

KEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY Inc.

P.O. BOX 175, KEW, VIC., 3101

President:

Dr. Laszlo Benyei, A.M.,

Hon. Secretary:

Miss Lex Allen

September 1992

Newsletter No.50

Dear Members,

Communication within any organization is very important, and although this is only the second Newsletter for 1992, we have had a friendly year.

The "Gourmet Pickle Stall" during the Kew Festival was a great success, both financially and socially.

The gracious hospitality of the McIntyres during our Saturday outing to "Swinton" and their river side house was greatly appreciated. Our Heritage bus tour to the Yarra Bend Park, on both sides of the river, was educational and we are indebted to Mr. and Mrs. John Thompson for their participation and knowledge of this beautiful area of our heritage. Great interest was shown in the Deep Rock Swimming Pool and we have permission to include herewith a short history from the archives of the Yarra Bend Park Trust.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held in No.3.Hall on Wednesday, the 14th October at 8 p.m., when the Mayor, Cr. R. Streeton, will speak. Signed nominations for office bearers and the committee should be in the hands of our Secretary, Lex Allen, 15 minutes prior to the meeting. We have been unable to find an Assistant Secretary this year and thank Mrs. Helen Reeve for taking on the role of Vice President.

The 1992-1993 membership fees became due on 1st July 1992. Please check that your payment is up to date. (Individual members \$ 5, family membership: \$ 8, life membership: \$ 50) .

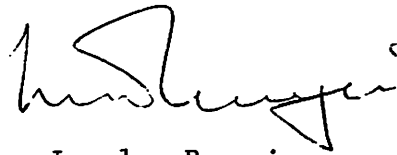
Do not forget the annual Cup Day outing to "Coolart" ! Bookings to Lex Allen or the Benyeis please.

Our final meeting for the year will be addressed by Miss Fran van Brummelen, President of Kew Cottages Historical Society, in No.3 Hall, at 8 p.m. on November 11th.

Thea and Max Sartori have again invited us to their home for our Christmas Party - 7.30 p.m. on Friday the 11th December, at Family names beginning A to L please bring a savoury supper plate, M to Z cakes etc. Santa Clause asks, that we each bring a small gift labelled "lady" or "gentleman" for distribution.

Further reports will be given, and our future activities discussed, at the Annual Meeting. - Please come.

Yours sincerely



Laszlo Benyei
President

Welcome to the following new members:

Reverend Douglas and Mrs. Doreen Belcher
Mr. Rodney and Mrs. Joan Fernald
Mr. Frank and Mrs. Phyllis Hewitt
Mrs. Kath Smelt
Mrs. Kay Stewart
Mr. David Webb and family

DEEP ROCK SWIMMING CLUB AND LIFE SAVING BASIN

There was a secluded spot near a bend in the northern bank of the River Yarra within a kilometre upstream from Dights Falls adjacent to the entry of the Merri Creek into the River. It was situated below an area later to be called The Headland. There was considerable depth in the River at that particular site and a large number of senior residents and young people from the Collingwood area in particular saw fit to use the River in preference to the local Municipal Baths. It was the day of the coach and buggy when the site was almost inaccessible to other than foot traffic.

Prior to the 1914-18 War a number of regular users of the Basin, as it was called, formed themselves into a Club which in time came to be known as the Deep Rock Swimming and Life Saving Club. They were a very enthusiastic group and had a timber building erected to serve their needs. At the commencement of the War a few of the members joined the Army and in 1916 the remainder of the group (prominent among them being Peter Reville, a popular League footballer at that time) set to work and built into the River concrete terracing and made a separate pool for young children in which to learn, erecting at the same time a high diving tower displaying at its base a notice indicating the depth of the River at that particular point.

The area of the surrounding land was under the control of the Mental Hygiene Department; in those days it was called the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum, but in 1926 the Government appointed a Board of Inquiry to determine the future use of the area as inmates of the Asylum had been transferred elsewhere.

The Board's recommendation that the area of some 300-odd acres in the Parish of Jika Jika be retained as a parkland for recreation purposes was approved and a Committee of Management was appointed to take control. The Committee appointed consisted of three Government representatives and two Councillors from each of the Districts of Collingwood and Heidelberg. At the time Heidelberg had not been proclaimed a city. The Honorable T. Tunnecliffe M.L.A. was appointed as Chairman. The Club carried on as before. It was very popular and was noted for its outstanding efforts in teaching people how to swim and the art of lifesaving.

The main, and practically only means of entry to the Basin was by way of foot across the Roseneath Street footbridge, but came the disastrous flood of November 1934 and the bridge was washed away, although in time it was replaced. sad to relate that two workmen lost their lives in the restoration. Just prior to this the timber building serving as a Clubroom was destroyed by fire. It was insured by the Club which, at the time, refused to hand any portion of the insurance money over to the Yarra Bend Committee of Management. It was understood that the amount obtained from the Insurance Company was lodged with the National Bank, Clifton Hill, in the Club's name.

About this period the Unemployment Relief Scheme commenced and a good deal of improvement work was set in train at Yarra Bend under the plan of work for sustenance for the unemployed. The Yarra Bend Committee of Management was able to have included in the plans a new concrete building at Deep Rock consisting of a huge centre room for social purposes as well as a dressing shelter at each end of the building, one for males and one for females. In addition, two toilet blocks were to be built on the high land at the rear of the building. The work was carried out and the Basin became more popular than ever and the club made a request, which was approved, for an ornamental doorway to be included at the main entrance to the building, with a plaque each side to have inscribed thereon the respective names of the Pioneers of the Club and agreed to advance part of the money received from the Insurance Company to meet portion of the cost of the work.

Close at hand is the spot where a high dive took place and it was proclaimed in Miller's Guide for many years as the highest dive in the world. It was in the year 1916 during the 1914-18 War when with the object of raising funds for patriotic purposes, arrangements were made for Duke Kanamaku, a noted Hawaiian swimmer, to dive from a raised platform, but on the day he could not be located and a prominent local swimmer and diver in Alec Wickham was dressed up with feathers etc. and announced as Count Wickyamo performed the feat before a large crowd. On inspection one can only marvel at his intrepidity.

At one stage the late John Wren was Chairman of the Club and in appreciation of his efforts on its behalf, the Members had a separate mound established near the waters edge. It consisted of a concrete block with his name inscribed on the plaque that had been set therein.

For some time the popularity of the pool reached a low ebb but with the re-building of the footbridge and the new building, the place again came into its own and enthusiasm reigned as before. Dances were held regularly each Sunday night and the Members of the Club policed the area with credit much to the pleasure of a big crowd attending the Basin, particularly in the summer months. The Yarra Bend Committee then had a Workmans' Cottage erected on the high land within close call of the pool, but with the coming of the second War when a number of the Club Members had joined up, and the fact that the motor car era had arrived taking people in comfort to beaches, etc., that formerly had been practically out of bounds for the average working man in Collingwood, interest in the pool began to diminish and to make matters worse for the pool, the November flood of 1934 having washed away portion of Dights Falls, the Public Works Department, to prevent a repetition, had a concrete wall built into the River at an angle to break down any sudden rush of waters from upstream. This caused the basin to silt up and it gradually became useless for swimming. The high diving tower became obsolete and was dismantled and, although a few of the regulars attended, one of whom was Mr Pat Kennedy who used to have his early morning swim each day before walking to his place of employment at Queens Street Melbourne where he commenced duty at 9.00 a.m., but the others one by one ceased to visit the place.

The silt reached the stage where it was a couple of feet below the surface and in an endeavour to restore it as a swimming pool I waited on Sir Arthur Rylah, who had become a Trustee of the Park and was Chief Secretary, and prevailed on him to request the Board of Works to have the silt removed. A dredge was made available and as a result tons of silt were bucketed and carted to the park's main golf course forming much needed mounds which were badly required to prevent stray shots from going into the River.

Unfortunately in addition to the trouble with silt at the Basin itself, the River throughout the park, which once boasted of hundreds of swimmers in season between the Chandler and Walmer Street Bridges, when the water was practically clean enough for drinking purposes had, through the short-sightedness of the authorities, been allowed to become so badly contaminated that it was no longer healthy or of any use for swimming.

Other than Sunday night dances the Basin was being sparsely attended. Many complaints came to hand from residents who were fed up with the behaviour of some of those going to and from the dances where liquor was becoming the main attraction. Vandalism became rife and subsequently the Trust let the building to a school for the storage of boats at a nominal rental. The conduct of some of the people who frequented the area met with so much disapproval it was decided to ask the police to visit the place, but the Department considered it impracticable owing to shortage of personnel and the remoteness of the area.

In the meantime the Workmans' Cottage was demolished and with the building of the freeway through the park, with the exception of the ornamental doorway, no great attempt was made to salvage any other part that was once a wonderful rendezvous for good hard-working folk and the baptism to swimming and lifesaving of many who even today can think back and remember the pleasant hours they spent at the Deep Rock Swimming Pool.