

H I S T O R Y O F

"F A I R Y L A N D"

C O T T A G E

57 MALMSBURY STREET, KEW.

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1860 - 1960

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"FAIRYLAND"

Some time prior to 1863, in which year records of streets and houses were commenced for the Borough of Kew, some unknown person built this little cottage. It could be over one hundred years old, but, at least, it is as old as Kew itself. Of one thing I can assure you, that, in this year of 1960, it is much better known than it was in the 1860's. Indeed, it is known World Wide, and has had much publicity. Some years ago it was featured in colour in a supplement to one of the daily newspapers, and recently it had a mention on television. It is a veritable children's Paradise.

In 1944, the present owner, Mrs. Grace Tabulo, and her husband, the late Mr. Jim Tabulo, a Digger of the First World War, came to live there. They were soon known to the children of the district, as both were very fond of young folk, and had a manner that endeared them to children. Their home was ever open to any who called, and Mrs. Tabulo soon set about turning the small garden into a land of Fairytale. The children helped by bringing pieces of broken ornament and coloured glass, which the lady, in her gifted fashion, and with the aid of cement, shells, moss, and anything to hand, arranged in pageant representing the popular children's stories.

My young folk went there as children, and I with them, to see Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, the Seven Dwarfs, and other groups too numerous to mention. A Palace of glass and mirror, nursery rhyme characters, and historical events such as the birth of our Royal children, were all depicted there. The children received a splendid grounding in patriotism, as one could not find more loyal subjects to the Crown than these two people. It would be impossible to say how much of her own money Mrs. Tabulo has spent on flags and cards for the children. The war time saw many celebrations at the cottage. On Victory days the children marched, with flags flying, and Mrs. Tabulo leading.

It was a popular resort on New Year's Eve, and to see tiny children drinking from cups that were two hundred years old was, to me, an astounding sight. Mrs. Tabulo trusted them with her priceless treasures. I remember, on one occasion, a small girl, helping me to butter biscuits, was thoughtful enough to

suggest that we all brought a little bit of butter next day, as Mrs. Tabulo was short of coupons. They not only played there, they shared the lives of this couple, and, what is more, parents knew that their children learned only that which was good from these folk.

This went on for years, but then, in 1950, came the sad day when Mr. Tabulo was thrown from his cart and seriously injured. The gloom amongst the children could not be described. Night and day, whenever she was not at the hospital, her vigil was shared by the little ones, but, sad to say, after a week of terrific strain on the old lady, her husband passed away at St. Vincent's Hospital. As a Digger, he was given a Military funeral, and this was attended by a number of children; a small lad from the East Kew School Band played "The Last Post". For a long time afterwards, you would see Mrs. Tabulo, accompanied by children, going to the cemetery with flowers for his grave.

Mrs. Tabulo, with the affection of the children, carried bravely on, still building the garden and repairing the cottage in many ways. But years passed, the children grew up, and another generation has taken their place. Today we find her, in her 84th year, still giving her time to the children, still handing out Birthday cards, and still collecting for the Royal Children's Hospital. She has certificates showing a total of over £400, and of these she is justly proud.

It is not only the children who have been entertained at "Fairyland", however. Adults have spent hours there, and nine books of signatures include those of many people from abroad who have called to see it. During the Olympic Games she had a number of visitors. Inside the cottage there is a vast collection of antiques, many of them priceless Museum pieces; first editions may be found there, and porcelain with historic background; Mrs. Tabulo has collected for many years and her treasures in the cottage are only a small part of what she once had.

Having told you the present story of the cottage, I will return to approximately one hundred years ago, and give you its early history, for at least one lady, born there, became a well-known person.

In 1863, the cottage was owned by a Mrs. Warboys, a widow, who resided there for a short time, and, in 1864-5, let the property to a Mr. John Shands. Records for the next few years show her to be the owner still, but not living in it. I can supply the details, however, for it was my grandparents, William and Henrietta Lowe, who took up residence, in 1866, with their five daughters. I have a prayer book, the flyleaf of which is dated Advent 1867, and signed by the Reverend Rowland Haywood, first incumbent of Holy Trinity Church, which was given to my mother, Alice Lowe, for regular attendance at Sunday School. A few years after this, my mother was stricken with typhoid fever, and, at the height of the illness, the medico attending decided that her lovely head of hair must be shaved off. This decision so alarmed the patient that she became worse, and my grandfather, not wishing to witness her distress, walked across the paddocks. He chanced to meet Dean McCartney, who, seeing his distress, sought the reason. The Dean accompanied him home to the cottage, where he assured the patient that he would not let them touch her hair, and sat beside the bed, holding her hand until she slept. When she awoke the fever had abated; thus the Dean was always accredited with saving her life.

In 1869, another daughter was born in the little cottage; they called her Annie - her story I will tell later. About this time my grandfather became totally blind, and his health failed rapidly, and, in July 1871, he died and was buried at Boroondara Cemetery. Thus Grandmother was left alone with six girls to care for and educate. When she was about twenty, Emma, the eldest, became nurse to the children of Mr. and Mrs. Beath, who lived at the opposite end of Malmsbury Street, and, later, she went to England with them. Her health was always poor, and the extreme cold did not suit her, so she returned to Australia, where she died in 1890. The second daughter, Mary, married Daniel Dannock, son of a very early Kew resident. She and her husband died within five weeks of each other in 1907. My mother, Alice Lowe, who was the fourth child, also lived with the Beaths, who took her at an early age to enable her to receive education with the governess employed for their own children. She remained with them until her marriage, in 1884, to a William Richardson, an employee of Mr. Beath's warehouse. The marriage took place in the parlour of the cottage; Mr. Martin Hosking, of the Ballarat City Mission, officiated. For

some years they lived in Auburn, but later returned, and lived in Cobden Street, Kew. The other sisters married and moved away from Kew, but Grandmother stayed on at the cottage. Meanwhile, Annie, the child born at the cottage, had been educated by the Rev. Richard Connibee. She was a clever child, and, under his guidance, she won many scholarships for her literary efforts. This culminated in the publication of a book of poems entitled "At The Sign Of The Southern Cross". She had married by this time, and it was under her married name of Annie McDonald that she wrote. Later she moved to Sydney, where she became a feature story writer for a Sydney newspaper, published other volumes of poetry, and lectured in English from 2UE Sydney. It is her poem "Gordon's Leap" that is framed and hung in Gordon's Cottage in the Ballarat Gardens.

In 1898, Grandmother sold the cottage and went to live with Mrs. McDonald in East Melbourne. Mr. Arthur Spruzen, a gardener, was the new owner. He lived there until 1904, then let the cottage to Mr. William Walter Key and moved to Eglinton Street, where he commenced an asphaltting business. Mr. Spruzen built a new house in Disraeli Street later on, and, in 1924, he was elected to the Council, and served for a number of years. From there he moved to Mary Street, and eventually to Gellibrand Street, where he and his wife died in 1931. In 1907, Mr. William Coucher bought the cottage, but he stayed only one year, letting it to Mr. Henry Stainer, then, in 1910, having gone to Whittlesea to live, he sold it to Mr. Carl Safstrom, who was a grocer, and had the shop that is at the corner of Derby Street. Mr. John Hughes was his first tenant, a boot-maker, who also stayed for one year, then, in 1911, Mr. Patrick Britt rented the cottage and remained there until 1919. During these years their three youngest children, Maria, Albert and Dorothy, were born there. Two of them are still living in Kew. It was then sold to Mr. George H. Smith, also a gardener, and this gentleman held it until he died. His widow stayed there, and, in 1939, she remarried, and, as Mrs. Anders, occupied it until Mrs. Grace Tabulo bought it in 1944. This completes the history of the cottage, and gives a summary of those who occupied it during the hundred years. I have been told that it has been altered a little, but the original thatch roof is beneath the iron.

The story of the Lowe family was not quite complete, for, in the early 1900's, Grandmother returned to live with my parents who, by this time, had built a house in Gladstone Street, Hyde Park - as it was then called - and there, in 1905, I was born. When I was three years old, Grandmother died, and was buried with her husband at Boroondara Cemetery. There were seven members of our family. Miss Elsie Richardson, the eldest, lives at Surrey Hills, and celebrated her 76th birthday during the Celebrations. The eldest son lives at Carlton, and the next two have passed away. Charles, the next son, was killed at Gallipoli. My brother, Arthur, lives in another house Father built in Gladstone Street, and neither he nor I have ever lived out of Kew.

Just as an added bit of history, I have the old clock that hung in the cottage in 1866. It was brought from abroad by my great-grandmother some time prior to 1848. It is over 150 years old.

Dorothy Rogers