



The Whitehorse Historical Society NEWSLETTER

Series 17 no 3 May June 2009

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The Whitehorse Historical Society Inc.

Mission Statement

The purpose of the Society is to foster historical interest and knowledge.

To collect, document, research, preserve and exhibit items that show how people have lived and worked in the development of the Whitehorse area from human settlement to the present day.

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* WHS archive NP 1236—photographer unknown

William Cook, orchardist of Cooks Road, Mitcham.*

In his later years Cook became known as the 'Cherry King' of Nunawading. He acquired this title due to his great pride in the quality of his fruit, always first onto the market each season.

As part of the Alwyn Till collection of papers which were recently donated to the Society some of Cook's fascinating correspondence with his wife Jinny (Jane) has come to light.

On pages 3 and 4 of this issue of the newsletter you can read about an earlier period in Cook's life (1893-1897) when he travelled to and survived on the tough outback goldfields of Western Australia.

Photocopies of transcripts of the original letters have been forwarded to the Eastern Goldfields Historical Society in WA.

See page 3 & 4 for Yvonne Fitzmaurice's fascinating article on Cook's goldfields experiences.

Next meeting : Saturday 13th June 1.30pm

**Speaker Peter McPhee - RSL Healesville
on "The Kokoda Trail"**

From the President

Dear Members

We have had an incredibly busy and intensive few weeks preparing for our meeting with the Museum Accreditation Program Committee. This process has been a 3 yearly event ensuring that museums and keeping places are keeping up to the standards that merit accreditation as a Museum as recognised by Museums Australia. We must demonstrate how we have tried to improve our performance and facilities. Accreditation is very important and underpins our capacity, eligibility and credibility when we apply or the Council applies on our behalf for special funding grants to protect our collection or maintain the premises. I am happy to report that the process is now only required by MAP on a 5 yearly basis in recognition of the huge amount of work involved.

Some members of the WHS recently took a trip to Broken Hill and in one of our later issues this year we hope they will be able to share some of their impressions of this historic town, I believe it was a surprising place for some!

As part of the Till Collection that we acquired recently we discovered letters written by Mr William Cook in 1896-97 to his wife Jane and daughter Amy from the Western Australian goldfields. The letters contain a lot of details regarding life on the goldfields and Yvonne Fitzmaurice has not only transcribed them for us but also carried out further research and has summarized her findings in the article on pages 3-4 of this issue.

Vicki Jones-Evans

Vale Bette Jones

We are sad to report the death of our long time member, Bette Jones. I would like to pay tribute to the work which was done for the Society by Bette, in conservation, displays and record keeping which helped us reach the standards needed for Accreditation. Bette maintained her interest to the end and always liked to look at our latest displays. She was generous with the donations from her own collection and was happy to share her knowledge. We are grateful for her contribution and we shall miss her. We extend our sympathy to her family.

BOOK REVIEW - *Eliza's Vision*, by Ray Peace

Anyone who heard Ray Peace speak at one of our General meetings in 2006 on the history of Wattle Park will have some idea of what can be expected of this fascinating book.

The product of three years of research, the book details the history of the park area, from the early selectors through a series of small free-holdings. The book also covers its gradual acquisition, 1901-1915 by Eliza Welch, a director of Ball & Welch, the haberdashery firm, and later developments to 2006.

Shortly before her death in 1915, Eliza agreed to sell the property, then known as *Phoenix Grange*, to Hawthorn Tramways Trust, at a figure probably well below its market value had it been subdivided. A covenant was placed on the land, in order to ensure that it remained "open space in perpetuity". An Act of Parliament was required to give the Trust the power to acquire land, and contributions from a number of Councils, including the Shire of Nunawading, were required to meet the cost of purchase.

The Trust saw the park (named *Wattle Park* in 1917, inspired by the local vegetation), as an attraction which would boost the use of the tram line. At this time the line extended to Boundary (now Warrigal) Road. Shortly after the Trust's acquisition by the Melbourne & Metropolitan Tramways Board in 1920, Camberwell and Nunawading Councils and local progress associations urged the Board to further extend the tram out to Elgar Road, this, however, would have required reconstruction of Riversdale Road, and there was considerable disagreement on both the route and funding of its construction. Agreement was not reached until 1925, and trams did not run until 1928. Meanwhile, the MMTB was active in other areas of park improvement, including a great deal of tree planting and construction of the *Chalet*, known as *Arlington* in 1928. Construction of a golf course commenced in 1937, and in 1940 the now famous Tramways Band recital series began.

The park came under the jurisdiction of the MMBW (later Melbourne Parks & Water) in 1991, and under Parks Victoria in 1998 - a return to Crown Land status. Apart from the details about the park's development and usage, there is a map which enables a visitor to trace the remnants of houses and other structures in the area which over time have been demolished. For those less energetic, the book is simply a great read.

Peier Simmenauer



*Cook circa
1880*

WHS
NP2219

William Cook, Letters from the WA Goldfields 1896 -1897

Prior to his success as an orchardist William Cook, later of Cooks Road, Mitcham chose to live apart from his family apart for two years while he tried to make his fortune on the goldfields of Western Australia. Why he felt compelled to leave his family is not known, but speculation suggests that it may have been a result of the 'boom and bust' period of the late 19th C. which caused a great deal of uncertainty and financial distress at that time.

Cook and his wife were both thirty-eight years old when he left, and during those two years he wrote regularly to his wife Jane, fondly referred to as Jinny, [Jane] and to his daughter Harriet Arney [sic].

Prior to his departure he had a clearance sale of all the household goods and tools from his property and raised a little over one hundred pounds. William's homeless wife and daughter were lodged with Jinnie's brother Sam and his wife Eliza who promised William they would care for them in his absence. As with all families, tensions arose that made Jane unhappy, but we know from William's correspondence that Jane lost weight and felt ill.

Unfortunately we haven't her letters but his replies give an adequate picture of the problems. It was evident that Jane missed William's company and advice as much as he missed his home comforts.

While in the fields around Kalgoorlie, he was continually worried about the state of his land in Victoria and hoped that a Mr Chugg, the tenant who was 'only used to buying and selling', was cultivating it properly. Money worries were always present, if not his, then those of his family; Cook's main concern were to do with shortfalls due to rents not being collected that should by rights be passed straight on to Jane by the local stock and station agent, Mr Sweetman. To compensate William sent only small amounts of money with his letters as these could often be lost en-route. Interestingly a West Australian pound was worth less in Victoria.

It is known that Cook worked as a wood carter in Nunawading because in his letters he discussed the pay he received in W.A. compared with his previous income as a wood cutter cum carter in 'Little Vic' as he referred to his home state. The amount he earned over in W.A. was about double that of Victoria's.

The life he led was a Spartan one. It was many months before he wrote of the joy of a bed made of dried leaves up off the ground.

For a short period he and his tent mate washed themselves in a frying pan after their bucket had been sold. He longed for fresh fruit and was delighted to have the occasional meal of potatoes and onions which was a change from the standard fare of oatmeal, rice, bread and 'tinned dog'. Even with all these privations and very long hours at work he remained healthy and generally injury free. He worked constantly, firstly as a teamster, then as a wood cutter cum carter. Although not seriously interested in prospecting for gold he took the opportunity when it arose.

His camp sites in the W. A. were many miles from the nearest town of any importance. He wrote of walking six and more miles each way to collect his pay or his mail. As a result he knew little of the events in the outside world although when in town he heard news

about the nearby goldfields. We know that William Cook either worked at, visited, or heard reports about the following places, some of which have disappeared from modern tourist maps: Albany, the Darling Ranges, Fremantle, Hannans, Hanoner / Kanone, Hampton Plains, Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie, Menzies, Lake Darlet, Leeuwin, Mont Maggie, Mont Malcolm, Mount Burges, Murchison, Perth, Six Mile, W.A. Smiths Hill and Southern Cross.

William's old fragile letters neatly tied in a bundle, arrived at the Society's rooms in a generous donation of material from the Till family who are related to Miss Amy Cook, the sole descendant of William Cook and Jane née Maggs. The writing paper he used is lined and gives the appearance of being pages removed from the centre of an exercise or notebook.

The letters are of great interest to read as they give both a personal insight into the hard life on the goldfields of Western Australia and the emotional toll it took on a family left behind.

The people who are primarily at the centre of the letters are his wife and daughter. A Mr Salisbury, also from Victoria, features regularly and as a trusted friend and work mate has his health reported upon. Local business associates, or family and friends are not always clearly identified as they were often referred to by either initials or by forenames only. With further research however some of these have now been identified.

Unfortunately it has been very difficult to establish from official records very much additional information about William Cook's family. Most records state he was born 'about 1859', one states Wickcliffe, Victoria, as his birthplace but there are no available Ararat records to confirm this. Another birth record for 1862 mentions a different set of parents.

The location of his marriage to Jane MAGGS is equally confusing as both Wickcliffe and Nunawading are cited, but the year of 1880 is consistent.

The place of William's death and the date are consistent, 9 August 1939 at Mitcham. In

Jane Cook
(nee Maggs)
Circa 1880

WHS image
NP 2220



one of the records his parents are listed as William Cook and Amery Speechlea.

The daughter of William and Jinny, Harriet Amey never married and was known to the family as 'Cousin Amey'. She was born in 1881 at Box Hill, made her will in 1956, died 13 September 1962 in Surrey Hills, Victoria and is buried with her parents in Box Hill cemetery.

Research notes:

The research of "Australian Vital Records" and "Inward Shipping for Victoria" using the search terms COOK, and the surnames of SPEECHLEA/SPEECHLEY in Australian and English records were all unsuccessful. It is clear that more protracted and specialist research may reveal more but for now the origins and arrival of the COOK family remains obscure. One possible clue to follow up as to the English origins is the fact that there were a great number of families named COOK who lived in Clutton, Somerset, where his wife's family also originated. William Cook often spelled words as he would have pronounced them, in particular, 'very' was always spelled with a double 'r' - which is similar to that used in a West Country accent.

References:

WHS files ND 932, ND 533;
ND1621, ND1674, ND1580; ND1799, ND1800; ND 1804.

Box Hill Cemetery:

L.D.S. Family Search & Diggers Index,
B.D.M.; Pioneers index; IGI film.

Yvonne Fitzmaurice

our museum displays

We have a number of external displays planned for the remainder of the year, so keep an eye out on your travels around Whitehorse.

June—Vermont South Library -
Memories of the 1950s

July—Nunawading Library—the 1950s theme will be continued.

In September both **Heritage Week** and our **Open Day** will also maintain a theme of the 1950s.

The Mayoral Dinner at Box Hill Town Hall—a display in the foyer will be developed exploring Art Deco themes in dress and artifacts, in keeping with the Architecture of the Box Hill Town Hall.

PROFILE OF ROB INNES



Ted Arrowsmith retired as our Computer Administrator at the end of last year, having looked after our computers for 15 years, including the set-up of the Inmagic database system in 1997.

We are fortunate that Rob Innes heard that we had this vacancy, and indicated that he was available to take on the role.

He has long experience in computing, starting as a printing compositor, learning computer typesetting for linotype machines, and studying for a BSc (EDP) at Caulfield Institute of Technology. He worked for "The Age" and others, moving to various computer management, R & D and troubleshooting roles with firms such as Coles Myer, ANZ Bank, IBM, Monsanto and Victoria Police, and working as a consultant for some years until he retired. As a troubleshooter, he worked all over Australia at short notice – he remembers that he used to pack underwear in his briefcase, as he never knew where he was going to go and for how long.

For the last few years he has been doing some volunteering, including Commonwealth Games driving, and currently looks after the computers for U3A Nunawading. We are very glad to see him at the Local History Room and look forward to a long association.

Peter Simmenauer

Whitehorse Historical Society Dates for your Diary

2009 Meetings –Speakers for 2009

Meetings are held at the Local History Room
Schwerkolt Cottage & Museum Complex

13th June 1.30pm

Speaker Peter McPhee - RSL Healesville on "Kokoda Trail"

15th August our AGM

Speaker Mayor Helen Harris OAM - TBC

10th October

Speaker Ray Galloway on the "History of Ventura Buses"

12th December

Speaker Laurie Bunn on the "History of the Puffing Billy"

WORKING BEES—2009

September –Saturday 12th—spring clean and preparation for Heritage Festival

November—Saturday 14th

Commence at 9.30 am to about 12 noon

Please come and help even if you only have an hour free.

Marysville Memories - please contact

Glen Turnbull on

0409 287 359 or email

gturnbull@yahoo.com.au

Cataloguing Statistics

Photographs	-	3531
Artefacts	-	4119
Documents	-	6115

REMEMBER

Whitehorse Historical Society
Local History Collection & Place of Deposit
open 10.30 am to 2.30 pm Wednesdays. Visitors welcome. Ring 9873 4946 for an appointment at other times.

Box Hill Cemetery Records & Nunawading Gazette for 1964-1974 available on microfiche for research

WHS Committee Contacts

President: Vicki Jones-Evans
9873 3383 - vicki@xi.com.au

Vice. President: Valerie Marshall
9803 4434

Secretary: Peter Simmenauer
9877 0141-psimm@primus.com.au

Treasurer: Bob Gardiner 9874 6592
bobnbarb@primus.com.au

Local History Room: (03) 9873 4946

Newsletter

Editor: Jay Miller 8344 7158 (BH)
email: jmil@unimelb.edu.au

Newsletter support group:

Yvonne Fitzmaurice
Kaele Way
Wendy Standfield
Peter Simmenauer

WHS internet site:

<www.vicnet.net.au/~ndhsinc/>



Melway Ref. 49 D7

**Copy deadline for WHS Newsletters first Saturday of the month preceding the meeting month.
Next deadline : 1st week of July 2009**



1063

From the Collection

*Can you guess what
these two examples of
labour-saving devices
for the kitchen could
be? Answer provided
in next issue of the
newsletter.*

WHS NA 1083

WHS NS 1361



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Sender: *Whithorse Historical Society Inc. & Schwerdtfeger Cottage and Museum Complex*, Deep Creek
Road, Mitcham, Vic, 3132 (Melway Ref. 49 D7) If undeliverable please return to P.O. Box 272
Mitcham, Vic 3132.