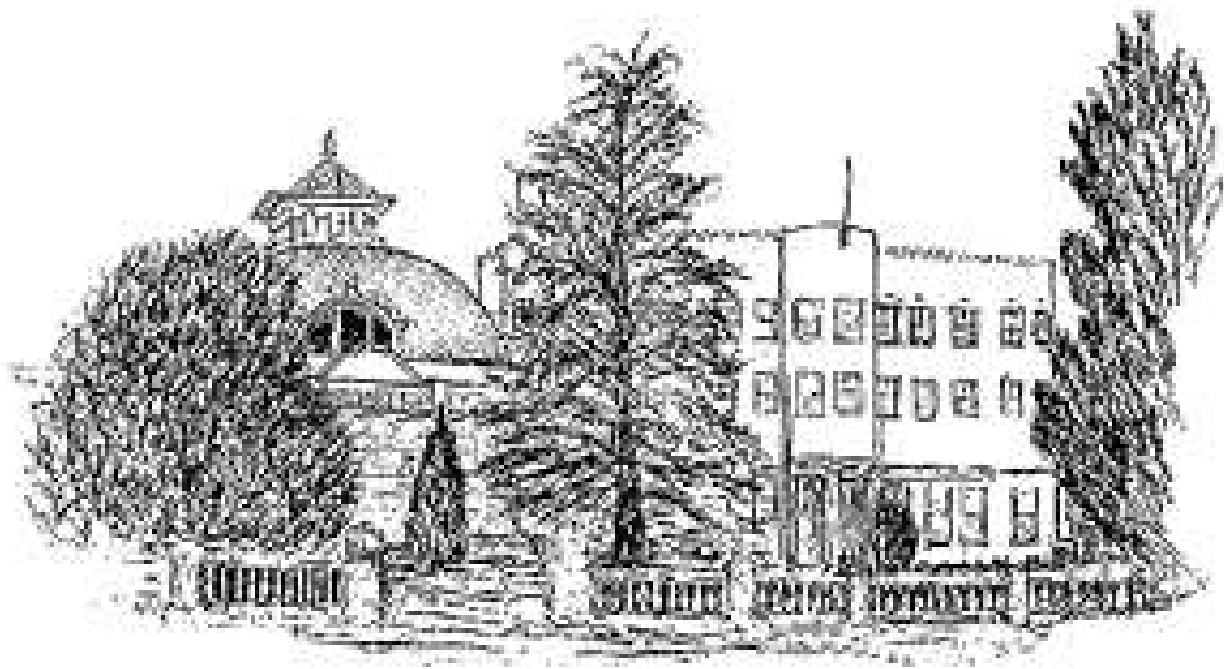


St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2004 EDITION

MERRY XMAS



*Mecure Grand Hotel Hydro Majestic
Celebrates its 100th Birthday*

HAPPY NEW YEAR

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Meetings are held 2:00 PM the third Saturday of the month (except January) in the Meeting Room 1st Floor, Rockdale Town Hall, Princes Highway, Rockdale. Members, please bring a plate. Visitors are welcome.

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER EVENTS AGENDA

Nov 20th

Peter Sage

At this meeting we Peter Sage will be coming to give us a talk and slideshow on The Tea and Sugar Train to Western Australia – Slow supply train across the Nullarbor to Western Australia that was undertaken 40 years ago

Dec 12th

Christmas Gathering at Lydham Hall. 12:00pm – 4:00pm.

Would everybody please bring a plate of sandwiches, cake, etc.

The Light Horse Brigade

In the year 2004 it is 90 years since The Great War. This year we honour Their Light Horse Brigade and their performance during War time. During The Boer War, 18,500 horses served.

A parade was held on July 4th, 2004 and was honoured by 120 horses, specially trained by The Mounted Police. Also included was a Light Horse Contingent and three Cavalry. They were all dressed in 1914 uniforms. The Penfolds' Wagon and one other was also used in the parade.

Fifty other associations were also included on the day and the parade took in the Macquarie Street and College Street in Sydney City.

At the end of the parade a Plaque was uncovered in honour of The Light Horse Brigade.

In our recent news broadcasts it has been mentioned that a monument will be placed somewhere on the M6 highway in honour of The Light Horse Brigade.

Gloria Henke



A Palace in the Wilderness

Celebrating its 100th Birthday in 2004

Perhaps as early as 1901, Mark Foy, attractive retail baron, world traveler and sportsman, sold off nearly all his shares in the elegant family owned department store to finance what was to become Australia's first "Health Retreat".

He purchased a site on what was called "The Great Western Road", upon this site stood the Belgravia Hotel and a homestead belonging to the Hargrave's Family, of gold prospecting fame.

In 1868 the Railway to Mount Victoria opened, which included a modest station at what is now known as "Medlow Bath", which was later updated in 1902. It remains one of the few original stations which exist in New South Wales today.

The basic building of "The Belgravia Hotel" with extensions formed "The Hydro Majestic". Most of the construction took place in 1903, the same year that Mr. Foy successfully applied to have the name of the township changed to the more appropriate name of "Medlow Bath".

The inner workings of the resort were all thoroughly modernised and included a steam driven generator, imported from Germany. This generator produced electricity for the resort and the neighbouring township of Medlow Bath. In fact "The Hydro Majestic" had working electricity four days before the city of Sydney.

The resort also had its own water supply, steam laundry, freezing works, sewage treatment works, and a telephone system connected to The Sydney Exchange.

Mr. Foy hired Dr. George Baur, formerly of the 'shoeneck Health Spa' on "Lake Lucerne" in Switzerland, to devise and supervise a program of diets and weird and wonderful treatments.

The "Hydropathic" establishment officially opened on July 4th, 1904, during a snow storm. A group of special guests arrived by train at Penrith, where Mr. Foy had a fleet of motorcars waiting to drive them to the Hotel.

Artworks" collected from all over the world were housed in "The Gallery" several hundred feet long as shown in the photograph below. Entertainment took place in the "Casino Ballroom" (it was never used for gambling) the magnificent dome is still in place today. The dome was pre-fabricated in Chicago, USA and shipped to Australia.

The Guests strolled along the pictureway to reach the Grand Dining Room, the half barreled vault ceiling with its gilded features, is still much admired.

The Hydro Majestic attracted guests from around Australia and the world. Famous Australian Opera Singer, Dame Nellie Melba sang at the hotel a number of times, as did English Opera Singer, Dame Clara Butt and Nellie Stewart.



German munitions heiress, Bertha Krupp, made several visits to the hotel, she arrived complete with dogs and two Railway Boxcars containing her possessions and a Steinway Concert Piano which later she donated to the Hydro Majestic.

Bertha Krupp was the daughter of Friederich Krupp, and upon his death in 1902 she took over the operations of the family firm. The Main business areas of the company included the manufacture of Steel and Alloys and produced equipment for Ship Building and Mechanical Engineering.

Emperor William II personally sought an acceptable husband for young Bertha (1886-1957) eventually choosing Gustav von Bohlen und Halbach, a Prussian Diplomat. They Married on October 15th, 1906 and Gustav was authorised by the Emperor to add the name Krupp to his own, hence Gustav Krupp Bohlen und Halbach.

Gustav named a 98 ton Howitzer (cannon) in honour of his wife and called it "Big Bertha" and it was used to shell Liège and Verdun, others included the great cannon that bombarded Paris from a distance of 82 miles away.

Australia's first Prime Minister, Sir Edmund Barton, actually died at the hotel in 1920.

Other famous guests were, Sherlock Holmes" creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Julius Blau of "4711" perfume fame, and the Rajah of Pudukoota with his Australian born wife, the former Molly Fink and also the Scottish entertainer Sir Harry Lauder, of "Roamin' on the Gloamin'" and "A Wee Doech An' Doris" fame, he also entertained the troops during wartime.

Sir Harry Lauder and Dame Nellie Melbas' portraits still are displayed, amongst many others, at the Hydro Majestic.

A number of well known Foy Family friends also stayed at the hotel, including Hugh Ward, Dame Nellie Melbas' Australian manager and his son, naturalist and anthropologist, Melbourne Ward and the first Australian Swimmer to win gold at the Paris Olympic Games in 1900, Freddie Lane.

In 1922 fire destroyed "The Belgravia" and "The Gallery". Mr. Foy however, took this loss in his stride and commenced work on "The New Belgravia" which was to take 14 years to complete.

The hotel was now catering for elite families. Their daughters would be sent to "The Hydro Majestic" with chaperones, with the prospect of meeting an eligible young man.

After dinner each night, the young men would take their cigars to the lounge, and have a game of Billiards, the young ladies, accompanied by their chaperones would sit in "The Gallery" nearby and gossip, literally tearing each other apart. They would parade up and down in a different outfit each night making comments like "She wore that outfit 2 days ago" and "That colour really does not suit her". "The Gallery" affectionately became known as "Cats Alley".

In 1942 "The Hydro Majestic" was taken over by "The U.S. Defence Department" and was turned into a Hospital for American casualties from the Battles of the Coral Sea and the South Pacific.

In 1946 a new building was opened with Bedrooms on the upper floors, and a large lounge downstairs complete with a huge fireplace.

Again as recently as 2002 bushfires threatened "The Hydro Majestic" hotel and at that time it was cut off from Katoomba and Blackheath, the fire coming as near as the rear windows of the hotel. The Fire Brigade took up residence in the hotel and were treated very hospitably by the owner.

The Guests had to be kept in a close situation for their safety, so they were entertained and fed and also had their thirst adequately satisfied free of charge for 3 days.

When the fire brigade gave the all clear they were in the lounge singing songs from “The Titanic” and enjoying themselves thoroughly and appeared to be quite sorry that their imprisonment was over.

“The Hydro Majestic” has always enjoyed its reputation as a place for lovers, being sometimes called “The Honeymoon Hotel”. At one time, a sign could be seen hanging in the hotel that stated:

***“Marriages were made in heaven,
But People meet at The Hydro”***

I am sorry to say that somebody took a liking to this sign and removed it.

A Gentleman by the name of Mr. McGrath arrived at “The Hydro Majestic” with the request that he may be able to view “The Grand Ballroom”.

Mr. McGrath’s parents would leave their Dairy Farm in Bathurst on a Saturday afternoon and travel to “The Hydro Majestic” where they would dine and dance the night away, returning to Bathurst on the Sunday.

As it was his parents 50th Wedding Anniversary, he hired “The Grand Ballroom” complete with Orchestra and a table set for 2 only, to celebrate their Anniversary.

He also went to the trouble of checking the Hotel Registrar to find the date of their first booking at “The Hydro Majestic” and when he discovered this he had a copy of the entry made and framed to be presented to his parents on this special occasion.

A Tea Dance was held at “The Hydro Majestic” on Sunday afternoons and I think the phrase ***“Romancing on the Western Road”*** may have been associated with this.

In 1950 Mr. Mark Foy died, aged 86. His family, politicians, sports persons, and dignitaries attended his funeral. His many significant contributions to Australian life spanned the area of Medicine and Sport to Retailing and Tourism. Certainly he was a true Pioneer of The Australian Hospitality Industry.

Today Accor is Australia’s leading hotel company and a worldwide leader in hotels and tourism. Attentive personal service and excellence is their vision. Grand excellence has been achieved at the Mecure Grand Hotel Hydro Majestic and they will continue to offer grand service and impeccable hospitality to every guest, at any time.

Come and be part of the experience and immerse yourself in Australia’s best and well known historical hotel, the Mecure Grand Hotel Hydro Majestic, just a short hour and a half’s drive from Sydney’s CBD. All guests are welcome to attend the popular historical tour conducted daily in the hotel.

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Source: *My many thanks go to Malcolm Craig, concierge and his staff at the Mecure Grand Hotel Hydro Majestic.*

Encyclopaedia Britannica for reference to the Krupp Family.

Photos care of The Internet.

Gloria Henke

A "SIGNAL" FAILURE.

My Grandfather Salvatore Macinante left a small Italian village in 1912 with his wife and seven children, persuaded by the four sons, who had settled happily in Australia, my father at Narrandera.

Nonno died less than two years later, a lonely exile, and although I never knew him I treasure the sad letter he wrote on a country train, 13th August 1912.

- o O o -

We are in a comfortable carriage of the Sydney - Melbourne railway stopped at a Country Junction waiting for the train from Narrandera. I would like to see a town, but all I see through the window is sky.

What do these people do in their spare time?

All they do is pray for rain and they work no more than they have to.

There are three of us in a second class carriage - my son Candido, myself and an Englishman or Australian.

He at first wished to speak to me, but I could not answer him as I could not yet express myself in English.

I feel ashamed that a man like me, having taught school for thirty eight years in Italy, is now just like a junior scholar.

I find myself so far away from my Country, with people I do not understand, the different dress and, for me the awful language.

It is 3am - the train is stopped at Goulburn. There is a Prison here for the unfortunate ones sentenced to six months or more in jail.

To this place many come to try to make a fortune, but I prefer life in Old Europe.

We are traveling like this for hundreds of kilometers - then it is daylight, we are able to see things - some trees!

I would like to see an olive tree - but there are none.

Things are so far from one another, desolate shepherd's huts, but there is no sign of a human being - I cannot see a living thing.

Finally it is bright daylight and everything is much clearer.

Vast expanses of land - sometimes flat, then in small steep valleys.

Lots of arid land, and some covered with stubble - some has been sown for fodder, barley and grain.

Immense defenceless land, in which, as though lost, wander cows, oxen, horses and sheep.

We are beginning to see pairs of rabbits, some birds and parrots.

Later we arrive at the station of Cootamundra in an area uninhabited by human race.

Only timber huts a long way from each other, and always the same country, with sparse native trees and stumps.

Some groups of houses, separated by hills and valleys - Fields freshly sown - grain and barley already out of the ground. But where are the men?

Who does the work?

Some flocks of sheep already shorn, are the only pastoral pursuit, without a shadow of man to guide them and guard them.

Some hovels and huts are scattered around, fruit bearing orchards and some poor vegetable patches, which would benefit from the hand of man.

These are neglected and in an almost wild state.

The sub-soil is bared and arid starved sheep tear blades of grass out of the ground.

On arriving at one of those unusual groups of huts which are called towns, we see many wild ducks feeding on the open ground, many bags of grain wait to be loaded on the railway.

Here is Junee-Junction and we change trains.

Traveling in a northerly direction and barely outside the station was to be seen an immense endless plain, but it was the same wheat country, some ploughed fields, some where wheat had germinated.

One man is driving six horses drawing a plough.

We arrive at Coolamon - There under a great zinc covered shed is a deposit of large bags filled with wheat.

I would like to see the harvesting of these great crops of cereals and see how this land of Australia sends its grain to the Old World of Europe.

This great land with grain and more grain germinating as far as one can see.

In front is a stand of trees. Oh! I wish they were olive trees.

But it is always the same - a great deposit of wheat at Ganmain.

Around here are groups of houses of a newly developed town - Nearby is a Saw Mill supplying timber for building.

As usual there are endless fields of growing wheat - Some birds and a few poultry - Vultures circle in the distance. Given the nature of this vast territory many more species of birds should be seen, but lack of water is the reason.

This would be Heaven on Earth if there was water and the cultivation of fruit trees in this area. I speak of irrigation but it would need an inland sea of canals.

The small tanks, made of zinc, beside the houses to gather the rainwater, provide barely enough for the need of man.

Narrandera rises up in a boundless plain, Mostly uncultivated, on which exists thin and boney cattle and poor poultry - Dry and arid from the long drought this year.

Cultivation of grain here is extensive, ploughing and sowing is done by machinery pulled by up to ten horses driven by one "Yokel".

Harvesting of the grain is done by machines which do the reaping, threshing and bagging at the one time.

Hay and other fodder, which mixed with some wheat, is separated and bagged. This mixture the English call "Chaff" which is fed to horses and other animals.

Some vegetable grow by the river, and by the canals fed by rain water. Cultivated by some Chinese, who are the only ones prepared to grow garden vegetables.

A long railway line, with no branch lines, runs to the Capital, Melbourne - From Junee, which is halfway.

Distances between towns is great. Here live the "Country Blokes" - Country Pastoralists in various numbers. These towns of 300 people, and up to 3 and 4 thousand, have several hotels.

- o O o -

The original, translated from Italian, was unfinished.

Anastasia Cuddy.

Dear Members,
After being your Treasurer for several years, which I have enjoyed immensely circumstances have made me decide to resign

Thank you kindly for your support and generous donations to our Society. Unfortunately high insurance fees and other costs have drained our finances as you will see from our Annual Statement.

Best wishes to all

Dora Lenane

THE EDITORS REPORT

Another year has come and gone, and there have been a few changes this year in our Society.

The biggest being our change of meeting times which has meant that more of our members attended and we hope that more members will attend next year.

We the editors of the St. George Historical Society Inc. hope that you have a very Merry Xmas and a very Happy Healthy New Year.

