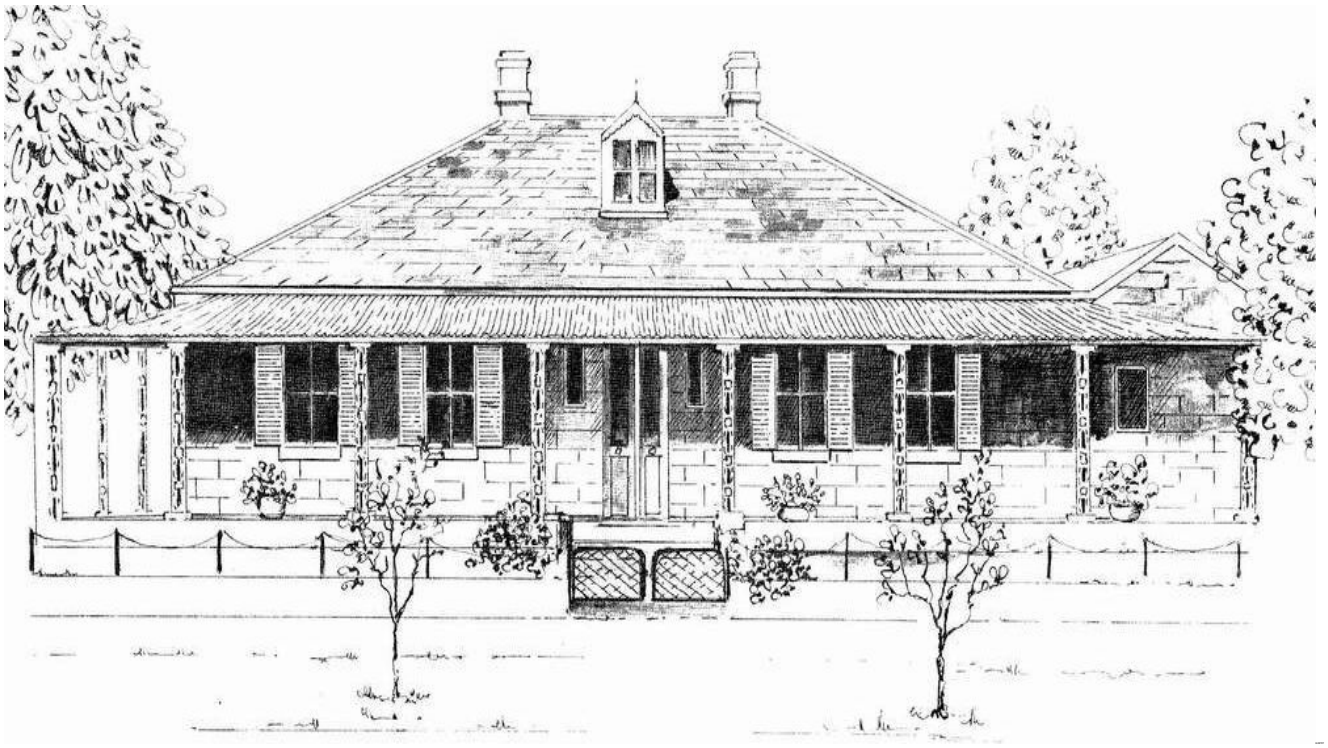
St. George Historical Society Inc. Bulletin

PROUDLY SPONSORED BY ROCKDALE CITY COUNCIL

JANUARY - JULY 2009 EDITION



PRESIDENT	Mr.	Bernard Sharah	(02) 9567 - 8989
VICE PRESIDENT	Mr.	Wesley Fairhall	(02) 9546 - 1165
SECRETARY	Miss	Laurice Bondfield	(02) 9599 - 4274
TREASURER	Mr.	Wesley Fairhall	(02) 9546 - 1165
PUBLICITY OFFICER	Mrs.	Gloria Henke	(02) 9587 - 8307
BULLETIN EDITORS	The	Henke Family	(02) 9587 - 8307
LYDHAM HALL COMMITTEE	Mrs.	Gloria Henke	(02) 9587 - 8307
	Mrs.	Joan Rankin	(02) 9567 - 8641
	Mr.	Bernard Sharah	(02) 9567 - 8989
PUBLIC OFFICER	Mr.	Robert McGarn	(02) 9588 - 1097
RESEARCH OFFICER	Mrs.	Gloria Henke	(02) 9587 - 8307
REFRESHMENTS OFFICER	Mr.	Allan Stahl	(02) 9556 - 2805
LYDHAM HALL ROSTER	Mr.	Bernard Sharah	(02) 9567 - 8989
AUDITOR	Mrs.	Joan Rankin	(02) 9567 - 8641

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.

EVENTS AGENDA

July 18th **2009 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

July 19th **CHRISTINA STEAD DAY – HISTORIC WALK**

In celebration of Christina Steads Birthday, the Society is holding a Historical Walk from "Depetto" (Macquarie Lodge) 171 Wollongong Road, Arncliffe to "Lydham Hall" 18 Lydham Avenue, Rockdale. This event will star at Depetto at 2PM and finish at Lydham Hall with an Afternoon Tea. Cost $10. for booking and enquiries please contact Mr Bernard Sharah (02) 9567-8989.

August 29th **BEXLEY SPRING FAIR**

There will be entertainment of everyone, with a selection of stalls; this included a variety of food, clothing, plants, amusements for the children.

SKERRICKS

THE RON RATHBONE LITERARY AWARD

We believe that all entries for this must be in by August 28th, 2009 and the presentation should be made some time in October. The venue for this has not yet been decided.

TEMPE HOUSE

After 7 long years Tempe House and St. Magdalene's Chapel were opened again for the public to view after extensive renovations had been done by Australand, the developer of Discovery Point site on which the properties stand.

We were sorry that little notice was given of the opening and that it occurred mid week, Tuesday and Wednesday the 7th and 8th of July.

Upon talking to those who attended, the renovations have been done very well and at great expense.

It was suggested by certain people that local history groups or interested parties could volunteer to open these buildings for viewing weekly, preferably on weekends.

MY COUNTRY

By Isobel Marion Dorothea Mackellar

(1 July 1885 – 14 January 1968)

The love of field and coppice,
Of green and shaded lanes.
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins,
Strong love of grey-blue distance
Brown streams and soft dim skies
I know but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror -
The wide brown land for me!

A stark white ring-barked forest
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon.
Green tangle of the brushes,
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchids deck the tree-tops
And ferns the warm dark soil.

Core of my heart, my country!
Her pitiless blue sky,
When sick at heart, around us,
We see the cattle die-
But then the grey clouds gather,
And we can bless again
The drumming of an army,
The steady, soaking rain.

Core of my heart, my country!
Land of the Rainbow Gold,
For flood and fire and famine,
She pays us back threefold-
Over the thirsty paddocks,
Watch, after many days,
The filmy veil of greenness
That thickens as we gaze.

An opal-hearted country,
A wilful, lavish land-
All you who have not loved her,
You will not understand-
Though earth holds many splendours,
Wherever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly.

Benjamin Boyd

THE FORGOTTEN

Recently we mourned the passing of probably Australia's richest man, the late Kerry Packer, inveterate gambler whose courage and enterprise minted him millions, wealth which he matched with generosity, mostly concealed. He survived a “close encounter” at the end of year 2000, when playing polo his heart failed; however, “on the spot” paramedics revived him and he lived to tell the tale. The tale being that he found no evidence of another life after his “death”. Hopefully, when his soul finally left his body five years later he was not only to find God there for him, but maybe meet up with a kindred spirit, Benjamin Boyd – reputed to be the wealthiest man in Australia in 1845.

A valuable booklet entitled *Benjamin Boyd in Australia 1842-1849,* written by H.P. Wellings (undated) and published by Bega News Press, “outlines the activities of a London broker in the commercial, industrial, shipping and political arenas during 1842-1849”, who gambled on being able to build a new colony for the British Empire on the South Eastern coast of New South Wales; now known as Boydtown on Twofold Bay. It is said “money makes money”, and like Mr. Packer, Boyd had access to substantial amounts. Sailing from Gravesend in September 1840 for Sydney in a splendid paddle-steamer “The Seahorse” purchased for 30 000 pounds, he at once put the vessel into service carrying cargo between Port Jackson and Port Phillip, and even to Launceston.

Before he returned to England to negotiate a land grant to develop his colony he left instructions for the construction of a wharf, shipping facilities and the sinking of several wells to be lined with brick and to be domed like the rural English style.

Perhaps we should be trying to locate them at this time of water shortage.

On returning to England, Boyd's application for a grant of land made to the British Government was by-passed to the Governor of New South Wales, eventually resulting in a large grant of pastoral land; “Boyd secured vast areas and in surprisingly speedy ways”. By 1845 he had an active interest in over half a million acres on the Monara Plateau including the Murrumbidgee headwaters and close to two million acres in the Riverina district, “grazing for one hundred and sixty thousand sheep and ten thousand cattle”. This was his beginning in the wool industry and included the building of boiling down works to produce tallow from the surplus fat of sheep. He formed the Australian Wool Company with his brother Mark, gathering staff from the three vessels on which they had journeyed here.

At the same time Boyd was floating the Royal Bank of Australia with a London Board of Directors and several well-known businessmen.

The booklet *Benjamin Boyd* shows pictures of the grand strategy where roads and houses were built, the Seahorse Inn, the ruined wool store at Boydtown, ruins of the boiling down works, a ruined church never completed at Twofold Bay and Boydtown. He was quick to realise the potential of the whaling industry, in the Sydney Record 1844 is printed: “perhaps there is no individual who has done more for the colony and in so short a time as Benjamin Boyd”.

“Scattered round the beach and under rocks are enormous bones of whales bleaching in the weather”.

The Imlay brothers from Europe set up a deep sea operation while Boyd pursued his from the beach. The beautiful Mt Imlay may have been named for the brothers, though not stated here.

“Both whaling parties included Europeans and Aboriginal crews and these had but little superiority over each other. The Aborigines were men of peculiar habit, able to row speedily and strongly in short bursts, their vision was superior to that of the Europeans.”

All that remains of the most famous whaling station in the southern hemisphere are the wells, and a few splendid mulberry trees.

The period was 1843-1848 and exports to England 1848 were listed as:
281 tuns whale oil
7 tuns whale bone.

By 1849 the whaling venture had failed due to financial strife and disloyalty among the workers.

“In order to secure labour at the cheapest rate upward of two hundred natives were brought in from the nearest Pacific Islands Janna, Lafow, Anatam and delivered to pastoral areas. However, they were quite unsuited to both the work and life inland, eventually drifting away.

Benjamin Boyd's activity in the labour problem included a proposal for time expired convicts of Tasmania be brought to New South Wales in batches at ports other than Port Jackson or Port Phillip, the plan being to introduce useful people into the colony. He also planned to bring suitable migrants from London to Twofold Bay.

Boyd was squeezed out of his control of the Bank of Australia and began to issue his own notes to cover unfinished projects everywhere, without success.

As the whole dream became a nightmare, the brilliant mind of Boyd pointed him in a new direction - California, where gold had been discovered.

“Sailing from Sydney in 1849 in his yacht “The Wanderer” he arrived at the Californian coast where he spent almost a year with varying success.”

But always at the back on his mind he cherished the idea of building another colony, possibly on a Pacific Island, many of which he examined and finally arrived at San Crystoval. At dawn on 15th October 1851 with the intention of duck-shooting, he left “The Wanderer” in the company of a native from Pohape, and was never seen again.

“Some years later whilst reports of his probable captivity by the natives of Guadaleanar were being investigated by the commander of H.M.S Herald, a skull was purchased from a native chief purporting to be that of Boyd. Subsequent investigation in Sydney Museum proved that the skull was that of a native, not European.”

The yacht “Wanderer”, in attempting to enter Port Macquarie, struck in the bar and was wrecked completely, but the truth as to Boyd's death remains unknown.

It would seem God was not prepared to give Benjamin Boyd a second chance.

Anastacia Cuddy

VALE

We are deeply saddened to report the passing of two of our long standing members.

Thelma Mary Pendlebury OAM

1929 -2008

Thelma Pendlebury was a resident of the St George area for most of her life. She was born in Narrandera in 1929 to Frieda (nee Graf) and William Sherriff. At the age of one she moved to Banksia, then Kyeemagh, where she attended Arncliffe Infants School and Rockdale Primary School. Thelma completed her Primary Education at Kingsgrove Primary School when the family moved into a new home in Unwin St, West Bexley. This was during 1940 when there were still dairies in that area and one of her responsibilities as a child was to walk to a dairy to purchase the milk for the day.

Thelma continued living in Unwin Street during her secondary education at Methodist Ladies College; now simply called MLC, Burwood. She married James Pendlebury in 1952, who was a secondary Science teacher at Lithgow High School in his first year of teaching, having met Jim when he was a Science student at Sydney University. They were married in West Bexley Methodist (now Uniting) Church, where Thelma had begun worshipping after her conversion in 1950, and their Reception was held in Victoria House, Forest Rd, Bexley.

In the years between the Leaving Certificate and her marriage, Thelma, being a woman, could not procure a job in geology in which she had a strong interest, and so commenced as a Laboratory Assistant at Green Canneries, Marrickville. She soon became Secretary to the Factory Manager, which led her to a position of Legal Secretary for a solicitor in Spring Street, Sydney.

It was during Thelma and Jim's 8 years in Lithgow that their 4 children were born. In 1960 Jim was appointed as a Chemistry Lecturer at Sydney Teachers College so the family moved back to Bexley to live. This was Thelma's home for 49 years until she died. It was in the Rockdale municipality/city that she spent 70 happy years.

Thelma was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2003 for her "outstanding long service to the community, particularly through the Bexley Uniting (formerly) Methodist Church." A further unexpected pleasure soon after was the presentation by Mayor Yvonne Bellamy to Thelma during a Rockdale Council Meeting of a large framed Mayoral Minute with Seal by way of congratulation and appreciation on behalf of the citizens of Rockdale City.

Thelma's voluntary work began immediately after her Christian conversion at twenty by accepting the challenge of being the youth leader at Redfern Methodist Mission. On moving to Lithgow in 1952, she immediately accepted youth leadership responsibilities in the Methodist Church. Youth leadership was also her initial voluntary contribution in the Bexley Methodist Church on her return in 1960. Through this position Thelma influenced a range of boys and girls who have since occupied several important positions, e.g. a family lawyer, a Federal Senator, a tertiary lecturer, school teachers and other valuable citizens.

Service to others was an integral part of her Christian faith and the Bexley Church provided her opportunities she gladly accepted:

- 20 years as a faithful Chorister followed, until her death, by 29 years as the Music Director. For many of those years the Choir performed in Aged Care Facilities and also publicly raised money for community causes.
- Treasurers in more recent years were 'thin on the ground' and so Thelma willingly served as Treasurer for her Bexley Church and also Treasurer of a State Organisation and an Australian Organisation within the Uniting Church, for a number of years.

Thelma possessed an ecumenical outlook and so for 21 years was the Bexley District Secretary of the Bible Society and for several years a co-organiser of the Annual Fete for Edward Eagar Lodge for Homeless Persons. As well as serving on the Carlton Primary School Canteen for many years she was also a helper for Rockdale Meals on Wheels.

Thelma's training in and love of music and her legal bookkeeping led to her being appointed to the Uniting Church Music Committee on which she served as Treasurer for 5 years. This same interest and skill enabled her to be appointed as honorary administrator / bookkeeper of the NSW Conservatorium Association for 9 years in which one of her responsibilities, in addition to the usual money matters, was the organisation of tours for advanced Conservatorium students to country regions, which she thoroughly enjoyed. Painting was an important way in which Thelma relaxed. She belonged to a class which met, and still meets, weekly in the Bexley Uniting church Hall. One of her paintings hangs in the Bexley RSL lounge and another in the Alan Walker College of Evangelism, Oatlands.

It may well seem that Thelma would not have time available for family and other people. This could not be further from the truth. She was a people person through and through. She loved many and was loved by many. She shunned on-line and telephone paying of accounts because of the pleasure she gained by dealing with people and building up a rewarding relationship. She loved, supported and enjoyed her large extended family which was warmly reciprocated. They were the jewels in her life.

All the service that Thelma rendered was born out of the love of God for her - and all of us - in Jesus Christ. It gave her great pleasure that the final major service she was accepted to do, after the appropriate courses were satisfactorily undertaken, was as a Chaplain at St George Hospital. It was a profound and enriching experience and thankfully accepted by most patients and their families.

Thelma, who was dying from inoperable pancreatic cancer, and her family were, and are, most appreciative of all the prayers offered on her behalf and the palliative care she received before hospitalisation and during her 3 week period in St George Hospital and her 12 days in Calvary Hospital. She died with dignity, surrounded by love, protected from excruciating pain and with family present. She is survived by her loving husband, 4 children, 12 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren.

Jim Pendlebury OAM

JEAN WAILKER FAULKNER

Jean was born on the 19th of January 1914. She was the eldest child of Alexander Belford Christison and Elsie Pearl Christison (nee Walker). Two years later her brother Alec followed and ten years after that her sister Win. Her mother was always ready to help those in need and during her childhood Jean shared their Bexley house with her cousin Herb and, for short periods, other children her mother took in.

Her father held a number of senior positions in the Post Master General's Department but his great love was music. He was instrumental in the foundation of the St George and City of Sydney Eisteddfods and other events that encouraged young people to grow their talents. He had enormous self-confidence and tackled new challenges with enthusiasm, building the same attitude in his children. He learned to ride a surfboard from Duke Kahanamoku at Freshwater and built one of the first wireless receivers in Sydney. (He was also a strong Empire Loyalist, although Jean did not inherit her father's political views.) Jean's mother was a tireless worker for the church and charities. An excellent cook, she often performed her own version of feeding the five thousand by inviting anyone who she thought might be lonely or down on their luck along to join the family for dinner.

The family initially rented a house in Queen Victoria Street Kogarah, but moved to Grey Street Kogarah. In those days the Chinese market gardens extended that far and her family were friendly with some of the gardeners with the children often visiting the gardens. Later her father bought a house in Mimosa Street Bexley, then an outer suburb of Sydney, with a block of land large enough to grow vegetables and raise chickens.

There were few houses in Bexley then and Jean often recalled going swimming with Alec and their friends in a waterhole fed by a small stream near their house. The stream had its source in a swamp in a red cedar forest (now Hurstville) and ran through Bexley down to a vineyard (now Bexley Golf Course). Near the bridge over the stream, the vineyard operated a wine bar that catered for the bullock drivers taking the cedar logs into Sydney. The whole St George district had a village atmosphere and looking back to her childhood, she believed that she had seen Australia at its best.

Her brother Alec had been a keen sailor even when young and built his first sailing skiff from mail-order plans, stitching the sails on their mother's sewing machine. He and Jean carried the finished skiff down to Kogarah Bay, walking the whole distance from Bexley. To her surprise the skiff sailed perfectly and she often recalled going sailing with Alec, which she enjoyed tremendously.

Jean attended Bexley Public School, and later Kogarah Domestic Science School, (now Kogarah High School). She had to walk to and from Mimosa Street to both schools, but if it rained she was always advised to shelter with two friends of the family who ran a confectionary shop in Bexley; she forced herself to accept the numerous lollies they offered while it rained. (Although her father was a staunch member of the Loyal Orange Order) she spent a year at St. Mary's Star of the Sea Hurstville the only school in the district to offer school age girls training in office work. She left school just as the Great Depression of the thirties started.

During the depression her family was luckier than most. Her father had a well-paid and secure job and supported the family from the garden. She often had to look for work but was able to find a variety of jobs - as a typist, managing a news agency and working for a gunsmith. She also found time for charitable work with the Presbyterian Church helping unemployed Aboriginal people from the bush settle in Redfern. She attended the Sydney Arts College at the old cell block in Darlinghurst.

She had had a couple of not-very-serious boyfriends, but at a social function she was introduced to a young local chap who played in a jazz band and rode a motorcycle. The

young fellow's name was John Davenport Faulkner and Jean announced to her family that he was the one! They were soon engaged and married in 1939.

At that time Jean was working as a typist for an exporting firm in the old Fairfax Building in Surrey Hills. She remembers that on one cold spring day she looked out the window and saw snowflakes falling. They melted as soon as they touched the street but she felt that this year had something special in store. The next day the staff of Reuters on the floor above were moving through the building telling everyone that Germany had invaded Poland and that Britain had declared war. The young men expressed their excitement at being able to go on the great adventure that their fathers had, but Jean felt only dread at the prospect of war. As a high school student she had been encouraged to undertake charity work at the old Concord Repatriation Hospital where she saw men without arms and legs, who were blind or disfigured or whose lungs had been damaged by poison gas, so she had no illusions about war.

With economic activity directed elsewhere it was harder than usual for the newlywed couple to find a house. They had purchased a cheap block of land at Herne Bay (now Riverwood) and bought shares in a home ownership scheme. Through his Masonic connections her father discovered that the scheme was fraudulent and with the aid of his brothers from his lodge was able to recover their money, sell their land and find a house going cheaply; he also organised a bank loan for two thousand pounds at two percent interest — a heavy commitment for those days.

The house was being built by a developer called Gooley who later became the first developer of Sylvania Waters. John had been keen to join the services but with flat feet and deafness he was not the military's first choice! Besides this he was a skilled machinist and needed in the armaments industry. All the same he bought a rifle, just in case the Japanese Army passed his way. The rifle proved valuable as he and his brothers had to mount guard over the house until it reached lock-up stage to prevent the neighbours stealing the plumbing fixtures.

Like many young couples the wireless provided cheap entertainment and a large console radio occupied pride of place in the living room. Their radio was also able to receive shortwave broadcasts from overseas and so during the war they volunteered to operate what was called a Listening Post A group of locals would meet on certain nights to listen to Japanese propaganda broadcasts because these often contained messages from Australian prisoners of war. If any of these came from local boys the families could be informed that they were still alive. The government used this method, to control who listened to enemy propaganda, and prevent the spreading of defeatist rumours. If the news was grim, as it often was, John would organise a singsong to cheer everyone up.

With peacetime came prosperity. A new car replaced the second-hand Chev and the backyard vegetable garden and chook run as way to a flower garden, allowing jean to indulge her passion for rose growing. In some years she could count over 400 rose blossoms. Two sons came along: John and Douglas, and this kept Jean busy looking after the house and her family and working in the Parents and Citizens associations of their schools.

The house contained a large number of books and she encouraged her sons to be enthusiastic readers using Rockdale Councils Bookmobile service and later visiting the local library. She began to take a detailed interest in Australian history, questioning the version of history taught to her generation.

Their social life revolved around dances and entertainments organised by the local Masonic Lodge and the Rockdale Scottish Association. John was Worshipful Master for a couple of years and the lodge paid for the installation of a telephone. When John stood down Jean

insisted that the phone be disconnected on the excellent grounds that if you had a phone, as she said, "people seemed to think that they could just call you up".

Summer holidays were spent at her father's weekender at Gerroa on Seven Mile Beach, but there were frequent weekend picnic trips by car, often to catch and eat yabbies caught in the Royal National Park. Jean also played tennis with neighbouring wives and attended whist parties to raise money for charity. When the home loan was paid off in 1965 a television set was bought to celebrate but the phone was not reconnected for another twelve years.

As the two boys grew older and were able to take care of themselves, John and Jean took longer trips around Australia. She never had any desire to visit other countries, with the possible exception of New Zealand, and was critical of anyone who came back from an overseas trip praising foreign things. This was also a period in which Australians became aware of the need to preserve their own heritage. Jean became a founding member of both the St George and the Rockdale Historical Societies and wrote a number of articles for their journals. She was made a life member for her work.

The Christisons had been pillars of the Presbyterian church for many generations but disagreement with the church led to the family moving to the Congregational church, first at Bexley, then at Rockdale. Jean however, grew disenchanted with organised religion believing that too many were hypocrites or else using religion for their own purposes. She retained some belief but gradually lost even that as she contemplated her own life and what history had taught her.

As the 1980s drew on age and ill health began to take their toll. John's deafness grew worse and he developed Parkinson's disease. Jean's arthritis made itself felt and she spent more of her time looking after her husband. Inevitably it all grew to be too much bringing on a heart attack, and in 1990 John had to go to a nursing home where he soon passed away. Jean tried to look after herself for a few years but after a series of falls went to “Hurstville Gardens” nursing home.

She resented being there but she was physically frail despite her mind being quite sharp. She continued to read widely on history and politics giving small talks to other residents, but otherwise not mixing. She came to rely on her television set and her telephone although her increasing deafness made her phone calls a bit like a call from the colonel of the regiment — it didn't matter if you agreed or disagreed, you had your orders.

She maintained contact with her surviving relatives and friends but she grew to outlive almost all of them. She was still able to write, however. and she produced a number of letters of complaint and correction sent to various government bodies and to the new owners of Hurstville Gardens whom she disapproved of, mostly because they were Victorians. When they decided to rebrand the home as Torino Lodge, she wrote off a detailed list of arguments against it. The owners responded by naming the home Gannon’s Gardens after a local historical figure and wrote to Jean to let her be the first to know, probably hoping that she would be pleased. Jean. However remembered Gannon as a timber merchant and later property developer who, with others, cut down the red cedars of Hurstville and built houses over the little stream where she had played.

On New Year’s Eve 2008 she had a final fall which proved fatal. Despite a very game struggle she passed away at 11:25 on the 2nd of January 2009. She will be greatly missed.

Laurice Bondfield

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

An essay in memory of John Farrell (1851-1904)

POET OF 'YOUNG AUSTRALIA

By ALAN KATEN DUNSTAN

"Radiant Land! O'er whom the Sun's first dawning
Fell brightest when God said Let there be Light;" — John Farrell

In numerous media interviews recently following the death of `Slim' Dusty, the well-known "country" singer, almost all the interviewees who commented on the singer's ability as a lyricist, unfailingly likened him to "Banjo" Paterson or Henry Lawson. And so now it seems that these two are the only Australian poets which the modern generation, raised mainly on an aggressively, anti-intellectual American culture, has ever heard.

FORGOTTEN POETS

Sadly, such ignorance is not new. Historians have unswervingly remembered only some poets and forgotten others of equal worth. Nowhere is this more true than with John Farrell. Yet in his own time Farrell was one of the country's best-known poets who, among other things, wrote nearly one hundred poems for the nascent ***Bulletin*** in the days when it was still patriotic and democratic. He also wrote the first "serious Australian story" - ever to appear in the ***Bulletin***, `One Christmas Day; in December 1884[(1)] and the first story ever serialized by that journal viz; ***Jenny - An Australian Story***, which ran from October 14 1882, till March 31, 1883.[(2)] And he did these things at a time when, as Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953), writing mainly of developments in Britain and France, warned that the 'Official Press of Capitalism' was increasing its corrosive influence by purposely manipulating or omitting facts that didn't suit them.[(3)] Farrell, however, in an attempt to warn people of the true position, wrote and edited four journals that set him firmly in the opposition `Free Press' camp, namely; ***The Lithgow Enterprise, The Democrat, The Australian Standard and The Single Tax.***

> When John Farrell - poet, journalist and social reformer - died at the age of 54 in 1904 Victor Daley wrote of him that he was 'the friend of every man worth knowing'. I am indebted to Alan Dunstan for writing this tribute to the memory of my great-grandfather on the centenary of his death. Farrell, who was born in Rosario in what is today known as Argentina, loved to hear the poet Roderic Quinn sing sorrowfully about nightingales in Greece. May his generous soul rest in peace.
>
> - Editor

And as far as this writer can tell, the Stalinist-like process of cutting certain writers, or John Farrell in particular, out of the public mind, began with the Scottish-born dramatist Louis Esson (1879-1943) who, in 1909, in a long article dealing with Australian writers,[(4)] indefensibly ignored Farrell completely. Esson in the same article, did however praise Louis Becke, Grant Hervey, Montgomery Grover, John Masefield, James Hebblewhite, Arthur Balydon and Albert Dorrington who, some fifty odd years later, all failed even to make it to the index of ***The Literature of Australia.***[(5)] That noted, the most that can be said of such a book is that it is only a poor guide. But now, knowing more, the important issue of who is "remembered" or not need not detain us.

THE POET AND POLITICS

For the people of Australia, the late 1880s and early 1890s were difficult years of high unemployment and social division. Yet up to that point, it had long been the boast of the 'cornstalks' [(6)] that they were, somewhat exaggeratedly, 'the freest people under the sun With pardonable pride they pointed to the rich landscapes, warm and sunny climate, stable democratic institutions and the widespread spirit of independence amongst the people. In glowing terms they pointed to the opportunities that the country presented to workers, as evidenced by the many instances in which men from the lower ranks in the `Old World' had, as colonists, risen in a few years to positions of affluence and power. They also compared conditions in Australia with those of their brothers overseas, and spoke of the absence of that poverty which was such a degrading feature of life in the 'mother' country.

Yet by 1893, with a full scale banking crisis plunging the country into the worst economic collapse since the 1840s depression, Farrell began to think the country had suddenly been cursed. [(7)]

A position not far from that taken a few years earlier by William H. McNamara, [8] a socialist with whom Farrell sometimes shared the political stage and who, using a phrase so heavily laden with meaning that it was almost incapable of misinterpretation, once wrote: 'This colony will be another Ireland before long. [9]

As Farrell saw things, in a land literally 'flowing with milk and honey, it was incredible that its people should be anything other than 'free and prosperous: That they were not, was due to the increasing monopolization of the land (in its widest sense, including natural resources) to a few. And anyone glancing at the figures gathered by Timothy Coghlan,[10] the government statistician, would have found the startling fact that a mere 677 individuals owned more than 20,000,000 acres, or more than one-half of the whole of the alienated lands of New South Wales. (A situation that led McNamara to argue that conditions not dissimilar to those behind the 'troubles' in Ireland or the Highland 'clearances' in Scotland, were being replicated in 'the sunny land of the property - shark and land - speculator)[11].

And since it took, theoretically, about one-million-seven-hundred-thou sand acres to make a farm one mile in width extending 3,000 miles, or from Sydney to Perth [12]. with 20,000,000 acres already in the hands of the few, it was not difficult to see why in 1890, one-third of the population were huddled within a radius of 15 miles of Sydney.[13] And whilst prodigious grants of land made to John Macarthur[14] or the Australian Agricultural Company, in the early days of settlement, might have been justified in the name of promoting development, from the mid-1850s the practice had been for big landowners to grab all the acres they could; land then being the only form of property not subject to taxation, direct or indirect, and also the one form which increased in value proportionately with public activity and expenditure.

While Farrell recognized a complex range of monetary and credit causes behind the economic decline of the late '80s, he maintained that land speculation was the basic and ever-present cause. And chose to fight speculation via land nationalization, or more specifically, by joining the 'Single Tax' movement. Single Tax being the name given to a reform proposed by the American economist, Henry George, in his book ***Progress and Poverty (***1879). George proposed: 'To abolish all taxation save that upon land values.' This idea was developed not merely as a fiscal reform, but as a method for applying a more far-reaching social reform, the aim being to establish rights in land for all men and to raise wages.

In working to achieve these ends Farrell became an advocate for Freetrade. And in recognition of his efforts, the Bulletin suggested that whatever success single taxers enjoyed in politics was [mainly] due to Farrell, whose enthusiasm compared with that of John Plumb and C. L. Garland, two Single Tax parliamentarians: “Was as ginger-pop to Mackay rum”.[15]

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

John Farrell was born on December 18, 1851, in what was then the Spanish Republic of La Plata, better known today as Argentina.[16] His family were Irish-born, and his parents, Andrew and Mary Farrell both came from well-to-do Dublin families. However, in 1847, Andrew took his wife and their three children, Andrew, Matthew and Kate, to South America where he set himself up in business; running the only chemist shop in Buenos Aires where English was spoken."

John Farrell was born in Buenos Aires in the same year that gold was discovered in Victoria. When news of the gold strikes reached the Farrell's, Andrew sold up and took his family to England in order to get a ship that would take them to the diggings. They set sail for Australia on August 14, 1852.[18]

Arriving in Melbourne four months later, Andrew, after finding a place to live, left Mary and the younger children and set off with Andrew junior, aged 10, for Ballarat. For those left behind in Melbourne, conditions were primitive and the price of food and rents were high. Medical treatment was also expensive and difficult to obtain, and there were no proper sanitary arrangements. In the circumstances it was scarcely surprising that baby John sickened and almost died.[19]

In his search for gold, after spells at Ballarat, Bendigo and Whroo (Rushworth), where he did moderately well, Andrew gave it away in the late 1850s and bought a 40-acre farm at Baringhup, on the Lodden River. John's mother, Mary, (a deeply religious woman.)[20] died in 1862, and Andrew, his father, in 1897.

John's love of books, which led to him becoming a writer, and whatever education he received, was acquired mainly through his parents, for it was not until the family had lived in Australia for eight years that the children received any formal education, and with the death of their mother, they received no further schooling beyond what their father could provide.[21] However the rich vocabulary of 'convict, bush, cockney and American slang that Farrell picked up, and would mine with profit all his life,[22] was something that began to develop in the 'green years' of his boyhood. When the Farrell boys spent days roaming the bush or `yarning' with the men working in the large sheep and cattle 'runs' near their home.

In 1870, aged nineteen, he left his father's farm and took a job as a brewer in Sandhurst (now Bendigo). Shortly thereafter, with one or two companions he set off for North Queensland, looking for gold along the Palmer River. Sadly they found no gold, but Farrell fell dangerously ill with 'Gulf fever: - a recurring illness that would plague him for the rest of his life.

Back home in Baringhup after two years away, he took up making wine, but soon returned to his first trade - brewing beer. Brewing then took him to Camperdown (Victoria), where he met Eliza Watts, who became his wife on November 16, 1876. After their marriage the young couple 'selected' a small piece of land at Major Plains, where they tried to make a living farming. But making a farm out of the wilderness with little capital, was terribly difficult and it soon became necessary for John to find other work.

Abandoning the farm, he took a job making cordial in Benalla, and from there to a brewery in Melbourne; and in 1878, to a brewery in Albury, where three of Farrell's six daughters were born.[23] In 1883, with money borrowed from two brothers, Tom and Frank Gulson, the three men left for Goulburn where, in partnership, they started their own brewery. And whilst it was in Camperdown that the first of Farrell's verses were published, it was in Goulburn that he really began to get noticed, when he penned more than thirty-eight poems for ***The Bulletin.***[24]

In 1884, with the Goulburn brewery doing well, Farrell moved to Queanbeyan to open another, and it was in Queanbeyan that two of his three sons were born: Walter (who died a month after his birth in July 1885) and Victor Daley John (1886), who was named after Farrell's close friend Victor Daley, the Irish-born poet who was then living as an itinerant, taking any work he could get.

WRITING AND WORKING FOR THE SINGLE TAX

Other events also stand out around this time. First, Farrell found George's book, ***Progress and Poverty***, which came to him like 'a wonderful revelation, and second; with the encouragement of William Bede Dailey, a selection of his best poems were published under the title of ***How He Died and Other Poems.***

The book was well-received in the ***Sydney Morning Herald*** and in reviews in the ***Brisbane Courier*** and ***Freeman's Journal*** by J. Brunton Stephens. A copy, too, went to Alfred Lord Tennyson, at `Freshwater' on the Isle of Wight, who also praised the work.

Farrell's next big move came in 1887, when he moved his family to the mining town of Lithgow and purchased a newspaper there that he called the ***Lithgow Enterprise***. But with poor management skills, and a natural ***penchant*** for ignoring small questions of policy or local interest, Farrell was soon forced to close. In the meantime however, he'd become friendly with a young Henry Lawson, and was, according to Henry, the first editor to send him a cheque. Lawson later wrote: [Farrell] 'the living poet hero of my unhappy boyhood became the good strengthening and comforting friend of later, and not brighter, years... I owed him much in many ways.[25]

He left Lithgow for Sydney in 1889 to edit a newspaper that he called ***The Australian Standard*** after Henry George's newspaper in New York.[26] At the ***Standard*** J. E. Anderton, an ex-associate of McNamara, intercepted incoming cheques etc.,27 to the extent that Farrell was again forced to shut up shop. Before closing, however, the Standard announced the forthcoming lecture tour of New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia by Henry George.

Subsequently, in early 1890, he joined the staff of the ***Daily Telegraph*** as a leader writer and editor; he also accompanied Henry and Mrs. Annie George (who'd been born in Sydney), on his barnstorming three-months tour, writing as he went dozens of reports for various newspapers across the country.

In the months leading up to George's visit, there'd been a series of explanatory articles, written by Farrell entitled `The Philosophy of the Single Tax; and notably, in 1893, a series for the ***Brisbane Worker*** entitled 'For Those Who Remain, wherein Farrell set forth his objections to William Lane's expedition to 'New Australia: Later, in January 1899, as a long-term supporter of 'Home Rule' for Ireland, he journeyed to Tasmania - principally to visit the home of John Mitchel, author of '***The Jail Journal***' an exile of `1848: A resultant series of fine articles on Mitchel, by Farrell, appeared in the ***Telegraph*** during February and March, 1899.

Among his best poems were `Australia; which appeared as an introduction to the ***Picturesque Atlas*** in 1888, and 'Ave Imperatrix' (Victor Daley's favourite), which was first printed in the ***Daily Telegraph*** in 1897. Another notable achievement, amongst a swag full, was `No; a poem written against the authorities who wanted to re-settle one of the murderers in the infamous 'Phoenix Park Murders' (Dublin) in Australia. At this point, may this writer suggest that Farrell's poem reflected the views of most Australians, and that rarely have such views been put more eloquently.

Sadly, Farrell died too young, of Bright's disease in January, 1904. And among the many tributes from the host of friends he had helped along the way, the politicians George Black, William Hughes,

William Mika, Sir William Elliot Johnson and James Ashton et al, and the poets, Edward Dyson, Edwin Brady, William Goodge, as well as Paterson and Lawson — we leave the last words to George Essex Evans who, in a few lines touched the core of the essential Farrell in the lines chiselled on the grey marble slab that sits over his friend's grave:

> ‘Sleep heart of gold, `twas not in vain
> You loved the struggling and the poor...
> The lust of wealth, the pride of place,
> Were not a light to guide your feet,
> But larger hopes and wider space,
> For heart to beat.’

Requiescat In Pace.

1. Paul Stenhouse, M.S.C.. PhD, 'Pegasus Impounded, The Life and Times of John Farrell, Poet, Journalist, Social Reformer Kensington, 1986, p.29, hereafter referred to as Pegasus
2. lbidem p.81.
3. Hilaire Bello, The Free Press, Norfolk, V, IHS Press, 2002, p.56.
4. Louis Esson, Australian Literature: Australia To-Day, n.p., December 1, 1909, p.p. 57- 61.
5. Geoffrey Dutton (ed.), The Literature of Australia, Melbourne, Pelican, 1964.
6. 'Cornstalks: the name given in the 1880s and 1890s to those born in Australia. In earlier times locals were referred to as 'currency' lads or lasses.
7. John Farrell, 'The Curse of Australia; The Single Tax, Sydney, September 20, 1893
8. William H. McNamara, first secretary of the Australian Socialist League and father-in-law to both the poet Henry Lawson and Jack Lang, sometime premier of New South Wales.
9. William H. McNamara, Liberator, August 8, 1885.
10. T. A. Coghlan, Labour and Industry in Australia., reprint, Melbourne, 1969, of orig. ed., 4 vols, Oxford, 1918.
11. William H. McNamara, Australian Radical Newcastle, William Winspear, 24 March 1888.
12. Ligutti and Rawe, Rural Roads to Security, p.77, Cited by B. A. Santamaria, The Earth - Our Mother, Melbourne, Challenge Press, 1945, p. 43.
13. The Bulletin, March 22, 1890.
14. Arthur Jose, Australia Human and Economic, London, Harrap, 1932, p. 32.
15. Bulletin, April 12, 1890.
16. Paul Stenhouse, 'Pegasus: p. 1.
17. Ibidem, p. 1.
18. Ibidem,p. 2.
19. Matthew Farrell in a letter to Bertram Stevens, ML Uncat MSS 277, February 24, 1904.
20. According to Dame Mary Gilmore, a long-term friend of John Farrell; 'Pegasus: p. 9.
21. Paul Stenhouse, 'Pegasus: p. 4.
22. Ibidem p. 6.
23. Bertram Stevens, 'Memoir: in How He Died and Other Poems, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1905, pp. xi-xlv, hereafter referred to as 'Memoir.'
24. Paul Stenhouse, 'Pegasus: p. 20.
25. Quoted from Colin Roderick, 'Formative Years of Henry Lawson (1883-1893),' RAHS, Journal of Proceedings, vol 45, pt. 3., November 1959, P. 125.
26. 'Memoir: p. xxxiii.
27. Newcastle Morning Herald, June 7, 1890.

Extracted from ANNALS, Journal of Catholic Culture, 2004 – 7 with their approval.