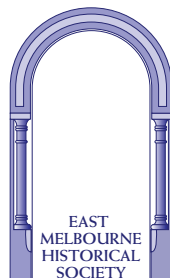


# EAST MELBOURNE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



## September 2017

## 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.

Published by EMHS and supported by City of Melbourne Community Services Grants Program.



**CITY OF  
MELBOURNE**

## Committee

### President:

Jill Fenwick 9419 0437

### Vice President:

Rosie Smith 0431 707 405

### Hon. Secretary:

Sylvia Black 9417 2037

### Treasurer:

Malcolm Howell 0417 337 519

### Committee:

Diane Clifford dianeclifford1@gmail.com

Sue Larkin 9415 9771

John Stone 0419 433 540

Graham Shepherd 9486 9039

### CONTACT DETAILS

**1<sup>st</sup> Floor, East Melbourne Library,  
122 George Street, East Melbourne  
PO Box 355, East Melbourne 8002**

**Telephone: 9416 0445.**

**Email: [info@emhs.org.au](mailto:info@emhs.org.au)**

**Web: [www.emhs.org.au](http://www.emhs.org.au)**

## Membership

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

### Enquiries: Diane Clifford

dianeclifford1@gmail.com

Annual subscription: \$25.00

Guests are welcome  
at individual meetings \$5.00

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

## President's Letter

One of the most satisfying parts of our work for the EMHS is the response we get to all the material on our website. Every month, about 30,000 pages are accessed by a variety of internet searchers. Some are our own members, who are looking for information about events we are holding or are interested in a particular aspect of East Melbourne. Others are students involved in research, or home historians seeking family connections or information about houses or people within the suburb.

We had a massive response when our research on the World War 1 soldiers was made available on the website. Families wrote in appreciation of the material we'd researched, added more, corrected us when we were wrong, donated photographs and made queries about how we had gone about the research. Janet Scarfe's meticulous studies of the World War 1 nurses also received a tremendous response, which has continued into this year.

Even our most notorious citizens, like Grey Street's 'Madam Opportunity', Minnie Costain, are beloved of their descended family. Minnie allegedly ran a house of ill repute during World War 1, largely for the officers of the US forces based in East Melbourne. She had previously had a boarding house at 167 Wellington Parade South,

Jolimont, where, it seems, she was harassed by a police force intent on proving that she was either a sly grog dealer or a brothel owner. Her great-great nephew wrote to us only last week, thrilled to have rediscovered her:

Finding out info about the Costain family has been really, really, difficult. Chancing upon this has not only given me a laugh but put a smile on my face. I see on Google Earth that Minnie's home in Grey Street survives and as I will be in Melbourne in September I will make a point of going and having a look at it.

I am thrilled when we get this sort of response from out there in the internet world. In the near future we hope to initiate a new project, a biographical database of past residents which will match them with their addresses. We can begin with the more famous ones, but hope that many of our members will contribute information about the original owners and occupants of their property.

*Jill Fenwick*

# Cairns Memorial Church

On the evening of 15 August 1988, the lights in East Melbourne turned off and not only the lights – the whole electricity system was shut down by order of the State Electricity Commission. The Cairns Memorial Church on the corner of Powlett and Hotham Streets was ablaze and the authorities feared that live wires might help spread the fire to the whole neighbourhood.

The Cairns Church was originally Presbyterian and named after Dr. Adam Cairns, the late pastor of Chalmers Church on Eastern Hill, who had emigrated to Australia in 1853. Born in 1802 in Longforgan, Perthshire, Scotland, Cairns was commissioned to found a Melbourne congregation, unite all Presbyterians and to promote education within the colony of Victoria. Described by his biographer, Don Chambers as 'Hasty of temperament, firm of conviction, doctrinally rigid, but withal warm of heart and sincere'<sup>1</sup>, Cairns was both successful and extremely popular, particularly with the large numbers of Scottish Presbyterians in Melbourne. He died in 1881 and in tribute, the Presbyterian community called for the founding of 'a handsome and commodious edifice in the early Gothic style, capable of seating 750 people'<sup>2</sup> in his honour.

The chosen design was by architects Henderson and Smart. The interior was to be octagonal in form, with organ and choir in the southern transept, "a handsome and commodious edifice ... (with) a tower 180 feet tall, ascending from the north-eastern corner."<sup>3</sup> The foundation stone was laid in 1882 and

the church was formally opened in 1884<sup>4</sup>. It was completed in 1887 at a cost of £19,384, though the tower was never built, having proved too expensive.<sup>5</sup> Electric light was installed in 1916.

In June, 1977, the Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian congregations joined to found the Uniting Church. In the division of property between the continuing Presbyterians and the Uniting, the church passed to the Uniting and was renamed as the Cairns Uniting Church. By the late 1980s, however, there were few church goers and the fire is believed to have begun from faulty electric wiring.

On the night of 15 August, local East Melbourne photographer Rod Goodwin was coming home from a professional engagement. As a result, he had his camera equipment with him and was able to capture a series of shots that showed the ferocity of the blaze and the gradual demolition of the church. In 1999, with the co-operation of the City Council, the ruined church was converted into eleven luxury apartments.

- 1 Chambers, Don Dr. Adam Cairns ADB Vol.3 (MUP) 1969
- 2 The Australasian Sketcher Jan. 1853)
- 3 The Argus 1 September 1882 p.4
- 4 The Argus 12 February 1883 p.3
- 5 The Argus 22 April 1887 p.4

# Gustav Techow and the National Gymnasium

In 1848 revolution was raging in the German states and Lieutenant Gustav Techow of the Prussian Army's 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Infantry, was one of the officers serving at the Berlin arsenal

and by 1852 he had made his way to Australia.

Little of his life in his early years here has emerged, but he was naturalized in 1854 and his certificate



Drawing by Charles Samuel Bennett. 1. View of buildings in Jolimont. 2. La Trobe's Cottage Jolimont. 3. Engineers sheds. 4. National gymnasium and Techow's cottage. 5. Lonsdale's Cottage.

when it was attacked by the insurgents. Techow's sympathies lay with rebelling citizens and he refused to shoot them and defend the arsenal. He became a hero to them but was court-martialled for his treachery. He managed to escape to Switzerland while his trial went ahead without him. He was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. He could never go back to his native country

gives his residence as Melbourne and his occupation as engineer. 1860 is the earliest that his name can be found in the newspapers:

ST. KILDA GYMNASIUM,  
established according to the system of  
the eminent Swedish professor Ling,  
will be OPENED, on the 9th of April,  
at the Theatre attached to the Royal  
Hotel, fronting the Beach Reserve.



Three classes daily, except Saturday, one in the morning, from half-past 7 to 9; one in the afternoon, from half-past 4 to 6; one in the evening from 7 to 9 o'clock.

Terms-Two guineas per quarter, payable in advance. G. TECHOW.

Techow had learned the system of Swedish gymnastics founded by Per Henrik Ling early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century while still a member of the Prussian army. For the next few years he taught gymnastics privately, including instruction at schools. In 1862 it was advertised that he would teach callisthenics and gymnastics to the pupils of Mr and Mrs Damm's Educational Institution for Young Ladies, 1 and 2 Apsley place, Eastern-hill, Melbourne. This site is now occupied by the fire museum.

In the following year Techow, aged 48, married the 17 year old Elizabeth Cumming. Six children followed.

At this time gymnastics was considered by many as slightly unseemly; that it was not dignified to throw your body around, and contort it into unnatural and uncomfortable positions, but the tide was turning and people were beginning to understand the virtues and benefits of a good work-out. Especially it was thought that it would be excellent training for the volunteer army corps and eventually the government agreed to provide premises for a national gymnasium. The Argus reported on 16 February 1864 that:

The National Gymnasium, for the establishment of which the sum of

£490 was voted by the Legislature last year, and towards the maintenance of which £300 has been granted this session, will be open about a week hence. The place set apart for the purpose is the annexe to the Exhibition-building, William street, which is now fitted up with parallel and horizontal bars, leaping and climbing stands, ladders of rope and wood, perpendicular and slant poles, and other gymnastic appliances. Bath and dressing rooms are attached to the building. The establishment will be under the direction of Mr. G. Techow, a palaestic professor well known in the colony. It is designed chiefly for the advantage of the volunteers, but certain hours each, day will be devoted to the instruction of private classes.

However by 1870 it had been decided to build the Mint on the site of the old 1854 exhibition building and it was demolished, but the iron annexe was carted over to Wellington Parade South and re-erected adjacent to the East Melbourne Cricket Ground, which was on the corner of Jolimont Road. At the same time the trustees arranged for a timber house to be built next door for the gym instructor, Gustav Techow. He died there in 1890 but the gymnasium continued for another few years, with former pupils instructing, until 1909 when a tender was awarded for the 'purchase and removal of old National Gymnasium, cottage, &c., on railway reserve (near East Melbourne Cricket-ground), Melbourne, £35.'

*Sylvia Black*

## Media Release – Mount Alexander's Silk Woman

Readers of our newsletter may remember the story of pioneering sericulturist, Sarah Bladen Neill, and her connection with East Melbourne in our March 2017 issue. Now a book has been written about her.

**S**arah Florentia Bladen Neill is a name not familiar with many but if historian- writers Ian Braybrook and Marilyn Bennet have their way that will soon change. They have written a book about her and it is due for release this month.

Sarah's attempts to establish a silk industry in Australia in the 1860's to the 1880's make for a most remarkable story about a unique person.

Sarah came from a very wealthy family that originated in the U.K. She inherited considerable interests in properties in the Corowa district on the death of her husband.

She began experimenting with Sericulture there on a small property on the Albury Road, which she named Mulberry Farm.

Her initial step, in 1865, was to plant a large number of Mulberry trees at Mulberry Farm, essential food for silkworms.

Encouraged by the success of this planting, she began work on a project that was to occupy her for the rest of her life.

In 1874, as part of her bold plan to grow the industry, she established a Sericulture farm on Mount Alexander. Under management of her friend Jessie Grover she planted thousands of Mulberry trees there. The farm consisted of a number of substantial buildings, essential to raising silkworms and harvesting their silk. In 1877, for a number of reasons, the farm was abandoned. Sarah however continued her determined work for many more years.

Her fascinating story is fully revealed in the book titled "Sarah's Search – A Silk Odyssey". To quote renowned Historian and Author Michael Cannon 'It is about time it was told.'

Further Information: Ian Braybrook  
0409 333 513

## Mystery Women - Can You Help?



**T**his photo appeared in The Argus on 9 September 1953. The three women are un-named but described as 'irate East Melbourne property owners'. They were meeting with the Town Clerk in protest about the removal of the elm trees in George Street. They

were undoubtedly foundation members of the East Melbourne Group. We would very much like to know their names. If anyone can help please contact Jill Fenwick [jill\\_fenwick@yahoo.com](mailto:jill_fenwick@yahoo.com) or Sylvia Black [sylvia.black@bigpond.com](mailto:sylvia.black@bigpond.com)

## Proposed New Rules

When our Society was incorporated in 1999 it adopted as its Rules the Model Rules enacted in 1981, with one alteration.

The Model Rules were replaced in 2012, but the 2012 Rules have not been adopted by our Society. At the annual general meeting on 18 October the committee will put forward a motion for the adoption of the 2012 Rules, with seven alterations or additions that are consistent with the way in which the Society has been run in the past.

Notice of the annual general meeting, and a detailed explanation of the proposed Rules, will be provided to members. The explanation and the proposed Rules also are available on our website [emhs@org.au](mailto:emhs@org.au)

## Notice of AGM

Notice of Annual General Meeting and nomination form are enclosed with this newsletter.

All financial members of the EMHS are eligible to be nominated for the committee.

## Coming Events

Wednesday, 18 October, at 8.00 p.m.  
– AGM

Following the AGM Dr Madonna Grehan, historian, registered nurse and midwife, and Honorary Fellow at the University of Melbourne, will talk on:

The Midwife, the Bishop, and an Assassin: three degrees of separation in nineteenth century Melbourne. Peter Andrew Charles O'Farrell is but a dot in the history annals of East Melbourne. At some point in the mid-nineteenth century, he owned two plots of land on Powlett Street. A property speculator and a solicitor of Victoria's Supreme Court, O'Farrell was a volatile and obstreperous individual. Shining a spotlight on his shady character, this presentation explains O'Farrell's close connections with three unlikely bedfellows: a midwife, a Bishop, and an assassin.

At Clarendon Terrace, 210 Clarendon Terrace, East Melbourne

Wednesday, 6 December at 6.30 –  
Christmas Drinks

Put it in your diary now. More details later.

Cover Image  
Cairns Memorial Church ablaze.  
Photograph by Rod Goodwin.