



Peninsula Historian

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Pittwater Historical Society Inc.

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FROM THE EDITOR

I said that I would edit a couple of issues and

Phil Colman has contributed an article which starts in Victoria and ends at Colloroy Beach.

Peter Graves contributed to the Historian a couple of years ago and in this issue we have part one of his story of Curtin, Canberra.

Bryant Lavaring starts a new series of articles which he hopes will raise questions and information about local places and monuments.

I was offered photographs going back to about 1920, of a property named 'Calmar' which at that time stood with a frontage on Addison Road, Manly. Mentioning this to Jim started the two of us off investigating its history. In this issue Jim has contributed the first part of the results of his investigations.

Our thanks go to all our contributors but we still need more.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Well we are into the new year and one of the first issues that we need to get your feedback on, is the ability of the Society to have a Facebook account. Alan Ventress raised this at our 90th celebrations and others have talked about it. However an organisation has to maintain some control over the Facebook account to prevent inappropriate usage and see that it is achieving the benefits designed for it. We really need

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www.mwphs.com

some communication from members as to the way they would use Facebook. The point Alan was making was that to achieve a better balance of members young and old, prospective younger members would be seeking channels of communication relating to local history that were more attuned to the way they lived their lives. The older members could ask younger family members and friends as to what would interest them to be involved and what historical subjects they would like to explore.

The New York Historical Society has presently an exhibition of photographs on Martin Luther King's march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. This is accompanied by talks by various New Yorkers who were on that march. The film "Selma" is presently on general release in the USA and in contention for various awards. It may be that the subject matter that we focus on has to have a more contemporary relevance.

The subject of communication gives me the chance to acknowledge the part that Tony Dawson, Richard Michell and now Bill Slessor have performed in editing the newsletter. Tony oversaw the change of the newsletter from "Polhistor" to an expanded newsletter of eight pages, the "Peninsula Historian". That necessitated a new format and an expanded requirement for copy which he often met

himself. It also required a movement towards a greater use of colour and greater attention to type styles. In the meantime, Tony had his own interests which resulted in books on Trig Stations and another on the Lambert Peninsula.

Richard took over from Tony and at the same time continued his leadership of the Friends of Dee Why Lagoon. (Clean Up Australia Day is on the first Sunday in March and they meet at the Dee Why S C). Richard has also been active in the recording of the history of Dee Why. Richard added his own particular skills in maintaining the quality of the newsletter and added a few quirks of his own.

Bill Slessor has taken over the editorship on a relieving basis while continuing in his role as Webmaster for the Society. Bill has brought his own particular skills to the "Peninsula Historian", and added a few more tricks associated with his voluntary work with the Shipley Tramway in Yorkshire. Bill has only taken this job on for a short time as he is often out of the country.

The production process of the newsletter has now been firmly established as has sources of copy. A longer term arrangement needs to be set up and I would be happy to discuss the position in general in the first instance. The Society would be happy to financially assist the new editor in improving skills and with other historical activities that he or she may like to consider.

THE SARGOOD CENTRE – a very brief, convoluted story

Sir Frederick Thomas Sargood, who died in 1903, had inherited some stores dealing with soft goods, in Victoria. In 1858 he had married Marian A. Rolfe, and soon after built Rippon Lea, in Elsternwick, Victoria (now a National Trust property). In 1861 son and heir Frederick George, one of 11 children, was born. Marian died in 1878, and in 1880 Sir. Frederick remarried, in 1880, to Julie Tomlinson.

Frederick George effectively took control in the 1890's, and in 1898 he moved to Sydney. At the turn of the century there were 15 warehouses and 5000 employees. He had married Agnes Penrose Parker in 1885.

In the early 1900's he built Rippon Grange, at Wahroonga – a Sulman-Joseland designed mansion. He also bought a beach-front house at Collaroy. (This story is really all about Collaroy.) Unlike his father he never entered politics, but was a staunch member of the conservative Liberal Reform Association. In 1916 Agnes died.

Lilian Mary Christian had married Major Edward Augustus Antill in 1902, but was widowed 3 years later. She became very active in Sydney with ways to support the soldiers overseas during the war. Purely as Mrs. Antill she became very involved with the War Chest Fund, which overlapped with the Red Cross providing comforts. Otherwise she was barely known. With others, she organised women and others in getting knitters all over the country to producing socks for the soldiers, but also donations of wool. By late 1918 over half a million pairs of socks had been dispatched, plus balaclavas, mittens, underwear etc.. She had even organised transport for all this.

Frederick Sargood, who had also become quite involved with any war supports, be it financial or otherwise, became very impressed, and then smitten, by Lilian Antill, and eventually married her at St. Marks, Darling Point, in Nov. 1919. Although never involved in politics, he remained engrossed in his business, which kept growing, and in 1926 amalgamated with Gardiner, another retail chain, to become Sargood Gardiner, covering Australia, the Pacific and London. Prior to that he became a founding member of Sydney Rotary (in 1921) and in 1922, under the presence of the NSW Governor Sir Walter Davidson, opened a convalescent home at the Collaroy property. He died in 1932. After Frederick died, Lilian moved permanently to Bowral, where she died in 1945.

I move now from a story of a person to a story of a place, a building, a block of land on a prime site overlooking Collaroy beach.

Although originally bequeathed by Frederick Sargood to the State, eventually as a convalescent home for returned soldiers, the building eventually changed into a Children's Hospital, becoming an adjunct of the Royal Alexandra Hospital. In those days, a separate hospital for children was necessary to cater for those maladies such as whooping cough, mumps, scarlet fever, polio etc. However, with improved medicine, and age, the hospital became rather worn-out and run down. It played a role for a while as a facility for mentally retarded children but eventually ceased that role as well. Lacking modern facilities, being of fire-prone timber, lacking wide corridors for efficient movement of beds etc., it was eventually condemned, and was demolished after 2004.

Neither the NSW Health Commission, nor any medical bodies, expressed an interest, and it was feared that it would eventually end up flogged off to the highest bidder to become yet another block of flats. However, intense pressure from the local community and others made every effort to continue using the land for some sort of medical use. Initially it looked as if the State Government would sell it off, but it should be acknowledged that through the efforts of many residents, particularly Bob Loder, Greg Millson, Colin Apps, and Rod and Liz Macqueen, this didn't happen. In 2011 a new partnership was formed between the Life Time Care and Support Authority, The Sargood Foundation (representing the community) as well as private interests. Those unwitting patients, be they footballers, surfers, skiers and others who have suffered a supposedly life-threatening traumatic spinal cord injury, can be accommodated here in this world class facility, where in-laws can stay as well, while all effort is made to assure the patient that there can be a full-filling life afterwards.

It is interesting how history evolves. Such disparate and supposedly minor facts, played out by various unrelated actors on a very wide stage, can coalesce and give a result not one of the many playwrights envisaged. Lilian Antill spent much of her life, her efforts, to support the individual, unknown players in the war effort. Frederick Sargood, a man of virtually unlimited means, donated coin and property to the organisation this so-far unknown woman helped establish. Both those players eventually marry,

and pass on, but the property remains, goes through several instars but eventually metamorphoses into an imago not unrelated to its larval stage, though none of the players would have envisaged this outcome.

Acknowledgements. I have drawn from various sources for this very hurried account, but I must acknowledge Rodney Cavalier for the bulk.

Phil Colman

FROM MANLY TO CANBERRA

Remembering 50 years of Curtin

*Peter Graves last wrote for the **Peninsula Historian** in April 2012 about living in Manly's boarding houses during the 1960s. He recently retired from the Australian Public Service and will be undertaking a PhD at the Australian Defence Force Academy, researching the extensive reforms to the APS over the past 35 years. He is also a member of the Walter Burley Griffin Society.*

70 years ago John Curtin died on 5 July 1945. Fittingly, his memory continues in Canberra's Parliamentary Triangle, where there are two life-like statues of John Curtin and his Treasurer Ben Chifley together on their morning "walk" to (Old) Parliament House.

Curtin's name was first commemorated in the Canberra suburb of Curtin, where I have lived for the past 7 years. Our suburb recently turned 50 and these are some its stories collected by our local historical group. While Canberra is now a centenarian, most of our suburbs have been built after those "pioneering" days of the early 1960's, with 85,500 people living in the nation's capital. When I arrived in early 1972, Canberra was a pleasant country town of 150,000.

Canberra – the Early years

Although the city's foundation stone was laid in 1913 and the "provisional" Parliament House was opened in 1927, Canberra's subsequent development languished badly. Several

significant factors intervened after 1927, including The Depression of the 1930's and World War 2, combining to divert government responsibilities, its priorities and those all-important resources from completing the nation's capital. It did not help that the Director-General of Works had an aversion to travelling to Canberra from his head office in Melbourne, where a large proportion of the public service remained located.

1958 - The National Capital Development Commission formed.

Canberra's land tenure was uniquely designated as 99 year leasehold by the Commonwealth, in order to prevent land speculators profiting from the Commonwealth government investments and to ensure the orderly, controlled release of land consistent with the city's expansion. The additional feature of a "lease purpose" clause also helped in the planning of the nation's capital, by avoiding industrial activities being located in residential areas and ensuring orderly development of other commercial areas.

In 1958, the new NCDC decided it had three key priorities: develop the lake; increase the transfer of public servants from Melbourne and provide housing, shops, schools, offices and services for them, then finally expand the projected number of Canberra's residents from 110,000 (as originally estimated in 1955) to 250,000 by about 1985.

Naming the early Woden Valley Suburbs

Initially, there was a preference for honouring former Prime Ministers (subject only to their being dead): **Hughes** - named after William Morris Hughes (Prime Minister between 1915 and 1923); **Lyons** - Joseph Lyons (1932-39); **Chifley** - JB Chifley (1945-49). **Garran** was an exception in 1966 as it was named after Sir Robert Garran, who had helped draft Australia's constitution and was the first Commonwealth public servant in 1901.

NCDC and Curtin

Before suburbia in the Woden Valley, there were three rural properties: "Yarra Glen", "Illoura" and "Melrose Farm"; all were eventually subsumed into the above suburbs. In 1963,

70,775 people lived in Canberra and the first houses had just been built in Hughes, which had beaten Curtin to being the first developed in the Woden Valley. The first house in Hughes was enthusiastically occupied by the-then Minister for the Interior, Doug Anthony, who went on to be Deputy Prime Minister in 1971/72 and again in 1975/83.

This aerial shot of the Woden Valley in 1964 shows that initial development of Hughes with a population of about 1,200 and two remaining rural properties, one being Curtin's Melrose Farm (*middle, lower of picture*).



Source: The Future Canberra. National Capital Development Commission, Canberra, 1965, p.68

The 1964 view above also highlights the preliminary work then underway laying out the street plan for Curtin. Some of these preliminary roads may well have been graded by an enthusiastic NCDC engineer, Bill Minty, who was known to get in the driver's seat of a bull-dozer occasionally and form the first roads of a new suburb.

The role of the NCDC was to plan, develop and construct Canberra's buildings, but not to sell them. Curtin was planned to be larger than the standard of the time, being double-sized both because of the rapid increase in population and the nature of the landscape. NCDC town planners were not easily able to divide this topography into separate neighbourhoods.

The first house in Curtin was begun in 1964, with the separate government-owned housing being built as a first priority for the new public

servants arriving in Canberra. Getting your hands on the raw land for building a house occurred in three ways. If you were an owner-builder, private house blocks were available at restricted auctions, while commercial developers could bid for multiple blocks at group auctions at the Albert Hall. Then there were open auctions, where the blocks were freely available to any bidder.

For those with memories of pre-decimal values, builders paid an average of £1,108 each for 102 sites in Curtin at an unrestricted auction in April 1964. Later in 1965, you could buy a house in Curtin for £6,500, "complete with wrought iron (railings), fencing, paths, rotary hoist, linen and cloak closets, built-in robes, tiled bathroom and aluminium windows". Alternatively, it could be built on "your land from £5,000". Construction was supposed to take about four months.

Radburn Housing Principles

Curtin is one of the few suburbs in Canberra to feature what was intended as ground-breaking urban design in Australia – the "Radburn" layout. Radburn is a community in New Jersey, USA, founded in 1929 to follow the planning principles of England's Garden Cities. Those principles also influenced the construction of several suburbs in Winnipeg, Canada during the 1940's and 1950's and Walt Disney, in his original planning for EPCOT - the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow – in Orlando, Florida.

The Radburn principles make parts of Curtin unique: pedestrian paths which do not cross roads (ensuring safety for children on their way to school) and houses facing out onto visually-pleasant open green spaces, with these green spaces being intended for community use. The access roads and garages are behind the houses, acting as barriers between cars and the walkways. This design was also intended to allow residents to have quick access by foot to the local shops and other community facilities, reducing their use of the motor-car. Reflecting the language of the 1960's, a lot of the original proposals mention the possibilities of "housewives" being able to walk to the shops.

However, a Curtin resident of 1965 did have the temerity to note there were no tar-sealed roads or a shopping centre. An original resident later lamented in 1967 that there were also no schools, buses, dentists, doctors, public phones or post boxes either.



"We need some newer history."

"GROPER" DICK

In 1963 my parents, siblings and myself moved to the Quarantine Station at North Head from the Quarantine Station in Darwin. My father was in charge of the Station and was given the title of Forman Assistant.

At the time of our arrival a man, possibly a local from Manly, would fish from the rock platform on the Manly side of Old Mans Hat. He had the nickname of "Groper" Dick, presumably after the species of fish he was reputed to have caught. Dick had constructed a wooden ladder on the cliff face to a ledge about halfway down. On this ledge he had built for himself a sandstone hut with an iron roof where sometimes he would sleep. The ruins of his hut can still be seen from the ferry when travelling from Circular Quay to Manly.

Do you know the identification of "Groper" Dick? Are you able to provide some

information about his life and/or family? Is there someone you could suggest who may have some information on "Groper" Dick?

Where is this Secret Site?



Do you have any information about this Secret Site including data, reminiscences, references (Internet, publications, etc.). then please write (MW&PHS, PO Box 695, Manly 1655) or email your response to jimboyce37@gmail.com.

The answer will be revealed in the next edition of the Newsletter.

A **gymnasium** once stood near the corner of Bower Lane and Marine Parade in Manly. The building was demolished sometime in the 1960's. The centre contained a boxing ring and I have a vague memory that an Australian boxer did his training there before a title fight, again in the 1960's. The gymnasium was opposite the Fairy Bower Rock Pool and a house or block of units now occupies the site.

Do you have any information about this gymnasium? Please write (MW&PHS, PO Box 695, Manly 1655) or email your response to jimboyce37@gmail.com.

Bryant Lavaring

Bryant Lavaring

The next meeting is 14 February at Narrabeen Tramshed, 2pm. Nadine Phipps will be talking about the Heritage of Mona Vale Cemetery.

SAIL MAIL

Columbus's Mother: I don't care what you've discovered, you still could have written.

MARINE VILLAS (1)

As detailed in the book by J M Freeland "Architecture in Australia", "The first of January 1838 was an important date in the history of Australian architecture. On that day there came into effect , in Sydney , a comprehensive set of building regulations that spelled doom for the Colonial style". The 1837 regulations were essentially aimed at fire control. Immediately speculative builders focused on rows of terrace houses. At the wealthier end of the residential spectrum, villas were starting to make their presence felt. In 1828, Governor Darling had directed that Woolloomooloo Hill be subdivided into town allotments, with each grant to have one residence or villa built to approved standards of quality and design, set within landscaped grounds. A villa was essentially a two story dwelling with an extensive number of rooms for family and their household staff. The landscaped grounds were very much in the gardenesque style which emphasised the art of the designer and featured exotic trees, shrubs and plants within extensive lawns. Other features included winding paths, a graveled driveway and an imposing gated entrance. The whole property emphasised status.

The book "Demolished Houses of Sydney" edited by Joy Hughes gives an overview of the great houses that were built in Sydney, and are now no longer present. Many of these villas could be found in suburbs away from the harbour such as Randwick, Strathfield, Dulwich Hill, Marrickville and Turrumurra. As the price of land increased due to the increase in population and the improvements in transport both public and private, these houses were demolished and the properties were either replaced by flats on the same footprint or subdivided into smaller lots.

However, we are going to focus on a particular subset, marine villas. Marine villas began to be developed along the Sydney Harbour

foreshores from the 1830's with the building of "Craigend" for Thomas Mitchell. These fine mansions and spacious grounds had extensive water views and were generally owned by prominent people of industry and government. The marine villas were predominantly of an Italianate style but later, in the early 1900's, Federation and other styles were adopted.

GOLDEN YEARS

In 1920 for the first time in recorded history, the average life expectancy of human beings exceeded that of goldfish. Before that year, a newborn infant could expect to live 48.4 years. For many species of wild goldfish, the projected life span was over 50 years.



Craigend - Darlinghurst

As Manly developed, marine villas began to be seen facing Manly Cove and North Harbour and the second instalment of this article will be detailing the way these properties were developed and their ownerships. In particular we will focus on "Calmar" on Eastern Hill, which had an interesting history and a particular derivation of its name.

THE FAMILIES OF STREETS

There are a number of suburbs which were developed at a certain time and in a short amount of time. The street names in these suburbs, for one reason and another, adopted a common theme. One thinks of North Balgowlah and the street names there which focussed on towns on the North Coast. As to why that happened is the source of another article later in the year. Then we have Allambie Heights, where street names were chosen on the theme of place names in Papua – New Guinea, which became famous as scenes of battle in the Second World War. These street names were often selected by the developer of that particular area of real estate.



Abergeldie - Dulwich Hill

The piece of real estate that instigated this article, is Wheeler Heights, which was the long time residence of Kevin Martin, before he moved to Neutral Bay. The Wheeler family were one of the first families in the area and their homestead was a feature of the southern shore of Narrabeen Lagoon. The Wheeler Estate was eventually broken up after the Second World War. The family had originally come from Cumbria in the North East of England, popularly known as the Lake district. Thus the street names of Wheeler Heights reflect the towns and villages there as well as many of the geographical features of the landscape. For instance, the names of many of the lakes are the names of streets such as Derwent, Coniston, and Windermere. The latter name is also a reflection of the particular geographic terminology, a mere being described by the Oxford dictionary as "a sheet of standing water". Then we have the larger towns such as Ambleside and Penrith. The dales are a particular feature of the Lake District, being valleys leading up to the mountain range in the

centre of this peninsula jutting out into the Irish Sea. Thus we have Ennerdale Crescent and Langdale Place. However the family did put its name to James Wheeler Place and of course Wheeler Heights.

I am sure there are other stories of this type. They don't necessarily have to focus on the number of names present at Wheeler Heights. The story of the origin of a name or names is the important ingredient.

Jim Boyce

Editor's note: An old trick question has always been 'How many lakes are there in the Lake District'?

The answer is just one - Lake Bassenthwaite. All the other stretches of water are 'meres', 'tarns', 'waters'.



Windermere - the longest lake in the Lake District.

*There are more pictures on the web site
www.mwphs.com*

If you are viewing this Peninsula Historian through our web site but have not yet paid your membership fee, may we respectfully remind you that producing the web site and the Peninsula Historian costs money and we rely on subscriptions to meet those costs and the costs of promoting the society.

If you are not a member of the Society, why not join us? Membership Application Forms are available on the web site.



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