



fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com

October 2008

PO Box 180, Fitzroy 3065

**Sunday, 19 October 2008
10am to 4pm**

**Come Celebrate the
Fitzroy Swimming Pool's
100th Birthday
with a Family Fun Day**



EXTERIOR OF THE BUILDING

Opening of the Pool in 1908 – from the Fitzroy Library photo collection

Sunday, 9 November 2008 at 11am - Walking the Fitzroy of 150 years ago

As part of Fitzroy's 150th celebrations during September, FHS and the City of Yarra developed a brochure and a program of four different walks from the Fitzroy Town Hall.

Join us at 11am on 9 November on the steps of the Fitzroy Town Hall, collect the brochure, and do the Town Hall Precinct Walk and optionally any of the other three walks to the west, the south, or the north-east.

**FHS Annual Dinner
Friday, 14th November 2008, at 7pm
Dante's, 150 Gertrude Street**

The Fitzroy History Society's Annual Dinner will be held in Dante's function room (downstairs)
We have arranged a two-course menu for \$35.

Reservations are essential as we cannot accept reservations on the night. So please book early.

Please RSVP by 7 November, to Sue Bradshaw at
randbradshaw@bigpond.com or 9416 0616



2008 – FHS celebrates Fitzroy's 150th birthday

2008 has been a very important year for the Fitzroy History Society, as it marked the 150th anniversary of the creation of Fitzroy as a separate municipality. The Society, with assistance from the City of Yarra, organised a number of events to celebrate this milestone.

Petitions leading to creation of the Fitzroy municipality

On April 23, we celebrated the 150th anniversary of the second (and successful) petition in support of the creation of Fitzroy as a municipality. Meg Lee and Mike Moore spoke about the historical context of the petitions and the debates surrounding them.

Annual General Meeting – Social Reform in a Changing Fitzroy

9 September was chosen as the date for our Annual General meeting as it was the anniversary of the Governor's proclamation of the municipality – the "birthday of Fitzroy". In Renate and Brian Howe, we were fortunate to have two distinguished speakers who are long-time residents of Fitzroy. Renate and Brian reflected upon social change during the 1960s and 1970s – a time within the memories of many present.

Drawing on the findings of a Deakin University research project, Renate characterised this time as a unique period of urban transition and activism. Up to the late 1960s, Melbourne was a manufacturing centre. However, with the reduction of tariffs, many small factories in Fitzroy were no longer able to compete. Many of the migrant working class were moving out of the inner suburbs around this time. There were predictions that the area would decline, but there has instead been rejuvenation since then, featuring creativity and new kinds of employment opportunities.

Renate observed that a number of social reform organisations emerged in Fitzroy during these two decades, based in quite a small area. Organisations such as the Centre for Urban Research and Action raised issues relating to housing, living and working conditions, often adopting innovative approaches. The Fitzroy Residents' Association was one of several residents associations formed around this time: in some cases, they started with a heritage preservation focus but expanded to a wider social agenda, promoting public participation and mobilising support from a variety of other groups.

This period saw the first of three waves of gentrification in the inner suburbs. While the new residents contributed to the rejuvenation of Fitzroy, perhaps in a time of high property values there may be less inclination to focus on social issues.

Brian shared some personal reflections and reminiscences, starting with ideas of social change, conflict and public involvement that he brought back with him from Chicago University. He returned to take up an appointment at the Methodist church in Fitzroy, and almost immediately his heritage sympathies were engaged when the remaining historic church building was demolished.

Brian spoke about particular organisations that began in Fitzroy, including the Hanover Centre, which adopted the 'revolutionary' approach of talking with homeless people and building case records of their lives. Brian recalled Fitzroy as the site of early initiatives in social welfare, urban planning, childcare and multiculturalism, and acknowledged the work of the Ecumenical Migration Centre, St Mary's House of Welcome, the FRA and other groups.

While the construction of the housing commission towers in Fitzroy was an 'engineering feat', Brian became concerned about the lack of resources supplied to look after the many disadvantaged residents. The Fitzroy population was increasingly ethnically diverse during this period too, but it was a battle to get resources for translation.

Both Renate and Brian identified the 1960s – 1970s as a time when many people were looking for a change of approach. Renate quoted one of her interviewees, who spoke of the 1970s as a time of confidence, when people believed strongly that they could 'do things' and make a difference. It was inspiring and salutary to reflect back on this time.

Reading Room Display and Historic Walks

During September and October a display of historic documents and photographs was open to the public in the Reading Room of the Town Hall, and public access was also provided to the former Council Chamber and Mayor's Room which themselves house items of historical interest including early Mayoral portraits. The display was made possible with the generous assistance of the Public Record Office of Victoria, which lent key documents such as the petitions for separation, the first Council minute book and the Seal of Fitzroy; and the City of Yarra, who arranged for photographs from the Local History Collection and other sources to be available. Special thanks are due to Local History librarian Lina Favrin for her assistance.

Again with the assistance of the City of Yarra, FHS produced a brochure entitled "Fitzroy's Founding Footsteps" which details four walking tours around sites of historical interest within the suburb. Guided tours of each of the four routes were offered on the days that the document display was open. Attendances during the period were very pleasing, and included Fitzroy residents, visitors from other suburbs, descendants of Fitzroy councillors, and passing library users. The display and walks attracted a lot of interest and led to sharing of information and memories.

Anniversary of first Council Meeting

On 30 September, the City of Yarra hosted an evening function at Fitzroy Town Hall on the date of the 150th anniversary of the first meeting of the original Fitzroy Council. What an evening this was! The arrival of the 'official party' in horse-drawn carriages, a rousing welcome from the town crier, the mayor in robes and chain and guests in all manner of costumes from 1858 to 2008. A few of us – including well-dressed 19th century gentleman Harold Mackrell – sought the expert help of the friendly staff at Rose Chong's Costume Shop in Gertrude Street. We were pleased to see some of our Richmond & Burnley Historical Society friends in period costume too.

The hall hushed when Wurundjeri Elder Doreen Garvey-Wandin welcomed us to Aboriginal Country and spoke about the lives and contributions of Indigenous people in Fitzroy. We also heard from Mayor Judy Morton and from Meg Lee on behalf of the FHS. A portrait of the current Yarra Council in session by artist Eric Henshall was unveiled, following which guests were invited to view the historical display in the nearby Reading Room. A string quartet treated us to classical music, and we enjoyed food and drinks, reunions, meetings and conversation into the night.



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 in September 1898. The Victorian Government Gazette and the council's first minute book describe the period to September 1860.

The first reports of the Municipal Council of Fitz Roy: 1858 – 1860

The first half-yearly reports of Fitzroy's council, as reported in the Victorian Government Gazette of the time, provide a fascinating first-hand insight into life in Fitzroy in the period that the municipality was created.

One of the first bye-laws passed by the new Council was for the purpose of "levying a rate of One shilling and sixpence in the pound for the current municipal year". The Council reported that levying this rate would yield revenue of £10,838 2s, on the basis that the rateable property within the municipality was valued at £144,508. The actual rates collected in the half-year to 31 March 1859 were £14,632. The great majority of the Council's expenditure was on contracts, labour and tools for public works. Other major items were election expenses of £45, 11s 3d, and gas account for street lamps - £48, 3s 4d.

Fitzroy appointed its first Health Officer, R.T. Tracy, in December 1858. It was reported that Dr Tracy prepared and transmitted, together with the certificate required by the Health Act, a "favourable report" of the sanitary condition of the district to the Central Board of Health. One of the public health issues which had an impact on the sanitary conditions in Fitzroy was the securing of cesspools. In the half-yearly report for the period 1 April to 1 September 1860, it was reported that:

The council's attention having been directed the injurious effects arising from improperly secured cesspools, caused a survey to be made of those existing in one of the best portions of the municipality. The report thereon disclosed the fact that even in that locality several watercloset cesspools were not built in otherwise secured; and as most disastrous consequences might arise from their poisonous and putrid exhalations, the council at once caused notices to be served on the proprietors to take proper means for prevention of the evils complained of, by the construction of properly secured cesspools.

In 1858 there were no public baths in Fitzroy. The first half-yearly report records that a deputation from the Fitzroy Council to the President of the Board of Lands and Works:

... received a favourable reply to an application for a site for public baths, and for other purposes of recreation. The locality indicated as a suitable spot was that triangular portion of land lying between the Heidelberg Road and Smith and Reilly Streets.

That location, now bounded by Alexandra Parade and Queens Parade, is opposite the site on which the present Fitzroy Baths were built 50 years later. The land originally requested was not within the original area of the Fitzroy municipality, and it was necessary for the Council to petition the Governor "praying for the extension of the northern boundary of the municipality, so as to embrace the above-described locality".

Then, as now, transport and traffic issues were important. In 1858, the Chairman and Councillor Langton represented Fitzroy Council at the municipal conference, with the object of endeavouring to "obtain redress from the Legislature with respect to the monopoly of carriage licenses possessed by the City of Melbourne". In 1860, the Council sought to pass bye-law No. 12, entitled "For the Regulation of public Carriers, Carters, and Drivers of public Vehicles". The proposed bye-law "compelled the use of a chain for locking wheels for the prevention of accident" and "provided also that all descriptions of vehicles should be driven at a walking pace past places of public worship during hours of service". The Victorian Government objected to this bye-law, apparently asserting that it was beyond the Council's power in that it would in fact impose restrictions on private, as well as public vehicles.

In February 1859 the Council appointed a Benevolent Committee. When voting the necessary funds for this Committee, the Council had the "laudable end" of relieving

“none but extreme cases, and those only after investigation”. Within its first seven months of appointment, the Benevolent Committee disbursed £45.6s in the relief of nine cases, “all of which, with one exception, were women in great poverty”.

Moves towards establishing a free public library occurred very early in Fitzroy’s history. A Free Public Library Committee, consisting of Councillors Rae (Chairman), Langton and Hargrave, was established on 1 December 1858, and by the first half-yearly report had already held four meetings. By September 1859, the Council was able to report that:

The Public Library Committee had concluded their labours and brought up their report, which was adopted by the Council, and instructions given that a bye-law be prepared by the municipal solicitor, vesting the proposed site in Smith Street in the joint councils of East Collingwood and Fitz Roy, and for authorising the appropriation of a portion of the municipal funds for the purpose of carrying out the recommendations of the committee.

The Council’s Public Works and Lighting Committee, comprising Councillor Groom (Chairman), Bennett and Bell, met 28 times during the Council’s first half-year of existence. During this period, Brunswick Street, Gertrude Street and a portion of Victoria Parade were metalled using money provided to councils by the Victorian Government “in aid of repairing the streets of Melbourne”. Other public works included: “kerbing, pitching and paving” various streets; forming footpaths; cleaning water channels; pitching around fire plugs to ensure security. It was also reported

that during the first half-year, the Melbourne Gas Company laid mains down Nicholson Street to Johnston Street and agreed to lay mains throughout the entire length of Brunswick Street. The Council stated that it intended to call for tenders for supplying lamp posts, “with a view of better lighting the present unlighted portions of the municipality”.

Fire services at that time were locally organised. Until May 1860, the Collingwood and Fitz Roy Volunteer Fire Brigade served the Fitzroy area. When that brigade disbanded, the Fitzroy Council “declined the proposal of the East Collingwood council for co-operative action”, believing that “the protection of the property in their municipality from fire would be better secured by the formation of a local brigade, under their direct and sole control”. In the report for the half-year ending September 1860, it was reported that:

The United Insurance Companies having offered the sum of £60 per annum for defraying the expenses incurred for the suppression of fire, the council, on 11th July last, agreed to the suggestion of the Public Works Committee for the formation of a Fitz Roy Fire Brigade, composed principally of the men employed in watering the street, who, with the others, would only be paid for actual services rendered at fires. Under the superintendence of Mr Geo Rushall, the brigade has been efficiently drilled, and though their services have not yet been required in Fitz Roy, they have attended and suppressed two fires in East Collingwood, for which they have been paid by the United Insurance Companies.

Catherine Pugsley

The locations of the early Council Meetings

The first Council Meeting on 30 September 1858 was held at the Royal Exchange Hotel still standing on the north-east corner of Gertrude & George Streets. The next eight meetings through to 26 October were held at Wood’s (National) Hotel still standing at the north-east corner of Brunswick & King William Streets. On 18 October, the council accepted John McBean’s offer to use “the large room and one adjoining” in the Fitzroy Hotel as municipal chambers, and the tenth meeting was held there on 10 November 1858 at the south-east corner of Napier & Webb Streets.

An early improvement was the flagging of the footpath in front of the council chambers, from Little George to Napier Streets. The Fitzroy Court of Petty Sessions was soon proclaimed, and sat weekly in the council chambers until the new courthouse and municipal chambers were built in Napier Street by 1864.

Mike Moore



Royal Exchange Hotel



Wood’s National Hotel



Fitzroy Hotel

The 1891 Women's Suffrage Petition and the achievement of Women's Suffrage 100 years ago

In 1893 women were enfranchised in New Zealand (the first country to grant the right). One year later South Australian women were given the right both to vote and to contest parliamentary elections. This marked the start of a 29 year period (1894-1923) in which the colonies (later States) and Commonwealth of Australia granted women the right to vote and the right to sit in Parliament.

In Fitzroy there were 700 women of 30,000 who signed the original Petition in 1891. Now one of the State's archival treasures, the Women's Suffrage Petition (1891) reflects the dedicated work of those women, who went from door to door across Victoria to collect the signatures. Its tremendous length earned it the name of the 'Monster Petition'. Several interesting signatures adorn the top of the petition, including:

- *Margaret McLean* (as Mrs. William McLean), head of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and campaigner for women's rights and the vote

Margaret has a strong association with Fitzroy. The following is an extract on her entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography

McLEAN, MARGARET (1845-1923), temperance advocate and feminist

In 1859, after primary school education, she became a pupil-teacher at the United Methodist Free Church School, Fitzroy. She attended the new Melbourne Training Institution for teachers in 1862-64 and then worked as an assistant at Common School no.557 (St James' Cathedral School) until 1869. On 10 March that year at Fitzroy she married William McLean.

For her 'long and distinguished services' Margaret McLean was made honorary vice-president of the W.C.T.U. of Victoria in 1907. In retirement she continued working for temperance, social reform and the Baptist Church. Survived by eight of her children, she died at Malvern on 14 February 1923 and was buried in Melbourne general cemetery.

Meg Lee

Incoming Committee for 2008-2009

Nominations for the new Committee were received at the AGM, and the Committee for 2008-2009 comprises:

Mike Moore	(Convenor)
Meg Lee	(Secretary / Newsletter editor)
Catherine Pugsley	(Membership Secretary / Minutes Secretary)
Chris Friday	(Assistant Treasurer)
Harold Mackrell	
Heather McRae	
Julie-Anne Smith	Sue Bradshaw
Graeme Pritchard	Trudie Fraser
Kym Ortenburg	Lina Favrin

We welcome new Committee members Trudie, Kym and Graeme, and thank outgoing Committee members Tim Gatehouse, Mike O'Brien and Paul Bevilacqua. We pay particular tribute to the work of the following former Committee members who provided outstanding contributions to FHS over many years: Jill Robertson, John Senyard, whose death we mourned during the year and June Senyard. June and John were foundation members of the Society and have been continuing members of the committee since its inception. They have contributed greatly to the activities of the Society.

Catherine Pugsley & Heather McRae