



Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

March-April 2019

Meetings

Thursday 14 March 2019

Speaker: Bob Kerr

Topic: The Mysterious Henry Elgar

Bob Kerr has recently been researching this very early Boroondara landowner and has come up with some surprising information about his life.

Thursday 11 April 2019

Speaker: John Haward

Topic: Wartime Experiences in Vietnam

John Haward, a Vietnam Vet and member of Box Hill RSL, will share with us some of his recollections of the Vietnam War.

Thursday 9 May 2019

Speaker: John Barnao

Topic: Orchards & Fruit Shops in Doncaster & Box Hill

John Barnao plans to cover the heyday of farm production in the Doncaster area and responses by towns and retail businesses along the Maroondah Corridor, mainly Box Hill, to meet the needs of the district's orchardists.

**Meetings are held at the Balwyn Evergreen Centre,
45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn**

Email: balwynhistory@gmail.com website: www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs

Recent Speaker: Bill Mackie

Bill Mackie spoke about Robert Reid, born on 17 October 1842, his great grandfather. Their ancestors came from the port of Leith near Edinburgh and Kirkcaldy, on the northern shore of the Firth of Forth. Robert left Leven, with his nine siblings and parents, on the Ralph Waller on the 4th of January 1855. The ship struck an ice burg on 22 March, arriving in Melbourne in April. In June Robert's father died and Robert started work at twelve in a drapery shop in Collins Street.

He later worked for William Watson and Sons, soft goods importers, marrying Mary Jane Clancy, who came from Ireland, in 1865. After initially buying a home in Punt Road Richmond, they then purchased a house on four acres facing Whitehorse Road. By 1903, Robert and Mary Jane owned 33 acres bordered by Whitehorse Road, Reid Street, Mont Albert Road and Parkside Avenue.

In 1904 Robert died. Mary Jane later donated seven acres (next to Camberwell Boys Grammar) that became Belmont Park as a memorial to Robert Reid. In 1924, Mary Jane died and in 1926, a major sale of Belmont Estate took place with 1,800 attending, where 66 of 68 lots sold. A much smaller sale of land took place in 1955.

Larino, one of the four major houses, (designed by architect Edward Albert Bates), built on the estate, became Frances Barkman House in 1939 and is now Balwyn Manor in Maleela Avenue. Myambert in Myambert Avenue is the only surviving home on the Reid estate.

German Speaking Immigrants – the Fankhauser Family - Part 5

By Marilyn Poole

Introduction

This is the fifth article in the series on German speaking migrants who arrived at Port Philip in February 1850. Johann Gotthard Fankhauser, born in the Zillertal, Austria made his way to Silesia, Prussia accompanied by his wife Elizabeth Geisler and their four eldest children. Among these children was their son George born in the Zillertal in 1836 who accompanied his parents into exile in Silesia, Prussia and then migrated with them to Australia on the barque *Pribislaw*. It is not possible to discuss all the members of the Fankhauser family. The focus in this article is mainly on two second and third generation members of the family, that is George and his son George Frederick as both had close associations with Balwyn.

George Fankhauser (1836-1897)

Initially, George worked on his father's land in Hawthorn for a number of years following the family's arrival at Port Phillip. It seems likely according the Rate Books that he and his father Johann were working land in Balwyn by 1859. On 8 August 1860 at the German Lutheran church, George married Louise Johanne Neumann. Louise was born in Silesia in 1840 the daughter of Christian Neumann and his wife Johanne Klose and travelled to Australia with her parents in 1866. George and Louise had 13 children.

By 1861, both George and his father Johann Gotthard had taken up land in Ewart's Road (now Belmore Road) Balwyn, clearing it before engaging in mixed farming and fruit growing. (McWilliam p. 80). In 1863 there is reference to both father and son as tenants on the 39 acres which formed part of the Henty estate which lay east of Balwyn Road (McWilliam p. 137).

Both Johann and son George were listed on the 1864 roll of electors for the South Bourke election for the Legislative Assembly (*South Bourke Standard* Friday 9 September 1864 p 3).



George Fankhauser and his wife Louisa Neumann

According to the rate books, a house had been erected on a property at Belmore Road, Balwyn by 1862. This house very likely preceded the present structure, named *Weidenthal*, built sometime in the 1870s or 80s, which now stands at 224 Belmore Road, Balwyn

Snippets of George's life appeared in the local papers. In a case before Kew Police Court in 1872 it was reported that George "had been losing fowls two or three at a time, for the past two years,' However around midnight on the 12 June 1872 he heard a noise in his 'fowl-house' and went to investigate. He saw the thief with a bag in her hand 'wearing a large pair of men's boots and an old black hat. She attempted to escape but he overtook her and found she had three of his fowls in her bag and a large basket nearby for better carriage of the plunder". George detained the woman until Senior Constable M'grath appeared and took charge of the prisoner. Apparently, she had been selling fowls in Hawthorn for some time. She was sentenced to four weeks imprisonment and both bag and basket were confiscated. (*South Bourke Standard* Friday 21 June 1872 p. 3).

Only after George's death in 1897 has a detailed description emerged of the house and adjoining land south of Belmore Road stating it as "twenty-three acres and eleven perches or thereabouts... on which is erected a brick and weatherboard house, 6 rooms, pantry, scullery and dairy...also stables, barn, cow sheds, pigsties". There was also an orchard on ten acres of land and it was noted that the orchard was 25 years old (established in 1872) (Balwyn and Balwyn North Heritage Study, 2015 p. 2 Built Heritage Pty). The relatively modest size of the house belied the size of the Fankhauser family; George and Louisa had eight sons and four daughters.

Under the terms of George's will, his wife Louisa was a tenant for life in the house but ownership of the property passed to George Frederick, their eldest son. Louisa did not live in the house long but went to live with another son Walter in Hawthorn and died there on 26 July 1916.



The Fankhauser house, 224 Belmore Road, Balwyn
Source Steve McLean

Lots 1 and 2 were advertised for sale in *The Reporter* (Friday 16 November 1917) as an 'Executor's Realising Auction in the estate of the late George Fankhauser. Of rich and beautiful Eastern Suburban Paddocks. Held unbroken by the Deceased and his family for Nearly Half a Century, and Very prettily and Attractively situated within 8 miles from the city, at Picturesque and Progressive Balwyn"

Lot 1 consisted of 23 acres and the brick villa (see picture above) which still stands on the south side of Balwyn Road. Lot 2 consisted of 69 acres on "East side of Balwyn Road, Fronting Koonong Creek, and Having also a Direct Road Connection from its South-Eastern corner to Doncaster Road. Including a Commanding Hill, Beautiful Slops and Splendid Creek flats, with rich soils. This is admirably adapted for residential and Garden Farming purposes, while for an Orchardist it possesses unsurpassable advantages. Both properties are suitable for Subdivision, and Certain to enhance in Value, as electric tram extensions and other Developments in the Locality Proceed".

George Frederick Fankhauser (1861-1951)

George Frederick Fankhauser was born on June 12, 1861 in Balwyn the eldest son of George Fankhauser and Louisa Neumann. George Frederick attended Balwyn State School and some anecdotal reflections on his schooldays are in the pamphlet "*Balwyn State School 1868-1968*" commemorating its centenary. Many of these recollections may not be exact historically and in fact, some contradict the information in previous paragraphs. However, while some of the stories in the centenary pamphlet may be hearsay, nevertheless they provide an interesting insight into George Frederick's schooldays.

...the Fankhausers lived in a slab hut near the corner of Balwyn and Winmalee Roads. Possibly having come from a wine-growing area of Germany, it was only natural that a vineyard soon appeared there. In time, George attended the school walking down the rough track of Balwyn Road past another farm before reaching the swampy part of what is now Gordon Street. In winter, this was often half under water and was a good excuse not to wear any boots for you had to wade through it. At the school gate, other boys told him that they had seen another cart-load of wood bogged in Whitehorse Road, in fact the road was so bad that a detour was being made from near where Northcote Avenue is today south to cross a toll-bridge over the creek near the present Canterbury station. Mr Werrett was in charge of the toll-bridge. The detour track would rejoin Whitehorse Road at Deepdene where there was an inn, the Survey Hotel.

Like most boys George got into trouble sometimes, one day, a goat tied near the school got away. How this happened we are not told, but knowing boys, we suspect! Anyway, George and Bill Maling chased it and eventually caught it – at the corner of Glenferrie and Cotham Roads! The goat was hauled back to school with a piece of string where the teacher failed to appreciate the good deed and 'each got from the teacher six cuts with a cane' for absenting himself from school'.

On leaving school, George Frederick was apprenticed in the building trade. According to Dovile (p.282) he spoke with a nephew "recollecting times when he was a boy and Whitehorse Road, Balwyn was only a bush track with bullock wagons weaving in and out of the trees". He recalled seeing "Aborigines walking through the area with the men in front, women and children following carrying their chattels. He described how as a young lad, he walked to Canterbury Station to catch a train to Werribee to go rabbit shooting. He carried his gun and put it on the luggage rack and on the return trip, brought the rabbits home with him" (Ibid p. 282).



George Frederick Fankhauser and Martha Finger Source Glenda Dovile

George Frederick Fankhauser married Martha Pauline Finger (1864-1920), daughter of Carl Heinrich (Henry) Finger and Johanna Caroline Aumann, pioneering orchardists, on 21 January 1886 in Doncaster. They had eleven children, four sons and seven daughters.

In 1893 at a time of the collapse in prices following the land boom in Victoria, George Frederick bought 70 acres of land in Highbury Road, Nunawading. George Frederick was a builder before turning to fruit growing. He cleared the land with the assistance of his brother John and planted an orchard, which was continued by his son Victor (Dovile. p. 182). Some twenty years later an article in *The Leader* (Sat 27 November 1915 p. 11) stated "the site was carved out of virgin bush, in which it was easy to get lost at a short distance from the house: it is now a highly improved and productive orchard, of which it would be hard to find the superior in any part of the state. George Frederick's orchard was 'situated on the hill side, with ample slopes for catchment, and the water is distributed from them by gravitation'. The bottom of the orchard runs Dandenong Creek which at times contains a large body of water" (Ibid). George Frederick and his wife Martha were still living at Highbury Road, East Burwood in 1918.

This orchard in East Burwood continued to be highly productive while under the care of George Frederick and Martha's son Victor. Like many others in the Fankhauser family, they were not only successful fruit growers but grew many different varieties of fruit.



Marriage of George Frederick Fankhauser and Martha Finger in 1886 Source Glenda Dovile

George Frederick was elected Councillor for the seat of Burwood in the Shire of Nunawading in November 1895 and held a seat for thirty years. Later when the shire was divided, he was elected to the new shire of Blackburn and Mitcham and served as President for a term. According to Dovile (p.282) George became a councillor much against the wishes of his mother as she felt that people who held those positions 'often became disliked and he also had a family of children to rear'. His wife Martha was of great assistance to him in terms of the social functions associated with his being a Councillor and also helping in the orchard.

One of George Frederick and Martha's sons, George Ferdinand, joined the A.L.F 58th Battalion, 5th Division .and was killed in action on 4 September 1918 and is buried in the Indian cemetery, La Chapalette, France.

Following the death of her son, Martha died on 26 November 1920. George Frederick then retired to 21 Scott Street, Canterbury. The house was one he had built as a carpenter and before he bought the land in East Burwood (Nunawading). He lived there with two of his daughters Lilian Ida and Emily Auguste. Lilian Ida as the eldest girl in a large family had spent her life caring for others and took up nursing as a career, which she continued until her father moved to Canterbury (Ibid). George Frederick died in a private hospital in East Melbourne on 11 June 1951. Both he and his wife Martha are buried in Box Hill Cemetery.

Post-script

According to the memoir of E. S. Fankhauser "*a large area extending along Springvale Road from Canterbury Road to Highbury Road and from Springvale Road down Highbury Road to the Dandenong creek, and from Spring vale Road down past Cathies Lane, and along Bayswater Road from Burwood Road to Lily Vale (sic) Road was largely settled by the descendants of Johann Gotthard and Elizabeth Fankhauser.*"

Acknowledgements

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Sources

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