

The Fitzroy History Society Inc. Newsletter

October 2001

August's activity

It was wonderful to see so many people turn up for our Show and Tell (and Annual General Meeting). Perhaps we will have to make this a regular AGM activity!!! We were warmly welcomed to Dodgshun House by Mary Cameron. The 1864 house is now the Mary of the Cross Centre, a support facility for families of drug-affected people. Mary gave us a tour of the elegant mansion, pointing out the grand tiled and marbled fireplace, the magnificent cedar staircase, the beautiful leadlight glass, and the imposing entrance. In the grounds we saw a lemon tree and a pittosporum dating from the house's beginnings. The gate house is one of a very few remaining in Melbourne.

Our Show and Tell elicited some fascinating glimpses of Fitzroy life (running the gamut from the 1860s to the 1990s).

- Marie Linton and Lina Favrin from the Fitzroy Library displayed calico signs from the Edinburgh Gardens, a button-making die, an historical statement on the opening of the Fitzroy Town Hall in 1873 and a 1958 centenary medal.
- Gwen Heron brought along (and donated copies to the library) invitations to the Federation celebrations on 9 May 1901 belonging to her grandfather Johann Yaegar, former Mayor of Fitzroy.
- John and June Senyard showed architectural plans of their George Street terrace house and their son's 1991 Fitzroy Secondary College windcheater.
- John Capp, whose grandfather Dr Morton was the Health Officer for the Yarra Council, showed a photograph of the family outside their Brunswick Street house which was decorated with bunting for the Federation celebrations. The doctor is resplendent in his top hat, a horse and carriage wait patiently nearby.
- Miles Lewis brought along a 1904 handbill for a concert at the Cathedral Hall in Brunswick Street plus copy of the book *Fitzroy: Reclamation of an Industrialised Suburb*.

- Val Noone talked about the first Aboriginal Church—of Christ in Australia (corner Gore and St David streets) where Pastor Doug Nicholls was pastor. A faded plaque can still be seen. Perhaps the Society can restore the plaque. (See story at right)
- Barbara Stroud came all the way from Wagga specially to share her family's photographs and to read excerpts from Agnes's diary.
- Keith waved a Fitzroy flag produced by the Fitzroy Residents Association during a protest over proposed council amalgamation, plus three evocative 1970s calendars featuring Fitzroy bluestone and sketches of buildings.
- Jill Robertson read an advertising card for MacRobertson's tomato sauce.

In the 1860s

From *The Argus*, Saturday December 5, 1868

Fitzroy: The sitting magistrates on Thursday were Messrs Templeton, Levy, Rushall, Hailes and Wild. Several persons were summoned before the Court and fined ten shillings each for wasting their supply of Yan Yean water.

Thomas Dowd, for having unstamped measures in his possession was fined ten shillings and costs.

Four mischievous young urchins named Joseph Williams, Theophilus Tulloch, Joseph Garraway and Arthur Andrews who were brought up for damaging property, having been found pelting stones at a cherry tree in a garden, were sent to the Industrial School for two years, as neglected children, their parents being ordered to pay for their support.

Help

From Cardiff, Wales comes a call for help. Jean Reader is researching her family history and would like information on the Davies family who settled in Fitzroy as drapers in Brunswick Street in the 1860s until the 1890s.

An SOS a little closer to home comes from Tasmania. Ian Hodges would like information on his Scottish ancestors James Cooper who lived at 242 Brunswick Street, and Agnes Baishont (formerly Cooper) who ran a restaurant in Brunswick Street in the 1890s to 1913.

Thanks and welcome (the Annual General Meeting)

Convenor John Senyard thanked all members for an activity-filled, satisfying year. He paid tribute to two outgoing members of the committee: Laurie O'Brien and Margaret Lee. Laurie's contribution to the Society as a member of the inaugural committee, a past convenor of the Society and a tireless worker in the production of *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb* was acknowledged. Appreciation and thanks also to Margaret who has been convenor as well as a valuable committee member, and has recently moved overseas.

We welcome to the committee Annabel Barbara (who has been elected convenor-congratulations!), Chris Friday and Tom O'Brien.

Gore Street Church

The following has been supplied by Val Noone, using Mavis Thorpe Clarke's *The Boy From Cummerooonga* as a reference.

The building on the north east corner of Gore and St David streets, Fitzroy, was the first Aboriginal Church of Christ in Australia, operating in the 1950s and early 1960s. Doug Nicolls was the pastor.

Nicholls was a famous Aboriginal leader and Victorian footballer, later Governor of South Australia. He worked as a greenkeeper at the Fitzroy Oval to supplement his £1 a week income from his church work.

He worked with Fitzroy's Aboriginal community, befriending those in need and encouraging leadership and urging pride in Aboriginal identity. In line with this, he invited visiting black celebrities to the Gore Street church. Among those joining his congregation were pianist Winifred Atwell and singer Harry Belafonte who donated their talents to the Sunday service. The words on the sign were clear until a few years ago when they were painted over. However, the raised lettering can still be read by an astute passer-by.

Executive Committee —2001-2002

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