

# NUNAWADING HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER

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### Van Diemen's Land Company

Major land development by the Van Diemen's Land Company in north-west Tasmania was described by Miss McGaw at our February meeting. Miss McGaw's father was manager of the company for many years during this century. The company still operates and is the second oldest in Australia. It was formed in England under Royal Charter in 1824 with a capital of £1,000,000, intending to raise sheep in Tasmania. When it applied for 250,000 acres Governor Arthur diverted it to the north-west to be away from other settlement. Surveyors, agricultural experts, directed by Edward Curr, the first manager, explored the country from Port Sorell. They thought the country wretchedly poor but found good grazing land at Circular Head, so the first settlement was formed there. Other good land was found in thickly-forested areas and the Company obtained 350,000 acres in several lots. It formed a base at Emu Bay, which is now the site of Burnie and cut roads to its various properties. These were very wet all the year, mud was everywhere, so it was poor country for sheep. These natural conditions caused a number of failures until 1851, when conditions became more favourable.

Natives lived mostly along the coast where they had many middens for cooking shellfish. There were troubles between natives and settlers, some were killed on both sides, as well as horses and sheep. Many natives died because they could not adapt to civilisation, dying of tuberculosis.

In 1871, when tin was discovered at Mt. Bischof, alongside one of its properties, the company built a railway to the mount. This was later sold to the Emu Bay Railway Co.

Some emigrants, arriving in Tasmania, rented and bought small farms, others were sold to farmers on mortgages and large areas to the A.P.P.M. for paper manufacture. During the 1960's the company sold off town and other lands, retaining only the Woolnorth Sheep Station.

Although it is an English company and would probably need an Act of the British Parliament to dissolve it, most of the directors are now Australian.

Mayor's Night - Our annual Mayor's Night will be on Thursday (not Wednesday) April 13. We meet in the Mayor's reception room at 7.30 p.m. to receive visitors from neighbouring kindred societies, then go to the Willis Room, where Mr. Laurie Dunn will show films of famous Melbourne buildings and bullock teams.



Australian Navy - At our March meeting Mr Ricketts, who served in the Australian Navy from 1913 until after 1945, with the exception of 18 years between wars, told us about his experiences and the various ships flying the Australian flag. There will be a fuller report in the next News Letter.

Theater Night - We are planning a theatre night on 28 April, when the Mitcham Repertory Society will be presenting a comedy, "How's The World Treating You?" Tickets are \$2 each

Excursion to Mornington - Arrangements are being made for an excursion to Mornington, with help from the local historical society, which will probably advise us what to see, where to go and provide guides.

Coffee Table - Mr Harold Bakes has given us a mahogany coffee table to be disposed of for the museum funds. Tickets are 20 cents each, or three for 50 cents. This will be drawn on May 10

Centenary of "Loch Ard" Wreck - On 1 June 1878 the "Loch Ard" was wrecked near Port Campbell. There were only two survivors. This was the most famous of more than thirty major wrecks in the Cape Otway area. A number of events will mark the centenary this year, including an oration by Professor J.J. Auchmuty, "Settlers Under Sail" in the Great Hall of the National Gallery on Wednesday, 15 March. We will be represented by six of our members

Exhibition of Photographs - As part of the Moomba celebrations the Royal Historical Society is presenting an exhibition of some of its oldest and most interesting photographs, contrasting with modern ones. The exhibition opened on Tuesday 7 March, and is on the 14th level, 495 Collins street. Times of opening are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily. This exhibition will be in conjunction with the publication of Mrs. Tipping's photographic history, "Melbourne on the Yarra."

William Witt, First Shire President - William Witt was born at Salisbury, England, in 1833. He studied chemistry and when he married in 1857 he came to Australia on the recommendation of his brother, who was at Beechworth. He opened a chemist's shop there and followed succeeding gold rushes through the north-east of Victoria and the Eastern Riverina, opening branches on every new field. This often involved travelling through roadless country and crossing unbridged rivers, sometimes in dangerous circumstances. He was soon involved in public life and became Mayor of Beechworth in 1867. He began an agitation for a railway line to Albury and when the government agreed to build it he was elected to Parliament for the Murray district. He held this seat for three Parliaments, but had to leave Beechworth because he could not attend to his Parliamentary duties without being in Melbourne. For a time he had also to give up his business. He bought a property at Burwood, and was immediately elected to the new Shire Council. He was President for some years. Later, on retiring from Parliament and the council he resumed business at Prahran, then in Flinders street, Melbourne, while living in South Melbourne. He died in 1910, at the age of 77 years.

News-Letter - We have arranged to publish our News-Letter monthly instead of two-monthly. This issue has been delayed owing to difficulties in arranging duplication. These are now apparently overcome and we expect that each issue will appear about a week before each monthly meeting.