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ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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24 Duff Street,
ARNCLIFFE. 2205.
December 1981.

Dear Friend and Member,

The December Meeting will be held as follows:-

Date: Friday Evening, December 18th, 1981, at 8.00 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale.

Business: General. (As this is our Christmas Meeting business will be very brief.)

Syllabus Item: Mrs. Mendoza has kindly offered to show a few slides taken when she visited the Red Centre recently, at the conclusion of which we will all join together for the "Get Together" of the year.

Supper Roster: Ladies, put on your best 'Bib and Tucker' for a "super" supper. Miss Dorothy Row, Captain, and all who can help, please do.

Mr. R. Lee,
President.
Phone: 570.1244

Mrs. B. Perkins,
Publicity Officer.
Phone: 587.9164

Mrs. E. Eardley,
Sec. & Bulletin Editor.
Phone: 59.8078

Mrs. E. Wright,
Treasurer.
Phone: 599.4884

Mrs. D. Row,
Social Secretary.
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Mr. A. Ellis,
Research Officer.
Phone: 587.1159

Let me live in a house by the side of the road, where the race of men go by,
The men who are good and the men who are bad, as good and as bad as I,
I would not sit in the scoffer's seat or hurl the cynic's ban --
Let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man.

.... Anon.

The President, Mr. Bob Lee, & Officers wish you a HAPPY CHRISTMAS.

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Many of our Members have been and still are, ill. We are sorry to hear this, and hope they will be well again soon.

Heritage Week 1981 was an outstanding success. Put your thinking caps on -- we need suggestions for Heritage Week 1982.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

The St. George Historical Society is pleased to announce that the following books, written and illustrated by the late Gifford E. Eardley, for the Society, have been reprinted and are now available. No. 8 Book was compiled by Mrs. Bronwyn Perkins.

- No. 1 "The Wolli Creek Valley"
- No. 2 "Kogarah to Sans Souci Tramway"
- No. 3 "Saywells Tramway -- Rockdale to Lady Robinson's Beach"
- No. 4 "Arncliffe to Bexley Tramway"
- No. 5 "Our Heritage in Stone"
- No. 6 "All Stations to Como"
- No. 7 "Tempe and the Black Creek Valley"
- No. 8 "Early Churches of the St. George District"

All books now available at \$1.25 per copy - plus current rate of postage.
For your copy of the above books, please contact one of the following:-

Mrs. E. Wright - Phone 599 4884, Miss B. Otton - Phone 59 4259 (after 8 p.m.)
Mrs. E. Eardley - Secretary - Phone 59 8078, Mr. A. Ellis - Phone 587 1159

Also available is a very interesting book - "Tempe - East Hills Railway", by B.J. Madden. Published by Hurstville Historical Society. Price \$1.80 per copy. Phone 599.4884, 59.8078.

The Research Project - "Early Pioneers of the St. George District" -- undertaken by some of our members, is progressing. Much information has been gathered. However, there is still a long way to go. Help from interested members would be greatly appreciated. Can you help towards "Book No. 9" in our series of books on history?

MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE: Due to circumstances, it has been found necessary to increase the Annual Subscription as follows:-

<u>Per Member</u>	..	\$3.00)) <u>Due July 1981.</u>
<u>Per Family</u>	..	\$5.00)	

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN TO PAY YOURS?

WEST OF THE RIVER ROAD (Contd):

- Jacqueline Davies
- Dorothy Mulholland
- Nora Pipe - 1979.

1893 - 1938 (contd):

At "Frog Hollow", near the site of the present Revesby Hotel, there was a muddy dam where local children used to swim in their "birthday suits". Most parents disliked their children swimming there as the water was not clean and swimming in dams was known to be dangerous, so the little escapade was usually "on the sly". Very few of the culprits escaped detection, as the muddy water left a yellow stain on the skin, giving the game away completely!!! Of course, there were other activities enjoyed by adventurous young boys, not often talked about in those days. Orchard-raiding was a carefully planned exercise, more often than not quelled by a farmer brandishing a rifle and threatening to tell their parents.

In 1901, the first church west of the River Road was built: the Congregational Church next to the school in The River Road near Beaconsfield Street, Revesby. Before that, the Congregational Minister, the Rev. Mr W Dunkley and Mrs Dunkley used to walk from Bankstown to East Hills to visit elderly or sick folk.

Ministers of various denominations made occasional visits to the district. In distant, sometimes isolated homes they were the only contact folk had with the church. It didn't matter if one was of a different faith to that of the Reverend Gentleman, he was welcomed into all homes & was quite often asked to baptise the newest addition to the family. As a result, some parents found themselves with a family of Methodist, Congregational, Baptist, Presbyterian and Anglican children!!!

St. Saviours Church of England, Punchbowl, was the church most often attended for marriage, christening or funeral services for the East Hills folk. Many of the pioneer settlers of this district are buried in the grounds of St. Saviours Church. The steep hill on which the church was situated was known locally as "Boneyard Hill".

It was also in 1901 that the Schwarzel family came to the district. John & Sarah Schwarzel had a property on Tower Street where the present Squash Courts stand. John Schwarzel worked a market garden and a very productive orchard. Sarah Schwarzel won the gratitude & respect of the East Hills folk when she became midwife of the district & dedicated her life to the welfare of mothers & babies. She was fondly known as "Granny Schwarzel" by the many children she helped deliver, & by their parents she was called "The Mother of East Hills".

There were no doctors in East Hills, the closest doctor being in

Bankstown. A story is told of a mother who ran from East Hills to Bankstown to the doctor, carrying her seriously-ill child in her arms. The closest hospital in the early days, was the Cottage Hospital at Auburn, which meant a long uncomfortable trip by horse & cart for an ill or injured person. It was at time of crises like these that the district seemed very isolated.

Indirectly, the George's River led to an increase in the rate of development of the district. Recreation areas such as Brereton's Pleasure Grounds and Parksvale became very popular, & people flocked to the Georges River from all over Sydney. A paddle steamer service operated from the railway station at Como to Parkesvale at Picnic Point. This gave local residents a second route to travel to the city. Previously they had to walk to Bankstown, catch the horse-drawn coach to Haslams Creek (Rookwood), then a steam train to Sydney. Walking, or "Shank's Pony" (an early term for walking), was very much a part of life in the early days. Today's residents would pale at the thought of walking to Bankstown, but our pioneers thought nothing of it. Admittedly, they did not have to follow streets or dodge traffic - they walked across country, cutting through paddocks & over creeks. The countryside was criss-crossed with foot tracks or pads, one well traversed track running from near East Hills to Bankstown.

Before long, horse-drawn buses were seen travelling regularly over the rough roads, taking groups of visitors to picnics beside the Georges River. The single deck buses were usually pulled by two horses & double decker ones by four horses. These buses were privately hired for group outings. Other people travelled by sulky or cart, clip-clopping along Tower Street between the tall Norfolk Island pine trees (which had been planted from The River Road to near Neville's Store) then down Lambeth Street to the River. Local folk also enjoyed the entertainment facilities by the river. Sometimes they would travel home from dances held in the dance pavillions in Mr Bede Brennan's petrol driven open-topped bus "The Majestic". "The Majestic" was built to carry between 30 & 40 passengers. On one memorable night, 104 happy, laughing folk managed to squeeze on the bus for the trip home!

In 1907, another building, the East Hills School of Arts, was added to Tower Street, & became the pride & joy of the East Hills folk. The building was situated beside the present Panania Mobil Station, & became a central meeting place for the people of the district.

The School of Arts belonged, by way of subscription, to the people, & was controlled by a Board of Trustees. A committee was elected consisting of a President, 4 Vice-Presidents, Treasurer, Secretary, Librarian & Assistant Librarian. The Committee met once a month. The object of the institution was to cultivate an appreciation of literature, science & art, & to provide intellectual improvement & healthy amusement for its members.

A caretaker was appointed & this honour fell to Billy Bell for many years. Some of his duties involved climbing the ladder to light

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the 4 kerosene lamps which hung down from the centre of the ceiling & lighting the large kerosene lamp at the front of the building which advertised that a function was being held. Billy was also chief stoker in charge of boiling the kerosene tins of water for cups of tea at supper time.

The monthly dances, too, were always popular. Candle wax, boracic & bran were spread on the floor to make it smooth for dancing. Dances of the day were the Waltz, Foxtrot, Schottische (polka). Prizes, usually a box of chocolates, were won by lucky couples in the Monte Carlo, Spot & Barn Dances. Jack Bower was, by reputation, a fantastic dancer, never short of partners. George Davis, an excellent dancer himself, gave dancing classes once a month. At these functions gents paid a shilling & ladies brought a plate of "goodies". Fred Johnson always played the piano. A gifted pianist, self taught, he could play any tune after hearing a few bars hummed. His son, Wilf, along with Gwen, Ivy & Evelyn Bell, often sang along. Mrs Cox would always pester Wilf to sing "Sweet Maree" her particularly favourite song.

The East Hills Progress Associations' Annual Bazaar was another eagerly-awaited event. Exhibits of jams, pickles, vegetables, flowers & needlework & other handicrafts would be displayed & money prizes awarded for the best entry in each category. After the judging the entries would be sold.

One year, Clarrie Pickering an amateur comedian, in an attempt to brighten up the aftern-on, offered 5/- prizes for the best recitation or song. Prizewinners were Wilf Johnson, for his rendition of "The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck", Gwen & Evelyn Bell for "Please Give Me a Penny, Sir" & "Jesus wants me for a Sunbeam", & Mabel Coleman (Lambeth Street) for "Whispering Hope".

On New Years Eve the community would farewell the Old Year and welcome in the New Year at a dance in the hall. This function was a combined effort of the East Hills Progress Association & The School of Arts Committees. All the family went along & when the children were tired they would be wrapped in rugs & tucked away under seats or in corners until it was time to go home.

Most people walked to & from the School of Arts, lighting their way with hurricane lamps. Tales are told of East Hills folk wending their way home along the bush tracks, their lights flashing like strings of fireflies in the darkness.

It is easy to imagine the neighbourliness & warm companionship that flourished in that old building. The library in the School of Arts brought countless hours of happiness to the readers of the district. It became a regular routine for many folk to walk to the School of Arts library in the late afternoon to borrow a book & then walk around the back of the building to take a short cut to Jimmy Spence's store. After collecting their mail & having a yarn with Jimmy, they would stroll home to enjoy an evening reading by the mellow light of an oil lamp.

On 7th December 1977 the East Hills School of Arts was dismantled. This ramshackle old green building had played an important part in the lives of the early community of the district. It had at times been their church, meeting place, library & entertainment centre. Many forms of entertainment & recreation had been enjoyed in the early years.

The Belmore Brass Band used to visit the East Hills District once or twice a year. It gave stirring band recitals in a paddock surrounded by a post & rail fence on the corner of Tower & Lambeth Streets on a Sunday afternoon. All the residents would gather to listen to the music, then later go to someone's home for afternoon tea.

Sport played an important part in the lives of the residents. Rugby League football was played on a field where the "Old Panania" shopping centre stands today (near Picnic Point Road). Woodchopping was also a popular sport, with regular competitions held in Bell's Paddock in Tower Street.

A well-used cricket pitch was situated, in the early years, between Tompson Road & Rowland Street, Panania. Matches were frequently organised & cricket was probably the most popular sport of the time. One of the district's largest families, the White family, held the distinction of being able to hold a cricket match with the teams formed from family members only, the Whites versus the Whites.

In the evenings the families of the district enjoyed a few hours relaxing together. Mr Walter Bennett, Snr., was the proud possessor of a wind-up gramophone. He would place the gramophone on his back window & because of the vast open space of the district, the music carried to other farms. Everyone would sit outside enjoying the concert (at that time there was no radio) until Mr Bennett would call out: "Well, that's all folks, I'm turning in now". And so did everyone else in East Hills.

When the railway line was extended from Belmore to Bankstown in 1909, regular bus services were started, running between Bankstown & East Hills. The bus terminus was at the corner of Tower & Lambeth Streets. A bus trip to Bankstown was sometimes quite an adventure, especially during wet weather when seven horses were needed to pull the bus over the muddy road. Even then it often became bogged. Pioneer bus-men of the district were Mr Harland, Mr Matts & Mr Brennan.

In 1914, the Baptist Church (today the Gospel Hall) was built in Tower Street on the corner of Hinemoa Street. It was almost completely built in one day by volunteer labour. A resident of that time remembers seeing "a hive of activity all over the building" from first light to dusk. The first Pastor of the East Hills Baptist Church was the Rev. Mr Walldock.

Picnic Point Road was put through in about 1914, opening up large areas of land formerly called "Tompson's Bush" & "Weston's Bush". Picnic Point Road ran from Tompson Road towards the river & was not extended to join Tower Street until later.

As the district developed & the population grew, more services were

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established. The first bakery was opened in Weston Street, by Mr Sanfoss. Mr O'Neill, a baker from Bankstown, delivered bread daily for many years to the East Hills district. Most of the houses were set well back from the roads, so wooden boxes were nailed to the front gate post, and the delivery men left their goods in these to save the extra travel to the homes.

As well as bread, milk was delivered from Watson's Dairy: a billy was left out, and the milk measured from a large milk churn into the billy can. Freshly-killed meat ("hot" meat as it was called) was delivered from Hickey's Butchery in Bankstown. Only enough meat for one or two days would be bought, as there was no refrigeration. "Drip Safes" or "Coolgardie Safes" were used to keep perishable food cool. A "meat safe", which was made by covering a wire frame with mosquito netting, was used to keep the always-present flies off the meat. Flies were really a problem in those days, before homes were fitted with insect screens. Some plants were thought to repel them and bunches of mint, bracken fern or butcher's plant (a plant with large green leaves) were hung in the kitchen.

There were other pests encountered, maybe not as frequently as the flies and mosquitoes, but remembered vividly for years. Snakes sometimes came out of the bush & ventured close to homes, where they became a danger to small children. Something then had to be done to remove the cause of concern. When a snake was known to be about, a saucer of milk would be placed near where the snake was last seen & a watch would be kept. More often than not, the snake came out when Dad was out in the paddock working & Mum was alone. One snake showed itself at such a time, finished up in many small pieces. Mum chopped the snake in half with an axe & as the two pieces kept wriggling she kept chopping, until she was certain it was well & truly dead!! Occasionally, if Mum was lucky, she may have been saved from having to deal with an unwanted "creepy crawly" by the timely arrival of one of the regular "hawkers", who called on homes in the district from time to time, to sell their goods.

The "Clothes Prop Man", with his cart loaded with clothes props, the "Bottle'Oh" who paid about one penny a bottle, & the "Rag, Bag and Bone Man", were colourful characters of these early times.

By 1916, Jimmy Spence, who had been in charge of the East Hills P.O. for almost 22 years, decided to retire. Mrs Linda Fingleton took the responsibility of the P.O. in February 1916. She had a room built close to the road on her property in Weston Street (near the present Panania Railway traffic overpass) from where she ran the P.O.

A water supply was brought to the East Hills district after a long dry spell when most tanks, wells & dams were almost dry. Farmers were concerned for their crops & livestock & conservation of water was of prime importance. Mrs Johnson, Snr., used to pack her washing into a wheelbarrow & take it to Little Salt Pan Creek. There she would boil up the wash in kerosene tins over an open fire,

then hang the clothes over the bushes to dry. While it sounds like a lot of hard work, one of Mrs Johnson's children remembers those days as being "like a picnic day beside the creek". When the Water Board became aware of the difficulties the people were experiencing, they agreed to provide a water supply if Bankstown Council took responsibility for all expenses. Wooden water pipes carried water as far as Tower Street with stand pipes situated in convenient places for people to collect water in buckets or barrels. One stand pipe was in the front garden of the Coleman Cottage in Tower Street, directly opposite Lambeth Street. Mrs Coleman kept the key to the stand pipe. Though the water was free, the pipe was kept locked to prevent accidental wastage.

One early local paper was "The Alert", which served Marrickville, Canterbury & Bankstown. In 1920 a competition was held to find a name for a proposed new local newspaper for the Bankstown Municipality. The winner of the competition was a young office girl, whose suggestion "The Torch" lights the way, was accepted as a very fitting name. The Torch today (1979) has a circulation of 71,500 copies weekly. No doubt "The Torch" reported the severe bush fires which regularly threatened the East Hills District. "Black Friday the 13th" in 1920, when the temperature rose to 113° is still remembered vividly by residents of that time. A bushfire started at Campbelltown & travelled through the tops of the trees at unbelievable speed towards East Hills. Valued possessions were tied on a rope & lowered down the well for safe keeping. The teachers at the East Hills School (present Revesby Public School) took the children to shelter under the bridge over Rileys Creek (near the present Revesby Police Station), where they stayed in the water safe from the flames. The fire jumped the Georges River at Rocky Reach & raged through the bush, eventually burning out at the George Hotel, Belmore. Residents fought the flames with wet bags and green branches & by forming "bucket brigades". Miraculously only two homes were destroyed in East Hills, the Saxburg's & Hibbards. Both homes were rebuilt by voluntary labour.

Mr Hibbard was a favourite with the children of the district because he was the "Ice Cream Man". He started his ice cream run on a pushbike, with a box holding a wooden ice cream churn tied to it. The ice cream was not the firm frozen type enjoyed today, it was a soft confection kept cold in ice.

In 1922 a produce store of "Hay & Corn Store" was opened in Tower Street (just opposite Rodgers Avenue). Prior to this all produce, stock feed etc., was brought to the district by horse & dray. The produce store is still in existence today.

Another building erected at about the same time and still standing is Mr & Mrs Waddington's charming home in Ferndale Rd, Revesby. Mr Waddington built the house himself from sandstone blocks cut from near a small creek on his property. He carried the stone in a small home-made horse-drawn cart.

Electricity, "that new fangled thing", according to Miss Neville, was

connected to some homes in the East Hills district by 1925. Many older folk treated it with suspicion: "You know, if that globe broke in the night, the electricity could leak out & kill you while you slept". Of course, electricity was soon connected to most homes & even though the current was weak to start with, it was a vast improvement on the oil lamps and candles which previously provided all household lighting.

The next step was radio. Families gathered around the wireless set, listening to the news, music, plays & later, serials. Mr Waddington's mother had the last word on what would happen when people accepted the "modern contraption", when she announced: "The people of this world are getting too clever for their own good. God will give the world a kick & tell it to start over again."

In 1927, a second Congregational Church was built in the district, in Eddie Avenue near Tower Street. Before this, the Rev. Hope Hume rode his pony to distant homes making visitations. The Rev. H.C.Hunt also made visits. However, he travelled around the district in his sulky or rode a bicycle.

In 1928 Mr Arthur Smith built a shop close to the present East Hills Park. The shop was a mixed general store & refreshment room. At first the shop was only opened on weekends to cater for picnic groups. Later, nearby residents asked him to open the shop during the week. Mr Smith was Mayor of Bankstown for two terms of office.

Another well-remembered alderman of Bankstown was Mr Stevens who, when campaigning for re-election, rode his pushbike through the streets of the district, wearing a placard on his back as a means of publicising his policies.

In 1929, Mr Frederick R J Quessy, built a brick shop & dwelling on the corner of Tower & Malvern Street. The shop became a butcher's shop & the East Hills P.O. moved from Mrs Gibson's cottage to a side room in the butcher's shop.

On 21st December 1931, the first train steamed along the newly completed stretch of railway line from Kingsgrove to East Hills. It was a memorable day, which not only saw the first trains, but also the birth of a new suburb, Panania. The constructional name of the station situated between Revesby & the terminus of the Tempe - East Hills line was "Nioka", an aboriginal word meaning "green hill". It was some years before "Panania" an aboriginal word meaning "the sun rising in the east & shining on the hills" was accepted favourably by the residents of the district. Early rail services consisted of a steam train morning & evening, with rail motors during the day.

The railway brought many changes to the district. For people employed in the city, travelling time was shortened & more convenient. Also produce could be sent to market by rail.

The railway embankment & line divided the district with a physical barrier. Where once folk could walk or ride across paddocks or along tracks, the railway line blocked their way. Children soon found a new game, sliding down the railway embankment on a piece of old sheet iron. It was almost as much fun as waving to the train driver.

The Great Depression of the 1930's was felt around the world. It appeared that the halcyon days were over, as the folk west of the River Road, felt the effects of the times. The people who lived here were probably, in most cases, in a better position to cope with the problems of the time than people living in the suburban area of the city. Even though there was no market for the farmer's produce, they could grow food for their own use.

As the depression deepened a large "shanty town" sprang up on vacant land within the district, where people, evicted from their homes, erected tents or shacks in which to live. Many of these temporary dwellings were near the river, especially around Lambeth and East Hills Parks. The people fished or hunted rabbits (which were in plague proportions where East Hills shopping centre is today) to supplement their meagre unemployment benefits. Sections of the former market gardens, orchards & poultry farms were sold for housing blocks.

In November 1937, after much agitation by parents & progress associations, the Education Department rented the building in Elliott Street (near East Hills) which had previously been Mr Stevens' Dance Pavillion, to be used as a temporary school. The "East Hills Public School" remained in these temporary premises for many years. This school, set in its picturesque bushland setting overlooking the George's River, was the first step in the formation of the present Panania Public School.

The building of the George's River Feeder Road began late in 1938, to provide unemployment relief work for men still fighting the effects of the depression years.

This road was later re-named Henry Lawson Drive.

On 17th December 1939, residents west of the River Road, watched with great interest as the first electric train travelled along the newly electrified section of the Tempe-East Hills Line between Kingsgrove & East Hills.

The years following the end of the Second World War heralded the biggest building boom the East Hills district has ever known, completely changing the character of the once-rural district. There is very little land available for home sites today in the area west of the River ROAD. The seclusion & isolation of the bushland setting, which in earlier days made the district unattractive to settlers and the land difficult to sell, is today a highly sought-after attribute.
