ST. GEORGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BULLETIN

24 Duff Street,
Arncliffe. 2205.
November 1976.

Dear Friend and Member,

The regular meeting will be held as follows:-

Date: Friday Evening, November 19th, 1976.

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

Business: General.

Syllabus Item: An Illustrated Address by Messrs. Frank Dubos & Bob Wade,
Members of Concord Historical Society, who will tell of
Dame Edith Walker & Yaralla. You will enjoy this talk.

Supper Roster: Mrs. Day, Captain, Mesdames O'Shea, Samuelson, Longhurst,
& Kell.

Ladies please bring a plate.

Mr. D. Sinclair,
President.
Phone 587.4555.

Mrs. E. Eardley,
Hon. Secretary.
Phone 59.8078.

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Publicity Officer.
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Mr. A. Ellis,
Research Officer.
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"An apportunist is a person who, given one and two, sees a way to make twelve."

(E.S.B.)

BYGONE DAYS.

- G.H.Eardley.

In these days of rigid Egg Board and unfortunate municipal control, one does miss the presence of the back-yard fowl run with its usual covering of passion fruit vines and their pendant green and purple fruit. The before daybreak fanfaronade of the local cocks, a sound so seldom heard in the present scheme of things, was always pleasant to hear, particularly when one was personally acquainted with the roosters concerned. The birds answered each other to the full extent of their vocal powers, more or less in strict rotation of calls, some strident, some demonstrative and some extremely warlike - a veritable call to battle.

It was very comforting to lay snugly in bed listening to this wide range of cacophony arising from almost every property in the adjacent streets. One could speculate on Mr Smith's Rhode Island Red, in his tremendous and overbearing personality, and Mr Jones' Black Orpington Rooster, the very soul of mournful probity in his general appearance, but one with a voice, to the pleasure of his docile hens, that could make the welkin ring as he sent out his morning round of defiance to all and sundry, both near and far. Mrs Robinson's Bantams, in all their spectacular feathered finery and collosal impudence, were not to be overlooked with the first streaks of dawn.

But alas, the glories of sunrise, in so far as the residential area of St. George is ooncerned, has departed and one may hear, if one is lucky, a solitary cock-a-doodle-doo from some dispirited bird tightly penned up in a box to await his forlorn fate on the following Sunday.

There was a time in Rockdale when poultry fanciers could keep over 100 birds in the various wired runs of their yards. The sale of eggs was always a source of income to the housewives, while at the same time enjoying local gossip. The merits of the fowls was a constant topic for conversation and considerable excitement was engendered when the wife was attacked with beak, wings, and spurs of an offended rooster, full of spleen and just wrath - an attitude which generally led to his head being chopped off!

THE MITCHELL LIBRARY.

- Mrs B Goodger, Manuscripts Cataloguer,
Mitchell Library.

- Delivered to the Society, 20.6.'75.

The Man and The Collection:

Most people know the mellow sandstone building in Macquarie
Street that houses the State Library of New South Wales as the
Mitchell Library, for since 1910 the west wing has stood,
housing the world famous collection of Australiana. Not until
1941 was the rest of the building completed, facing Shakespeare
Place, to house the other functions of the State Library. But
less people know of the man - David Scott Mitchell - whose name
is perpetuated in the Mitchell Library, the man who gave to
Australia, its most magnificent gift - a priceless part of our
National Estate.

To call the Mitchell Library a collection of Australiana, is
really too limiting, for the scope of the collection covers
the geographical area east of Australia as far into the Pacific
as Easter Island, west as far as Sumatra, north to the Philippines
and Hawaii and south to include the Antarctic.

What type of material does the Mitchell Library collect?

Anything that will add to our knowledge of our country -
manuscripts, printed books, pamphlets, newspapers, journals,
maps, charts, plans, pictorial material of all types, regardless
of its intrinsic merit, photographs, films, records, tape
recordings, etc.

How did David Scott Mitchell come to collect?

Let us look at his background.

In 1821 (just 33 years after settlement began) a young surgeon
of 29, Dr James Mitchell, arrived in N.S.W. From 1823-1837 he
was assistant surgeon at the Rum Hospital in Macquarie Street.

In 1822, Robert and Helenus Scott arrived, their father, Dr
Helenus Scott having died on the trip out and been buried at the
Cape of Good Hope. They took up land at Glendon, on the Hunter
River, and were soon able to send for their mother and sister,
Augusta Maria.

Miss Scott and Dr James Mitchell married in 1833, and set up

house in the Officers' Quarters of the Military Hospital, so
that David Scott Mitchell was born, on 19th March, 1836, just
a short distance from where the Mitchell Library was to be
built 74 years later (in 1910).

Scots have a traditional respect for education, and the young
David Scott Mitchell was born into an educated, literate and
cultivated family. His father was on the committee of the
Australian Subscription Library from 1832 until 1869 (the
year of Dr James' death) and the year that the government of
New South Wales took over the Australian Subscription Library.
(That is why the State Library of New South Wales proudly
uses the crest dated 1826, which you see on the glass entrance
doors as you enter).

So David Scott lived in a house where books were important!

When Sydney's first University was opened in 1852, David Scott
was among the first 24 students enrolled - and in 1856 was among
the first graduates. He took B.A.(Hon.), his M.A. in 1859 and
was then called to the Bar. However, he never practised law.
He was fully occupied in managing the family estates. His
father had retired from official medical duties in 1837 and
had many business interests besides his private practice.

In one of the Colony's many depressions, in the 1840's, Dr.
James was forced to sell much of the family property. At that
time there was some land in the Hunter Valley that his creditors
did not bother to take. But it was on this worthless land, that
later coal was discovered, and the family fortunes were soon
solidly based once more.

David Scott Mitchell was very much a recluse in his later years,
but as a young man, there is evidence that he enjoyed the typical
social life of a wealthy, cultivated young gentleman with entree
into Government House and the polite society of the day. There
are some "verses" written in 1864 in reply to his fair partner
who berated him for abandoning her at suppertime at a ball to
drink "a foaming glass of beer !!!", and programmes of amateur
theatricals at Government House in the 1860's.

The family lived in the fashionable area of Cumberland St., in
The Rocks. After his mother's death in 1871, Mitchell moved to
17 Darlinghurst Road - the house in which he lived for the rest
of his life - and gradually, literally, filled with books!

At what time Mitchell began to concentrate his collecting
on Australiana, is not known, but by the 1880's, Mitchell
had first refusal of anything in this field that Angus &
Robertson bought.

Mitchell was able to use his social position and wide range
of acquaintances in his collecting and it is thought that
many choice items were obtained from old colonial families,
in need of money.

Although a rich man, he bargained shrewdly - and at least in
the early days, the price of Australian items was not as high
as it is to-day. He had rivals, but he sometimes solved that
as he did with Alfred Lee. Lee had bought Banks' Journal which
Mitchell coveted, and would not part with it. He is supposed
to have replied in exasperation to one request from Mitchell,
that he would rather part with his whole collection - whereupon
Mitchell offered him 7,000.0.0 pounds (a fortune at that time)
and so got the whole collection, including Banks' Journal!

But he was not merely a collector. Scholars who benefited from
his generous permission to use his books found that he could
produce the book or the quotation they needed from his knowledge
of his collection.

In the 1890's, the Principal Librarian, H.C.L.Anderson, became
friendly with Mitchell and helped him regularly with his collection.

By 1898, Mitchell was 63 and in poor health. Doubtless, the
fate of his unique collection began to concern him, and in that
year he offered his magnificent collection to the State - with
fortunately, a proviso that it should be housed in a suitable
building.

It is almost unvelievable to learn that his gift was not immediately
accepted by the Government of the day. Finally, on 11th September,
1906, after 8 years delay, the energetic Premier, Sir Joseph
Carruthers, was able to lay the foundation stone of the Mitchell
Library. By this time David Scott Mitchell was too frail to
attend, and he died on 24th July, 1907 - nearly three years before
the Mitchell Library was opened to its readers.

As I look at the story of the man, I see an element of luck -
wonderful, undeserved, good luck - for me and for all Australians.
How lucky that before our country was even one hundred years
old, there should be a man of wealth and leisure - and of education
and discrimination - to devote himself to collecting the records

of the discovery, the settlement, development, arts
and letters of our country; how lucky that he should
also be a man of selfless generosity; and again how
lucky that the right men appeared at the right time -
librarians, politicians and others, to ensure that
Australia did not lose the priceless part of our
National Estate that forms the heart of the Mitchell Library.

" In books lies the soul
of the whole past time -
the articulate, audible voice
of the past -
when the body and material
substance of it is altogether
vanished like a dream."

- *engraved in marble
above the Reception Desk.*