



Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

Jan.– Feb. 2020

Meetings

Thursday February 13 2020 – 8pm

Speaker: Robin Kelly

Topic: From Brass Bands to Brass Beds

Robin will speak about growing up in Deepdene, her ten-year career as a singer with musical stars such as Barry Crocker, the Bee Gees, Johnny O’Keefe and Helen Reddy and her 48 year career as an antique dealer at Robin Hood Antiques in Deepdene and Canterbury.

Thursday March 13 2020 – 8pm

Speaker: Euan Warmesley

Topic: My Uncle and other *Dunera* Friends

Euan Warmesley will speak about the early lives and later experiences of his uncle and five friends who were among the boat-load of mainly German-Jewish internees sent from England to Australia during WW2. These men were later referred to as the “Dunera Boys” after the name of the ship on which they were transported.

Thursday April 9 2020 – 8pm

Speaker: TBA

Topic: TBA

**Meetings are held at the Balwyn Evergreen Centre,
45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn
Email: balwynhistory@gmail.com website: www.vicnet.net.au/~balwynhs**

Recent Speaker: Peter Smith OAM

Pete Smith was educated at Wesley College and on leaving school joined the ABC in 1956, initially as a messenger boy, before announcing on the home service and on Radio Australia. In the early years of television Pete appeared on Channel 2, where he was an announcer, variety host, and compere of his own Saturday afternoon "Sports View Hit Parade". In 1964, Pete joined Channel 9 and Graham Kennedy's "In Melbourne Tonight" (IMT) presenting commercials, appearing in comedy sketches and sometimes acting as compere. He worked for many years with Bert Newton on "New Faces" talent show. Pete's voice boomed out for over 21 years welcoming viewers to "Sale of the Century".

Pete grew up idolising radio commentators and broadcasters – i.e. Jack Davey, Norman Banks and Bob Dyer. He also listened avidly to Blue Hills and the UK "Take It From Here". Philip Brady, who went to Xavier, became a close friend. IMT had a great team of over 250 working on the show, including Joff Ellen and Rosie Sturgess, very experienced performers and comedians. Advertisements done live, would often run for far more than the scheduled minute, with sales for the products, such as Pal, Colvan Chips and Raoul Merton, soaring.

Pete is a wonderful storyteller, recounting how he met Victor Borge on a tram organised by Lou di Gregorio, after learning that Victor was fascinated in trams. Pete was amazed when he realised that Victor Borge was driving the tram along St Kilda Rd and Swanston St, stopping to pick up passengers! He also described one of his many roles as an MC, organised by Ron Walker, at a room at the MCG, where 60 dignitaries gathered to meet the Queen and Prince Philip. Pete has met many of Hollywood's greatest performers, recalling with pleasure, for example, Sammy Davis Junior and Van Johnson.

Matthew ETTY Leal

After Pete's very entertaining talk, we enjoyed a delicious supper.

News and Notes

- Heather Alford has agreed to be co-opted to the BHS Committee. She will take on the role of office manager – Thank you Heather.
- Thanks to all who assisted with our Christmas meeting. Several members requested the recipe for Elizabeth ETTY Leal's delicious slice. It will be available at our meeting
- Thank you Elizabeth.
- Meetings are still being held re the development of a Canterbury Hub.

Balwyn Historical Society - Contact details

Balwyn Historical Society is a program of the Balwyn Evergreen Centre. Phone – 9836 9681

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First settlers: the families who first lived in the house now called *Colongulac*

By Marilyn Poole

Part 1 The Wiedemann Family

Introduction

This, and other articles to follow, tells the story of the land purchases, the building and some of the early inhabitants of a house later named *Colongulac* which now stands on Luena Street, Balwyn North.



Photo of Colongulac on Luena St, photo courtesy of Steve McLean

Swen Nilson Wiedemann and his wife Prudentia Towt

Swen Nilson Wiedemann was born in 1823 in Bosjökloster, Kristianstad, Skåne, Sweden. He travelled as an unassisted passenger to Australia sailing from Liverpool to Sydney on the *Argonaut* arriving on 11 March, 1854. His arrival coincided with a vast influx of people from all over the world who arrived to seek their fortune on the goldfields. The first wave of the Swedish born immigrants to Victoria began in the 1850s during the gold rush period and it is estimated that 1,500 Swedes lived in Victoria between 1857-59 (origins.museumsvictoria.com.au).

Mass migration from Europe to the New World was a characteristic feature of the 19th Century. One of the highest exit countries in Europe was that of Sweden. Among the reasons for this was from 1825 to 1900 there had been a sharp increase in the Swedish population. There had always been a shortage of good productive farm land in Sweden and in the 1850s there were a series of poor harvests. This, combined with a larger population, made the situation worse (Swedish Statistics 2013). Poor economic conditions, religious persecution, the conservatism of the Swedish Lutheran Church and class inequality in the hierarchical Swedish society were often cited as reasons for the mass migration of Swedes from the 1850s onwards.

Swen Nilson Wiedemann is first mentioned as farming land in Boroondara in the work of Gwen McWilliam. In 1859 he was a tenant farmer on 72 acres near Riversdale Road. By 1861 he was farming 40 acres of cultivated land and 56 acres of uncultivated land owned by Thomas. H. Power on portion 8B and later 9A of Elgar's Special Survey. By 1863,

Wiedemann was a tenant farmer and had a house on land owned by Gideon Rutherford on Ewart's Road, now Belmore Road (McWilliam *Balwyn Background, Pioneers*).

McWilliam (2010 p 128) notes the rising affluence of Swen Wiedemann: "Wiedemann (as a tenant of Power then Rutherford) with under 100 acres in 1860, 101 acres in 1878, 190 acres (1888) in Portion 8B, then acquiring land in Portion 9A".

Swen Wiedemann married Prudentia Towt on 16 May 1867 at Christ Church, Hawthorn. He was 44 and she was 19. Prudentia was the daughter of John Towt and Eliza Ford. Her father was a very successful builder and businessman in Brighton in the Port Phillip District prior to his move to Boroondara. Prudentia was born in Brighton on 16 July 1847 and spent her early life there. In 1857, John Towt purchased sections 6B, 7B and 18A of Elgar's Special Survey from the Dyce family and later built a fine home *Rosehill* on his property in Boroondara. Although much modified, this house stands today in Kenny Street in Balwyn North. Prudentia Towt no doubt met Swen Wiedemann as a neighbour when he farmed land opposite the Towt property. Swen and Prudentia had the following children namely: Nils Arthur; Carina Prudentia; Hilda Dorothea; Minnie Bertha; Anna Mildred; Gustave Charles; Clare Gertrude and Percy John.



*Swen Nilson Wiedemann,
Photo courtesy of Jan Hanslow*



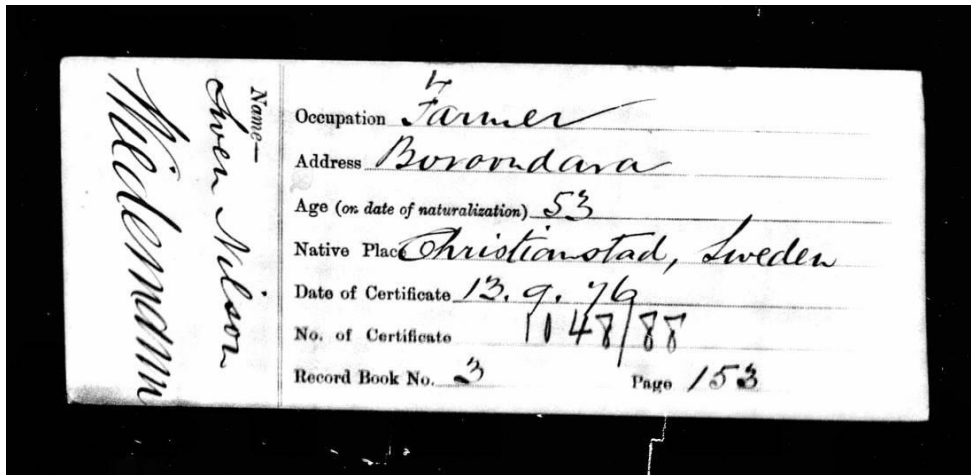
*Prudentia Towt
Source State Library of Victoria*

An auction in 1876 refers to the sale of Rutherford's Estate (*The Age* Monday 11 December 1876 p 4). Rutherford's Estate being "*portions of Elgar's Special Survey comprising 1118 acres or thereabouts of splendid land adaptable to the requirements of those seeking desirable building sites, market gardens, dairymen and grazings and within nine miles of the city of Melbourne*". Included in the advertisement of 1876 was mention not only of Wiedemann's Paddock but also of a homestead on the property.

"Weidemann's (sic) Paddock of 273 acres divided into 4 allotments, one at the corner of Towt's and Ewarts Rds upon which stands Mr Weidemann's homestead, 2 fronting Tout's (sic) Road and one at the corner of Tout's road and Doncaster road".

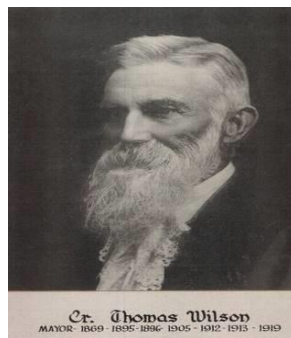
The location of portion 8B of the Survey known as Weidemann's paddock extended on the east side of Towt's Road (Greythorn Road) between Ewart's Road (Belmore Road) and Doncaster Road.

Swen Wiedemann became active in community affairs and was successful in his election to the Boroondara Shire Council in 1874 (*The Age* 5 August 1874, p2). He remained a shire councillor until 1889 when he failed to be re-elected (*Reporter* 25 July 1889 p2). He took many prizes at local agricultural shows for his pure stud cattle, ewes, lambs and horses (*Leader*, Saturday 5 May 1883, p.3; *Reporter* Thursday 8 August 1889, p. 2; *Weekly Times*, Saturday 6 September 1890)



Swen Wiedemann's Naturalisation Record 1876

The sale of Wiedemann's Paddock on Gideon Rutherford's estate was complicated. Swen Wiedemann perhaps wanted to buy the land but it was purchased instead by Thomas Wilson, brother-in-law to Prudentia. Thomas Wilson was married to Prudentia's sister Susan and was an astute businessman and successful lawyer who became Mayor of Brighton on seven occasions.



Source State Library of Victoria

According to Warwick Foster, Thomas Wilson bought the land (121 acres) Lot 1, portions 8B and 9A from James Rutherford and Ewan McPherson (executors of Gideon Rutherford's estate) at auction in 1876 for £1849. There was a settlement time of 18 months, in which time he sold the land in 1879 to Swen Wiedemann with no apparent profit. Wiedemann then obtained a mortgage from the Australian & Mortgage Bank for £1600. This mortgage was discharged in late 1882 (personal communication Jan Hanslow).

To further complicate matters financially, Prudentia's father John Towt purchased land in Nunawading in 1875 from Robert Power and Fred Fenton the executors for Thomas H. Power. He then sold it to Prudentia in 1878. The land was along the Koonung Creek, Elgar Road and Ewart's Road (Belmore Road). In January 1882 she sold the land to Joseph Aspinall and John Toon for £2,100. In an affidavit after Swen's death, Prudentia stated that

she had lent the sales proceeds to her husband but he had only repaid £600. The remainder of £1,500 plus interest was due to her out of his estate (PROV VPRS 28/ [PO](#) unit [638](#), item 50/440).

It is possible that Swen and Prudentia lived in the homestead in Wiedemann's Paddock for some time. On the other hand, there is speculation that they lived in a modest dwelling where *Colongulac* now stands. The Rate Books from 1861 onwards are not especially helpful but it seems Swen Wiedemann occupied the same piece of land on Ewart's Road (Belmore Road) for some years. The 1888 Rate Book entry shows Swen owned land on the 12 acres in Belmore and Whitehorse Road and his twenty-year-old son Nils owned a house and 89 acres. Both blocks were occupied by Swen Wiedemann. In 1888 the Wiedemanns commissioned architect Arthur Clarke for the construction of a house. Clarke was the architect of many buildings including the Box Hill Shire Hall (1889).

Tenders

ARTHUR E CLARKE, Architect, Nicholson's chambers opposite Town Hall, Swanston-street, invites TENDERS for erection of large BRICK VILLA, At Balwyn, for S. N. Wiedemann, Esq. Drawings, &c., at my office. ARTHUR E. CLARKE. (The Age Thursday, 5 January 1888 p3)



Box Hill Shire Hall 1889 Source City of Box Hill: local Government

The Wiedemann's house was constructed on the highest piece of land on the smaller lot on land sub-divided into two portions in 1889. The smaller lot consisted of about 12 acres.

Swen may have been having some financial difficulties by February 1889 as the following advertisement for an auction appeared in *The Age* (Saturday 23 February 1889, p3).

S N Wiedemann to sell by auction the whole of his valuable herd of cattle comprising 100 purebred pedigreed Jerseys including cows, heifers, yearlings and bulls.

Sale of pure Jersey cattle at Balwyn, near Kew. Also 20 half bred dairy cows, 12 horses including harness, medium and heavy draughts, pair of deer (elk buck and spotted deer), single seated buggy and harness, double do-do single and double harness, 3 iron ploughs, 1 set barrows, mower and reaper and sundry implements

Perhaps the most dramatic event was the nature of Swen Wiedemann's death. Contemporary newspaper accounts detailed how he was gored by a bull which was witnessed by his wife and children. According to the magisterial inquiry into his death:

Killed Thursday 11 August. Chas Gustavon stated he was a labourer in the employ of the deceased, He was assisting him to remove a bull from the cultivation paddock when he said

to the deceased “He looks a bit savage” to which he replied “He will not do anything”. Witness had a stick in his hand which the deceased took from him and touched the animal on the nose with it. Witness then said “Be careful Mr Wiedemann, he might rush you”. Deceased replied “Oh he won’t touch me” at the same time striking him over the nose with the stick. The bull shook his head, the deceased ran away, and the animal after him. The bull struck the deceased on the body with his horns and tossed him over his head. When he alighted the bull again rushed him and gored him against the house. Witness tried to pelt the animal with stones, but it was no use. At that time, he appeared to be dead. He assisted to remove the deceased into the house. The bull had been on the premises for a year and appeared quiet. (Reporter Friday 19 August, 1892. p3)

Swen was buried in the Boroondara cemetery. He died intestate, a wealthy man. He owned his Belmore Road property and also large holdings in Boroondara. *The Leader* (Saturday 26 November 1893) detailed instructions from Equity Trustees regarding the sale of properties owned by the deceased in Jindivick which consisted of 1050 acres, 5 lots and on one lot a homestead of 9 rooms with men’s huts, stables, yards etc.

Following Swen’s death, Prudentia left their newly built home and rented it. She married William Parrant in January 1900. They lived at 3 Rupert St, Newport which was built for Parrant in 1891. This house is one of the oldest dwellings in Hobson’s Bay and the earliest surviving house of the Grindlay Estate (Hobson’s Bay Heritage Study 2006 Amended 2017). Parrant died in December, 1905 and is buried in Williamstown Cemetery.



3 Rupert Street, Newport. http://vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/places/result_detail/22249

After William’s death, Prudentia moved to her daughter Clare’s residence in Rochester Road, Canterbury where she died on 13 March 1906 and is buried with her first husband Swen in the Boroondara Cemetery.

The “Other” Wiedemann

There were two Wiedemann brothers bearing remarkably similar names. One was Swen Nilson Wiedemann who was a wealthy farmer in Boroondara and who built the fine Italianate villa now called *Colongulac*.

There was also his half-brother Sven Adolph Nilsson Wiedemann born in May, 1844 in Bosjökloster, Kristianstad, Skåne, Sweden. This brother, known as Adolph, was trained in the coach building business. Adolph migrated to Victoria 28 November 1863 on board the *Oceania* and married Mary Ann Cole in Castlemaine 11 September, 1869. He established The Osborne Coach Company in Burwood Road, Hawthorn, living in Hawthorn and Auburn for many years. He bought land in South Australia and died in Adelaide on 11 July, 1930.

The confusion of the identities of the two half-brothers is long standing. Alexander Sutherland in *Victoria and its Metropolis* published in 1888 confused the two men and conflated their activities into that of one person. This confusion lasted well into the 21st century. It should be noted that when researching the activities of the two brothers on Trove one was referred to as S.N. Wiedemann and the other as S.A.N. Wiedemann which does little to clarify the situation.

Acknowledgements

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Sources

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PROV VPRS 28/ [P0](#) unit [638](#), item 50/440.
Weekly Times, Saturday 6 September 1890
