

Things Past

Newsletter 45 November 2011

Mount Evelyn History Group Inc

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Dates for your diary

History Walk around Lillydale Lake Reserve led by Kevin Phillips and Anthony McAleer, Saturday 19 November, 2pm. RSVP to Paula or Kevin. Brief meeting to follow.

Launch of *Aborigines in the Yarra Valley and Northern Dandenongs*, Mt Evelyn Station House, Saturday 3 December, 1.45pm for a 2pm start. Historian Dr Gary Presland will launch the book. All welcome, RSVP to Paula or Karen. Contact details p.4.

The Gordon family and Mt Evelyn

A family that has been in Mt Evelyn for over 90 years but has not featured in previous articles is that of Norman and Jean Gordon, who arrived in 1920. Norman, from Kew, had a bookkeeping and clerical background. After serving in World War I, he married a young Scottish woman, Jean Easton. They took up a war grant, partially funded with money from a relative, and settled in a home called 'Kooka' on 25 acres in Old Hereford Road. Here they tried to establish an apple orchard near the Morrison's large orchard, between the blocks of the Treveynes and the McChesneys.

Norman and Jean had three surviving children: Doug, Cam and Marian, who attended Mt Evelyn Primary School. During the 1920s, no doubt due to difficulties in making a living from the orchard, Norman and a friend who lived with them participated in the building of Silvan Dam. 'In the morning they hitched the horses to a sleigh and walked all the way to Silvan Dam, worked all day, then walked all the way back with the horses.'



Dick Harrison in the Gordons' garden in Old Hereford Road c. 1930. Note the horse-drawn sleigh with water barrel.

Norman played cricket in an early Mt Evelyn team. Jean was an active member of the CWA, befriending well known identities Tina Marshall and Alice Wray at their meetings in the Mechanics Hall.

Daughter Marian remembered the 1939 bushfires well:

They were pretty horrific. I was nine and I remember because we had a big veranda that looked down over the orchards and paddocks. Mum and my father and Dick Harrison and Louise Morrison, they were all down on the paddock with their hessian bags trying to fight the flames. I had to stay at home. Looking down from the veranda I can still see this fire just jumping ahead of them the whole time. It just wiped Mt Evelyn out right down near the school. The Smith family down there were just completely wiped out. It just went right through. It was pretty scary.

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Watching the cricket at Mt Evelyn, early 1930s. Marian is with her mother Jean, centre.

'Life in Melbourne' - 1854

Concluding our extract from the *West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser*, 21 April 1854.

The great drawback to the place is the dust, which blows in clouds just the same as it does occasionally in Egypt; but here, what with busses, carts, &c., and a strong wind to aid and abet, it gives the place the appearance of being in a thick fog, and is extremely annoying, as the dust is of a very subtle nature, penetrating everything. The trade of washer-woman – now I am on dust – is an extremely lucrative one; 12s. a dozen articles, small and great, is the charge; but at the hotel where I am staying, which is an 'aristocratic' one, the charge per dozen is only 8s., because, as the housemaid informed me, 'Gents is cleaner here, and wears more shirts.'

All this will give you some idea of the good town of Melbourne. Notwithstanding the enormous wages of masons, &c., they are hard at work in every part of the town in building shops, &c., and what they build seems to be of a very solid nature, stone being the chief material used.

They say that all these buildings are worth their weight in gold to their enterprising builders and owners; indeed, if gold should last, Melbourne will be one of the principal towns of the world before long; it has everything in its energetic enterprising merchants and thriving shopkeepers, in its population, of able bodied, money-getting, and money-spending population, to insure success – magnificent land for cattle, corn, &c., – as back country, and, supposing gold were to fail, they say that there are mines of other metals which would be almost [as good], perhaps better, being money certain for the trade of the colony.

Hobson's Bay is crowded with shipping, and, looking from the town at it, it looks like the whole range of the London docks, as seen from the river; such a collection of shipping together I have never seen at one *coup d'oeil*. The great difficulty is to get the goods up to Melbourne from the bay, as the river only admits of small schooners, &c. This is a heavy item of expense as goods have to be shipped in lighters, and conveyed nine miles to their warehouses, although Hobson's Bay is only two miles from the town, the river widening like a labyrinth.

A cut across the neck of land which divides the bay and town is a thing talked of at present as a ship canal for that distance would be a rather expensive undertaking, as you may imagine from what I have told you about the price of labour.

There are a great number of Americans in the place, who are spoken of by all as being the most enterprising set of fellows; they have already established an American line of coaches to the bay and American bar-rooms; and American advertisements (the Yankees are great advertisers) are as plentiful as bears in some valley the name of which I have forgotten.

***Things Past* turns four**

Your newsletter celebrates its fourth birthday this month; it first appeared in November 2007. Over time the publication has developed columns, a masthead and illustrations. I've been doing the layout in PageMaker Since March 2010, which is why you started receiving pdfs instead of Word files.

The name, chosen in May 2009, derives from the most moving line in all of English poetry:
'I summon up remembrance of things past'
(Shakespeare, Sonnet XXX: ii).

Kevin began his popular segment 'From Kev's rain gauge' in July 2009. Kevin, who is also newsletter photographer and email distributor, has his own cult following.

After a suggestion from Jean Edwards (plus my own frustration at searching through back numbers), I'm starting an index to *Things Past*. It will be a chance to practise skills learnt at an indexing workshop last year.

I intend to enter the new issues on an Excel database as they appear, while working through the back issues gradually. If anyone is interested in doing a year or so of indexing, please let me know. I'll send you the spreadsheet and you can go for your life. The aim is to have all the past issues indexed by the end of next year. We may put out the first four years of newsletters, plus index, on CD.

Things Past can claim to be an international publication, as we now have a group member in South Africa. Greetings across the Indian Ocean! Thank you to all contributors and thanks to readers for your support. Your feedback is always appreciated.

Karen Phillips, Editor

From p.1

Marian did 'not particularly like school at all' but remembered the principal, Mr Krieger, and two teachers who became close friends of her mother: Madge Bell and Miss White. The small Mt Evelyn Primary School had only three class rooms and made use of the Recreation Reserve for sporting activities. Marian remembers the tragic death of her classmate Joey Moschetti, who drowned in the Olinda Creek near this Reserve in 1938. 'He just walked down and slipped and fell'.

Marian did not have much time to get into sport or playing games, as she and her brothers and the Underwood children had to walk some distance to and from school. She did enjoy horse riding though and attended the Mt Evelyn Presbyterian Church for Sunday School. Marian grew up as a 'bush kid', enjoying many happy times and good friends. The bush contained 'eggs-and-bacon', wild boronia and an abundance of birdlife: rosellas, blue wrens, owls. All the children in those days were orchid lovers and knew the best spots to find a wide variety, including spider orchids. Purcell's house was the best bush area in those days. 'Every orchid you could think of. Just magic.'

The Underwood family were well known in Mt Evelyn, as Mr Underwood was a talented musician who tuned pianos for a living. The family were also distinctive due to their membership of the Christian Israelite sect. They were vegetarian. The mature women wore bonnets and long skirts and the men kept their hair and beards long. The family mixed well with other Mt Evelyn residents but Friday nights and Sundays were sacrosanct. On Fridays the family home was taboo to outsiders and on Sundays they went to Fitzroy, where a



Presbyterian Sunday School, mid-1930s. Marian is second from right, front row.

community of Israelites met. Many Mt Evelyn residents were stunned when one day, without warning, the family left the sect. Mr Underwood shaved and cut his hair and was unrecognisable to many. He claimed it was no longer fair to his family to 'be brought up in that strict religion'.

In the thirties and forties Mt Evelyn had a small shopping centre with Wray's Newsagency on the bottom corner, Haughton's Grocery opposite the station and Matthews Bakery at the top on York Road. Marian was friendly with Haughton's daughter, eventually acting as her bridesmaid. She even worked at times as an assistant in their shop after school, weighing up sugar and coconut and so on, possibly rewarded for her labour with sixpence.

Janice Newton, from an interview with Marian Adair (née Gordon), 25/9/2011. To be continued next month.

Accidents along the railway

We received the following odd newspaper report courtesy Mike Foley.

An elderly man died to-day almost immediately after being rescued from a wire fence near the railway line at Mount Evelyn, outside Melbourne. He had been suspended by his feet for several hours. Police believe he fell in trying to climb over the fence and caught his feet in the wires. The man was Frank Watkins, 70, of Mount Evelyn. A passenger of a passing train noticed Watkins caught in the fence and told civilians and police. A group of civilians reached the scene first, and extricated him.

(The Townsville Daily Bulletin, 30/1/1950; see also The Sydney Morning Herald, 30/1/1950).

Re another railway accident, Reg Varty wrote: 'I sent a copy [of *Tracks to Trails*] over to my parents and Dad is adamant that the train incident



Jean Gordon and children, left, In the garden with friend Jean Fuller and others.

'Follow the yellow brick road'

The Street Party on 22 October was another fantastic community event. There were some great scarecrows, including a Wicked Witch of the West and other 'Wizard of Oz' characters, a composite bride/groom and Veggie Man.

Ian James contributed his Aeolian Corvine Phobia Inducer (wind-powered scarecrow). Ian found this contraption under his house, the former Mitchell property 'Blayney' in Old Hereford Road. The device, which consists of a steel rotor with a vane to turn it into the wind, is still attached to its original gum sapling pole. The rotor produces a rattling sound as it turns. Ian's scarecrow is a variant of the traditional *klopotec* of Slovenia. A *klopotec* has wooden hammers driven by a windmill. If made from the right kinds of wood, the hammers produce both audible sounds and ultrasound that scares the birds. See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klopotec>

Visitors enjoyed our display on the Mitchells. John and Joan Pinker were very interested in how Paula got the list of names of the workers at Cave Hill. Joan said she learnt more about her father (Bill Ellis), grandfather and cousins than she had heard from family.

Several people gave us information for our house names list. Janni from Kookaburra Lane mentioned that her place is called 'Nether Wallop'. It is an old building that provided refreshment for coaches on their way to the Dandenongs, according to the previous owner. The name comes from a village in Hampshire.



Ian James' genuine Australian orchard bird-scarer from 'Blayney' fitted both the scarecrow theme and our display on the Mitchells in Mt Evelyn. Photo Kevin Phillips.

From p.3

happened at a different location to that recorded in the book. Dad says it happened in the cutting just below the police station, not out near Clegg Road'.

The crash mentioned in *Tracks to Trails* occurred in 1926. A newspaper report states that a motor bus and a goods train collided at the level crossing near Mt Evelyn State School. (*The Western Argus*, Kalgoorlie, 28/9/1926).

There was another accident on 14 July 1934, when the Melbourne to Warburton train collided with the Mt Evelyn to Silvan bus driven by Mr John Oats of Silvan. The crash site was 'around a bend 150 yards from the station' (*The Argus*, 16/7/1934). If this was the York Road crossing, and the impact pushed the bus into the cutting, that would agree with Mr Varty's recollection.

A third collision occurred in 1954, between a steam train and a motor vehicle driven by Mr Edward Matthews of Mt Evelyn. Mrs Peirson-Jones was a passenger. The report says the vehicle was struck at a crossing next to the station. (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14/4/1954; *The Argus*, 14/4/1954).

From Kev's rain gauge

We are now in the Wurundjeri season *Buath Gurru*, Grass Flowering Season (November). Kangaroo Grass is flowering. *Buliyong* (bats) catch insects in flight. Male Common Brown butterflies are flying. *Coranderrk* (Victorian Christmas Bush) is coming into flower.

From 'Seven seasons of the Kulin people', <http://museumvictoria.com.au/forest/climate/grass.html>

Rainfall for October 2011 for Mt Evelyn, McKillop (from Jean), Melbourne and Melbourne average:

Mt Ev	McK	Melb	Melb Av
99mm	108mm	62mm	66.4mm

Kevin Phillips

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Opinions expressed in *Things Past* are those of the writers, not necessarily those of Mount Evelyn History Group.

