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ROCKDALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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December 1989

Dear Friend and Member

Thank you for your support throughout the year.
Have a Happy and Safe Christmas.

The December meeting will be held as follows:

Date Friday, 15th December 1989 at 8 p.m.

Place Council Chamber, Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale

Business Presentation of Fellowships of the St George Historical Society to inaugural recipients Ald. Ron Rathbone O.A.M. and Mrs Eileen Eardley.

Guest Speaker

Peter Sage will entertain us with his slides.

Supper Roster

Members please bring a plate (preferably with a "Christmas flavour") and something to drink.

Social Activities Tour of Master Touch Music Factory

This is an outing you must not miss! Master Touch manufactures rolls for that most nostalgic instrument - the pianola. We will be given a guided tour of the factory and see how the rolls are produced. Our outing will also include a visit to Hugh Jones' Harpsichord workshop, where this charming predecessor of the modern piano is still produced today.

Bring a picnic lunch and round off the day with a relaxing afternoon in historic Petersham Park.

Date Saturday, 17th February 1990 at 10.30 a.m.

Location 96 Crystal Street, Petersham Cost \$3.00

Please contact me to make a booking.

Bernard Sharah
599-1971 (after 5.30 p.m.)

AN APPRECIATION - MRS EILEEN EARDLEY --

From its earliest days, synonymous with the name of the St. George Historical Society, has been that of the Eardley family of Arncliffe.

Our Society was only one month old when the late Gifford Eardley, together with his wife Eileen, joined not merely as members, but as active participants.

A gifted artist, especially pencil drawings, and writer, Gifford immediately set about contributing to the Society's Newsletters and at the same time prepared material for those well-known booklets dealing with our district and for which there is still a ready market.

He was President of the Society for twelve months and his untimely death in December 1974 was a great loss to us all.

Eileen was just as involved in the affairs of the Society, firstly, by helping to despatch the monthly Bulletin and then as Secretary. In this capacity she served for no less than thirteen years, carrying out the onerous administrative tasks at a time when the membership numbered 240, and attendance at the meetings was never less than 80 people.

She carried out these duties for five Presidents - D. H. Sinclair, J Stead, R. Lee, L. Abigail and A. Ellis.

On relinquishing the position of Secretary, Eileen continued to prepare and send out the Bulletin, performing this task for twenty years. Only recently was this task handed over to others.

All members of the Society would like to express their gratitude to Eileen Eardley for the tremendous contribution she has made over many years. All wish her well in the future.

STATUS OF FELLOW OF THE SOCIETY.

In order to show appreciation to members of the Society who have performed outstanding services, it was decided at the September meeting, to create the position of Fellow.

It is pleasing to report that the first two recipients of this honour are - Eileen Eardley and fellow-member Ron Rathbone.

November 1989.

- D. H. Sinclair
Senior Vice-President.

SIR JOSEPH HECTOR McNEILL CARRUTHERS K.C.M.G. M.A. LL.D.

M.L.A. Canterbury 1887-1894; M.L.A. St. George 1894-1908
M.L.C. 1908-1932. Premier of N.S.W. 1904-1907.

by Alderman R. W. Rathbone

Joseph Hector Carruthers was born on 21st December 1857 at Kiama N.S.W. one of nine children of John Carruthers, a prosperous Scottish migrant farmer and his wife, Charlotte Prince. He was educated at William Street and Fort Street Schools in Sydney, Metcalf's School in Goulburn and the University of Sydney from which he graduated with his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1876 and his Masters in 1878. He was articled to A. H. McCulloch and admitted as a solicitor in June 1879. In December the same year, at the age of 21, he married Louise Marion Roberts in St. James's Church, King Street. They settled first in Ocean Street, Woollahra and then at Kogarah, later moving to Russell Avenue, Sans Souci.

Although slight of stature and frequently dogged by ill-health, he was an enthusiastic tennis player and represented the University at both football and cricket. It is the game of lawn bowls, however, for which he is best remembered and which he is credited with introducing into the St. George district.

He soon became involved in land speculation as a sideline to his conveyancing duties and made considerable sums of money from the land sales which followed the opening of the Illawarra Railway Line in October 1884. This he invested in grazing properties in the Central West and Monaro Regions. He was an active member of the Kogarah Progress Association, Patron of the movement working for the incorporation of Kogarah as a Municipality and Honorary Solicitor to the committee seeking the establishment of a public hospital in the area.

He first became interested in politics while still at the University when he worked for the return of the liberal Dr. Arthur Renwick for the University seat in the N.S.W. Parliament against conservative protectionist, Edmund Barton and in February 1887, was approached to stand as a Free Trade candidate for the four-member constituency of Canterbury in succession to William Judd of "Athelstane", Arncliffe who had decided not to seek re-election. This seat covered the whole of southern Sydney from Watson's Bay to Liverpool.

Despite his lack of political experience, he proved to be an energetic and capable campaigner and topped the poll ahead of retiring member, William Henson, book publisher Alexander Hutchinson and race horse owner William Lovel Davis.

Of Canterbury's four representatives Carruthers was soon marked out for ministerial preferment. A strong supporter of Sir Henry Parkes, he used his maiden speech to make a plea for the building of a tramway from Kogarah to Sans Souci and in November 1887, piloted through the House the Bill to change the name of the Municipality of West Botany to Rockdale. The same month saw him pressing for a protective fence for Arncliffe School where the cutting down of Cobblers Pinch at the entrance gates had made conditions extremely hazardous. The following year he demanded completion of the

Western Outfall Sewer which at that stage was discharging into Cook's River and acquisition of land at Kurnell for a public reserve. He was, in short, a most active and effective local member and no subject was too trivial to engage his attention. Throughout 1888 he did not miss a single sitting of the House but it was his well reasoned advocacy of Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration to settle trades union and labor disputes and for the provision of financial endowments to local government authorities which won him widespread notice and support.

The Parkes Ministry lasted until January 1889 when a revolt of his own supporters caused Parkes's resignation and new elections. Carruthers again led the Free Trade team in Canterbury where his personal popularity ensured them the easiest of victories. When Parkes reformed his Ministry after the election, Joseph Hector Carruthers was named Minister for Public Instruction.

This was a particularly difficult portfolio because the full effect of Parkes's Public Instruction Act of 1880 was only then beginning to be felt and existing school facilities were being strained to breaking point. Those schools which did exist were hopelessly overcrowded and new schools were needed in many rapidly expanding districts. There was a serious shortage of properly trained teachers and few facilities for secondary and tertiary education. This was a challenge that was to prove no match for Carruthers. Although, perhaps, the most harrassed and closely questioned member of the Ministry, his great tolerance, patience, courtesy and understanding together with an acute intellect, unflagging industry and economical administration made him by far the most popular, approachable and respected member of the Government. During those years new schools were built at Kogarah and Hurstville and a school established at Hurstville West (Mortdale), the first mentioned being considered the finest educational building of its day. Moves were also made to establish a Teachers Training College but his most lasting monument was the establishment of our present system of technical education and the building of the Ultimo Technical College in 1891. Carruthers was also responsible for starting the School Penny Banking system and endowing the Women's College within the University of Sydney.

The early 1890's were, however, completely overshadowed by the Great Maritime Strike which brought N.S.W. to a standstill, disruption to industry and commerce and misery in many homes. After nearly twelve months of riots, strikes, lockouts and privation, the strike collapsed and the maritime unions were crushed. It was out of this strike that the Australian Labor Party was born and when the next State Election fell due in June 1891, one of the 45 seats in which the new Party ran candidates was Canterbury. Although a number of prominent St. George families which had previously supported Carruthers and the Free Trade Party switched their allegiances to Labor, Carruthers again topped the poll by thousands. But 36 Labor candidates were successful and in the new Parliament they held the balance of power. After a short flirtation with Parkes they switched their support to Protectionist Opposition Leader, Sir George Dibbs. This caused the resignation of the Parkes Ministry. Carruthers then moved into opposition where, in true character, anything he had to say was fair and helpful to the man who had succeeded him.

The next two years were, unfortunately, to prove very difficult for

him. He suffered one of his most serious bouts of ill-health and his marriage ran into difficulties when his wife became an alcoholic. This resulted in an undefended divorce suit in 1895 when Carruthers was granted custody of their daughter. Throughout 1892 and 1893 his impeccable attendance record suffered and the only time he received a mention in the press was in June 1893 when, in an impassioned and thoroughly out of character speech, he accused the Premier, Sir George Dibbs, of deliberately withholding vital information which the police needed for the prosecution of a man named McNamara whose boiling down works at Rockdale were creating a public nuisance.

Just before the 1894 election fell due the Government abolished the old multi-member electorates and created in their place 125 single member constituencies. One of the new electorates was called St. George and embraced the three municipalities of Rockdale, Hurstville and Kogarah. Although there had been some speculation that, because of the state of his health and his marital problems, Carruthers might possibly retire from politics, the calling of the election seemed to give him new heart. George Houston Reid had replaced Parkes as leader of the Free Trade Party and with the tide flowing strongly in his favour, fought an inspired campaign. Carruthers was his chief lieutenant. The result in St. George was such a foregone conclusion that Carruthers spent the greater part of the campaign speaking in other electorates where he was in great demand. One of the issues of the election was abolition of the Legislative Council and it was during this campaign that he made his now famous retort that "Anyone who felt the need for two chambers would do well to buy a kerosene tin". The result was a Free Trade landslide, Carruthers polling more than seventy percent of the votes cast in St. George. After the declaration of the poll from the steps of the Rockdale Town Hall he was carried shoulder high along the main street.

When Reid formed his Ministry, Carruthers was appointed Secretary for Lands. Like Public Instruction a decade before, this portfolio had been plagued by controversy but his penchant for reform, investment experience and legal expertise made him the ideal choice for the office. His proposals for closer settlement of rural holdings were considered to be a master stroke. The life of this Parliament, however, was dominated by the push for Federation of the six Australian colonies. This movement had begun as early as 1853 but State rivalries had ensured that little progress was made towards it. French and German colonial expansion in the Pacific in the 1880's and a critical report in 1887 on Australia's total inability to defend itself in the event of a hostile attack gave the matter more urgency and from the time of Parkes's memorable speech on 24th October 1889 at Tenterfield, the move towards Federation gathered momentum.

Reid had little enthusiasm for Federation for, although he genuinely believed in the linking of the six Australian colonies, he realized it could only be achieved at the sacrifice of his beloved doctrine of Free Trade. Free Trade was the means of raising revenue by low duties on consumer goods and a graduated system of personal income tax. The opposing doctrine of Protectionism was one of little or no personal income tax but high duties on consumer goods. This was practised by the five other Australian States. Carruthers was even less enthusiastic for, as an ardent States Righter, he could see the capital of the new Commonwealth of Australia being established in Melbourne - then Australia's largest

city and Victoria dominating the new Federation. When the first Referendum was held in 1897 to approve the Federal Constitution, Reid and Carruthers refused to instruct their supporters which way to vote and as a result, most Free Trade voters abstained. The affirmative vote failed to reach the minimum figure of 50,000 required under the enabling legislation. In July 1898, Parliament having run its three year course, new elections were held and Carruthers, because of his equivocation on the issue of Federation, found himself strongly challenged in St. George by an enthusiastic Federalist, Colonel George Walker Waddell, Chief Inspector of the Australian Joint Stock Bank and Commanding Officer of the Third Regiment, N.S.W. Volunteer Infantry. Although both Reid and Carruthers were returned their majorities were greatly reduced, the Government lost ground and it was obvious that despite the fact that the voters were satisfied with the administration of Reid and Carruthers, they also wanted Federation. A second Plebiscite was held in June 1899 and this time the Yes vote reached the required figure.

Reid continued on as Premier and Carruthers as his Minister for Lands where his never failing courtesy, firmness and fairness enabled him to resist the pressures from interested groups without giving offence to anyone but above all else he remained the local member extra-ordinary. His remarriage in January 1898 to Alice Burnett of Bexley, whose father was the Superintendent of Mails, only added to his immense popularity. In April 1899, Reid reconstructed his Ministry and Carruthers was promoted to the portfolio of Colonial Treasurer, the second most senior ranking position in the Cabinet after Reid himself but he was only to hold this office until September when the Labor members combined with Opposition leader, Sir William Lyne, to bring down the Government.

The year 1900, saw him devoting more and more time to his growing family and entertaining extensively at his new home, "Ellesmere" in Vista Street, Sans Souci. He was also able to concentrate on his flourishing legal practice and although he was still a persistent questioner, he spoke only briefly in the House.

The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act received Royal Assent on September 17th 1900, one of the last acts of the dying Queen Victoria and Australia was officially declared a Nation on January 1st 1901. The first election for the Federal Parliament was set down for 29th and 30th March and a great scramble ensued to contest the new Federal electorates. The whole of the St. George district along with Sutherland, Canterbury, Marrickville and Newtown was located in the Federal Electorate of Lang and it was assumed that Carruthers would be the Free Trade candidate for this seat but Carruthers had other ideas and there was quite a little pique expressed locally when he stated flatly that he had no interest in Federal politics and had no intention of deserting St. George for the rarified atmosphere of the Federal Parliament. Premier Lyne was elected for Hume and Opposition leader Reid for East Sydney. This meant both major Parties in N.S.W. were left leaderless. John See succeeded Lyne as Premier and proposed a composite government consisting of representatives of all three Parties. This was flatly rejected by the other two.

When the Free Trade Party came to replace Reid, Carruthers appeared to be the logical choice but to everyone's surprise it preferred the ailing Charles Alfred Lee, Member for Tenterfield who had served briefly as

Reid's Minister for Justice and Secretary for Public Works. Carruthers had favoured a composite government and had badly misjudged the feeling of his own Party on the matter. He was plainly disappointed and when State Elections were set down for July 1901, he seemed to have little heart for the fight. The Free Trade Party or as it had now become, the Liberal Party, began to fear that Carruthers was running dead and St. George could well be lost to the Labor Party. Despite his reluctance to campaign and a bitterly cold wet winter's day, his supporters turned out in sufficient numbers to give him a comfortable win.

See continued to lead a Protectionist (now called Progressive) administration backed by Labor and in the months that followed, we see Carruthers in an entirely different role. Aggrieved at having been passed over for the leadership of his Party, he voted against his own leader on the question of reducing the size of the N.S.W. Parliament and featured in an ugly affray with Government members when the question of extending the franchise to women came before the House. Carruthers claimed women had not asked for the vote and their influence was more paramount in the home. In any case, he maintained, it would be necessary to provide separate polling places for women which would be both costly and inconvenient. Works Minister E. W. O'Sullivan described Carruthers' speech as "ingenuous and leavened with crystallised conservatism" whilst Labor leader McGowen claimed he had no backbone and the barbed tongued John Norton, accused him of being the greatest confuser of issues of all time.

to be continued.