



"Nurungi"

Remembered

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CONCORD HERITAGE SOCIETY

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www.concordheritage.asn.au

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MEETINGS

General Meetings

2nd Wednesday of month
at 7:30 pm in the
Concord Citizens' Centre
(except July)

Executive Meetings

4th Wednesday of month
at 7:45 pm in the
Concord Citizens' Centre

Committee Meetings

As arranged
Contact Chairpersons
for details

Museum

Fred Stansfield, 9743-1866

Walker Estates

First Thursday each month
(please contact to confirm)
Concord Bowling Club
Clermont Ave, North Strathfield
Errol Grace, 9743-4301

Heritage

Bill Barlow, 9743-3662

Oral History

Lola Sharp, 8753-0659

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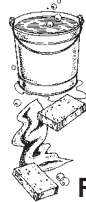
**CONCORD
HERITAGE MUSEUM**
5 Wellbank Street

Open 2:00 - 4:00 pm
Wednesday & Saturday

Museum Cleanup

THANKS to all those who came along on the working bees to help clean out the Museum storeroom - a big job well done. We managed to dispose of a lot of rubbish and make room to sort and label what still has to be stored.

However, it was a much bigger job than anticipated and as a result we will not be opening the museum during the month of February. Instead we will have to have some more working bees to sort through and re-pack the items.



So, if you can give us some time on each of the next Saturdays, or even a week-day if it's more suitable, we will be able to get the whole place sorted and clean ready for re-opening on Saturday, 1st March.

REMEMBER - Working bees on 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd February - from 10:00 am - all welcome.

REMINDER to those rostered for February museum duty - we won't be open but you can still come along and help if you can.



Australia Day - A History 1788 to 1888

The 26 January, through 200 years or more of debate and controversy, has remained the traditional Australian celebratory day since that date in January 1788 when 'formal possession was taken of the Colony of New South Wales. On that day, Captain Arthur Phillip became Governor of the Colony, having jurisdiction over the area bounded by latitude 10 37' to latitude 43 49' south and inland to longitude 135 east'. The fledgling colony very soon began to mark the anniversary of 26 January 1788 with formal dinners and informal celebrations. Manning Clark notes that on the 26 January 1808, the 'anniversary of the foundation of the colony' was observed in the traditional manner with 'drinking and merriment'. John Macarthur Senior had ensured his soldiers were amply supplied with liquor; bonfires were blazing and private houses illuminated.

By 1820, Australia was beginning to look undeniably prosperous and sentiments of Australian patriotism were being expressed at gatherings of ex-convicts. The sense of belonging to a new nation must surely have been encouraged in 1817 when Governor Macquarie recommended the adoption of the name 'Australia' for the entire continent instead of New Holland.

An article in the Sydney Gazette on February 1, 1817 records a typical anniversary dinner that was held on the 27 January in

the house of Isaac Nichols, a respected emancipist and Australia's first Postmaster. Similar dinners are described involving William Charles Wentworth and friends on 26 January 1825 and 1828 when the catchcry and traditional toast had already become 'to the land, boys, we live in'. Many of these ex-convicts had become the wealthiest and most successful businessmen in the colony.

The first official celebrations were held in 1818, marking the thirtieth anniversary of white settlement. Governor Macquarie ordered a salute of 30 guns to be fired from the battery at Dawes Point and in the evening gave a dinner at Government House for civil and military officers. A ball followed, hosted by Mrs Macquarie.

During this time the day was called Foundation Day. Throughout the early nine-



Bulletin Board

January - NO MEETING

February 12 - Noel Crusz, "Hollywood in the 50's" (see write up in October *Nurungi*)

March 12 - Amy Wilcher, Parapsychologist, "Ghosts of Yaralla and other Paranormal Phenomena"

teenth century, the day became one for sporting events, with horse races in the 1820's and the regatta from the 1830's.

The growing sense of patriotism was being expressed in other ways. Young Charles Tompson, reputed to be our first Australian-born poet and the son of a transportee, was moved to compose eight stanzas of tribute to his native country for 26 January 1824 titled *Wild Notes from the Lyre of a Native Minstrel*.

Charles Tompson was no doubt one of that section of the Australian-born whom Edward Smith Hall, proprietor and publisher of *The Monitor*, had in mind when he wrote in 1821 'the circumstances of the parents of the most of them having come to the country in bondage, so far from making them humble, causes them to be the proudest people in the world.....the circumstance of being free is felt by them with a strength bordering on fierce enthusiasm'.

A different commemorative event was held in the summer of 1836 when a group of seafaring Sydney friends decided to celebrate the founding of their new nation with a sailing regatta. The Australia Day Regatta, originally the Anniversary Regatta, is still held on Sydney Harbour on the 26 January each year and has become the oldest continuous regatta in the world.

Fifty years after Phillip landed, in 1838, a number of celebratory events were organised and the first public

holiday ever marked in Australia was announced for the 26 January in that year. This inaugural public holiday in New South Wales was to become an annual event from that year, held on or around the 26 January.

In distinct contrast to the mainly private and somewhat elitist anniversary dinners in previous years, 26 January 1838 became a 'day for everyone' with the harbour foreshores crowded and many sailing vessels participating in races and competitions. Crackers and rockets ended the day's exuberant festivities.

By 1888, Australia's population numbered almost three million and many changes had taken place over the previous fifty years. Gold had been discovered in the 1850's bringing great wealth and immigration, and New South Wales had become self-governing in 1859.

While this wealth and prosperity was certainly not equally spread - the incoming NSW government of 1886 had inherited severe financial problems and over eleven thousand 'centennial parcels' of rations were distributed to Sydney's poor on the 26 January 1888 - the first centenary of white settlement was celebrated with great enthusiasm.

With the exception of Adelaide, all colonial capitals had declared Anniversary Day 1888 a public holiday and celebrations took place throughout the colonies.

Ceremonies, parades, exhibitions, fireworks, banquets, church services and regattas were commonplace and 50,000 people watched the Governor Lord Carrington unveil a statue in honour of Queen Victoria. A march of thirteen thousand trade unionists culminated in the laying of the foundation stone for a new Trades Hall and many religious services were held.

Centennial Park, Sydney was formally reserved for public use on the 26 January 1888 and in Melbourne there was a Centennial International Exhibition which remained open from August 1888 to February 1889, attracting nearly two million visitors. The centenary was also marked by numerous historical publications and commemorative volumes as well as souvenirs and other centenary ephemera.

Australians were beginning to talk widely about other political questions of the day, including the move towards Federation. However, despite the pride in achievement celebrated in January 1888 and the moves towards a united nation, there were no doubts about the 'continuing loyalty of the four million Australians to the mother country'. A description of the unveiling of Queen Victoria's statue included the comment 'the mood was British, the crowd was Australian'

(Author, David L. Lewis of Jenkins Lewis Heritage & Historic Consultants. Published with permission.)

Walker Estates Committee Meeting

Thursday, 6th February at 8:00 pm at Concord Bowling Club

This meeting is open to **all** members who are interested in the preservation of the Walker Estates.

There are many interesting things in the pipeline so come and give us the benefit of your input.

Please **note the date** on your calendar **now** so that the secretary doesn't have to remind you.

The preservation of this unique estate is a very important part of our activities and the more people meeting together to discuss ways and means of making sure nothing happens to it, the more we will be able to achieve.

Our big task over the coming months (years?) is to raise enough money to restore the squash court, the first built in Australia, so we need all the help we can get and all the ideas for raising the money.

Come along and help us!!!

We also need volunteers for the day - are you one? Put your name on list.

Clean up Australia Day

Sunday, 2nd March, 2003 - 10am to 2pm

"Australia's Own Medication"

We have decided to hold our "clean up" effort at Yaralla on this day. It will be a good opportunity to make the area more presentable for our open day on 30th.

If you will be able to take part, please telephone the secretary.

Progressive Dinner

Saturday, 22nd February, 2003

Book this date into your diary now!!

It will commence at 6:30 pm at the home of Errol and Margaret Grace, 27 Boronia Street, Concord West for pre-dinner drinks and nibbles; then on to Graham & Margot Packett's, 30 Cumming Avenue, Concord West for the main meal (*note change of venue*)

It will conclude with dessert at the home of Lorna and Allan Wright, 2 Myall Street, Concord West.

Cost: \$30.00 per head.

If you can help with catering, please telephone Trish on 9764-3296 or Errol on 9743-4301.

URGENT: If you will be joining us please telephone the secretary as soon as possible for catering arrangements.

Were There 19th Century Working Class Communities?

(Continued from January 2003 issue)

In looking at Mortlake as an **evolving physical community**, I have addressed the issue of major employment and the sense of community identification in this specific location. It is therefore interesting to follow the development of the accompanying public services and community services.

As with all the municipality, Mortlake was not included in the metropolitan sewerage system and maintained the dry-earth system. Water was obtained from wells and tanks and by the late 1880's few streets had been "formed and metalled" but the main road from Mortlake to Parramatta Road had been covered with tar and ashes, materials by courtesy of AGL.

Street lamps were not available in the municipality although by 1888 gas mains had been laid in the main streets and plans made for lighting of the district, at which time there were 423 ratepayers in the municipality, occupying 354 houses paying a general municipal rate of one shilling in the pound.

Karskens reports that the series of cottages still standing near the junction of Gale Street and Tennyson Road are excellent records of this early settlements. My own experiences of the area attest to the remaining working men cottages which despite the current gentrification, are still very much in evidence; minute weatherboard, single fronted cottages, chimneys back and front, often an outside shed covered in creepers (upgraded from outside "dunny" of yesteryear to latter day storage shed) backing onto meandering lanes. Shops still standing on the corner of Tennyson Road and Macdonald Street, are considered a significant heritage building; the corner shop appears to have served as the area's first Post office.

As with all communities, education and religion were integral. Because the gasworkers' children were forced to walk a distance of 2 miles to the Concord School, a resident petition resulted in Mortlake Public School being built at a total cost of £1265 for land and a simple wooden structure. It opened on 27th July, 1887, having an end of year enrolment of 135 pupils. Fees were 6d. a week although it is alleged that the Education Department did not press payment.

Drinking water was a major problem, stored in an unlined underground tank

made of brick, and often regarded as unfit to drink.

Meanwhile, "aware of the sad conditions of Catholics living at Mortlake" the nuns established a Sunday School in a local hall and because of its success, started a school for young ones too small to walk to Concord with first day attendance reaching 70 pupils.

Karsken notes the establishment of church buildings also strongly reflects the development of the region and the changing patterns of population. St. Marys Mission (Anglican) Church, "a simple structure" was begun in Mortlake 1886 following the opening of the gasworks but due to a shortfall in funds was nothing more than a mission hall, licensed for worship under the oversight of the Minister of St. Luke's Anglican Church, Concord. In contrast, St. Patrick's Catholic Church 1894, which was architecturally designed, and again the direct result of opening of the gasworks, whose employees numbered many Irish Catholics, was in the fortunate position of being free from debt immediately upon its opening. This accords with the historical perception that one third of the working class in the 19th Century was Irish. However, to be fair, I would argue that perhaps much of the money had been contributed prior to the depression of the 1890's.

Whilst there are conflicting views as to the location of the earlier weatherboard premises, the brick Congregational Church and hall, Tennyson Road, Mortlake, was opened in July 1886 after land was secured following the AGL construction. Church minutes of 3rd March 1887, record over eighty persons at evening service. In September, 1887, a tender of £176 was accepted to erect a weatherboard club room to act as a "Working Men's Reading Room and church records also reveal the existence of three committees, viz. Workmen's Institute, Band of Hope and Temperance Society; and Local Church.

As Concord changed, so too did the leisure pursuits of its residents. Francois Lepailleur had earlier written that drinking alcohol was a popular pastime amongst the area's pioneers. Montgomery's Palace Hotel, Tennyson Road, Mortlake was built in 1886 "to cater for thirsty gasworkers." The towers and verandahs provided an excellent view of the sculling races on the Parramatta River, which were a major tourist attraction.

Swimming was popular from 1886

when Ashton's baths were established, having been excavated from rock, measuring thirty metres by 12 metres, and the first to be built in the metropolitan area. By 1888 Mortlake boasted an Institute in Tennyson Road.

In abetting my investigation into the local history of this area, Commonwealth Post Archival records open a window onto the young community viz.

P.O. memo Postal Inspector visiting Mortlake where "there are 50 houses and others being erected. Gas Company employs 600 and will have more (October 1886);

Petition to Postmaster-General from Mayor and Councillors plus some 50 residents "No Post Office in this important municipality - over 1000 who are considerably inconvenienced (November 1886).

Details of applicant for position of Postmaster - Joshua Wilson "lately lost his leg", "well known to Mr. Sturt (licencee of Palace Hotel) who is willing to put up the house to enable Wilson to make a small pittance with a salary of £10 per annum.

Subsequent correspondence details the drowning of Postmaster Wilson "a man of sober habits". Other appointments include R. Stirrat, whose wife is appointed in his stead when he resigns to "extensively travel through gold and silver mines". Indications of hardships of the 1890's are identified when a hoped-for post and money order-come-savings bank at Mortlake "necessitated by £1,000 paid in wages by the gas company" is refused. On 27th December 1894, Postmistress Stirrat's salary is reduced from £49 to £30 "in consequence of the very small revenue derived from your office". Mrs. Stirrat accepts but "hardly thinks it fair."

Thus from the foregoing postal records, I have gleaned first hand estimates on the number of houses in Mortlake (as opposed to municipality of Concord); number of employees at AGL in October, 1886, a human interest story on the late Postmaster, the activities of the new Postmaster and his domestic situation and how the "boom and bust" sequence has impacted on both the area and the inhabitants.

My study of Sands Sydney and Suburban Directory 1870-1896 gives an indication of the relevance of the specified area of Mortlake and the growth within the area, thus support-

ing my conviction of both a physical community and a community of consciousness.

Whilst 1884 records refer only to Concord, by 1886 *Mortlake* rates a mention. In 1887 *Mortlake* only mentioned as "Majors Bay to Mortlake under Burwood Road", i.e. Burwood Road - Majors Bay to Mortlake. Mortlake Gas Work and Office is mentioned and listings indicate 1 store, 3 boarding houses, 1 dining room, 1 hotel and 1 butcher. However, by 1888, 5 boarding houses, 1 tobacconist, 3 dining rooms, 1 hotel, 2 butchers and 1 baker are listed. In this same listing, specified streets, i.e. Bennett, Bayard, Edwin, Emily, Hill, Hubert, Lake, Macdonald are bracketed as Mortlake, whilst the 1890 Sands entry is "*Mortlake* - see Concord", thus identifying it as a physical community within the municipality.

In an endeavour to ascertain an idea of the increasing population figures from 1884 to 1900, I consulted a list compiled from Sands Directory which proved to be most inconclusive. Whilst it showed "households" in 1884 as 12 and at 1900 as 150, which did not assist my population calculation to any great degree, what it did show was the mobility within the area as can be gauged by the following two entries

Moiler, A. (Listed as Moiler, Abraham 1891 to 1893; described as Blacksmith 1890; Residence in Bayard Street 1894, 1895 named Apple Grove) Major Road (Mortlake) East side 1890; Hilly Street (Mortlake) 1891 to 1893, Bayard Street 1894, 1895.)

Moore, Thomas (described as Gardener 1886, 1887) Breakfast Point Road, North side 1885; Mortlake Road, East side 1886; Mortlake Road 1887, Burwood Road, 1889, 1890, Major Road (Mortlake) East side 1891 to 1900, Burwood Road, West side 1901.

My last attempt to calculate population growth was through the Census of NSW 1891, which showed -

Concord - Population 2107, total habitation 498, number of inhabited dwellings 431 and proportion of persons to each inhabited dwelling as 4.9.

From this, I could only surmise that as Concord showed "341 ratepayers in 1886 that Mortlake was the greatest growth area with the gasworks employing some 600 people, of whom I am assuming the majority were men, many of whom would have been breadwinner with say 3 dependants, Mortlake could well have had a population in the vicinity of three quarters

of the population of Concord, say 1500-1600. This does not seem unreasonable in light of Kelly's argument that the Mortlake peninsula was transformed into a large thriving workingmen's village following the opening of the gasworks. Cashman emphasises it is important to try and locate communities within a suburb in order to make local identification; and members of the community are the church congregations, the "faces in the crowd." O'Brien argues the influence of economic implications on a town's social history. These views substantiate my conviction that working class Mortlake was a physical community as well as a community of consciousness, typical of similar 19th Century working class communities.

From the local history level, I would argue the Mortlake community were not unhappy in its relationship to the gasworks, the physical presence and size of which offered a long term security both for the skilled and the unskilled worker. They fit the picture of the working class as a closely knit community of that time, with the intimacy of work and life breeding a sense of place that normally overshadowed the workers sense of exploitation. Mortlake fits the criteria of a locality wherein industry existed, with overlapping bonds based on kinship, religion and neighbourhood reinforcing identification among people in similar material circumstances.

It is pertinent to note that the physical ruins on the site of the now disused AGL still stand as a testament to the existence of a once typical, thriving working class community.

From conversations with so many local residents, it is obvious the ethos of "father to son" prevailed in the continuity of employment of four generations of workers linked physically and consciously by what McCalmán suggests were the bonds and networks which provided working class families with the greatest support in times of stress, illness and unemployment.

What has proved to be the greatest tool in reinforcing my argument that the community of Mortlake was one example of a 19th Century working class community which can be interpreted both as a physical community and a community of consciousness, has been my own initiative. From a local history point of view, it was devastating to find that valuable Council records had been lost and access to much AGL material was no longer possible. As a result, I was forced to "ferret", which produced historical, economic and social background mentioned only briefly here in my reference to Commonwealth Post Office Archives. The longer term benefit is that I can make my own contribution to enriching the Concord Historical Society, which offered me as much co-operation as they were able. The June 1996 newsletter of that organisation shared the following snippet:-

"I knew Mr. Stirrat, the Postman . . . I recall at Christmas time my mum would be waiting for the Postman with a piece of Christmas cake and a glass of wine . . . Mr. Stirrat was very well liked and a smiling and cheerful gentleman. (Mrs. Anne Leggett)

(Contributed by Lola Sharp)

HELP WANTED: *With our next Open Day coming up the secretary needs help with photocopying and other work in the lead up. Can you spare some time? Please phone*

Dates for your Diary . . .

- ☛ **Sat. 1, 8, 15, 22 February** - Working Bees at Museum
- ☛ **Thurs. 6th February** - Walker Estates Committee - 8:00 pm, Concord Bowling Club
- ☛ **Wed. 12th February** - General Meeting - Noel Cruz, "Hollywood in the 50's"
- ☛ **Sat., 22nd February** - Progressive Dinner (see item elsewhere)
- ☛ **Wed. 26th February** - Executive Meeting - 7:45 pm
- ☛ **Sunday, 2nd March** - Clean up Australia Day (Yaralla)
- ☛ **Thurs. 7th March** - Walker Estates Committee - 8:00 pm
- ☛ **Wed. 12th March** - Amy Wilcher, Parapsychologist, "Ghosts of Yaralla and other paranormal phenomena"
- ☛ **Wed. 26th March** - Executive Meeting - 7:45 pm
- ☛ **Yaralla Open Day** - Sunday, 30th March