



MARCH 2008

EAST
MELBOURNE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

Contributions and Suggestions

We invite contributions relating to the history of East Melbourne from our members. Articles of up to 1500 words will be considered for publication. Small articles and items of interest are also welcome.

We would be pleased to receive your suggestions and ideas for activities, guest speakers, excursions or anything else you might like us to organize on your behalf.

Please contact any member of our committee.

Aims

A full Statement of Purposes appears in our Documents of Incorporation but briefly the aims of the Society are as follows:

- To foster an interest in the history of East Melbourne.
- To build an archive of material relevant to the history of East Melbourne.
- To promote interchange of information through lectures and tours.
- To promote heritage preservation.

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Membership

Membership of the East Melbourne Historical Society is open to all who are interested in the history of East Melbourne.

Enquiries: Merrilyn Murnane: 9419 2560

Annual subscription: \$25.00

Guests are welcome
at individual meetings \$5.00

**Affiliated with
The Royal Historical Society of Victoria**

President's Letter

Welcome back to all our members. It promises to be a good year for the East Melbourne Historical Society, with some excellent speakers.

We finished 2007 on a festive note with our Christmas drinks at 'Braemar'. Our thanks go to Maureen and Peter McKeon for their hospitality and for all the work they did in making the occasion such a success. We could not have had a better venue or more welcoming and generous hosts. Thanks also to the EMHS committee who donated their time and their cooking ability. To our barmen, Alan Basham and Graham Shepherd; to Malcolm Howell, who provided the security; and to our wonderful cooks, Maureen McKeon, Elizabeth Cam, Deirdre Basham, Sylvia Black, Jacinta Ryan, Marion Shepherd. Special thanks to our Secretary, Sylvia, for all the organisation in preparation for the event.

On 20 January, Helen Botham gave our members a special tour of La Trobe's cottage. Over twenty attended her informative tour (see article). We are following this up with a visit to the Goold Museum and the Mary MacKillop Museum as our February excursion, the result of some planning last year by Neville Quinn. We had hoped to include a tour of St. Patrick's Cathedral, but unfortunately, tours were already booked out on the 20 February, so

we will try to reschedule the visit for another time.

One disappointment for 2008 was the rejection of our proposal for a booklet and photographic exhibition to honour the work of Margaret McLean, the first signatory on the petition to give Victorian women the vote. She was also active in the Temperance movement, a strong advocate for the reform of the judicial and prison system in its treatment of adolescents and an East Melbourne resident all her adult life. This year is the centenary of female suffrage in Victoria and the State Government asked for submissions for funding to celebrate the event. Our proposal went through four stages of consideration, but was eliminated on the last round of voting. We still hope to have a lecture on Margaret McLean and her work, but unfortunately, are not able finance the booklet and exhibition.

We hope to present an interesting and stimulating program of lectures for our members this year, beginning with Stephanie Alexander's reflection on her father, Winston Burchett, in April. Thanks to you all for your continued support of the heritage of East Melbourne and of the EMHS.

Jill Fenwick

La Trobe's Cottage Visit



The small cottage of Charles and Sophie La Trobe sits almost unnoticed in the Botanic Gardens, tucked away in a small area of land across from Gate 5, and without the garden that Charles La Trobe cultivated with such enthusiasm. For such an important historical remnant of Port Phillip history, it seems a sad fate and but for the work of the National Trust and dedicated volunteers over time, it might well not have survived at all.

Charles Joseph La Trobe came to the young settlement of Melbourne in 1839 as Lieutenant Governor. He brought the prefabricated house along with his other possessions and placed it on the twelve and a half acre lot which he purchased just north of the Yarra and called Jolimont, after the house in which he and his wife had spent their honeymoon. After his departure from the colony of Victoria in 1854, the land was gradually subdivided. The cottage languished for many years in the yard of

Bedggoods' Factory, before the remains were purchased by the National Trust and restored according to the drawings of the period, and eventually moved to its present location.

Helen Botham, the author of *La Trobe's Jolimont: A Walk Around My Garden* took a group of twenty East Melbourne Historical Society members through the cottage on 20 January. Much of it is reconstructed, but some of the original remains to show us just how modestly the La Trobes lived in the fifteen years they were in Melbourne. Their bed, the shaving mirror La Trobe used, their dining table and chairs all speak eloquently of the life they lived and the huge contrast it must have been with the refined circles in which they mixed in Europe. Nevertheless, they soon found friends among the families of Port Phillip like Georgiana and Andrew McCrae, the philanthropist Dr. John Singleton, the Howitts of Spring Street.

Helen's lively presentation, vast knowledge of La Trobe and his circle and her commitment to keeping this section of our history in the public eye made our visit a most enjoyable way to spend a few summer hours. Both Irene De Lautour and Sylvia Black volunteered their time on Australia Day to assist Helen when the cottage was open to the public.

La Trobe's cottage is generally not open to the public but groups can visit by arrangement with the National Trust.

Congratulations

East Melbourne's Dr. Ann Galbally is well known as a distinguished art historian and biographer. Her biographies, *Redmond Barry An Anglo-Irish Australian* (1995) and *Charles Conder, The Last Bohemian* (2002) and her monographs on Arthur Streeton, John Peter Russell and Frederick McCubbin have added much to the understanding of Melbourne cultural values and of the myths which grew up around the Heidelberg School. Ann has been a member of the Fine Arts department at the University of Melbourne, on the Committee of the Writers' and Readers' Committee of the State Library of Victoria and served on the Arts Council. On 26 January 2008, her services to the arts and to the preservation, development and promotion of art history were recognized when she was made a Member of the Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours. We offer her our congratulations and best wishes.

100th Birthday

On 15 February, local resident, Nora Riches turned 100. Her son, Graham, and his wife, Viv, invited family and friends to celebrate the occasion with her.

Many of you would know Nora and have heard tales of her colourful and adventurous life. For those of you not acquainted with her here is a brief introduction.

Nora was born in Birkenhead, Cheshire, England. As a young child she was an avid reader, particularly of poetry and plays. This, combined with an infallible memory, led her inevitably to a career in the theatre, acting under her maiden name, Nora Peachey. Among her many performances her favourite remains *The Cradle Song*, which she played twice.

At the age of twenty she married her actor husband, Arnold Riches. She tells the story of spending their honeymoon in Montreux at the same hotel as Stravinsky and his wife. Stravinsky was busy composing and his much younger wife was bored and spent all her time with the newly married Riches, much to their dismay.

The birth of her first child put her life on the stage on hold, but she was still in the thick of the theatrical world through her husband who continued a successful career. Rex Harrison was a close friend and, according to Nora, had exceptionally long arms. She used to take the arms out of his shirts and add extra material before re-attaching them. Under a jacket they looked fine.

In the lead up to World War II the Riches fell under the influence of the Mosleys, and became friends. Arnold stood for Parliament and Nora campaigned wearing a sandwich board and handing out pamphlets. Arnold failed to get in but polled better than a labour candidate had ever polled before in their electorate.

Nora joined an organization which provided temporary refuge for Jewish families while negotiations took place for their resettlement. She put aside a bed-sitting room in their house for that purpose and during that time fed and looked after seven or eight families.

In 1939, realizing the inevitability of war, the Riches approached J.C. Williamson with the idea of setting up a theatre company in New Zealand. Williamson agreed and gave them a two year contract, but asked that they perform a couple of short plays in Sydney on the way. By the time that the ship reached Colombo war had been declared. On arrival in Sydney the couple fell in love with it and never made it to New Zealand, or back to England. Looking for work in Sydney they approached E.J. Tait who pointed out the fine print in their contract – null and void in the event of war. Nora eventually got work with the ABC, in particular the children's show called *The Argonauts*. This had a segment called "Fishy Fantasies" starring two characters, Stella the Stealing Starfish and Silas the Sinister Shark. Nora played Stella, and Peter Finch played Silas.



In Melbourne finally, with young children at school and fees to pay, Nora took work with *Flair* fashion magazine. She brought to it the idea of an eating-out column and each month would try out restaurants and write a short column of her experiences. She was involved in the fashion side too, and her biggest coup was to have Lisa Minelli photographed for the magazine's cover.

In her retirement Nora continues to star on East Melbourne's stage with women, young enough to be her grandchildren, citing her as a role model for their senior years – charming, vibrant and positively "cool". On behalf of EMHS we extend our warmest congratulations and best wishes.

A Scullery Maid in East Melbourne

Mary Louise Friedrichs, known as Louise, was born in 1880. Her father had migrated to Victoria from Hanover, Germany, in 1860 hoping to teach the violin. Alas, such opportunities were in short supply and he became a wood carter, labourer and miner. Louise and her three siblings grew up in a small miner's cottage in Parker Street, Maldon. The family lived simply. Her mother, Mary Therese, born in Galway, may not have been able to read or write, but she could sing and she loved the Irish jig.

When young Louise left the local Catholic school she took a job as a scullery maid for Thomas Welton Stanford of Stanford House, Clarendon Street, East Melbourne (now the site of the Freemasons Hospital). Louise's grandmother, Maria Stanford, a hotel keeper, was born and married in Athlone, Roscommon, Ireland. She died in Ballarat three years before Louise was born. Two relatives of Louise, still living in Maldon, said their grandmother always said they were related to the same Thomas Welton Stanford for whom the young Louise worked, and indeed they thought that was how she got the job.

Thomas Welton Stanford, the brother of Leland, founder of Stanford University, arrived in Melbourne in the 1860's with a shipment of kerosene lamps. So successful was this new light that on the first night of its demonstration in a shop window, the sidewalk was so blocked with



Louise (nee Friedrichs) and Robert A. Johnston

spectators that a policeman had to be stationed in front to clear the way. Stanford married his Canadian born wife, Minnie, in 1869. She died the following year. Stanford was distraught and his interest in Spiritualism was heightened with his home regularly playing host to meetings.

We are not sure when Louise commenced working as a scullery maid in East Melbourne, but in 1900 she sent a postcard to her brother from Stanford House wishing him a happy birthday.

Miss Annie Cupit was Mr Stanford's housekeeper and one day her friend Miss Johnston paid her a visit

accompanied by her brother, Robert Alexander Johnston, a boot maker. This was the man Louise was to marry in 1909. Their one and only child, William Robert, was born in Lilydale in 1911.

Thomas Welton Stanford made a new will in the same year, and died in East Melbourne in 1918. Whilst Stanford did not leave William anything, when one reflects on their lives they had a lot in common. Both were collectors – Stanford collected paintings, and Johnston collected furniture and porcelain. Both started collecting as young boys. Throughout their lives they both owned substantial property and both loved gardening.

In later life William Johnston went to work at Ackman's Home Furnishers in Smith Street, Fitzroy (now Safeway's), a property Henry Ackman had bought off Stanford during the 1880's.

One has to wonder whether Louise Johnston (née Friedrichs) ever took her young son back to Stanford House to visit Miss Cupit, or perhaps even Thomas Welton Stanford himself. If so, how much did these visits, or his mother's talk of this fine mansion, influence and shape William Johnston's life?

The Johnston Collection, East Melbourne, the legacy of William Robert Johnston, houses a collection of 18th and early 19th century antiques. A biography of Mr. Johnston is in the planning stages and we would be grateful to hear from anyone who has any snippets of information, no matter how small, that might help us with this project. For further information visit www.johnstoncollection.com or telephone 9416 2515.

Coming Events

Winston Burchett: a life remembered

Wednesday, 16 April at 8.00 p.m.

Stephanie Alexander will share memories of her father Winston Burchett, well known to all East Melbourne residents as local historian and author of *East Melbourne, People, Places Problems 1837-1977* and *East Melbourne Walkabout*. His Conservation Reports and Index to City of Melbourne Notices of Intent to Build are still the basis of much local and architectural history research today.

Margaret McLean: caring power in social reform

A talk by Dr. Liz Rushen

Wednesday, 18 June at 8.00 p.m.

Margaret McLean of 'Torloisk', on the corner of Vale Street and Wellington Parade South, was the first Victorian President of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. She was the first signatory on the 1891 Petition for Votes for Women, a founder of the National Council of Women and instrumental in many other areas of social reform. Her story is not widely known

**Both at Clarendon Terrace, 210
Clarendon Street, East Melbourne**