



fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com

May 2008

PO Box 180, Fitzroy 3065

Sunday, 25 May 2008, 10am to noon

Walk the Fitzroy history sites and neighbourhoods of 1858

Come and join us as we map out walks to help us celebrate Fitzroy's 150th anniversary.

We will be conducting reconnaissance for future walks radiating from the Town Hall to try to find out:

- what can we find still standing from 1858?
- where did the early petitioners live?
- where did the early participants in government live and work?
- where were the hotels and meeting places?

From the Town Hall steps, walk your neighbourhood, and bring your local history knowledge and enthusiasm !

In September, we will conduct these walks for the public as part of the month-long 150th celebrations.

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**Wednesday, 18 June 2008, 4pm to 5pm**

## **St Vincent's Hospital - Highlights from the Archives**

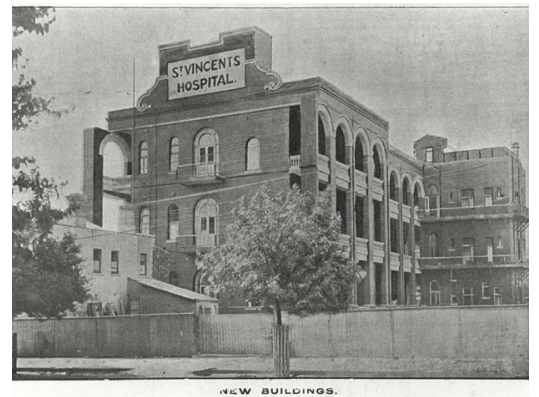
Join Barbara Cytowicz, the hospital archivist, for an interesting look at a few of the hospital's treasures.

Numbers are strictly limited to 15

- we may run another later visit.

RSVP to Sue Bradshaw at [rand Bradshaw@bigpond.com](mailto:rand Bradshaw@bigpond.com)  
or 9416 0616 (please leave a return phone number for meeting point arrangements)

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NEW BUILDINGS.



Sunday, 22 June 2008, 10am to noon

Fitzroy's Industrial Heritage

Walk led by Matthew Churchward,
Senior Curator, Museum Victoria

Start at the corner of Bell and Nicholson Streets to see former boot factories, Avon butter factory, Harrison's aerated water and cordial factory, coach factories, Reilly's flour mill, Fitzroy ice works, Anderson & Ritchie's foundry, MacRobertson's, Mitchell's Crankless Engine Co. and more.

Gertrude Street Walk

Sunday 2 March 2008

Gertrude Street reflects the history and changing fortunes of 'Melbourne's First Suburb'. It contains significant buildings of the 1850s gold rush era, although many of the surviving historical buildings date from the 1870s and 1880s. During its heyday, Gertrude Street rivalled Bourke Street as a commercial and shopping precinct, with its furniture stores and 'costumiers'. People came to Gertrude Street to do their banking, and the street was dotted with butchers, bakers, chemists, dentists and a generous number of hotels.



Depression hit Fitzroy badly, and the Gertrude Street neighbourhood suffered during the following decades. The 'slum clearances' of the 1960s were a response to poor living conditions in the area. The 1980s and 1990s saw newcomers to Gertrude Street, with an increase in specialty shops and cafes. Nowadays, low cost accommodation and public housing towers sit alongside bars, boutiques and galleries in a street as diverse as the population it serves.

An eye-catching article in the *Melbourne Times* drew a larger than usual crowd of around 70 people to Jill Robertson's Gertrude Street walk on the sunny morning of 2 March. Participants included members of our own and neighbouring historical societies, a Yarra councillor walking her dog, one or two cyclists, passers by, and a cameraman from Channel 31. The raised flower beds on the pavement made useful stopping points and podia.

Lina Favrin provided enlargements of historical photographs of some of the buildings along our route. Some of Gertrude Street's historic buildings are no longer there and can now only be seen in photos. Our first stop, Granite Terrace, was demolished in 1965. An office building stands in its place.

Other buildings have been adapted to new uses. Only a few of Gertrude Street's original hotels are still trading now. However, many of the buildings remain. The former Carlton Club Hotel is now a dialysis centre for St Vincent's Hospital. Further along the street, the Royal Exchange Hotel, where the early Fitzroy council once met, is now a real estate agency.

Fitzroy is an important area to Aboriginal people, and several Aboriginal organisations have based themselves in Gertrude Street. The Koori Club was formed in 1969 at 41 Gertrude Street. The Aboriginal Health Service was established at 231 Gertrude Street in 1973 and later moved to the large bank building at number 138. Jill drew our attention to the publication *Snapshots of Aboriginal Fitzroy*, which is also available online at: <http://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/Services/Aboriginal%20Affairs/>

We stopped at the corner of Fitzroy Street, where Jill pointed out a former butchers shop at number 61 and a former bakery opposite at number 56 Gertrude Street. Both these shops operated for many decades, illustrating the role of Gertrude Street as a shopping centre for local residents.

Glass Terrace, built in the 1850s for Hugh Glass, is reputedly the oldest surviving terrace in Melbourne. Unlike Granite Terrace, it was saved from demolition by the efforts of the Fitzroy Residents Association and the Fitzroy Council.

During the walk, we heard about instances of compassion shown by service providers and traders of Gertrude Street. Duncan Reilly, a pharmacist at 102 Gertrude Street for many years, was known for his kindness to the residents of Fitzroy.

At 108-110 Gertrude Street stands an impressive four-storey building, which was one of George Clausen's furniture warehouses in the 1890s. Jill's research shows that a succession of different businesses have since operated from this building.

Claypots restaurant on the corner of Napier Street stands on the site of the only church in Gertrude Street, the United Presbyterian Church. Opposite, Drewery's Family Hotel opened in 1854 at 146 Gertrude Street, with a billiard room and stables.

Dante's restaurant was once a grocery and wine store. Many people will remember it as a furniture store and auction house. Nearby, the distinctive Queen Anne Revival style building at 158-164 Gertrude Street has always been residential upstairs, with a variety of commercial uses downstairs.

At the corner of Gertrude and George Streets, we looked at a photo of a fire that destroyed the top two storeys of a four-storey furniture warehouse in 1963. This warehouse was part of the Johnston family's Gertrude Street furniture empire. The Fitzroy Gym, a recreation centre for Aboriginal people, opened in this building in 1982. Across the road, the building at number 181-183 is described by the National Trust as a rare example of a gold rush era commercial building.

The Builders Arms Hotel, on the corner of Gore Street, is unusual in that it has nearly always had the same name. Here we heard an enticing advertisement for the wares of the drapers store formerly at number 210-214 opposite. Rose Chong's well-known costume shop at number 218 has seen a wide variety of businesses come and go. The Albanian and Macedonian Social Clubs once used this premises – just one example of the influence of post-war European migrants upon the cultural life of Fitzroy.

As the walk drew to a close, we stopped near 247 Gertrude Street, which has been a dental surgery since 1890. Locals and visitors alike would find the large billboard on the corner of Gertrude and Smith Streets hard to miss. Jill pointed out that this corner has been the site of a hoarding over many years. This was an interesting conclusion to a walk that brought us face to face with both continuities and changes along Gertrude Street.

A number of the group had memories and information to contribute, and some people were already known to Jill through her research. We eagerly await the prospective publication of Jill's book about Gertrude Street's buildings and social history. Meanwhile, copies of her Gertrude Street walk leaflet may be obtained through the Fitzroy Library. Thank you Jill for giving us an insight into the story of this historic precinct.

Heather McRae





Fitzroy 1858 - 2008

1858	Municipal District of Fitzroy
1865	Borough of Fitzroy
1870	Town of Fitzroy
1913	City of Fitzroy

150 years ago Fitzroy achieved municipal self-government. Some more history of our separation follows:

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## The separation of the Municipality of Fitzroy from Melbourne - 1858

From mid 1853 the Melbourne Corporation negotiated an agreement with visiting financier Antonio Gabrielli to borrow £500,000 for public works in the Municipality of Melbourne, of which Fitzroy was a ward. Enabling legislation was passed in April 1854. Fitzroy Ward was supposed to receive £50,000 of this money. In 1853-54 improvements were made by the Corporation to Fitzroy, notably street realignment and road works. However, a financial crisis in 1854 hit the Corporation and public works were cut. After four years of virtual inaction from Melbourne, the patience of Fitzroy Ward residents had worn thin. On 19 June 1857, a petition containing 1047 names was lodged in support of Fitzroy being declared a separate municipality from the City of Melbourne under the Municipal Institutions Act. A counter petition with 1308 names asking that Fitzroy remain part of Melbourne was lodged on 24 July 1857. On 23 April 1858 a second petition in support of separation, with 1690 names, was lodged. Apart from the financial issues referred to above, stated reasons in support of separation included:

- the ward is both politically and geographically separated from the city
- the ward, containing as it does, 13 miles of streets and 12,000 inhabitants, is sufficiently important to require distinct local management
- Fitz Roy ward is entirely destitute of market accommodation
- The want of a local police court and of a small debts court is felt to be a source of serious inconvenience, the Melbourne courts being too remote.

A Separation Committee was formed, prominent members of which included Dr. Embling, (MLC for Collingwood, Chair), G.H. Williams (Hon. Secretary), Alderman Walsh, Mr. Langton, Dr. Bennett, Dr. Tracey, Mr. Peck, Mr. Best, Mr. Topping, Mr. Kidney and Mr. Symons. At a meeting held on 23 August 1858 at the Fitzroy Hotel, motions were passed that: 'The meeting condemns the City Council for its vacillating and unbusinesslike conduct in furnishing no less than 5 balance sheets varying in character and amount'; and 'No more rates be paid by inhabitants of the Ward to Council as they wanted the time protracted until another rate period was collected'.

It was recommended that a representative Committee of three be set to resolve the matter. According to a report of the meeting reported in "The Argus", the Fitzroy separationists claimed that, while the Governor was sympathetic to Fitzroy independence, Melbourne City had presented false claims about the amount of money spent on Fitzroy improvement and was stalling agreement to separation. The debate dragged on for several weeks, with accusations of financial double dealing, negligence and personal incompetence being made by the separationists against Corporation Councillors and officials. Meanwhile City bureaucrats, such as Mr. Fitzgibbon the Town Clerk, defended their probity and tried to justify the amount of money spent on Fitzroy improvement in letters to the newspapers. Attempts to resolve the impasse were made by the executive government, and finally, apparently growing tired of the controversy and anxious to push the establishment of independent suburban local government, the Governor in Council granted Fitzroy separation in September 1858. The official Proclamation of the Municipality of Fitz Roy (this was the original spelling) was made on September 9 1858.

John Senyard



The Public Records Office Victoria, the archives of the state government, still holds the original petitions and the many letters to the Governor from concerned Fitzroy residents. During September 2008 these will be on display at the Fitzroy Town Hall.

This first petition of June 1857 was signed by 1047 residents

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS LEADING TO THE PROCLAMATION OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF FITZROY

| Date                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Event                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1842</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 12 Aug                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 320 acres of Collingwood, the suburb of Newtown, is constituted as part of the Gipps ward of the Corporation of Melbourne.                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>1850-1</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Ward of Fitz Roy is established                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>1854</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| The Fitzroy Improvement Committee Act is established.                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Appointment of a competent surveyor Civil Engineer to prepare plans necessary to bring the Act into operation and for other purposes stated.                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 29 Nov                                                                                                                                                                                                                | The Municipal Institutions Act is passed, enabling the creation of separate municipal districts in Melbourne and Geelong                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>1855</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Municipal districts created at East Collingwood, Prahran, Richmond, St Kilda, Emerald Hill. Also Williamstown (1856), Brunswick (1857).<br>Fitzroy Improvement Committee submits a petition to 'Open up Young Street' |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>1857</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 16 Feb                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Melbourne Corporation passes a motion 'That previous to any further disbursements for improvements in Collingwood being made from the general revenue of the Corporation of the City that the means to ascertain it is the wish of the Fitzroy Ward to be erected as a separate municipality. |
| Cr Reilly calls for a report of all works in Fitzroy –their nature, extent, cost and date. Referred to Public Work and Finance Committee.                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 17 Mar                                                                                                                                                                                                                | The Argus newspaper reports of a deputation to the Governor by 25 Fitzroy gentlemen with a petition for separation                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 19 Jun                                                                                                                                                                                                                | First Petition for municipal separation published in the Government Gazette                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 24 Jul                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Counter Petition presented                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 30 Aug                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Gas lights erected in Fitzroy Ward                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>1858</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 30 Mar                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Public meeting establishes Fitz Roy Ward Separation Committee                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 23 Apr                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Second Petition presented                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 17 May                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Separation Committee requests that City Treasurer be instructed to prepare a return showing liability in response to the Corporation Loan which will devolve upon the Fitzroy Ward in the event of the Ward being separated from the City of Melbourne                                        |
| 11 Jun                                                                                                                                                                                                                | G. H. Williams, Hon Secretary of the Fitzroy Separation Committee in a letter to the City of Melbourne, objects to accounts furnished and requests further information                                                                                                                        |
| 21 Jun                                                                                                                                                                                                                | The Melbourne Town Clerk, Mr Fitzgibbon, doubts benefits of creating separate municipalities                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 2 Jul                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | MCC financial difficulties become apparent                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 23 Aug                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Fitzroy Separation Committee calls public meeting and reports on their unceasing endeavours to achieve separation since the petition was presented                                                                                                                                            |
| 9 Sep                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | The Governor with the advice of the Executive Council decides that the Fitzroy Ward share of the Gabrielli loan debt is twenty thousand pounds, and publishes the proclamation of the Municipality of Fitz Roy.                                                                               |

## 23 April 2008 - Fitzroy's petitions leading to separation

On the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the second (and successful) petition in support of the creation of Fitzroy as a municipality, Margaret Lee and Mike Moore gave illustrated presentations on the events leading up to Fitzroy's separation from Melbourne. The granting of independence to Fitzroy was muddled by the counter-petition opposing independence. Margaret and Mike clarified this difficult issue and gave lucid and colourful accounts of the debates, and the process leading to the formation of Fitzroy. Both presenters made extensive use of the primary sources that they have identified at the Public Record Office, the State Library of Victoria, the Baillieu Library and the Fitzroy Library, and are to be congratulated on their research.

Margaret showed a time-line (see insert) which provided a historical context for the events leading to separation. Copies of letters published in "The Argus" gave a fascinating insight to the debates, including the letter from "Doubtful" published on 29 September 1858, in which the author opined that the proposed Council "... if composed of the gentlemen at present on the roll as candidates for municipal honours, will cut but a sorry figure ... I think thus simply from the fact that the majority of them are totally unfit to undertake duties of a responsible nature". Mike showed photos of several key documents from 1858 - several handwritten on the blue foolscap used by the

bureaucracy of the time - including two of the petitions, a printed copy of a petition and the Governor's Proclamation of separation of Fitzroy from Melbourne on 9 September 1858. Interestingly, there were twenty five people who signed the counter-petition, objecting to their name being recorded in the first (pro) separation petition. Several claimed to have changed their mind in the meantime, some claimed their name had been used without permission and a few stated that they had signed without fully understanding the issue. The presentation was further enlivened by use of the *Municipal petitions index 1856-1863* database (compiled by Marion McAdie). This database, with a copy held in the Fitzroy Library, enables the 4000 petitioners' details to be sorted by name, address and occupation, and allowed us to see, for example, that active support for separation came from Brunswick Street (424), with Gertrude, Moor, George, Smith, Napier and Fitzroy Streets each having well over 200 petitioners..Familiar Fitzroy names such as Delbridge, Falconer, Rae and Rushall featured amongst the pro-separationists, while Fergie, Freeman, Kneen and Mahoney were counter-petitioners. Some of the occupations recorded at the time included bricklayers & brickmakers, draymen & druggists, farmers & fruiterers, musicians & nightmen, saddlers & sawyers, watchmakers & wheelwrights.

John S. and Catherine P.

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## September 2008 - Celebrating Fitzroy's proclamation of 150 years ago

During September the City of Yarra and Fitzroy History Society are planning celebrations including a special council meeting at the Fitzroy Town Hall, a display of archive documents and historic photographs in the Reading Room, and a series of walks to nearby sites of relevant interest. At this planning stage we earnestly seek participation from FHS members in donating or loaning historic photographs, preparing the historical display, and planning for the neighbourhood walks. If you can assist now or later in September, please let us know at the email address on the front page, or via a phone call to Mike Moore on 9416 1446.

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## Visit to Medley Hall on 17 February 2008

On Sunday 17th February we were privileged to visit Medley Hall in Drummond Street, Carlton - a hall of residence of the University of Melbourne. Medley Hall comprises three Victorian houses, with a modern extension at the rear.

The largest house, named 'Benvenuta' (Italian for 'Welcome') is one of the grandest and most ornate Boom period houses remaining in Melbourne, and has been a landmark in Carlton since its construction in 1892. Designed by the architect Walter Scott Law, it is notable for the extraordinarily rich stucco ornamentation on the exterior, and the equally elaborate treatment of the interior decoration, in plaster, carved wood, tiling, marble and stained glass.

The house was built for widow Leah Abrahams and her four sons who carried on a small arms business. Leah died in 1914. Emanuel Abrahams moved out in 1921, and the house was leased to the federal Attorney-General's Department.

In 1934, 'Benvenuta' entered another colourful phase of its life, as an Italian social club. It is said that at this time there were dances and boxing matches downstairs, and a brothel upstairs. The bullet hole in the staircase window may date from this period. It is on record that the house was raided by the police, in search of obscene paintings. After the death of Alfred, the last of the brothers, the house was sold to the State Government in 1949 for use as a students' hostel.

In 1954 it became a Hall of Residence of the University of Melbourne, and named after a vice-chancellor, Sir John Medley. The terrace houses on either side were purchased, and an extension was built at the rear in 1960. It now houses approximately 60 staff and students.

After the tour of the building, we enjoyed morning tea in the splendid surrounds of the dining room. Our thanks go to the principal of Medley Hall for making our visit possible, and to Nat Bradshaw and the other staff and students who helped make it such an enjoyable occasion.

(A more complete description of the building and its early occupants is available on request from Tim Gatehouse (9489 2357).)

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## Early Fitzroy Building Plans and Building Specifications now available

Public Record Office Victoria has recently catalogued, and made available for public use, its extensive collection of Building Plans (VPRS 16127) and Building Specifications (VPRS 16128) from the City of Fitzroy over the period 1920-1990. Did you know that the Standard Hotel in Fitzroy Street was rebuilt in 1927 to the design of noted architect Harry Norris?