a case of you, you, and you, will do such and such on this and that date. No excuses were accepted. If they protested they had other appointments or engagements on the days allocated, the reply was brief and to the point. Change them. The other ladies also brought in their friends. The result, in a very short time, was a task force of over 300 ladies of outstanding ability and prestige performing a wide variety of duties. A staff member, Mrs Verna Jeffress was appointed Liaison Officer and Co-ordinator at Kooyong. The Head Office Liaison was Mrs Miranda Matthews.

18. CHANGES IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Vale. In the 1960s a last goodbye was said to some great ladies of the Association.

Miss Winnie Hobson aged 78 years died on the January 3, 1961 following a period of failing health. Her illustrious service was honoured in naming a wing of Mirridong in her memory.

Mrs Elsie Lawrence nee Tait died in June 1961. She became honorary minute secretary while still in her teens prior to the turn of the century. Her father was the minister of the Punt Road Presbyterian Church where the Association held its meetings. When the Association moved to a city office she was asked to give up her job and become the first paid office staff member. Her deeds of kindness were forever enshrined in the hearts of those who knew and loved her. On May 27, 1962, at the Brighton Home Mrs Hutchinson unveiled a beautiful chiming clock donated by the blind members. On it were inscribed the words, " In Memory of Elsie Scott Lawrence devoted and loyal friend of the blind for over 60 years".

Mrs. Margaret Bartlett, aged 93 years, died in Villa Madonna in October 1962. One of the solid core of early members who laid the foundation of the Association, she served faithfully in many positions and offices in good and bad times for more than half a century. She always endeavoured to build up and unite the blind in an atmosphere of peace.

Mrs Lelitia Hutchinson died on August 31, 1963, aged 85 years. She joined the Association in 1896, the first year of its formation and served on Committees in every elective office except President from 1902 until 1958. The Committee minute reads in part: "Mrs Hutchinson was a woman of high integrity and tremendous courage. In the public sphere she battled unceasingly for the blind and was unswervingly devoted to their advancement and welfare. Privately, she was widely respected for the continuous unobtrusive help rendered to those in need."

Mrs. Ethel May Paterson died on May 9, 1964 in her 90th year. She served on various Committees from 1911 to 1957. She left the Association her Estate of \$2,300. One section of the Committee tribute read: "A devoted wife, she was a wise and softening influence on her husband. Not privileged to be a mother she mothered a far greater family, the blind. To them her house was always open. No one ever sought her help in vain."

Mrs Ada Robertson, wife of Association giant the late David Robertson, died in the Brighton Home in August 1968 aged 92 years. Throughout their long married life she had been a loyal and devoted helpmate to her husband.

Two great men also passed on to their reward.

Mr Hamish Mackenzie died aged 64 years on May 29, 1965 from a heart condition. He lost his sight at the age of 36 as a result of glaucoma and thereafter served the Association devotedly and with distinction in many capacities. He was noted for his oft repeated saying, " I would rather be blind and fulfil God's purpose for me in life, than have my sight and fritter my life away." The Hamish Mackenzie Room in the H.M.Lightfoot Centre was named in his honour.

Rev. Bro. P.G.O'Neill MBE died in October 1968 in his 83rd year. Bro. O'Neill taught at St Francis School, Lonsdale St Melbourne; helped to establish St Patrick's College, Ballarat and was Principal of St Vincent de Paul's Boys Orphanage, South. Melbourne. While serving in NSW. he helped to establish St Lucy's School for Blind Girls and St Edmund's School for Blind Boys at Wairoonga. Paying tribute at the following Committee Meeting, Mr Lightfoot referred to his long and valuable service to the Association and the affectionate links between the Association and Villa Maria Society. He concluded by saying: "Through his generous friendship and wise counsel he lives on in our hearts and minds as a model of service, faith and fortitude." The President, Chief Executive Officer and many Association members were present at the Requiem Mass in St Patrick's Cathedral.

Naming the homes. The Blind Members were now expressing dissatisfaction with the perpetuation of the name 'Blind Home', seeing it as an expression of the old stigma. They wanted each Home to have a name and for that name to be used.

The Bendigo Committee was the first to respond in 1960. A public competition for a suitable name attracted 590 entries. The winning entry selected by the Bendigo Committee was 'Mirridong' an aboriginal word meaning 'Happy Home'. No truer description could have been found.

When Brighton was registered as a hospital in 1955 the term 'hospital' was used. The Hospitals and Charities Commission requested reversion to the term Home as being more appropriate. This was done. With the completion of the John Grant wing in 1968 debate again took place on a suitable name. 'Elanora' meaning home or camp by the sea, which had been chosen as its name by the new Auxiliary was considered appropriate and adopted.

The Ballarat Home residents were asked to submit their suggestions to the Committee. One of the residents, Miss Agnes Sharry proposed 'Kelaston', a combination of the names of Helen Keller and Tilly Aston. This was readily adopted.

These names, confirmed by the General Committee, have become hallowed with the passing of the years. The continued use of aboriginal words was later perpetuated in the naming of the majority of new Regional Centres - Baringa, Shepparton; Pindari, Warragul; Illawarra, Geelong and Yalundah, Warnambool.

The last nomenclature of the early days was the slogan, 'caring for the aged, infirm and unemployable blind', This slogan had been adopted by the AAB in its early days and promoted actively to distinguish it from the RVIB. It still appeared on some publicity material in the early 1970s. Mr Wicking considered the slogan conjured up in the mind a picture of a 'second class' people and did not fairly present the image of the current generation of vision impaired people. The slogan was then finally buried.

Centralisation versus De-centralisation. From Federal / State relationships through business organisations to community bodies with state wide services this disease of democracy spreads its tentacles. The issue is centralised control or local autonomy. Either view, according to the particular circumstances, may be right. The underlying

conditions are independence and power. The Association faced the challenge as the organisation expanded.

At the 61st Annual Meeting in 1956, the President, Mr. Bruce Small could say: *"Ours is an organisation which differs from most of the others in the social service field in Victoria. It is in a very real sense a partnership. The Committee consists of members elected by contributors and representatives of non sighted folk. Each Committee member takes an active part in the affairs of the Association and in addition specialises in one aspect of the work. The representatives of the blind members make known from personal experience the needs and feelings of blind people. This enables the correct type of assistance to be rendered in the correct manner"*.

This system which had worked well for a small body now required adjustment. Following a thorough internal study and analysis amendments were made to the Constitution. The concept of Branch Committees was adopted. The Branch Committees had the responsibility of generating local interest and fund raising to make their unit financially independent, supporting administration and the programme, and taking a personal interest in the blind residents. All current and future Branches were placed on the same footing. The name of the organisation was shortened from 'Association for Advancement of the Blind' to 'Association for the Blind'.

A Working Memorandum for Branch Committees containing detailed operational roles and procedures was introduced. The Rules for the Blind Members and Auxiliaries were revised. Recognition was had for the increased responsibilities being undertaken by senior staff and the title of Managing Secretary changed to Chief Executive Officer.

Relationships between General Committee, Head Office and Branch Committees emerged as a difficult area. The General Committee was limited by law in respect of the powers it could delegate. In its deliberations it looked at the organisation as a whole and the overall needs of blind people, balancing these with local aspirations. On the financial side Head Office Staff had the responsibility of ensuring observance of the accounting standards and meeting the wide ranging requisitions of both Federal and State Authorities. The goal of the staff service providers was a quality professional service of equal standard throughout the organisation.

Branch Committees found irksome the restrictions these factors imposed on their own authority. This was understandable as the Branch Committee Members were able persons of high standing in their communities and quite capable of managing the Homes and Centres independently. From time to time problems arose in relation to staff management, service standards and purchasing. In respect to the latter, Melbourne could purchase many items more cheaply through the Victorian Hospitals Association bulk purchasing system. At the same time local business made clear that their support was conditional on local purchase. Compromise was necessary. A problem, specific to the Brighton Branch Committee, was the location of the Head Office in its buildings. Head Office tended to reach into the Brighton domain. At times this made the Brighton Committee feel unwanted and that it served no purpose.

A major problem related to political action. The General Committee, viewing the broad scene and after consultation with the Branches would determine a course of action. Often a branch would approach its local Parliamentarians prematurely or to

push their local aspirations. The local Members in turn would raise the issue with the Minister or if there was a chance of political kudos, in Parliament. Understandably, no Minister liked that sort of thing. The Minister rebuked his Department Head and the latter the CEO of the Association, warning that while he might win that particular battle he would certainly lose the war. The CEO realised quickly, that his best defence on hearing a branch had stepped out of line, was to advise the Department who briefed the Minister who had the answer ready if the matter was raised.

Expressed in another way, the Association and its branches had become a grown up family with the children desiring to go their own independent ways. This could not be. The blind members were adamant the organisation should not be split up and the authorities stated they would only deal with one parent body.

The imperfections of the Committee structure were recognised. A number of methods were tried to achieve the most effective and fairest composition. These had varying degrees of success. The ideal in one direction meant less than desirable representation or weakness in another. The end result was and always continued to be a compromise. The flawed system worked well because those involved wanted it to work and emphasised the positive. That harmony reigned most of the time was a tribute to the personal friendships and goodwill of the people serving and their willingness to sublimate their personal views and desires for the common good.

Programming. Another challenge was the transfer of operational control of programmes from volunteers to staff. In many instances groups started in a small way and were run as socialisation programmes by volunteers. As numbers grew and professional staff became available and involved, the objective of the programmes changed. Volunteers had an emotional attachment and wished to give the blind members an enjoyable day together. Staff were more objective and wished to teach the blind members to be independent and manage their own lives. The transition was not always easy from any of the three viewpoints but in the end it was always achieved with good relationships maintained.

Self help groups remained independent and self contained only seeking assistance when required. This applied particularly to the sporting, recreational and special interest groups. Some programmes remained under the control of volunteers. Notable among these was the sewing group under the leadership of Miss Edna Wilson assisted by Mrs Hucks and Mrs Downie and the recreational and sporting activity groups.

Individual blind and sighted volunteers worked as members of the professional staff teams. Blind members Alfred Tanz worked part time as a craft instructor and Paul Fretton as a pottery instructor. Sighted volunteers, Bert Leeson, Jim Grumont, Jeff McLean and Alan Dean, supervised the woodwork classes.

Blind membership. The Blind Membership and its contribution came under close examination. Among the overall blind constituency were strongly held and conflicting viewpoints. Individually the leaders of the Blind Workers Union were fine responsible people. However in the corporate view of the Union the Agencies remained the enemy. This 'us and them' view meant that many potential leaders were unavailable to the agencies. A blind person could accept a minor job with an Agency but not a staff or management position. To do so was to be branded as a traitor. Those blind persons who had obtained employment in open industry usually wished to throw off the

shackles and keep free of the system. The younger blind people with business and professional qualifications inclined towards the wider community. When the RVIB School moved to Burwood and St Pauls School opened, the negative pressures of the Blind Workers Union waned. The younger blind people were then attracted to the newly formed National Federation of Blind Citizens. Some activist blind persons found the generalist Disabled Peoples' International group more to their liking.

As a consequence the bulk of the blind membership of the Association consisted of mature age persons who were participating in its programmes and activities. Power went with numbers which meant the membership attending Kooyong dominated. A blind member from another branch or, for example, a blind university graduate willing to serve stood little chance of election. The former was not known to the core group and the latter was not 'one of us'. Naturally the core group did not want to dilute its influence by change. Nevertheless over a period of some twenty years a change in thinking did take place and wider representation on the Blind Members Council and the Committee resulted. A pleasing feature was the selection of a number of professional and business men such as Hugh Jeffrey, Neil Westh, Fred Tolstrup, Alan Nuske, Geoff Braim, Vern Dunstan and Norman Banks and the selection of blind representatives from the Branches.

Committees. One challenge of change was the turnover in sighted Committee membership, for various understandable and acceptable reasons such as changed employment responsibilities, interstate postings, health, family reasons and retirement. This meant an element of informal learning was ever present. A good induction combined with a study of the operational procedures was an excellent aid to enlightened and good relationships.

The Ballarat Branch Committee welcomed as vacancies occurred, Messrs Barton, Barnes, Chester, Hook, Cr. King and Mrs Tweedie. Bendigo welcomed Messrs Adams, Andrew, Granger, Hesse, McManus, Parsons, Sutherland, and Mesdames Every, Hewitt, Jones and Morgan. At Brighton Messrs Jamison, Grant, Carroll, Brown, Case, Streader, Parkes, R Wilson, Bond, General Legge and Mesdames McKenzie Brown, Burke, Edwards and Betty Worrall were among those persons who served. All gave meritorious service. As Chairman of the Brighton Committee 1964 - 1970 and member of the General Committee, Mr. John Grant was a particularly talented leader. The 1968 wing at Elanora was named in his honour.

The Branches chose their own style of leadership. Ballarat and Bendigo adopted contrasting methods. At Ballarat the Chairmanship rotated among the membership every year or two. There was sadness at Ballarat when Mrs Nunn died before her award of the British Empire Medal was publicly announced. At Bendigo Mrs Rose remained in the Chair for some 32 years. Later, Shepparton with Mr Alan Dainton at the helm and the George Vowell Centre with Mr. Jim McCoy, followed the Bendigo pattern while Brighton, Kooyong and Geelong fell in between the two. All methods had their advantages and disadvantages.

The General Committee too, had a number of changes in the late 1950s and 1960s. Whether or not Mr Horsfall had a premonition of his forthcoming sudden death at the young age of 52 years, in September 1959 is not known, but he did shortly before it happened bring in as his understudy a young accountant, Mr Wal McMahan. Mr Lightfoot introduced Mr Colin Trumble. Mr Opperman despite his Ministerial

responsibilities managed to attend meetings and make his wise contribution. Mr Bruce Small was appointed Town Planning Consultant to the Snowy Mountains Authority and was also spending more time at Surfers Paradise. Despite prolonged absences he continued to attend and chair meetings and make his presence felt. He tried on many occasions to resign but the Committee would not countenance the idea. Mr Lightfoot as Vice President accepted more and more of the day to day responsibility. Messrs Jamison, Bride and Brown, specialists in specific areas, were also appointed.

Mr Bruce Small moved permanently to Queensland in 1964. The Committee then accepted his resignation. In presenting his last Annual Report that year he said in farewell: *" My ten years in office have been happy ones. I have much personal satisfaction in the growth of the Association and value deeply the rich personal friendships made. The honour of leading the Association in the future will belong to Pat Lightfoot. He richly deserves it. His twenty five years of service for the blind have given him unrivalled knowledge. No one stands higher in the regard of the blind or sighted friends of the Association."*

"In conclusion, the Association must go forward. There have been a number of occasions in the past ten years when the Association has been in an seemingly impossible situation. We have always lifted our eyes upwards and Divine help has been forthcoming. As we look into what is at present a dark, cloudy future we still have this faith."

In his new venture at the age of 69 years Bruce Small went on to become the Mayor and King of the Gold Coast, enter Parliament and receive a Knighthood in the Queens Birthday Honours, 1974. Association visitors always received a warm welcome at his home on the Isle of Capri.

Mr Opperman's resignation followed in 1967 when he was appointed High Commissioner to Malta. There he received the well deserved accolade of Knighthood. While overseas he continued to support the Association and resumed his interest on return.

The Committee appointed both Sir Bruce and Sir Hubert, Honorary Counsellors of the Association. They continued to take an active interest in Association affairs. Sir Bruce died in 1983.

Of particular note, too, was Major General Legge who became Director of Fundraising and Public Relations in May 1961 and resigned to join the Committee in November the same year. General Legge was quite unlike the stereotype army officer in every way, except bearing. He was of average height, medium build, grey haired, softly spoken with a quiet restful personality. He had ended his army career as Master of Ordinance and was an exceptionally clear, logical thinker and excellent speaker. He devoted much time to producing statistical information on blindness and analysing associated problems. His findings, used as a tool, lifted the Association to new heights in areas where previously it had merely dabbled around the edges. He resigned in 1971 because of hearing impairment and was appointed an Honorary Counsellor.

The burden of the Treasurer became ever heavier. Mr McMahan resigned in 1964 for family and business reasons. His successor was a banker, Mr. Norman Winckle, who

was transferred to Sydney in 1968. He, in turn, was succeeded by Mr Gary Fitzgerald CMG, a leading figure in the accounting world who lifted the horizons of the Treasurer's responsibilities. A few months before the death of Mr Fitzgerald at the end of 1970, Mr Lightfoot introduced another chartered accountant, Mr John Wall, as Assistant Treasurer. The choice was brilliant. One of nature's gentlemen, he was respected and admired by all. He devoted an immense amount of time to his area of expertise and accepted responsibility for financial investments, analysis and forecasts. Management deferred to his wisdom and knowledge. The President had unqualified confidence in his advice. His exceptional service was recognised in the award of the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1989. He retired in 1991.

Following the Guiding Light Appeal in 1968, the Deputy Chairman, Mr Michael Fitzgerald, Melbourne General Manager of the Commercial Banking Co. of Sydney Ltd, whose wife Billee was a respected volunteer leader, was invited to join the General Committee and appointed a Vice President. In addition to a natural involvement in finance, he actively participated in the development of the new branches at Geelong, Mt Eliza and Warragul.

Mrs Kitty Rose from Bendigo joined the General Committee in 1969. For the following eighteen years she travelled by train each month to attend the Committee Meeting. Her special interest was the affairs of the country branches and the welfare of the patients.

Pressure of business necessitated the resignation of Mr Colin Trumble in 1969. His invaluable legal contribution had proved the wisdom of having a lawyer on the Board. He was succeeded by Mr Alec Cook DFC, another well known, highly regarded lawyer. His company, Russell Kennedy and Cook handled the Association legal affairs.

Mr George Bond became Chairman of the Brighton Committee in 1970 and member of the General Committee when ill health led to Mr John Grant's resignation. He undertook the valuable role of devil's advocate ensuring that all aspects of an issue were considered. Mr Bond was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1995.

Mr Wayne Reid OBE, President of the Lawn Tennis Association of Australia, replaced General Legge. Appointed a Vice President, he took a particular interest in the management structure and Kooyong.

Mr Lightfoot had now reached the normal retirement age and having been through a time of unremitting pressure as President, expressed his desire to stand down from the position and serve as a Committee Member. Members agreed, provided he found a suitable replacement.

Mr John Wicking, Managing Director and Chairman of Kiwi International was introduced to the Committee towards the end of 1971 and elected President in 1972. Mr Wicking was a long time business associate of Mr Lightfoot and had been involved in the 1966 appeal for Kooyong. The happy relationships within and the stability of the General Committee continued.

Mr Wicking was a top business man and grazier who shunned personal publicity. He was tall, well built, strong physically and mentally, with a natural authoritative air of

command. He expected much from his associates and was not fond of excuses. His outward bearing covered a delightful sense of fun and humour. He was kindness personified, his unobtrusive generosity was unlimited and his feelings for blind people deep and sincere. He needed these qualities to face the problems which were appearing on the horizon.

Mr Wicking was new to the ramifications of the Health Service system, which despite his enormous business experience were, at first, beyond his comprehension. He frequently shook his head in disbelief and frustration..

At the first few Committee Meetings he appeared lost. There were staff recommendations for projects costing hundreds of thousands of dollars on the agenda. There was the Treasurer calm and unperturbed saying there were no funds. There was Pat Lightfoot saying that if the project was worthwhile and was really needed the Association should go ahead and the money would follow. There was Michael Fitzgerald, ever the banker, saying it was necessary to have the capital in hand and a government guarantee of the operational costs. before undertaking a project. There was George Bond advocating that money should not be spent on building projects anyway but on direct services to blind people. They all looked to Mr Wicking to act as Solomon and make the right decision. Despite all the differing views no word was ever spoken harshly or in anger. The Members were the best of friends and relished each other's company. When a decision was reached,-generally by the President summing up the majority view or expressing his own,-all worked without reservation to achieve it. The negative 'I told you so' was never heard.

Such were Mr. Wicking's qualities the complexities were quickly mastered. Soon he was able to walk unannounced into any branch and be greeted warmly as a friend by blind people and staff alike. Similarly at Committee level he accepted, indeed flourished under the heavy burden of responsibility attached to the office of President.

During those first few months when he thrashed around like a bull in a cattle crush, he introduced a new word to the Association vocabulary. The word, used as an expletive, conveyed his feelings perfectly. It says much for his gentlemanly heritage that this word, 'Codswallop' no matter how forcibly expressed, was acceptable to the ladies.

The Association was fortunate in the quality, standing and influence of the membership of the various Committees. Through these representatives excellent relationships were established and maintained with local Councils and Members of Parliament both State and Federal.

The Association was also a member of various co-ordinating bodies. These included the Victorian Council of Social Services, Victorian Council on the Ageing, Association of Geriatric Centres, Voluntary Care Association , Australian Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled and Australian National Council for the Blind.

The breadth of the Association's knowledge and contacts added to its prestige. Various sources and methods were used and strong representations made to achieve its aims. Note was taken of Mr. Opperman's advice and confrontation avoided. Note, too, was taken of General Legge's experience that no bureaucrat would listen and treat seriously your file on any subject unless it was at least two inches thick.

Staff appointments. The metropolitan expansion necessitated the appointment of additional staff. The first new member of Head Office was Mrs Yvonne Blight who was appointed in 1958 to handle Direct Mailing but who at first worked out of the reception office at Brighton, where she could help Matron McLeod. Mrs Blight retired in 1977 but continued to serve as Secretary of the Brighton Auxiliary, in the Hampton and Sandringham Opportunity Shops and as a volunteer, until her death in 1992.

After three appointees as Office Managers/Accountant failed in their performance, Mr Lightfoot approved the appointment of Mr Bob Pearson, John Wilson's brother-in-law, in 1958. Mr Pearson had been on the staff of the Association's Auditor and had the advantage of knowing the accounting system. Mr Pearson's acceptable personality and public speaking ability saw him serving in many roles, including public relations, fundraising and with the auxiliaries and blind members. He retired at the end of 1985.

Head Office was moved to Brighton on July 1, 1959. Early key office appointments after the move included Miss Judith Bloy who served until 1993, Miranda Matthews, nee Damman, Carole Laird, nee Opperman, and Angelica Marcelin, nee Orphanidy, who was visually impaired.

Following Matron McLeod at Brighton came Bernice Agar, Betty Cutting, Phyllis Hart, Betty Armstrong, Joan Bartlett, Chris Whitehouse, Carol Meade and Jillian Cocks who is still serving. Each gave prestigious service. Under their leadership the nursing services of the home acquired and maintained a fine reputation..

Mrs Alice Mann was appointed Chief Clerk in the Brighton office in 1961 and also looked after all the patients personal financial affairs until she retired in 1973. She was followed by Mrs Audrey Thomson who continued until her retirement in 1993. Overall the patients received the warm-hearted professional care and compassionate understanding the Committee desired and the public standing of the Home was enhanced.

A number of senior metropolitan staff appointments were made in the 1960s and 1970s. Miss Kathleen Shepherdson, Secretary of the Victorian Council of Social Services was appointed Senior Social Worker to replace Mr Mackenzie. Miss Shepherdson served for 10 years until her retirement. She introduced a modern system of social work records and assisted in developing groups at Kooyong. She was particularly proud at having started the Young Mothers group. During her last year of service she wrote '*Sunshine in Shadow*' a brief account of the Association history to that time.

Mrs Carol Morris, a young Occupational Therapist with overseas experience, was given the dual role of supervisor of the Blind Citizens Community Craft operations and Branch craft activities during their establishment. She resigned for family reasons in 1967. The services of Miss Jean Hogg a senior member of the profession were then secured. As the work expanded she was joined by Mrs Ann Rogerson.

The leadership qualities, enthusiasm, and ability of Miss Shirley Campigli, manager of a unit for the mentally handicapped who was appointed early in 1966, were so

outstanding that within six months the Committee had approved her appointment as Assistant to the Chief Executive. She resigned when she married Mr George Admans in December, 1968 and then had the unique distinction of being the only sighted person ever selected and drafted by the Blind Members as one of their representatives on the General Committee. Mrs Admans who was living in the country resigned from the Committee in 1970 following the birth of her son David. She returned to the staff in 1978 and is still serving.

A personable young man, Mr Murray Mountain was appointed Accountant in 1968, taking over from Mr Bob Pearson whose time was by then fully occupied in other areas. Always enthusiastic and optimistic, Mr Mountain showed a caring feeling for the blind members and was always prepared to assist colleagues with their problems. His special interest became buildings, building design and equipment. He became noted for his contribution to this area and was asked by the Australian Standards Association to attend the International Standards Association original meeting in Vienna in 1990 to develop international standards for the disabled in the built environment. Mr Mountain served in various senior Executive positions including Manager Homes 1974-79. At present he is General Manager, Finance. and also Project Manager for the Centenary building programme. He has displayed exceptional loyalty to the Association.

A manager for the BCCC, Kooyong, who possessed the desired qualities, was not easy to find. In 1968 Miss Shirley Campigli was acting on a temporary basis when the right man appeared. The Rev. Arthur Wilkins had been an RAAF Chaplain during WWII. He had continued in the Air Force part time and advanced to the position of Principal Air Chaplain with the rank of Air Commodore. He was also the Minister at Kew Baptist Church, the largest Baptist Church in Melbourne at that time. Deteriorating sight had brought him within the definition of blindness. He had also recently suffered two serious heart attacks. The combination of these factors led him to submit his resignation from both the RAAF Chaplaincy and the Church. He contacted Miss Kath Shepherdson to enquire about re-training. Following some discussions with the CEO and President, to his surprise he was invited to become Manager of the Centre.

Despite serious ill health, which he kept well hidden, he was dynamic and exuded friendship. He could turn opponents into friends in no time and then used their services without mercy for the benefit of vision impaired people. He was forever reaching out to wider horizons and setting new goals. He had a passion for rehabilitation and the ability to translate theory into practical reality. He was a publicist and fund raiser extraordinary and a writer of outstanding ability. Without seeking he continued to exercise a pastoral ministry.. His simple faith and positive thinking were clear to all. Blind and sighted alike confided their troubles to him. He was asked to conduct weddings and funerals.. In total he had a major impact on the whole spectrum of the work. In his later years, he expressed the view that the purpose of his life's work, however meritorious others saw it, had been to train him for his service to blind people in which he found his greatest fulfilment.

The Committee, Staff and Blind Members alike acknowledged his uniqueness. The President, Mr John Wicking called him Mr Magic. The staff saw him as a 'one off', saying that after the Great Potter made Arthur, He destroyed the mould. Arthur served on the staff until his retirement in 1976 and then on the Committee and Blind

Members Council until his death in October 1986, a total of 18 years. His contribution, , was inspirational.

Mr Ralph Skilbeck returned to the Association in 1969 as Manager Elanora. He resigned in 1974 to accept the position of Assistant Manager, St Andrews Hospital. It was he, who, through his contacts at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital, learned the Sister Margaret Biggs was returning from Brisbane to Melbourne.

Sister Margaret Biggs later Mrs Lawrence, was appointed in 1970 to a senior rehabilitation position in anticipation of the introduction of the Low Vision Service and her appointment as Administrator. She devised and implemented the administrative system and procedures of the clinic, established high quality relationships with the eye care professions and made an important contribution to the international low vision field. A delightful friendly person of great ability, she was widely admired both within Australia and internationally. She retired in 1991 after a most illustrious career.

Mrs. Lorraine Adamson, a friend of long standing, came to help John Wilson as a temporary measure in January 1970. Her outstanding business ability was recognised quickly by both Committee and Staff. She remained as Executive Assistant to John Wilson and then John Cook until her retirement in 1991. Her responsibilities at Executive level did not have boundaries. Among her varied duties she prepared the documentation for the General Committee, processed decisions and hosted functions. She liaised between the President, Treasurer and Chief Executive and worked closely with each. She filled in for the Chief Executive Officer during his absences and was an adviser, both officially and unofficially, to senior executives.

Mr Gordon Merry was recruited by Mr Wilkins in 1970 as Head of the Social Work Department following Miss Shepherdson. He served until retirement in 1987. An ordained minister and a qualified social worker, he possessed an enquiring mind and pursued widely differing interests. His extensive knowledge of electronics and research into genetics were of particular value to the Association. During his years as Head of Department, Social Work services expanded greatly in both the city and country. His vast range of abilities were extensively used.

Mr John Cook was appointed Assistant Manager at Kooyong in 1973 and Manager in 1974 when Mr Wilkins moved to Head Office. He, too, moved to Head Office in 1977 as Manager Rehabilitation Services when Mr Wilkins retired. In 1979 he received a Churchill Fellowship to study the Accreditation of Services. On his return from the United States national use was made of his knowledge. He was appointed General Manager in 1983 and by the General Committee, Chief Executive Officer from the beginning of 1985. Mr Cook had an outstanding academic record and possessed a brilliant intellect. A clear logical thinker he became the specialist in statistics and analysis. This strengthened the Association internally but his ability to detect flaws and highlight inconsistencies in government presentations was not always welcomed by department officers. He has an extensive, detailed grasp of the health and welfare system in Australia and its many complexities. This knowledge is of inestimable value to the Association.

Miss Jane Duncanson was appointed Accountant in 1974. After qualifying as a Hospital Manager she transferred to Elanora as manager in 1979 and remained in that

position until her resignation in 1990. Her service at Elanora coincided with a period when the Hospital Employees Federation was very active and militant. Miss Duncanson showed notable ability in standing up to, and dealing with, difficult union officials while maintaining services with minimum disruption.

Mr. Lindsay McMillan joined the Association in 1977 as Assistant Manager, Kooyong. He followed Mr John Cook as Manager, Kooyong and later as Manager Services. He resigned in 1992 to accept appointment as Chief Executive Officer of another large service agency. Mr McMillan was highly qualified in the Education sphere and was also a teacher of the deaf. He displayed outstanding skills as a negotiator, established a good rapport with government officers and was given responsibility for the final development of Radio for the Print Handicapped. He also established the National Centre for Sensory Loss.

These Senior Executives faced constant wide ranging challenges in planning and implementing the various programmes which lifted the Association to a superior world class agency. The competent assistance of a devoted administrative and professional staff ensured success.

During the 1950s and 1960s the Association was a small unknown organisation struggling for recognition. Honorary workers were mainly the close friends or relatives of blind members. Strange as it may now seem, helping blind people frightened off volunteers. The remark was often made that they felt scared. They did not know what to do or how to talk to blind people. With employment plentiful, working among blind people held little appeal for employees. For quality workers there was nothing to stimulate ambition. For neither group at the time was there community standing, recognition or social prestige. As a consequence those persons who assisted the work during the early expansion period were particularly choice persons, highly motivated.

To cover the shortage of honorary workers Committee Members and Senior Staff brought in their friends and families to help. The varied experiences of the period drew them all together in a rare and close bond which transcended conventional wisdom in respect of working relationships.. Staff members had picnics, barbecue's, social evenings. Their children helped at fund raising functions as did the children of Committee Members. In their teens many of those children came for work experience. Some became staff members working in professional or administrative roles. In that category, from Committee Members' families were Margaret Lightfoot, Carole Opperman, Elaine Small, Mollie McDowell, Sue Jamison, Amanda Trumble and Amanda Ramsay. From Staff families came Valda Nugent, Robyn Pearson, Heather Cameron, Jan Wilson, Aileen Hair, Fiona Stewart and Anne Benzie. Within the Association the various categories were members of one team with a single objective - to serve and further the cause of blind people.

The close contact between the Committee Members, Volunteers, Staff and Blind Members of those days did much to cement the concept of partnership and the spirit of the Association. Friendships then established ,remain.

19.EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Guide dogs. By the beginning of 1954 a group of people had set out to establish a Guide Dog Association. Dog lovers were behind the move and strongly represented. Provision was made for a representative of each agency for the blind. Mr. Mackenzie represented the Association. The other agencies did not participate. By the end of that year Mr Mackenzie reported to the Committee, that "*the Guide Dog Committee had not made up its mind what it wanted to do. Although it had some very substantial and well known names connected with it, unless a person with knowledge of the subject, drive and organising ability was found to strengthen the body, it would die from inertia.*" The Association thereafter ceased to be represented.

In October 1957 Mr Keith Holdsworth, Manager of the Guide Dog Training Centre in Perth, W.A. visited the Melbourne Agencies for the Blind. He advised that his organisation wished to transfer to Melbourne which was a more central location, more suitable climatically and had a better supply of dogs. The intention was to establish a National Guide Dog Training Centre. Because of the negative response from the Agencies the Guide Dog Association itself negotiated with the Government and secured a seven acre site near the Yarra River at Kew.

The Chairman of the Guide Dog Association, Sir Norman Martin convened a meeting of the Agencies in August 1959. He had heard criticism and asked the Agencies to state their objections. The RVIB, Villa Maria Society, Association for the Blind and Guild of Business and Professional Blind expressed concern on three accounts. Firstly, the media were giving the impression of expensive and extravagant plans which they feared would reflect adversely on them. Secondly, they considered it desirable that the service should be attached to an existing organisation. Thirdly, they were opposed to yet another organisation appealing for funds for the blind. The Braille Library dissented saying the other organisations had been given ample opportunity to take up the work. This was true. Blind people still seemed uninterested and for various reasons the Agencies were unable or unwilling to accept the responsibility.

Mrs Gration, one of the first two ladies in Victoria to obtain a guide dog from West Australia, was invited to join the Guide Dog Committee. She became impatient with what she considered was the slow progress in implementing development plans, caused a disruption at an annual Guide Dog Association meeting and resigned. She then approached the Association which had indicated it supported the concept of a National Guide Dog Training Centre. Asked if it would join Mrs Gration and a number of her friends in forming a separate Guide Dog Movement, the Committee answered, "No".

Mrs Gration then formed the Guide Dogs Owners and Friends Association and established the Lady Nell "Seeing Eye" Dog School in 1960. 'Lady Nell' was the name of her dog.. The National Guide Dog Centre at Kew was opened in November 1962.

Mrs Gration, with her good intellect and legal degree was adept at producing an argument to justify her position. In this instance she defended the existence of two Guide Dog organisations on the basis of 'right of choice'. Sighted persons had the right of choice in respect of most services. Why should a similar right be denied to the blind? This argument had a strong appeal to the younger blind group. So it came about

that while the agencies were by then talking co-operation, elimination of duplication and the reduction of costs, the voice of the younger blind was advocating increased duplication.

Braille library. When Dr. Graeme Orr, an ophthalmologist, became President of the Braille Library, he invited Mr Lightfoot and Mr Wilson to lunch. During discussion on the future direction of the Library, he posed the question: What one word could be used to describe the special niche of the Library? Mr Lightfoot responded with the word "Communications".

The Braille Library faced challenge after challenge. Although there would always be a hard core of Braille users to be serviced and it was essential to retain the hard won expertise, momentous changes were taking place. Readers were being drawn to the modern type Talking Books, students to the compact cassette recorders. Large print books appealed to the vision impaired. In 1972 the Library imported over 800 Clarke and Smith six track cassette talking book machines from the U.K. Readers experienced trouble with the cassettes. This was a common experience throughout Australia. In 1977 two track cassette books were added to the Library service. These could be played on standard recorders..

Throughout this period the RVIB was broadening its curriculum. An increasing number of students went to the normal school system for their secondary education and thereafter to university. The Education Dept. had the unfortunate habit of not making the Book List available until the last moment before the new school year. The Braille Library was not staffed or equipped to cope with the rush for translation. The RVIB had to look to its own resources.

In total, the Library, short of funds, was being left behind by the other Libraries for the Blind which accepted and implemented new developments more rapidly and co-operated with each other.

At the heart of the Library service were the transcribers, a magnificent group of older ladies still devoted to improving the minds of blind people through the provision of uplifting literature and occupied in fighting a losing battle with the readers on the subjects of sin sex and swearing. The battle was lost. In April 1967, Vice President Miss Mary Mitchell wrote to the Association; *" We are convinced we have no right to act as censors and that whatever our private feelings about certain trends in modern literature, we should give our readers the opportunity to make their own judgments. If at any time we ask you to transcribe a book which you find distasteful , we shall do our best to see this sacrifice of personal inclination is made as seldom as possible"*.

Tied as it was to tradition and with a Committee short of business experience Dr Orr was unable to lift the Braille Library into the new era. Neither could it bring itself to accept help by entering an arrangement under which the Association would handle its accounting, permitting it to concentrate on development, production and distribution.

Co-operation between the two bodies remained excellent. The Braille Teachers taught at the Blind Citizens Community Centre, the Association Welfare Officers distributed Braille books and tapes as required. With the blessing of the Library Committee their Ballarat Auxiliary amalgamated with the Association's Ballarat Auxiliary. Mr Hector Bathurst OAM, who followed Dr Orr maintained the close relationship with the

Association. He introduced a number of new features including the Book of the Year Award in an endeavour to lift the profile and increase fund raising capacity. A major handicap was lack of funds to appoint both a qualified librarian and a good administrator with fund raising ability.

United giving. In the 1950s churches in Victoria began an extensive building programme. The format of the Wells Organisation from the U.S. was adopted by many as the fund raising system. Seen by many Australians as a typical American 'hard sell' the method, although extremely successful, stirred up resentment. It did however set a new standard of fund raising and the Wells practitioners were most generous in sharing their extensive knowledge.

During the same period the increased demands by charitable organisations on local Councils and business companies for support led to strong moves by leading business men for the introduction of another U.S. development, United Givers Funds or Community Chests. A written submission was presented to the Government. The move was supported by the Lord Mayor's Fund which was nominated as the controlling body, Municipal Councils who were sick of ratepayer complaints of too many door knock appeals and the Hospitals and Charities Commission.

The reasons given for the proposal were:

- business men were fed up with begging letters;
- they did not know which were or were not worthwhile charities;
- large donors were not interested in specific charities;
- the costs incurred by charities in raising funds were too high.

There was also a serious questioning if corporation directors were entitled to give part of their shareholders' profits away.

The proposition was that the Community Chest be all embracing and all other appeals be eliminated. The RSL, Red Cross and other patriotic funds immediately attacked and secured their exemption.

The Association's perception was of three classes of giving. There were those companies who gave to 'charity' through the Lord Mayors Fund. There were donors who gave to people, the charity for which the people were working being of secondary importance. There were contributors who gave to a specific cause. The Association believed the majority of its contributors were givers to a cause, specifically blind people.

After studying the detail a tremendous outcry was raised by welfare and charitable organisations who saw the move as a confidence trick, because

- the majority of the proposers were on the Boards of the major Hospitals;
- distribution was to be on the then current Hospitals and Charities basis, namely 75 percent Hospitals, 25 percent all other organisations;
- the majority of their donors were specific givers and would not support a Community Chest to the same extent.

The Victorian Council of Social Services appointed a sub-committee to pursue the matter. Archdeacon Sambell was elected Chairman, John Wilson a member. After a

warm sustained debate over some years the idea was finally killed. Two local Community Chests only were set up. These were at Geelong and Hawthorn and on a different basis.

Arising from these two events and initiated by the Wells practitioners, although not limited to their methods, came the formation of the Australasian Institute of Fundraising. This body developed fund raising to a professional basis, provided training and established a Code of Ethics. John Wilson was a Founding Member and an Office Bearer. For many years their monthly dinner and training segment was held at Elanora, Brighton.

Publicity. The need for increased publicity always weighed heavily on the Committee. The commencement of the building programme and increased fundraising efforts emphasised the need for action. Three avenues were pursued: Increased use of the media; an attempt to produce a publicity film which had limited success; and an Association publication. From January 1956 a four page monthly journal titled '*Courage*' was produced. It was called *Courage* because the word seemed to epitomise the very essence of the great quality needed to face and endure adversity.

The production was favourably received by all sections of the Association. The appointment of Mr. Gerry Bride, an advertising and marketing specialist, to the Committee led to a revamp and wider circulation in 1960. The sale of advertising then met the costs. Miss Mollie McDowell wrote most of the material. Although according to the theories of the experts the format broke their rules, the magazine was immensely popular with the readers. Regrettably the less than ethical conduct of some advertising salesmen caused the Committee to cease production at the end of 1974. During its nineteen year life the magazine served a valuable public relations and information purpose. Its closure was widely mourned.

Mr Arthur Wilkins then wrote '*In Touch*', a popular internal publication primarily for the the Blind Members and Kooyong volunteers.

Fragrant gardens. Poets often refer to England as a garden and garden lovers in that country started to promote fragrance or scented gardens for the blind. The concept, promoted by garden lovers, not blind people, spread to other countries including Australia in the 1950's and 60's. Some blind people, mostly gardeners, felt it was a good idea. Some felt that if the sighted were kind enough to provide them they should be accepted graciously; some felt such gardens gave blind persons an inferior standing; some felt that if they wanted to smell flowers they could do so with complete freedom without any need for special provisions. Sighted gardeners said that blind people who opposed the concept were ungrateful. When the point was reached of fixing braille name plates which few could read, to trees which they could not see most agreed enough was enough. The Association compromised by planting scented shrubs in the Tilly Aston Fragrance Garden outside the new wing at Kooyong.

Decimal currency. Australia was one of the last countries to change to the decimal system. The idea was first proposed in the new Federal Parliament in 1901 but rejected. Not until 1957 was a Decimal Currency Board set up to carry out the job.

Decimal Currency was introduced on February 14, 1966. The run up to 'C' Day as the conversion day was known, posed problems for both the staff and blind members. For

the accounting staff it meant changing all the financial records and the problem of dealing with two sets of currency in the books. For the blind people it was more confusing. All the Agencies Australia wide as well as the Australian National Council for the Blind had endeavoured to have the new currency made easily distinguishable.

There was much talk of consultation by Treasury and the Decimal Currency Board. The blind talked, Treasury listened and made vague promises. Nothing happened. To insensitive old fingers some of the coins were almost indistinguishable

The dies at the Mint stamped out standard size coins for other countries in addition to Australia. The die sizes suited countless millions of coins and people. It was asking too much to expect they would be changed at great expense to suit a minority group. The difference in note size, too, was small, making detection difficult. This together with the two sets of currency and the fact that older blind were steeped in the £sd system and found conversion hard, made for a difficult few months.

Currency distinction, both coin and paper remains an issue for a substantial section of the population.

20. THE ROAD AHEAD

The road ahead stretched as far as the mind could visualise. There was no speed limit but there were obstacles to impede progress.

As the spread of health and welfare services widened and grew and the cost of funding multiplied, some - once almost exclusively the province of private charity - tended in varying degrees to become a government responsibility. The cry, "let the Government do it," became ever louder. However disjointed interaction and complicated relationships between the various Federal and State government authorities and departments often prevented people in need receiving the care and assistance to which they were justly entitled.

This, no doubt, was partly due to differing government ideologies and the fact that no formula had been devised which would correctly measure and balance the value to the community, the benefit to the individual, the relief to the sufferer of services rendered. Neither had a formula been found which would equate the cost of services over a wide field of charitable endeavour to their effectiveness or worth.

The Home building programme of the 1950s completed, the Committee wished to consolidate and digest the achievements. It was not given the opportunity to meander along the road. The 1960s became a decade of ever accelerating speed. This was in part due to a Policy Planning Sub Committee which it had appointed and which tabled its recommendations in September, 1962. These were that:

- A central index of blind persons be established;
- The situation of the multiple handicapped blind be studied;
- Kooyong be developed as a Blind Citizens Community Centre;
- The desirability of establishing a Rehabilitation Centre be investigated;
- The Welfare Department be studied to ensure maximum efficiency and that a sighted country welfare officer be appointed;
- A training course for staff be developed;
- The need to provide a holiday home be investigated;
- A library of Aids for blind people be established;
- The original wing of the Brighton Home be remodelled and the desirability of establishing Brighton as the accommodation centre be examined;
- Active steps be taken to collaborate with all organisations for the blind with the object of increasing services and avoiding duplication.

Central Index. Lack of statistical information as to numbers and age distribution of blind persons made accurate assessment of needs and forward planning difficult. The Lions and Apex Clubs which had considerable involvement with the Agencies at that time did talk of a combined survey. The difficulties of obtaining broad co-operation were too great.

Traditional groups of blind people were strongly opposed to notification or registration of blindness. They claimed 'notification' placed them in the same category as infectious and venereal disease cases. The Agencies were divided. Some wanted it as a means of determining service requirements, others were hesitant being afraid their clients would be poached. This was rather humorous as a considerable number of blind people, exercising their right of choice, participated in the programmes of up to

five agencies. In so doing they confused the few statistics that did exist on numbers. ophthalmologists in some states were in favour on the basis that valuable information would become available for research purposes. Governments would not act while blind people were opposed.

The Association worked on an assessment by General Legge based on U.K. figures where a register of blind people was maintained. This assessment showed the local situation as:-

Category	Percentage	Estimated No.
Children under 16	4%	152
Employable adults	12%	450
Unemployed under 50	10%	380
Unemployed 50 - 69	29%	1,080
Aged 70 and over	45%	1,680

In brief, the Association had an interest in over 80% of the blind people of Victoria. Further analysis fleshed out the profile.

Age groups of elderly blind.		Age of onset of blindness.		Causes of blindness.	
60 - 64 years	11%	Under 60 years	24%	Glaucoma	30%
65 - 69 years	13%	60 - 64 years	10%	Cataracts	23%
70 - 74 years	17%	65 - 69 years	12%	Diabetes	9%
75 - 79 years	15%	70 - 74 years	18%	Degenerative processes	7%
80 - 84 years	17%	75 - 79 years	9%	Detached Retinas	3%
85 - 89 years	20%	80 - 84 years	14%	Other eye conditions	28%
90 years and over	7%	85 - 89 years	3%		

Marital status.		Living conditions.		Other statistics.	
Single	20%	Living alone	10%	Totally blind	31%
Married	35%	With Spouse	18%	Legally blind	69%
Widows or Widowers	44%	With children	35%	Medical treatment,	
Separated, Divorced or		Boarding	5%	other conditions	74%
De Facto	1%	In some protective care	30%	Dependent on pension	70%
		Other arrangements	2%	Own home	28%

Many of those living privately did not have a plan to meet an emergency or for future care. Of those who did have plans 51% were on a waiting list for some sort of protective care, 33% expected to live with their children, 8% expected to get someone in and 8% expected to rely on home help. Many of the expectations were unrealistic.

The composite elderly blind person known to the Association was likely to be over 75 years of age and on some form of a pension. The odds were two to one that the blind person would be a woman, two to one that she would be single or widowed, three to one that she would have some guiding sight and three to one that she would be receiving medical attention for some additional condition.

The Hospitals and Charities Report revealed the percentage of annual maintenance costs it funded were:-

Benevolent Homes	44%
Hospitals for the Aged	33%
Hostels for the Aged	30%
Villa Maria Society	11%

The Association made a noise. The annual maintenance grant was increased from £3,500 a year to £6,500 a year. It thanked the Commission and made more noise, pointing out the deficit was increasing by £2,000. a month. "If our policy is wrong, tell us. If you wish us to curtail services, show us which ones. If we are an integral part of the State service system, help us." The next year the maintenance grant was increased to £9,000 and a Capital grant of £15,000. made to help with repairs at Brighton.

From the general statistical information readily available an increasing aged population in the future was clearly signalled. This, in turn, meant an increase in the number of elderly blind people with an ever greater demand for accommodation and ancillary services. Already in Victoria one elderly person was losing his or her sight each day. By eighty years of age one person in every thirty was blind. The Association could not rest on its achievements.

Multiple Handicapped Blind. The Association became deeply interested in this group when, for good reasons, a 16 year old, ambulant, slightly mentally handicapped blind girl was admitted to the Brighton Home in 1960. This test case showed that mixing young and old blind people was not mutually beneficial, quite apart from the additional disability. In the previous two years the Association had been approached on four occasions by parents unwilling to have their teen age child admitted to a Mental Hospital.

The RVIB would not take children unless they were physically able and educable. The Association had always claimed in its publicity that it cared for the infirm. Its interpretation of the word was narrow and related to frail aged blind people. When St.Paul's School was opened by the Villa Maria Society it soon became a haven for multiple handicapped blind children. This threatened the education of normal blind children.

These events coincided with Commonwealth wide concern at the plight of the disabled generally. N.S.W. proposed that an effort be made to have the Aged Persons Homes Act extended to cover the disabled. The Committee of the Association agreed to co-operate with organisations attempting to initiate action.

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights states as a fundamental principle. "The child who is physically, mentally or socially handicapped shall be given the special treatment, education and care required by his particular condition".

That principle, was not being practised in Victoria. Normal blind children were well catered for. The State Mental Hygiene Authority was led by an exceptional group of devoted practitioners. It suffered from inadequate government interest and funding and confessed its inadequacy to cater for the many sighted retarded children let alone multiple handicapped blind children.

At the time Professor Arnold Sorsby of the U.K., a world authority on blindness wrote: "*Statistics show that most blind infants today are born blind. This is a striking contrast to conditions a generation ago when most blind infants were born normal and became blind from infection and other environmental factors early in life.*"

The Australian scene was the same. Increased medical knowledge, science and skill meant fewer blind infants were being born and blindness in children after birth was greatly reduced. Those same skills were responsible for the accompanying problem, - the preservation of life in those children born with gross multiple handicaps including blindness. In previous generations such children died. Now, if a doctor did not intervene with advanced technology, he risked being charged with a criminal offence. If he did manage to preserve that life he imposed a lifelong burden on the parents and, or on, the community. Resolution of this contretemps, which continues to this day, appears to be beyond the bounds of human ingenuity.

Enquiries revealed there were twenty five blind children in residence at the Kew Cottages. In the majority the primary handicap was mental. Only a couple had any possibility of ever being released to an outside community organisation. Hundreds of multiple disabled children were waiting for admission. Because of the great range of mental and physical problems, the tremendous cost of service and the highly skilled specialist staff needed, there was acceptance that only a government instrumentality could cope with the cost. Within the Authority the point of transition from child to adult status was sixteen years. In general, at that point, the multiple handicapped child was transferred to a Mental Hospital. The Social Worker at the Kew Cottages agreed there was a small pocket of multiple handicapped blind children in the community who could be catered for externally. The number was not known.

General Legge gave the matter detailed attention. He had discussions with, among others, Dr. Cunningham Dax, Chairman of the Mental Health Authority, Dr. David Pitt the widely admired and respected Paediatrician and Director of Research at the Mental Hygiene Dept. and Bro. O'Neill, President of the Villa Maria Society. The Board of the RVIB advised Dr. Pitt and General Legge in writing that it had nothing to contribute to the discussions.

General Legge produced a paper titled Blind and Retarded Children in Victoria 1966. He estimated the small pocket of mentally retarded blind children consisted of between twenty and thirty youngsters. He wrote that although numerically small, the measurement in terms of children suffering, parental heartbreak and physical burden was tragic. At the Annual Meeting of the Villa Maria Society in August that year Bro. O'Neill said: "We have care for all other shades of afflicted people. The mentally retarded is the group missing and it is the one which needs most help."

A number of meetings were held. The consensus was that the Villa Maria Society was the most able to undertake the care and training of those children who could be assisted outside of the Kew Cottages. It consented to do so provided government financial assistance was made available. General Legge convened a meeting at the Blind Citizens Community Centre on Tuesday, April 1, 1969 to finalise agreement. The RVIB then surprised all by announcing only days before the meeting in a press release under the heading of 'The Forgotten Children' that it was accepting responsibility for the care of physically handicapped blind children. They were, however, excluding the care of the mentally handicapped unless they were trainable. These, they considered, were the responsibility of the Mental Hygiene Department. This had never been denied, not even by the Authority itself.

The Villa Maria Society in a public appeal at the end of that year made one of the objectives, a residential unit at St. Paul's School, for mentally retarded blind children. Later, to see the tender attention lavished by the staff on the both mental and physically handicapped blind children in their care was to see a love which surpassed the bounds of human affection and entered the realm of the Divine.

Other developments had been taking place in parallel. Within Australia the Royal NSW Institute for Deaf and Blind Children had pioneered services for such children at North Rocks, Sydney.

In January, 1967 a meeting was convened at Scotch College, Melbourne. Representatives from NSW explained the purpose of their school and raised the question of its becoming the national centre. In the next few years a small number of Victorian children did go to the NSW School.

In Victoria, as an outcome of this meeting, the Deaf/Blind and Rubella Children's Association was formed in February 1967. Dr. David Pitt was elected President; Dr Hugh Ryan a noted ophthalmologist connected with the Villa Maria Society, Vice President, and Mr E. Keir an audiologist with the Royal Children's Hospital, a Committee Member. Within a year 24 Deaf/Blind children due to Rubella were located in the metropolitan area and six in the country. Fifteen over the age of three were considered educable. Eleven were under three years.

The Deaf/Blind and Rubella Childrens' Association made steady progress. In 1981 with Sir Eric Pearce and Dr. Pitt as Patrons the first Family Group Home was opened.

Rubella was a major cause of congenital damage to sight, hearing, brain and heart function. The Deafness Foundation under the Chairmanship of Mr Peter Howson took the lead and with the co-operation and financial support of the agencies serving both the deaf and the blind, instituted in the 1970s a vigorous publicity campaign for immunisation. Headed up by Mr Dick Cudlipp of the George Patterson Advertising Agency the campaign was aimed at all girls and women of child bearing age. Sister Margaret Biggs represented the Association. The doses of vaccine distributed jumped from 23,000 in 1976 to 69,000 in 1977. In 1980 there were only two cases of children born blind in Victoria whose condition could be attributed to Rubella. This was the smallest number on record. There was also a substantial reduction in all other states which had been stimulated to organise their own campaigns.

Kooyong Services. The experiences of overseas countries was that less than 2 percent of older blind people were willing to attend residential rehabilitation centres. The Committee decided the necessary retraining would be on a day basis at the Blind Citizens Community Centre and in the person's own home.

This training was underpinned by the definition of health in the World Health Organisation Constitution, namely, "health was a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not just the absence of disease and infirmity".

To achieve this desirable outcome five broad objectives were determined.

- 1 To assist with the re-adjustment of the newly blind;

- 2 To provide a range of help and services which would enable blind people to live privately in the community setting for as long as possible with the greatest degree of personal independence;
- 3 To co-operate with and utilise services provided by the community and other blind welfare agencies;
- 4 To provide accommodation of various categories to meet particular needs;
- 5 To co-operate with agencies specialising in the prevention of blindness.

The services at the Blind Citizens Community Centre, Kooyong, were developed to cover as follows:

- Medical. -- Medical Consultation, Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Social Work.
- Activities of Daily Living. - Home Management, Cooking, Sewing, Grooming, Hairdressing, Social Graces, Orientation and Mobility, Communications.
- Diversional Therapy. - Handcrafts, Weaving, Pottery, Carpentry.
- Error! Bookmark not defined.** Social and Recreational. - Group Activities, Cultural pursuits, Outings, Sports.

The traditional groups using Paterson Hall were added to by a number of self organised and self contained groups. These included the Paterson Friendship Club, Indoor Bowling Club, Square Dance Club, Uncle Arthur's Club, Amateur Radio Enthusiasts' Club and Blind Housewives' Club. The latter had fifty members, mostly young blind ladies with children. Many had been together at school. A number were members of the Guild of Business and Professional Blind. A volunteer teacher ran a creche for the children. A volunteer sister was in attendance to advise on any health problems. The members gave tremendous support to each other. The Square Dance Club under Colin and Margaret Fox and Bryan and Peg Sitlington reached such a high standard it gave exhibitions and participated in the National championships. The Amateur Radio Club with the help of David Ditchfield, studied and obtained a licence for the amateur band.

By the end of the decade 300 blind persons were participating in the daily programme and a further 300 in group activities. They were served by a staff of 10 and more than 300 volunteers. Paterson Hall was in use both day and evening.

Once again the vexed question of Centralisation v De-centralisation raised its head. This time Senior Staff wrestled with the issue. The BCCC, Kooyong was bursting at the seams. Should it be further enlarged? Should all services continue to be centred on Kooyong or should perimeter metropolitan services be established? Further, equality of services for blind people throughout Victoria was the goal. Country people were missing out. What should be done? What recommendations should be made to the Committee?

Welfare. By the 1960s Mr Mackenzie was having heart problems and Miss Henderson was understandably, slowing down. There was agreement the number of visits would be increased if she travelled by car. The finance to do this was just not available. Mr Lightfoot asked the matter be left with him. He spoke to his wife Beth. Mrs. Lightfoot contacted her friends. The response was magnificent as was Mrs Lightfoot's organisation. A team of more than forty voluntary drivers was arranged to transport Miss Henderson. The drivers were generally invited into the homes of the blind members, became friends with them and frequently provided additional services. They

were a positive force in the service area. The service, operating outside the staff system, continued for the remaining years of Miss Henderson's working life. In the northern suburbs some residents questioned the integrity of the Association when, as they saw the situation, the organisation provided a Rolls Royce and chauffeur to drive Miss Henderson around.

As the number of referrals increased additional staff was required. There was recognition a friendly visit was no longer sufficient and a much wider professional service was needed. The Social Work Department was the first to be enlarged. Details of the Home Teachers training course was also sought from the Royal National Institute for the Blind in the U.K. By another coincidence an application for a position was received from an English lass who had completed the course. Carole Opperman, now Mrs. Laird, who happened to be in England, was asked to interview her. Within a few months Miss Margaret Hugill was in Melbourne passing on her knowledge.

A team approach evolved. Supporting the Social Worker or Welfare Officer as part of the home Rehabilitation team were the services of a Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist and Mobility Instructor who could be called upon as required. Mrs Evelyn Muirden, a young Social Worker with visual impairment, was the first person taken on strength to support Mr Mackenzie and Miss Henderson.

But what about the country? In most areas the specialties were not available. Multi skilled staff attached to the existing Homes seemed the obvious starting point. The Mirridong and Kelaston Committees agreed. Mrs. Gregson, Miss Robertson and Mr John Taylor were successively appointed to the Bendigo Region and Mrs Lilian Dethridge to the Ballarat Region. In a following series of moves Mr Ron Nugent, Manager of Elanora, who was gifted in human relationships was transferred to Welfare and appointed to develop the North Eastern Region. Miss Margaret Harrison, a Brighton Home nursing aide of considerable ability who was born and raised in Gippsland, was allocated to that area. Tempted out of retirement, Mrs Dorothy Simpson, previously Mr Opperman's personal secretary who lived in the area, was appointed to Geelong. The move for state coverage was under way.

Establishing a presence in the country was not easy. Head Office sent letters to the doctors, hospitals, service clubs, police stations, Red Cross and other community organisations, telling of Association services, the desire to contact blind people, that the Welfare Officer would be in the area on such and such dates and would be in touch with them. A number of visits by the welfare officers were required to secure acceptance. Once credibility was established doctors and hospitals welcomed the contact.

A remarkable feature was what might be termed the underground movement. Few blind persons were known to community organisations. However it only needed one referral to set the Welfare Officer off on a long trail. Every blind person seemed to have heard of some other blind person who lived in such and such village or farm up to twenty miles away. From the one original contact it was possible in a chain reaction to locate a score of blind people. On subsequent visits if the Welfare Officer could not bring some of them together he or she acted as a very welcome news carrier. Country blind people had little awareness of the statutory benefits to which they were entitled

or the services available to help them. The multi purpose skills of the welfare officers were invaluable.

Staff Training. The newly blind lady in her eighties rang Head Office. She was irate. "That young woman you sent to help me was useless. She couldn't even cook an egg." The young woman in question was a qualified Occupational Therapist. When questioned it was clear that academically she knew every step to cooking eggs in a variety of ways. Why then the trouble with the old lady? "Oh! I hadn't actually cooked an egg before." "Mummy always did the cooking so I could study." This led to further questioning: What about looking after your clothes, making your bed and keeping your room tidy? "Oh, Mummy always did those things so I could study." Well, surely you have operated the washing machine and vacuum cleaner? "Not really, Mummy always did.---"

A young Social Worker was sent to assist an elderly blind lady apply for the Free of Means Test Blind Pension. On her return, asked how she managed, she replied "Fine". "I told the blind lady she could get a form from the post office; that when she filled it in she did not have to answer such and such questions; that she should ring her ophthalmologist and get an Eye Certificate. "But how could the blind woman fill in the form? Didn't you help her to do the things you spoke of?" "Oh no! we were taught to give non directive counselling, to present the options and leave the client to decide what he or she would do. If I had filled out the form it would have damaged her self esteem and created a dependent situation."

The Matron and Sister of a small country hospital and nursing home approached the Doctor and asked that a elderly blind male patient be certified as mental. Since admission a few weeks earlier he had become unmanageable and was disturbing the other patients. Fortuitously, Mrs. Dethridge called in on one of her visits. Convinced the man was mentally sound she over-rode all opposition and had him admitted to Kelaston. Within a few weeks he was a very happy man contributing to the life of the Home.

This man had lived on the land and had never been in hospital. He had been admitted to a multi bed ward. No staff member had thought to give him a familiarisation tour pointing out the hazards, to explain the ward layout, to show him the location of the toilets and shower. He bumped around and cursed as he tried to find his way. The other patients, not knowing how to speak to or help a blind man, were scared and complained about him being a trouble maker. The blind man heard the rattle as a Domestic wheeled the meal trolley through the ward. Then came the Sister who chided him for not eating the meal he did not know was there. He learned the meal was placed on the over-bed table at the foot of the bed but no one explained what it was, the location on the plate of the various items or offered to cut up for him meat or other items he could not handle. Then he heard staff talking of his piggish eating habits. He refused to take tranquillising pills and had been sedated without warning by injection. His resentment, frustration and anger boiled over. At one point Matron Ena Cameron at Kelaston, Ballarat, on pre-admission assessment visits, reported three such cases in a period of six months. All recovered from their hospital treatment.

Incidents such as these, although rare, did emphasise that the professional qualifications and zeal of young graduates were not always sufficient to enable wise counsel and appropriate assistance to be given to vision impaired persons. At the other

end of the spectrum some mature life experienced women so valuable in practical down to earth situations, were inadequate when faced with situations beyond the primary parameters. Desirous of helping they sometimes added to the problem with wrong advice.

Clearly, an understanding of the feelings and frustrations of blind people and of the techniques needed to be of assistance was a priority. At the basic level this entailed a knowledge of helpful responses when entering into a dialogue with vision impaired people, feeling what it was like to function under blindfold, and learning the sighted guide technique.

The humour and goodwill of the blind members was also frequently tested by the ignorance of the public. Many were the stories related at blind members' meetings. Take one experience of Geoff Smith. Geoff had his own band, taught piano and was also a piano tuner. One busy day, after tuning pianos at Government House where he found himself having a long conversation with the Governor's wife, he decided to eat his lunch on the tram as he travelled to the next job. He could hear two lady passengers talking. As he unwrapped a sandwich they became silent. He knew they were watching him and could feel the tension grow. Then with surprise in her voice one exclaimed: "Look, he can find his mouth without help". And this was the 1960s.

Sadly, incidents such as these did occur. Those blind persons who had adjusted were able to laugh at the ignorance and stupidity of the sighted. Those still adjusting wanted to cringe and shrivel up. Their sighted friends cried inwardly. Such incidents emphasised the importance of education and training. A number of facets needed to be addressed.

- Increased public education on the abilities of blind people;
- Although the Association was by then an approved training unit for a number of professions input was needed into the courses themselves;
- A positive effort was required to develop awareness of blind people's needs in hospitals and also homes for the aged;
- Association welfare staff, particularly those working in country areas, needed to be multi skilled.

Commonsense dictated that Association staff generally should be able to set an example. A comprehensive course was developed covering both theory and practice. It covered social work principles; the eyes; causes of blindness; helping a blind person; home management; basic orientation and mobility; legal principles and legislation; social service benefits; the Association, its purpose, principles and procedures. Role playing and working under blindfold were valuable teaching tools. A schedule of lectures was drawn up and staff from all sections including the office encouraged to attend. The result was a team of versatile Welfare Officers and a pool of interested knowledgeable staff members. Some Committee Members and Volunteers attended segments of interest to them. Induction classes were also held for new staff members. So it came about that although it could not afford a large Public Relations Department the Association possessed an informal informed public relations team of happy staff members able to discuss and sell intelligently the Association and its work and within defined limits, give basic practical assistance. One remarkable way in which this paid off is told in another chapter.

Holiday Home. As the Braille Library had a beach side cottage at Chelsea and the RVIB the country Tye Estate at Romsey, the Association felt any activity on its part would be an unnecessary duplication.

Aids for the Blind. The RVIB was supplying a range of aids such as braille watches, long and short canes and games. It also specialised in more expensive educational equipment. The Association serving mainly the aged decided to concentrate on items for the home. Many of the older blind people indicated they wished to purchase all their requirements while attending Kooyong so the range of products was widened. The first service centre was a bench top in one of the flats. When the Low Vision Clinic moved from the flats to its purpose designed home, the Aids section moved to a room in the same area where it could also service the visiting vision impaired patients. The RVIB and Association co-operated and frequently bought from and sold bulk supplies to each other. Doing so did not stop friction. The Association sold the items at cost plus 5 percent handling charge believing this was fair to both the blind and contributors. The RVIB subsidised the items heavily. The Association Welfare Officers and blind members complained about the difference in price. Association prices were reduced.

In the 1980s with the word 'Aids' taking on a new meaning the Association changed the name of this service to the Adapt Centre. Adapt being an acronym for adaptive devices and practical training. Once again it outgrew its premises and with the completion of the Vision Resource Centre at Kooyong, was moved to a spacious and prominent area on the ground floor. Under the capable supervision of Mrs Pat Sykes, herself vision impaired, practical training and information on how to deal with everyday tasks such as cooking, eating, dressing and writing is provided. More than 400 items are available, many of them specially designed or modified for use by people with defective vision. New items are added to the range as they come on to the market. Information leaflets on the use of various devices have been written. Vision impaired persons have welcomed and value this service which has now been expanded with displays and sales of Adapt items at each Branch and Centre.

Accommodation Centre. Committee Members talked around this subject over a period of some years. Should they build accommodation at Kooyong? Should they build nursing homes in the outer suburbs?. The winds of change were blowing. Churches and Friendly Societies as well as the RSL were now involved in Hostels and Nursing Homes in a big way. There was recognition that older people going into a home preferred to stay in an area they knew and which was readily assessable to the family. This became a more realistic option as an increasing number of older blind people retained some residual vision, had received re-adjustment training and the number of church sponsored homes increased. Equally there was a strong feeling the expertise gained by operating Homes for blind people should not be lost.

Opinion crystallised on centralisation and the development of Brighton as the metropolitan accommodation centre. A broad view was taken of accommodation. The Village concept with various levels of accommodation was emerging. Although at the time such thinking was opposed to official policy, the future, possibility of hostel, independent units, self funded housing and nursing home on the same campus could not be discarded. Further it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that ever changing thinking could see the Association show its appreciation of Brighton support by admitting local sighted persons to such a complex. Indeed, when one proposition

was being considered, the Blind Members' Council suggested the admission of sighted persons, provided blind persons always received preference of admission.

Just as at Ballarat and Bendigo, great foresight was shown in purchasing land for future development, so, at Brighton, a similar approach was adopted. Over a period of years 17, 19, 21, 23 and 25 New St were purchased. Elanora Auxiliary raised the funds to purchase for the third and final time 21 New St. In Haileybury St Nos 6 and 8 were secured. Mr Francis bequeathed No.5 Mair St to the Association and 15 Mair St. was purchased.

Mrs. Martin, the owner of 25 New St at the rear of the Home provided a real surprise in 1964. She approached Mr Wilson and advised her intention to sell, saying she was sure her grandfather would wish the Association to have first option. Her grandfather, she revealed, was the late Charles Monteath, first Chairman of the Home Committee. The house was purchased with a £2 for £1 grant under the Aged Persons Homes Act and used as a Hostel with Mrs Rentoul as Housekeeper. St. Leonards Church filled the pantry with Harvest Thanksgiving gifts.

Collaboration. The Braille Library, National Guide Dog Association, Villa Maria Society and the Association found no difficulty in co-operating in a friendly manner.

The RVIB, still the largest and strongest body was regarded warily, at least by the Association. While the two Presidents talked collaboration, real progress was minimal. This may have been partly due to a well publicised statement by a highly placed RVIB staff member to the effect that the RVIB sat back, watched the other agencies develop an idea and make the mistakes then having assessed the possibilities stepped in with its resources and took over. Examples of this were not hard to find.

Conversely over a period of some years the RVIB made a major contribution in bringing three leading U.S. specialist workers for the blind to Victoria, namely Dr. Merle Frampton an educationalist, Dr. Waterhouse head of the famous Perkins School for the Blind in Boston and Dr. Richard Hoover of the Department of Veteran Affairs who had developed the Long Cane. In each case a real spirit of co-operation was shown in an invitation to the other agencies to share in the proceedings and benefits.

The appointment of Mr. Ted Hanlon AM, as President of the RVIB in 1973 and Mr Ted Petersen AM, as Chief Executive Officer led to a marked improvement in relationships and a welcome increase in collaboration.

21. GOVERNMENT GAMES

At the turn of the last century Victoria had 36,000 people over the age of 65 years and 2500 beds for the elderly in State Government institutions. In 1970 there were 280,000 persons over 65 years. The State Government provided only 4,500 beds.

Under Federalism the Victorian Government's contribution had fallen from one bed for every 15 elderly persons to one bed for every 62 elderly persons. Part of the reason had undoubtedly been a succession of miser like Victorian State Governments coupled with their claim that they were not receiving an equitable financial reimbursement from the Commonwealth.

Humanitarian reasons, emphasised by State Government dereliction, had pitchforked churches and voluntary organisations into this area of service in a big way. With assistance received under the Aged Persons Homes Act they were now providing 7,500 beds. Nevertheless the 1970 Hospitals and Charities Report spoke of 7,000 elderly people still seeking admission to government institutions. Victoria had the lowest ratio in Australia of beds for the elderly.

The State Government allocated \$60,000,000 to the Hospitals and Charities Commission for the year ended June 30, 1970. Hospitals and government homes were funded on a 'needs' basis, that is, they were deficit funded. This absorbed \$58,000,000 leaving \$2,000,000 for all other charities. The Association was well treated receiving \$170,000. Church homes for the aged did not receive an annual maintenance grant. This was seen both as discrimination and an anomaly, as in the education field church schools did receive a subsidy. Church homes did receive a little capital cost assistance.

In Victoria by the 1960s a newer, less experienced generation of employees was beginning to take over senior positions in the health department and hospitals commission. At the time the state was acting as agent for the Commonwealth in overseeing various aspects of the Aged Persons Homes Act. The spirit of the rules and guidelines which had been followed by their predecessors was gradually replaced by enforced observance of the newcomers interpretation of the letter of the rules.

As a consequence the intention of the Aged Persons Homes Act that 'persons reside in conditions approaching as near as possible domestic life' was subverted to as near as possible hospital life with associated discipline and restrictions.

The changes were made with the best of intentions and the purpose of lifting standards but they were irritating to church and voluntary organisation homes. These were providing quality care and had at heart the interest of their residents. They wanted a homely atmosphere not a sterile hospital setting.

In the 1930s with the great depression dominant, staff were at the mercy of employers. By the 1960s with prosperity and full employment dominant, employers were at the mercy of staff. Extravagant demands were made in respect of wages, conditions and staffing levels. Governments conceded. The consequence was a blow out in operational costs. Governments were not nearly so ready, indeed resisted, funding the costs of their decisions.

As church and voluntary organisations with Commonwealth assistance increased the number of beds provided, the State took advantage of its situation, to, where possible, cost shift the provision of new beds and their operational costs to the Commonwealth. By the 1990's cost shifting of Health Services between the two governments had developed into a major competitive enterprise and the subject of serious dispute.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s as Commonwealth health and social welfare programmes expanded and costs increased the funds allocated were insufficient to meet the financial liability and were spread thinly. Some years of uncertainty developed. The agencies became confused as projects backed up in the pipeline and debt increased.

The Commonwealth had by now realised the likely extent of its financial commitment to nursing care costs. For the previous ten years the nursing home benefit had remained static at \$2 a day. The government had shut its ears to repeated warnings as daily bed costs more than doubled. In 1968 with great fanfare the Commonwealth tried to opt out with a petty cash payment. It introduced a Supplementary Benefit of \$3 a day for nursing patients requiring intensive care. The Minister said this was a new approach to people with special requirements and would remove financial worry. In reality, the conditions attached were prohibitive, a minimal number of patients received the benefit and it became a source of discord. In 1969, the Commonwealth tried again to quieten the service providers with a Personal Benefit Subsidy of \$5 a week for patients over 80 years.

Legislation was also introduced under which the Commonwealth offered the States assistance on a \$1 for \$1 basis for the provision of Home Care and Paramedical Services. The concept was excellent. The amount allocated was grossly inadequate. In Victoria's case \$137,000 for Home Care and \$68,000 for Paramedical services. Matched by the State Government it would only total \$410,000. The Association's entitlement alone would have been \$100,000. The Premier refused to accept the offer.

At the February 1971 Committee Meeting, Mr Lightfoot reported the Association was facing a deficit of \$200,000 for the financial year. Such a debt was unsustainable. The Finance Committee had examined and applied every possible means of effecting savings. Every possible avenue of funding was being explored. The solution had to come from Government.

The Annual Financial Accounts showed the effect of the measures introduced which reduced the shortfall to \$110,000 or 14 percent of the expenditure of \$750,000. The budget for the 1972 financial year showed a shortfall of 22 percent on an expenditure of \$900,000

Mr Lightfoot said the Association would endeavour to maintain its services to the end of August 1971 when the contents of the Federal Budget would be known. It also hoped by that time the Premier would have made a decision on the Home Care and Paramedical Services legislation. If the outcome was not satisfactory the Committee would face the harsh reality of making some heart breaking decisions.

The outcome was not favourable. At the August 1971 Committee Meeting, Mr Lightfoot reported the Federal Budget had given rise to a widespread feeling of unbelief. The following telegram had been sent to the Treasurer:-

"The undersigned co-ordinating organisations representing those non-profit bodies responsible for all aspects of care for aged and infirm people express the bitter disappointment of their members at the disregard in the Budget of the needs of the elderly who require supervised accommodation and nursing or domiciliary care. Our sense of shock is the more profound because of the courtesy with which our many submissions and deputations were received and the understanding Ministers showed of the problem. End result of this will inevitably lead to a reduction in the volume and quality of care given to sick aged pensioners by voluntary and state nursing homes and a consequent undermining of the function of the Aged Persons Homes Act.

[Signed] Victorian Council on the Ageing.

Association of Victorian Homes and Hospitals for the Aged.

Victorian Council of Social Services. "

The Committee also received with appreciation, the following message from Executive Staff transmitted through John Wilson:-

"Senior department heads asked that I inform the Committee they share its concern that the recent Federal Budget failed to ameliorate the financial situation of the Association.

"They wish the Committee to know that in no way do they regard the present precarious position as due to lack of diligence or foresight on the part of the Association, but entirely to large salary increases over which the Association had no control and broken promises on the part of State and Commonwealth Governments.

"They have appreciated the strenuous unceasing efforts of the Committee in the past six months both to convince State and Commonwealth authorities of the catastrophic situation developing and to secure additional funds and have been pleased to give unreserved support in the avenues available to them.

"They recognise the Committee must now appraise realistically the present policy and programme and make adjustments to bring services into line with funds available. They have welcomed the opportunities afforded to express their views in the formation of the programme and hope similar opportunity will be given in relation to projected amendments."

Foreseeing the looming financial dilemma Executive Staff had also held regular meetings to monitor developments and initiate action at the operational level.

Unfettered by the traditions and heritage of the past they were troubled by the overall structure of agencies for the blind in Victoria and the lack of cohesion in the delivery of services. They strove by discussion with and referral to other agencies to reduce the demand on the Association.

In spite of this the Kooyong intake was still five blind persons a week. As an economy measure staff leaving were not replaced. The target of excellence was temporarily suspended in favour of quantity over quality. Individual assessment was replaced wherever possible by group induction. In the service area the ratio of blind people per staff member was increased and blind persons were speeded through the rehabilitation process to group activities which could be supervised by volunteers.

In the Homes patients' fees were examined and increased whenever possible, pressure was placed on suppliers to reduce prices and staff who left were not replaced. This latter decision gave rise to a further set of problems.

All sources of income were increasing but the position was still not being held.

What should have been the knock out blow came in October 1971. The bank advised the overdraft limit had been substantially exceeded. It would accept the cheques which had been presented and not dishonour them. However it would not process them. The only exception was Wage and Pension cheques. The handling of finances on a day-to-day basis by Mr Wall and Mr. Mountain had become crucial.

The Hospitals and Charities Commission was approached with the object of borrowing an advance payment on the State maintenance grant to enable the Commonwealth Aged Persons Homes grant to Ballarat to be paid back. This would have enabled the whole of Kelston to be registered as a nursing Home and to be self supporting. The Commission was sympathetic but refused - fortunately as events were to prove - for some years later the Hostel beds were reclassified as nursing beds. The Commission did make a very welcome grant of \$25,000.

Following the Commonwealth Budget, the Premier, under pressure from his Ministers, accepted the Home Care and Paramedical funding.

Mr Lightfoot made a personal approach to the Premier and the Secretary to the Treasury. The measure of his success became known in March, 1972, when a Special Grant of \$100,000 was received. Although advised it was a 'once only' grant, the annual allocation thereafter was increased by that amount. The deficit for the 1972 financial year was a satisfactory \$29,000 or 3 percent.

The immediate crisis was over. Although groggy, the Association slowly clawed its way back to viability. Throughout this desperate period, Rudyard Kipling's lines applied "and so hold on when there is nothing in you except the will which says to you, hold on". Indeed, faith in the future was demonstrated in the continuing development of plans and projects.

Mr Lightfoot who had not been enjoying the best of health relinquished Office following the Annual Meeting in 1972. Thrust into the overall fray as spearhead for 1973 was the newly appointed President, Mr. John Wicking.

New Government. In 1972 the people of Australia elected a new Federal Government. Few of the members had been in a ruling party. None had been Ministers. The sudden move from a long established decentralised form of government to that of a socialist centralist ideology was disruptive. Public Ministerial statements were often contradictory. Departments were restructured with some bits and pieces being hived off and others tacked on. During the learning period Departments found difficulty in determining with certainty their Minister's theories and translating them into practical realities.

One welcome initiative, with tremendous impact, was the prompt decision to increase substantially the nursing home benefit from January 1, 1973.

In the Age National Review July 30,1973 , the Prime Minister, the Hon. Gough Whitlam stated: "The new Government is clearing away the accumulated dead wood of twenty three years and charting a new course for Australia.---To promote these ideals we must necessarily embark on a programme of change." Two months earlier in May, he had documented in Parliament a list of forty six different commissions appointed to open up new policy initiatives. Four of these impinged directly on the work of the Association. The more important were The National Hospitals and Health Services Commission and the Social Welfare Commission.

The Treasurer, Mr. Frank Crean, in presenting the Budget on . August 21,1973 said: "We are making the first financial provisions for reforming health services in Australia. The budget is not simply an economic document it is also an important instrument whereby we give effect to our goals and aspirations." The policy was centralisation.

Government spokesmen said a new concept and range of services, administered and financed in a new way would emerge. Views expressed under the 'new thinking' were many and varied, and illustrated the prevailing enthusiasm and ignorance. "The Government would exercise control and manage through the public service." "The existing Committee system was not adequate and would be replaced by Commissions of experts." "Managing bodies of patients and residents would look after the internal affairs of their Homes and not outside Committees however well intentioned." "More responsibility would be placed on local Councils." "The era of the voluntary organisation and honorary worker had passed. The Government would do it all."

The Prime Minister said the new pattern would take three years to mature and there would be considerable experimentation. In the interim benefits and services under existing legislation would continue. An early change to health funding with far reaching consequences and beneficial results was the introduction of Medicare.

The irreversible changes taking place in health service ideology and service delivery were not readily grasped by the Health and Social Service field. The previous, long established system, with all its faults was understood. What the nursing home providers did understand was the red 'stop action' signal which went up while the programme was reviewed. The Association was fortunate. It had representatives, either committee or staff, on nine state and national co-ordinating bodies as well as most professional staff groups. Continual feedback enabled a course to be charted through the ever shifting quicksand and immediate advantage taken of firm government thinking and decisions. The Australian National Council for the Blind and the Agencies made numerous submissions to government Ministers, Commissions and Departments, for blind people were classified as not coming within the definition of 'greatest need' for the allocation of future project finance. A proposal that the pensions of all blind people between 16-65 years be taxed, was opposed, fought and won.

One of Bruce Small's many down to earth illustrations now had application. Years earlier at Elanora, seeing John Wilson taken aback by one of his actions, he explained it in this way: "Suppose you wanted to cross the bay from Brighton to Geelong by boat. Now if the boat was big enough, strong enough and the motor powerful enough, you could open the throttle and power straight across, letting the waves batter you, the wind tear at you and the tides push at you. But, if you were in a small frail sailing

dingy you would constantly tack, using the winds to push you, avoid sailing head on into the waves and make adjustments for the currents. Sometimes you might be pushed backwards, sometimes be becalmed. This may delay you but your objective was still the same -to get to the other side.

"The Association was like that small sailing dingy. It was neither big enough, strong enough, powerful enough or rich enough to ignore the forces which surrounded it and charge through. It must tack and use tact. At times it may have to accept compromise. Some it may not like, some it may turn to its advantage. The primary objective always remained the same, 'service to blind people'. When by chance the wind did blow favourably, hoist all sail and race as if your life depended on it."

Change in Government. In 1976 the Government changed once again and with it another major upheaval in the Health and Welfare areas. The newly elected Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Malcolm Fraser, announced in July the setting up of a task force under the chairmanship of Mr. Peter Bailey. Its terms of reference were, broadly, against the background of the Government's new Federalism policy, to make recommendations on the co-ordination and delivery of health and welfare services.

The result known as the Bailey Report was tabled in Parliament on January 17, 1977. Health and welfare agencies throughout Australia were asked to comment. Mr Bailey visited each state for consultation. Many of the recommendations were supported wholeheartedly. For example, reduce twenty six current Commonwealth programmes into four broadly based programmes. However, when the Report was examined in depth and questions asked, another dimension emerged.

Why had a member of the Prime Minister's own department been appointed Task Force leader?

Why were the Ministers of Health and Social Security whose departments were the subject of the task force report excluded from this Committee?

Why did the Planning and Co-ordinating Committee consist of Ministers who were not noted for their sensitivity and rapport with people or their needs?

The agencies then noted the almost total vagueness as to how the recommendations were to be implemented and finally grasped that the report was a political ploy to devolve responsibility for Health and Welfare to the States.

The Government's new Federalism was a policy of Decentralisation. It appeared to be designed to turn back the clock, pass responsibility for Commonwealth Government health and welfare programmes to the states, reduce the Commonwealth financial contribution and force either a cut back in services with the accompanying odium to the states, or a greater state contribution.

The service agencies believed Australia was one and its people were one. Equality of entitlement, difficult as it was to achieve, was seen as only possible under Commonwealth administration. The outcry was so loud, that Mr Bailey's follow up report was squashed. Superficially, the field appeared to have won. The matter died. But had it won? Take the Community Health Program: The Commonwealth started out by funding 100 percent. As the years passed this was reduced to 90 percent, 75 percent, 50 percent, forcing the states to pick up the balance. Many Commonwealth grants were and remain paid only if matched by the states. Block grants to the states were

introduced. Control of the national treasury gave the Federal Government dictatorial powers which were exercised.

Two decades on, the cycle of everlasting change in health and welfare services continues. Debate continues backwards and forwards as to whether the Commonwealth or States can provide the most appropriate and effective range of services and who should pay. The prospect of a real partnership between the two seems remote. In more recent times a Council of Australian Governments has been established. Its deliberations are said to be marked by a climate of goodwill and reform. Hopefully this Council will achieve positive results. In the meantime slowly but surely, after a century of Federation, the States are losing their powers and sovereignty.

The later years of the 1970s with Senator - later Dame Margaret Guilfoyle - as Minister for Social Services were a happy period for voluntary organisations in the accommodation sector. The Department had superb officers at the head of its various sections and they were accessible to the field. The Minister cared, travelled extensively, visited agencies and fought hard in Cabinet for funds. Effective planning and project approval on a three year basis was introduced. The Department also had very fine officers in Victoria. With Mr Arnold Kopp as Director and Mr Bill Whittaker, followed by Mr Peter Purcell in charge of the Aged Persons Homes Section, working relationships were harmonious with positive outcomes. For the first time the accommodation shortage was being overtaken. To the dismay of the aged care sector, Senator Guilfoyle was transferred to another portfolio and the Department funding reduced.

New directions for Victoria. By the mid 1970s change for change sake was the fashion, an inspired revelation which now impacted on state governments. The Victorian Government chased the illusory mirage. The Hospitals and Charities Commission under the leadership of Dr. John Lindell and the Mental Hygiene Authority under Dr. Cunningham Dax had achieved world wide renown in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s. Subsequently there had been a deterioration as a consequence of deaths, the retirement of senior officers and the blow out in costs.

The Government initiated an enquiry into health and hospital services. This was conducted by two highly respected dignitaries, Sir Colin Syme and Sir Lance Townsend. Their report recommended merging the Health Dept. Public Health Commission, Hospitals and Charities Commission and Mental Hygiene Authority into one body, the Health Commission. The recommendation was accepted.

The Health Commission came into being in December 1978 with a staff of 10,000. The close relationship which had existed between the Hospitals and Charities Commission and the field had passed away.

22 THE GROWING BRANCHES.

Future projects From the 1950s the development of the Association can be viewed from a number of angles. For the purposes of the next three chapters the pattern is seen as the expansion of existing branch facilities at Brighton, Ballarat, Bendigo and Kooyong. This was followed by the establishment of new branches at Shepparton, Geelong, Mt. Eliza, Warragul and Warrnambool. Finally each branch was developed as the base for a regional service. This ensured a state wide coverage of service and conformed with the Government concept of regionalisation.

Even as funds were being raised for the new 1966 wing at the Blind Citizens Community Centre, Kooyong, application was made to the Hospitals and Charities Commission for authorisation for a Public Appeal. The month of April 1968, was allocated.

Projects for the Appeal were discussed in May 1966 and an Appeal organisation then set up. The projects agreed were Nursing wings at Elanora, Brighton and Mirridong, Bendigo with Day Centres at Kelaston Ballarat, and Geelong. The Geelong Auxiliary felt a Public Appeal in its area was premature. The two blocks of flats in front of the BCCC, Kooyong, were then added.

Public appeal. The Guiding Light Appeal was launched in April 1968 at a luncheon generously donated by the Southern Cross Hotel. The Appeal Chairman was Mr Emil Christensen, Deputy Chairmen, Mr John McFarlane and Mr Michael Fitzgerald. Cr Roy King was Chairman of the Ballarat section and Mr Ern Granger of the Bendigo section. Appeal Directors were Harry Beitzel and Associates.

The Governor, Sir Rohan Delacombe accompanied by Lady Delacombe, launched the Bendigo section during a dinner at the Shamrock Hotel. The Prime Minister the Rt.Hon J.G.Gorton opened the Ballarat section from T.V. Station BCV 8. The Premier, the Hon Sir Henry Bolte KCMG accompanied by Lady Bolte, initiated the Metropolitan section at a late afternoon party held at the home of Mr. John McFarlane, the Deputy Chairman.

Outstanding Appeal efforts in the metropolitan area included those of the Leading Light Committee under the Chairmanship of Mrs. Barbara Guest which raised \$40,000. Highlight of this effort was a night at the Palais St. Kilda with The Seekers, who donated their services. The Staff under the chairmanship of Miss Shirley Campigli raised \$11,000 and the Blind Members contributed \$3300.

The Appeal Target was \$370,000. A total of \$379,000 was raised.

By 1973 the Committee recognised the need for a further input of capital funds to complete the 1968 building programme which had grown substantially. A separate building for the Low Vision Clinic at Kooyong had also been added. The Hospital and Charities Commission granted the month of May 1974 for the second Guiding Light Appeal. This time it was for \$1m. In the meantime Sir Henry Bolte had relinquished the office of Premier and resigned from Parliament. Initially approached regarding the Appeal Chairmanship by Mr Lightfoot whom he held in high regard, Sir Henry made very clear that he would not lend his name to failure. After meeting and questioning Association office bearers and senior management in detail, he consented.

Sir Henry worked untiringly and exceedingly hard ably supported by Dame Edith. Heading the Appeal Executive were Mr. Wayne Reid and Mrs Diana Jones as Vice Chairmen and Mr Fred McMullen as Director. Appeal Committees, each under its own Chairman were set up at Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong and the Mornington Peninsula.

The Publicity Committee was chaired by Mr. John Briggs. The George Patterson Advertising Agency and International Public Relations P/L gave in depth assistance. Excellent media coverage was received.

The second Guiding Light Appeal raised \$1,050,000. In thanking those who participated, Association President Mr John Wicking said: *"We trust as the Chairman and the team see buildings rise in the coming years, they, together with the people of Victoria, will have great personal satisfaction in knowing this service to blind people is a direct result of their work and giving"*.

ELANORA, BRIGHTON. Looking out from her office window , Mrs. Alice Mann saw a lady and gentleman standing rather hesitantly in front of the Home. She spoke to them. On their expressing some interest in the Home she invited them in, showed them around, introduced them to Matron and various patients and talked. At the conclusion of the tour the gentleman said, "What you have told us is very interesting. We are Executors of an Estate, have some funds to disburse and have been visiting a number of organisations." "In that case" said Mrs. Mann , "I better take you to see Mr Wilson." The gentleman was Mr. Kean from the Equity Trustee Company and the lady his co-executor of the Englebert Estate. The Appeal projects were outlined to them.

The outcome, in June 1966, was a gift of \$80,000. Attached were the conditions that it be used for building purposes and that the Government match it on a \$2 for \$1 basis. Immediate discussion took place with the Chairman and Commissioners of the Hospital and Charities Commission. This resulted in the promise of a grant of \$225,000 towards the Brighton project, to be spread over three years at the rate of \$75,000 a year. In this manner, through the original initiative of Mrs Mann, the financial foundation for the project was secured.

Oakley and Parkes were commissioned to prepare plans. The contract was let to Jennings Industries in December 1967. Work commenced at the beginning of 1968.

The building was a two storey structure, to accommodate patients on the ground floor and staff upstairs. The staff dining room doubled as a function room for fund raising events. A lift, large enough to take a bed was installed, for the Master Plan envisaged future development to 200 beds and the staff quarters as a nursing wing.

Most people yearn to understand the meaning and purpose of life. The Elanora residents and patients were reared in an era when religious teaching was an integral part of life. Slowed down by age and blindness there was more time for reflection. Early values came to the forefront of the mind and spiritual resources became more precious. To meet this need a small chapel with a seating capacity of 35 people was included in the design. At the rear of the Sanctuary was fitted a stained glass window of three panels in a modern design. The panels, blended into an overall presentation

by the artist Mr B.M.Kozak, illustrated three sayings of Jesus thought to be appropriate to the Home:- "I am the light; I am the life; I am the good Shepherd". This memorial window was the General Committees' tribute to and in remembrance of, the Founders of the Association. The organ was the gift of Sir Hubert and Lady Opperman. The Rev. R.N.Gilmore, President of the Brighton Ministers Fraternal, dedicated the Chapel to "The Man who Listens." "I am convinced", he said, " that one of man's most desperate needs in this modern world, is for someone to talk to, some one who listens, someone who understands. In this Chapel the residents will find that Man."

The Hon. Sir Henry Bolte KCMG, Premier of Victoria, opened the new wing on October 10,1968, in the presence of 400 guests. Brighton Council approved the closing of Mair St. for the occasion and large marquees were erected on the road. The Minister for Health the Hon V.O.Dickie announced a welcome increase in the State Govt. Grant to the Association from \$75,000 to \$160,000. The new building increased the capacity of the Home to 120 patient beds. The total cost of building and furnishings was \$350,000.

Always concerned for the public perception of the Association and always a great publicist, Mr Bruce Small when President, kept pushing for an Association symbol which would be recognised by the public and serve a useful purpose. After years of searching for the answer, the Committee decided on a beacon to be erected at Elanora where it would overlook the sea. The beacon would have a twofold purpose. A reference point and guiding light for small craft on the bay and symbolically for blind people, a guiding light to help and a safe harbour. As Mr Bernard Bell, the non sighted Public Relations Officer said: "We want to get across to the public that the Guiding Light symbol is to us what the beacon will be to small boats seeking their way." The Guiding Light was switched on by Bruce Small on October 5 1969. The light stood 70 feet above sea level and could be seen up to ten miles out to sea. Mr Small was satisfied and donated the cost of \$3000. Smaller models were erected at other Branches.

Folk Singer Shirley Jacobs wrote a song specially for the occasion and performed it at the switching on ceremony. Two verses were:

*"There's a light that's shining brightly
Down Elanora's way.
A guiding light for seamen
Shining out across the bay.
In the stormy seas of Life
We are frail and tiny boats
But the light that shines in friendship
Is a guide to life and hope.*

*The guiding light has found its home
with spirits warm and free.
It dwells with love and friendship
In the home there by the sea.
You can see its purple beacon
Flashing far into the night
Giving guidance and direction
With the message of its light."*

MIRRIDONG, BENDIGO. The Appeal at Bendigo under the Chairmanship of Mr. Ern Granger, a respected local chartered accountant, was also, as expected, a success. The target was \$70,000. The amount raised \$84,000. The Bendigo Committee expressed its strong desire to proceed with its building programme as soon as the Elanora project was finished. Plans were prepared by Oakley and Parkes while the Elanora project was still proceeding. The Bendigo project unwittingly led the Association into an unwelcome situation..

In August 1968 the Commonwealth Minister for Health, Dr. A.J. Forbes, stated the Government's intention of boosting Nursing Homes. The Dept. of Social Security issued a circular stating that if an approved organisation in a district provided accommodation for aged persons and did not take up the one third nursing beds to which it was entitled these could be transferred to another organisation in the district.

The requirement at Mirridong was for nursing beds. The decision was for a project of 20 nursing beds in a separate wing but attached to the main Home by a covered way. The Bendigo Committee arranged for the transfer of the required nursing bed entitlements. The wing could now be built under the Aged Persons Homes Act with a \$2 for \$1 subsidy.

The Bendigo Committee stressed that promises made during the Appeal and widespread local publicity required immediate action to maintain integrity. In order to co-operate the Association was guilty of a rare mistake. It submitted the Application for Approval to the Department of Social Security and without waiting for a reply called for tenders. The contract was awarded to local builders J.W and R.G. Michell in February,1970.

The Dept of Social Security refused to approve the project. The proposed new wing was not a separate entity as it interpreted the word. The nursing bed transfer was not from organisations within the district according to its interpretation. For good measure the Department. threw in the fact that the nursing bed transfer could not be used to increase nursing beds at an existing home. This response was completely out of character with the normal co-operative and helpful attitude of this Department.

Mr Ray Whittorn , the local Federal Member for Brighton, arranged for the then Minister for Social Security the Hon. W.C. [Billy] Wentworth to visit Elanora in May 1970. Mr Wentworth disagreed with his colleague the Minister for Health. The need was for more hostel beds not nursing beds. He did agree a more liberal interpretation could be placed on the word 'district' for purpose of the transfer of nursing bed entitlements.

The Victorian Association of Homes and Hospitals for the Aged was greatly troubled by the skyrocketing inflationary costs and the failure of the Commonwealth Govt. to fulfil promises in respect of nursing care costs. Letters to Ministers did not prove satisfactory. A Special Meeting was held in March 1971 to consider the serious situation. A delegation of the Executive to the Prime Minister was agreed. This delegation, which included Mr Lightfoot, saw Senator Greenwood and expressed the concerns of the field. Mr Lightfoot took the opportunity to raise the Bendigo situation.

The Dept. of Social Security then approved a grant for the project, but without resolution of the number of nursing beds. The Dept of Health was willing to register 30 beds, namely, the 20 beds in the new wing and the existing 10 beds in the original Home. The Dept of Social Security was prepared to register the 20 beds in the new wing but insisted the registration of the 10 existing nursing beds in the Home be cancelled. The Association Committee resolved to open the new wing empty and not admit patients until the bed position was resolved. The various authorities involved were advised.

Local interest was so great two official ceremonies were held - an Official Opening and a Dedication Ceremony two weeks later.

Sir Rohan Delacombe, Governor of Victoria, opened the Nursing Wing on March 5, 1972.

In his address Sir Rohan said, " The link between the earlier services to blind people in the district and the present scene was undoubtedly Mrs Kitty Rose who had served the Bendigo branch of the Association for thirty years. It was fitting that permanent recognition be given to her work." Sir Rohan then announced the new building would be known as the Katharine M Rose Wing.

In her speech Mrs Rose encapsulated the financial situation. "When the Committee went into recess in the middle of December last, we felt reasonably happy with our financial position as it then stood though fully aware the road ahead would not be easy. Before the year ended the situation had completely changed. Hospital workers' salaries rose 18 percent followed in January by the National Wage increase of 6 percent. . Then followed increased penalty rates and increments. These events followed advice from the Hospitals and Charities Commission that our annual Grant could not be increased because of financial stringency. The position has been further aggravated by a postponement by the Commonwealth Government of a promised increase in Nursing Home Benefits. The cost of maintaining each resident has increased from \$50 to \$62 a week in the past twelve months."

The cost of the project was \$350,000. The Commonwealth contributed \$96,800, the State Govt \$50,000 and the Association \$203,200.

The Dept of Social Security now advised it would not pay the outstanding balance of its grant until patients were admitted. This meant breaking the rules. One department said it was an offence to admit patients until registration had taken place. The other said registration could not take place until patients had been admitted.

Patients from outside were admitted in June. Social Security paid the balance of the Grant and the Dept. of Health had its way and registered 30 beds. Directors of Nursing following the opening of the Katharine Rose Wing were Ruth Hulls, Dorothy Wild, Jean Williams and Geraldine Webb who is still serving. Each gave notable service. The medical service throughout these years was provided by Dr E.F.Pereira. .who took a detailed personal interest in the health of the patients.

The Bendigo Branch celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1977. One more project was needed to round off the then building programme - an activities and handcraft centre.

The people of Bendigo and District again gave unqualified support. The facility was opened by Mr Wicking in September 1978. The cost was \$180,000.

In 1986 Mrs Ella Vicars Foote donated \$100,000 for the purpose of building a Patients Day Room in the Katharine M. Rose Nursing Wing. At the same time alterations were made to the Wing at a cost of \$194,000.

Finally, the Katharine Rose Wing was enlarged and remodelled with ensuite facilities as part of the Centenary Building Projects. The cost was \$400,000.

KELASTON, BALLARAT. Mrs Dethridge was the catalyst for assistance to blind people in the region. Her enthusiasm could not be contained. A widow with three young children, she lived in Melbourne but wished to move to Ballarat to enable her young daughter Pamela, who was deaf, to attend school at Ewing Housa.

Appointed a part time handcraft teacher within the Home in 1963, in a matter of months she was involved in local welfare work. She wanted to reach out further but to do so had to obtain her driver's licence. She did. She was provided with the smallest car in the Association's fleet, a Mini Minor. To the despair of all she found even this too large to fit through the driveway gates without damaging the pillars. Undaunted she persevered, spurred on by threats of grounding from Head Office. She forged strong bonds with Mrs Nunn, Mrs Tweedie and Mrs Bennett from the Committee. They were a formidable team. She spoke to and encouraged the local Auxiliaries, addressed the Service Clubs, Raised funds and from the business sector obtained sponsors for a weekly programme on radio station 3BA Ballarat. This she produced and presented. A person who gave unstinted support and became a grand friend of Kelaston was Mr John Sorrell of 3BA.

Mrs Dethridge tried to broaden the interests of Kelaston residents. With the co-operation of the Manager and Matron of the large Queen Elizabeth Home with which Kelaston had excellent relationships, a number were included in their craft programme. The venture failed as it had on every occasion it had been tried elsewhere. The blind were placed in a corner of the room and ignored. The residents of the Q.E. Home resented their intrusion. The Instructors said they did not have time to help them.

As more and more blind people became known. the demand for services grew. In 1967 after much pestering Mrs Dethridge was given approval to begin a service one day a fortnight in premises she had to secure and provided there was no cost to the Association. This was a challenge. The first gathering on 15th July was in the Church of England Girls Friendly Society Hall. Nine blind people were present. The hall was too large and the use of the Anglers Club hall was obtained. Committee Members Harry Davies and Mrs Tweedie gave their support. Volunteers were recruited. The number attending rose to thirty and the need for a Day Centre at Kelaston became apparent. One of the original blind members was a young lady Miss Maureen Davies. Over the years Maureen became an important member of the group. She wrote a short history to commemorate twenty five years of service by the Day Centre and still maintains an active role

The Ballarat Shire decided to introduce a Meals on Wheels programme. The Shire Offices were situated nearby and a close relationship existed between the Councillors and the Committee. Kelaston was asked if it would provide the meals. It agreed.

Because of limited staff, space and capacity the cook thought ten meals would be the maximum with which she could cope. The Shire thought that would be sufficient. The number grew quickly to 40 meals a day and the cook still coped. In 1986 this service was transferred to the Queen Elizabeth Home which was supplying Ballarat city.

At the Kelaston Annual Meeting in October 1973, the Chairman, Cr. Roy King, said the Committee hoped to begin building the Day Centre the next year. However, because of government caused delays it was not until 1978, when, funded under the Community Health Programme, the all clear was given. The Kelaston Community Day Centre was Opened by Sir Henry Bolte in April 1979 and was an immediate success. The builder was A.W.Nicholson and the cost \$365,000.

Within a year there were 111 registered clients. Of these 82 participated on a regular basis, 59 were visually impaired and 23 had other disabilities. Under the supervision of Sister Deidre Fletcher and then from 1980 till 1991 Sister Laurie Hay, Medical, Physio, Occupational Therapy and Podiatry services were provided. Mrs Fiona Carland followed Sister Hay. The programme covered a wide variety of interests including cooking, grooming, music appreciation, handcrafts, carpentry and typing. Recreational activities included dancing, games and quizzes, socials and outings in the Red Cross bus.

Although service to blind people remained the core of the Association operations, each Branch had to be flexible and design the programme to cover local community needs.

Other local groups who used the facilities were the Arthritic Group, Diabetic Foundation, Wendouree Combined Pensioners and the Better Hearing Association. Special interest groups were the Deaf children from Ewing House who attended weekly for recreation activities as a change from school type activities and atmosphere and the mildly to moderately younger intellectually retarded from McCallum House who attended weekly for disco dancing. This was to improve co-ordination, body image, right and left discrimination and balance. The fact emerged that although they had no experience with money and had no staff member to teach them, they were expected to move to open community living. Kelaston trained them in remedial maths, money handling, shopping, buying food and budgeting and in general built up their confidence.

Staff costs were funded through the Commonwealth Community Health Programme. Staff were assisted by a team of 46 excellent volunteers.

The Branch Committee decided to make its project for the 1981 Reach Out Appeal extensions to the Day Centre including a Low Vision Clinic and a Workshop for the men. This project was completed at a cost of \$360,000. It was opened in 1983 by the President of Ballarat Shire, Cr. Bill Flynn.

Mr Don Dunstan succeeded Mr Jim Gower as Manager in 1979. Kelaston functioned efficiently and happily under his competent administration and development continued. Mr Dunstan who suffered from a chronic back injury, retired in 1992. His replacement Mr Terry Fraser was transferred from Baringa, Shepparton and continued to expand the programme. Following the retirement of Matron McLeod the patients received excellent care from the successive Directors of Nursing, Sheila Crute, Ena

Cameron, Kath Grist, Heather Aiton and at present Helen Hovey. Dr N.F. Pescott provided the medical service throughout these years.

23.REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

GOULBURN VALLEY REGION.

Baringa Shepparton. The Goulburn Valley Friendship Club was established at Shepparton in 1966. Contact had been made with 17 blind people in the area by Mrs Rita Gregson, the Bendigo Regional Welfare Officer. Transferred to the district at the time was Snr. Constable Ern. Russell. His wife Beryl was a blind member who had participated in the Kooyong programme. Mr Russell gave wholehearted support to the concept of a Club and accepted the office of President. The group worked and flourished happily within the framework of the Elderly Citizens' Club. When the Victorian Health Dept ultimately caught up, it objected to a special interest group being within the Club. Despite protests by the Council and the Elderly Citizens Club it insisted the blind group disband or get out.

From among the Volunteers an Auxiliary was formed in 1969. Two of the ladies who gave notable service were Mrs Betty McPherson and Mrs Betty Dainton. Their husbands were prominent local citizens.

Interest grew. By 1974, 100 blind persons were known and a new venue became essential. In August, St. Aiden's Anglican Church Hall which was being used as a kindergarten came on the market. Mr Wicking visited Shepparton in September and was impressed. The Committee agreed to purchase at a cost of \$30,000. Replacement value was estimated at \$60,000. A Development Committee was then formed with Mr Alan Dainton as Chairman and Mr Don McPherson a member. Mrs Ruth Thompson was appointed Administration Officer. She continues to serve with distinction. Mr Alf Roggerio was transferred from the George Vowell Centre, Mt Eliza, to Shepparton as Manager.

The blind members' activities were moved to St Aiden's Hall in mid 1975. It was shared with the kindergarten until the latter vacated the premises in 1977. Alterations were then carried out. The project was subsidised by the Dept. of Social Security under the Handicapped Persons Assistance Act. By this time 20 blind people were also known at Numurkah. The local Service Clubs paid for a class one day a fortnight. This was held in the Pioneer Lodge and staffed from Shepparton.

Confusion arose because another handicapped group also used the title Goulburn Valley Club. The blind members considered the matter and recommended the name 'Baringa', meaning 'light'. This name was adopted.

The Department of Veteran Affairs [DVA] had a small number of clients in the region requiring Renal Dialysis. One of these was a senior staff member of the Dookie Agricultural College. Treatment entailed a round trip to Melbourne of some 400km involving seven hours travelling and five hours on the machine. The patient returned home exhausted and in a poor physical condition. The DVA approached the Base Hospital with a request for service. Negotiations failed.

The DVA then approached the Association with the request that it be permitted to place two dialysis machines in Baringa. Such a service was seen as having potential value to blind people as diabetes was both a cause of blindness and renal failure.

Representations were made to the Hospitals and Charities Commission. At that time all such services were based in hospitals. A costing showed the Centre could provide the service at less than half the hospital cost. Despite some opposition from medical and hospital sources, approval was granted. Two machines were installed. A nursing sister was appointed and went to the Austin Hospital, Melbourne for training. Within a few months four patients were being regularly dialysed. The Dookie patient suggested that if the treatment took place at night the patients could sleep during the process and would not lose as much work time. The change was made. To date 18 patients have been dialysed. Six of these, including the Dookie patient, subsequently received successful transplants. A number of other people passing through the district have also been helped.

In October 1979 the house backing on to Baringa became available. As vandals and thieves were a problem it was purchased for \$35,000 and used as a residence for the manager, Mr Ken Moore. The first manager, Mr Alf Roggerio had developed cancer which proved fatal. A fine man, popular staff member and capable manager, Alf was widely missed.

A number of the older blind people required nursing care. However there were not sufficient in that category to justify building an economic size nursing unit. In 1979 the Committee of the large Tarcoola Retirement Village, located on the outskirts of Shepparton, made an approach regarding the possibility of a joint venture to establish a 30 bed nursing home. The Tarcoola Committee had the land and a large Hostel complex but not the expertise to establish a nursing home. The broad concept was that each organisation would have the right to fill fifteen beds. The Association would handle the design and paper work. The building cost would be shared. Tarcoola would manage the nursing home with guidance from the Association. The Association would have the right to nominate a representative to the Tarcoola Committee. The operational cost would be shared pro rata according to the number of beds each was using.

Agreement was reached and an Application for Grant made under the Aged Persons Homes Act. The Department was not sure it liked this sort of deal and claimed there were already enough nursing beds in the area. This claim was incorrect. The help of the local Federal Member, Bruce Lloyd, was sought. His efforts brought success. Named Acacia House, the Nursing Home was opened on July 7, 1981, with Mrs. Valmai Berryman, who still retains the position, as Director of Nursing. The total cost was \$750,000 of which the Commonwealth provided \$375,000. The full complement of patients was admitted within two weeks.

The history of the other branches was repeated. The Day Centre programme outgrew St Aiden's Hall. The search for a larger site commenced despite doubts on the part of some local Committee Members. After much searching and encouraged by Head Office a 12 acre block of land was purchased in October 1984. The price of \$140,000. was advanced by the General Committee. The land was on the outskirts of the city on the Melbourne side. Within a few years local reservations disappeared and the decision was shown to have been wise as the city expanded to the area.

The intention was to duplicate the George Vowell nursing home and day centre. In 1986 the Government was restricting the number of new nursing beds. The Association's application was rejected. Discussions were opened with the State

Department of Housing and continued for fifteen months. The outcome was a partnership project. The Department of Housing agreed to erect 24 independent living units on the land at no cost to the Association. At the end of 55 years the units would become the property of the Association. The Association had the right to nominate tenants provided they met the means test of the Ministry and also had the responsibility for the management and maintenance of the units.

The Units were opened by the Minister for Housing, the Hon Barry Pullen MLC, in April 1990. The cost was \$1.4million.

The activity associated with the building of the housing units stimulated the Shepparton Branch Committee. The conventional view was that the timing for an appeal was not appropriate. The District was in the midst of a serious recession and rural crisis and an appeal would follow a \$2.5 million appeal for the Goulburn Valley Base Hospital and a \$1 million appeal for the Mooroopna Retirement Village. A Regional Resource Centre was the long held dream of Head Office. This could function admirably on the site of and in conjunction with the Independent Living Units.

Mr Terry Fraser, an Association Welfare Officer, who was studying Health Service Management, succeeded Mr Ken Moore as Manager in 1985 when the latter retired. Terry had done an exceptional job in support development and fund raising during the intervening years and was an enthusiastic supporter of the project. The Branch Committee agreed to support a major effort. The Rotary Club of South Shepparton gave a three year commitment to the project. Active young business men were recruited. As a consequence a Public Appeal with a target of \$950,000 was launched in April 1989 from the basket of an tethered hot air balloon as it rose into the air. Office Bearers were Mr. Peter Ross -Edwards MLA, Patron; Mr John Panton, Chairman and Mr Terry Fraser, Director. The work the office bearers and committee put into the effort was outstanding. The Appeal succeeded magnificently, the amount of \$1.2 million being raised.

The Governor of Victoria, Dr. Davis McCaughey officially opened the \$1.3 million Baringa Centre in August 1991.

When Mr Fraser was transferred to Kelaston in 1992 the appointment of Mrs Barbara Brown as Manager ensured services were maintained at a high level.

In addition to the original satellite service at Numurkah regional outreach services were commenced at Rushworth, Murchison and more recently in the large city of Benalla. The Benalla Base Hospital provided space and back up assistance to the Association service which operated from its Community Health Centre. Towards the end of 1993 overcrowding necessitated a move.

The Association, Alzheimers Association and the Home and Community Care Linkages programme then moved to an independent location known as 'Alinda House.' The Minister for Aged Care the Hon. Rob Knowles performed the opening ceremony on October 28, 1994.

Following the opening of the Shepparton Centre in 1966 a delegation of Wodonga ladies visited head office and asked that a service be established at Wodonga. A

survey was carried out. Discussions followed with the Royal Blind Society of NSW regarding a joint operation to cover Albury and Wodonga. Ridiculous bureaucratic difficulties arose. The Berlin Wall was nothing compared to the barrier imposed by the Murray River bridge. The RVIB then expressed the wish to serve the towns along the Victorian side of the Murray River where it had Auxiliaries. In order to avoid duplication the Association withdrew. The Association later become involved in the Albury Low Vision Clinic. In recent times as part of a programme consolidation the RVIB withdrew from Murray River towns. Vision impaired people in the region asked the Association to provide a service.. To this end an office was opened in Wodonga in March 1995.

GIPPSLAND REGION.

Pindari Warragul. A study carried out in 1967 showed that Traralgon was the ideal location for a centre in Gippsland. The town had a base hospital, Home for the Aged, all amenities, was close to the large industrial coal mining population towns but had clean air. A Committee was formed and raised \$1000 for the 1968 Guiding Light Appeal. However little interest was shown or support given by the unionised coal field towns. The effort withered.

Courage, vision, determination, and persistence. In Warragul, a rural town some 100kms to the west of Traralgon, a small auxiliary was formed in June 1965. Mrs. F.W.G. Penfold was elected President. The first Annual Meeting was held a year later in the home of Mrs J.L.Armour, an elderly lady with failing sight. The sum of \$240 had been raised. In 1969 when Miss Harrison began working as Welfare Officer 40 blind people in the region were known to the Association. Twelve months later the number was 136 with a good representation surrounding Warragul.

By the late 1960s Mrs Jean Armour was President of the Auxiliary. Her persistent lobbying over the years wore Head Office down. Mr Wilkins and Mr Pearson visited her home to discuss the situation. She was adamant. A programme for the blind was required and a centre in due course. Other projects had been waiting longer and had a higher priority. In the hope of appeasing and keeping Mrs Armour quiet, Miss Margaret Harrison was asked to see what she could do.

Services were begun in a room in the pavilion of the sportsground. The room was only available for a limited time. The RSL kindly offered to help.

The first half day meeting was held in the RSL Hall in November, 1974. Early members included three farmers.,Dennis Wood, and Norm and Keith Anderson. The three men were supported by their respective wives, Barbara, Bernice and Janet. Mrs Armour appealed over Radio 3UL for volunteer drivers and helpers. Mrs Margaret McLeish joined as a volunteer and later became a valued staff member. The gatherings extended to full days and from once a month to weekly with a maximum class capacity of 20 members. A handcraft teacher and other assistance was sent from Kooyong.

The RSL Hall was not altogether suitable for the purpose. There was no storage and its availability, too, was limited. Equipment, craft materials and crockery were stored in various premises and had to be transported backwards and forwards in cars. Nevertheless the work flourished. Before long a further 20 blind people were waiting

to join. This spurred on Mrs Armour. Nothing less than their own centre would now satisfy her.

Then the unexpected happened. Mrs Shirley Admans, who was now living only an hours drive away, indicated she was ready for work. In May 1978 the Warragul situation was handed over to her. With the co-operation of the Spastic Society arrangements were made to commence a similar programme for blind people at the new Spastic Centre. The Association provided the staff. The venture was a valuable learning experience. It was not successful. The Spastic Centre members were young, strong, noisy and active, even those in wheel chairs. The Blind members were older, quieter and slower in their movements. Frequent physical collisions left the blind people frightened and dented their self confidence. The Association was grateful to both the RSL and Spastic Centre for their assistance but the time to move had arrived.

Mrs Admans discussed the future of the service with the West Gippsland Council for the Handicapped. This Council expressed the view, that, as in recent times the district had supported a Spastic Centre, a Mentally Retarded Centre, and a Centre at the Hospital, there would not be great interest in a centre for the blind.

Little did they know Shirley Admans. After much searching a parcel of land with an old timber house was purchased in March 1979 for \$40,000. The location on a hill on the outskirts of the town was excellent. The Lions Club renovated the house. In no time it was too small for all the activity taking place. Plans for an extension were drawn up. The estimated cost was \$100,000.

An Appeal Committee was formed with Mr Paul Devine, a local solicitor, as Chairman. The Auxiliary, Volunteers and Blind Members worked mightily. The building was opened in February 1982 during the district's 100 Year Celebrations. The day was most unpleasant with 100° heat and a strong north wind. Association President, Mr. John Wicking, chaired proceedings and Mr. Arthur Wilkins opened the Centre. A home cooked afternoon tea of country proportions was served by the ladies. The Appeal target of \$100,000 was reached in June 1982. The local Federal MHR Mr Barry Cunningham was and still continues to be a true friend and supporter.

The local people in consultation decided on 'Pindari' meaning 'high ground on a hill' as the name for the unit. Within a year 61 blind members were attending. Among the 16 men attending were nine farmers. One man approached earlier had refused to attend because he was too busy. He now had some spare time and decided to come along. He was 95 years old. Mrs Armour was now one of the blind members. The oldest lady was 98 years. Twenty four members travelled up to 8 km, 12 from 8km to 16 km and 15 between 16km and 40km. Such was the enthusiasm that 5 travelled from 40 to 60 km and 5 from 60 to 100 km. Mrs Admans, a qualified instructor, also introduced Riding for the Disabled.

Contact was maintained with 48 home bound people through telelink. The leader of this service was a blind member, Mr. Norm Anderson. His brother, Mr Keith Anderson, was elected to the Blind Members Council.

Pindari was further extended in 1986 with the assistance of Commonwealth funding. This extension included a woodwork room, activities room and dining room. The project cost \$280,000. It was opened by Mr Barry Cunningham, MHR.

Welfare visitation and home assessments were important. Tilly Aston was expressing a reality of life when she wrote 'blindness is never sweet.' When the light is also shut out of the mind and soul of man, the consequences can be even more bitter. Shirley Admans had heard from various sources of a 'fearsome, unapproachable blind man who lived a hermit's existence on what had been his parents property deep in the bush'. She picked up snippets of information. The location of the property; that he had been a chartered accountant in Melbourne; that his sight loss was due to diabetes; that he couldn't accept his blindness or face his colleagues and friends; that defeated, he had run away to hide.

Mrs Admans went to visit him. There was the culvert, the broken down front gate, the overgrown track through the bush. At the end in a semi clearing was what appeared to be an abandoned timber farm house with a veranda all around. The veranda posts and floor had rotted, the spouting was loose and broken, rubbish lay around. This place is abandoned, she thought, no one could possibly live here. As she turned the car she saw baling twine tied from tree to tree. It must be the place. Hesitantly and fearfully she got out of the car. "What do you want"? was the surly greeting. The man said he didn't want to see anyone. He didn't need anything. A neighbour brought him supplies once a week - the wrong food for his diabetic condition. Mrs Admans kept on visiting, was finally accepted and invited into the derelict house.

Then she received word he was in the local hospital. The neighbour who took him in had found him in a coma. When he recovered and realised he was in hospital he became very agitated. He managed to escape unobserved. The Police were advised and a search was mounted. He was found some days later. Somehow he had reached the front of the property, crawled into the culvert - and died. Great courage, so misdirected.

Why couldn't he have been like the elderly lady admitted to Elanora? "I used to be bitter and wonder why God let me lose my sight. Now I know. It was so I could come to this beautiful home where I am comfortable and well cared for and have so many things to interest me."

Mrs Admans was transferred back to Kooyong full time in 1991 as Manager of Blind Members Services. This was a wise move. No one had a greater depth of knowledge of the blind members and they held her in very high regard. Mr Ray Lord was transferred from Kooyong as manager of Pindari.

With Pindari as the Regional Headquarters, development continued. Activity classes were established at Moe, Leongatha and San Remo. By mutual agreement the area east of Sale was serviced by the RVIB. In 1994 reports received via the Telelink service indicated this service had been withdrawn. Discussions were held with aged care service providers in Sale and Bairnsdale. The outcome was the establishment in 1995 of a base in Bairnsdale. The wisdom of the move was confirmed by a flow of referrals from throughout rugged East Gippsland to the NSW border.

In a recent report the area officer, Miss Amanda Woodhouse wrote: *"It is hard to explain how one has worked an eleven hour day and yet only done one home visit. That home visit was to Gibbo River north of Benambra. It was only 180 kms distance but over very difficult and often gravel roads. The lady was in her mid eighties and*

lived in a slab hut. She had no electricity but did have the phone connected. She is an enthusiastic member of Telelink. Other visits were made to Cann River and Mallacoota."

MORNINGTON PENINSULA REGION

George Vowell Centre. Mt. Eliza. In January 1956 , in a spontaneous gesture of affection, the residents of the Brighton Home organised a Farewell Party for Mrs Flora Douglas, a loved and valued member of the nursing staff. Her husband Mr Judd Douglas had been appointed Headmaster of the school on Nauru. Mrs Douglas and their three sons Malcolm, Ian and Stewart accompanied him.

Following their return to Melbourne Mrs Douglas became involved as a volunteer at Kooyong and Brighton. She also joined the newly formed Elanora Auxiliary.

When Mr Douglas was appointed Headmaster of a high school in the Frankston district they decided to move to that area. Mrs Douglas made purchase of a suitable house a difficult task. Aware of the difficulty in obtaining voluntary drivers to transport blind persons from the Mornington Peninsula to Kooyong she was determined to start a group in her own home and needed a room of adequate size.

A house which met her specifications was located and purchased. Mr Lightfoot and Mr Wilson attended a preliminary meeting of prospective volunteers at her home to discuss the project. Mrs Douglas was supported by Mrs. Audrey Moffat, one of Miss Henderson's drivers who was also a Kooyong volunteer and lived in Mt. Eliza. Mrs Moffat then organised a meeting at her home of the volunteers and other friends including Mrs. George Vowell.. Mr Wilkins spoke to the ladies. The Peninsula Auxiliary was formed with Mrs Vowell as President, Mrs Moffat as Vice President and Mr Bill Moffat as Hon Secretary/Treasurer. Auxiliary membership comprised both ladies and men.

A weekly class commenced in February 1971 with blind persons from throughout the Mornington Peninsula. The programme was basic crafts and socialisation with minimum staff involvement provided by Mr Nugent and Miss Harrison.

The Auxiliary meeting following the commencement of the service was held at the home of Mrs Vowell. Funding for the service was discussed. At the end Mr Vowell who had been sitting quietly, listening, gave an opening donation of \$1000.

The next Friday afternoon Mr Vowell rang Mr Lightfoot. He wanted on the following Monday, an Appreciation of the Association's proposals for services on the Peninsula and the area of land required. These were conjured up and written up by John Wilson over the weekend, typed on Monday morning and hand delivered in the afternoon.

Forty eight hours later Mr Vowell rang Mr Wilson and asked him to be at his home by 9am the following morning. The day was spent with an estate agent looking at broad acres between Frankston and Mornington. Two days later Mr Vowell rang Mr Lightfoot and said he had purchased on behalf of the Association 'Glenfine', a 20 acre property with a house, on the east side of Nepean Highway, Mt Eliza. This was breath- taking news. Only six weeks had elapsed since the group commenced to meet in the home of Mrs.Douglas.

While Mr. Vowell could be very generous as a number of organisations knew, he was also a hard taskmaster. The moment the Association took possession at the end of May he was on the phone wanting to know when a programme would commence in the house and what commercial use was being made of the land in the meantime. Mr Alf Roggerio, originally a tradesman, was transferred from Elanora as Development Officer to renovate the house and maintain the land. Miss Margaret Wright, an Occupational Therapist from Kooyong was given the responsibility of developing and managing the programme. The blind members moved from the Douglas home in July 1971. Mrs Moffat was very active as a volunteer in all aspects of the programme and Mr Moffat in the business aspects and supervision of the property.

The Social Work department carried out a detailed survey of blindness on the Peninsula.

Senior staff saw an exciting future for the site with a complex including Nursing Home, Hostel, Independent Units and Day Centre. Noting considerable expensive preparatory work was required on the land, local transportation was non existent, and no sources of government funding were immediately in sight, they recommended against a building project at that time in the existing circumstances. The Committee ruled faith had to be maintained with Mr.Vowell and action should be initiated immediately.

In August 1972 the existing circumstances changed. Under a new Aged Persons Hostel Act, introduced by the new Commonwealth Government, the Association on the basis of its existing beds was eligible for a grant covering the construction of 131 hostel beds. This Grant at the rate of \$8050 a bed was worth over \$1m. The life of the Act was limited to three years. The Committee resolved to proceed with the construction of a 60 bed Hostel and Day Centre.

Now a Westernport Authority [WPA] had recently been established under the State Minister for Local Government. This Authority in its infinite wisdom decreed there should be a 'green belt' running from Port Phillip Bay to Westernport Bay. The property was in the middle of the green belt. For the first time the Association encountered obdurate and obstructionist attitudes and treatment.

In July 1974 after a long intense effort a Permit to Build with conditions attached was issued. The building had to be sited more than 700 feet back from the front fence; it must not be seen from the highway; the height of the building must not exceed 14 feet; the whole must blend in with the landscape; the bricks must be of a colour approved by the Authority; the whole must be contained within a circle. [The Authority would not listen to requests that a rectangle or oval of the same ground area be substituted.]. The entrance had to be from Cobb Rd., a side road on a map which, in reality, was a fenced paddock used by the next door neighbour. The new building plus the existing house, stables and sheds must not exceed a ground cover of 4% of the total area. This was an unreasonable condition. The bureaucratic mind works strangely at times. No way would the 4 percent be fractionally increased but after haggling the WPA permitted the area of the adjacent water supply reservoir to be included for the purpose of computing the 4 percent.

The Architect, Mr Kevin Knight of Oakley and Parkes, began planning the extensive earthworks and negotiating with the many authorities involved. The Architects

worked through the Mornington Council as was normal but the WPA had overriding power. The Council could not approve submissions or plans. It sent them on to the WPA which in due course approved or otherwise, sent them back to the Council which in turn submitted them to the next Council Meeting for approval.

The SEC demanded the power lines go underground and that they be sufficiently heavy to supply other future users along Cobb Rd. The water authority would not permit the Association to tap into the Water Supply Reservoir just across the fence and run a direct line across the paddock. It had to tap into the main along the Highway and run the supply along Cobb Rd. It insisted the diameter of the pipe be sufficient to supply all future users along Cobb Rd. A sewerage main had been promised along the Highway for years but nothing had happened. The sewerage authority insisted a line be run to the front of the property, a large holding tank and pump be installed and the effluent pumped along a further line to the nearest sewerage connection hundreds of yards away. The Roads Board insisted the Association form Cobb Rd., make it to a specified width, lay foundations to their standards and asphalt it to their specifications. All of these things had to be done at the Association's expense. Mr. Vowell, used to doing his own thing in his own way was exceedingly irritated as the months passed with nothing apparently happening.

In October 1974, the Minister for Social Security, Mr Bill Hayden, announced the subsidy to build Activity Centres and Homes had been increased from \$2 for \$1 to \$4 for \$1. The ceiling placed on the subsidy per bed halved its value in Victoria.

In July 1975, the Dept of Social Security advised there was now no possibility of a Hostel being approved for Mt. Eliza within the remaining time frame of the Act. However in the interests of the Association the Department itself had reclassified the project as a Nursing Home and would consider it on that basis. This consideration and action by the Department was unprecedented and deeply appreciated.

Mr Roggerio was transferred to Shepparton in 1975. Mr Ian Brooks was appointed Manager with responsibility for both the service and building programmes. Transferred as Secretary and Administrative Officer was a widely experienced senior office staff member, Miss Loraine Brown, with 11 years service at Kooyong and Head Office.. A caravan was purchased as an office.

In order to cope with the people wishing to enter the programme, relieve the strain on the facilities of the house and the load on the volunteers a service was commenced in the Methodist Church Hall, Rosebud. This was opened by the Hon Roberts Dunstan, Minister for Public Works, in May 1975. Prominent in fund raising was Mrs Jean Turner particularly through working at the Rosebud Carnival. There was widespread regret when Mrs Turner suffered a stroke in 1980. Mrs Turner recovered, returned to her much appreciated voluntary labours, and died in the early 1990's..

The Commonwealth Hansard of September 8, 1976 listed the schedule of nursing home approvals for funding in 1977/78. Mt. Eliza was included. In November 1976, after a period of difficult negotiation, the Hospitals and Charities Commission gave a firm promise on maintenance funding.

There was one final hitch with the WPA. The final design exceeded the 4 percent ground cover, by the area of the original house. This would have to be demolished

before a permit to build was issued. Twenty two blind people daily were attending classes being conducted in the house. There was head on confrontation. Codswallop! Mr Wicking was fed up. The Association replied in writing that it would demolish the house, if necessary, when the new building was completed. It was not necessary. Tenders were called in November, 1977. By the time the building was completed the Westernport Authority had disappeared as rapidly as it appeared. The house became the managers residence. In the following years the 'green belt' also disappeared.

The builders, R & L Collins, were plagued by delays caused by consistent wet weather and by strikes by the building workers over nonexistent issues. These latter were the more upsetting as never before on any project had there been anything but the most agreeable co-operation.

The 60 bed Nursing Home and Day Centre was opened by the local Federal Member and Commonwealth Treasurer the Rt. Hon. Phillip Lynch on May 2 1980. The design which received much favourable comment resulted from the contributions of many staff members, particularly Mr Mountain and Mr Brooks allied to the professional skills of the Architect Mr Kevin Knight. The interior decor to which Mrs Adamson had made a major contribution set new standards and was highly praised.. Later knighted, Sir Phillip and his wife Leah became firm friends and were always welcome visitors to the complex. The cost of the project was \$2.1million. An honoured guest at the opening was Mrs George Vowell. Mr Vowell had died on November 11, 1975. The complex was named in his honour. His portrait, painted by Mr John Balmain, hangs as a focal point in the entrance foyer. Mrs Vowell died in June 1985.

The opening of the complex ended a frustrating period and ushered in good years. The first Committee Chairman, Mr Bill Moffat resigned in 1974 and died soon after. He was succeeded by Mr Len Seward who guided the project through to the opening and then stood down as chairman. Mr Jim McCoy was then elected and still holds office. Each of these three men was a prominent Melbourne business man. Mr McCoy was supported by Dr. Jean Jackson a leading auxiliary member and service volunteer, Dr Don Hanslow, Dr John Zwar and Cr Graeme Otte. Mr John Blanch, who had moved to the district, represented the General Committee. Mr Ian Brooks who retired at the end of 1979 also joined the Committee. He and his wife, Mrs Marge Brooks, a valued auxiliary member and volunteer, were by then living in the area.

A superb staff team was recruited. Mr Barry Furness was appointed Manager. A local well known and respected resident he was an excellent choice in every way. Transferred from Melbourne at their request were Miss Judy Bloy as Accountant, who had 19 years service, and who had joined the Association as a teen age school leaver and Sister Toni Cocks as Programme Co-ordinator. Miss Cocks had served as a nursing sister at Elanora and as a senior member of the Kooyong staff. The Peninsula Welfare Officer was Mr Ivan Molloy ex Braille Library staff, who with his wife Lorraine, an Association honorary worker was now residing in the area. They were joined by Sister Colleen Forrester from The Mt. Eliza Geriatric Centre as Matron; Mrs Vhonda Herbert as Housekeeper and Mr Peter Shinsky as Chef. The Gardener, Robert Funston, commenced a horticulture project for the blind members which attracted widespread attention. The Volunteer Co-ordinator, Derek Scott, introduced Riding for the Disabled. Derek was later one of the main stunt riders for the film *'The Man From The Snowy River'*.

From the outset the various elements which constituted the home, both honorary and paid, combined in friendliness and harmony to provide the same service of supportive excellence which characterised the other Association Homes.

In recent years financial cutbacks forced the closure of the riding programme. The horticulture programme was taken over by volunteers. The restrictions did not prevent the introduction of satellite services at the Baxter Retirement Village and again at Rosebud.

BARWON REGION

Geelong. An arrangement between the RVIB and the Association in the 1930's recognised Ballarat and Bendigo as Association bases and Geelong as an RVIB base. Each organisation defended its territory fiercely. The people of Geelong worked hard for the RVIB. The bulk of the funds raised were remitted to Melbourne.

When Mr. Opperman, the Federal Member for Corio, joined the Committee he advocated an Association presence in the area. Miss Henderson, driven by volunteer Mrs. Muriel Downie, began to make occasional forays to visit blind members who had moved from Melbourne to the area.

The lovely home of Mr. and Mrs. J. Spencer Nall, Newtown, was the setting for the Inaugural Meeting of the Geelong Auxiliary on July 31, 1963. Mrs Ken Nall was elected President, Mrs Willis, Hon. Secretary and Mrs Snibson, Hon. Treasurer. Mrs. Opperman and Mrs Ronald Mc Allister consented to be Patronesses.

In the absence of a Welfare Officer the ladies of the Auxiliary extended their interest beyond fund raising and developed a rewarding friendly visiting programme. They were soon advocating greater Association involvement.

In July 1966 the Association Committee agreed to take positive steps to establish a programme and later acquire a property for a Centre. As the large Grace McKellar Home for the Aged was providing such residential care as was necessary and every courtesy was extended to the Association Welfare Officer, the provision of accommodation was not envisaged. Vice President Michael Fitzgerald was asked to make the project one of his particular interests.

Mrs. Dorothy Simpson was appointed Welfare Officer for Geelong and the Western District in 1969. The number of known blind people had risen to over 100. Mrs. Simpson had been Secretary to Mr Opperman for 15 years, had undertaken welfare work from Mr Opperman's office, was well acquainted with the Association and was a member of the local Meals on Wheels team. She also knew many of the Auxiliary members.

Mrs Patricia Heath was by then President of the Auxiliary. Young, active a trained Sister and an able business woman, she examined the cost structure and decided, with the agreement of the auxiliary members, they could not fund a building programme and operational costs at that time. She then pursued two avenues of action. Firstly, a joint venture with the RVIB Auxiliary. Secondly, if the first failed, the commencement of activities in rented premises.

In August 1971 Mrs Heath advised the General Committee she had discussed with Mrs Jacobs, President of the RVIB Auxiliary, the possibility of establishing co-ordinated services for blind people in the Geelong district. The response was most encouraging. The Association Committee endorsed her action. Mr Lightfoot discussed the subject with Dr. Bennett, President of the RVIB. who also gave it his blessing. The Executive Officers of the two bodies also had discussion. At this point, when it appeared a united effort was feasible, Mrs Jacobs unfortunately died. The proposal lapsed.

Thanks to the generosity of the Church authorities, group activities began in All Saints Church Hall on June 5, 1973. These were on the basis of one day a week. The Auxiliary provided the work force. Minimal staff was supplied from Kooyong by Mr Wilkins. The official opening took place on July 17. in the presence of Mr and Mrs Opperman many local dignitaries and high church officers. Mrs. Heath, then immediate Past President of the Auxiliary said: "future development would require our own site enabling five day operation with permanent staff. A Public Appeal would be held in May 1974."

Many properties were looked at in Geelong. Through one of her contacts Mrs Heath heard part of the Hermitage Girls College had just become available. The College was moving to new premises. Newtown City Council had purchased the main building, Armytage House, for use as Council Chambers. Dacomb College had secured another wing. One recently built section, the Science Laboratory block of two storey class rooms and an adjacent house, was still available. Urgent action was imperative as several parties were interested. As Mr Wicking was overseas, Mrs. Heath advised Mr Lightfoot the same evening, Thursday October 4, 1973. An inspection the next day showed the property to be ideal. The Contract of Sale was signed on Monday 8th October. The purchase price was \$75,000. The Association advanced the money for the purchase. This was later repaid from the Geelong Appeal funds.

A Branch Committee was established with Mrs Heath as Chairman, Mr Ross Averay as Treasurer and Mrs. Daphne Smith as Hon Secretary. Mr. Lindsay Heath was a member. The local decision was made to call the centre 'Illawarra', meaning high place above or overlooking the sea.

Mr Lindsay Heath consented to chair the Geelong section of the Guiding Light Appeal in May 1974. The method he adopted was Direct Giving. In six weeks, supported by an enthusiastic Committee of young business men, \$140,000 was raised. In recognition of the magnificent Baxter Trust donation of \$30,000 the main hall was named Baxter Hall.

Mr David Hundley, Snr. Social Worker at the RVIB and Mr Gordon Merry always worked together co-operatively. They combined to produce a report on Welfare Services for the Blind in the Barwon Region. The Region had a population of 175,000 people. Statistically, it was estimated there should be 255 blind persons in the region. The Association now knew 192 of these. The RVIB had by now, also commenced a handcraft class in Geelong. The Association invited it to share the resources of the new complex. The offer was refused.

The building required alterations to make it suitable for its new purposes. A local firm, Buchan Laird and Buchan, was appointed the Architect.

Details of the Commonwealth programmes were becoming available. The Prime Minister announced the Barwon Region was being given priority as a testing ground for new programmes and \$990,000 had been allocated to the Region. The Association made application for a capital grant and operational funding. Representatives of Applicants were asked to appear before officers of the Hospitals and Health Services Commission and present their case in person. Mr Whitlam, in a recent speech, had promised to reward initiative. His theme was, "Don't wait, do and we will catch up with you." The Association said it had believed Mr Whitlam and acted. A building had been purchased and alterations were being planned. An integrated Day Centre for handicapped persons would be established.

The project was one of nine out of more than twenty applications, approved on Friday . December 13,1974. The Commonwealth Government would meet 75 percent of the capital cost and 90 percent of the operational cost. The contract for the alterations was signed with Van Driel Pty.Ltd, the successful tenderer, on Monday December 16. The cost of alterations and furnishing was \$350,000.

Illawarra, the first integrated handicapped centre developed under legislation introduced by the new Australian government was opened on October 1,1975. The Governor, Sir Henry Winneke, performed the ceremony. The first year's grant for maintenance was \$129,000 for an approved staff establishment of 16 persons.

The Illawarra Branch Committee nominated Mrs Heath as its representative on the Barwon Regional Council for Social Development. She became Chairman. She was already a member of the Board of the Geelong Base Hospital. In 1979 she became President of the Hospital Board. The Association nominated her for election to the Board of the Victorian Hospitals Association. She was elected and went on to become Vice President of the Australian Hospitals Association. Mrs Patricia Heath was awarded the British Empire Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours 1977 and her extensive community service further recognised in Membership of the Order of Australia in 1993.

The Committee attracted prominent local people prepared to give public service. Mrs Joan Backwell, Dr J. Bishop and Messrs. Bain, Hyett, and Herbert were added to the original Committee. Changes to committee members over the years were minimal. The Committee performed with distinction, functioned efficiently and served effectively.

Illawarra was equally well served by its Managers. Mr Norman Pressey 1974-75, Mr Peter Prendergast 1975-77 and Mr Greg Merritt 1978- 86. In September 1976 Mrs Dorothy Simpson, was killed in a motor accident while on duty. Also killed was a blind member, while another in the car was injured. At the Blind Members Christmas Party in December 1977, Mrs Heath unveiled a memorial wall mural in memory of Mrs Simpson.

Because of the experimental nature of the project, Canberra asked that a statement of policy be prepared. Prospective users of the Illawarra too, had a sense of insecurity, fearing they would be evicted or abandoned as services to blind people expanded. A policy of usage, applicable for the first five years was prepared and circulated. The Association felt projection beyond five years was not realistic. Government thinking and policy could change. The Association may wish to reconsider its involvement.

The Branch Committee, in the light of its experience, may wish to make recommendations of substance.

The document spelled out the relationships between the Association and Geelong Committees and the respective Managements. To safeguard other organisations it established a Users Committee and operational procedures.

Within two years of opening 500 disabled persons had contact with the centre. The ages ranged from six children under 9 years to 31 elderly persons 90 years and over. Two thirds of the older persons were women. Disabilities included blindness, low vision, diabetes, deafness, cerebral palsy, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, polio, stroke, asthma, paraplegics, quadriplegics and moderate intellectual disability.

Some organisations such as Yooralla and Noah's Ark Toy Library established their local office headquarters within the centre. Others such as the Deaf Society attached an officer part time. The Hospital and Charities Commission attached its rehabilitation project planning officer and regional medical records librarian to the centre. The Commonwealth Dept. of Social Security and Commonwealth Employment Service sent clients for assessment and training.

So great was the demand, the facilities which were thought to be quite generous, soon proved inadequate. Fortuitously in May 1977, the Dacomb College section of the complex became available for \$160,000. The Government funded the purchase 100 percent under the Community Health Programme.

Expansion continued. Staff employed directly by Illawarra increased to 26. Users and self help groups increased to 30. Many other Auxiliaries and local community groups held their meetings at the Centre. Monthly attendances reached 1000 for user and self help groups and a further 1000 for ancillary bodies. By 1980 annual expenditure was \$324,000.

Mrs. Heath relinquished the Chairmanship in 1979 on becoming President of the Geelong Hospital and was replaced by Mr Ross Averay. Located in one of the proudest and most parochial cities of Victoria, as happens in the sporting arena, an occasional variance of opinion between Geelong and Melbourne was to be expected and did occur. The presence of Vice President Michael Fitzgerald and Mr John Wilson at Geelong Branch Committee Meetings meant resolution of most difficulties as they arose. Two remained chronic in nature. These related to the role and powers of the Branch Committee and overall management control from Melbourne

The General Committee saw each Branch as fitting into a common framework, having a primary allegiance to the Association, fundamentally serving blind people but occasionally with some particular extra service as an added ingredient.

The Geelong Branch had many more variables. It did not have a long tradition of Association service. It was the base for services to a number of disabled groups of which blindness was only one. It had to be even handed. The flow on was involvement with the many user organisations. It also rightly saw itself as having a loyalty to Geelong health and service organisations and the Barwon Regional Council. The funding went direct to the Branch from government which had its own

expectations. In summary Illawarra had become an important Geelong organisation in its own right.

Further extensions to the main building were opened in 1987. These included a community resource library, physiotherapy, carpentry facilities and accommodation for community user groups. The Victorian Community Services Dept. made a grant of \$77,000 towards the cost of \$225,000.

The main block was partially destroyed by fire in 1992. In the rebuilding, opportunity was taken to make some internal alterations and refurbishment to improve operational efficiency. The fire insurance payment amounted to \$185,000, the cost of repairs and alterations \$246,000. The building reopened in June 1993.

A series of managers followed in fairly rapid succession after Mr Greg Merrett who had become prominent in local social welfare affairs, resigned in 1986 to go into business.

The conversion of the Association to a company in 1990 with consequent changes in responsibilities, the introduction of computers and centralised accounting, changes in Board and Committee membership, and new future service directions, brought underlying tensions and problems between the Branch and Board to the surface.. Involved were strong personalities and differences in management and service concepts and styles. Discussions did not resolve the differences and sadly, although invited to do so, Branch Committee members did not nominate for re-appointment in 1993. This did not prevent some of the Branch Committee members from continuing their voluntary service. The oversight of Illawarra was then temporarily exercised from Melbourne.

The future programme of Illawarra was summed up in a mission statement. as to reduce the impact of physical, sensory and multiple disabilities on individuals living in the Barwon Region. Its execution included a more holistic approach to disability, closer integration of the disability groups within the Centre, the greater use of specialist services and a wider outreach.

Between 1991 and 2001 the estimated growth of vision impaired persons in the Barwon Region was estimated at 28 percent. A similar growth in other disabilities was predicted. Using Illawarra, Geelong, as the base the intention was to serve the people from Queenscliff to Apollo Bay and up to Cressy and Apollo Bay.

Since 1993 a Low Vision Clinic has been established at Illawarra and the first outreach service has commenced at Colac.

To oversee the work a Barwon Regional Advisory Committee, in lieu of the Branch Committee, was established in 1995.

GLENELG REGION.

Warrnambool Action was initiated by Mr Bob Pearson and the Regional Welfare Officer, Miss Carolyn Peake, in 1975. In 1976 a fortnightly handcraft class was commenced under district resident Mrs Jo Malseed. As Miss Jo Watkins, Mrs Malseed had been a handcraft teacher at Kooyong. Supported by the Warrnambool Auxiliary, the group met in a rented room. Discussion between Mr John Cook and Mr

Alan Hughes, Manager of the Warrnambool Base Hospital, led to a room being made available at the Hospital. The class was then held weekly. Staff members recruited and trained the necessary volunteers.

Mrs Sharon Muldoon, who worked from the Portland Community Health Centre was given responsibility for the service. The number of persons receiving assistance increased from 86 in 1981 to 350 by 1986. Mrs Muldoon then moved her base to Warrnambool. Satellite groups were commenced at Hamilton in 1986 and Timboon in 1987.

After 14 years at the Hospital the Day Centre had outgrown the facilities available and a move became mandatory. The Association was able to rent two rooms at the local Seventh Day Adventist School in 1991 while looking for a permanent base. Efforts were fruitless until hearing that Yalundah, the Adult Day Training Centre was on the market. Negotiations ended in its purchase. With alterations it proved an excellent Centre with ample room for additional activities. The centre was opened as the Association regional base the last week in June 1993. The cost to purchase, alter and furnish was \$505,000. Mrs Muldoon who had made a notable contribution to the development of services in the region continued as the popular Regional Manager.

The Governor, Hon. Richard Mc Garvie, an old boy of the area, officially opened the centre on the 14th October 1994.

Due to a lack of alternative regional options and aware of the centre's fine standard of service, the regional office of the Dept. of Health and Community Services approached the Association in 1992 with the request it provide a Day Placement Programme for clients being relocated from Caloola, the centre for the intellectually disabled in Sunbury. The Department would accept funding responsibility. The service located at Yalundah operates five days a week. Nine clients, close to 50/50 male and female with high support needs, participate. They had been institutionalised for 30 to 67 years. Their ages range from 60 to 80 years. They had a wide range of health and disability problems and challenging behaviours.

The complexity of their problems which might daunt other less devoted care givers presented a new and different challenge to Mrs Muldoon and the staff. The improvement in the clients health and behaviour in the short intervening period has impressed the Department. The success has led to a decision by the Department to expand its programme with the Association.

Portland. In 1978 a land owner in the Western District offered a broad acre property to the Association. He was visually impaired and in poor health. He wanted the Association to establish a centre for visually impaired persons. The property was many miles from the nearest population centre.

A survey of the Glenelg region carried out by the Association's Research Officer, Miss Ruth Mushin, showed a centre for blind people in that location could not be justified. It also showed a comprehensive range of services was based at Hamilton and Warrnambool. Portland was disadvantaged, indeed isolated with very real problems of accessibility to services and transport. At the same time there was a core of Portland people who had a true caring concern for the disadvantaged but did not know how to work the system. The integrity of the Association required the prospective donor be

told his property was not in the right location and Portland was the nearest possibility. He withdrew his offer.

During the survey good contact had been established with Cr. J.S. Brophy, Chairman of the Glenelg Region Consultative Council, and Phillip Shanahan, Town Clerk of Portland. The announcement of the huge Alcoa project now impinged on the scene. The Association was asked to make Miss Mushin available to carry out a comprehensive survey of health and community needs. The proposal had the unanimous support of all sections of the local community, including Alcoa.

The approval of Dr. John Wiseman, Senior Medical Officer of the Health Commission was sought and obtained. A Steering Committee was formed with Mr. W.G.[Bill] Maling FRCS., FRACS. as Chairman and Mr. Jack Finck as Hon. Secretary. This survey in 1979 showed an overwhelming need for a Community Health Centre which could provide a comprehensive range of services. The Council willingly made land available and the Association applied to the Hospitals and Health Services Commission for a Community Health Grant.

The Association lobbied in Melbourne. Mr Maling and the Steering Committee lobbied The Prime Minister, in whose electorate Portland was situated, and local parliamentary representatives all of whom were supportive. The Council added its weight and influence and the Hospital Board extended its co-operation.

At the beginning of 1980, the state Minister for Health, the Hon Bill Borthwick announced a Community Health Centre would be established at Portland. Initially it would use the portable buildings then being used by the Sunbury Community Health Centre. These would become available later in the year. They became available in a matter of months. The department officer charged with responsibility for moving the buildings, asked the Council if he could sight the title of the land. The Council then received a major shock. It did not own the land. Fortunately ownership was traced to another government authority and the necessary transfer made.

Although the Steering Committee asked to be, and indeed was, constituted as a branch of the Association, and the local Community wished the Association with its extensive knowledge to remain the operator, this was not thought to be wise. The Alcoa project was taking off. The influx of workers was creating some tensions which would not be understood in Melbourne. A changing emphasis in demand could also alter the direction and work of the Centre and leave the Association as a minor user.

The Committee considered the achievements remarkable in such a brief period of time but decided to withdraw from what had been a happy partnership and let the Community Health Centre proceed as an independent locally controlled operation. The Welfare Officer, Mrs Sharon Muldoon used the centre as a base for local services until 1986. The area was then serviced from Warrnambool.

LODDON MALLEE REGION

Mirridong. The Home and Centre at Bendigo has been established as the base for service to the region.

MILDURA. The Mildura Auxiliary was formed in 1951 and worked very hard for the Association. The members effort was the more notable for two reasons. Firstly, distance meant they had limited contact with Head Office. Secondly, the city had a mixed allegiance. It was part of a Mildura, Broken Hill, Adelaide axis. The first two cities felt themselves isolated and poorly treated by their capital cities. They were also closer to Adelaide for shopping and other services.

John Taylor, the Welfare Officer based on Bendigo, began visiting the area in the late 1960s. The Auxiliary ladies had already established contact with a number of blind people and helped them in a variety of ways. The President, Mrs Clarice Ramsey a tower of strength, advocated some form of local service.

The first meeting of the Sunraysia Club for the Blind was held in St Andrews Presbyterian, later Uniting Church Hall on March 19,1973. Some 25 blind members were present.

The Association Research Officer, Miss Elizabeth Travers conducted a survey of facilities and community services in the region. The 1973 Victorian Year Book showed a population of 14,280 persons in the Mildura City and a further 15,290 in Mildura Shire. Persons 60 years and over totalled 3715. With one or two exceptions the facilities and services available were good. Miss Travers interviewed blind people along the river Murray as far as Swan Hill. The message was clear. In so far as accommodation was concerned they preferred to be with sighted people in their own area. They did feel a need for supportive contact with other blind people and specialist services. The limited population did not justify the establishment of a fully fledged branch. The isolation meant a continuing local service would be both beneficial and appreciated.

Mr Merry from the service aspect and Mr Pearson from the fund raising angle maintained contact with Mildura until a Welfare Officer was appointed to the region in 1978.

Mr Merry also co-operated with the Hospital in its endeavours to obtain approval for a Coimunity Day Centre and other facilities which the Association would have used. The Health Commission bureaucracy used funding cutbacks as the reason for non action.

Age finally took its toll of the Auxiliary members who had shown remarkable loyalty and served for a long period of years. Despite their small number they continued until 1990. The Auxiliary then went into recess.

A hiccup occurred in 1991 when the centre was closed due to financial restrictions. The volunteers decided to to continue to provide a Day Centre Programme and formed the Mildura Day Services Auxiliary. They maintained pressure on Head Office and the Government. The closure was only of short duration.

Since 1993 a five day reception service for blind people has been operated from the new Mallee Family Care Centre. Welfare services have been restored and there are regular visits from specialists in different aspects of visual impairment and independent living skills training. Telephone Support and Companion Visiting Programmes have been established. An ethnic Telelink Program funded by the Home

and Community Care Service is also provided to sighted, non English speaking, Turkish and Italian people.

Echuca. A Day Centre at Echuca supported by the RVIB was in danger of closing in 1992 following the decision of the RVIB to rationalise services. Following discussion the Association guaranteed its continuance.

Maryborough. Kalparrin, Maryborough, commenced in 1992 with a Commonwealth Home and Community Care grant of \$22,000. It serves people both with and without visual impairment and operates three days a week from the Football Club rooms. Currently there are 35 members and 23 volunteers.

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS REGION.

Kelston Ballarat is the base for services in this region.

Avoca. In 1994 a fortnightly service was commenced in this town which has a higher than average aged population but lacks day services for older people with disabilities. The Avoca Senior Citizens made their clubrooms available as a project partnership.

Warracknabeal. In 1995 a service was based in the premises of the District Hospital. Seventy new referrals were received in the first six months.

State coverage. By 1995 the Association's aim of providing a state wide regional service and tele support programme had been achieved. with the claim. that 90 percent of vision impaired people were within an hours drive of a service centre Forty seven per cent of the staff are located outside of the metropolitan area.

24. METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT.

Vibrant with life, industry and activity was the history of the Blind Citizens Community Centre after the opening of the new wing in 1966. The new staff members accepted the challenge offered and kept introducing new services. Volunteers made notable contributions. Geoff Arnold, a Rotarian and retired electrical engineer, had been making special tools and jigs for use in the Elanora Craft Room . He now expanded his output to meet the demands of Kooyong and the other centres. This brought his skills to the attention of other charitable organisations and soon demand far exceeded his ability to supply. Bruce Kingsmill assisted in the men's workshop. Edwin Baynton gave notable assistance in the electronics field. Joe Talia successfully converted a standard TV set to permit its use in the Low Vision Clinic in conjunction with a reading machine. Sold or loaned to low vision patients, Closed Circuit TV units became a powerful tool in the rehabilitation programme.

The Kooyong Building Committee was reclassified as a Branch Committee. Added to its membership were Messrs Reid , Braim and Banks from the General Committee; Mrs Billee Fitzgerald representing the Volunteer Service Group; Mrs Robyn Ramsay the Springfield Auxiliary and Mr Ern Giles the evening and weekend activities of the blind members.

Mr Colin Trumble continued as Chairman until 1972, when pressure of business necessitated his resignation. Mr Brian Sargood accepted appointment, became deeply involved and was a tower of strength during the years of developing services. In 1978 he resigned to fulfil an ambition of many years - to sail around the world in his yacht. His crew was his wife Marion, a member of the Springfield Auxiliary and a long serving volunteer at the Centre. Mr John King, a Rotarian and business man motivated towards community service, then accepted the responsibility of Chairman. The outstanding events of his distinguished leadership were the development of Radio for the Print Handicapped and the building of the Vision Resource Centre. Mr King served until 1989. He handed on the task to Committee Member, Mrs Alwynne Jona, who continues to lead the team. As a young lady, Mrs Jona had worked with Mr Lightfoot. She receives the full hearted support of her husband, Mr Walter Jona AM, who was a Victorian Government Minister prior to retirement from Parliament.

Other delegates to represent Springfield Auxiliary during the decade were Mrs Averil Derham, Mrs Mel Jeffries and Mrs Beth Harris. This Auxiliary was responsible for a constant stream of major fund raising events. Two men, Mr Stan Middleton and Mr John McCosh, also joined the Committee and majored on fund raising. An appointment which gave particular satisfaction was that of Mr John Campbell as Hon. Treasurer. Mr Campbell had recently retired as Senior Accountant of the Hospitals and Charities Commission, For more than twenty years the Association had fought him over financial grants. As Mr Campbell struggled with the Kooyong deficit he saw the H&C Commission from a different perspective. Dr. Ruth Williams joined the Committee after relinquishing her practice at the Centre and made a major contribution in the service area.

Blind Member's representatives, Vern Dunstan, Geoff Braim and Norman Banks MBE, and sighted members, Bill O'Donnell, Ern Giles, Stan Middleton and John McCosh died during this period. Each had given devoted and distinguished service.

Mr McCosh left a major bequest to the Association which assisted in building the Vision Resource Centre.

Serving on the Kooyong Committee into the 1980s were blind members Mrs Gloria Pascoe, Mr Arthur Wilkins and well known sighted volunteers in Mesdames Win Biram, Beth Harris, Nell Little and Verna Jeffress. Businessman Malcolm Daubney was also volunteered by Mr. John Wicking. Not long afterwards Mr Daubney was posted to Singapore, became involved in services to blind people in that country and served on the Committee of the Singapore Association for the Blind for five years. Mr Daubney rejoined the Kooyong Branch Committee on his return and more recently was appointed to the Board of the Association. The ladies were extensively involved in fundraising ventures. Beth Harris was a prominent advocate of a lapel badge for volunteers indicating years of service. The suggestion was adopted by the General Committee and applied throughout the Association. The premier recognition, a medallion for fifteen and over years of service, was designated the Tilly Aston award.

Within a year of opening the space and facilities of the 1966 wing were fully utilised. In 1968 Mr Lightfoot approached the Buckland Trust for assistance to purchase one of the two blocks of flats in front of the Centre. A gift of \$20,000 was received. The Hospital and Charities Commission also provided financial assistance. Three of the four flats were used by the Doctor, Sister, Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, Hairdresser and Low Vision Clinic, the other as a caretaker's residence. From it Bryan and Peg Sitlington with their sons Don and Robert and later Mr. and Mrs John Sturgeon exercised a necessary supervisory function and security role. In 1970 the second block of two flats in front of the centre was purchased. They were used for administrative offices and a base for regional services. The purchase of these blocks of flats restored the property to the original area secured by Mr Paterson.

Blind from birth, Miss Eva Fisher had participated in Kooyong activities since the opening of the Clubhouse.. It was the centre of her life and she valued deeply the friendships she had made. As a permanent expression of her appreciation she determined to present a meaningful sculpture. Noted Melbourne sculpter Mr Ian Bow was commissioned. Before commencing the work he went through a traumatic period in which he lost his own vision. The devastating experience gave deeper feeling and meaning to his work. Entitled Urban Cycle, the six panel metal sculpture depicts the evolution of the locality. Sited in front of Paterson Hall it was unveiled in October 1975.

In 1976 when still more space was required a two storey extension was made to the 1966 wing of the Centre. The lower floor was used for materials storage. The upper floor provided increased areas for blind members activities and group meetings.

Decentralisation During the last quarter of 1972 Senior Staff grasped the prickly nettle. The purchase of the flats had only provided temporary relief. With 12 referrals a week the BCCC had reached its maximum capacity. Many more could be expected from the Low Vision Clinic.

The BCCC was drawing its clientele from the eastern and south eastern suburbs. 55 percent of the members attending lived within 5 miles. Another 38 percent lived within 10 miles. Transport from northern and western suburbs was a real problem. It was unreasonable to continue asking voluntary drivers from the south eastern suburbs,

after dropping their children at school, to go out to Broadmeadows, Reservoir, Sunshine or Altona bring the members in and then take them home again before picking up their children in the afternoon.

In addition, a number of the members were very elderly, semi invalids, even wheel chair cases. They were really outside the scope of Kooyong but still needed assistance in a number of ways. In many cases a few hours' relief was essential for the carers.

Decentralisation was the answer. A decision was made to look for suitable premises which could be rented in both the northern and western suburbs. Each centre should be able to cope with 25 members. The services of an occupational therapist, handcraft teacher, welfare officer and mobility officer would need to be on call. These would be provided from Kooyong. Community services and professionals would be used whenever available or possible. Local volunteer participation was essential. The cost was estimated at \$5 per blind person per session. At this time Mr Gordon Box was appointed as Senior Rehabilitation Counsellor. Later he succeeded Mr Lindsay McMillan as Manager of the BCCC.

NORTHERN SUBURBS. The Northern Suburbs Auxiliary was formed at a meeting chaired by Mr Bob Pearson at the Glenroy Bowling Club in September 1973. The prime movers were a number of voluntary drivers led by Mrs Min Wencke who previously gave their services to Kooyong. The Auxiliary attracted to its membership a number of the lady bowlers. Mrs Wencke was elected President. The Auxiliary, supported by Mr Ken Wencke as Treasurer, raised funds and the nucleus of Kooyong voluntary drivers worked with management and Mr Gordon Merry in setting up and developing the first perimeter service. This was established with six members in the Oak Park Swimming Pool Hall in 1973, moved to the Oak Park Guides Hall in 1974 with 30 members, then to St Alban's Church Hall in 1976.

In 1987 a Hall was purchased from the Uniting Church for \$240,000. Extensive renovations cost \$135,000. Located at the corner of Albion and Lawson Sts. Essendon, the centre was opened in August 1987 by the Hon Caroline Hogg and named the Arthur Wilkins Centre in memory of Mr Wilkins and his service to the area..

As part of the 1995 Centenary appeal and programme the Arthur Wilkins Centre has been enlarged to regional status. It will be the equivalent of Kooyong in the North /Western Suburbs. Mrs Jane Gallo was appointed the first Regional Manager. Service staff moved in early in 1995.

EASTERN SUBURBS. Don Brady dreamed of a place where his blind invalid wife could be cared for while he was at work. He talked to friends involved in Ringwood welfare services and community organisations. He called a public meeting in February 1973. A Committee of 11 persons was formed. Four of them were blind members of the Association. The objective was to establish a drop-in centre for the vision impaired living in the outer eastern suburbs.

Four months later the Committee decided to rent the Presbyterian Church Manse at Heathmont. Rent and other costs were underwritten by the Villa Maria Society, RVIB, and Association. The Mayor of Ringwood, Cr. Lawrie Lawrenson, was elected

President of what was constituted the Maroondah Centre for the Visually Handicapped. The Mayoress, Mrs. Glida Lawrenson, accepted the Presidency of an Auxiliary formed to raise the operating funds. The centre was commonly called Penumbra meaning "half in shadow".

As the years passed the other organisations dropped out and responsibility fell increasingly on the Association. Particularly active on the Penumbra Committee were Association blind members John Miersch and Margaret Eisenbach. In February 1984, the inaugural President Lawrie Laurenson, stood down. Mr Bryan Sitlington was elected to the position and served for two years. The Association then withdrew and the centre continued operation as a separate, independent organisation. It has since closed.

NORTH EASTERN SUBURBS. With the approval and co-operation of Dr. Lorna King the Medical Superintendent and Miss Rosemary Cummings the Senior Occupational Therapist a group was commenced in the Janet Day Centre, Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital in April 1978. The appointment of a new Medical Superintendent who looked up the book of rules and said civilian outside groups were not permitted to function in a Departmental Hospital, added to cutbacks in the Hospital budget funding in 1980 meant the Hospital had to withdraw from the programme. A worthwhile gain was the recruitment of Heidelberg staff member Mrs Jennifer Gibbons.

Activities were then moved to the Salvation Army Hall at Macleod where they continue. The centre has been supported by a strong and committed band of volunteers from the commencement. Staff are provided from the H.M.Lightfoot Centre.

WESTERN SUBURBS. The Western suburbs were the hardest area to activate. Largely industrial, strongly working class, predominantly ethnic, the community looked to government to provide for its needs.

Many blind people had been located and were waiting to enter the programme. The Footscray Lions Club was outstanding and arranged a roster among members to transport some blind people to Kooyong.

After efforts spanning some years a group of volunteers was gathered and a weekly service was commenced in St Andrews Church Hall. The service was opened by the local member Mr Ralph Willis MHR, in August 1975. In the early 1980's it moved to the Gordon St. Church of Christ. The area proved difficult to light adequately for the low vision members. In the early 1990s efforts were made to secure alternative accommodation . These were unsuccessful and the service was moved to the Arthur Wilkins Centre.

In 1993 a Confident Living Programme was launched at the Community Health Centre at Werribee. This satellite group meets as a self help group.

SOUTHERN SUBURBS. At Mordialloc, a bayside group began operating in a small way as a social gathering of non sighted neighbours in the home of Mrs Pat Sykes, a

vision impaired lady who attended Kooyong. The numbers attending increased rapidly necessitating a move. It settled down in the Ellen McLean Hall as a self help group under the watchful care of Mr Arthur Nothling, and celebrated its 19th birthday in March 1995. There were then 43 persons on the roll with an average attendance of some 30 persons. Mrs Sykes had been appointed to the staff as manager of the Adapt Centre at Kooyong. Mr Bryan Sitlington followed Mr. Arthur Nothling.

SPORT AND RECREATION. A belief that disabled people were on the brink of breaking into the sporting and recreational fields in a big way and that young blind people would have a prominent role was behind the inclusion of a small gymnasium in the 1966 wing at Kooyong. The move was premature. There was not a Recreational Officer on the staff and the few younger blind sportsmen preferred to train at their local gym or with their parent sporting club. The gym area was a welcome addition to other programme activities.

Towards the end of 1970 Mr. Norman Pressey was appointed Programme Co-Ordinator at Kooyong. He had just returned from Canada where he had obtained a B.Sc. majoring in Physical Education, and M.Sc. majoring in Recreational Management. While with the Association Mr Pressey completed specialist courses at the National Guide Dog Centre in Orientation and Mobility and the new electronic devices coming on to the market. Sport and recreation were, naturally, part of his overall interest.

In December 1972 the Victorian Government proclaimed the Youth Sport and Recreation Act, the first of its kind in Australia. Recreation and Sport for the Disabled, which had been ignored and neglected, now became a live issue. Noted league footballer, Brian Dixon MP. was the Minister. The Association immediately began exploratory discussions with the Department. A recreational complex with heated swimming pool was proposed for Kooyong. As a matter of policy the pool would be made available to other handicapped groups. The Department was interested. John Cook contacted the other disabled groups who declared themselves in favour of the project. In June 1974 the Department agreed in principle to funding a Recreational Centre. The Minister announced the fact publicly and preliminary planning commenced. In June 1975, the Department advised in writing it was now trying to arrange with the Victorian Committee of the Australian Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled for the establishment of a Committee which would more fully represent all disabled organisations.

The Association was not naive enough to provide the land, at least 50 percent of the building cost and all the operating costs and be dictated to by an outside Committee. In July 1975 the Department was advised the proposal was not acceptable and the Association would not be proceeding with the project. With the Association out the project never did proceed.

Public advertisements announced funding was available from the Department for the appointment of Recreation Officers. The Association applied. The application form of many pages was a bureaucrat's delight and an affront to commonsense. The Association was then told grants would only be made to Councils and that the appointee had to serve all local sporting and recreational groups. The Association decided to proceed independently.

In 1976, Mr Peter Rickards, a young vision impaired man who had just graduated with a Diploma in Recreation was appointed Recreation Officer. He rode to work on a bicycle. Staff were petrified as he came careering down the Glenferrie Rd. hill. This quiet, calm, slow speaking young man, who went his own way no matter what, could not understand why. By keeping to the side of the road he could just make out the gutter. As was later appreciated, this was only one indication of his venturesome spirit.

In May 1977 the Glenferrie Rotary Club organised the first River Run from Alexandra Gardens to the Kooyong Centre. The event attracted more than 2000 entrants and became an annual feature. The proceeds were used to develop sporting and recreational activities.

Sporting success soon followed. Sixteen countries participated in the Far East and South Pacific Games in Sydney in 1977. Six of these countries entered teams of blind competitors. Blind staff members from the Association won six medals. At the games the National Blind Sporting Association was formed. Ivan Molloy was elected President and Peter Rickards, Hon. Secretary.

April 1979 saw Jeff McNeill, a young blind Association Welfare Officer, representing Australia at the International Symposium on Sport for the Blind in Yugoslavia. Jeff's hobby was gold fossicking and his sport, open competition running.

In January 1980 Mrs. Gloria Pascoe, a lady of great spirit and competence was one of three Victorians selected for the Australian Blind Bowling team to take part in the Olympics for the Disabled in Holland. She won one gold and one silver medal. The major part of the funding was raised by Mrs Muriel Downie. Mrs Downie was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1991. The blind members elected Mrs Pascoe to the General Committee in 1982. She served until 1990 when she resigned due to deteriorating hearing.

The same month, January 1980, Ivan Molloy, another exceptional blind sportsman, was in Bombay teaching blind Indians how to play cricket. The following year he took a group of 16 blind and three sighted sportsmen to Sri Lanka to foster blind cricket, bowls, table tennis and leisure time activities. He personally raised the bulk of the funding. Ivan was awarded the medal of the Order of Australia in 1986.

Peter Rickards was a competitor in the Second Winter Olympics for the Disabled in Norway. He won a bronze medal in the cross country skiing. Back home he conducted cross-country training classes for blind skiers at Falls Creek, formed the Victorian Disabled Skiers' Association covering all disabilities, was founding President and served in that capacity for six years.

In April 1980 the Guiding Light Square Dance Club performed at the International Square Dance convention in Adelaide with caller Colin Fox. In 1984 nine blind members of the team performed before 10,000 people at the World Square Dance Convention in Winnipeg, Canada. This group, too, was self funded.

The Australian National Games for the Disabled in Sydney in April 1981, were a triumph for Association blind staff members. Miss Diane Temby competing in the

track and field events won six gold medals, breaking three world and one Australian record. Peter Rickards in the swimming section won one gold and three bronze. Jeff McNeill won gold in the 800m, 1500m and 5000m athletics events.

By the time of the Far East and South Pacific Games in Hong Kong in 1982, 17 of the 23 countries competing were able to enter teams of blind competitors. At the Australian National Games in 1984, 300 Australian blind athletes competed.

How it came about is not now clear but a tandem bicycle was donated to the Association in 1975. That, of course, triggered off Sir Hubert Opperman, who felt tandem bike riding was an ideal activity for young blind people and should be promoted. Wayne Reid agreed and raised funds to purchase six tandem bikes. To demonstrate how easy it was and gain some publicity, Oppy and Arthur Wilkins gave a demonstration ride at Elanora. They went for a spin around the block - and got hopelessly lost. A car was sent to search for them. To this day Oppy cannot explain how it happened, apart from the possibility that Arthur led him astray.

Enthused by his vision Oppy then proposed a bike ride from Sydney to Melbourne to promote the sport and publicise the ability of young blind people. There were polite protests as the ride from Sydney to Melbourne along the Hume Highway was seen as too dangerous for any bike rider. Oppy was not to be dissuaded from the principle and a ride from Adelaide to Melbourne was agreed upon.

The team consisted of blind members Neville Kerr, Alan Nuske, Stephen Jolley, Tim Palmer, Carmel Delaney and Catherine Hannah. Sighted riders were Bob Panter and Len Laycock both professionals. Bob Pearson and John Cook drove the mini buses and handled media publicity. Sister Toni Cocks went along to massage sore legs and if need be, apply soothing balm to aching bodies. Arthur Wilkins was team leader and told not to ride, but of course he did. This project in September 1975 was an unqualified success. Tremendous goodwill and interest was created and media publicity in towns along the route was overwhelming. The team received a civic reception at the Melbourne Town Hall on their return home. A Tandem Bicycle Club was formed.

Sport and recreational activities for blind Australians had exploded into a mainstream activity in seven short years. The pioneering efforts of the Association for the Blind and the encouragement and support given by the Australian National Council of and for the Blind were major factors. The National Blind Sports Association now attracts some government funding.

Peter Rickards, showing tremendous persistence, keeps discovering and organising new fields for the visually impaired to conquer. He has written a series of Handbooks promoting sports for the vision impaired. His own most recent venture has been sailing. Despite little experience he returned recently from an international blind sailing competition in Auckland, NZ with the bronze medal. Participation in the Moomba Dragon Race has provided a challenge for a number of visually impaired young people. The choice is there for all. Tennis, golf, sailing, water skiing. Four blind sports persons have Victorian Institute of Sports Scholarships and one has an Australian Institute Scholarship.

In 1993, Maurice Gleeson, the blind Welfare Officer serving the Western Suburbs and his brother Nick, also blind, toured the U.S. and U.K. by themselves. They have a different hobby. As owners of a racehorse, they are involved in the sport of kings.

The Coonara Great Race, a Moomba event in 1986 provided another adventure challenge and was an excellent opportunity to show that blind people could participate in community events. This race from Sydney to Melbourne was based on Jules Verne's *'Around the world in 80 Days'*. It involved travel dressed in period costume in a hot air balloon, tiger moth aircraft, 1905 steam engine, penny farthing bicycle, vintage fire engine and motor cycle with sidecar.

Twenty five teams participated. One was from the Association. The members were Mr Barry Furness and Mrs Sandy Pelling, sighted. Mrs Doris Nothling, then in her seventies and forever game to try anything and Mr Maurice Gleeson represented the blind members. The team members were excellent ambassadors for the Association. Extensive publicity was given and a warm welcome received everywhere they went. At the end of the race they had the satisfaction of taking out the second prize of \$10,000. in open competition. The winners were TV personality Tony Barber and a team from Sale of the Century.

Active outdoor sports, less strenuous indoor activities or quiet intellectually stimulating recreation such as chess by telephone, will all be found in self help groups within the perimeters of the Association. Participation in some form of activity is now regarded as the norm. Focus on this area by the Association has lessened in the 1990's due to funding cutbacks.

Sports for the Disabled are now recognised world wide and associated with the Commonwealth and Olympic Games. The achievements of vision impaired women and men in this field could not even have been dreamed of by the visionary young Tilly Aston of the 1890's.

25. SEEING AND HEARING

LOW VISION CLINIC. If you are constantly told you are blind and treated as a blind person you will start acting as a blind person even though you have some useful vision.

The response of blind persons to the low vision aid developed by Mr Joe Lederer in 1953 had a profound effect on John Wilson. Intuitively he felt the blindness system was wrong; that people with some vision should not be placed in the 'too hard' category. He was new and profoundly ignorant. Even to question conventional, long established wisdom seemed traitorous. Thereafter he followed keenly in overseas journals the development of what became known as Low Vision Services. Three countries stood out, the U.K., U.S. and Sweden. Possibly due to its social welfare system Sweden appeared to be ahead of the others.

Dr. Gerard Crock was appointed to the first Chair of Ophthalmology, established at the University of Melbourne in 1958. His Department was based at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital. His patients included a number of the blind members. A close relationship developed between Professor Crock and the Association.

In the late 1960s Senior Executives at their regular meetings discussed low vision. They knew that 75 percent to 80 percent of blind people, thanks to greater medical knowledge and new techniques, retained some residual vision. This residual vision varied in degree and location. If the amount and area of remaining vision could be identified, it was now possible in many cases to prescribe assistance from among a range of optical aids.

The primary concern of ophthalmologists was diseases of the eyes. They would not have the time required nor possibly the interest in the detail involved. The task was one for optometrists whose area was the measurement of vision and prescription of spectacles. Again the catch was the time required for the examination. It was not an economic feasibility for an optometrist in general practice. As the patients would have to be first seen by and cleared by the ophthalmologists a co-operative effort would be needed. This appeared an insurmountable hurdle as the two groups did not fraternise.

Executive staff concluded low vision services had the potential to benefit persons with some vision defects and had a major role to play in helping visually impaired people. They believed effort should be directed not to teaching people with some residual sight to be blind but to teach them to function as sighted people. This was a revolutionary concept. Despite all the foreseen negatives they proposed to the General Committee that the Association pursue the matter and that such a service be based at Kooyong. Both the General and Kooyong Committees concurred.

Mr Wilkins was one of Professor Crock's patients and brought the subject up during a consultation. Professor Crock then joined representatives of the Committees and Staff for lunch in October 1970. He agreed with the reasoning, emphasised the many difficulties which would be met and promised his support.

When the Association's intention became known the universal response was 'it couldn't be done'. Realism shouted 'give up and forget it'. In view of the major financial crisis then facing the Association, this might have seemed an acceptable excuse. It was not

taken. Four major problems were seen. Space, finance, acquiring a suitable Administrator and harnessing the goodwill and help of the two eye care bodies. Mr Brian Sargood, Chairman of the Kooyong Branch Committee, threw his weight behind the project and was a source of much strength.

Space was obtained by requisitioning a room in one of the flats. It was not a large room. Later when eye tests were being carried out the patient had to sit out in the passage and look through the doorway to obtain the required focal length. Mr Brian Sargood approached the Hecht Trust. The result was a grant of \$7500. for equipment. The Hecht Trust also made a grant of \$2500. to cover operating costs for the first year.

The Director of the College of Optometry was Dr. Barry Cole. His mother attended Kooyong and he knew of its services and reputation. Contacted by Mr Wilkins, he responded favourably and happily, promising all possible assistance and co-operation. The College of Optometry loaned equipment until that ordered by the Association arrived from overseas.

The facts as they were then known, pointed to the Administrator as the key person who, in establishing and maintaining working relationships between the two eye care professions, would make or break the new endeavour. Mr. Ralph Skilbeck, who at this time was back with the Association as Manager, Elanora, had previously been Deputy Manager, Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital. From this source he heard that Sister Margaret Biggs, [later Sister Margaret Lawrence.] a former member of the hospital staff who was working as a Rehabilitation Officer with the blind in Queensland, was returning to Melbourne. Sister Biggs had a fine record and enviable reputation. She was one of only two Sisters in Australia who were known to have completed a Low Vision training course at Moorfields Eye Hospital London. Miss Biggs became Supervisor of Rehabilitation Services at Kooyong in 1970, took charge of the Clinic in 1971 and was a key person in its establishment and later operation.

Professor Crock, Dr. Cole and John Wilson met to define the roles of the three bodies. Professor Crock undertook to make an ophthalmologist available from his department. The young men who gave service are now leading members of their profession with above average understanding of vision impaired people. One, Dr. Hugh Taylor, was appointed to the Chair when Professor Crock retired in 1991.

Dr Cole provided the optometrists. Those who participated in the early days achieved high honour or established successful private practices. The first, Mr Ian Bailey was appointed a Professor of Optometry at Berkeley University, California. The second, Miss Jan Lovie, as the result of a generous donation from Mr John McCosh, received an Association Research Scholarship to enable her to undertake studies for her Master of Science Degree. Later, as Mrs Jan Kitchin, she was appointed Senior Lecturer at the Brisbane College of Optometry. Miss Kate Doherty established a private practice specialising in children's eye problems. Miss Helen Robbins remained with the Clinic and became prominent both as a lecturer and practitioner.

Mr Bailey had a major role in setting up the clinic and in its early operation. His enthusiasm, professional knowledge and work schedule highlighted the complexities of the work of such a the clinic. In conjunction with Jan Lovie the Bailey Lovie Eye Chart was developed. This eye chart was designed scientifically to measure the sight

of persons with little vision. It received wide acceptance both nationally and internationally and is now, with variations, used world wide.

The present Senior Optometric Consultant, Dr. Alan Johnson, who also served in the Clinic from its commencement, succeeded Mr Bailey. A delightful person and highly gifted professional practitioner he has great empathy with and understanding of visually impaired persons. Dr Johnson, is Senior Lecturer at the College of Optometry. He has gained international recognition and is sought as a speaker at scientific conferences. Dr Johnson has been involved in the establishment of the Low Vision Clinics in South East Asia and has visited China on a number of occasions as a World Health Organisation Consultant. He was appointed Associate Professor in 1994.

The Association provided the Administrator and ancillary staff for the Clinic, arranged the appointments, provided follow up programmes and met the cost. Nothing was committed to paper. Success depended entirely on the integrity of those involved.

Professor Gerard Crock received the award of Officer of the Order of Australia in 1985 and Professor Barry Cole the same honour in 1987.

The first patients were seen on Wednesday, February 23, 1972. The start was low key - one session a week, three patients a session. A famous quotation of Miss Helen Keller's applied: "While they were saying among themselves it cannot be done, it was done"

Sister Biggs was a member of a medical family and familiar with the intricacies of medical etiquette. From the commencement Dr. Kenneth Howsam Medical Superintendent of the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital was supportive and referred patients. On the other hand ophthalmologists in private practice were, understandably, not keen to refer their patients. as the level and quality of service was unknown. Aware of the sensitive issues involved, Sister Biggs, through excellence of service, first class administration and follow up contacts, was able to win them over.

The first year there were 140 referrals of which 8 came from private ophthalmologists. The next year there were 301 referrals of which 72 were from private phthalmologists. Each patient required three hours of attention spread over three or four visits. Although the number of sessions was increased the waiting list grew to unacceptable levels. This threatened external confidence. The 1974/75 budget of \$40,000 threatened internal confidence and cessation of the service.

Two steps were taken. The first, in view of the Association's financial circumstances was regarded by many as unwise. Next to the south block of flats with a frontage to Glenferrie Rd. was a decrepit garage and motor repair shop. This had been seen by the Committee as the next expansion site and the owner had promised to advise the BCCC if he ever intended to sell. Some years went past with nothing happening. One day in May 1974, Mr. John Cook felt impelled to go into the garage and enquire as to the owners current thinking. The owner had just resolved to place the building on the market.

With commendable courage and many fears Mr Wicking, the Treasurer Mr. John Wall and the Finance Committee threw their support behind the staff recommendation that it

be purchased. This was done at a cost of \$120,000 which was a fortune to the Association. Mr Wicking still recalls vividly, the worry the deal caused him.

Secondly, the Clinic was the only one of its kind in Australia and was attracting Departmental visitors from Canberra. Although entitlement was said to be doubtful an application was submitted for operational funding under the new Commonwealth Health Programme of the Whitlam Government. Its approval was greeted with joy. Financial assistance granted under this Commonwealth programme still underpins the service. The Association acknowledges the credit due to the officers of the Department.

In 1976 Sister Biggs was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study Low Vision Services in the U.S., Canada and U.K. She returned in time to contribute, in conjunction with the other professionals, to the interior lay out of the remodelled garage. The architect was Mr Kevin Knight of Oakley and Parkes and the contractor Vaughan Constructions.

On July 13, 1977, the Hon. R.J.Hamer, Premier of Victoria unveiled a plaque honouring the major donors. These included the Hospitals and Charities Commission \$30,000. Springfield Auxiliary and Kooyong Family Fair as well as an allocation from the 1974 Guiding Light Appeal. The total cost of the project was \$350,000.

By 1980 referrals had levelled off at between 800 and 1000 a year. The major source of referrals was now ophthalmologists in private practice. The Education Dept. and Schools for the Blind were also routing vision impaired children through the clinic. The children received an excellent, caring service from the Paediatric Ophthalmologist, Dr.Hector MacLean, later Associate Professor of Ophthalmology, the Optometrical team and the medical ancillary specialists.

Clinics were also being established at major branches of the Association. Isolated towns were serviced by a Mobile Sight Conservation Unit donated by the Elanora Auxiliary. Sister Biggs was now assisted by a Deputy, Sister Lorna Maher, a Referrals Officer, Miss Kerry Bounds and a small administration team. She could also call on other specialist services such as Occupational Therapy, Mobility and Social Work from the BCCC staff. The Commonwealth Grant had risen to \$155,000 per annum.

Other events added to the work load and reputation of the clinic. Following the study tour of Sister Biggs to the U.S. a steady stream of Low Vision Practitioners started to visit Kooyong from that country. John Wilson also presented a paper on Low Vision Services at the Fifth Pan Pacific Conference of the International Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled in Singapore, November 1975. This, combined with visits to agencies for the blind in Singapore and Hong Kong, stimulated interest in Asia.

Major General Paul Cullen AC DSO, President of the Australian National Council of and for the Blind requested the Association to promote the service in Asia. The Committee agreed. Sister Biggs visited Singapore and Malaysia at the end of 1979. The U.S. and Asian threads came together in May 1980 when the First Asian Pacific Conference on Low Vision was held at Kooyong under the auspices of the Australian National Council of and for the Blind. Many distinguished speakers participated.

Following the Conference Dr Alan Johnson, Mrs. Jan Kitchen and Sister Biggs, now Mrs Lawrence, assisted in setting up Low Vision Clinics in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong. Sister Lawrence was also asked to assist in the revision of a standard U.S. Text Book on low vision care by Freid and Mehr. Dr. Alfred Rosenbloom wrote in October 1982 following a visit to gather material for a U.S. text book: "It is the finest low vision facility I have seen". He added that in a conjoint study with Dr. Alan Johnson an endeavour would be made "to establish appropriate guidelines for quality low vision care within various kinds of practice setting worldwide, using as a model the Kooyong programme". He also praised the valued assistance received and contribution from the Librarian, Mrs Bernadette Hodgkinson and Research Officer, Miss Ruth Mushin.

In December 1982, thanks to a generous donation from Dr. Hamp of Drouin, Sister Lawrence was able to visit the U.S., present a paper to the American Academy of Optometry on the first ten years of the Kooyong Clinic, and also follow up on low vision developments.

On returning from her Churchill Fellowship study in 1977, five years after the Clinic opened, Sister Lawrence reported to the Committee: "the Clinic has become known and the Association had joined a small circle of low vision practitioners on a world wide basis". A further five years and she reported the Clinic was being held up as a world model.

The ever growing world recognition of the Kooyong Clinic led, in turn, to increased pressure on the Association to host a Second Australian International Conference on Low Vision as a ten year follow up. This Conference was held in 1990 and was opened by His Excellency. the Governor General the Hon Bill Hayden. An outstanding success, it was attended by 270 delegates from 23 countries.

In conjunction with the Low Vision Conference the Association also provided a three day training programme for participants from South Pacific and South East Asian countries. This highlighted the need for low cost low vision aids training kits for less developed countries. A suitable kit was developed and is being trialled by the World Health Organisation.

This conference was a stimulus to all and cemented the the Low Vision Clinic's role as an elite world unit.

By 1994 Low Vision Clinics were in place and operating at ten Association centres. The widening of this service ensured state wide coverage and more than doubled the number of referrals to 2500 a year

Forseeing the possibility that other persons or bodies could spring up and infer, perhaps without warrant, that they were providing a low vision service, the College of Optometry and the Association discussed and placed in writing the *Principles of a Professional Low Vision Service*. These guidelines have the support of ophthalmologists.

RADIO FOR THE PRINT HANDICAPPED. Early in 1974, as was his custom, Mr Gordon Merry was listening to station 3LO on his car radio as he travelled to work. An American, was talking about public interest radio stations which had made their appearance in the U.S. These stations allowed ethnic and special interest groups access to the air waves. There were eight such stations in New York alone.

Mr Merry, who had been a wireless maintenance mechanic in the RAAF during WWII, grasped the possibilities of such a service to blind people. He saw specialised radio as a major communication link for blind persons, a dispenser of information and a solver of isolation and loneliness with their resulting depression. He shared his thinking at a meeting of executive staff. Members showed interest and stored the thought in their minds.

Mr Merry's view was also held by Mr Hideyuki Iwahashi, Director of an agency for the blind in Osaka, Japan. Mr Iwahashi, an Executive Member of the World Council for the Blind, circularised agencies world wide, seeking information on radio programmes available for blind people. The responses were made available to all member bodies. Although very few countries had programmes for blind people, the responses reinforced the conclusion that Radio for the Blind was an area of considerable promise and potential value.

In June 1974, Mr Merry attended the inaugural meeting of the Community Radio Federation. Some of the interested bodies were the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Waterside Workers Union, Women's Electoral Lobby, Parents without Partners, National Trust, Port Phillip Conservation Group, and Gay Liberation.

Various ways and costs of getting a radio station to air were discussed at that meeting. Mr Merry reported back that the group was very articulate and extremely democratic. The project would be either an outstanding success or would never succeed. Executive staff did not think the General Committee and supporters of the Association would wish to be affiliated with such a diverse group and did not pursue membership. Mr Merry was right on both counts. In May 1975 it went on air as 3ZZ, successfully articulated extreme views unacceptable to the authorities and was closed down in July, 1977.

In November 1974 as the upsurge of interest in public broadcasting continued, and a number of able young leaders of the blind with technical knowledge were showing sustained interest, Mr Merry convened a meeting of blind radio enthusiasts. Representatives of all the agencies of and for the blind were invited, the thought being such a service presented a wonderful opportunity for a combined effort. A Committee was formed with Mr Ron McCallum, as President, Mr. Peter Walsh as Secretary and Mr John Machin as Treasurer, The three were non sighted. Each agency also had a representative. Mr Merry represented the Association and Mrs Margaret Fialides the RVIB. The Committee decided after some meetings to be responsible for the preparation and broadcasting of material pertaining to blindness on whatever avenues should become available and to call itself the Radio for the Blind Committee. Some finance was provided by the agencies.

The Radio for the Blind Committee became a member of the Community Radio Federation which was itself campaigning vigorously for a licence. The Commonwealth Government decided that before granting licences to public broadcasting groups it

would ask the ABC to establish an experimental public access station. This development took place in Victoria and resulted in the birth of the aforementioned Access Radio 3ZZ. The Radio for the Blind Committee was offered a half hour programme in prime time every Sunday evening. This was pre taped and went to air under the title '*A Blind Affair*'. John Machin had audio equipment at home and produced the tapes. These were the only programmes the ABC permitted to go to air without vetting. This talented group of mainly young blind people produced and edited to ABC standards, 113 weekly programmes for the station before it was closed.

In May 1976, the Community Radio Federation was itself granted a licence and went to air under the call sign 3CR Community Radio. The Radio for the Blind Committee was allotted a 45 minute time slot each Friday evening. This programme was called '*Broadview*'. A third programme was also produced for 3RMT, later 3RRR, the programme of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.

When 3ZZ closed down in 1977 the Radio for the Blind Committee became hesitant about the security of 3CR. The decision was made to establish its own radio station. In 1977 in NSW a sister organisation called the Sydney Radio Foundation for the Print Handicapped was formed. Combined representations were made to the Minister for Posts and Telecommunications, Mr Tony Staley and his department. Similar Radio Stations were being or had been formed in Canberra, Hobart and Brisbane. Perth also was considering the subject. The Minister took a personal interest. He advised a Victorian delegation he did not have the personal power to grant a licence. The delegation, which had studied the relevant acts, told him he had residual powers under the Wireless Telegraphy Act. A Senior Departmental Officer, Mr Roger Smith, who was most helpful throughout, confirmed the fact.

The Handicapped Persons Assistance Act had recently been promulgated. This act covered Print Disabled. Mr Smith expressed the view that if the proposed service had a wider base it could be classified as a legitimate special broadcast service. Such a service would have a number of advantages.

In 1978 the Minister had Broadcast Licences granted to each of the print handicapped groups. However, because of the Ministers' limited personal powers, these were not on the broadcast band but the Marine Band. This meant the number of listeners was greatly restricted.

At the time there was much debate as to whether the Radio Service would finally end up on the AM or FM band. The feeling was it could be the FM band. The FM band had a three letter prefix. In discussion with the Minister and Mr Smith, agreement was reached that the title should be 'Radio for the Print Handicapped', abbreviated to RPH.

The Radio for the Blind Committee converted to the Radio for the Print Handicapped [Vic] Co-op in February 1979. Mr Stephen Jolley was elected President and Mr Gordon Merry, Hon. Secretary. The difficulties of the past were nothing compared to the complex problems now confronting the group. A number of sub-committees were formed with blind persons as convenors. These covered Programme - Hugh Jeffrey; Personnel - Stephen Jolley; Finance - Ian Westerland; Technical - John Machin; Legal - Ron McCallum. Mr Neil McCrae, a sighted person with his own business, gave invaluable help as honorary technical adviser. He remains a constant and irreplaceable honorary consultant.

The Co-op soon realised it could not manage without outside help. The Managers of the commercial radio stations were helpful with advice and donations of superseded equipment. Mr. Maurice McKernan, Manager of the Villa Maria Society, made space available at 7 Donald St, Prahran, for studios. The conversions and technical installations carried out by Serge Bankovsky, the Jolley family, Neville Kerr, John Machin, John Simpson and a number of other young blind persons, were a convincing demonstration of ability.

The RPH Co-op requested further financial assistance. Association staff recommended to the Committee that it fund a Station Manager. Mr Norman Banks MBE, a well regarded broadcaster and a member of the Association Committee, stressed the importance of professionalism without which the Radio Station would inevitably fail. The Co-op was extremely fortunate to obtain the services of Mr Paul Savage an ex ABC staff member who undertook to serve a year in order to get the station off the ground. Paul was assisted by his wife who graciously acted as honorary hostess. The Annual Meeting of the Co-op recorded that without the very real help of the Association and Villa Maria Society the project would have foundered.

Radio Station 3RPH Information Radio, went on air in 1981 on a frequency of 1705Khz with an output power of 500 watts from a transmitter based in Collingwood. The transmitter had been built from bits and pieces in the garage of Dale Butler of 3CR. This station also allowed 3RPH to diplex on its antenna. 3RPH broadcast for three hours on three evenings a week. When Neil McCrae saw the tangle of wires in the studio at 7 Donald St and the transmitting equipment, his opinion was expressed in a simple sentence, "an accident waiting to happen".

While in the U.S. in 1982 John Wilson questioned extensively the value and purpose of Radio Reading Services. At the time there were some 300 such services on air. The question constantly thrown back to him was, "Would blind people continue to listen and the number of stations keep increasing if there was not a need?" In Washington he spent time with Dr. Margaret Rockwell Phanstiehl, Director of *'The Washington Ear'*, looking at physical requirements, programming, staffing and volunteer input. The minimum staff was seen as three and volunteers were extensively used. All volunteers wishing to go on air were auditioned for "on air" presentation. Approximately 50 per cent failed.

Looking to the future, Association Executive Staff saw special interest radio could be incorporated as an integral part of the Association programme. It would serve valuable functions as a news disseminator, information provider, education medium, service alternate and as a public relations and fund raising channel. They also saw it as having application to a much wider community. This was later confirmed by a survey of handicapped people carried out by the Bureau of Statistics in 1981. The survey found in relation to all handicapped persons aged 10 years and over 9.7 percent had difficulty in holding a book or magazine or turning pages and 25 percent had difficulty reading a book. An Australian Illiteracy Board Circular of 1983 estimated that 10 percent or 1.3 million of the population was functionally illiterate.

Discussions were held with 3RPH Directors. Association Executive Staff indicated they could not recommend the Committee spend considerable public funds on the programme as it then existed. The position was summarised in a report to the

Committee in October 1982. From a negative viewpoint the station was still only on air three evenings a week; it was hobby not commercial level; it suffered from being low powered; it was on an unsuitable frequency. Because of these factors the station was not being promoted energetically. The Villa Maria Society, too, needed the house for its own purposes and had asked the station to vacate. On the other hand there were positive features. The Directors were hard working, enthusiastic and had amply demonstrated their perseverance and commitment to the project; vision impaired persons were interested in a quality programme; there was a nucleus of volunteers; an auxiliary had been formed; excellent publicity had been received; good relationships had been established with the metropolitan media; the station was moving to a new frequency 1629Khz, closer to the normal AM. band which ended at 1606.5 Khz. Although some radios would need to be adjusted the listening audience would be increased.

Staff reminded the Committee the Association had proved through Illawarra and the Low Vision Clinic that it could take a raw idea and within 10 years turn it into a world class service. They recommended the Committee seize the initiative which then lay with the Association as the interest and involvement of the other agencies had waned. The Committee again showed its vision, courage and faith by giving approval.

A Special Meeting of the Co-op members was held on November, 22 1982. At the conclusion of the debate Mr Hugh Jeffrey moved, "that this meeting of shareholders of Radio for the Print Handicapped [Victoria] Co-op. Ltd. approves in principle the proposal of the Directors to negotiate a contract with the Association for the Blind in furtherance and for the benefit of radio for the print handicapped in Victoria. Under this contract the Association for the Blind to provide studios, management expertise, personnel and finance for the running of 3RPH under the direction, guidelines, policy and control of the Directors of the Co-operative who shall continue to be responsible to the shareholders." Although the blind co-op members were fiercely independent they passed the motion.

The Agreement with a life of five years, was signed in March 1983. For both Stephen Jolley, President, and Gordon Merry, Secretary/Treasurer, who had carried the heaviest burdens for nine long years, it was a moment of satisfaction. Mr John Cook and Mr Lindsay McMillan had been the principal negotiators for the Association.

3RPH moved to 9 Talbot Cres. Kooyong, part of the H.M.Lightfoot complex, in August 1983. The responsibility of managing 3RPH had been added to the duties of Mr Lindsay McMillan, by then manager of the BCCC. His contribution to the development of the station, particularly in the area of negotiations, was outstanding. An Operations Committee was set up with Mr Arthur Wilkins as Chairman. Representing the Co-op were Mr Stephen Jolley, Mr Neville Kerr and Mrs Margaret Fialides. Like Mr Jolley, Mr Kerr and Mrs Fialides had been associated with the project since its inception. The Association was represented by Mr Gordon Merry, Mrs Di Sher and Mrs Marjory Lane . Mrs Sher was a member of the Coimmittee of the Association specialising in honorary services. Mrs Lane, had just completed her term as International Commissioner for the Girl Guides Association and been snapped up by the Association. Given the choice of several honorary positions she decided on Volunteer Co-ordinator 3RPH. Her value in this position was beyond measure. Mrs Elaine Harris was programme co-ordinator and Mr David Ditchfield, technician. Both were blind persons.

The establishment of Low Vision Clinics at the Branches released the mobile Sight Conservation Unit for other purposes. It was converted to a mobile outside radio studio.

"The information explosion meant there was an even greater need for the service the station provided." The statement was made by the Minister Mr Michael Duffy when he officially opened the new studios in December 1983. This event was the signal to Mrs Lane to start a major drive for volunteers.

Among the first to respond was a long time friend Mrs Marjorie West AM, who completed her term as State Commissioner of Girl Guides in October 1983 and commenced as a 3RPH volunteer in December 1983. As always, she was supported by husband John. Mrs West and Mrs Lane, worked exceptionally well together. Mrs West specialised more on the 'on air' side and was rarely seen without a tape recorder slung over her shoulder, microphone in hand. Both Mrs Lane and Mrs West were indefatigable in addressing service clubs and other groups. The devotion and ability of Mrs West was recognised in her appointment to the Board of the Association in 1993.

The first advertisement brought an eager response of 169 applications. These persons had to be interviewed and slotted into positions for which they were qualified and shifts for which they were available. The positions included readers, presenters, researchers, receptionists, technical operators, production assistants. 'On air' volunteers had to be auditioned and trained. It was a case of the blind leading the blind for Mrs Lane herself had no previous experience. Fortunately among the volunteers were a number of experienced radio and T.V. personalities who freely made their knowledge and skills available. In particular, Brenda Marshall gave invaluable service in training the 'on air' presenters and readers. The keenness of the volunteers was shown by one operator who lived on the Mornington Peninsula and came up to Kooyong each morning in time to take his position on the 6.30am shift. As transmission hours increased so did the number of volunteers.

The first meeting of the Australian Council for Radio for the Print Handicapped was held at the BCCC in February 1984. Stephen Jolley was elected President and Lindsay McMillan, Secretary/Treasurer. The two had been instrumental in forming the body and convening the meeting. All states were represented and reported they had commenced or were in the process of developing similar services. From N.Z. word had been received from Mr. Geoff Gibbs, Executive Director of the N.Z. Foundation for the Blind that his organisation was looking forward to establishing a service and he would be visiting 3RPH as the most advanced radio reading station in Australia.

In 1985 Mr.Lindsay McMillan visited the U.S. on a Churchill Fellowship to further study the operation of Radio Reading Services in anticipation of the erection of a new building and custom designed studios. Included was a visit to the *Washington Ear*. This visit enthused him with the possibility of audio description in theatres. During the year the pressure of many activities resulted in Mr.Stephen Jolley standing down as Chairman of the Co-op. Mr Neville Kerr was chosen to succeed him.

The Minister, Mr Michael Duffy, advised in 1986 his Department had completed a review of RPH stations and it was now appropriate that they be licensed under the Broadcasting Act as Special Interest Stations and utilise normal broadcasting

frequency bands. However because of the Department's heavy workload considerable delay, amounting to years, would occur before the changes took place. The formal public hearing by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal into the RPH licence for Melbourne required the preparation of a 186 page application.

The Agreement between the Association for the Blind and the 3RPH Co-op expired in 1988. The results and relationship had exceeded the expectations of both. There was agreement the consumers voice should continue to be heard. A proposal that the National Federation of Blind Citizens establish a Victorian supporters special interest group was adopted. The Licence was transferred to the Association.

November 1, 1989 saw 3RPH move into custom built studios in the new Vision Resource Centre building at Kooyong. The eight studios, furnished with modern broadcast equipment were designed for easy use by volunteer readers and panel operators and cost \$1 million. Described as a 'champagne' occasion, Melbourne celebrities and popular personalities from television, radio, print media and sport visited the studios and contributed to the programme on the opening day.

In the meantime the Hon Gareth Evans had become Minister for Communications. He was the architect of the metropolitan radio plan for all capital cities. Under this plan, commercial radio stations would tender for FM licences. Part of the tender proceeds were set aside to meet the cost of transferring special public interest stations to the AM Band. 3RPH received the Special Broadcast Licence for Melbourne.

3KZ was one of a number of the commercial stations which transferred to the FM Band. In 1990, 3RPH was transferred to the previous 3KZ transmitter and AM frequency of 1179Khz on the main broadcasting band. Signal strength and quality was improved. Listeners throughout Melbourne and surrounding areas could receive the broadcasts. It added to its transmission the BBC overnight service. In seven years 3RPH had progressed from three evenings a week on the marine band to 24 hour transmission on the open broadcast band.

What an achievement for a small number of dedicated enthusiasts and a large group of committed volunteers! From start to finish the project was the product of positive thinking, devoted service and in the latter stages a remarkable step in faith. When the Vision Resource Centre was designed incorporating the broadcast studios, there was no promise that the Association would receive the Special Broadcast Licence. Further, not until after the studios were operating was the station allocated a frequency on the main broadcasting band.

But was it all worthwhile? The answer, many times over, was 'Yes'. The listening audience extended well beyond the vision impaired. The information given was received with relish. The news reading service was followed by people in their cars as they listened while driving to work, by vision impaired persons who could now participate confidently in discussion and, as an unexpected bonus, was popular with new immigrants learning English, who were able to sit at a table with the newspaper and follow the words as they were spoken. From the death notices through the stock market reports, to how to care for your animals the wide variety of information was welcomed.

A telephone call to Marj. Lane on the Comment Line speaks for itself:

"This is the happiest day of my life," declared an elderly man.

"Why so." asked Mrs Lane . "Is it your birthday or perhaps an important anniversary?"

" No, today through 3RPH I have read the newspapers for the first time in the 40 years since I lost my sight."

The present station manager is Stephen Jolley who has been involved since the beginning. He succeeded Mr Jim Hilcke who resigned due to ill health. The original seeding grant by the Association to the Radio Enthusiasts Club was \$500. The operating cost of 3RPH is now approximately \$250,000 a year. The station is well on its way to be self supporting through sponsorship. Applications have been made for licences to enable establishment of local RPH stations at Mildura and Shepparton. In due course similar applications will be made for Bendigo, Ballarat and Warragul. This will enable state wide coverage.

To complete the story, tribute needs to be paid to the three Commonwealth Ministers involved, Tony Staley, Michael Duffy and Gareth Evans . Each made himself accessible, gave the scheme personal attention, initiated action with minimum delay and cut red tape wherever possible.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION. In 1988 Mr McMillan and Mrs Lane attended a national Radio Reading Conference in Philadelphia, U.S. and then visited the *Washington Ear*. Dr. Margaret Phanstiehl, whose husband Cody was a brilliant electronics engineer, now had Audio description working. This was a system by which blind persons attending theatres and live shows could be given a background description in one ear of what was taking place on the stage and the costumes the actors were wearing, while listening to the play with the other. This gave the blind person far greater enjoyment.

Mrs Lane was asked to relinquish her greatly loved job as volunteer co-ordinator and introduce this new service to Australia. The volunteer force had levelled off at between 350 and 400, the number required to operate the station with the assistance of five paid staff members. Her task had continued to include keeping the volunteer establishment up to strength, allocating an appropriate role to each member and keeping in touch with them all. To this end she had introduced a monthly newsletter which was read avidly. With much regret she handed over to Mrs Mary Armstrong, another volunteer who had answered the first advertisement in 1984.

Lesser or more knowledgeable persons would have quailed before the magnitude of this new challenge. The Audio system required a financial input of some \$25,000. The Hawthorn Rotary Club undertook sponsorship of this sum . The technical aspects were very complex. The answer was found in Mr Rod Brown, Soundmaster at the Victorian Arts Centre. Dr Phanstiehl and her husband were invited to visit Australia and advise. Audio describers had to be auditioned and trained. All obstacles overcome, the system became operative in 1991. The first theatres wired for the system were the Playhouse and the Victorian Arts Centre. The system had one drawback. The price of tickets was beyond the means of many blind persons.

Dismay was widespread when ill health led to the retirement of Mrs Lane from an active executive role in 1993. The 3RPH volunteers presented her with a new name tag designating her position as 'Co-ordinator of Enthusiasm.' Mrs. Lane was

awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1988 in recognition of her meritorious community service.

TELEPHONE SUPPORT. By the beginning of the 1980s new referrals of seriously vision impaired people were averaging three per working day. The Friendly Visiting practice of more than 80 years could no longer be sustained. Neither could Day Centres hope to cope with the inflow.

The answer was seen as a new concept, Telephone Support Programmes. The somewhat vague concepts of Senior Executives was conveyed to Mrs Jennifer Gibbons, a member of the Social Welfare Dept., together with the responsibility of developing a programme.

At the time business tele conferencing was on the horizon. Telecom wished to experiment and develop its tele conferencing system. Mrs Gibbons and Telecom worked together to the mutual advantage of both. Mrs Gibbons received a Churchill Fellowship in 1982 to enable further study in the US and UK. On her return, she was able to advise a number of organisations who sought her help in developing similar programmes.

The benefits multiplied as the programme was developed. Because the medium did not rely on eye contact, facial expression and body language the blind person felt comfortable. The conversation was taking place in the blind persons home environment which encouraged relaxation and participation. It was not intrusive in the sense the person visited did not feel the house had to be orderly and hospitality extended to the welfare officer. It established linkage and generated confidence in the Association.

In its final form the programme had three strands. Each continues to expand. Under the heading of Telelink six to eight blind persons are brought together weekly on a forty five minute group conferencing call. The session is under the leadership of a staff member or volunteer who at times may be a member of the group. Telelink serves a variety of health, rehabilitation and social purposes. The Ethnic Telelink programme provides a regular service to visually impaired members in ten languages - Spanish, French, German, Greek, Russian, Italian, Dutch, Turkish, Cantonese and Vietnamese. In 1994 113 persons were participating.

The Telecare programme offers reassurance to frail aged or disabled people who may be housebound, isolated, lonely or fearful but wish to live independently although feeling the need for some support. It enables those at risk to continue to live in their homes with regular monitoring, usually daily, by volunteers. If calls are not answered after several attempts, prearranged steps are taken to clear up doubts as to the persons condition.

The Telecontact programme, also operated by volunteers, maintains contact with individual vision impaired persons every two to six months. It gives advice and information on Association programmes and Government legislation. In the event of

changes in the blind persons' circumstances the volunteer encourages the person to contact their Welfare Officer or will do so on his or her behalf.

Needs emerging from all three forms of support are channelled back to staff for attention. For persons requiring non professional assistance which cannot be dealt with over the phone Telephone Support offers the Companion Visiting Service. This is a back-up service of volunteer visitors who fulfil a wide range of needs including reading mail, assisting with business matters and correspondence. They also escort members on shopping and social outings and help them to access other facilities for people with disabilities.

Telephone support, supervised by Regional Officers, has been extended to country towns and rural areas. Overall the key to the success of this programme is the devoted involvement of a large number of knowledgeable volunteers with people skills.

Telephone Support Programmes, as pioneered by the Association, have become a widely recognised and accepted form of community service.

Mrs Gibbons was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1991.

VISION INFORMATION LINE. Prior to Christmas 1985, Senator Grimes announced funding under the Handicapped Persons Assistance Act, for 40 innovative demonstrative projects. Five projects were selected in Victoria out of 200 applications. One was the Association's proposal to set up a Vision Information Hotline using a '008' Telecom access number. The service covers the whole of Australia.

The service provides general information on all aspects of blindness and visual impairment. It advises the services available from all the blindness agencies and information on pensions and other government assistance. It answers a broad and diverse range of enquiries. The service is used by teachers and students for school projects, by employers, by medical and medical ancillary staff, and by vision impaired people.

Information is available quickly either from the operator's personal knowledge and experience or by reference to the computer data base which is continually updated. If required, material can be forwarded to the caller either in print, large print, braille or audio cassette.

Both the original operator Mrs Christine de Clifford [nee Jolley] and the current operator Janene Sudha are non sighted.

AUDIOLOGY Among the bravest and most courageous people helped by the Association have been the Deaf Blind. In earlier days there was endless debate among the blind members as to whether they would prefer to be blind or deaf. The matter never was resolved. This in turn led to discussion with the deafness agencies as to which was the primary handicap and which organisations, the deaf or the blind, should accept responsibility for services. Invariably, the responsibility went to the blindness agencies.

As with blind people, deaf people could be divided into two main groups. Those who were hard of hearing and those who were totally deaf. The Association had a number of each among its members. Lip reading was not possible due to lack of vision. Communication with the hard of hearing blind was voice possible and they could participate in activities with varying degrees of difficulty. Communication with the totally deaf blind did present problems. With some, sign language on the hand was possible. With others, it was a matter of slowly spelling out individual letters on the palm of a hand with a forefinger. A number of the staff had to learn these methods known as signing and finger spelling. Even a short conversation took a long time.

A number of deaf blind ladies lived alone and managed quite well. but the risks that were taken alarmed sighted staff. Most left their doors unlocked so their friends could get in. This itself was a fearful risk. Add to it the thought of a person in the darkness, unhearing, unseeing and unsuspecting being physically touched by someone unknown. It was also daunting for blind friends when they went to visit. They had to listen for sound and feel their way around unfamiliar surroundings until contact was made.

Mr Lindsay McMillan had experience with deaf people prior to joining the Association. He felt more could and should be done in the combined hard of hearing and blind area, particularly as many elderly blind people experienced hearing loss. The combination and interaction of the effects of sensory losses - sight ,hearing, taste, touch and smell - on the ageing individual had been recognised. The disability agencies usually dealt on one aspect and ignored the complicating factors of other sensory loss. Government disability services had concentrated on the 16-65 age group. After that age according to conventional wisdom, a person was considered old and must expect life to be downhill. Vision impaired persons placed extra reliance on their hearing and it was necessary this should operate at its maximum acuteness.

The installation of a full sized audiological booth in the Vision Resource Centre and the appointment of an audiologist, Mr Richard Osborn, in conjunction with the Victorian Deaf Society in 1988 allowed a programme of aural rehabilitation and sensory training to commence. Sound location became part of the rehabilitation programme for the vision impaired. The Audiology Clinic was approved by Australian Hearing Services as a service provider.

NATIONAL CENTRE ON AGING AND SENSORY LOSS. .

Data from an Australian Bureau of Statistics survey in 1993 indicated that 18 percent or 3 million of the Australian population had a disability.

Of these 3 million people, 45 percent [1.4 million] were over the age of 60years and of this group 41 percent had a hearing disability and 14 percent had a vision disability.

This survey confirmed the findings of Mr Rick. Osborn, who had found the number of people with both hearing and sight difficulties far exceeded conventional thought.

With the purpose of raising the profile and needs of people with late onset sensory losses and to research, provide training and information on the subject, a National Centre on Aging and Sensory Loss was established in the Vision Resource Centre with Mr Osborn as the Director of Education and Research. An Advisory Committee of leading professional practitioners from all over Australia. was appointed. The

service is of such excellence, leading international organisations including Helen Keller International, have sent representatives to study the programme.

Welfare Officer Maurice Gleeson was one of 600 delegates to a conference on the Deaf/Blind in Washington in 1992 . He reported that services for vision impaired people were at least equal to if not better than in the US and UK but that Australia had a lot to learn in terms of assisting the deaf/blind. In light of the rapid developments which have taken place within the Association since that time, that conclusion, is no longer valid.

26. THE AGE OF REALITY

The year 1979 was spoken of in the health area as introducing the 'Age of Reality'. The Minister of Health, the Hon W.A. Borthwick, speaking at the Annual Meeting of the Victorian Hospitals Association, gave hospitals and welfare organisations a stark warning. They could no longer take for granted they had any intrinsic right to exist simply on the basis they had served the community well in past years. It is doubtful if the Minister realised how prophetic his words would be.

The last two decades of the 20th. century saw the introduction to a 'new age'. Massive changes rocked the foundations of Australian life. Previous sacrosanct community and social conventions were shaken apart. Confidence in business integrity was shattered. The divide between the privileged and under privileged became a deep chasm. A century earlier the great national issue was Federalism. Now, ever present was the equally great national issue of Republicanism. In this upheaval Health and Welfare services, among others, struggled for survival.

Some of these changes, in so far as they impacted on the Association, are the subject of this section.

Part of the reality of the scene was a perception that, 'Greed is Good'. This saying was repeated frequently, as the speculative boom of the 1880's was repeated in the 1980s. When the balloon burst Victoria was once again targeted as the 'basket state' of the nation.

Commonwealth action. The principal performer on the Health and Welfare stage, was the Commonwealth Government. The Commonwealth was originally thrust into the Aged Care Homes theatre in 1954 without experience or preconceived ideas. In the 1950s and 1960s the great need for hostel and nursing beds meant few restraints on numbers and location were necessary. The State was delighted to see Commonwealth spend money in its bailiwick on the provision of beds for the elderly .

By the 1970's the system was firmly established and the Commonwealth was giving greater attention to detail and becoming concerned with the need for cost containment. It looked at the number of beds in relationship to the elderly in each state selected the lowest and sought to make that the standard. This number was, of course, in Victoria. This was a source of irritation to Victorian organisations which, as was their right, battled hard for more beds to bring them up to the national average.

Towards the end of the 1970s a perception developed that nursing home operating costs were getting out of hand. Midway through 1981 the Commonwealth Auditor General produced Efficiency Audit Report No 2. This dealt with the Administration of Nursing Home Programmes. The Report was one of a number of critical reports on the subject. The emphasis was on figures, inefficient funding systems and lack of co-ordination. It was critical of the cost variation between states. The figures swamped the issues of quality of life and care. The Commonwealth thereafter stepped up its attention to the area of nursing homes and hostels.

The abnormal increase in costs was caused by the ageing of the population which meant an increasing number of elderly people required care; the growth in wages; a more than 30 per cent growth change in the ratio of female to male wage rates; an

increase in staff to patient ratios; and additional ancillary services. All except the first were the fruits of union and professional staff agitation. Victoria also suffered from escalating building costs. All these factors were outside the control of the service providers.

In 1984 the Commonwealth introduced the Home and Community Care Act [HACC] although details still had to be finalised and negotiated with the states. The purpose was to increase generic services within the community to older persons. Agencies providing services to specific disability groups only, such as blind persons, were not eligible. In order to obtain funding the Association had to modify some programmes. The effect was to broaden its service base while still retaining its core service to blind people.

The Commonwealth also established a Department of Community Services under Senator Grimes. Senator Grimes was keen to pursue a shift to community care which the Government saw, as it did every few years, more appropriate and cheaper than nursing care. In 1985 the Association was placed under this department.

The Disability Services Act [DSA] was introduced in 1986. It replaced the Handicapped Persons Assistance Act of 1974. It provided for increased flexibility in the range of services which could be provided and funded. The underlying principle was that 'positive consumer outcomes' should be the rationale for programme funding. Positive consumer outcomes included such factors as increased independence, employment opportunities and community integration. Although the Act was successful two aspects disadvantage the majority of blind persons. In practice the service was restricted to those persons under 65 years whose long term impairment became manifest before the age of 50 years. Secondly it was developed mainly as a programme for the unemployed.

In 1986 the Commonwealth also replaced the Aged and Disabled Persons Homes Act 1954 and the Nursing Homes Assistance Act 1974. The purpose was to promote community care programmes for people over 65 years and reduce the need for nursing and hostel beds. Studies had shown that Australia had a higher proportion of nursing beds for the elderly than other western countries. Australian governments whatever their political allegiance appear to seize overseas programmes and statistics without questioning, especially if they will permit their own financial commitment to be reduced.

From 1985 the Commonwealth policy was to maintain the existing level of 100 residential care beds for every 1000 persons aged 70 years or over. To achieve this ratio Victoria needed 42 percent of all new beds built in Australia. This was conclusive proof Victoria did have a shortage of beds. The \$4 for \$1 capital subsidy was replaced with a flexible subsidy arrangement of up to 100 percent for disadvantaged groups, ie. aboriginals and ethnic groups. This was an interesting turn about and showed the increasing power of minority groups. In earlier decades the Commonwealth had opposed vigorously the concept of separate accommodation for cultural and disabled groups. Assimilation had been the policy. It what was now termed a multi cultural society separate accommodation for cultural groups had become acceptable while the assimilation of disabled persons remained policy.

The average cost to the Commonwealth of maintaining a nursing bed in 1985/86 was \$18,500 per patient or eight times greater than in a hostel where the cost was \$2,300 per resident. Canberra decided money would be saved by allowing the population growth to reduce the existing number of nursing beds from 67 per thousand persons over 70 years to 40 per thousand and pushing up the hostel beds from 33 per thousand to 60 per thousand. The money saved could be diverted to home care which would serve many more elderly people at less cost and replace beds in homes. Brakes were placed on the provision of more nursing beds.

At the instigation of Mr Grimes a study was carried out into nursing home costs, particularly in Victoria where the daily subsidy cost of \$45. was almost double that of other states. He froze the amount of the Nursing Home Benefit subsidy. The freeze lasted for ten years.

During this freeze alternate proposals for funding the operating costs of nursing homes were considered. The model finally decided upon by the Commonwealth included what were termed a Care Aggregated Module and a Standard Aggregated Module commonly referred to as CAM and SAM. Nursing Home patients were assessed and placed in one of five categories. The amount of the nursing benefit varied according to category. The average cost of maintaining a Category 1 patient was set at \$100 a day reducing to \$28 a day for a Category 5 patient. The Commonwealth also placed a ceiling on the fee the nursing homes could charge. This was set at 87½ percent of the aged pension. The proposals were recommended for implementation from July 1, 1987.

These funding arrangements meant a substantial reduction in nursing home benefits in Victoria. The nursing home income of the Association was reduced by one third.. The stressful time which followed sent shock waves through the organisation as a painful reorganisation of the nursing home services took place and staff were retrenched. Some relief was experienced when fifty hostel beds were reclassified as nursing beds.

Nursing Homes naturally preferred patients in the top three classifications who received a higher benefit. Patients in categories four and five were a substantial financial liability and left to Hostels whenever possible. The computers did not program the human factor. Diverting patients from nursing homes to hostels raised the hostel work and nursing load and consequently the cost. The hostels which were largely operated by church and voluntary organisations retained some independence. These operating agencies had a choice. They could restrict admission to light care residents or they could admit category 4 & 5 nursing cases and raise fees. Now comes the paradox. While patient fees in Nursing Homes were controlled there was no restriction on the fees which could be charged in Hostels and Special Accommodation Homes. This meant elderly people whose only income was the pension were limited in the range and quality of the accommodation they could afford.

Between 1985/86 and 1992/93 nursing beds increased by .5 percent each year. Hostel beds increased by 5 percent each year. The increase in hostel beds did not keep pace with the reduction in nursing beds. In the aggregate, bed numbers fell from 100 per 1000 of persons over 70 years to 96 per 1000. Cost increases more than ate up the financial savings. The cost of home and community care increased by almost two and a half times in the same period.

During the contretemps, the co-ordinating bodies of public, private and voluntary providers of aged care in Victoria formed a peak council to present their case. Lobbying became, of necessity, a high priority for Mr Cook. The combined effort had limited success.

In the meantime, studies in the US had concluded that community care services deferred admission but did not replace hostel and nursing home beds and, while improving the quality of life, also raised expectations of a final life care which may not be realised.

Victorian action. The second major role in the Health and Welfare drama was played by the Victorian Government.

In the latter part of 1981 the Commonwealth Government thought it would reduce its direct involvement in the provision of services. In a mind change it saw its role as the provider of finance. A series of State Grants Acts were passed and Block Grant payments to the States introduced.

The Victorian Health Commission was in a turmoil as it faced changes in the Commonwealth/State funding arrangements for health, changes in Hospital Fee structures, still more change in the Medicare system and changes in the leadership of both state political parties. The Block Grant System, although it may have been intended in part to make the States exercise greater control over costs, also meant undesirable in-fighting. State Ministers and Departments tried to hack off as much as they could for themselves and tear off as much as they could of other Department allocations. Grants to subsidised organisations did not keep pace with increasing costs.

Full of energy but lacking essential skills, a fresh Labour Government replaced a tired Liberal Government in Victoria early in 1982. In the run up to the election a spate of promises were made relating to health services. To implement these promises and a number of his own ideas, Mr Tom Roper was appointed Minister of Health. Some tempestuous years followed.

One of the pre-election promises of the government was to widen the representation on Hospital Boards to permit greater community representation and employee participation. Committees saw employee participation as another potential battleground because of conflict of interest and confidentiality ethics. Responsibility for Board appointments was assumed by the Minister. In varying degrees thereafter, political allegiance appeared to be a factor in appointments.

The Victorian Hospitals Association which represented employers, had handled industrial disputes for employers and represented them on Wage tribunals. The Minister took these rights away from this organisation and handed them to the Health Commission. For all practical purposes this meant himself. Naturally the unions made most of the situation. A 38 hour week was introduced from July 1983. The Minister said the employers had to absorb the cost. This would have meant an additional annual cost of \$200,000 to the Association, an impossible impost.

The Hospital Employees' Union members were to receive the benefit but not the professional staff. There was a loud howl and quick rethink. When the Agreement

details were revealed, the benefit was restricted to all employees of State health instrumentalities. It mostly took the form of a day off a month with pay and became known as the Rostered Day Off or RDO. The staff of church homes, voluntary organisations and private hospitals were excluded. Many staff thereon moved across to the public hospitals leaving a shortage elsewhere.

The Health Commission told the Association not to grant the benefit until its revised rosters had been approved. The Industrial Section then approved payment but the Finance Section refused to pay saying the Association was not among the approved organisations. The Industrial Relations Commission issued a list of the organisations to which the benefit applied. The Association was on the list. The Finance Section then maintained it only applied to Illawarra and the Kelston Day Centre. The Association, keeping its promise to staff, paid the benefit. Reimbursement was not received until eighteen despairing months had passed and a new Minister was appointed. The cash position deteriorated alarmingly in the interim.

For four months the head of steam built up among disgruntled health care staff. In October 1983 the valve blew. Five thousand staff members from excluded private hospitals and nursing homes held a stop work meeting. The 38hour week was then granted quickly to the entire field. The four months of intense turmoil were quite unnecessary.

Midway through 1981 the Health Commission produced a Discussion Paper on Regionalisation. In the second half of 1983 the principle of regionalisation with devolved authority was introduced. The Minister announced eight health regions with Directors and Regional Councils would be established. Thirty District Health Councils each covering about 100,000 people would be set up to maintain surveillance on the Regional Councils. Regional Directors, Regional Officers of various categories, Regional Advisers, Regional Assessment Teams, and so on, were appointed.

Everyone had their say, a real circular talkfest with perplexity dominant for power and authority was not devolved but remained centralised in the Minister. Little could be done without his personal approval. The plan also called for the existing Health Commission to be restructured and up to 200 staff relocated to regional offices. Health Commission staff played the trump card. They refused to leave their Melbourne office. The Victorian Public Service Association supported them. Stalemate.

A number of the Regional aims had caused the Association concern. The first was a proposal to place all health services in a region under the umbrella of the regional base hospital. There was a real fear the Association branches would become satellite bodies, lose their independence and be divorced from the Association.

The second, on which there had existed a difference of opinion since regionalisation was mooted, was the allocation of beds for the elderly. The number approved was based on the number of elderly in a region related to the number of beds.

The method did not take into account the reality that in some regions were specialist homes and or large government institutions which took patients from far and wide. This could mean a shortage of beds for local elderly people. The quota system also affected specialist Homes. Take Elanora, Brighton as an example. Only 30 of its 120 beds were likely to be occupied at any time by residents of the region. The remainder

were from all over Melbourne and the country. The effect was felt when application was made for approval to build a further 60 nursing beds. The application was rejected on the basis the region already had more than its ratio of beds. The method also failed to take into account that some conditions, such as blindness, may require earlier admission to nursing care than the norm. Regionalisation destroyed the earlier plans for Brighton to be developed as the nursing and accommodation centre.

The third was a proposal by powerful academic theorists to do away with specialist services in favour of general services. This had been done in England some twenty years earlier with disastrous results. Staff became the employees of the local Regional Authority. Specialists in blind welfare were posted to mental hospitals, units for the deaf and so on. Specialists in other handicaps were posted to units for blind persons. People requiring rehabilitation had to put up with the local officer whatever his or her qualifications and expertise. People requiring admission to a home were sent wherever there was a vacant bed. Pandemonium resulted. A cry went out to the Royal National Institute for the Blind from units all over England: "Please send us specialists in blind welfare." The answer was, "We can't and we can't even train any. All our specialists have been taken and absorbed into the system.."

Knowing this and concerned for the future, the President, Mr John Wicking in his 1984 Annual Report wrote: *"Rightly or wrongly we are fearful of the impact of Regionalisation on our organisation. We are specialists in the care of blind people and have accumulated many years of experience at all levels of the organisation - committees, volunteers, staff. We have the guidance of our blind members. We are all committed to the unity of the Association. We fear fragmentation and the disastrous consequences which would follow the introduction of general services. With this in mind we have and are continuing to make submissions to the Minister"*.

Early in 1985 the Yooralla Society for the Disabled released its Report on 'Future Directions'. This report did recommend a move to generic services within the community. The Report divided Yooralla into two groups. The Concerned Parents and Friends of Yooralla wanted retention of specialised services and direct care of clients. The professionals advocated the "new directions" approach. The voting membership jumped from 300 to 1200. At the Annual Meeting 13 candidates stood for five positions on the Board. The Director General of the Department of Community Services addressed the meeting and stressed the 'new directions' was in accordance with the Government's policy and intentions. Despite all the pressures exerted, the ballot was a victory for the Concerned Parents and Friends.

This was the major test of the headlong move to integration and the demise of agencies providing specialist services. While a milder form of Regionalisation was established, the extreme proposal for generalist staff and services did not eventuate.

Relationships with State Government and Health Commission led with accelerating speed into further hazardous, uncharted territory.

The Health Commission had seen the charities as an encumbrance and wanted to off load them. Despite much scratching of its head it could not define for this purpose what a charity was. Hospitals came under the definition of charities and it certainly wanted to hold on to them. The first step was the promulgation of an Associations Act in 1981 enabling small non government non profit organisations to be hived off.

In 1985 the Hon. Tom Roper moved to another Ministry. He was succeeded by the Hon. David White with the task of restructuring the Health Commission and ensuring it was no longer a political liability. Mr White was regarded as one of the best educated and toughest of the Ministers. He was believed to be the only Labour Minister in Australia to hold a Master of Business Administration degree.

As was now increasingly the custom with Ministers, Mr White buried many of his predecessor's policies. One of Mr White's decisions which did give great pleasure to the Association was authorisation of the 38 hour week payment. The payment was not received despite a number of approaches. During the second quarter of 1985 The Premier, the Hon John Cain visited the BCCC Centre, Kooyong. The financial position of the Association had deteriorated to a dangerous level. The situation was reminiscent of the 1972 crisis. Contingency plans had been prepared and were within days of being introduced.

Mr Cain was interviewed by Mr Arthur Wilkins on 3RPH. Mr Cain recounted the sad story of the State's financial sickness and the need to cut back in government funding. Somehow, with Arthur interviewing, he finished up promising on air to shake up his Ministers and bureaucrats and make sure the Association received its 38 hour week financial entitlements. By this time these were in excess of \$500,000. Mr Cain kept his promise. The funds were received without further delay.

In Mr White's early days as Minister, the Health Commission succeeded in having transferred over to a new department titled Community Services Victoria [CSV], the Association and other welfare organisations. No detailed arrangements were made. This new Department was made the fiefdom of the Hon. Caroline Hogg.

The Health Commission was not gleeful for long. In a media interview Mr White said his management technique was to convince senior bureaucrats he would commit mayhem if needed to get his own way. [Age 16/3/85]. He did. He had the Health Commission converted to a Department which gave him absolute power, dispensed with the services of or moved aside a number of senior officers and engaged a new team of 'top managers'. Having had no experience of the health field they knew exactly what was good and right for it - so they thought.

Confusion and uncertainty still reigned as to which department should fund the Association. Four months after the transfer of the Association, CSV had still not announced any Senior Appointments. Information was difficult to come by let alone decisions. Responsibility for funding was finally placed on CSV. In 1986 it expressed astonishment on realising it was funding Association nursing homes, the only ones funded by that department. It didn't do that sort of thing. It seemed as if by slow payment and non payment it showed its resentment. In 1988 it discovered it was funding some of the Low Vision Clinic costs. It didn't do that either, so it said.

In CSV Ministers kept playing musical chairs. In 1988 there were three in a year. The Hon Caroline Hogg, Race Matthews and Peter Spyker. The appointment of the Hon Kay Setches brought temporary continuity until the next state election.

At the Departmental level staff changes, transfers and promotions occurred at a bewildering rate adding to the confusion. It carried out planning exercises, charting

exercises, mapping exercises, economic reviews, service reviews and studies without limit.

In 1988 the Department committed an unpardonable sin in breaking a cardinal convention. It moved away from the principle of honouring its previously approved commitments. In a statement it said it would fund from year to year in accordance with its priorities in the disability area and to the extent it approved operating budgets. This meant it could change its priorities and funding allocations without notice and services would not be funded to their true cost but only to the levels set by CSV. The second stage 4 percent National wage increase was also due to be paid in 1988. This was subject to productivity increases. The Health Dept. paid it. CSV refused till 4 percent offsets were seen. Already suffering financially because of frozen Commonwealth nursing home benefits and having endured savage State cuts in funding the organisations affected were in a desperate plight.

A section of the Department was also attracting unwelcome widespread media notoriety for its handling of child welfare cases. This was reflecting adversely on the Government.

In October 1989, from outside the health and human services sector, Dr. John Paterson was appointed Director General of the CSV Department. In April 1991 Mr. Cook reported to the Association Board that CSV had reduced the State Govt. Grant; that the Association would receive about \$1million less cash than the previous year; that reimbursements of \$750,000 were outstanding for Award increases and that long service leave payments had not been funded. These matters were resolved eventually but it was an exceptionally stressful time for the Board.

A new funding formula applied to the Association as from 1993. The Annual Report of the Association for that year stated Nursing Home costs would have to be reduced by \$1.25million or 10 percent per annum over the next four years to meet the Commonwealth/State cost funding level. The benefit to the Association was that the Agreement meant security of funding for that period. It also entailed changes in the number and a redistribution of hostel and nursing beds.

The accomplishments of the Association for the Blind were remarkable during this period when seen against the complexities of Commonwealth/State relationships. and financial crisis. In this context the vision, energy and commitment of the CEO Mr John Cook during the transition from the age of reality to new beginnings was recognised and appreciated by the Board.

Those agencies deeply involved in aged care did not then realise and only afterwards would they see they had participated in and witnessed the death struggles of an era. In the political and bureaucratic spheres of life compassionate humanitarianism was being eroded and replaced with, what, by the end of the century, came to be known as economic rationalism.

27.EVENTFUL YEARS.

The United Nations proclaimed 1981 the International Year for Disabled Persons. The aims were:-

- to increase awareness of the needs, abilities and aspirations of disabled persons;
- to increase participation, equality and integration of disabled people;
- to prevent disability;
- to promote more positive attitudes to disabled persons.

Prof. Laurie McCredie, a Board Member of the RVIB was appointed Chairman of the IYDP National Committee of Non Government Organisations and was afterwards awarded the CBE. Mr Alan Nuske, a blind member of the General Committee of the Association, was appointed to the Victorian Committee. Mr Nuske was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1991.

The aims of this special year had always been part of the Association's endeavour. Overall the year had a beneficial influence although the results were not always apparent immediately

Public Appeals and Projects. 1981 was also the year of the Reach Out Appeal for \$1million. Chaired by Sir Leslie Froggatt, Chairman and Managing Director of Shell Australia and with Mr Marsden Wood as Appeal Director, the Appeal was successful in reaching the target.

Part of the proceeds were expended on the West Gippsland Day Centre, Warragul, the 30 bed nursing home, Acacia House, Shepparton and extensions to the Day Centre at Kelaston, Ballarat incorporating a Low Vision Clinic and a therapy workshop for men.

The metropolitan project was at Elanora, Brighton. It consisted of a new patients dining room and lounge together with a service block including kitchen, laundry and store rooms. The total cost of \$1.22m was met from Association funds. The project was opened by the Governor, Sir Brian Murray, at a special function for the patients on March 24, 1983. Sir Brian had lived locally as a boy. He and Lady Murray were good friends and visited Elanora on a number of occasions.

Work then commenced on 16 independent living units on the New St frontage. The cost was \$700,000. The Department of Social Security subsidised this cost to the extent of \$276,000. The Association contributed \$424,000. The original name of the Brighton Home was again brought into use in naming the block of units Woodburn Lodge. Senator Grimes, the Minister for Social Security, performed the opening ceremony in April, 1984.

The Vision Victoria Appeal for \$2million followed in 1987 with Mr Arnold Hancock OBE as Chairman and Mr Desmond Fletcher as Appeal Director. Mr Hancock, a prominent and respected banker received strong support from the banking industry. He was supported by an outstanding Committee of eminent Victorians. His wife, Pat, was a valued volunteer with 3RPH. The principal objective of the Appeal was to raise the funds required to build the Vision Resource Centre at Kooyong. This was the largest Appeal conducted by the Association to that time. The timing was fortunate being just before the great financial crash. The Appeal was successful.

The Vision Resource Centre, built by the Jennings Group, was opened on May 3, 1989 by the Governor, Dr. Davis McCaughey. The cost was \$5million.

Attached to the Low Vision Clinic, this purpose designed building incorporated 3RPH studios. It brought together non residential services, became the centre for a wide range of education and training activities, and the home of the blind members.

Sister relationship. Mr Mountain visited Japan in 1981 on an Australian/Japanese Foundation Study Grant. Ten weeks were spent undertaking an extensive study of services to blind people. A particular friendship was established with the Seimei Association for the Welfare of the Blind in Tokyo. Each year thereafter groups of Japanese nurses and health workers visited the Association and reciprocal visits were made by Association staff. These visits continue.

On June 8, 1985 Mrs Jones and Mr Mountain attended a special ceremony at the Seimei Association for the Welfare of the Blind in Tokyo. This was to mark the formal proclamation of the sisterhood relationship between the two agencies which had similar aims. Present were Her Highness, the Princess Chichibu-no-miya, the Mayor of Tokyo Mr Masao Yamazaki, the Australian Ambassador Sir Neil Currie and Lady Currie.

Retinitis Pigmentosa The First National Retinitis Pigmentosa Conference was held at Elanora. in November 1985. It was associated with the Annual Dinner of the Retinitis Pigmentosa Society and was attended by a number of international ophthalmologists.

RP as it is commonly known is an inherited condition causing blindness. Research into this condition was one of the compelling interests of Mr Gordon Merry. Part of his long service leave was spent in the UK and Europe studying the subject. Working in partnership with Dr. Pamela Dickinson and Mr Cameron Algie of the Retinitis Pigmentosa Society, a major contribution was made to knowledge of this congenital condition. His thesis on the subject gained Mr Merry a Masters Degree in Social Work.

Birthday parties. 1985 ended with the Association's 90th Birthday Luncheon and Concert at the Camberwell Civic Centre. In a massive effort organised by the staff and with transport provided by the volunteers, 600 members from all over Victoria attended. Compered by Mr Fred Levett, it was a happy occasion and reunion. A further gathering was organised in 1990 to celebrate the Association's 95th birthday. Held in the Dallas Brooks Centre, it was compered by television personality Peter Smith.

Each year all centres and homes held their own annual Christmas break up and party. These took various forms and were very happy events. That held at Mirridong may be taken as an example.. Following a Christmas tea with all the trimmings patients staff and committee gathered together in the lounge for a concert and to meet Father Xmas. A superb programme was presented by Miss Mavis Webster OAM and the Benola Singers. Mrs Rose in the guise of Father Xmas arrived with tinkling bells and a trolley loaded with gifts bought with the proceeds of the local Christmas appeal. All received gifts, participated in the joys of the festive season and hated to see the evening conclude.

Property purchases. The legacy and wisdom of past Committees in securing land for future development was by this time recognised. With the future in mind 1985-86 saw the purchase of broad acres at Ballarat, an additional property at Bendigo and another in Talbot Cr. Kooyong. This latter property was altered to accommodate country members and carers while visiting the Low Vision Clinic or attending medical appointments. The refurbishment was made possible by the generosity and hard work of the Chadstone/Malvern Lions Club.

Cricket pavilion. 1987 saw the erection and opening of the Charlie Bradley Cricket Pavilion on the playing field at Kooyong. This building, designed to be the home of the Victorian Blind Cricket Association, was sited to provide visual observation of both playing ovals. It included clubroom, scorebox, storage, toilets and bar facilities. It was named in honour of one of the great long serving cricketers. Provision was also made for the direct broadcasting of matches through 3RPH. The cost of the building was \$125,000.

Leadership changes. With a feeling their contribution to the ongoing mission was nearing its end, the early 1980's saw both the President, Mr John Wicking and the Executive Director John Wilson talking retirement. Mr Wicking had been a strong leader, successfully and devotedly steering the organisation through ten worrying but ever challenging years. During this period he was also presiding over important large scale business ventures, takeovers and massive restructuring. There was gratification throughout the Association when he was honoured by appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia in 1981. John Wilson, after thirty years of hectic endeavour, was beginning to feel the effects of burn out.

The Committee had been preparing for a smooth changeover. As early as 1981 in an initial move Mr John Cook had been appointed General Manager. Mr Wilson followed this up with a recommendation that a task force be established to plan for the remaining years of the Association's century of service. This would ensure all sections of the organisation had an input, knew their objectives and had an united understanding of future direction.

The Committee concurred. Vice President John Blanch was appointed to chair the consumers group and Vice President Diana Jones the service providers group. The two groups worked separately, consulted widely and then combined to unify their findings. The final report was completed in February 1984. Comprehensive in character, it re-affirmed the extended family, warm hearted approach of the Association, was farseeing in its concept of services and set both short and long term goals.

The Committee was in good heart. Recent years had seen the retirement of long serving key members in Messrs Pat Lightfoot OBE, Alex Cook DFC, Wayne Reid OBE, Michael Fitzgerald, Alan Nuske AM and Norman Banks MBE. Their replacements were of the same high calibre and had settled in quickly. These were Mrs Diana Jones, Mrs Diana Sher, Mr Ian Bult LLB and, from the blind members Mr John Blanch, ED, Mr Arthur Wilkins OAM, Mr John Mierisch, Mrs Jean Ross and Mrs Gloria Pascoe.

The Honorary Services Group was devoted, enthusiastic and constantly growing. The Blind Members Council was composed of well informed persons who spoke responsibly for the members and made a positive contribution in broader affairs.

Both the President and Executive Director were immensely proud of the staff and the quality, strength and depth of staff leadership which was envied by blind welfare agencies throughout Australia and beyond. Not only were staff members proficient in their own areas they were also specialists in humanity, an attribute constantly stressed as an essential by the Presidents. In recent years a number of senior staff had progressed to management of larger hospitals. Also, as mentioned earlier, four senior staff members had been awarded Churchill fellowships, one an Australian/Japan Study Grant and one an Australian/ New Zealand Fellowship. Other members contributed to national and international conferences appropriate to their profession. Should exceptional circumstances ever arise when the two senior tiers of management were unavailable, the strength, knowledge and competency of the administrative officers and secretaries was of such high quality, they could confidently step into the breach, handle the day-to-day affairs of the organisation and liaise with their respective Committees.

The Branch Committee system was strong and functioning well. Branch Committee membership consisted of long serving, knowledgeable members with a proven record of service.

At Elanora Brighton there were Mrs Namur West, 1969-1986; Mrs Nancy Dowdle, 1974-1990; and Mrs Gwladys Jeavons, 1980-1995. Each succeeded the other as Chairman. Mrs Jeavons moved to the Committee after retiring from the staff and is still serving. Mrs Dowdle, a solicitor, was also used extensively in the legal area in an honorary capacity. Her husband, Mr John Dowdle remains an active fund raiser for Elanora. Mr Stan Parkes MBE, the Architect, served from 1968 to 1984 by which time his vision had deteriorated to below legal blindness. A real gentleman and one of the few remaining Gallipoli veterans, he was admitted to the Home he knew so well and had served for more than 50 years. There he died. Other members were Messrs Colquhoun 1980-86, Marshall 1983-92, Kelleway 1983-92 and Hulme 1985-93.

The Blind Citizens Community Centre, Kooyong had a knowledgeable experienced Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr John King with Mr John Campbell as Treasurer. Contributing as members were long serving volunteers in Mesdames Harris, Jeffrey and Biram. Male members who each had their specialty were Colin Fox, Malcolm Daubney and Geoff Braim.

At Bendigo Mrs Kitty Rose BEM served from 1940 to 1988. She was chairman of Mirridong 1956-88 and a member of the General Committee 1970-88. The service of Miss Norma Young AM, commenced in 1952.. She remains an active member of the Committee. Throughout this long period she has given exceptional unselfish and continuous service as either Vice Chairman, Hon. Treasurer or Hon. Secretary. After the retirement of Mrs Rose she served a term as Chairman. Other long serving members were Mrs Jean Jones, 1969-86; Mrs H Morgan, 1971-89; and Messrs Herb Hesse, 1973-90; Joe O'Sullivan, 1980-90; John Cartwright, 1980-93; Dennis Potter, 1980- 94; and Brian Armstrong 1985-.

Kelaston Ballarat was served by Mrs May Tweedie OAM, 1968-89; Cr. Roy King BEM, 1969-92; Mrs Evelyn McClure OAM, 1971-; Mrs Marj Trahar, 1980-; Messrs Daryl Chester, 1973-; Robert Hook, 1973-; Cr David Baird OAM, 1980-; Cr Harry Hitchcock, 1980-94; Mr Bob Jones, 1980-; Mr John Conaughton, whose father Robert had also served as Committee Member and Chairman, joined the Committee in 1982 and is still serving.

At Illawarra, Geelong foundation members Lindsay and Patricia Heath AM BEM, served from 1974-93; Mrs Daphne Smith, 1980-93; and Mr Peter Bain, 1980-93; Other respected local persons who served for a number of years included Messrs Averay, Herbert, Larcey, Dr. Lansdell and Mrs Joan Backwell.

The Committee at Baringa, Shepparton had also been blessed with remarkable stability. Original members Messrs Dainton, Chairman, Holt, Kellock, and Miss V Williams are still serving, while Mrs Wallace retired in 1990 and Mr Don McPherson in 1994.

In every way the timing seemed right for a change in the Association leadership. There was stability throughout the organisation. A series of major projects had been completed, another series was about to begin. The winds of change were blowing strongly as both Commonwealth and State Governments entered the road of 'new directions'. New leadership for a new era seemed advisable. Some rough conditions on the road ahead were expected. The extent of the hazards was not foreseen.

Still, it was not without regret the President and the Executive Director stood down from office at the end of 1984. The close working partnership which had also included the Treasurer, Mr John Wall, and Mrs Lorraine Adamson, had been most enjoyable, successful and beneficial for the Association. Friendships had been forged which still continue. Mr Wicking, following the pattern set by his predecessor, Mr Pat Lightfoot OBE, remained on the Committee, where his knowledge and contribution was of value to the Committee and incoming President. The service of John Wilson had been recognised by the Anzac of the Year Award in 1981, Membership of the Order of Australia in 1983 and internationally, by Life Membership of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind in 1984. The Committee appointed him an Honorary Councillor.

For many years the Committee had hoped the day would come when a blind person with the required business experience, community prestige and personal charisma would be available to take the position of President. Now two such persons were available in Vice President John Blanch and Committee Member Arthur Wilkins. Unfortunately neither was enjoying the good health necessary for the onerous position.

To the sighted Vice President, Mrs Diana Jones, was given the honour and distinction of being elected the first and only lady President since Miss Tilly Aston. Introduced to the Association by Mr Wayne Reid, Mrs Jones had an enviable record as an achiever in a number of community service fields. Within the Association, as Deputy Chairman of the 1974 Reach Out Appeal and President of the Honorary Services Group, Mrs Jones had confirmed her reputation as a capable, hard working leader. She was highly regarded by the Volunteers, Blind Members and Staff.

The General Committee appointed Mr John Cook as Chief Executive Officer.. Possessing a strong personality and ambitious for the organisation, he was far seeing,an intense committed worker, tenacious to the point of stubbornness. These were essential qualities, as he was about to face in the Association's interests, an agonising ten years of brain torturing, physically enervating struggle with both Commonwealth and State Governments and Departmental bureaucrats. There is acceptance his efforts since appointment, have been a major contribution to the survival and expansion of the Association.

Mr John Wall remained as Treasurer to oversee the property purchases of the 1980's and the building of the Vision Resource Centre. After nineteen years of notable service he retired at the end of 1989. Mr Wall was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, an honour richly deserved. Mr Robin Pleydell, Managing Director of ANZ Trustees, who had recently joined the Committee accepted the responsibility of Treasurer.

The Auditor, Mr Bob Dixon of Duesbury's also retired after nearly twenty years of examining and commenting on the Association accounts. Held in the highest respect by the President, Treasurer and Head Office Management, Mr Dixon never let the feeling of friendship which had grown up, interfere with his duties or performance as Auditor.

28.HONORARY SERVICES

In his book, *'The Way to Happiness,'* Bishop Fulton Sheen talks of choosing a master value and making it a goal.

He wrote: *" Many choose wealth, some power, others honours, position, fame. The wise choose service. To continue helping in the midst of indifference, reproach or even opposition indicates that one is governed by a higher law than the applause of one's fellows. Such service cannot be bought; it is beyond price; neither does it need to be bought; it is freely given."*

The story of Honorary Services to the Association deserves a book of its own. From the time of Miss Tilly Aston through to the present, the records emphasise the loyal consistent friendship of the sighted community for its blind members.

To make a friend you need to be one. To be one you must be on hand when needed. The vision impaired people of Victoria have been blessed in the quality and number of their friends.

In the quality because of their high standing in the community, their personal qualities and the faithfulness of their support. In the number because they comprise Committees, Auxiliaries, Donors, Volunteers, Staff, Charitable Trusts, Churches, Service Clubs, Schools and leading personalities from all walks of life. For a hundred years they have practised the precept:-

"If there is any good that I can do, or any kindness I can show, let me do it now; let me not defer it or neglect it for I shall not pass this way again".

Naturally, the support and contribution of women receives prominence in the records. A young woman gave birth to, was the mother of the Association. Women, both blind and sighted, have nourished and cared for it ever since. The magnificence of their contribution cannot be estimated or over emphasised.

Hundreds of gifted men have applied their business logic, used their considerable influence and political skills, extended their financial support and served with distinction. Nevertheless it has been the thousands of warm-hearted women, mostly unseen and unknown outside their particular group who have given themselves unsparingly to the hard, slogging, often monotonous, day-to-day work and tasks. Their reward has been the warming inner knowledge that in placing service before and above self they contributed to the well being of their blind friends and the community.

Loving and serving are inseparable as the story in the school readers long years ago recounted. The story of Ben Abou who awoke one night from a deep sleep to find an angel in his room writing in a book of gold.

" What writest thou?", enquired Ben Abou.

" The names of those who love the Lord."

" And is mine one?"

" Nay, not so," replied the angel.

" Then write me as one who loves his fellow men."

The angel wrote and vanished.

The next night the Presence again appeared in the room. Ben Abou woke and gazed at the open book. And lo! his name led all the rest.

This chapter is a tribute to the host of ladies, too numerous to name individually, who have lovingly cared for the Association for the Blind and its Members.

The contribution of these ladies falls into one of three main categories, namely Committees, Auxiliaries or Service Group. Some, indeed, served in all three.

Ladies remain the heart and soul of most Committees. In the early days of the Homes they had the wearying tasks of the so called old-fashioned 'mother'. They ran the households, handled the money, took a personal interest in each of the residents, saw they were fed, dressed and cared for properly, settled their disputes with each other and with staff. They had control and exercised much authority. As the homes expanded, government funding increased, accountability with its associated paper work multiplied and managers were appointed, the role of the Committee ladies also inevitably changed. Some welcomed the changed role. Some found it hard to accept. Nevertheless their loyalty remained intact and their love did not fail.

The ladies on the Committees continue to fill essential roles. They still take day to day leadership and a personal interest in patient welfare. They balance their business oriented male colleagues and the overt professionalism of staff. They are involved in the affairs of their Branch, community activities, public relations and invariably, fund raising.

The modern era of the Auxiliaries may be said to have commenced after WWII. The appointment of Mrs J Stanley Smith as Auxiliaries Organiser in 1948, triggered a rapid expansion. Her husband was manager of Scots Hotel, Collins St, Melbourne. This Hotel was the home of many substantial Western District families when they came to town for Show Week, the Melbourne Cup or on shopping expeditions. Meeting the wives gave Mrs Smith many worthwhile contacts who formed or became Auxiliary members.

Mrs Stanley Smith retired in 1962 after her husband's death and went to live in Surfers Paradise. She was followed by Mrs Betty Leeson who retired in 1968 and died in 1995. Because of the changing trends a successor was not appointed. Thereafter Mr Bob Pearson maintained personal contact with the auxiliaries and was always received warmly.

During the years 1948-68 auxiliaries were formed in the west of the state at Birchip, Camperdown, Hamilton, Horsham, Lismore, Linton, Lake Bolac, Mortlake, Peshurst, Snake Valley and Whoorel. To the east of Melbourne were Port Welshpool and Won Wron. In the metropolitan area, Brown, Bamburra, Blind Members, Central, Caroline, Carinya, Elanora, Toorak, Springfield, Strathmore and Scots Hotel.

The efforts of Mildura Auxiliary, a lonely outpost, continued unceasingly. Following the pattern set by auxiliaries at Bendigo and Ballarat, new local Auxiliaries led to the formation of Association Branches at Geelong, Shepparton, Mt Eliza and Warragul.

In 1963 a State Luncheon of Auxiliaries was held in the Brighton Town Hall in the presence of Lady Delacombe, wife of the Governor. Three hundred ladies from all over Victoria attended. The function gave the President, Mr Bruce Small, the opportunity to thank Auxiliary Members for their outstanding efforts. By this time a changing trend was emerging. Auxiliaries were showing a desire to work for the Home or Centre in their locality. This was encouraged by the General Committee. New auxiliaries had also been formed to support local services.

In total, Kelaston, Ballarat, was supported by Ballarat, Bungaree, Brown Hill, Buninyong, Camperdown, Lismore, Hamilton, Kelaston Ladies, Kelaston Younger Set, Kelaston Carers Staff, Lake Bolac, Linton and Snake Valley/Carngham auxiliaries. Mirridong, Bendigo, by Bendigo, Friends of Mirridong, Huntly, Inglewood, Laura Clarke, Tilly Aston, McIvor and Strathfieldsaye Auxiliaries. Baringa, Shepparton by Shepparton and Kalparrin Auxiliaries. Illawarra, Geelong by Illawarra and Whoorel Auxiliaries. Pindari, Warragul by the Warragul, Port Welshpool, Won Wron and Latrobe Valley Auxiliaries.

Elanora Brighton was supported by the Brighton and Elanora auxiliaries, the Lamplighters and latterly the Elanora Fund Raising Committee. The Blind Citizens Community Centre, Kooyong, by a number of auxiliaries, some of which worked for a particular service. These were the Kooyong, Blind Members, Springfield, Talbot, Tilly Aston, Vision and Guiding Light auxiliaries and the Kooyong Fair Committee.

The George Vowell Centre received the backing of the Mt Eliza Fund Raising Committee and the Rosebud and Hastings Auxiliaries.

Metropolitan Perimeter Services also had local help. The Northern Suburbs and Sunbury Auxiliaries worked for the Arthur Wilkins Centre at Essendon. The Western Suburbs Auxiliary supported the centre at Footscray.

The past twenty years have seen a move towards Opportunity Shops. In part this has been due to the ageing of the ladies, the large number of new community support groups each requiring its own auxiliary and the drying up of the reservoir of available ladies as more and more remained in the work force. The first Association Op. Shop was opened in Hampton in 1977. There was considerable staff involvement as the mode of operation was learned. The exercise proved the viability of such endeavours. This shop was closed due to a massive rent increase. Others were opened at Sandringham, supporting Elanora; Rye and Somerville supporting the George Vowell Centre and at Shepparton, supporting Baringa. At Warragul during the pre Christmas period each year the Pindari Shop opens and trades exceptionally well. The Springfield Auxiliary held special sale days at the BCCC.

In 1990, through Mrs Gandel and the Gandel Trust of which Mr Walter Jona AM is Chairman and in partnership with the Council of the Jewish Museum, the 'Top Opp' was opened at the Chadstone Shopping Centre. Partly manned by Association volunteers and with the involvement of Mrs Gandel, this shop has been fantastically successful. More than \$250,000 has been received.

While keeping within the framework of the Constitution for Auxiliaries, each has its own distinctive features and method of operating. Some broad differences have been observed.

Some Auxiliaries retained the same Office Bearers for many years while others rotated them regularly. Both systems worked well.

There were those Auxiliaries whose original members were either previously friends or who developed a close enduring friendship. These usually remained as a functioning unit until the passing of time reduced their active number and the auxiliary closed down. Conversely other auxiliaries kept recruiting and regularly changing Office Bearers. In such cases members tended to drop out after a decade or so but, if the recruiting had been wise, the group remained vibrant.

Melbourne visitors sometimes received a shock when first visiting one of the smaller country auxiliaries. It was not unknown for an Auxiliary President when declaring a meeting closed to say: " Well ladies, we are going well for time. I see we are all here. We will have a cup of tea and reconvene as the Red Cross [or some other] Auxiliary". These same remarkable ladies were not only the many local auxiliaries but to avoid dispute had allocated specific annual fundraising events to each organisation or cause they served.

Methods used to raise funds were many. Some were regular, some varied with the prevailing fashion. There were musical soirees, card parties, lectures and talks. Jumble sales, street stalls and raffles galore. Luncheon parties, Dinner parties, Dinner dances. Shipboard Dinner Dances in the days when overseas liners docked overnight were sure fire winners. Competitions from Queen Carnivals to Bonnie Baby Quests to Dog Shows were popular in their time as were table setting competitions. Hat bars, apron bars, tupperware demonstrations had their day. Tendering for catering rights and soft drink stalls at country shows was the speciality of one Auxiliary. Another contracted to do the washing up at local functions for \$1 an hour. That was back to the 1950's. Members of still another marched around the perimeter of the local football field at half time carrying a blanket and soliciting donations.

There were golf days, bowling competitions, tennis afternoons. There was a period when outstanding homes and gardens were opened for inspection at specified times. If there was a sufficient work force and first rate organising ability, art shows, fetes, fairs and car rallies showed a good return. Providing people for crowd scenes in TV commercials had their day.

For the office bearers and staunch members these all involved planning, organisation, and the whipping up of enthusiasm and support.

According to the nature of the function, months of knitting or sewing may have been involved, baking for hours over a hot stove, selling raffle tickets to an unresponsive public on a bleak cold street. In members' homes housework was rushed or perhaps left undone, husbands and children neglected for a period while the work was done.

For some members it meant undertaking tasks which were unpalatable. Perhaps forcing themselves to be bold when by nature they were sensitive, or pushing themselves forward when the desire was to withdraw.

The ladies paid a big cost in time, money and energy. At the end of a function they often returned home bone weary with thumping heads and tired aching legs.

No one can tell the real cost of raising the funds earned by the Auxiliaries. It cannot be measured in money values. The stories associated with their efforts are legion.

From the beginning the Association had the help of volunteers. The distinction of being the first belongs to young Mary Blakely who acted as sighted secretary at the Founding meeting in 1895. Sighted friends escorted early Committee members as they travelled about on recruiting drives. They took blind members shopping, to various types of appointments and assisted at social functions. On a more organised basis they assisted at the Association's Annual Picnic held at the Caulfield Racecourse from 1897.

The opening of the Brighton Home in 1910 introduced new avenues for voluntary service. Mention was made in an earlier chapter of the grand service given by the churches and people of the Brighton District during the first fifty years. The Bendigo and Ballarat Homes enjoyed the same warm hearted support.

History was repeated with the opening of the new Homes at Ballarat and Bendigo in the 1950s. The opening of the new wing at Brighton in 1958 co-incided by and large with the introduction of the next generation to the work. Once again the congregation of St. Leonards Presbyterian Church, Brighton Beach was in the forefront. Close behind were St. Peters Anglican, Were St. Methodist, St Mary's Catholic, Hampton Baptist and Hampton Church of Christ. Mrs Griffiths, a member of the latter served with great distinction for over fifty years. Then there were the readers, shoppers, sewers, entertainers, visitors and those ladies who regularly took the ambulant residents to afternoon tea in their homes. Activity did not cease throughout the day. However the majority of residents did not appreciate evening entertainment. Mostly over 80 years of age, they preferred bed. The pattern of voluntary service was the same at each of the Homes. Church ladies saw help extended to the residents as a fulfilling Christian service.

The social and recreational programmes at Kooyong when the Clubhouse opened in 1928 required the assistance of volunteers. These were needed to prepare and serve suppers, wash dishes, serve as umpires, scorers, and as dancing partners. In this area relatives and friends of the blind members were originally in the majority.

Blind members unable to travel by themselves were encouraged to arrange their own travelling companion who then served as a volunteer. Self help groups were expected to arrange their own assistance. Over the following thirty years a substantial pool of sighted knowledgeable volunteers was built up. Most had become known to each other and an enjoyable comradeship established. Like the older blind members these volunteers were reaching the end of their active life. Association activities became the main social interest in the lives of many of these volunteers. When the blind member died the long time escort felt lost. The compassion of Mr Fowler was displayed when he asked the Committee for approval to continue asking them to Association functions. This was readily given.

The commencement of handcraft classes in 1956 required a considerable force of volunteers as drivers, to help with the handcrafts, to assist the blind members to move around the centre and to prepare and serve morning tea and lunch.

The opening of the new wing at Kooyong in 1966 with far greater capacity and facilities and a much wider range of activities meant a further substantial input of volunteers was essential.

When the Committee reflected on the totality of the volunteer contribution across the whole Association and the number of persons involved, it seemed right and fair that recognition be given to this branch of the work. The result was the formal establishment of the Volunteer Services Group in 1966 with Lieut. Colonel Francis Shippen RRC as President of Honorary Services.

The combination of paid professional staff and volunteers working in harness was not always immediately successful. Some professional staff resented the volunteers and tried to lord it over them. They had to be firmly reminded such behaviour was not acceptable. Some honorary workers saw themselves as a higher class than paid staff and because they were volunteers thought they could turn up or not and come and go as they pleased. They had to be politely shown that from the Association's viewpoint volunteering involved a serious commitment; that they were an integral part of the work force and service programme; that if only one failed to turn up the entire day's activities could be jeopardised. Today volunteers who have been through Association training courses accept considerable responsibility and work side by side with staff on a number of programmes.

Another sensitive time occurred when an auxiliary or volunteers had been running a social programme and the time arrived for a staff member to assume responsibility. The volunteers usually saw the objective as giving the blind members a pleasant day's outing while the staff saw the goal as positive rehabilitation training leading to independent living.

A matter of concern to surface now and then related to the voluntary drivers. Young staff members were tested for competence before they were permitted to transport blind members. The voluntary drivers were usually mature ladies with years of experience. Now and then one came across as accident prone or had sight so poor she should not have been driving or was really too old to be driving. Insurance cover in such cases was a problem. The Association considered its primary responsibility was the safety of the blind members. It was not easy to tell a volunteer that her services could not be used in a particular category. Good leadership and the commonsense of the persons involved usually sorted out any matter of discord with minimum upset.

When the Low Vision Clinic was commenced volunteers were on hand to greet the clients with a cup of tea and foster them through, what to many was a nerve racking experience. Today blind peer workers assist the new comers. Knowing the nervous feelings and the unspoken questions they are able to give needed information and help of a general nature.

When Radio for the Print Handicapped went on air in the 1980s a group of specialist volunteers with a variety of particular skills was required. While other volunteers had direct contact with the visually impaired, the service of these volunteers was to indirectly inform, feed and broaden the minds of their listeners. These volunteers work under tremendous pressure to get the programme 'on air' and so meet their commitments to the blind members and listening public.

The Telephone Support Volunteers perform yet another service. Gifted in personal communication skills they directly assist the vision impaired and other disadvantaged people on a one to one basis.

At the Braille Library a further group of volunteers with another range of interests produce Braille and Tape Books.

The Sporting and Recreational areas cannot be left out. Each self help group has its quota of volunteers.

The spread and extent of volunteer services within the Association for the Blind is so great it is difficult to grasp. In 1895 one sighted volunteer. At the commencement of 1995, 5000 active volunteers. In 1994, as near as can be estimated, volunteers on committees, auxiliaries and other fund raising ventures worked 33,000 hours. Service volunteers worked 227,000 hours. The grand total of 260,000 hours was the equivalent of 136 full time paid positions. Paid as wages that time would have cost over \$3million This ignores the great unseen personal cost to volunteers. Without the volunteer contribution the Association's programmes would collapse. The Honorary Workers of the Association are one of the largest such bodies in the State.

No wonder the General Committee on the retirement of Lieut. Colonel Shippen due to ill health, honoured the volunteer service group by appointing one of its own members, Mrs Diana Jones, as President of Honorary Services. This gave the volunteers a representative and spokesperson at the highest level. When Mrs Jones was elected President of the Association the precedent was continued in the appointment of an equally fine person, Mrs Diana Sher. Both ladies travelled extensively to acknowledge the honorary services given and encourage the givers. They endeared themselves to volunteers and staff alike.

The current President, Mr John Moule, referred to the importance of and thanked the volunteers at the 1995 Annual Meeting of the Association. The Board of Directors know they need to be kept informed of the Association programme; that they suffer stress; that they require nourishment; that they need to hear expressions of appreciation. As one method of ensuring their voice is heard and they are thanked Mr Moule and the CEO meet regularly with the volunteer leaders to discuss and keep abreast of their work, listen to their needs and give encouragement.

The words recorded long ago remain true:-

*"He who shows kindness to those who are seen but do not see
will be rewarded by Him who sees but is not seen."*

29. THE SWINGING PENDULUM

For blind people the clock of opportunity commenced ticking with the foundation of the Association for Advancement of the Blind in December, 1895. Throughout the succeeding century the blind members pendulum of activity has swung backwards and forwards. Whether weak or strong the constant movement and tick of the pendulum has never stopped or ceased to be heard.

This book, on the hundred years' life of the Association for the Blind, presents a broad picture. This chapter reflects in brief, on the chronicles of the Blind Members as part of the total body and the Blind Members Council as the successor to the Committee of Founders.

Considering the tumultuous political situation at the end of the last century, the living circumstances of blind people and the position of women in the community it is difficult to grasp the person, the attributes, the authority, and the driving force which was the young Tilly Aston. There is wonderment that such a personality could emerge, flourish and inspire in such a harsh environment.

Yet this now mighty organisation has grown out of the efforts of, at first, inexperienced blind working men and young girls. The girls, blind and sighted, were in their twenties. On the blind side were Tilly Aston, Janie Robertson and Katie McDougal. Their sighted friends, Mary Blakely, May Harrison and Elsie Tait were normal office workers. The mind gropes for a logical understanding and reason for their extraordinary success.

At the outset Tilly Aston enunciated a policy which appeared impractical. "The blind would take the initiative and speak up for themselves. Only blind persons could understand blind persons and consequently handle their affairs in the proper spirit". This policy anticipated the 'people power' movement some seventy five years before the term became part of every day communication.

Miss Aston displayed her undoubted wisdom and political acumen with the introduction of a parallel policy which recognised the assistance and support of the sighted was necessary in some areas. The AAB under Miss Aston did not castigate government or blame the sighted community for the situation of blind people. It sought to establish links with influential leaders and present blind persons in a positive role of acting to advancing themselves. Government, statutory authorities and the community responded by showing a willingness to help those trying to help themselves.

The enormous achievements of the first twenty five years, summarised in Appendix 1, were the direct result of the blind members activities. The exception was the establishment of the Brighton Home. This dream originated with the blind members but they did not see themselves as capable of translating the vision, with its business pitfalls, into reality.

The constitutional change in 1920 was a major shift in emphasis. The Amendment opened the way for the election of a sighted President, Treasurer and three members of Committee. That such a change was approved by the blind members shows the close relationship which had grown up between the blind and the sighted supporters and the confidence and trust the blind members had in their sighted friends. Thereafter the

sighted members exercised greater influence in business and financial affairs. The blind members, through their monthly meetings, still exercised overall control of the body and the activities of daily life. They personally selected the sighted Committee members.

The AAB-RVIB relationships of the 1930s had an impact in shaping the future of the AAB. Another far sighted policy of the Founders had been that the organisation should remain independent of religious and political affiliations. At a time of considerable dissension within the wider community, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish members worked together in friendship and harmony and wished to continue that way. Blind Members' recollections of the blind workers cruelty in ostracising Miss Aston remained vivid. Because of this they did not wish to be drawn into the industrial debate between the RVIB and its employees with its political overtones. Although a representative always participated in the Financial Agreement discussions with the RVIB and full reports were made to the meetings of blind members an element of suspicion as to the motives of the sighted did take root in the blind members' minds and, for a time, colour their thinking.

This suspicion was aggravated by the attempted coup by a few blind members in 1943 and the petition by the sighted for incorporation. These actions injured the AAB internally and were painful. If even Miss Aston was hurt and dismayed, the negative feelings of the less knowledgeable blind members can be understood.

The blind members, although they endorsed incorporation, felt they were choosing the lesser of two evils. The AAB had ceased to be an organisation of the blind and had become an organisation for the blind. Between the two concepts was a gulf difficult to bridge. The original active members of the AAB who had served and provided leadership and stability were now well into their seventies. As often occurs, a period of strong leadership was followed by a gap in leadership.

In the UK, US and NZ blinded service officers of WW1 had provided outstanding leadership to the non sighted group and were in turn followed by colleagues from WWII. In Australia blinded service people formed their own organisation and as a general rule did not participate in the general scene. This denied needed leadership to the civilian blind. The young potential leaders naturally gravitated to the Guild of Business and Professional Blind. Many blind people who had secured employment in open industry during WW2 wished to remain integrated in the sighted community. Added to these considerations was the feeling, still fuelled by the Blind Workers Union, that any blind person who accepted a management position with an agency was betraying the cause. Partly as a consequence no young vision impaired persons pursued management and business studies. They pursued law, teaching and music degrees.

The sum of these factors contributed to the dearth of leadership. Membership dropped. Fewer attended meetings. The pendulum slowed, the beat weakened. A hard core of the faithful, kept the flag flying. They were staunch people. Neither miserable cold wet weather or searing heat stopped their attendance. Mrs Letitia Hutchinson, Mrs Mabel Bartlett, Mrs Hazel Bradley, Miss Alice MacClelland, Miss Elsie Henderson, Miss Eva Fisher, Miss Nance Evans, Miss Mabel Smart, Arthur and Doris Nothling, George and Emily Lewis, Barry and May Palmer were among the regulars.

The 1944 Incorporation Constitution provided for monthly meetings of the Blind Members and a Blind Members' Council [BMC] replacing the previous Committee, responsible for the management of the body of blind members. The Blind Members Council consisted of nine persons. Five blind persons elected by the members of whom not more than two could be staff members, two blind members of the General Committee and two sighted members.. The Blind Members Council was to meet monthly. The blind members, still distrusting, insisted business continue to be transacted openly at the monthly meetings of members. This deprived the Council of vitality and authority.

Further, during the next few years the blind members became inward looking, living in the past. The hard core at the monthly meetings played a tough game. Mr Lightfoot spoke of occasions when they howled him down and stamped their feet on the floor. Their main target however, was the sighted Secretary.

Old habits died hard and for the first fifteen years following incorporation the meeting agenda remained the same. John Wilson recalled the procedure applying in 1953. Hamish Mackenzie was the Chairman. After the apologies came the names of the proposed new members. The fun, if it can be so termed, then started. The blind members had a canny sense as to the amount of residual vision a person possessed. At most meetings there would be at least one applicant for membership known to some of those present. Even though an ophthalmologist's certificate was available the odds were that someone would claim the remaining sight of the applicant was outside the limit of legal blindness. Great argument as to right of admission would follow.

Next came the obituary. This was a favourite and good for up to half an hour. Comments would range from 'good riddance', to, 'so the dear old soul has gone at last'. The cause of death would be debated knowingly with no facts to confuse them. Countless reminiscences would be shared. This was a pleasant interlude.

Admissions to the Homes followed. The applications for admission always far out numbered the beds available and the members naturally pushed for their own friends. Long debates took place as to why she was admitted before her and whose need was the greater. Paradoxically, they also shook their heads sadly when a friend was admitted to the Brighton Home. To them, at that time, it was the ante chamber to death.

By this time the members were warmed up and ready to dissect the accounts. This was a nightmare time for the Secretary. Blind Members' grey cells worked overtime as they questioned and compared costs and recalled with faultless accuracy the amount expended on various items the previous month and demanded to know the reasons for the difference. No auditor could have given a greater grilling.

Then came general business. Acknowledging his ignorance John Wilson went through the Agenda with Hamish Mackenzie in the office prior to each meeting. At his first few meetings he was astonished when Hamish reneged on some of the advice he had given and voted against it. Tackled on the matter Hamish had an unanswerable answer. "In the office during working hours I give advice as the professional Social Worker and a member of management. As Chairman of the independent Blind Members Meeting I speak as a blind member and rule accordingly". Another lesson the Secretary absorbed quickly was that there were strongly held varying opinions on

every matter which came up for consideration. The wise move was to pass a remark which started the members arguing. This occupied them until cup of tea time.

With the benefit of hindsight, if the time had to be specified when the pendulum of new life began to tick in the blind members, it would be the commencement of the handcraft class at Kooyong under Harold Gratton in 1956. In his first term report to the Committee, Mr Gratton wrote:

" Among the people attending the Centre are some who have been blind all their lives, others who have only recently lost their sight. Working together is a marvellous benefit for all as they get to know and understand each other's problems. Obviously the greatest benefit is to the newly blind as they are able to receive from the more experienced blind persons many little hints which help to make life easier. By so mixing, the newly-blinded people begin to realise that although handicapped they have a place in the community. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to hear some who were at first nervous and rather depressed now volunteering quite confidently to wash or dry the dishes or asking to be shown how to light the gas to boil the kettle for lunch. I would like to express my own and the feelings of the people attending the Centre for the foresight and understanding shown in establishing this, the first rehabilitation centre of its type for the blind people of Victoria".

An ever increasing number of those persons attending the classes were severely vision impaired sighted persons who had lost their vision in later years. They represented the new generation, the successors to the original blind people. They soon began to participate actively in the affairs of the Association. The personal courage and devotion of the original members was inherited by the new generation.

That courage was epitomised by eighty three year old Isadora Smith who lived with her husband Arthur in a little house in Argo St., South Yarra. Arthur, also in his eighties, had been an active worker for the AAB in the early days and a Vice President on four occasions. Both had been blind from birth. They were representative of the first generation members.

On entering a room in which his wife had earlier been reading a braille book to him, Mr Smith fell heavily against a gas heater and was stunned. Mrs Smith, hearing the noise, groped her way to him, felt his clothes were on fire and threw herself on him to smother the flames. Her calls for help attracted a neighbour who called an ambulance. Mrs Smith received severe burns to her hands. Mr Smith received burns to 40 percent of his body. He was admitted to hospital where he died two weeks later. Mrs Smith was admitted to Elanora. She was awarded the Silver Medal of the Royal Humane Society for her bravery.

The 1962 bushfires on the outskirts of Melbourne were a terrifying experience for a number of newer members who had recently lost their sight. There was Mrs May at The Basin, Mrs McIntyre at Warrandyte, Miss Mary Mitchell MBE at Kalorama and Mrs Lemon at The Patch. Each displayed great self control and courage in the face of danger.

Mrs Lemon who was eighty years of age and her daughter Ena had earlier been to the city shopping for clothes for a Snowy Mountains tour scheduled for a few days later.

As the fire approached and smoke filled the valley the residents were given five minutes to evacuate. Hurriedly seizing a few essentials they prepared to leave in Ena's

car. "Wait", cried Mrs Lemon and rushed back to the house through the smoke. She returned with the new clothes she had purchased for the forthcoming trip.

Asked by her daughter why she did such a foolish thing, Mrs Lemon responded: "Well, if we are to finish up with no home, no possessions and nowhere to live we may as well enjoy the Snowy Mountains tour and look our best."

Another kind of courage, the valour of the human spirit in disablement, was shown by Jack McDonald of Camberwell. A member of Toc H and a friend of Mr Lightfoot and Mr Horsfall. Jack, while still a young man, was struck down by a mysterious illness which left him paralysed and without sight. A contributor to 'Courage', he wrote the following story for the November 1956 edition:-

"We look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen. The things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal.

-St Paul.

"Over twenty years have passed since I last saw light. Over twenty years since I jumped eagerly out of bed. Lying here blind and handicapped I spend a lot of time thinking and it seems to me that a person can miss a lot in life when he fails to see with his imagination, with what Wordsworth called 'that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude'.

"Four men lay in a small hospital ward. All were badly disabled and unable to move. So they lay. That's all, just lay.

"The ward had one rather small window and the beds were so placed that only one man had a view of the outside world. So it was, that each morning after the nurse made them comfortable following the doctor's round, they rested quietly and listened while the chap in the bed near the window described the passing scene.

"He told them of a large park with wide stretches of lawns and many trees and crossed by wide pathways bordered by flower beds.

"In the chilling winter months he told of the bare trees, of people muffled up in coats and scarfs hurrying by in the biting wind and driving rain. After a fall of snow he would describe the children as they made a snowman, of their fun and glee while throwing snowballs.

"With the dawn of Spring, the buds on the trees broke into pale green leaves which each day became thicker and darker in colour. On the flower beds, splashes of varied hues appeared as the flowers burst into bloom.

"During Summer, people would rest in the shade of the trees. On holidays there would be happy picnic parties and groups of children playing with bat and ball on the grass.

"With the coming of Autumn, the trees would sometimes be shrouded in mist as their leaves changed to red and yellow and brown. On a windy day they would be blown from the trees and scattered on the lawns and to make a carpet on the pathways where they swirled around the feet of the people as they hurried on their way.

"And so each day they listened attentively to his description of the changing scene until, suddenly, one day he died.

"For some days the bed was empty. The others asked that one of them be moved to the vacant position. They drew lots. That night the chosen man was moved.

"In the morning they waited eagerly for the moment when they could rest quietly and once again hear of the happenings in the park.

"The new man remained silent so long his companions impatiently urged him, saying. 'Go on, tell us what you can see!'

"After a pause he spoke slowly. 'I see nothing but a high brick wall' ".

By the mid 1950s blind people were starting to scramble over their personal brick wall and take their rightful place in the broader community. In more recent times, as did Jack McDonald earlier, members with severe physical disability such as Lorraine Bennett of Kelaston and Barry Farnsworth at Elanora have inspired by the valour of their spirits.

The opening of the three new homes between 1956 and 1959 with an increased number of beds, was followed by a review of the Association control mechanism. The Constitution was amended in September 1960 to formalise the Branch Committee structure which had been undergoing trials. The Branch Committees were in fact sub-committees consisting of two members of the General Committee which gave them legal status. To these could be added up to eight other local persons. In practice the eight local persons conducted the affairs of their respective home or centre. . In addition to the benefits to management and the blind patients, Branch Committees were a vital factor in obtaining and retaining local support and confidence.

To establish direct liaison with the blind residents, the General Committee appointed one of its blind representatives as a delegate to each Branch Committee.. The blind representative accompanied the Chief Executive Officer to the home on committee meeting days, talked with the residents and reported his or her findings to the local branch committee. An independent report was also made to the blind members meeting on the morale, unresolved complaints, if any, and general situation of the residents. This system had the effect of increasing the involvement of the blind members in matters of relevance to them, stimulating their interest and increasing their influence. Matters of concern to blind members, continued to be referred to staff for action and resolution..

Among the blind members who emerged at this time to provide leadership were Mesdames Ann Docherty a regular contributor to the Association magazine *Courage*, Wyn Christian, Belle McIntyre and Ada Sharpe. On the male side Mr. Fred Tolstrup JP, an Insurance agent, did much to widen the acceptance by insurance companies of blind persons. All had been sighted persons.

The explosion of day services, activities and self help groups following the opening of the new wing at Kooyong in 1966 necessitated further changes. These were promulgated in September,1973. These changes recognised the priorities of the Association as a service provider and those of the blind members were no longer necessarily the same. Staff were insufficient to service both groups. Further, the Association when seeking funding had to walk warily and tread softly while blind

people speaking for themselves could be much more outspoken without fear of repercussions. The changes also recognised the traditional monthly meeting of members at Kooyong no longer represented all the Kooyong members let alone the state wide membership. Pressed by Mr Lightfoot, the decision was made to reactivate the Blind Members Council as a real management body with executive powers.

The original appointees to the Council had a close relationship with the General Committee and Chief Executive Officer. This ensured the new concept was developed in harmony with Association policies. Bryan Sitlington and Arthur Wilkins were selected as blind staff members. Mr Lightfoot who had stepped down as President was invited to accept appointment as the sighted person. Mesdames Margaret Eisenbach and Peg Sitlington and Messrs Braim, Brumby and Neil Maxwell [no relation to the late George Maxwell] were the members. Mr Sitlington was chosen as Chairman and continued in that role for eighteen years until his retirement. Miss Jan Wilson was transferred as full time Secretary. The Blind Members Council was regarded as a Branch and the Secretary given the status of a Branch Manager.

To replace the long established monthly meeting of members, the residents of each home and members of each day centre were encouraged to select a representative regional committee with its own office bearers. Regular visits were made to each centre by the Chairman and Secretary and such Council members as were able. Information and news were circulated. In the course of time representatives of country centres were elected to the BMC. The Council processed issues as they arose. As confidence grew the work load increased.

Two of the first matters undertaken by the Council were the design of a blind members badge and production of a booklet containing information of general use to members.

Miss Elsie Henderson, who was honoured in the award of the MBE in 1974, died in November 1976. She had lived with her cousin Alice Scoullar, her husband Doug and their children Jennifer and Rodney, in Gardenvale. All members of this family were deeply involved voluntary workers. Miss Henderson had served the blind people of Victoria faithfully and well for forty years. Never prepared to take 'no' for an answer, the number of newly blind women to whom she was a transforming genius is legion. At the request of the blind members her portrait was commissioned. It was hung in the Elsie Henderson room at Kooyong.

In 1978 the Blind Members Council under the chairmanship of Bryan Sitlington promoted a function in Paterson Hall to recognise twenty five years of service by John Wilson. To mark the occasion the blind members contributed to a fund to establish the John Wilson Award. The award recognises an outstanding contribution by a blind or sighted person to the Association or the Blind Members. This award is a plaque presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association.

During the 1970's a world wide effort was made under the auspices of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind to establish October 15 each year as White Cane Day. The objective was to promote the use of the white cane by blind people and draw the attention of the community to its purpose and safety requirements. The Association participated from the commencement. In 1979 the Premier, the Rt Hon. R.G.Hamer proclaimed October 15 each year as White Cane Day in Victoria. In 1980, recognising the lead the Association had taken, representatives from all the agencies formed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Bryan Sitlington to promote the White

Cane concept. The White Cane is now used and recognised internationally as the symbol of blindness.

From time to time Professor Gerard Crock, who was a tremendous friend to both the Association and the blind members, mentioned the need for a group where highly placed professional or business people with low vision could meet with others of like quality. The Association did not feel it had a suitable person of the requisite standing to provide leadership.

The appointment of Mr John Blanch to the Committee in 1979 changed the picture. Mr Blanch had severe visual impairment. He had held important company positions at senior management and director level, been President of St Andrews' Hospital and an Honorary Aide at Government House. He was asked to form a Special Interest group. The group is active, growing and successful. Although a number of the type of professional women Prof. Crock had in mind have participated, highly placed business and professional men have not, as had been hoped, felt attracted to group social interaction with others of similar standing. Being too independent can prolong grief, delay adjustment and deny helpful friendship.

The blind members overcame a major hurdle when Mr Arthur Wilkins made his presence felt at the BCCC. He was an old hand at organising church holidays and tours both within Australia and overseas. Within a year he had badgered the Committee into letting him organise one for the blind members, - provided there was no cost to the Association.

Cumberland House, Lorne was settled upon as the venue. The first holiday was held in August 1969 with eighty five persons present. The success was phenomenal. The Rehabilitation benefits exceeded all expectations. It was as if a prison door had been opened. Some congenital blind persons had never been on a holiday. Some blind members had not been on a holiday since losing their sight. Living, eating and sharing activities together broke down the barriers between blind members and sighted staff. The blind members felt they were among friends, that they were not being stared at as they ate, that they were not being regarded as inferior, that they could display ignorance without being laughed at.. Sitting on the beach members who had been blind from birth posed such questions as, "If the sky is blue and the sea is blue how do you tell where one stops and the other starts?" "How do you tell the difference between dirt and sand?"

Mr Wilkins had written to the local Council, Churches and Service Clubs preparing the ground. The people of Lorne responded magnificently, treating the holiday makers as "normal", which indeed they were. Pride, confidence, independence and mobility increased dramatically. The more naive of the staff and blind members were so pleased when most of the men, forgoing the demon drink, walked up the street for a milk shake before dinner each evening. It became known as the "milk run". Arthur was not deceived but his Air Force experience had taught him it was wise at times to turn a blind eye. The men always came back in time for dinner, upright in stance, clear in speech, steady of step, faces glowing with innocence. In future holidays a number of the ladies joined them.

The following year there were two holidays, both booked out. Husbands who had been ashamed or embarrassed by their wife's blindness started to come with them and

to their surprise enjoyed themselves. They began to see their partner in a new light and have pride in her achievements. One lady was in heaven when she later broadcast that her husband, a man of substance who had not been out with her since she lost her sight, was taking her on a world trip.

The sighted children of the young blind mothers, themselves now mothers, still talk about those wonderful holidays which were a new, mind blowing experience for them.

The blind members soon wanted to spread their wings. In 1972 it was Sydney, 1973 Adelaide, 1974 Surfers Paradise where Bruce Small was delighted to entertain them in his home. Central Australia followed. For those able to afford the cost the next move was overseas. Fiji, New Zealand, Norfolk Island, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong and into China. Many were the giggles of the blind ladies as they told of the shock and their experiences in coping with the hole in the ground toilets of China and the benefits of no sight when faced with some of the meals. Their adventures ranged from para gliding to camel riding.

Long weekend holidays by chartered coach became a regular feature. Organised by Arthur Nothling. The groups went to many parts of Victoria and across the border to the pokies. Blind people were doing all these things years before the practice became a sighted service club feature.

These holidays still take place under the auspices of the Blind Members Council. In 1994 there were two groups to Cairns under the leadership of Shirley Admans. In 1995 a coach tour of West Australia. The holidays have been a tremendous confidence builder and a major step in the integration and acceptance of blind people as equals in the wider community. The concept has spread interstate and been noted internationally.

Council Members who served in later years until the conversion of the Association to a Company were: Mrs Winsome Baker, Mrs Jean Ross Miss Eileen Campbell and Messrs Keith Anderson, John Blanch, Ralph Chamberlain, Ken Dixon and John Mierisch. A number of these members also served on the General Committee. In particular Mrs Jean Ross, a valued senior member, served from 1976 until her resignation in 1992 when she was living considerable distance away in the country. She was appointed a Vice President in 1991. Mrs Ross travelled extensively to the branches and day centres and was also a representative on Mirridong Committee. Mr John Blanch served as a Vice President from 1979 until 1991 when ill health reduced his involvement. Mr Blanch gave notable service in the business and public relations areas. Mr John Mierisch served from 1980 till 1990. His particular field of activity was the blind members activities and affairs.

In 1987 Mr John Wicking followed Mr Lightfoot as the sighted General Committee representative on the Blind Members Council maintaining its high profile and its close contact with the Committee.

Following Jan Wilson the secretarial and management functions were carried out by Miss Jennie Lawrie, Mrs Betty McKenzie and Mrs Camille Wilkins. Each served for a number of years. Mrs Shirley Admans has served since 1991. All possessed the special qualities which made them acceptable to blind persons.

The outcome of the 1981 Year for Disabled Persons was seen in the service area in 1986 when the Commonwealth replaced the 1974 Handicapped Persons Assistance

Act with the Disability Services Act. The key to this Act was 'positive outcomes'. The objective was to ensure that persons with disabilities, whatever their nature, received the services necessary to achieve their full potential as members of the community.

On November 22, 1990, the Commonwealth Minister for Community Services and Health, the Hon Brian Howe, addressed the Annual Conference of the Australian Council for the Disabled. The Convention theme was Human Rights - Beyond Welfare..

The Minister acknowledged complete change was a slow process. He introduced a series of Minimum Outcome requirements which had to be in place to obtain funding in the 1991/92 financial year. Both the Committee and BMC welcomed these statements of principle.

The BMC had by now reached full maturity. It was fulfilling Miss Aston's ambition that blind people take the initiative and speak for themselves. It had also absorbed the detail of the Commonwealth legislation. This legislation, introduced a hundred years later, reiterated Miss Aston's aspirations and goals.

The BMC had adopted the advocacy practice of the foundation committee of blind members. When Telecom announced its intention of charging for 013 Directory Assistance Calls the Council went public in opposition, speaking on behalf of disabled persons unable to read, handle or comprehend the small print in the telephone directory. Telecom granted exception. In response to complaints it negotiated the replacement of slippery tiles at Flinders Street railway station. It took action on the introduction of split pedestrian crossings which gave trams right of way over pedestrians in certain circumstances.

The BMC has been active and forward looking. Many of the needs of blind people are the same as those of the elderly and disabled generally. An outstanding example, chronic in nature, is hazards. The Council has pursued this issue with authorities who failed to police their own regulations. It has petitioned public authorities and commercial businesses for simpler clearer forms. It liaised with Vic Roads and the RACV on traffic safety. It organised an annual Confident Living Convention in conjunction with the National Centre for Ageing and Sensory Loss. It organised a Banking Awareness Day. It produces informative, appreciated newsletters, in print and audio tape. It conducts a weekly programme on 3RPH. A recently published brochure, *'Driving, Could It Be Time To Stop'* has been an outstanding success. It arranged for Mr John Balmain to paint a portrait of Miss Tilly Aston from an old photograph. Full size copies have been sent to all branches. It is currently preparing a submission to the Prices Surveillance Authority on banking fees and charges and another to the Packaging Council on difficulties encountered with today's packaging of products. A sub committee has also been formed to look at issues older people face in coming to terms with technological advances.

Council Members are expected to make suggestions. If approved the member is encouraged to initiate action. Mrs Elsie Germon organised the panel of blind speakers involved in the immensely successful and popular schools education programme. Mrs Mary Longman introduced the University of the Third Age. Mrs Winsome Baker who was injured when she fell as she alighted from a tram successfully negotiated for a coloured strip on tram and bus steps.

An important contribution, described in modern words, has been the 'peer service'. This was known to Tilly Aston in her school days as the buddy system when older more experienced girls looked after the younger children. The concept was introduced to the the Association as part of the friendly visiting system.

Blind members are to be seen as peer workers in the day centres, at holidays and wherever a group of non sighted persons is gathered. It is axiomatic that those who have travelled longer along the misty road, appreciating the help they received, would in turn help to ease the way of the newcomers.

A further step forward was taken with the opening of the Vision Resource Centre in 1989. A number of blind persons undertook a training course, were formally recognised as Centre Guides and have shown 15,000 people through the complex by the end of August, 1995.

Other members have received training and accepted responsibility as peer workers in the Low Vision Clinic looking after and assisting clients as they proceed through the testing process.

The BMC is actively involved in the Service Programme. It conducts feasibility studies and ascertains the feelings of the blind members prior to a programme being introduced and reviews the programmes on an on going basis. Each Council Member is responsible for a Region and attends Regional Meetings. Delegates visit and review the service programmes at Regional Centres. BMC Chairpersons conduct Workshops which are attended by Regional Chairpersons. The Council holds a combined meeting with the Chairpersons twice a year and it meets with the Board of the Association three times a year. In total a comprehensive series of communication channels and monitoring procedures are in place.

On the conversion of the Association to a company in 1990 a rule was introduced requiring one third of the elected council members to retire each year and recontest their position. With a blind membership of 1250, competition for a position on the Council is keen.

The current chairman of the Blind Members Council is Mrs Eve Lustig who is also a Vice President of the Association. A speech therapist, Mrs Lustig was introduced to the Association 16 years ago through the Low Vision Clinic. At Kooyong Mrs Lustig is a volunteer member of the guide team and conducts parties of visitors through the Centre. She also had a 15 minute segment, the 'Eye Opener' on 3RPH each Sunday morning at 7am. A confident capable speaker, she enjoys giving her time to public speaking for the Association. Mrs Lustig completes three years as chairman in the latter part of 1995 and will be followed by Mr Don Draffin.

Other Members of the Council for 1994 -1995 are Mesdames Judd , Cook, Crook, Knight and Messrs Gunning, Draffin and Lissendon.

Mrs Lustig, speaking of the present generation of vision impaired and blind persons, sees them as being self confident, integrated in and respected by the community. She sees equality of opportunity for realisation of individual capacities in the areas of physical, social, emotional and intellectual development. She sees them as now having the same basic human rights as other members of Australian society.

Members of the Blind Members Council have joy and pleasure at being able to represent the voice of vision impaired persons and contribute to the work and service of the Association. They are conscious of their awesome responsibility as representatives of and spokespersons for countless thousands of vision impaired people. They take very seriously their accountability in promoting policies, scrutinising services and in the need to work as a team with the Board, Volunteers and Staff.

The BMC considers itself fortunate to have had Mr. John Wicking as its sighted representative during the many changes of the past ten years. Mr Wicking retired in 1994 but remains deeply involved. Board Member, Mr Robin Pleydell followed for a year and has in turn been succeeded by Mr Malcolm Daubney who has worked closely with blind people for many years and has a strong empathy with the Members. It believes the Association is privileged to have a such a distinguished person as Mr John Moule as overall leader of the Association and is delighted to be associated with him.

Mrs Lustig spoke of the happy spirit and feeling of excitement and anticipation throughout the membership as the Centenary Appeal and new century draws ever nearer.

The progress of blind people during the past hundred years, from an inferior, destitute existence to a place of admired standing within the broad community has been a glorious victory. Although the Founders had no sight they did have great vision. A vision their successors latched on to and developed. The two strands of young Tilly Aston's original policy have been vindicated - self help and sighted support. Deserved credit is given to Commonwealth and State Governments for massive financial assistance, The support of sighted friends in a variety of ways along the way has also been essential. However, all the team work and help would have been to no avail if blind persons themselves, had not, with grit and determination, set out to master the physical impediments and mental inhibitions which could, so easily, have held them back and imprisoned them.

The Blind Members Council and the Blind Members are maintaining the spirit of Tilly Aston. They have toiled and beaten down the bars. They are living as others and taking their fill of all life's best. If Tilly could see them now she would feel very proud indeed.

And the Blind Members are proud of Tilly. The pendulum is swinging strongly, the tick is loud. Although the world may be vastly different, the task of the Blind Members Council and the blind members in 1995 is in every way as important and onerous as was that of the Committee of Founders and blind members in 1895.

As their acknowledgement of this fact and their tribute to the memory of Miss Aston they have determined as part of the Centenary Appeal to establish the Tilly Aston Library Fund. Knowing of Miss Aston's love of literature and braille, the proceeds of this Fund will be used to assist in transferring and establishing the Braille and Talking Book Library at Kooyong.

To commemorate the occasion the BMC is striking a Tilly Aston Medallion in gold, silver and bronze. The Medallion, together with this History will be tangible markers of a momentous event.

30. NEW BEGINNINGS

The chapter heading has two prongs. Firstly, the lead up to and conversion of the Association to a limited company which heralded a new beginning. Secondly, the future of the service programme which, as a consequence of changed government policies, was also a new beginning.

During the second half of the 1980s a number of organisations and companies of various kinds found themselves in deep financial trouble. Many of these costly financial failures were due to the ineptitude of Boards of Directors, the actions of ambitious dominant Chief Executive Officers or a combination of both. These debacles, a repeat of the 1890s, gave rise to a change in community attitudes in respect of the conduct of companies. One devastating deception was perpetrated by the Chief Executive Officer of the Victorian Safety Council. This led to the Board being accused of dereliction of duty and harmed the reputations of some very fine people. The shock waves reverberated through the charitable field. Board Members, although honorary, began to realise more fully the extent of their responsibilities and liabilities. This event gave emphasis and urgency to action brought initiated by the State Government.

In December 1985 a review of the state Health Legislation was announced. The intention was to replace entirely the Health Act and Hospitals and Charities Act.

In 1988 the Victorian Government passed new legislation entitled the "Health Services Act 1988". This Act repealed as from May 14, 1989, the Hospitals and Charities Act under which the Association was incorporated. A three year period of grace was provided during which those organisations affected were to migrate to the Associations Incorporation Act 1981 or the Victorian Companies Code.

The Committee of the Association, after consideration, decided to register under the Companies Code which was of higher standing and had more rigorous standards of accountability.

The right composition of a Board of Directors had never been more crucial to a community organisation. The responsibilities of Board Members were heavy, many and varied. They had a duty to act honestly and in good faith; a duty of care and diligence; a duty to ensure compliance with financial and accounting obligations. They had a duty to ensure that competent persons acted as officers and servants of the company. They were entitled to trust the Executives to perform their duties properly but still had the responsibility to protect their own integrity and that of the organisation by establishing mechanisms to monitor finance, service, assess the effectiveness of staff performance and the suitability and depth of the top management structure. These requirements of the modern Board were a far cry from the days when Committee members were involved in the detail of service provision and management.

In a community welfare organisation service to the clientele was paramount, not the profit motive. Stewardship of public funds was a major responsibility. Money was a tool to be wisely used, its acquisition not the end objective. If the Board was composed entirely of business and professional men they could, quite innocently, become preoccupied with the formal requirements and procedures at the expense of an

entrepreneurial spirit or involvement in the service areas. Both Commonwealth and State Governments had for years been strong advocates of major consumer participation on Boards. Consumers had always played a prominent role on the Committees and elsewhere within the Association. However, if consumer wants took precedence over responsible organisation and financial management, problems would result. The answer was to maintain and further develop the partnership of blind and sighted which had worked so well in the past.

Mr Wicking was appointed Chairman of the Sub Committee formed to look after the Incorporation as a Company. With his extensive knowledge of blind people, government procedures and organisational detail, Mr Wicking had been making an important contribution to the transitional linkage between the 1980s and 1990s. Mr Ian Bult handled the legal side. His many years acting for the Association in matters relating to the Hospitals and Charities Act had given him a deep insight into departmental thinking. He knew the ethos of the Association and was an exceptionally clear thinker.

No better qualified men could have been found to give expression to the deeply implanted desires and longings of the Association. Both spent much time and gave detailed consideration to the many thorny questions which arose. As far as the law permitted the new Articles of Association reflected and embodied the provisions and rules of the old Constitution.

The Association for the Blind Ltd. was incorporated under the Victorian Companies Code on the 19th June, 1990. One era had ended. A new one had commenced.

Members of the first Board of Directors were the current Committee Members: Sighted persons; Mrs Diana Jones, President; Mrs Diana Sher, Messrs Wicking, Wall, Pleydell, Bult, Malycon and Marshall. Nominees of the Blind Members were Mesdames Charters, Germon, Baker, Ross, Messrs Blanch, Kerr and Maxwell.

The Association was going through a rigorous external examination when the Board of Directors assumed responsibility. Two independent audits of the Association were carried out in 1990. The quality of service was reviewed by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology on behalf of the Commonwealth. Accounting and Finance were audited by Coopers and Lybrand, a prominent accounting firm on behalf of the Commonwealth and State. Both reports were positive. These Reports ensured continued government funding

By a strange twist of fate the first two major issues faced by the Board were relationships with the BTBL and RVIB.

A successful marriage. The dalliance with the Braille Library had begun ten years earlier.

In the late 1970's, planning had commenced on a multi storey building to replace the two blocks of flats on the Glenferrie Rd. frontage Kooyong. At the time funds were insufficient and informal discussion was taking place with the President of the Braille and Talking Book Library on the wisdom of the Library moving next to the H.M.Lightfoot Centre.

A strong case could be made for rationalisation and siting the two organisations on adjacent sites. Many of the BTBL readers were elderly and also participated in the

programmes at Kooyong; there was no longer a large concentration of readers living in the Prahran area as had been the case in the early years; there were common features between BTBL production and 3RPH program production; the Association had a growing collection of large print books; the BTBL acknowledged concerns about finance. If agreement could be reached the Vision Resource Centre could be designed as part of an overall master plan. The then President of the BTBL, Mr John Cockayne acknowledged the advantages but also saw a number of impediments to such a vision from the Library viewpoint.

One important consideration was the activity of Mrs Jan Smark Nilsson who had been appointed to the dual position of Librarian and Chief Executive Officer. Mrs Smark Nilsson believed strongly that the Library should be part of the Public Library system and funded in the same way and to the same extent. Sweden was a successful example of this concept. Just as Morse Code had been largely superseded by voice in Radio Telegraphy, so Braille was being largely replaced by audio and large print. If the new formats were made available through the public library system the advantages would extend far beyond blind people. Initially, success attended her indefatigable efforts in a number of directions.

In 1980 the Library was declared a Public library for use by print handicapped people. This meant the service could be used by anyone who, for whatever reason was unable to read print. Her concepts and efforts to take the Library out of the Blind Welfare system tended to put her offside with some of her more conservative colleagues among the agencies. The Library Committee did not wish to compromise her efforts if they would ensure the stability of finance. The Association proceeded independently with plans to build the Vision Resource Centre.

During 1989 the Braille and Talking Book Library faced up squarely to its unstable financial position and accepted it needed the support of a stronger partner. Government funding only met about half the annual operating cost of \$1.3m. Political promises had proved an illusion. The work, despite its importance, lacked public financial appeal.

The same year the Commonwealth Dept of Community Services and the RVIB combined to commission Touche Ross P/L to compile a report on RVIB services. This report allegedly said the RVIB had "an overall public image of complacent conservatism, lack of entrepreneurial initiative and was not keeping pace with developments in disability services." The report recommended the RVIB concentrate on its core activities and reassess the potential for its talking book and newspaper reading services to be amalgamated with the BTBL. [*Sun.* 17/6/89].

In April 1990 the Board of the BTBL made a request to the Victorian Minister for the Arts for additional funds. The response was a suggestion the Library enter discussions with the RVIB on the possibility of a merger. The RVIB responded that it was willing and prepared to absorb the financially troubled BTBL.

This disappointed Mrs Jan Smark Nilsson. She was opposed to a merger with the RVIB and indeed with any blind welfare agency. She had maintained consistently, her conviction that the Braille Library should be seen as part of the Public Library system and be treated accordingly. She maintained her stand and resigned.

Library Services for the print handicapped were indeed a complex subject. Major changes had taken place since the early days when transcribers, working at home with a blunt stylus, laboriously pushed out the braille letters one at a time, working backwards. Mechanical hand brailers after the style of typewriters followed. The best known were the British Stainsby and US Perkins Brailers. Then came the new formats including a variety of Talking Books, Cassettes and Large Print books. Education, vocation and leisure reading had to be covered in all formats. Newspapers, magazines, library books and text books were all reproduced in the alternate formats.

The RVIB Library service originally majored on educational material for its students. The service was expanded with the advent of talking books. It did however restrict lending to traditional users. The Braille Library on the other hand serviced physically disabled and print handicapped persons as well as blind people. Some 38 percent of its material went to public libraries. A recent review of Print Disability Services had shown the consumers had given the Braille Library an 82 percent excellence rating, the highest in Australia.

As a lender of braille books the Braille Library reached its zenith in 1989. It then had a membership of 576 braille readers, a stock of 6833 titles in approximately 450,000 volumes. In the five years following the number of braille readers declined to 370. This fall had been more than matched by an increase in other forms of reading. This was one indicator of the better use of residual vision by older blind people who always had difficulty in comprehending and mastering braille. Lack of sensitivity in their fingers made the dots difficult to feel or distinguish. The retention of some residual vision combined with the provision of low vision aids had enabled many to resume reading. Nevertheless a limited future remained for braille which was the only tactile system.

The Government endorsed a merger and set up a Committee to assist in bringing the two organisations together. Discussions took place between the Braille Library and the RVIB. From the Braille Library viewpoint a satisfactory basis for a merger did not surface and negotiations were ended.

A meeting between Board representatives of the Braille Library and Senior Executives of the Association led by Mr John Cook was then arranged. The Library delegates reported back: "The discussion can only be described as very refreshing, professional and of such significance as to give confidence the problems being currently faced could be overcome permanently."

A Heads of Agreement was drawn up and signed on August 22,1990, only three months after the new beginning. The Agreement recognised the two organisations had a common heritage and common consumer groups, that a merger would enable staff and information services to be rationalised and increase the opportunity to further increase reading services. The Agreement also contained the Association's commitments in respect of the future of the Library. The merger was to take effect from October 4,1990. Mr Ian Bult of Abbot Tout Russell Kennedy handled the legal aspects for the Association and Mr Nicholas Jones of Maule James for the Library.

The merger was taken to the Minister who gave his approval. The one matter of contention was the government financial grant. The RVIB maintained its Library Service was badly treated in this regard. The Minister solved the issue by cutting the Braille Library Grant down the center and giving half to the RVIB.

However, as was generally the case in work for the blind, it was a case of one in all in. The National Federation of Blind Citizens of Australia, in keeping with its slogan "the visually handicapped people of Australia speaking for themselves and acting in concert for their mutual benefit", objected to the deal. It said the Association was "biting off more than it could chew" and that the takeover would result in a lower standard of service to readers. A case was based on the flawed legal assumption that the Library Board did not have the power to enter such an agreement without the approval of its members. Both the Braille Library and Association perceived the long term wisdom of having the library members approval. A meeting of members was called. The intervening period saw intense lobbying. The voting members of the Braille Library confirmed the action of the BTBL Board.

On October 4,1990 the two organisations united under one banner in time to complete their respective century of service.

The BTBL had 3500 readers and an annual expenditure of \$1.3m. Approximately 50 percent had been met by the State Dept. of the Arts which funded public libraries. This was now halved. In the Library - RVIB discussions the future had been seen as more of the same. The Association's vision of the future was of a comprehensive information service ultimately joining the developing information 'super highway' and having a national basis. The merger had the immediate benefit of bringing the information and communication services, namely 3RPH radio information services, the telephone hot line 008 and the braille, talking book and large print reading services under one overall control. This resulted in a more cost effective and efficient service.

The fears of the NFBC were not realised. A permanent staff of 31 under Chief Librarian Rose Blustein, an outstanding Librarian, Administrator and Technocrat has an annual acquisition target of 1000 volumes. At the 30th June 1994 the Library stocked 15,000 audio and 5000 braille books. It had 4700 borrowers of whom 650 were young adults or children. By June 1995 the number of borrowers had increased to 5600.

A move was made to electronic technology. The Commonwealth Government made a substantial grant for new Computer equipment. This equipment could scan the printed page like a photocopier and print out the braille transcription at remarkable speed. The new computer system was compatible with the Public Library equipment. The quality of the audio production could be measured by the fact the Library had in the last three years won the annual National Award for the best audio book of the year. The range of all types of books had increased, the waiting list of new borrowers had been reduced and the turn around time in book exchange has been speeded up.

Further, even though the Braille Library remained part of a Welfare Agency, increased production had enabled a substantial portion of the output to go into the public library system. Before the end of 1995 the Braille Library will be linked to other public libraries through the VICNET system. This will give borrowers with personal computers and modem connections direct access to all public library book lists. Efforts are now being made to make the library self supporting financially.

An unsuccessful proposal. During discussions on the future of the Braille Library, Mr John Cook told the Chief Executive Officer of the RVIB that the Association was

willing to co-operate with the RVIB in Library Services or on a broader basis. The two jointly prepared a Discussion Paper.

The discussion then moved to Board level. The proposal presented an opportunity to consider as a minimum formal collaboration and the rationalisation of some services. The paper also canvassed the possibility of amalgamation. The timing was appropriate.

For years the Executive Directors of the RVIB, Mr. Ted Petersen; Braille and Talking Book Library, Mrs Jan Smark Nilsson; National Guide Dog Association, Mr Keith Holdsworth; Villa Maria Society, Mr Maurice McKernan and John Wilson had worked closely and amicably together on local affairs. In recent years, on national matters, they had co-operated under leadership of Prof. McCredie who was also the President of the Australian National Council of and for the Blind. All five Chief Executives had now retired or were retiring in the immediate future. New lines of communication needed to be established and the possibility of developing new avenues of rationalisation and co-operation for the benefit of the entire vision impaired population of Victoria required exploring.

The outcome of the discussions was not positive. The two agencies drifted apart as did all the Victorian agencies. However, by 1995 the Chief Executive Officers of the Association and RVIB were again discussing matters of mutual interest.

Mrs Jones retired as President and from the Board in 1992 after 16 years of service, the last eight years as President. Personal pride in her achievements was tinged with that one regret. Knowing that relationships between the two bodies had been sensitive during the first fifty years of the Association's life and knowing that in the second fifty years there had been a conscious effort by both organisations to cooperate and work in harmony, she had hoped to see the Association and RVIB establish some type of formal understanding as a precursor to the Association's second century of service.

The service of Mrs. Jones to the Association, and over many years to the wider community, was recognised in her appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia in the 1993 Queen's Birthday Honors.

Appointment of President. The Association was once again unbelievably fortunate. It secured the interest of Mr John Moule, Managing Partner of the large financial and accounting firm, Deloitte, Ross Tohmatsu. Mr Moule joined the Board in September 1991 enabling Mrs Jones to retire in April 1992. Mr Moule was then unanimously elected President. He settled in quickly, showed himself sensitive to the ethos of the Association and was seen by the entire organisation as a most admirable and acceptable choice. As has been the case with every President over the past fifty years he is supported by his spouse, Pam.

Gold is God. Mr John Moule had barely assumed the office of President when another major change occurred. The State Labour Government had presided over a series of disastrous financial deals. The long suffering silent majority of Victorians had endured enough. At the 1992 election they voted overwhelmingly for a change of Government.

The new Liberal Government acted as if there was no tomorrow. In its haste to replenish the Treasury finances with minimum delay, the slogan "no gain without

pain" was applied. That the government wanted to do the right thing was not questioned. Its visionary programme was generally applauded. However the manner in which it implemented essential change by turning conservative Victoria into the gambling state and harshly pruning front line health and public services was widely questioned by the community.

One of the government's early moves was to turn back the clock and merge Community Services with the Health Dept. This was a sensible move. Dr. John Paterson was appointed the head of the combined departments.. Under his leadership and that of the Hon Michael John MP Minister for Community Services and the Hon Rob Knowles MLC, Minister for Aged Care, proper business practices were introduced. and state planning for health and community services improved immeasurably. Co-operation between State and Commonwealth authorities involved in the area also reached new levels. New funding arrangements were hammered out for the Association. Beds were closed and staff reduced in the nursing homes. The nursing home staff loss was compensated by an increase in staff servicing day care programmes funded by Government. Overall the staff level of 424 persons remained the same as in 1980 with the number of blind and vision impaired persons assisted more than doubling.

There were those staff members who speaking of the nursing homes said the cuts had gone too deep; that "tender loving care" was out. They desired to give such care but felt there had been a return to the industrial production line concepts of the fifties and sixties; that in order to meet government requirements the time and motion study idea had returned; that each staff member was a small replaceable cog in a big wheel with a particular job to do and specified time to do it in.

There was a feeling that quality care was seen by government as providing the bare essentials for life. Anything above that depended on whether or not the organisation had the support of volunteers. "The days when you could see a gardener talking to an old blind lady, describing the glorious colour of the roses, a dew drop on a leaf, the bees busy gathering nectar, or leading her to enjoy the smell of a scented flower were gone. The days when a nursing aide could be seen walking slowly around the block, an elderly patient on each arm, enjoying the simple pleasure of walking and the joy of being outdoors were gone. The days when a young nurse assistant while making up beds, had time to chat about a night's outing with the eagerly listening elderly patient sitting on a bedside chair were gone. The little person to person enjoyments and contacts which bonded staff and patients and added quality to life had been taken away by Federal and State politicians and bureaucrats seeking financial efficiencies. As always, the innocent and defenceless were the losers".

These sentiments which expressed the personal feelings and disappointments of some nursing home staff members in the 1990s were refuted in varying degrees by others. The negative views may have been coloured by the general feeling of unhappiness which the media reported as endemic at all levels throughout the health service.

Undoubtedly the government had a major problem in reconciling community expectations in the health area with the availability of funds. The Association in turn had to reconcile quality and quantity of service with individual expectations and finance available. Since interpretation of these concepts varies from person to person and between sections of the community, resolution is not easy.

Business Plan. The Board addressed the positives and negatives, the strengths and weaknesses of the Association in an excellent business plan which looked at future operations.

This Business Plan is the second prong of this chapter. In it the Board saw the mission of the Association as, "to reduce the impact of ageing, blindness and disability for the individual". The outcome was seen as new beginnings for people: Overcoming the fear of sensory loss, regaining life skills and independence, re-establishing community contacts and in general restoring self esteem and dignity.

It saw the provision of services as requiring a caring approach, acting with integrity, adopting traditional values and being efficient in business operations. It foresaw a different mix in services, a shift in service priorities and the need for a building and refurbishment programme to give effect to the plan. It also felt it should not commit itself to service development unless funding was secure.

It saw fulfilment of the mission as requiring a combination of the different experiences, contributions and perspectives of the members, volunteers and staff.

The positives and negatives, strengths and weaknesses of the organisation were listed and received consideration. Statistics showed the likely service demand would be overwhelming and sufficient funds to provide the services envisaged would have to be obtained. A substantial increase in fund raising was seen as a priority.

The Business Plan set out detailed strategies by which the challenge could be met. Although the Board of the Association could not see into the future, the perils it would encounter or the obstacles in its path, it had great vision. It accepted the challenge to expand and develop services as its contribution to the needs of the next century. That challenge loomed up as big and frightening as that which faced the founders of the Association one hundred years earlier..

31. A CENTURY OF CHANGE.

Things are not the same as they used to be . What is happening?.

The question was asked frequently by long-serving members both blind and sighted as material was gathered for this chapter.

World wide, change had been occurring in every aspect of living. As part of what is termed the 'one world family' Australia could not escape participation or the consequences. To stand still was to be left behind.

As an achiever the Association had been facing the challenge of continual change for a hundred years. Change excited and energised the spirit, bound those involved into a vigorous team and spurred them on to conquer new frontiers.

However, it has been true change has been occurring with such rapidly during the past ten years only those persons intimately involved on a day to day basis have been able to keep abreast of the situation. The changes have been the result of external influence, mainly government action and policy directives and the internal response by the Association as it reacted to the unstable situation and sought to position itself for the next century.

Within Australia, politicians involved in the Health and Human Services area, are constantly bombarded by pressure groups pushing their interests. At a continuing round of conferences specialists from the finance health and service areas present and debate papers, diagnose the ills of the system and prescribe cures. The pressure exerted by the many protagonists ebbs and flows. The final result is a compromise of many forces and views. At all levels those involved sincerely desire the best possible service for the users. They really are on the same side.

Even if the experts, politicians, bureaucrats or computers could devise the perfect system it would be contaminated by human behaviour along the delivery chain.

This has been the Health and Welfare scene for decades. Within it the Directors of front line health and human service organisations operate. . Wisdom tells them to accept the framework under which they labour and the handicap it imposes and get on with their job They endeavour to anticipate the fashion of the next budget, what will be the 'in' service, the areas to which the funds will be allocated. and devise strategies to keep their organisation positioned correctly for approval and funding. Internally they project future requirements, balance funds available with service demands and staff required and determine achievable limits. They lobby and use their influence to assist in reaching the target set. Their accomplishments are remarkable.

The Association has implemented the changes of the past decade and emerged stronger. The partnership between Government, the Board, Branches and the Blind Members remains as firm as ever but with different emphasis on roles. Now with some confidence in government intentions and a more secure funding base the future is faced with courage.

Another notable feature and strength of the Association has been the quality of the people, both blind and sighted, who have served on the Committees. It is by no means unusual when long serving key people in an organisation retire for a wave of personnel

changes to follow. Within the Association such changes have served to introduce new ideas and strengthen the organisation. This occurred following when the Constitution was changed in 1920, and when incorporation took place in 1944.

This history has been repeated in the past ten years. The President, Mr John Moule, has an excellent new team. From the 1990 Foundation Board of Directors there are Mr. Robin Pleydell, Vice President, and Mr. Henry Malycon. New sighted members are Messrs Upton [Treasurer], Cocks, Daubney, Gorton and Mrs Margery West AM. Blind Members representatives are Mesdames Lustig [Vice President], Crook, Judd, Leahy and Miss Proctor with Messrs Draffin and Wurm. The sighted members of the Board have a wide range of needed professional skills. The representation of the Blind Members has never been as strong. Each representative has an extensive knowledge of the needs of vision impaired persons and is deeply involved.

The actions of this new generation of leaders will of necessity have greater regard for Government policies and they will exercise leadership in a different manner. The Board is strong, enthusiastic, committed. It has mastered the ramifications of the Association. Cherished traditions will neither be forgotten or overlooked as the Board leads it into the twenty first century.

The Branch Committees, as has already been reported, contain many members with long years of service who maintain close contact with day to day affairs and ensure stability. The increased involvement of the Blind Members Council at Regional level has been an added asset.

Regional staff leaders have fine reputations. Barry Furness, Manager Metropolitan Homes with Jillian Cocks Director of Nursing Elanora and Colleen Forrester at the George Vowell Centre; Terry Fraser, Manager Central Highlands Region and Helen Hovey Director of Nursing Kelaston, Ballarat; Romy McNally Manager Loddon Region and Geraldine Webb Director of Nursing Mirridong Bendigo; Barbara Brown, Manager Goulburn Valley Region; Sharon Muldoon, Manager Glenelg Region; Kevin O'Loughlin, Manager Barwon Region and Ray Lord, Manager Gippsland Region. The majority have been appointed to their present positions during the past ten years.

In the metropolitan area retirements and resignations have depleted the staff of the 1980s. Since then Senior appointments at Head Office have been General Manager Services, Ian Moore transferred from Kooyong; General Manager Marketing, Ian Wilson; Finance, Leslie Smith; Manager Service Programs, Mrs Jennifer Gibbons OAM; Manager Community Rehabilitation Services, Mrs Esther Lalor. They joined long serving members Mr John Cook, Chief Executive Officer, Mr Murray Mountain General Manager Administration, and Miss Heather Garton, Executive Assistant to Mr John Cook.

To staff the Vision Resource Centre at Kooyong, Mr Glen Mahoney was transferred from the George Vowell Centre and promoted to Manager and Mrs Shirley Admans from Manager Gippsland to Manager Blind Members Services. Mr Richard Osborn was appointed Services Director, Mrs Elizabeth Jarman transferred from Head Office as Executive Officer and Carolyn Myers appointed Manager, Low Vision Clinic. Mrs Bernadette Hodgkinson remained the long serving highly regarded Librarian.

Mr John Cook wrote in the 1993 Annual Report there had been a 100 percent increase in demand for services over the past decade. This service had been provided with fewer staff and at a lesser cost. With this in mind it is understandable that staff members cite stress as a problem. With an ever increasing work load well into the next century the Business Plan provides for a review of human resource management needs.

In a number of respects staff have weathered a testing time during the past decade. The extent of their devotion and allegiance can be measured by their commitment to the new service directions and programme and their support for the Centenary Appeal.

The growth and work and worth of the Volunteer Service Group has been recounted in a separate chapter. Here, too, there has been major change. Members of the group share equally in and contribute equally with the other sections in the growth and success of the Association.

The Blind Members Council, the modern version of the first Committee, the voice of the 1400 legally blind members and the supportive voice of countless thousands of people with vision impairment is healthy and powerful. It enjoys the confidence of the members. Its heartbeat has never been stronger.

Yes, it is true. Overall from the human resource viewpoint, things are not the same, However, as at other key periods of the Association's history the change has been good. The organisation is more powerful and energetic as a consequence. If a hesitation may be expressed it would be by way of analogy with the human body. Just as in a contest an enthusiastic competitor may be tempted to push his body beyond the limits of its endurance so it is with the human resources of an organisation.

The financial picture, too, indicates monumental change. The first State Government Grant of \$3000. was received in 1969. In 1995 the State contribution was \$9million and the Federal contribution either directly or through nursing benefits \$10million. The stupendous increase naturally curbed freedom of independent action and increased accountability to government sources.

The past decade has demonstrated the flexibility and adaptability which characterises the Association in the successful redefining of its partnership with government. Until the 1970s the emphasis of debate with governments was on the suitability and quality of traditional services. Now the emphasis is on finance, costs and new service directions. Other Victorian agencies serving blind people have also been substantially funded by government. In total the extent and value of government support for vision impaired people has been most commendable.

In the service area, changes are mind boggling. At the turn of the century the Government Homes for the Poor and Indigent were long bare drafty Wards with wooden floors. Along each side wall stood ten to fifteen beds. The Sister's station occupied portion of the centre aisle. When Brighton opened in 1910 with its four bed wards a major forward step had been taken. The single bed rooms of the 1950's building programme were further signs of progress. Plans for the Centenary Appeal homes look into the next century and include single rooms with en suite.

The first rehabilitation programme for blind people was in the second half of the 1800's when Thomas James travelled the state teaching Braille. It is hard to imagine anything more inappropriate, difficult and less appealing to poor uneducated mortals.

Yet with his positive demeanour and message of hope he was a ray of light. Mr James was followed by George Benson from the Braille Library. A blind member of the Association, Mr Benson, too, possessed great patience and understanding. He, too, was admired and respected, the friend of blind people throughout the state. Miss Elsie Henderson came next with her needle threader. She taught the blind ladies to sew and taught them to make a cup of tea using her thumb and forefinger trick.

In the 1950s came the first handcraft class at Kooyong with Harold Gratton. A whole range of developments then followed rapidly: Day Centres to serve local areas; personal grooming and enhancement skills; home management; adaptive devices; physiotherapy; occupational therapy; hairdressing and podiatry services. Development continued with low vision services, radio information services, telephone support services to name a few.

The programmes were expanded to help other people. Renal dialysis at Shepparton, the mentally disabled at Ballarat and Warrnaibool. telephone support for various sighted non English speaking ethnic groups. A National Centre for Ageing and Sensory Loss established in the Vision Resource Centre at Kooyong. Facilities were provided for other disabilities at Illawarra Geelong. Sport and Recreational pursuits took off and flourished. The travel bug hit hard. No wonder other disability groups within Australia and organisations for the blind overseas look with envy at Association achievements.

The programmes now being provided incorporate best practice and foreseeable trends. However the Association knows it cannot possibly handle the tidal wave demand for services in the future. While retaining its specialist core and knowledge it must also contribute to education programmes over a wide range of areas - in sighted accommodation homes and hospitals, to professional groups, the public and schools - so that wherever vision impaired people receive service in the next century, it will be from people with knowledge and understanding.

Best practice includes a holistic approach. This, for example, entails giving attention to the hearing defects in many older blind persons. Foreseeable trends, in order to maintain or secure government funding under the generic service policy, may entail an expansion of services to other disabilities. This is already happening with services to the mentally disabled at Yalundah, Warrnambool and in the increase in sighted ethnic telelink programmes. Further, with so many severely vision impaired and partially sighted persons passing through the Low Vision Clinics and the number of other disability groups using the Association service, it may be necessary in the future to devise some means by which they, too, can have a direct consumer input.

Blind people themselves have changed. The transformation over the past hundred years has been little short of miraculous. The generation of blind people once regarded by society as second rate, with no future and no hope, had, in general terms, died by the end of the 1950's.

The prospects of the next generation, emerging from the second world war years, were brighter and more and better services were on the horizon. The approach and programme suitable for the dependent non sighted up to the 1950s, many of whom had little self esteem, was not appropriate for the better educated more independent generation which followed. The knowledge and skills available at that time were

directed to improving available services and introducing new concepts to promote confident living and independence.

Today the majority of those persons losing sight and coming within the definition of legal blindness are in the older age group and retain some useful vision. With the back up and support of the Association they continue to function in the sighted community. They are the first generation to have an extensive range of modern services covering all aspects of life. They retain full and equal citizenship. Sighted people no longer think of inferring that a blind or low vision person should not participate in everyday activities. To the contrary, their abilities and achievements excite respect and admiration. The Association is proud to have been part of a three way effort in conjunction with the Ophthalmological and Optometrical professions in reducing the negative aspects of sight defects and of the contribution it has made to the effective use of residual vision.

No! things never do remain the same. . In life change is constant. Each generation faces new challenges. The Association has always been in the forefront, sowing the seed and harvesting the benefits of change.

That Mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, the embryonic Association for the Advancement of the Blind, has indeed become the largest of plants and grown into a tree. Its branches and services cover the whole of Victoria. Countless thousands of blind and vision impaired people have found succour, shelter, safety and stimulus in its shade.

1895	8 Blind persons.	Capital 80 cents.
1950	600 Blind persons assisted.	Assets \$106,000. Income and Expenditure \$60,000.
1995	15,000 Persons assisted	Assets \$30m. Income and Expenditure \$21m.

The story has not ended.

In September 1994 at the Annual Meeting of the Association , the President, Mr John Moule, confirmed the Board's plans for the future and announced the launching of a major Public Appeal, the biggest in the Association's history.

To be known as the Centenary Appeal, it will run through until the end of 1996. The target has been set at \$7.5m. Mr Don Argus, Managing Director of the National Australia Bank had accepted the Chairmanship. An Appeal Committee of unprecedented strength had been recruited. The Appeal would be managed internally to keep costs down.

The Appeal projects have been agreed as:-

Brighton.

A new nursing wing replacing 75 year old facilities would provide 30 beds. Sixty existing nursing and hostel beds would be refurbished to meet present day Commonwealth standards. Each ward and room would have en suite facilities. Cost \$2.97million.

Western Metropolitan Region.

A 60 bed nursing home and hostel would be erected at a cost of \$4.1million

Essendon.

The Arthur Wilkins Centre would be upgraded to a full regional centre with a focus on ethnic services. Cost \$350,000.

Ballarat.

A new nursing home would be built for Kelaston. The existing building would be refurbished into a 30 bed hostel. Cost \$2.4million.

Bendigo.

Mirridong would be refurbished in two stages. Stage 1 would extend the Katharine Rose Wing to 30 beds. Stage 2 would refurbish the Amy Bayne Wing. Cost \$1.4million.

Kooyong.

Relocation of the Braille and Talking Book Library from its 75 year old facilities in South Yarra. Cost \$3.3million The Blind Members Council has launched the Tilly Aston Library Fund with a target of \$750,000 which will assist this project.

Warragul.

A Low Vision Clinic and studios for regional radio services for print handicapped people would be included in a revamped Pindari Centre. Cost \$250,000.

Research.

Research programmes into the prevention and management of vision impairment and its personal impact would be undertaken in co-operation with universities. Cost \$250,000.

The last word

At the 1995 Annual Meeting of the Association for the Blind held on September 22nd the guest speaker, the Hon Rob Knowles, Victorian Minister of Aged Care demonstrated the confidence of Government in the Association by announcing a Commonwealth /State grant of \$600,000 for refurbishment and presenting a cheque for a \$100,000 as the first contribution of the Victorian State Government contribution of \$1,000,000 to the Centenary Appeal. Prior to this announcement Mr Moule reported the Appeal had raised or been promised \$2.5million to date. This excluded the government contribution.

In November, 1947, the *Melbourne Sun News Pictorial*, in reporting the death of Miss Tilly Aston said: " she was one of the best known blind persons in the world."

Not many people are as privileged as Miss Aston to have their names live on or their dreams come true. Yet, how could it be otherwise for the seer who penned the words:

*'No fruitful Then without the toilsome Now,
No harvest rich without the rending plough;
Without the shady vales no mountain height,
Where man can climb and find the perfect light.'*

MESSAGE FROM MR MOULE

The Board acknowledges the development and programmes of the past forty years would not have been possible apart from very great financial support from Government sources, both Commonwealth and State. It also acknowledges the substantial financial assistance received from public sources-: contributors, donors, auxiliaries, from charitable trusts and through bequests. It hopes this history, written independently as the Author saw it, conveys a picture of responsible stewardship giving confidence to the many friends of the Association to continue their support.

Appendix 1 - Historical Dates.

- 1873 December 11. Birth of Tilly Aston at Carisbrook.
- 1882 June. Tilly Aston admitted as a boarder to the Asylum and School for the Blind.
- 1894 September 27. Tilly Aston a Founder of the Victorian Braille Writers Association.
- 1895 December 8. The Association for the Advancement of the Blind founded.
- 1896 April. First public gathering of the AAB. : a musical programme and lecture.
- 1896 Home Visitation Programme commenced.
- 1897 Tilly Aston addresses the State Commission of Enquiry into Old Age Pensions.
- 1897 Establishment of a Tea Agency to employ blind people.
- 1898 Financial Assistance scheme through Loans and Grants.
- 1898 First Local Conference held.
- 1898 Restrictive Regulations on interstate travel amended.
- 1899 Concession travel granted on Railways.
- 1901 Tilly Aston's first book of poetry, '*Maiden Verses*' published.
- 1902 Free Postage introduced for Braille and Moon literature.
- 1902 Right of blind people to vote at Federal Elections included in the Electoral Bill.
- 1904 First office opened with salaried secretary.
- 1907 Submission made for Pension for incapacitated blind. Granted in 1911.
- 1909 Right to vote at State Elections granted..
- 1909 'Woodburn', Home for Adult Blind acquired at Brighton.
- 1913 Fund Raising Concert Party formed of blind members.
- 1913 January. First interstate conference of organisations of the blind organised by the AAB.
- 1915 Free Travel within the metropolitan area.
- 1917 Provident Fund established.
- 1918 Extension work in Ballarat.
- 1918 Travel concessions obtained for Ballarat blind people.
- 1918 Travel concessions obtained for Bendigo blind people.
- 1920 Major changes to AAB Constitution.
- 1921 Free travel on metropolitan trams.
- 1921 Lara St., South Yarra, Hostel opened.
- 1922 Victorian Association of Blind Cricketers formed.
- 1925 Extension work at Bendigo.
- 1926 Kooyong site purchased.
- 1927 'Egremont' 54 The Avenue Windsor purchased for a Woman's Hostel.
- 1927 First Home for the Blind in Bendigo opened. [Bennett St, Long Gully].
- 1927 Ballarat Auxiliary formed.
- 1927 Brighton Home Auxiliary formed.
- 1928 First Interstate Cricket Carnival at Kooyong.
- 1929 Kooyong Clubhouse opened.
- 1932 Blind Choir formed.
- 1934 Medical Benefits Scheme inaugurated.
- 1935 Tilly Aston's poems '*Songs of Light*' published.
- 1941 Lara St. Hostel closed.
- 1943 December. AAB incorporated under the Hospitals and Charities Act.
- 1944 March. Jubilee gathering at Braille Library addressed by Tilly Aston.
- 1945 February. Tilly Aston's Memoirs published by the Bread and Cheese Clqb.
- 1946 April. "Light at Eventide" public appeal.
- 1946 2 acre site for Home for the Blind purchased at Ballarat.
- 1947 March. Dame Enid Lyons MP planted a tree at Woodburn in memory of the Founders.
- 1947 October. Miss Aston died.
- 1948 May. Visit by Helen Keller.
- 1949 2 acre Home site purchased at Bendigo.
- 1950 March. Interim Home, Pleasant St. Ballarat purchased. Opened April 1952.
- 1950 March. Annexe at Woodburn opened.
- 1952 August. Federal Legislation for Free of Means Test Blind Pension. Paid in 1953
- 1952 September. Mr. H.M.[Pat] Lightfoot elected President
- 1953 January. Mr John Wilson appointed Managing Secretary.
- 1954 August. Federal Aged Persons Homes Act.
- 1955 March. Mr Bruce Small elected President.
- 1955 November. Public Appeal. 'Our Plea for the Aged Blind'.

1957 May. Kelaston, Ballarat, opened.
 1957 November. Mirridong ,Bendigo, opened.
 1959 December. Elanora, Brighton, opened.
 1960 Name changed to Association for the Blind.
 1964 March. First Childrens Fair at Kooyong.
 1965 March. New St., Brighton Hostel opened.
 1965 September. Mr M.M.[Pat] Lightfoot elected President
 1966 September. New Wing at Kooyong opened.
 1966 September. Goulburn Valley Friendship Club formed at Shepparton
 1968 April. 'Guiding Light' Appeal launched.
 1968 October. New Nursing Wing at Elanora Brighton opened.
 1969 September. First Blind Members Holiday.
 1969 October. Guiding Light Beacon switched on.
 1971 March. Katharine M Rose Nursing Wing opened at Mirridong Bendigo
 1971 April. Mr George Vowell donates 20 acre property at Mt. Eliza.
 1972 March. State Government Grant of \$100,000 prevents collapse of the Association.
 1972 Low Vision Clinic opened in Wm. Buckland House, Kooyong. First in Australia.
 1972 October. Mr John Wicking elected President.
 1972 Adjacent property at Kooyong purchased for future Low Vision Clinic.
 1973 June. Geelong service begins in All Saints Church Hall
 1973 June. Penumbra service commences in Presbyterian Church Manse, Heathmont.
 1973 Centenary of Tilly Astons birth celebrated at Carisbrook.
 1973 Mildura Service commenced in St. Andrews Church Hall.
 1974 Part of 'The Hermitage', Geelong, purchased.
 1974 St Aiden's Hall Shepparton purchased.
 1974 Warragul service commenced.
 1974 Northern Suburbs service commences.
 1974 November. Radio for the Blind Committee formed.
 1975 Footscray /Western Suburbs service commences in St Andrews Church Hall.
 1975 October. Illawarra, Geelong Opened.
 1976 Warrnambool service commenced.
 1977 May. Dacomb College purchased for Illawarra extension.
 1977 Mobile Sight Conservation Unit donated by Elanora Auxiliary.
 1977 Association staff involved in establishing a Low Vision Service in Singapore.
 1978 April. North Eastern Suburbs service commences in Heidelberg Repat. Hospital.
 1978 Numurkah service commenced.
 1978 September. Mirridong Activities Centre opened.
 1979 March. Warragul property purchased.
 1979 April. Kelaston Day Centre opened.
 1979 May Association and Optometrical Staff involved with Dr Fred Hollows in evaluating low vision eye care needs of Aboriginal people in central Australia.
 1980 May. 160 local and overseas delegates attend the First Australian/Pacific Conference on Low Vision at Kooyong.
 1980 May. George Vowell Centre, Mt. Eliza opened.
 1980 November. 'Reach Out ' Public Appeal launched.
 1980 Telephone Support Programme commenced.
 1981 United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons.
 1981 Train, Tram and Bus Passes combined into one Travel Pass
 1981 Community Health Centre established at Portland.
 1982 February. Pindari, Warragul, opened
 1982 Acacia House Nursing Wing opened at Shepparton.
 1982 April. Executive Meeting of the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind hosted.
 1982 December. 3RPH commences broadcasting from 7 Donald St. Prahran
 1983 March. Patients service Wing at Elanora Brighton opened
 1983 July. Extension to Kelaston Day Centre opened.
 1984 Woodburn Lodge, Brighton - 24 Independent Living Units opened.
 1984 12 acres of land purchased at Shepparton.
 1984 October. Mrs Diana Jones elected President.
 1985 January. Mr John Cook Chief Executive Officer
 1985 June. Sisterhood proclamation signed in Tokyo Japan between the Seimei Association for the Welfare of the Aged Blind and the Association.
 1985 June. Vision Information Hotline established.

1985 Satellite day centres opened at Moe, Hamilton and Rushworth.
1986 Extensions opened at Pindari, Warragul.
1987 Extensions opened at Illawarra, Geelong.
1987 April. Vicars Foote day lounge and activities room opened at Mirridong, Bendigo.
1987 August. Arthur Wilkins Centre, Essendon opened.
1987 'Vision Victoria' public appeal.
1988 Charlia Bradley Cricket Pavilion opened.
1989 May. Vision Resource Centre opened.
1989 3RPH moves to custom built studios in Vision Resource Centre.
1989 Shepparton Regional Centre Appeal.
1989 Satellite day centre at Maryborough opened.
1989 Timboon and Leongatha services commence
1989 Audio Description Services introduced to Australia.
1989 Audiologist appointed and Aural Rehabilitation commenced.
1990 Stage 1 of new Baringa Centre Shepparton - 24 Independent Units, opened.
1990 270 delegates from 23 countries attend the International Conference on Low Vision.
1990 June. Association for the Blind Ltd. incorporated under the Companies Act.
1990 October. Braille and Talking Book Library incorporated into the Association.
1991 August. Stage 2 completing the new Baringa Regional Centre opened at Shepparton.
1992 April. Mr John Moule elected President.
1992 Regional Centre at Warrnambool purchased. Opened 1993.
1994 Centenary Appeal launched.

Appendix 2 - Tilly Aston Poems

It is in her poems Miss Aston reveals her true self. In them personality and character sparkle, strength and motivation shine through. In them though dead she liveth.

Prominent throughout is the reality of her faith. Out of the depths of her failure, shame and breakdown,
she could braille the poem *Hymn*.

As from the vase the flowing stream
Raiseth the flowers drooping head,
So doeth His plenteous life restore
The soul with sorrow well nigh dead

As does the strong and lofty wall
The trusting citizens defend,
So doeth the Lord encircle them
Who seek his aid and call Him friend.

As in the heavens the glowing sun
Driveth afar the gloom of night,
So does His ever rising love
Shed in the soul a glorious light.

If God is life and love and power,
Why should we fear when foemen boast?
For He is stronger far than they,
And greater than a kingdom's host.

Miss Aston's love and feeling for beauty and the clarity of her inner vision is seen in her poem, *The Power of Beauty*.

She was walking with a friend who was describing the wonderland of beauty in which they were strolling.

"Her admiration passed the power of words,
And silence gave us time to think and feel;
While fervid awe and calmer reverence
Placed on our hearts their everlasting seal.

And then my friend grew pitiful and said -
'Never till now I knew how much the blind
Had lost in losing sight; nor yet how great
The pleasure we who see in seeing find".

To this Tilly responded:

'Your words have made more vivid and more
clear
Each detail; yet I feel no more delight
Than at the sense of beauty mystical
Which came unaided by your clearer sight.

'If not, then why do we conceive in things
Invisible the type of all that's fair?
What is beauty, then, of holiness,
The loveliness of mercy's tender care?

'Tis surely folly to assume that God
Has placed the only medium in the eye
Whereby our inner selves receive the good
Found in the glories of the earth and sky.

'Who hath beheld the mansions of the blest?
Yet Heaven is our beauty's goal and end;
And what more glorious than the love of God?
So glorious that we cannot comprehend.

'Each human sense within our bodies stored
Becomes the vehicle of outer things,
And soft impressions touch on every nerve,
Sending a message to their very springs.

'If I were deaf and helpless, dumb and blind,
I would not be an outcast from the light;
For God another channel would provide
By which could enter streams of pure delight'

'Beauty is not the vision satisfied,
But something deeper planted in the soul -
A longing for the spirit perfected,
For something not unfinished, something
whole.

The intensity of Tilly's feelings as a young woman in love come through in many of her poems.

COMMUNION

I need no eyes to tell me That he is passing by; I need no voice or footstep To say that he is nigh.	No touch nor tender whisper, No clasp of Loving hand, Gives warning that my dearest Close by my side may stand.	My very soul is listening For his soul's silent word: There needs no wakeful senses To make that whisper heard.
---	--	--

JEALOUSY.

Lord, pardon the sin I have sinned tonight,
Against my own heart and the heart of a friend;
I have given the field to a demon of blight,
And suffered my soul in its presence to bend.

She knows, and thou knoweth, I love her right
well,
With truest affection my heart to her cleaves,
But tempests of jealousy I could not quell -
My fondness dispersed like the Autumn shed
leaves.

I fancied his voice took a tenderer tone
When speaking to her than he offered to me;
And lo ! I have set him upon my hearts throne,
The king of a kingdom he wills not to be.

My jealousy raged but a moment then died,
But in it I learned that to hate is to kill;
I'd cast myself out on a passionate tide
Of murderous feeling and bitter self-will.

LOVE SONG.

A Golden gift I gave my love,
And gladly he received it,
And set the treasured thing above,
And praised and fondled it to prove
How precious he believed it.

It was a present strangely wrought,
And he, my love, misread it,
So, where a golden gift was brought,
A paler sheen his fancy caught,
And silvered o'er its credit.

He knew not that the thing I gave
Was all my hearts devotion,
A reverence for his manners grave,
A willingness to be his slave -
And not a friends emotion.

'Twas strange that my wrath to the lady should
lean,
Instead of the man who had wounded my heart;
For his the offence, if offence there had been;
But justice in jealousy findeth no part.

And now I am calm and remember the pain,
I know that its bitterness darkened my face;
And, turning away, for I dared not remain,
I strove in my anguish to hide my disgrace.

And if my beloved has chosen my friend,
What right have I even to envy the choice?
To see them made happy should be my love's end,
But passion is ever a clamorous voice.

Yet silence it, Lord, for it counselleth ill,
Or let me not hear it for envy employed;
And if I must love him, Oh give me the will
To strangle the demon that fain would me kill.

Yet that my love he did not spurn
Has banished my resentment;
And though I fain would have him learn
How deep my heart for him does yearn,
My soul has found contentment.

I still can touch his friendly hand
With shameless admiration,
And feel the good in him demand
My best and noblest to expand,
To meet his approbation.

A kindly look, a gentle word,
Are favours taken lowly;
But in the depths of passion stirred,
My love a pool with face unblurred,
Lies tranquil, pure, and holy.

TO AN INFANT.

A thing of wondrous mystery I hold,
Nestled in confidence upon my breast;
A sweet young infant do my arms enfold,
Whose gentle breath bespeaks a gentler rest.

Too young to know the tender words I speak,
Yet with a smile she doth to mine respond;
And softly straying fingers o'er my cheek
Have power to wake in me a passion fond.

Maternal instinct is not theirs alone
Who by their travail give the world a son;
It is a passion other women own
Whose lives this joyous honour have not won.

At least I wonder who could touch a child
And not desire to kiss, and kiss again;
Oh, baby, when I feel your presence mild,
The impulse in me is akin to pain.

WHO SHALL BE MY FRIEND.

Oh, what is the standard of friendship?
I ask, can we set it to high ?
And where is the limit of service,
The loveliest sign of that tie ?

My friend in me seeth the goodness,
Although to my faults never blind;
When misunderstood by all others,
He listens attentive and kind.

In all things not always agreeing,
Indeed, oft with differences warm,
And voices more loud than accordant,
But loving no less for a storm.

If of me he cannot speak praises,
He never of me will speak ill;
'Tis sad when a friend with small chatter
The mouth of a gossip will fill.

Whenever there's cause for fault-finding,
He bravely rebukes face to face;
Though I for a moment resent it,
Soon anger gives penitence place.

Oh, show me the true and the loving,
The soul who to sin never bends
The high minded, patient, courageous -
And these will I gladly call friends.

If the eyes are duller, the dear head grey,
If she will have things done in the same old
way,
If she thinks as in childhood you ought to obey,
Still, girls, she is your mother.

If sometimes her temper's a little short,
And hard words are uttered ere stayed by
thought,
And your rising anger must oft be fought,
Still, girls, she is your mother.

SHE IS YOUR MOTHER.

If she's not quite so dainty in foot and hand
As your delicate culture might demand,
If lacking that dignity you think grand,

Still, girls,
she is your
mother.

Have you forgotten the day when you
Determined your own sweet will to do,
And who it was that restrained you too ?
Why, girls, it was your mother.

How oft your naughtiness put her to shame,

And still she loved you just the same,
Has she no reason your love to claim
Because she is your mother ?

Oh, girls, dear girls, make smooth to the grave
The path of her who has been so brave,
And many a pang you thus may save
From reaching the heart of mother.

Appendix 3 - General Committee Office Bearers.

	PRESIDENT	VICE PRESIDENTS	TREASURER	SECRETARY
1895	D. Robertson	D. Blakely	Miss Aston	Miss Aston
to		C. Taylor		
1899		W. Hall		
1900	T. Marks	D. Robertson	Miss J. Robertson	
1902	H. Lee	D. Robertson	"	"
		B. W. Holgate		
1904	Miss Aston	H. Lee	"	T. Marks
		W. Quayle		
1905	W. Quayle	H. Lee	Miss Andrew	"
		Miss Aston		
1906	T. Lowe	G. Dangerfield	H. Wright	T. Marks
		W. Quayle		
1907	G. Dangerfield	W. Quayle	"	"
		T. Lowe		
1908	H. Lee	G. Dangerfield	"	"
		W. Hall		
1909	G. Dangerfield	H. Lee	"	"
		Miss Aston		
1910	Miss Aston	G. Dangerfield	H. Lee	"
		W. Hall		
1911	W. Campbell	Miss Aston	"	"
		D. Robertson		
1912	G. Dangerfield	W. Campbell	"	"
		Miss Aston		
1913	D. Robertson	G. Dangerfield	"	"
		Miss K. McDougall		
1914	J. Burston	Mr G. Walder	"	"
		Miss K. McDougall		
1915	H. Lee	G. Dangerfield	Mrs.L.Hutchinson	"
		D. Robertson		
1916	R. Reid	H. Lee	G. Benson	"
		W. Hall		
1917	R. Reid	R. Fleming	"	"
		A. Smith		
1918	R. Fleming	A. Robinson	Mrs M. Bartlett	"
		G. Dangerfield		
1919	H. Lee	A. Robinson	"	"

		R. Fleming		
1920	Hon. G.A.Maxwell	A. Robinson A. Phillips	C. Norton	"
1921	"	R. Fleming Miss K. Mcdougall	"	"
1922	"	R. Fleming Miss K. McDougall J.S. Vroland	"	"
1923	"	Miss Aston W.H. Paterson C. Monteath	"	"
1924	"	A. Smith A. Robinson W. Willmott	"	"
1925	"	A Robinson W. Willmott Mrs L. Hutchinson	"	"
1926	"	W. Willmott R. Flemming A. Smith	"	"
1927	"	W. Willmott R. Fleming A. Robinson	"	"
1928	"	"	"	T.H. McVilly
1929 to 1934	"	W. Willmott T. Marks A. Smith	"	"
1935	T. Marks	W. Willmott A. Smith Mrs M. Bartlett	"	"
1936	"	Cr. M Gray A. Robinson T. Clarke	"	"
1937	Miss Aston	Cr. M. Gray A. Robinson H.H. Mackenzie	"	"
1938	"	A.V.Worrall T. Clarke A. Pearce	A.W. Ness	Miss M. Date
1939	"	Cr. M. Gray A. Pearce F. Barkel	"	G. R. Fowler
1940	"	Cr. M. Gray A. Pearce Miss P. Lawson	"	"

1941 and 1942	"	Cr. M. Gray A. Pearce H. H. Mackenzie	"	"
1943	"	Cr. M. Gray H. H. Mackenzie T. Clarke	"	"
1944 to 1947	"	"	"	"
1948	W. H. Paterson	A.V. Worrall M. M. Lightfoot	"	"
1949	"	"	E. Dean	"
1950 to 1952	"	H.M. Lightfoot Bruce Small	"	"
1953 and 1954	H.M. Lightfoot	Bruce Small W.H. Paterson	W.J.S. Horsfall	J.W. Wilson
1955 to 1958	Bruce Small	H. Opperman M.P.	"	"
1959 to 1964	"	H. Opperman MP. H.M. Lightfoot	W.E. McMahon	"
1965 and 1966	H.M. Lightfoot	H. Opperman.MP Bruce Small	N.E.M.Winckle	"
1967	"	Nil	"	"
1968	"	M.C. Fitzgerald	"	"
1969 and 1970	"	"	G.E.Fitzgerald	"
1971 and 1972	"	M.C.Fitzgerald E.A.Cook	J.M.Wall	"
1973	J.O. Wicking	"	"	"
1974 to 1979	"	M.C.Fitzgerald W.V.Reid	"	"
1980 and 1981	'	M.C. Fitzgerald J.A.Blanch	"	"
1982 to 1984	"	J.A. Blanch Mrs D.I. Jones	"	"

1985 and 1986	Mrs D.I.Jones	J.A.Blanch A.L.Wilkins	"	N.J.Cook
1987 and 1988	"	J.A.Blanch	"	"
1989	"	"	C.R.Pleydell	"
1990	"	J.A.Blanch J.O.Wicking	"	"
1991	"	Mrs I.J.Ross	"	"
1992 and 1993	J.A.Moule	C.R. Pleydell Mrs E.R.Lustig	"	"
1994	J.A. Moule	C.R..Pleydell Mrs E.R. Lustig	G. Upton	N.J.Cook

Appendix 4 - John Wilson Award.

The Award was instituted in 1978 on the recommendation of the Blind Members Council to commemorate 25 years of service by John Wilson. The Award recognises distinguished service to the Association or direct to the blind members. It is open to both blind and sighted persons.

The Citation reads: " The Committee Blind Members and Staff acknowledge and record for posterity the outstanding service given to the blind people of Victoria by ----
--This exceptional contribution which has enriched the quality of their living, was made in a selfless warm hearted manner in the Association tradition of caring and sharing. Inherent in the many attributes displayed were the admirable qualities of leadership, loyalty, consistency of purpose and generosity of spirit"

1979	Agnes Tweedie. OAM.
1980	Elizabeth Lindsay.
1981	Flora Douglas.
1982	Edna Wilson.
1983	Herbert Brumby.
1984	Joanne Trumble.
1985	Arthur Nothling.
1986	Colin and Margaret Fox.
1987	Katharine Rose BEM.
1988	Bryan Sitlington.
1989	Edna Swanson.
1990	Ellena Little.
1991	Neil McCrae.
1992	Lillian Dethridge
1993	John Blanch.ED.
1994	Winsome Baker.
1995	Barry Farnsworth

Appendix 5 - Precis of National and International Involvement.

The Association for the Blind was part of a much larger and broader service to people with visual impairment. A brief outline of key elements follows.

Within Australia well meaning people, had been free to develop services for blind people along the lines of their own particular interests. Each state developed its own tradition and method of organising services. For example Victoria leaned towards free enterprise whereas in Queensland the Government operated the Industrial Workshop. State government legislation varied greatly as did its impact. In some instances agency action was limited. In others competition made co-operation difficult. Each organisation guarded its area jealously. No effort was made to present a national front.

The Guest Speaker at the Association for the Blind Annual Meeting in 1951 was Mr Arthur Richardson OBE. Recently arrived from England where he had been involved in work for blind people, Mr Richardson was dissatisfied with the programmes of the various industrial workshops. He advocated the establishment of a national programme for the rehabilitation, training and employment of the Blind. Blinded ex Servicemen could and did go to St. Dunstons in the UK. For other people there was no recognised formal training. He travelled Australia preaching this gospel, upsetting the Industrial Institutions who had felt they were doing all that was necessary. Mr Richardson goaded them into action.

As a consequence representatives of a number of institutions met at the RVIB between October 16 and 19, 1951 to develop counter measures. Those present resolved to form an Australian National Council for the Blind [ANCB]. Mr Stan Hedger was elected provisional President and Mr Ken Bunn the RVIB Accountant, Secretary. They foresaw opposition if at least some other organisations were not invited. The Blinded Soldiers Association and the AAB were included among the chosen. The proposal was well received throughout Australia. Mr Hedger retired in 1952. Mr Joe Lynch, President of the Blinded Soldiers Association, was then appointed interim President.

The first conference was held in November 1953 at the Royal Institution for the Blind in Adelaide. All states were represented. The Constitution was approved. Office Bearers were elected. These were Dr Charles Bennett, President; Messrs Lightfoot, Lynch, and Cornish [WA] Vice Presidents; Ken Bunn, Hon Sec/Treasurer. Ill health prevented Mr Lightfoot from assuming office. He was replaced by Mr Justice Maxwell of the Royal Blind Society NSW. Dr. Bennett was also appointed Australian delegate to the World Council for the Welfare of the Blind [WCWB] which had been recently established.

The objectives of the ANCB as agreed were: to co-ordinate services; establish liaison with government authorities; provide a forum for discussion; develop an informed public opinion and conduct training courses. All organisations retained complete autonomy.

This was the first time most of the delegates had met. The atmosphere was friendly, proceedings peaceful. Everyone was cautious and on his best behavior. Nevertheless various groupings were observable. There were the powerful Industrial Institutions who presented a united front and the 'all others'. There were the Gentlemen

[Committee Members] and the players [staff members]. There were the blind and there were the sighted.

The Second Biennial Conference was held at the RVIB in November 1955. By then storm clouds were building up. The Federal Council of the Blind had been the first national body in the blindness field. In 1945 a new constitution had been drawn up and it became the Australian Federation of Organisations of the Blind.[AFOB]. The majority of the eight foundation member bodies were worker unions. The objectives were to unite organisations of the blind and by reform advance the general welfare of the blind. The AFOB made a number of requests. It wanted equality with the ANCB in setting up a triangular peak body comprising two of its own delegates, two from the ANCB and two government nominees; it wanted observer status at ANCB conferences; it wanted one of the two voting seats on the WCWB which had been allocated to Australia. At that time many Committee members felt, quite sincerely, that blind people had nothing of significance to offer to the operation of the agencies. They also felt that paid staff members, like children, should be seen, do what they were told, but not be heard.

The AFOB requests were unacceptable to the industrial organisations. There was no way it would be given equal status. Observers would not be admitted to ANCB conferences. However if the AFOB could establish it was a competent body, the ANCB would consider granting membership to it. This, naturally, was unacceptable to the AFOB.

The third point, membership of the WCWB, was to be a painful running sore for fifteen years. Dr. Bennett had attended the 1954 conference of the WCWB in Paris. He succeeded in having the ANCB recognised as the Australian representative body. On the basis of population Australia was entitled to two voting delegates. The AFOB had also written to the WCWB and was told to discuss with the ANCB, the allocation of one of the voting entitlements.

At the 1955 ANCB conference Dr Bennett and Justice Maxwell were nominated as delegates to WCWB. Hamish Mackenzie then said he would not like to see anything happen that would harden the division between the AFOB and the ANCB and that the Council should consider giving them a seat. Blind delegates Messrs Lynch, Dickinson [Qld], Gibbons [SA] and Bro O'Neill supported him. The meeting finally resolved it must preserve its full rights to nominate representatives.

Other major matters considered were Rehabilitation; a sub committee appointed to examine; Notification of Blindness; agreed; White canes; strongly in favour; Guide Dogs; the limited benefits which would accrue did not warrant the large expenditure involved; Lead in paint and consequent poisoning affecting sight; follow up. Discussion took place on - the establishment of a National Reference Library for braille material; the future of Talking Books and production in Australia; the possible production of braille paper in Australia to reduce costs; Sales Tax exemption on goods manufactured by the blind. For example, imported Indian coir door mats cost \$2.30 compared with lowest Blind Institute cost of \$9.20; the effect of diabetes on sight; physiotherapy training in Australia for blind students; the possibility of a national annual appeal month as was the case in NZ. These were all important matters and emphasised the need for a national approach.

Queensland also moved that the Commonwealth and State governments be asked to carry out an investigation into blindness and eye diseases among native people in Australia with a view to diagnosis, treatment and cure and that the Commonwealth be asked to provide adequate social services, educational and welfare facilities. Both motions were carried unanimously. Both were initiated by blind people

The President of the WCWB issued a circular to the effect that member countries should make provision for adequate representation of organisations of the blind on its delegation and where these did not exist, of qualified blind persons on the staff of agencies. The ANCB using the alternative as an escape, nominated Mr Hamish Mackenzie for the 1964 Assembly in New York and the Rev Noel McCaw for the 1969 Assembly in New Delhi. Both were eminently suitable but they had not been selected by the organisation of the blind. As a consequence they were not endorsed by the AFOB. At the 1969 Assembly the President of WCWB publicly stated that while Australia was observing the letter of the law it was not observing the spirit.

The WCWB was also dividing along two lines, the service providers and the blind political activists. The latter who were particularly strong and vocal in the US and Europe. In 1964, Mr Hugh Jeffrey, a leading member of the AFOB was invited to a meeting of the American Federation of the Blind. A decision was made to form the International Federation of the Blind [IFB]. Prominent in the thinking was the belief that the blind should manage their own affairs and, as an outcome, manage the agencies providing the services. The AFOB, understandably regarding the ANCB with disfavour, affiliated with the IFB. Mr Hugh Jeffrey was appointed the delegate. Using Kooyong as the meeting place Mr Jeffrey and his friends developed a 'Charter for the Blind of the World'. He presented this Charter which was declared to be in conformity with the constitution and aspirations of the WCWB, to the first Convention of the IFB in Colombo, October 1969. It was adopted. Mr Jeffrey was elected to the Executive. He then attended the Assembly of the WCWB in New Delhi where he was also elected to the Executive of that body.

Few people have lived such a fulfilled life as Hugh Jeffrey. Within the general community he was a music teacher at St Pauls School for the Blind and Kingswood College and taught pupils privately. He conducted a series of musical appreciation sessions on the ABC, lectured for the Council of Adult Education and introduced CAE into Pentridge prison. He was a Methodist Lay Preacher, church organist and attended two International Conferences of the World Council of Churches. Within the blindness field he was a foundation member and President of the Guild of Business and Professional Blind, a foundation member of the Australia / New Zealand Association of Teachers of the Blind, as well a foundation member, Vice President and later Secretary of the National Federation of Blind Citizens of Australia. He was awarded the Medal of Paris for his work in drafting the Charter for the Blind and the Japanese Takeo Iwahashi Award for his work for the Blind. He is now revered as an elder statesman. He continues to be supported as he has been throughout, by his wife Alison. He was honoured by Membership of the Order of Australia in January 1995.

The 9th Biennial Meeting of ANCB held in Hobart in November, 1969 saw major changes. Dr Noel Pryde OBE, MM, National President of the Royal Guide Dogs was elected President of ANCB. Major General Paul Cullen CBE, DSO, ED and John Wilson, were elected Vice Presidents, and Ian Burnett, General Manager of the Royal Blind Society of NSW, Hon Secretary/Treasurer. Two Managers were also elected to the Executive. This was the point at which Committee Members started to withdraw

in favour of their Chief Executive Officers. One of the early decisions was to invite the AFOB to nominate a person to fill the second seat on the WCWB. Mr Hugh Jeffrey was nominated. The work of the Council now increased rapidly. Many of the issues related to management. Dr Pride suggested that Managers should have their own meeting prior to the Council and bring forward any necessary recommendations. This was done.

At the 10th Biennial Meeting in Perth in 1971, Dr Pryde, who was not enjoying good health and whose hearing was deteriorating, stood down in favour of General Cullen who had been chairing Executive Meetings. Following the elections, senior staff members became the majority of the Executive. Decisions were made to hold the meetings annually, to establish State Branches, to widen the membership, to become involved in service provision. Sub Committees were formed to handle specific areas of service. These included:- employment, braille, education, low vision, sport and recreation, technical aids, libraries and overseas aid. Mr Ian Burnett died in 1973.

Mr John Wilson assumed the responsibilities of Honorary Secretary, Mr Keith Holdsworth of Vice President and Mr Ted Petersen of Hon Treasurer. Mrs Lorraine Adamson, a delegate of the Association for the Blind became Minute Secretary. A decade of rapid development took place. The volume of work soon required two and three Executive Meetings a year. It became necessary to appoint an Executive Secretary. This was Ms. Dianne White, an achiever of outstanding ability and prodigious work capacity. A decade of rapid development took place.

Mr Wilson went on to be a Vice President of the WCWB and Chairman of the North American Oceania Regional Committee of the WCWB; Mr Holdsworth MBE the Chairman of the WCWB Rehabilitation Committee and the acknowledged specialist on rehabilitation of the blind in S.E.Asia.; Mr Petersen became President of the Australian Council for Rehabilitation of the Disabled. The three were extensively involved in a wide range of international organisations and affairs. Their broad overview was a factor in maintaining Victoria as the leading state in services to vision impaired people.

The influence of the AFOB waned as members aged and retired and the character of the Industrial Workshops changed. Concurrent with this, the influence of a new generation of younger well educated blind persons increased. In 1975 the National Federation of Blind Citizens of Australia [NFBCA] was formed. Among the key figures in this move were Mr Hugh Jeffrey, Mr David Blyth and the Jolley brothers. This new, politically active consumers organisation, claimed to be the voice of the blind. The Australian Federation of Organisations of the Blind disbanded.

The ANCB with its office at Elanora Brighton, and under the Presidency of General Cullen, an inspiring indefatigable leader, was now functioning and performing on a very broad base. It supported the successful Mobility Instructors Training Course initiated and conducted by Keith Holdsworth at the Royal Guide Dog Centre; played a large role in the development of Sports for the Blind, together with national and international competitions; was involved in producing expert papers on all aspects of service for blind people within Australia; with the blessing of Fred Hollows, sponsored a test programme in central Australia to ascertain if any of the agency programmes would be of assistance to Aboriginal people; organised and participated in overseas aid and prevention of blindness programmes from India to Fiji. The overseas section of the work increased to the point a separate organisation, 'Foresight', under the

Chairmanship of General Cullen was formed to handle it. The benefits of the extensive knowledge and experience gained flowed back to individual organisations throughout Australia.

Funding was always a problem. As the work increased and became more complex Boards of Management increasingly left it to their Chief Executive Officers. Persuading their Boards to make funds available when these were insufficient for the direct services of their own agencies was not an easy task. Fortunately General Cullen was deeply involved in overseas aid at Federal government level and Foresight was able to attract worthwhile financial support.

The Association for the Blind was one of a small number of agencies which gave notable financial assistance and made staff available to help with projects both local and overseas. Optometrist Helen Robbins from the Low Vision Clinic and Mobility Instructor Alf Roggerio were members of the Aboriginal assessment team. The Association was prominent in the organisation of a month long Australian course for the Welfare officers of the agencies. This was held under the auspices of the ANCB. It made a number of staff and in particular Sister Biggs available to assist in the development of Low Vision Clinics in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong. The College of Optometry made Dr. Alan Johnston available for the same purpose. It made the Education and Training Officer Ms Chris Poulson, and Senior O&M Instructor Mrs Sandy Pelling available to conduct on behalf of WCWB, a leadership course in Malaysia for blind women. It provided a wide range of training for overseas professionals. It hosted the first and second International Low Vision Conferences and also the first meeting in Australia of the Executive Committee of the WCWB. These activities gave it an enviable standing and reputation in international affairs of the blind. The international programme of the Association combined with those of the National Guide Dogs and the extraordinary achievements of Foresight had the effect of completely turning around the original poor standing of Australia and the ANCB in overseas eyes.

Prof. Laurie McCredie CBE was elected President in 1980. Major General Cullen CBE, DSO and Bar ED remained Chairman of Foresight. General Cullen was made an Officer of the Order of Australia, received the Anzac Peace Award and the Nansen Medal for his outstanding service. Finally he received the highest Australian accolade, Companion of the Order of Australia.

At the world level, relationships between the the WCWB and IFB deteriorated. The situation was unreal. Both bodies held their conferences following each other. The majority of delegates were common to both. There was little difference in the Agenda of the two bodies. The Honorary Officers of both societies met together afterwards and were usually able to reconcile resolutions. One delegate asked to explain the major difference between the two, replied after some thought, "At WCWB meetings a tie and jacket are usually worn." The two organisations voted for unification.

With nothing much happening, the initiative for reconciling the varying views and preparing a draft constitution for circulation and submission to a joint meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in October 1984, was taken by the Asian and North America/Oceania Regions. John Wilson convened a task force which met at Elanora, Brighton in April 1984. Representing Australia were Keith Holdsworth and John Wilson for the WCWB and Bill Jolley and David Blyth for the IFB. Representatives from India and New Zealand were also present. The draft constitution was prepared

and circulated world wide within a week. It formed the basis for the amalgamation of the two bodies into the World Blind Union at the Riyadh assembly later in 1984. The division, which should never have happened, was healed. At that meeting, Mr David Blyth of the RVIB was elected Chairman of the new Asian Region, which included Australia. Australia was by also represented on many of the international sub committees.

Back in Australia Mr David Blyth succeeded Prof. Laurie McCredie as President of the ANCB. General Cullen, John Wilson, Keith Holdsworth and Ted Petersen retired. Ms Diane White resigned when the office was moved from Melbourne to Canberra in 1988.

By pure coincidence extensive changes occurred simultaneously in the Committee membership and Executive Officers of the Agencies. This naturally flowed on to ANCB delegates. A reservoir of knowledge and understanding was lost. The interests and priorities of the new sighted Chief Executive Officers as providers of services to a wide ranging clientele and with budgets in total amounting to scores of millions of dollars and the young blind representatives as consumers of services were not easy to reconcile. The new agency representatives were not used to working in harness. The financial effects of the recession also had an adverse effect. State interests were pursued at the expense of national aspirations. Although friendly relationships continued the ANCB went into recess after forty years of service during which, despite a constant stream of problems, it led Australia from nowhere to a position of renown.

This was proved at the Convention of the world body in 1992 when Mr David Bligh was elected President of the World Blind Union. The Federation of Blind Citizens of Australia remains the spokesman for blind people both within Australia and internationally.

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