



Peninsula Historian

Newsletter of the Manly, Warringah & Pittwater Historical Society Inc.

VOLUME 12 No. 8

September 2019

ISSN 1835-7628 (print) 2207-8401 (elec-

FROM THE EDITOR

This issue contains an article by Keith Amos on the history of *The Kiosk* at Freshwater Beach, the building now known to many as *Pilu at Freshwater*. I thank Keith both for carrying out the detailed research and for allowing me to publish it.

I should also acknowledge the role that Keith played many years ago in the ultimately successful campaign, led by Gwen Gordon, to save *The Kiosk* when it was under very real threat of demolition. I believe that our community is richer for it.

Again I encourage others to put pen to paper or fingers to keyboards.

In the Pot Pourri section there is a short piece on Thomas Rowe, Manly's first Mayor. For the reasons explained in the article, Thomas Rowe is now the subject of some intensive research and hopefully I will be able to publish a more extensive piece in a later issue.

Richard Michell

DIARY

Meetings held at the NB Council Community Centre on the corner of Abbott and Griffin Roads, North Curl Curl

14 September, 2019 2.00 pm

Early Sydney Trams *Peter Kahn*

Peter will talk and show a film on the early Sydney trams, and also talk about the Manly and Northern beaches lines. Trams are topical again as Sydney's new Light Rail system finally nears completion.

12 October, 2019 2.00 pm

Midget submarine attack Peter Sweeney

Retired Lieutenant Colonel, Peter Sweeney RFD, will talk and give a presentation on the submarine attack on Sydney Harbour on the 31st May 1942. Peter is a military historian and a battlefield guide.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Last issue I reported that past-President Bob Pauling was unwell. Unfortunately Bob did not survive his illness and died only a matter of weeks later. I attended his funeral along with several other members and spoke on behalf of the Society.

Bob was a very active member of and contributor to the Society. At various times he served as our President, Treasurer and Archivist. He was also a prolific researcher of local history and was the prime mover for the Society's publications on Manly Vale and Mona Vale Cemetery. In recent years he produced two books of his own, *Art & Music in Early Dee Why* and *Going to the Pictures in Manly, Warringah and Pittwater*. His contribution is greatly appreciated and he will be missed.

Following the somewhat alarming message from the RMS regarding the remnants of the old bullock track at Mona Vale that I reported last issue, I met with one of their environmental managers on site to clarify what they had done. Fortunately, albeit by luck rather than management, the damage proved to be minimal. They had not recognised most of the remnant and hence it was saved!

In fairness, the RMS is now well-briefed on the matter and I believe that they will genuinely try to avoid any further damage. They are also now aware of the old water troughs that were also mentioned last issue and have promised that they will identify and protect them. So, with apologies for the delay to those members who have expressed an interest in participating in it, our own expedition to find the troughs can now proceed, without any danger of precipitating collateral damage.

Still on the RMS, their plan to create some form of memorial to the "blinking light" as part of the upgrade works at the intersection of Warringah Road and Wakehurst Parkway, Frenchs Forest has progressed. Agreement seems to have been reached with Northern Beaches Council to incorporate it into Brick Pit Reserve, adjacent to the intersection, and the RMS is now drafting the guidelines for an Expression of Interest document as the basis of a call for proposals. Proponents must have the capability to design, build and assist with the installation of the memorial.

Richard Michell

NEWS AND VIEWS

NEXT MEETING, Saturday 14 September, 2019

Peter Kahn from the Sydney Tramway Museum will talk about Sydney's early trams, including the showing of a film *'Shooting Through on Sydney's Trams'*. He will also speak to the book *'The Manly Lines of the Sydney Tramway System'* to add some local flavour.

Prior to WW2, trams were the Peninsula's B-Line.



Trams on The Corso in the 1920s

LAST MEETING REPORT, Saturday 8 June, 2019

A great roll up heard meteorologist Richard Whitaker on the subject of east coast lows, the intense storm events that from time to time wreak havoc on our shoreline and bring floods to low lying areas of Sydney. After explaining the conditions that generate them Richard identified a number of severe weather events over the past 150 years that led to ship wrecks and loss of life, that we can now identify as having arisen from such low pressure systems.



Consequence of an East Coast Low at Collaroy Beach 2016

POT POURRI

21 Whistler Street, Manly

A Development Application lodged with NB Council which involved the demolition and redevelopment of the property at 21 Whistler Street revealed that the existing building had apparently been built c.1876 in association with the construction of a larger house by Thomas Rowe, the first Mayor of Manly. This house apparently faced onto today's Belgrave Street and the building that survives was located at the rear of the property, adjacent to Whistler Street. An interim heritage order has been placed on the property, giving a six month opportunity to further research it.

Thomas Rowe was a very successful architect, helping to found the NSW Institute of Architects and was its President for many years. He had served on the Sydney City Council prior to his moving to Manly in 1877. His move coincided with the election of Manly's first council and his experience perhaps explains why his candidature was successful and why his fellow aldermen elected him as the inaugural Mayor. In his four years on Manly Council he was very productive.

Among other things, he was the driving force in forming a fire brigade, the first municipal brigade in Australia, and was its first captain. But his lasting legacy was his role in the decision to implement a very ambitious town landscaping project. He formed a Manly beautification committee consisting of himself and fellow-Aldermen Charles Hayes and John Smith. They sought assistance from the Director of the Botanic Gardens, Charles Moore. He recommended Norfolk Island Pines, Moreton Bay Figs and Monterey Pines. The committee decided on Norfolk Island Pines and Moreton Bay Figs and proposed a bold planting scheme, including pines down the centre of some roads. The outcome was the distinctive streetscapes and beach frontages that we still see and enjoy today.

Not a case of e-harmony

Jo Harris, who spoke at our July meeting on early radio in Sydney, has pointed out that I embellished Sir Ernest Fisk's name in my report. His surname has no "e" on the end.



Current building at 21 Whistler Street, Manly

ARTICLE

FRESHWATER BEACH KIOSK, 1908 - 2019

In the late 1970s, the old Federation-era kiosk at Freshwater Beach was at risk of being demolished. It had become increasingly dilapidated over many years and Warringah Council had the power to compensate the property's owner, dismantle the building and extend recreational open space at the beachfront. This study surveys the kiosk's history and the community debate that determined its future.

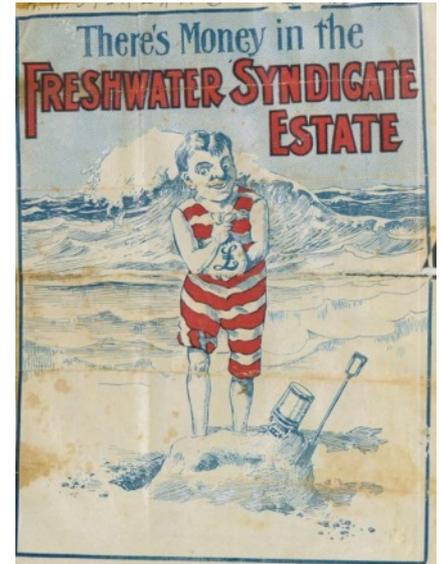
The kiosk's first owner was Robert David Lewers, who had migrated to Australia from Antrim, Ireland, aged about 16 in 1871. He married Maria ('Missy') Propsting in Victoria, transferred with the London Bank to Sydney, and by the early 1900s was a large investor in real estate at Queenscliff and the Freshwater-Harbord district. The couple and their children lived in a fine home at Queenscliff called 'The Eyrie', which had panoramic coastal views over the lagoon below, towards Manly and the harbour.

By 1908, when Lewers decided to build the kiosk, he was principal of a syndicate who owned 'Freshwater Estate', a 50-acre block of prime real estate directly opposite Freshwater Beach. This block was the same as that granted to Thomas Bruin in 1816: now bounded by Undercliff Road on the south, Albert Street on the west, and Evans Street on the north. It was first subdivided for sale in the 1880s, but did not attract many purchasers until recreational swimming began to be popular in the early 1900s. As weekenders' tents and rudimentary men's clubhouses (called 'camps') began to multiply, Lewers saw the business potential in opening a beach-side kiosk.

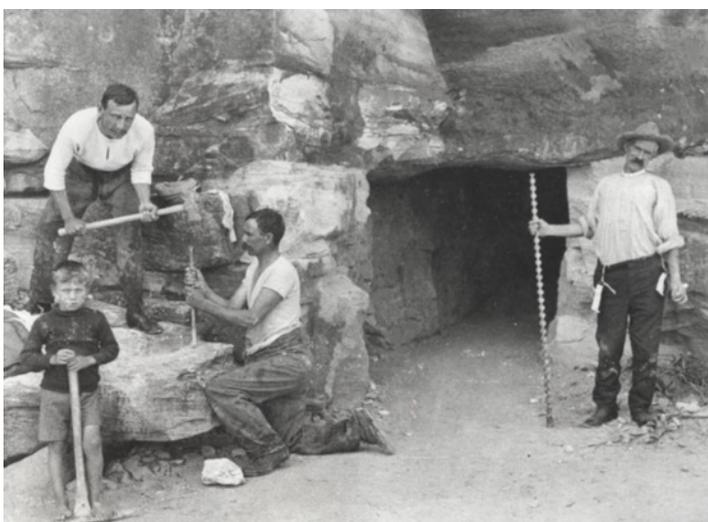
The building itself was on a slight rise at the south end of the beach, at the foot of a long flight of steps built in 1884 over Queenscliff headland. Its design was uniquely elegant for semi-rural Freshwater: a substantial weatherboard and tile-roofed building, Federation in style, with upstairs rooms and a semi-circular verandah facing the beach. Its main entrance was on the Undercliff Road side, giving convenient access for anyone arriving via Queenscliff Steps.

It was envisaged that a manager's family would live on site and that as well as selling refreshments and other provisions the kiosk would also be a venue for afternoon tea parties, public meetings and dances. There was some accommodation for weekend visitors, and for two years from 1909 the kiosk was also Freshwater's postal agency. During construction, Lewers also took steps to introduce change sheds for bathers and another store at the northern end of the beach - as reported in September 1908: -

J S E Ellis & Son, who are the architects for a refreshment kiosk and shop now nearing completion at the southern end of Freshwater Beach are calling for tenders for ladies' dressing accommodation at the same end of the beach, and for a gentlemen's dressing and sunbaking enclosure, with a refreshment shop attached at the north end of the beach, all of which are to the order of Mr R D Lewers



Freshwater Estate land sale 1912



Working on the tunnel December 1908

The kiosk was open for business before the end of the year. A *Daily Telegraph* journalist, impressed with its quality, observed: 'On the northern side of Manly, at Freshwater Bay, I was astonished to see an up-to-date kiosk at what is officially known as Queenscliff. The enterprising constructor apparently proposes to cater for visitors in first-class style. A small party of us reached Queenscliff by the steps across the hill.'²

To further encourage visitors from Manly, Lewers commissioned the building of a 25m tunnel through Queenscliff Point, intended as part of a scenic walkway between Queenscliff and Freshwater beaches. The contractor was D. Bevan, who finished the work in only three months in 1908. By January 1909 a great many people had walked through it.³ The tunnel can still be walked through today; however the scenic path never progressed, partly due to circumstances that will be outlined.

In August 1909 Robert Lewers leased the kiosk to William and Diana Farley. William Farley, a fellow Irish immigrant and reputable Manly builder, had built the notable sandstone residence for Cardinal Moran at North Head. The children of both families became close friends, all of them being keen surfers.

By 1910, Freshwater was Harbord's popular beachside precinct. The kiosk's side boundary adjoined Moore Street, the main road to the beach, and surfing stopovers in the 'camps' nearby were growing in number. In March, the kiosk hosted a meeting of the Queenscliff, Freshwater and Harbord Tramway League to discuss plans for a tram service through Harbord and along Moore Street, terminating at the beach. In the same month, Lewers' syndicate promoted a large sale of their real estate: -

Freshwater, Manly, Lewers Subdivision (for sale) – Right at the Grand Ocean beach The safest surf-bathing beach on the coast, and the favourite week-end and holiday resort north of Sydney – At last the opportunity has arrived to acquire a site for your seaside home on the original Freshwater Estate – Sale on the ground Easter Saturday, Richardson & Wrench. ⁴

Coinciding with Freshwater Surf Club officially opening its first clubhouse in December 1910, Robert Lewers had an unfortunate altercation with a neighbour, Frederick Dobbs, whom he accused of stealing some timber. When the case came to court, Dobbs sued Lewers for wrongful arrest and overnight imprisonment, claiming 500 pounds damages. The jury found in Dobbs' favour and by consent of the parties, Lewers agreed to recompense Dobbs 100 pounds.⁵

It appears that embarrassment from the case tragically preyed on Lewers' mind, which, combined with overwork, insomnia and deep depression, caused him to take his own life in October 1911, alone in a Moore Street camp late at night, by igniting a stick of gelignite. Some Harbord residents heard a muffled explosion but didn't look into it. His body was found by his daughter, Aldwyth, on her way to the beach for an early morning swim.⁶

Having eight children to raise, Maria Lewers had to put all of her husband's property up for sale in December 1912: -
Messrs H W Horning & Co. will submit the Freshwater Syndicate Estate, which practically comprises the whole of the delightful marine suburb of that name, with lots facing the beach, and also the pick of residential and business sites. The kiosk, a rusticated building of six apartments, and large sleeping-out verandahs, and a detached cottage of four rooms, will also be sold. Coaches will leave the tram at the Lagoon Bridge for Freshwater every few minutes.⁷

The kiosk was bought by Anton Herman Loebel to live in and run as a business. Born in London in 1862, Loebel had migrated to Australia aged about 23, married Annie Harman, and become a Sydney publican. The couple had three school-aged children, Herman, Anthony and Frances. Under the Loebels' ownership, the kiosk flourished as a café-restaurant, general store, place for meetings, functions, and holiday stays for 20 years; business being boosted by the tramway's branch-line extension to Freshwater Beach. Rental accommodation in 1917 was offered as follows: -

Freshwater Kiosk - Accommodation for visitors and families at moderate charges. Double bedroom, use of kitchen, everything found from 15/- per week. Right on the Beach, few minutes walk from tram. Mrs A. Loebel, Proprietess.⁸

Anton and Annie Loebel maintained the kiosk for the rest of their lives. Annie died aged 64 in 1929; Anton, at 73 in 1935, 'suddenly from a heart condition, at his residence the Kiosk'.⁹ The property was inherited by their 29-year-old daughter, Frances Bridget Loebel, who moved to another Harbord address after marrying George Kerr, letting the business to tenants. Frances Kerr remained the owner for close to 60 years, but as the building aged and competitive food outlets opened, the kiosk steadily lost its former prominence in the community.

A major change in the kiosk's function occurred in 1963, when the State government enacted legislation to make properties close to the beach less exposed to undermining when big seas combined with king tides. Under the law, Warringah Council re-zoned the kiosk's land from residential-commercial to recreational open space. This meant that the kiosk could no longer operate as a shop and that Mrs Kerr could only sell the property to the Council. As a result, the



Anton and Annie Loebel and their children, 1905

building became divided into five or six flats rented out by Mrs Kerr while she waited to be bought out by the Council.

In July 1977, Warringah Shire Council offered Mrs Kerr \$39,000 for the property in order to demolish the kiosk, however the offer was declined as being far below market value. Mrs Kerr pointed out that the property, inherited from her father, had given her a regular income from rental letting for many years and that more recently, when developers and others had offered her very large sums for it, they had been deterred from purchasing by 'your Council's Beach Improvement Scheme'.¹⁰

I was a Harbord Primary teacher at the time, helping Gwen Gordon after school with the manuscript of her book, *Harbord, Queenscliff and South Curl 1788-1978*. When the book came out, a kiosk



The Kiosk 1918

tenant informed Gwen about a pile of glass negatives and an old bellows-type camera he had found in the attic. Gwen informed Mrs Kerr about them and was given permission to print some of what were found to be were Anton Loebel's photos of Harbord and his family in the early 1900s. On this exciting discovery, some of the photos were included in the book's second edition in 1978 (the first having quickly sold out). One of the new kiosk photos had Gwen's caption: 'This is Harbord's oldest and most historic building. Every effort must be made to save it'.

The book revived much local interest in the kiosk, and also in Isobel Letham's famous surfboard riding demonstration with Duke Kahanamoku at Freshwater Beach in 1914. Being Gwen's neighbour, Isobel had related her story first-hand for the book. She also spoke about growing up in Harbord with the Lewers and Farley children, who were all excellent swimmers (and later connected through two marriages and the construction/cement business, Farley-Lewers). To celebrate Isobel's 80th birthday in March 1979, a gathering of women board-riders invited her to the kiosk, where she regaled her audience with colourful memories of early Freshwater-Harbord.¹¹

As secretary of Manly-Warringah and Pittwater Historical Society, Gwen urged its May 1979 meeting to support the Kiosk's preservation. Supported by the president, Geoff Johnston, a resolution was passed appointing Gwen and me to represent the Society on the matter. With this approval, Gwen wrote to the Warringah Council shire clerk as follows: -

Dear Sir,

At a recent meeting of this Society, it was proposed that I inform you of our interest in the preservation and possible restoration of the kiosk, Undercliff Road, Harbord, adjacent to Harbord Beach.

We are aware that the future of the Kiosk, and the property on which it is situated, is likely to be discussed by Council as part of the re-development of the beachfront area. If possible we would like to be informed of, and perhaps take part in, any discussions related to the Kiosk.

Erected about 1908, this historically interesting building was one of the first substantial buildings constructed in Harbord. It is in fact almost as old as the suburb itself and an excellent example of a type of architecture that has almost completely disappeared from the beachfront sites. It is remarkable that this building has survived re-modelling or demolition.

We are convinced that should the Council at some time resume and purchase the property, the Kiosk should at all costs be preserved. We believe that it could have an economically viable future perhaps as a restaurant under lease – similar to the Kiosk at Shelly Beach – with proviso that its architectural style be preserved.

Keith Amos (phone 982-4736) is available as a representative of the Society should you wish to contact him.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs) Gwen Gordon, Hon. Secretary¹²

In succeeding months, Gwen and I attended two public meetings and, by invitation from the Council, an on site inspection of the kiosk, along with the local councillors and other community representatives. These meetings and some *Manly Daily* coverage sparked a public debate on the kiosk, during which the Historical Society succeeded in having the building heritage listed by Council. By mid 1979 three community positions were apparent. A 'Kiosk Action Group' favoured Council resumption, arguing that a restaurant would cause loss of peace and quiet in the neighbourhood and impact adversely on the value of properties nearby. Then this group split into two factions: one seeking demolition for open recreational space; the other, restoration at Council cost for a Surf Club annexe and/or museum. The third position - shared by the Historical Society - was to restore the kiosk as a food outlet and community venue, similar to its original function.

In the meantime, Mrs Kerr agreed to lease the property to Reginald Coote, Director of Bangkok Jewellery Pty Ltd, Mona Vale; contingent on his obtaining Council approval to renovate the building and convert it into a quality restaurant. If this went through, Mr Coote undertook to outlay \$100,000 to restore the kiosk as far as possible to its original state, given the essential alterations required of a modern restaurant.



The Kiosk today - *Pilu at Freshwater*

Submissions to Council on the Kerr-Coote development application were invited and tallied. Opposed were 17 individual letters and a petition with 44 signatures; in favour, one letter and a petition of 520 signatures. Shire President Paul Couvret recognised that the Council had a difficult decision on the matter, due for debate at a Town Planning meeting in February 1980. The problem, he said, was 'having to ascertain which group represents the majority of the people, ... protect the rights of the individual and (balance this with) the interest of the community as a whole'. Also, to approve the application, the property would need to be re-zoned from open space back to commercial.¹³

In the event, Council opted for this course, obtaining suspension of Open Space Reservation for Mrs Kerr's property at 80 Undercliff Rd (Lot 23b, Sect.1, 979 sq.ms) from the Minister for Local Government, Eric Bedford. In September, *Manly Daily* announced that the kiosk debate was over. Under a heading 'History and chips soon at The Kiosk', the paper reported that although the old structure was dilapidated, public consensus opposed demolition; the question then became 'who was going to foot the bill for restoration?' Following were details of Mr Coote's Council approved application to restore the kiosk 'to its former glory', his \$100,000 commitment to the project, and news that a highly reputable local builder, Denzil Joyce, was already on the job.¹⁴

The building's Federation-style features were faithfully restored, the only major change being a Council requirement that the old shopfront entrance facing Queenscliff Steps be closed to avoid crowded car-parking in Undercliff Road and visitors' noise disturbing nearby homes. The kiosk's new entrance was approached from Moore Street, with provision for off-street parking.

As 'Freshwater Seafood Kiosk', the building was officially re-opened on 20th February 1981 by the Deputy Premier, L J Ferguson, guest of honour at an evening cocktail party. In time a small, detached food bar opened on the Moore Street side. After Frances Kerr died in 1992, the Loebel family stayed owners until 2001, when the property was sold to a private buyer for \$2,970,000.¹⁵ Since then it has remained a quality seafood restaurant and function venue, the attractive grounds and beachside setting being ideal for weddings and similar celebrations. Heritage-listed and well patronised, the old kiosk's future looks assured.

Keith Amos

Notes

1. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Sept. 1908 - Trove
2. *Daily Telegraph*, 11 Nov. 1908 – Trove
3. *Evening News*, 28 January 1909
4. *Ibid.*, 5 Mar. 1910 - Trove
5. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 Dec. 1910; *North Star* (Lismore) 15 Dec. 1910 -Trove
6. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 Oct. and 2 Nov. 1911 - Trove
7. *Daily Telegraph*, 21 Dec. 1912 - Trove
8. *Cootamundra Herald*, 16 Feb. 1917 - Trove
9. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 June 1929, 12 Dec. 1935 – Trove
10. Letter to Council, 15 July 1977, 'Freshwater Kiosk', Council records
11. Gwen Gordon, 'The Kiosk: now Freshwater Restaurant: Harbord's Most Historic Building', unpub. monograph, 2001, pp. 2-3
12. Letter to Council, 25 May 1979, 'Freshwater Kiosk', Council records
13. Letter to Mr & Mrs Humel (of the Kiosk Action Group) 18 Feb. 1980, *ibid.*
14. *Manly Daily*, 13 Sept. 1980, 'Freshwater Kiosk', Council records
15. Gordon, *op.cit.*, p. 2



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