

NUNAWADING & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JULY ... 1967

NEWSLETTER NO. 3

\*\*\* NEXT MEETING \*\*\*

WEDNESDAY, 12th JULY

An Address by Miss Patricia Reynolds

8 p.m.

'PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY'

Where should the Society's acquisitions be housed? To this and other questions, Miss Reynolds, Deputy La Trobe Librarian, will give us good counsel.

Place: METHODIST HALL, Whitehorse Road, Nunawading.

REPORTS: June Meeting. Notes on Mrs. P. Faggetter's address "Herbs & Pioneers".

In the 1850's, W. Slater, with his wife, established a medicinal herb garden in Nunawading, near the Koonung Creek. Mr. Slater had worked for 16½ years in the famous medicinal gardens of Potter & Moore's in Mitcham, Surrey, England - that's how Mitcham received its name: given by Mr. Slater because of his early associations with Mitcham in England. He brought cuttings in sand, and seed, which had to survive the long sea voyage. Land originally thickly timbered - especially with peppermint gums, which he used for distilling a fine eucalyptus oil, "Opossum brand". The garden flourished, and Mr. Slater supplied dried herbs and perfumes from distilled plants to Roche Tomsitt and Felton Grimwade. In 1880, a Government scent and herb farm was established at Dunolly to help promote a perfume industry. In 1886, Mr. Slater and Mr. Melton, manager of the State farm, gave evidence before the Royal Commission enquiring into Horticulture. A list of the plants grown in Mitcham was given and some, but not all, explanations of their uses. Many of these plants - forgotten by most people, but treasured by the early pioneers for their value in cooking, for drinks and medicines - were grown by our grandmothers around their first cottages, and can still be found in some old gardens. Many have already been planted around the Schwerkolt cottage in memory of the early pioneers and especially the Slater family, who established, we think, the first herb garden in this colony. More will be added as they become available. In talking with the oldest members of our community who remember the rare characters of the early days, it is quite evident that very few were in easy reach of doctors, so they used plants to help cure their ills. Onions for sprains and earache, marshmallow in ointment to relieve burns and sprains, horehound for beer and coughs, sage tea for chest troubles and an excellent tonic, parsley for a kidney tonic, lemon scented verbena, thyme or rosemary for baths and to soak the feet, and the deliciously scented geranium with lavender for sachets to put among linen and in clothes drawers.

(P. Faggetter)

TOUR of NUNAWADING: Members of the Williamstown Historical Society have accepted our invitation to visit Nunawading and District on Sunday, 13th August. Further details in the August Newsletter.

ARTS FESTIVAL: Through the courtesy of the Blackburn & District Tree Preservation Society, the Nunawading & District Historical Society will stage a Historical Exhibition of maps, letters, photography, etc., at the Native Plant and Flower Show to be held on Saturday and Sunday, 7th and 8th October, 1967. More details in the September Newsletter.

.. / 2.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE ORCHARDS GONE? This is the title of an interesting article on the history of Doncaster, in the July edition of "Walkabout".

---

BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF HISTORICAL SOCIETIES: The date has been fixed tentatively for the weekend from Friday, 19th September, to Sunday, 1st October, at the University of Melbourne.

A special time will be set aside for discussion of problems affecting affiliated Societies, and a Speakers' Panel will include experts who will advise on the collection of historical material, the keeping of records, indexing, the setting up of Historical Museums, and their maintenance and use, the placing of monuments, financial problems, and links with local Councils and other bodies.

---

HISTORY:

THE NUNAWADING MESSIAH

According to records at the La Trobe Library, James Morgan Cowley Fisher was a disciple of John Wroe, founder of the sect variously known as Wroeites, Christian Israelites, or Beardies. When Wroe died at Collingwood on 5th February, 1863, Fisher claimed leadership of the sect, but he was rejected by the members. He then started his own church, calling it the Church of the First Born.

Fisher was described as a magnificent specimen, over six feet tall, with "features of a Greek God, the shoulders of a giant, and a flowing mane of white hair. His beard, too, was long and white, and his eyes were pools of power".

He lived in a wattle and daub hut in Delaneys Road, Nunawading, and served for many years as a Shire Councillor. His occupation, at one stage, was listed as "charcoal burner". Little is known of his family, but his three sons were named after the great men of Israel - Samuel, David, and Solomon.

Fisher's followers, some fifty men and women, of "eccentric habit and cast iron virtue", gathered at Nunawading, from the City and from the mountains to the East, to worship in the open air, while their "Messiah" interpreted the Mosaic law.

In 1900, the Fisherites moved over to Western Australia and started an agricultural settlement at Wickepin, about 200 miles East of Perth. A church was built there, and the "Messiah" preached in it regularly, but later the sect was divided by internal dissension, and a second church was erected.

It is believed that James Fisher died in Western Australia about 1915. The two churches at Wickepin and the sect have all passed out of existence, but the settlement prospered well, and some of the descendants of the original members are still in the district.

(From "The Link" - a Toc H publication)

---

NON-MEMBER FRIENDS: Fifty Newsletters are posted each month, although the Society has only 28 financial members. If you are not a financial member of this Society, but wish to be included on our mailing list and to receive the Newsletter regularly, we must ask you to contribute \$1.00 per annum towards the cost of stationery, duplicating, etc., plus postage and telephone calls.

Full Membership - \$2.00 p.a.

Student Membership - \$0.50 p.a.

Enquiries: (Mrs.) N. Leach,  
39 Creek Road, Mitcham.  
Telephone: 87-3429

---