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WHITEHORSE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LEWIS ROPER INTERVIEW ON COMMUNITY RADIO

1994

VALDA ARROWSMITH ON THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LEWIS: Valda and I are old friends. We've known each other for a long time now. Valda is a longtime Councillor for the old City of Nunawading and Mayor for twelve months of that time. Today she is connected with the Nunawading Historical Society and she's come along to talk about that.

L. Good Morning Valda.

V. Good Morning Lewis.

L. What's your official standing in the Historical Society? I forgot to mention that.

V. President.

L. Oh, you're President, Oh, well then. You're actually the ideal person to come along and talk about it. How long has it been in business – very long?

V. Yes. We celebrated our 30th year last year. We are located in Deep Creek Road, Mitcham and a lot of people would know Schwerkolt Cottage and the Museum. We have a local History Room attached to that Museum and we have our Archives and our Meetings there.

L. Do you have a big membership?.

V. We have about seventy and our meetings average about thirty. We meet bi-monthly and have speakers on mainly Historical matters.

L. Apart from your meetings bi-monthly, what does the Society do ?

V. This is really where all the work is done. The meetings are just the icing on the cake in a way, because the purpose is to collect Historical matters. We have Archives and in that we collect quite a lot of Newspaper clippings, but certainly Historical matters to do with people in the Community and the Council in the past. We collect maps – for example, a couple of people have brought into us when they were building their houses in the fifties – their plans, their loans and how difficult it was and what you had to do. We keep those Historical matters. We've got a lot of photos from way back when the Municipality was first established in the mid 1800's and people can come then and research them if they're doing Historical research or Family research. So we keep all that. We've got maps and all the documents. We very much depend on people bringing us material. Anyone listening now, if they've got any photos or plans or information about the past, we'd be delighted to receive that. What we do is take a copy and then we'll give them back their original if they want to keep them. The same with photos, which of course are precious in lots of families, but we just keep them for a couple of days and give them back safely, so we would appreciate that.

We do Oral Histories of people who have seen many changes in the area. We're keeping all that so that people in the future will be able to come and just know what the area was like before they came.

L. Terribly important isn't it?

V. It's very important. Social History is very, very important and I think that because our country is so young it is something that just in recent times people have realised that we mustn't let this go. We must have it. They're bringing it to Historical Societies, Libraries, places where it will be kept for the future.

L. I suppose you'll need ever increasing space for storage, won't you?

V. We do! Now I have to talk to you about the Local History Room and what we have there. On the Complex we have Schwerkolt Cottage, which is an 1880 cottage built in the City of Nunawading, purchased and restored. That's a physical reminder of how things were back then. In 1977 the Council built us a Museum and in that we have Artefacts of things people used. We have an Implement shed and clothing, just to show how people lived back then. In 1988 the Council were then kind enough to put an extension onto that and that's our Local History Room where we keep all our work and those documents and papers. We do have a project now of Cataloguing, of all the items that have been given and collected by people over this 30 years. It's very much a Community contribution of people that started all this 30 years ago and it's been added to over that time. The group that's there at the moment – because Museum Australia Victoria (which is the body that guides and helps Museums) – they have brought in a system of cataloguing. They gave us a workshop about 2 years ago and we are now setting about cataloguing all the items that have been given. On that was much history of the people that gave it and that type of thing. We are getting a computer and that is from a Council grant too, for which we are very thankful. Then people will be able to come in and easily access. The eventual aim will be that right through Cities and other Municipalities will be able to annex each other's information.

L. What else do you want to tell me about the Society?

V. As I was saying about cataloguing and listing, in that it required a professional manner now with all these, but also in line with that we have applied for Registration for Accreditation and only a few weeks back we received that from Museums Australia Victoria. That means now that we have to, in the next 3 years, do a lot of work to complete the cataloguing, to improve our marketing, and look at ways that the public will find very interesting. They will want to come, come again, tell their friends about it. Once again it's getting back to the importance of history and the social history of our area. Formerly we did cover the former City of Nunawading, which was a very big municipality, and since amalgamation with Box Hill. Of course we were the one municipality prior to 1925 and we do have a lot of historical information in common, but with the Box Hill Historical Society we are working now together to cover the whole city of Whitehorse.

We would be delighted to hear from people who would have things of interest that they think would be good to have in the Archives for future reference. As well, where I talked about the photos and document type things, we do look at clothing. In actual fact we would like clothing of the 20's, 30's, 40's period. We have one or two pieces but we would certainly like to add to that, so we'd be very pleased to hear about that too. Of course we're always looking for new members and people that might like to come and be involved in this work. Meetings aren't always something that people want to go to, but they want to go and do hands on work, and maybe learn something and broaden. We'd be very pleased to hear from them too because you never catch up in this.

L. No, I can understand that.

V. There's always such a lot that has to be done.

L. So if anybody's interested in joining your society can you give me a phone number?

V. Yes. They could ring me 9874 1414 or our Secretary Barbara Gardiner 9874 6592.

L. Thank you Valda. I think when I spoke to you a while back, actually on Australia Day, you were saying that you were trying to establish the reason for some of the street names.

V. Yes. That is a project that we've got. One of our younger members with a computer is gathering all this information and putting it on that machine and then we'll have all that.

L. So if anyone has particular information about that, anything about the history of Nunawading, you'd be delighted to know about it, hear about it, borrow it, have it donated, anything -- it all helps.

V. That's right Lewis, and oral history, if people would like to talk to us of their memories. As you said, we've really just skimmed the surface in this interview, so if people think about it, or want to talk about it or ask more questions we'd be delighted to hear from them.

L. The phone number again is 9874 1414, that's Valda's phone number or the Secretary is 9874 6592.

V. Thank you Lewis for this opportunity.

L. Thank you for coming along Val. It was very good of you to come along and give us your time. Thank you very much and good luck with the society in the future. I think it's terribly important because in the future we're going to need all this aren't we?

V. That's right. We are indeed.