



July 2007

[fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au](mailto:fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au)

PO Box 180, Fitzroy 3065

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**Tuesday, 7 August 2007 at 5pm – Academy school 150th anniversary**

The Sisters of Mercy founded their convent in Nicholson Street in 1857 in the original bluestone house still standing within their present complex. The 1889 sandstone chapel is a landmark of Fitzroy. Read more of their foundresses and history at [www.academy.vic.edu.au](http://www.academy.vic.edu.au) In celebration of this 150th year, FHS members are invited to a special visit.



Numbers are limited to 20, so please book early. Those interested can have dinner afterwards at the Pumphouse Hotel.

RSVP to Sue Bradshaw on 9416 0616 or [randsbradshaw@bigpond.com](mailto:randsbradshaw@bigpond.com)

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**Tuesday, 21 August 2007 at 7.30pm – Fitzroy Town Hall – Reading Room**

**AGM & guest speaker Allan Willingham on 'The Benefactress, the Actress and the Fan : The Contributions of Peggy Cutten, Vivien Leigh and Miss Attwood to the Cultural Life of Fitzroy'**



Local architect Allan Willingham was our FHS convenor in the early years, and was involved in establishing the Cutten Trust which underwrote our excellent local history anthology and continues to endow the Fitzroy Library.

On this, our 25th Annual Meeting, we return to the magnificently restored Reading Room atop the steps of the southern wing of the Town Hall.

We may have to enter via the central tower entrance, because of maintenance work at the southern wing door.

We thank the City of Yarra for assisting in our use of the Reading Room for this and the following event.

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**Sunday, 2 September 2007 at 2.30pm – at the Fitzroy Town Hall Reading Room**

**Felicity St John Moore speaking on "Vassilieff in Fitzroy: an epic of urban life"**

Russian born painter Danila Vassilieff moved to Melbourne in 1937, lived at 236 George Street and painted over 30 Fitzroy street scenes. His paintings had a leavening effect on the art of Nolan, Tucker, Hester, Arthur Boyd, Perceval and Blackman.

Felicity, author of *Vassilieff and his art*, will tell us more about Danila Vassilieff and the influence of his paintings on Australian art in the 1940s.



Corner store (Fitzroy, 1938)

## Landmark Citizen and Landmark Building



The Society's May function, held at the Old Colonial Hotel in Brunswick Street on Sunday 27 May, featured illustrated talks on a landmark Fitzroy citizen and a landmark Fitzroy building. The Society thanks the Old Colonial for providing the very convivial venue for this function.

### John McMahon: councillor and businessman

John McMahon is one of the distinguished public figures in Fitzroy's history. He was twice elected Mayor of the city, and held various other important public functions, as well as being a successful businessman who constructed some significant buildings in the Fitzroy area and elsewhere in Victoria.

The most famous of the building works undertaken by McMahon in Fitzroy was the grand home at 75 Alfred Crescent, North Fitzroy, known as "The Haven", built in 1889. Other buildings constructed by McMahon are the terraces at 53 and 55 Alfred Crescent, North Fitzroy, and the row of 10 shops known as "Gladstone Terrace" on the corner of St Georges Road and Tramere Street, North Fitzroy.

McMahon was first returned to the Fitzroy City Council in 1877 and was twice elected Mayor. During his time on the Council the Fitzroy Library was founded (his name appears on the stonework in front of the Library steps) and the Edinburgh Gardens were established. Other public offices McMahon held were President of the Road and Bridge League, Northcote, and Chairman of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. He also donated over 50 of his collection of early Australian literature and original manuscripts of Australian history to the Newman College library.

McMahon, who emigrated to Australia from County Kildare, Ireland, in 1865 at the age of 18, was a well-educated man who had originally intended to enter the priesthood. However, at 14 years of age he had learned the art of tailoring from his father, a tailor specialising in clerical outfitting, and on arriving in Australia worked for 11 years as a tailor for Buckley & Nunn. He then started his own tailoring business in Fitzroy, achieving great prosperity before losing all his assets in 1895 following the stockmarket crash and the collapse of the land boom.

The Old Colonial was a fitting venue for McMahon's great-grand-daughter, Sue Bradshaw, to present an illustrated talk to FHS members, since it was here that McMahon chaired the inaugural meeting of the Fitzroy Football Club in 1883. A plaque in the front bar of the hotel commemorates the hundredth anniversary of this event. Attendees at Sue's presentation were also able to view the site of McMahon's tailor's shop, which was located at 113 Brunswick Street (corner of James Street), a block south of the Old Colonial. The building now houses a wine shop.



### "the handsome pile" a

A stone's throw north of the Old Colonial building at 145 Brunswick Street.

On 15 March 1883, "The Argus" newspaper *TENDERS invited ERECTING three-story building, Fitzroy, for Messrs Wilson Bros. Separate price required for fittings and fixtures. . . William Salway, architect and surveyor, 45 Swanston-street.*

The Wilson Brothers drapery was first established in 1865 and occupied premises in Brunswick Street until 1883. Sometime between then and 1892 the Wilson family moved from Victoria to Queensland, where Andrew Wilson is recorded as a draper in Bundaberg in 1892 and 1899. It was from Queensland that Myrtle Wilson departed Australia to serve in Europe with the wartime nursing service.

(It was a request from Sydney author, Dr Ruth Rae to Mike Moore for some history of First World War nurse Myrtle Elizabeth Wilson that led to Mike uncovering the origins of 145 Brunswick Street. More details on Myrtle Wilson and her burial in the Wimereux cemetery, near Boulogne in France were included in our FHS newsletter of March 2007.)

A panoramic view of Fitzroy, produced in 1889, depicted Fitzroy as seen from St Patrick's Cathedral spire, and featured Pearce's Great Drapery Warehouse as one of 12 significant Fitzroy buildings. It was described thus in *Victoria and Its Metropolis* (1888) Vol II B, p 717:

*This establishment is situated in Brunswick-street Fitzroy. It was formerly the Universal Soft Goods Company, but was purchased by the present proprietor – who is an Australian native – some two or three years ago. The site it now occupies was until recently occupied by buildings of small importance, but through the rapid rise of the district, it was found necessary to replace these by the handsome pile that is now so well known. The building is a square, three stories high, with a frontage of between 60 ft and 70 ft, with a depth of some 150 ft, divided into separate departments by the most modern means. In the full swing of the season's business some eighty or ninety hands are employed, and this will give some idea of the magnitude of the business done. Trade is done here with every part of Victoria and also with other colonies, and much spirit is shown by the proprietor in keeping well abreast of the times in every respect.*

The longest occupancy of 145 Brunswick Street was by Cox Brothers, who operated there from 1915 to 1956: as drapers to 1930, and as a furniture warehouse from 1941 to 1956 when they moved to 128 Bourke Street, Melbourne. The remains of the "Cox Brothers" sign painted on the north side of the building are still visible, and the building continues to be colloquially known as the "Cox Brothers Building".

Local residents recall attending the Panorama cinema which operated there during the early 1990s. Today the building houses the Fitzroy and Carlton Community Credit Co-operative.

## Clifton Hill Presbyterian Church and Howe Street

On 19th June Tim Gatehouse gave a talk on his research into the history of the Clifton Hill Presbyterian Church and the neighbourhood of Howe Street, North Fitzroy.

Tracing the history of the area back to the first land sales in the 1860s involved some of the notorious "land boomers" who contributed to the depression of the 1890s, which was when the church was founded.

The congregation was formed in Clifton Hill but the cheapest block of land they could find on which to build the church was in North Fitzroy – which is the reason the Clifton Hill Presbyterian Church is actually in North Fitzroy.

In his researching of the Health Department records in the Public Record Office, Tim discovered that the Secretary of the Department, his grandfather, had threatened to prosecute the Church trustees for opening new buildings without his consent.

After the talk, about 30 of our members enjoyed dinner at the Chianti Bistro in Queens Parade.

Tim G

## Inner Circle Railway Walk on Sunday 1st July

Chris Friday led over 20 of our members on a walk along the line of the old Inner Circle Railway on Sunday, 1st July.

We started at the former North Carlton Station and followed the line along Park Street, over Lygon Street and Nicholson Street to the site of the North Fitzroy Station, and on over St Georges Road to where the Inner Circle joined the Epping line near Rushall Station.

On the way we saw the sites of signal boxes, crossings, and other remains of the line, and were given the history and anecdotes of its short but eventful life.

We are grateful to Terry Nott for providing all the material, and were sorry that due to illness, he was unable to present the talk. However Chris Friday did a sterling job as emergency presenter.

Tim G

Your subscription expiry date is shown on the mailing label of this newsletter.

If your subscription has expired, or will soon expire later in 2007, please renew now - \$10 per year.

## Fitzroy History Society's 25th Annual Report for 2006-2007

Since the last Annual General Meeting in August 2006, when Laurie O'Brien gave an illustrated talk on "Brother Bill" Nichols of St Mark's and Father Tucker of the Brotherhood of St Laurence", our activities have been:

22 October	participation in the Open Day at the Old Colonists' Homes at North Fitzroy;
18 November	visit to Newstead Historical Society;
1 December	our Annual Dinner at Dante's;
9 December	100th anniversary of birth of Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls;
18 February	participation in the City of Yarra Community Day at the Edinburgh Gardens;
18-23 March	reopening of the Fitzroy Town Hall, and launch of the Fitzroy Town Hall book;
27 May	talks at the Old Colonial hotel, on John McMahon & Pearce's Great Drapery Warehouse;
19 June	Tim Gatehouse's talk on the Clifton Hill Presbyterian Church and Environs;
1 July	Inner Circle Railway Walk, with Terry Nott and Chris Friday.

As at 30 June 2007, our number of paid-up financial members was 85, together with 32 others whose subscriptions have recently expired since January and are not yet renewed.

The highlight of our year was the reopening of the Fitzroy Town Hall, and the publication and launch of *Fitzroy Town Hall: The Heart and Soul of Fitzroy*, compiled by Mike O'Brien to whom we owe thanks. We also thank the City of Yarra for the restoration and reopening of the Town Hall – an icon that we as the Fitzroy community can now use.

You committee over the last year has included Paul Bevilacqua, Sue Bradshaw, Peter Coyle, Lina Favrin, Chris Friday, Tim Gatehouse (secretary), Harold Mackrell (treasurer), Heather McRae, Mike O'Brien (newsletter), Catherine Pugsley, Jill Robertson, Keith Ross (minute secretary), John Senyard (membership), June Senyard and myself. Julie-Anne Smith joined the committee as a coopted member in recent months. I thank the outgoing committee who have organised and conducted the society's activities and affairs over the last year. We also thank the Fitzroy Library, and Lina Favrin in particular, for allowing our regular use of the meeting room, and for the excellent local history collection which many of us use and value so much.

Now at the completion of our 25th year, we all owe thanks to those who founded our Fitzroy History Society in 1982 and conducted its affairs so well since then. Next year in 2008, we can look forward to celebrating the 150th anniversary since the creation of the Fitzroy municipality back in 1858.