

The Fitzroy History Society Inc. Newsletter

February 2000

Welcome

A big welcome to all new members and our continuing members. We hope everyone has recovered from their New Year's Eve celebrations and summer holidays and is looking forward to an interesting year of historical events.

Our activities brochure is enclosed and outlines the events we have planned for this year. Already, fate has stepped in and dealt us its first card. It appears that the Christmas rains caused damage to the almost-completed library, thereby setting back its opening date. This, of course, has meant the postponement of our first activity: an evening at the new library browsing the historical collection. I say 'postponement' because this is being rescheduled for a date later in the year. You will be advised through the newsletter.

The revised opening date for the library (as this newsletter is being printed) is 15 March. This will coincide with the launching of a book of the library's rich and varied history. (See story below.)

History of Fitzroy Library

The Fitzroy History Society is publishing a book on the history of the Fitzroy Library. Written by local historian Carole Woods, the book describes the beginnings of the library and traces its progress up to the present.

The book will be on sale from the Napier Street library for \$15 rrp.

Subscriptions due

Subscriptions for the Fitzroy History Society are from January to December.

The annual \$5 subscription includes the cost of the regular newsletter, and reduced admission to the Society's activities. Please send your subscription to PO Box 180 Fitzroy 3065.

The Society caters for anyone interested in the history of the Fitzroy area. Join and learn more about Melbourne's first suburb. Share your own memories of Fitzroy, ask for research help and contribute to the active preservation of Fitzroy's heritage. All for \$5 a year.

Take a walk around Fitzroy

If you're interested in taking a stroll around Fitzroy and at the same time learning a thing or two about the suburb's fascinating history, you might want to have a look at a new book on the market—*Walking Melbourne* (Duffy, H. & Ohlsson, I., New Holland Publishers, 1999).

The Fitzroy walk starts at the corner of Victoria Parade and Fitzroy Street and ends up at Mario's Café in Brunswick Street. Along the way you will learn a little about Fitzroy's beginnings and the story behind some of the buildings, sites and early settlers.

Ackman's of Fitzroy

The words 'Henry Ackmans', 'Monster Furnishing Arcade' and 'Cash or Time Payment' were emblazoned in large letters on the front of the grand multi-storeyed Victorian building facing Smith Street between St David and Hodgso streets, Fitzroy. Built in the 1880s, the shop occupied the whole block with a factory extending back to Gore Street.

In the early part of the 20th century it was part of the bustling retail trade which comprised establishments such as Moran and Cato, Johnston's, Foy and Gibson and Coles.

During the 1930s Ackmans expanded into the city but, as with many other businesses in the area, gradually felt the effects of the expansion of the outer suburbs and the subsequent retailing move away from the inner-city.

Today, all that is left of the once-imposing building is the arcaded facade behind which is the car park for the Safeway supermarket, current occupiers of the site.

Cordial Factory

In the November newsletter we featured an article about a cordial factory in Falconer Street, North Fitzroy, begun in 1889 by the O'Neill family. Since then, further research by John Gordon has revealed that a Norma O'Neill married Jim Chessum and they took over the factory in the 1950s. Retiring in the 1970s, they handed over to their children who are still running the business under the name Slades Soft Drinks.

Did you know?

Doug Nicholls, the first Aboriginal to hold a high office in Australia—he became Governor of South Australia in 1976—played for Northcote and Fitzroy Football Clubs in the 1930s as a wingman.

'Largest electrical sign in Australia'

During my research of Fitzroy's chocolate 'king' Macpherson Robertson and his confectionery empire, I came across an article from the *Australian Electrical Times*, 27 June 1922:

'Probably the largest electrical sign in Australia has recently been erected. At either end of the sign is a rocket. In operation, the rockets ascend and, bursting into a red flare, the streamers ignite the first letter of the word "MacRobertson".

Immediately the word 'MacRobertson' begins to write itself, lamp by lamp, the words Old Gold burst into view beneath in their typical colour. The words are then obliterated and the action begins again.

Mr Tarrant, the chief electrician, built and erected it. The sign can be seen from the railway station as far east as Camberwell and Canterbury. It operates for five hours every night.'

The sign was atop the six-storey Old Gold building on the corner of Rose and Gore streets. The building is still there; the sign isn't.

New book

The Collingwood Historical Society has published a history of local churches: *Brimstone to Bunyip, Churches of Collingwood, Clifton Hill and Abbotsford 1852-1999*.

Contact the Collingwood Society c/- the Collingwood Library, 11 Stanton Street, Abbotsford 3067 or call 9201 1500 if you would like to buy a copy.

Executive Committee—1998-1999

Convenor: John Senyard
Treasurer: Harold Mackrell
Secretary: Shared role
Publicity: Margaret Lee
Editor: Jill Robertson (9419 8868)



The Fitzroy Public Library

The Fitzroy History Society is proud to announce the publication of the *History of the Fitzroy Public Library* by local historian Carole Woods.

The book describes the library's history from its establishment by Fitzroy pharmacist, councillor and book-lover Thomas Adam Ewing in 1877, to the present day.

Read about the times when 'no male visitor was allowed to occupy a seat at a table set apart for ladies', when the librarian banned books that were considered 'foul, false and wicked' and when visitors could enjoy 'glowing fires, good books, good and intelligent attendance, with cleanliness and brightness all around'.

Indeed, it will be 'brightness all around' again when the refurbished library is open in March.

The book is to be launched to coincide with the library's re-opening.

Special offer to Fitzroy History Society members of \$12.

More details in the next newsletter.