



# Newsletter 8, August 2008

## Mount Evelyn History Group Inc.

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### Dates for your diary

**August meeting:** Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> August 7.30 pm Morrison House.

**September meeting:** Phil Garland's talk on Victorian pre-Federation military history has been postponed to **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> September**, 1 pm in the Mt Evelyn Community Room. The speaker suggests that if any members have any old military bits, e.g. medals, photos etc of people who went to the wars, to bring them along and he will give them what information he can.

Our **October meeting** will be the Scarecrow Scoutabout on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October.

### Scarecrow Scoutabout

A Scarecrow festival is planned to coincide with the Scouts' Australian centenary. There will be prizes awarded for the best scarecrows. Would anyone care to make one? Paula intends to make a pair of them. The History Group will have a stall, probably under the Community Link verandah. In keeping with the scarecrow theme, we hope to put together a small display on Mt Evelyn's farming history.

Janice Newton is preparing her paper 'Flower Farming in the Dandenongs' as a History Group booklet. We hope to have it available by the time of the Scarecrow festival, as the farming theme will be in keeping. The booklet 'Aborigines of the Northern Dandenongs' is being updated to include material collected for the 'Mt Evelyn Dreaming' display.

### Gardens of the 1920s

A garden designer has requested historical information on local gardens of the 1920s. She is designing a cottage garden for a property in View Street.

The 1920s home has been renovated and there are some lovely old trees on the property. The client had no details on the history of the garden except that there was some friendly rivalry among the neighbours. The following comes from information provided by Janice Newton.

The Lilydale Express mentions the gardens of the Chandlers, Blamire Young (artist), Scott Morrison, the Absoloms and the Outhwaites, AE Syme, GT Chirnside and WM Black. Roses and gladioli seemed to be mentioned most often, also dahlias, daffodils, columbines, ranunculus, sweet peas, ferns, zinnias, geraniums, asters, phlox, begonias (and into the 1930s delphiniums, carnations and mixed pansies). Particular varieties mentioned were: gladioli The Duchess of York, Red Copper, Silvan Bells and Sans Pareil, mammoth decorative dahlias, and Blamire Young's Ophelia rose (Lilydale Express 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1929). From oral history we know that cypresses, apples, strawberries and tomatoes were common in gardens.

An interview with Friedl Gardner from 1997 is interesting as her property Cherrygarth (in East Avenue near the corner of Glenholme) is not far from the garden under restoration.

In the 1920s Mr Argyle Loftus bought 5 acres and built St Anne's and a smaller adjacent house for his artist son as a holiday place away from his home in Brighton. Loftus was a gardener and began to establish the garden seen today. He planted juniper, cedar, pine, birches and also had an apple, pear and plum orchard. (Friedl

traced his son-in-law named Ziegler, a bee keeper, through the Garden Historical Society). Ultimately the houses were separated and Doegs bought the cottage (Cherrygarth) and did some lovely stone work. It seems that this stone work was a feature of the larger gardens.

Friedl's mother knew garden designer Edna Walling and sculptress Ola Cohn, and a man at her work was from Mooroolbark. They checked one of these properties but thought it too dark. The estate agent bought them to Cherrygarth, which they bought in 1960. During the 1960s the owners of the Hollandia shoe factory in Lilydale owned St Anne's.

When Friedl and Geoffrey Gardner bought Cherrygarth they added much stone work, pools, native and mixed garden beds around them. A lamppost from parliament house, stone tables and birdbaths adorn the gardens and there is a natural gully of tree ferns (some replaced after the 1973 drought).

The gardens at Chateau Wyuna, Appin and Cirdec were laid out in the 1920s. Mt Evelyn Station garden received awards during this period.

### **Friedl Gardner**

We were sorry to hear that Friedl Gardner passed away recently. Friedl, who owned Cherrygarth, was a noted photographer and artist. Her photos of the garden were sold as fundraisers for charity.

### **Timeline Fence**

The Timeline murals to go along Bowens' fence beside the Warburton Trail are nearing completion. As well as supplying the historical background, the History Group is sponsoring the panel depicting Wurrundjeri life.

### **Water Race and Aqueduct**

The Friends of Water Race & Quinn Reserve are working on opening up the section of the historic Water Race trail between Borang Avenue and Reserves Road. Rubbish and weeds have been removed from the trail. A seven metre bridge is planned to span an eroded part of the formation.

The Friends of Mt Evelyn Aqueduct have obtained a grant to reprint their very popular brochure, with more historical information to be included.

### **The Naked and the Dead**

Does anyone have information on a nudist camp in Mt Evelyn?

Recently we were asked for confirmation of its existence and location. The enquirer's friend recently moved into a property believed to be a former nudist colony. The friend is convinced he is being haunted by a past resident and is much distressed by these visitations (unspecified whether the ghost is nudist).

Our only information comes from Ralph Alger's 'Reminiscences of the Cave Hill Tramway' (*Light Railways* 111, Jan 1991). Alger mentions a small, quaint log cabin on the south side of David Road that had once been the gatehouse to an area of bush used by nudists. There had been a larger, well-appointed log cabin further back that burned down about 1960. Paula remembers, as a young girl, rummaging through the ashes of the cabin while on an orchid-spotting walk with a friend. She still has a piece of stalactite that she picked up in the ruins.

Both cabins were believed to date from about 1920 (making them contemporary with the nearby log cabins at Chateau Wyuna and Appin). The gatehouse cabin was owned by a Mr and Mrs Erskine in the 1950s and was demolished about 1989. A Mrs Freeman lived on the property from the late 1960s.

If Alger was right about there being a branch of the Cave Hill Tramway in the David Road area, the route would have passed through or beside the nudist camp property. However the tramway would have fallen out of use by the time the camp opened.

### **Major Mitchell was here! – or was he?**

'Major Mitchell passed through Mt Evelyn!' This startling piece of news had us in a flutter recently.

Andy, our informant, said that when his family moved to Mt Evelyn 30-odd years ago, his dad bought an eight acre bush block behind Birmingham Primary School as a source of firewood. There was a strange track, edged with stones, through the bush. The family did some research on the history of the property and came up with Major Mitchell: 'He made it...he went all over Victoria'.

We were interested but not entirely convinced by the explanation. For one thing, we couldn't find any evidence that Major Mitchell ever passed this way. Besides, no exploring or surveying expedition would waste time moving stones to mark their track.

The back of Birmingham Primary would place the block in the Stubbs Avenue area. Stubbs Avenue is a continuation of Fuller Road (formerly part of Mitchell Road). The whole area was a selection originally owned by David Mitchell. It seems likely that the Mitchell who made the track was not Major Thomas Mitchell the explorer but David Mitchell, owner of the Cave Hill estate. Andy's track may have been part of the 'lost' branch of the Cave Hill Tramway or else a logging track leading to it. Either way, it would be independent support for Ralph Alger's theory and might even help to establish the exact route of the tramway.

This early branch of the tramway is believed to have followed approximately the route of David Road and Fuller Road. It seems to have gone out of use prior to 1915 and may have been obliterated when the roads were made. The main branch followed the Olinda Creek almost to Silvan. Most of the formation has been destroyed by roadmaking, the pipeline from Silvan and landscaping of Lillydale Lake Reserve. A short section can still be seen from York Road inside the fence of the nursery next to York on Lillydale.

### **Those tunnels again**

Another enquiry concerned the supposed tunnels under the Recreation Reserve. Our correspondent had heard the rumours of vehicles, weapons etc from the WWII military camp having been buried there. He added a little more evidence. A mate of his father's who worked at the site found a large tyre of some sort in the middle of the bush. There were also drain pipes coming out of the earth walls, suggesting an underground space.

There was very little we could tell him. Two youngsters are said to have found the tunnel entrance open (presumably not long after the end of the war) but one has since died and the other doesn't wish to be contacted. Two rival groups who have attempted to dig at the Reserve in recent years have taken out injunctions against each other. We don't expect the mystery to be cleared up any time soon.

### **Memberships due**

History Group memberships fell due on 1<sup>st</sup> July – still a bargain @ \$5 per person. We currently have 35 members.