



June 2015

**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: Diane Clifford 9486 0793

Annual subscription: \$25.00

Guests are welcome
at individual meetings \$5.00

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

President's Letter

I've just returned from nearly six weeks away, first on a trip through the southern states of the United States, beginning with Savannah, Georgia, and going through Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi, before finishing in New Orleans, Louisiana. We were travelling with that wonderful company, Australians Studying Abroad, and this was a literary tour, focussing on the great writers of the South and their works: John Berendt, Flannery O'Connor, Joel Chandler Harris, Alice Walker, Margaret Mitchell, Harper Lee, Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner, Richard Wright. From New Orleans, we went up to New York, and stayed on the East side, in close proximity to Central Park.

Common to both places were the dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers. The southern writers often came from small towns, many of which never recovered from the Civil War and the end of the slave-based economy. Blessed with a wealth of ante-bellum houses, their economies today are struggling, but loyalty to the home town and the desire to attract tourism has been at the heart of the creation of the 'southern literary trail' and at each town, we were greeted with enthusiasm, overwhelmed with kind attention, invited into homes, taken on tours and lectured by local experts.

One such group of volunteers, in Monroeville, Alabama, home of Harper Lee and Truman Capote, puts on the play of 'To Kill a Mockingbird' every second year, set in the grounds and in the courtroom described in the

book by Harper Lee. Other towns have preserved the writer's house or established a museum or give a guided walk. And everywhere, there was southern hospitality, including the occasional mint julep.

Similarly in New York and on a much larger scale, volunteers are at the heart of maintaining Central Park, the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art and presumably, all the galleries and private houses which hold so much interest to tourists. Since 1938, A Women's Committee has been a fund raiser to preserve and improve Central Park and, to date, \$750 million has been raised to keep it beautiful for the 40 million visitors who come every year. On the ground, nearly a thousand volunteers act as gardeners, guides, rubbish collectors, and other roles.

We're not so different in East Melbourne. The East Melbourne Historical Society, the East Melbourne Group, the First Sunday Lunch Group, the Johnston Collection, the Friends of the Elms, the supporters raising money for Holy Trinity Church and those maintaining the garden at Bishops court, are all volunteers and all of them welcome new members with open arms. If you have some time on your hands, would like to contribute to the community and make new friends, any one of these groups would welcome you with open arms. The EMHS would, in particular, have plenty to do for someone who is interested in archiving and/or in helping maintain our website.

*Jill Fenwick
June 2015*

The East Melbourne General Store

Although it has a distinct air of the 1970s, the East Melbourne General Store at the Hoddle Street end of Hotham Street has a history almost as old as the suburb. In 1861, the builder J. Hill, was commissioned to build a small shop on the site. It was to be a brick structure, containing three rooms and a kitchen. The land size was just as it is now, and there was a right of way at the back for deliveries and, of course, for the night cart to visit.

By 1862, the new building had a name, The Emerson Dairy and Shop and so it remained from 1862-1910. As the suburb grew, the east wall of the shop came to abut the terraces built next door and, on the vacant land at the back of the shop, there was a shed, stables and a fowl yard.

The Probate and Administrative files at the Public Record Office have Annie Emerson's Statement of Assets and Liabilities following her death in 1910. Amongst them is this entry:

**a Brick shop (One Story)
Four Rooms Kitchen – Brick
Partitions – Slate & Iron Roof –
Wood Outbuildings – Iron Roof
– Sewered – All Old been built
Forty-nine years ago. SHOP let
at 9/- per week. Valued at £540**

Presumably the shop was bought and operated by other owners, but by the early 1970's the original structure was probably too small to service the needs of the local community. The old shop was demolished and for the next four years, the block of land became vacant. In 1978, the rates book notes



the building of a new two storey shop, which Burchett says 'may include parts of the old', though this seems unlikely. By now it was a milk bar and local residents at the time can recall returning their empty bottles there, for a fee, and buying handfuls of mixed lollies instead. It was not, of course, the only shop or indeed milk bar, with at least two others nearby, the corner store at George and Simpson Streets and the milk bar on the Simpson Street and Wellington Parade corner.

With Norm and Anna Daher moving on after twenty-five years, the East Melbourne General Store will have a new owner and another new life. We wish them both, and their children, Michael and Erika, happiness in their new home. They have been wonderful members of our community and we will miss them.

Jill Fenwick

Dorijo

Next door to the Drill Hall at 458 Victoria Parade is an attractive but sadly neglected Art Deco apartment building, its most striking feature the small stepped, prism-like central tower which sits at its top like a crown. This, along with the design trick of reducing the width of the balconies at each floor level, appears to give the building greater height.

Its story started in 1933 when Rupert Stanley Joseph, auctioneer, of East Melbourne Investments Syndicate, commissioned I G Anderson to draw up plans for a 12 unit apartment building on the site he had owned since 1919. He gave the building the name of Dorijo in honour of his new wife, Doris Joseph. Anderson, who later designed the apartment buildings in Garden Avenue and those behind them in George Street, completed his plans by the end of the year and advertised for tenders in *The Argus* on 16 December 1933. Almost exactly a year later, they were advertised for rent. They were fire proof and sound proof, offered American tiled kitchens, free hot water, hot and cold showers, 'dainty' textured walls, dust and fly proof windows, phone and radio connections. Single bedroom flats took up the two lower floors, while the top floor held two three bedroom flats. Joseph died in 1954 leaving the income from his estate to his widow for her life time, with Equity Trustees as his executors. After Mrs Joseph's death Equity Trustees remained the sole proprietor selling to Peter Thomas Evan Rand in 1985.



Rand died in 1997 and the executors of his estate, one of whom was his solicitor, Frank Ernest William Levy, became proprietors during a period of protracted dispute over the will.

Rand was variously known as a 'colourful character', 'Pete the Poof' or simply 'dodgy'. Mark 'Chopper' Read wrote that If there was an award for the Mr Big of vice in Melbourne, Rand deserved the championship belt. He owned brothels, had criminal connections and was frequently named in reports of vice squad raids. Predictably he was a subject of interest to the Tax Office.

Rand's estate was mainly Victorian property: a house on three acres of

land at Sorrento, known as The Sisters, several blocks of flats including Dorijo and his own large house, Mahonga, in Domain Road, South Yarra. Annoyingly this house's perfection was marred by a tree on the neighbouring property blocking his view, so he bought the property and cut the tree down. He was also a keen collector of Australian art, and as such was at the centre of a mystery involving a stolen Rupert Bunny painting, missing for 23 years.

The main beneficiaries named in the will were his then partner and a previous lover. It was the solicitor for the latter who instigated the dispute over the will and during its course, the matter of the missing painting came to light. It had been stolen from the Blairgowrie home of Albert 'James' Watt in 1991. Rand and Watt knew each other. Their mothers, with whom they lived when younger, were friends and close neighbours in South Yarra. After his mother's death Watt, a career army officer and right-hand man to Brigadier

Charles Spry when he set up ASIO, moved to Blairgowrie not far from The Sisters. He bought the Bunny painting in 1953 and it was his pride and joy. When it was stolen the police regarded it as a targeted theft as nothing else was taken. All trace of it vanished until it was itemised in Rand's will as a legacy to Levy, his solicitor and executor, who innocently took possession of it and hung it in his home until 2010, when the police seized it after a tip-off. In yet another court case, the Watt family won the painting back as no record of purchase or other documentation could be found legitimising Rand's ownership of it.

Meanwhile probate has finally been granted and the two major beneficiaries continue to live off the income from the estate, which after their deaths will pass to the National Gallery of Victoria and the Anti-Cancer Council. Dorijo was sold at the end of last year and plans are now in place for renovations.

Sylvia Black

Dreaming The Impossible Dream

On 2 August 1907, 'on the plains of Maidstone beyond Footscray ... Motor-cars, phaetons, waggonettes, and scores of inhabitants were assembled; and in the midst of all, resting on the ground, was a grotesque object like a boat with wings, but which in reality was reputedly a flying machine designed to revolutionize the modes of travelling. ... The contrivance consists of a small boat with two masts, to which is attached four wings of sail canvas. The inventor is Mr. Newton Gordon,

of East Melbourne, ... Major Parnell, representing the Defence department, was present, and watched the preparations with apparent interest. The boat portion was attached to a motor-car, eight strong men held the wings in position, and at the word Go! the motor started. ... The inventor's expectation was that as the wings came into sharp contact with the wind the machine would rise like a kite, and arrangements had been made to sever the rope as it rose, to enable those interested to judge

of the carrying capacity of the flyer. When this is proved it is intended to fit a motor into the boat to make it self-contained and practically complete. But the machine absolutely refused to fly. ... As a mirth-provoking concern, the trial was a great success, but as a sample of the development in the direction of aerial navigation it was much less encouraging. The explanation given for the failure was that there was insufficient wind.'

Newton Roberts Gordon was born in Middlesex, England in 1850. In 1882, with Gertrude, his wife of nine years, he migrated to Australia. He had already established his lifelong commitment to building a working flying machine. He settled in Sydney and by 1894 was ready to put an early model to the test. It was more ambitious than his later version. It had 'a big barrel-shaped body in a canvas skin, an interior economy consisting of a small engine and boiler, numerous arms stuck out endways and sideways, and no legs.' It weighed 1,050lb [476kg], 'has four large wings, covering 970 square feet, and four wing propellers, which are 6 feet long, but will probably be made 9 feet after one or two experiments, so as to utilize the full steam power.' The machine was put on rails and pointed towards a cliff in Sydney Harbour. It failed to take to the skies and fell ingloriously into the water and was completely destroyed. Understandably Gordon was forced into bankruptcy that same year,

which possibly prompted his move to Melbourne, where by 1900 he resided at 535 Victoria Parade, a terrace house near the corner of Spring Street. In 1910 Gordon returned to England but did not give up the chase. In 1922, then living in Luton, he launched the Kangatross, which had 'wings like an albatross and legs like a kangaroo'. It weighed only 30lb [13.6kg]. His ambition was to have one in every home. It had flexible wings which the pilot flapped by kicking his legs, and the spring-loaded legs provided impetus to get the machine off the ground. Needless to say it was



doomed to failure. He died in 1925. The Wright brothers, meanwhile, had successfully launched their historic machine in 1903.

Sylvia Black

Refs:

Albury Banner and Wodonga Express, 9 Aug 1907, p.2

Adelaide Observer, 20 Oct 1894, p.34

Recorder (Port Pirrie, SA), 26 Jan 1922, p.1

132-140 Wellington Parade 1956

On 20 May, an article in *The Age* announced the sale of 132-142 Wellington Parade. The building had been sold through expressions of interest, with the expectation that it would sell for around \$9.5 million. In fact, the price achieved was around \$13 million dollars, a 30% rise above expectations.

The two storey building houses a number of offices, but for most local citizens, it is the home of the 7-11 store, Bayside Dry Cleaners and the Il Duca restaurant. There are seven existing leases, but demolition clauses in the leases allow development of the site over the next two years. Present indications allow for the retention of the façade, but with a development up to eight storeys to be built within the 709 square metre site.

The building dates from 1924 and was designed by Nahum Barnett, architect of many significant buildings within inner-city Melbourne and surrounds. Most familiar to East Melbournians are 'Chandos' (1885) in Hotham Street and the Cabmen's Shelter (1898), originally in Carpentaria Place, but transferred to Yarra Park near the Richmond Football Ground. Barnett's last building before his death in 1931, was the Melbourne Synagogue in South Yarra.

It's difficult to evaluate the effect of this sale on local residents. Initially, there will be a loss of amenity, as both the shops and the restaurant close and a great deal of temporary inconvenience caused to nearby residents, drivers,

pedestrians and those catching trams on that corner. The creation of yet another wind tunnel might also be anticipated. Saddest of all, East Melbourne will lose yet another attractive, historically significant building.

Jill Fenwick

Coming Events

Wednesday, 17 June, at 8.00 p.m.

Emily Fitzgerald is the co-author of the book, *Welcome to Wurundjeri Country: the aboriginal history of Yarra*, which was commended in the small publications category of the Victorian Community History Awards 2014. She will talk about the East Melbourne area as it was prior to European settlement. At Clarendon Terrace, 210 Clarendon Terrace, East Melbourne
Wednesday, 19 August,

Gone to War as Sister – exhibition opening

At the East Melbourne Library, 122 George Street, East Melbourne

New Members

We welcome our new members:

Jill Cochrane
Andrew Weekes
Denise Chadwick
Narelle DeBoos
Kristen Hinrichsen
Jan Clark
Graham Rogers
Lisette Malatesta
Liza Martin
Liz Jonson