

# The Fitzroy History Society Inc. Newsletter

## September 2000

### August activity

Our guest speaker was Val Noone, the researcher and author of *Going to St Joe's*, a history of the Marist Brothers school in North Fitzroy. It was a fascinating journey through the life of the school, mirroring the changes in our local history.

Traced over the years, the school enrolments reflect the suburb's migrant patterns. Val showed some wonderful photographs to illustrate this phenomenon—Irish schoolboys in the early years with glum faces clothed in put-together suit, and today's mixed cultural groups with happy faced Vietnamese.

The school's original site was a magnificent mansion bordering the Merri Creek. It was demolished when there was little protest held on these matters. An electricity sub-station now occupies this site. With new premises, the school's enrolments grew due to increases in migration, and the school expanded its program to include the Leaving and Higher School Certificates.

Research of school information and student's home addresses showed the changes in the patterns of public transport and the various routes of the cable tram and rail lines.

Poliomyelitis made a significant impact on some of the student's lives and Val told some heartrending stories. The life and living conditions of the priests and brothers were also described. Telling insights of life beyond the school were illuminated through a collection of parent notes for student absences. Illnesses, work schedules, shopping hours and women's responsibilities were all touched upon.

Some of the special past students include Bert Newton of Channel 9 fame and Jan Sardi, the author of the novel *Moving Out* and the screenplay for the movie *Shine*. A 1960s photo showed Jan after he had been castigated by the school for having long hair (the hair was a typical Beatles cut which hovered somewhere around the ears!)

Thank you Val for an interesting discussion which opened up aspects and interrelationships of our local history and institutions which thankfully have not become lost, and have now been preserved in your story of a school in North Fitzroy.  
*Meg Lee*

### Local History Conference

What do you do if you have an old theatre program, a sporting medal, or school records? Ask the Council if they want it? Call the local library? Throw it away? Have libraries enough space to collect local ephemera? Perhaps the material would be more suited to the state library than a local one. These and other situations were discussed at a lively conference on Sunday 3 September.

*Preserving the Past for the Future* was the title of the forum on community history, collections and collecting in the municipalities of Yarra and Melbourne. It was organised by the Yarra-Melbourne Regional Library Community Advisory Committee.

The forum explored what resources are needed for local history and local studies, what is currently available, how Yarra-Melbourne libraries fits in and what gaps and actions can be identified at state, regional and local levels.

The next newsletter will report more fully on the decisions and actions to be taken.

Editor: Apology—I am sorry we were unable to let members know about this meeting in time for you to attend. The newsletter was delayed by unforeseen technical difficulties (sometimes I think we were better off when we didn't rely on computers!)

### Federation News

#### Federation book

I'm sure there'll be a plethora of Federation material coming out from now on, but an early cab off the rank is John Lahey's *Faces of Federation, An Illustrated History*. It promises an 'insightful look into the faces behind the Federation story. Not merely bearded politicians in heavy suits, the convention delegates were mostly men of passion and learning'. The book is available from the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne for \$29.70.

#### Federation activity

The Society is planning its own activity to commemorate Federation. If anyone has any memorabilia (or ideas) please contact the Society.

### Thanks and Welcome

'Thank you' to everyone who has recently renewed their membership or joined as new members.

### The Mission of the Holy Redeemer

A red-brick church-like building in Leicester Street, Fitzroy gives no clues as to its fascinating, though short-lived, moment of glory. This edited extract from Laurie O'Brien's article in *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb* brings to life a forgotten piece of Fitzroy's history.

'In 1888 a new curate, Ernest Selwyn Hughes was appointed to St Mark's [Anglican Church]. Fresh from personal experience of mission settlement work in the East End dockland of London, Hughes was fired with enthusiasm to launch a similar project in Fitzroy, one that would bridge the gulf between class and class. With support from the vicar (who aspired to his church assuming its traditional role of moral leadership in the community) and money donated from supporters, a large building was erected on the corner of Gore and Leicester streets.

University students from Trinity College and lady visitors from Toorak were recruited to assist. Local children came surging through the doors, eager for buns and entertainment. Hughes set up an orchestra. But the university students left for summer holidays and never returned. Drunken men started hanging about. No sooner had the Governor opened the mission in August 1891 than the economic depression began to take its toll.

A new vicar thought that the mission was divisive and spelled economic ruin for the parish, dismissed Hughes and the mission collapsed. (page 73)

### New Committee

A new committee was voted in at the Annual General Meeting which preceded Val's talk, and they are already buzzing with new ideas for next year's program. If anyone has any suggestions for activities, please contact the editor or write to the Society at Post Office Box 180 Fitzroy.

Many of you wrote ideas on your membership form and we are definitely following those up.

#### Executive Committee —1998-1999

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

**Tuesday 12 September 2000**

**7.00 pm (Note early time)**

**Discovering the Local History Collection**



Fitzroy Information Services Officer Lina Favrin will guide us through the library's Local History Collection and answer all our questions.

- what's in it?
- how do I use it?
- when can I use it?

**8.00 pm**

**Researching Greeves Street**



Greeves Street resident Michael Moore is delving into the street's origins and its occupants up to the present day.

He will share his current findings gleaned from long hours poring over Sands & MacDougall directories, rate books, photographs, newspapers, architectural maps and much more.

**Meeting Room 1 Fitzroy Library, Moor Street, Fitzroy**

(Please note that no-one can be admitted after 8 pm because the library itself will then be locked)

\$2 members      \$3 non-members