Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

January-February 2018

Meetings

Thursday 8 February 2018 – 8.00 pm

Speaker: Loreen Chambers

Topic: Some Pioneers of Early Melbourne: From unnamed little shanty town to Colonial Capital 1835-185l.

Loreen Chambers' main interests are British and Australian history. She writes and lectures on Charles Joseph La Trobe's life after his return to England. Loreen was the editor of the C. J. La Trobe Society's journal *La Trobeana* from 2009 to 2015.

Thursday 8 March 2018 -8 pm

Speaker: Andrew Kelly

Topic: The Yarra River and the History of Melbourne

Andrew Kelly became the Riverkeeper in 2014 and is vice-president of the Riverkeeper Association. He is a passionate advocate for the Yarra – working not only to protect it but also to improve it as a sanctuary for wildlife and a place for everyone to enjoy.

Thursday 12 April 2018 – 8 pm

Speaker: James Nicholas

Topic: The Secret of Fairyland, Kew

All meetings are held at the Balwyn Evergreen Centre, 45 Talbot Avenue, Balwyn

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

A Word from the President

Hello,

I hope you all had a happy time with family and friends during the festive season and that you have renewed energy for exploring our history. We have an interesting program in place until our mid-year break in July.

I would like to thank all the volunteers who have offered their help during our meetings. We could not manage without you as our committee is very small and it is not always possible for all of them to attend every meeting. I will be calling on you again! Once more I urge you to try to promote BHS with family, friends and neighbours as our numbers are dwindling and it would be nice to recruit more members.

On a sad note one of our foundation members Donald Menzies Gibb died in November, 2017. Don was a foundation member of the Canterbury History Group and was editor of their newsletter – his last publication came out shortly before he died. Don was influential in promoting local history and oral history and played an active role in the RHSV. His book "Visions of a Village" has played an important role in promoting the history of Canterbury. As both a friend and a colleague at Deakin University of 30 years I will miss him as will all those fortunate in knowing him. Our condolences to Ann and to his family.

We continue to be kept busy with our community service activities, answering queries regarding families who once lived in or owned land in Balwyn and responding to Council with regard to heritage enquiries.

Finally, I would like to thank committee members for all their hard work during 2017 which was a challenging year due to the ill health of members. I look forward to working with them again in 2018.

Marilyn Poole

Balwyn Historical Society - Contact details

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

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Resource Assistants - Heather Alford
Lynette Wooley, Deidre Wooley

Several months ago we received a request from Rose Raymen for information about the Frances Barkman Children's home as she was researching the background of Mark Berkman, a boy who had spent time there in the late 1950s. We were able to provide her with several sources of information and were delighted when she sent us the most interesting article which follows.

STRANGER THAN FICTION:
THE PNINA BERKMAN STORY

By Rose Raymen

"I had no idea at the time that I was about to discover his mother's true identity and reconnect him with his long-lost maternal cousins in Australia."

On Sunday 21 June 2009, I attended a talk at the Jewish Historical and Genealogical Society of Western Australia (JHGSWA), given by author and investigative journalist, Estelle Blackburn.

Estelle is the author of two books *Broken Lives* and *The End of Innocence,* which detailed the crimes committed by serial killer Eric Edgar Cooke in Perth, Western Australia. Cooke's first victim was the 33 year old Pnina Vinico Berkman, who was stabbed to death in her South Perth flat, on Friday 30 January 1959.

Portrait of Pnina Berkman, Melbourne, Victoria.

Patricia Vinico Grigg, was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1925. She converted to Judaism and adopted the Hebrew name Pnina, when she married Gerszon Gary Berkman at the Caulfield synagogue, Melbourne, in 1949. In the following year their son Mark was born and when the relationship ended, Pnina and Mark moved to Perth, Western Australia.

Estelle spoke of the night Pnina Berkman was murdered and the fact that her eight year old son was staying with friends that evening. In the months following her murder, Mark repressed any memory of his mother and their life as it had been.

Photo of Mark Berkman taken shortly before his mother's death. Perth, Western Australia.

Visiting the graves of each of Eric Cooke's six murder victims, Estelle found that although Perth's Jewish community had raised funds for Pnina's funeral, her burial site was bare ground. She happened to mention this at an industry conference and as a result, a stone grave and bronze plaque were donated.

The audience at Estelle's talk was one of the largest the Society had seen, and such was the impact on me, I emailed her the following day and asked for Mark's contact details. I had no idea at the time, that I was about to discover his mother's true identity and reconnect him, with his long-lost maternal cousins in Australia.

It all began when Mark asked if I could find the aunt shown on the birth certificate he'd ordered in 1991, from the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

The first thing I noticed was that his mother's middle name 'Vinico' had been omitted from the document. Mark also wanted to know the

identity of the person who applied for custody of him at the time of his mother's death and sent me a note which read, *"C. L. Grigg, 'Harringal', Henry Road, Croydon."* So I submitted an enquiry to the State Library of Victoria, requesting a search of the 1959 Melbourne Street Directory for this individual. I received a reply a week later and now had the name of Charles Leslie Grigg but his connection to Mark was unknown.

Mark had given me the link to his Flickr website and so I read of his stay at the Frances Barkman House in Balwyn, Melbourne, when his father was unable to care for him. The Australian Jewish Welfare & Relief Society (AJWRS), established the children's home (originally named Larino) in 1939, to accommodate German and Austrian evacuees and refugees, arriving in the country.

The Frances Barkman House in Balwyn, Victoria,
October 1959.
(Source: Museums Victoria)

Mark exhibiting his talent as a wood carver.
(Photo taken at the studio of Rudi Lehmann, sculptor
and wood carver, Givatayim, Israel)

I also learned that in December 1961, Mark and his father Gary left for Israel and that in February 1972, Mark married Rivka Kronkop in Tel Aviv, the girl who befriended him on his first day at school.

Mark and Rivka Berkman's wedding day Tel Aviv,
Israel, February 1972.

Mark and Rivka had three children, eldest son Tamir, daughter Rona and youngest son Hadar. Mark worked for a Tel Aviv bank and sculpted in his spare time. However, the mother he couldn't remember remained in his heart and so, in September 2004, Mark, Rivka and Hadar visited Perth, the city where he lived in as a child.

Standing by his mother's gravesite, located at the Jewish Orthodox section of Karrakatta cemetery, he said *Kaddish* (prayer for the dead) and placed small stones on her grave. Mark had brought a plaque with him from Israel inscribed, "DEAR MOTHER YOU HAVE A FAMILY – MARK, RIVKA, TAMIR, RONA AND HADAR BERKMAN. WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER AND LOVE."

But there was already a plaque on Pnina's grave which read, "PATRICIA VINICO BERKMAN, DIED 30 JANUARY 1959, AGE 33 YEARS, DEEPLY MOURNED BY HER SON MARK." The family enquired at the office and was advised that the plaque had been donated.

On the 50th anniversary of Pnina's death, Perth's *Sunday Times* published an article on the story and as a consequence, 35 family photographs and documents, seized by detectives during the murder investigation, were located by a member of the Western Australian Police Historical Society. Estelle Blackburn collected the 50-year-old package from police headquarters in Perth and sent it to Mark in Tel Aviv.

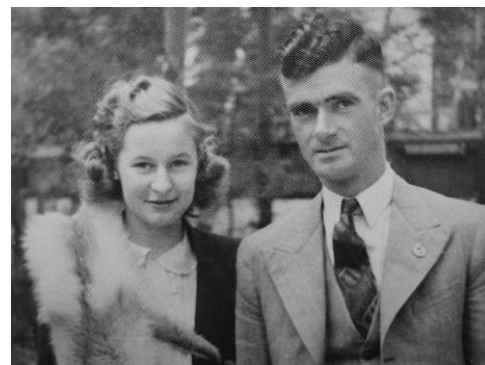Donated plaque on Pnina Berkman's grave, Perth, Western Australia.

During one of our conversations, Mark mentioned that his mother had served in the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) in World War Two.

Private P Grigg Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) operates an overhead crane at No.1 Base Ordnance Depot, Bandiana, Wodonga, Australia, 30 March 1944.
(Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial)

I ordered the service record from the National Archives of Australia, which arrived a month later. After studying the document, I deduced that the birth certificate Mark ordered in 1991, was for another woman, with the same first and last names, born in the same year as his mother. I also noted that Patricia's father was shown as Charles Leslie Grigg, the man who applied for custody of Mark. It took quite a bit of convincing that the birth record he'd ordered 18 years earlier was for someone else.

Patricia Grigg with adoptive father Charles Leslie Grigg, Melbourne, Victoria.

After several "NO RECORD" RESULT letters from the Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, I was certain that Patricia Grigg was adopted and that her unusual middle name 'Vinico' was a clue to her true identity.

But the ordeal had taken its toll on Mark and he asked me to stop searching. However, I was determined to uncover the facts and persuaded him to continue. Desperate times call for desperate measures and so I enlisted the help of my genealogist friend Sally Erwood-Carryer and together we drafted a letter for Mark, addressed to the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registrar, requesting her assistance in locating the document. Mark was then asked to fax Pnina's death certificate, resulting in his mother's correct birth record being found.

Patricia Vinnicombe, was born on 08 July 1925 in Carlton, Victoria, to 25 year old single mother Dorothea Vinnicombe, born in Romsey, Victoria in 1899.

I would also later discover, that his maternal grandmother Dorothea, lived in the same suburb as Mark, during the time he stayed at the Frances Barkman House in Balwyn, Melbourne.

An elated Mark then asked if I could find any living members of this new-found family. I checked the Victorian Residential White Pages and located 20 listings. I had done a substantial amount of research by then, so decided to contact the Vinnicombes who lived in country Victoria.

Portrait of Dorothea Vinnicombe, Victoria, Australia.

The first person on my list was an individual named Ron Vinnicombe. So I rang and said I was researching the family history of Thomas and Susan Elizabeth Vinnicombe and asked if he was related. I almost fell off my chair when he answered "*yes*." Ron suggested that I contact a woman named Jean Williams, a second cousin to Mark, who lived in the country town of St Arnaud in Victoria.

When I phoned Jean she told me she'd been searching for Patricia for many years and was overjoyed that I'd finally found her. Jean decided that welcoming Mark to the family was so important she flew to Israel. Mark described her two week stay as, "*the most wonderful thing that has happened to us*." He would also learn that Jean's sister Heather McKay and his mother had been close friends in the army, although neither of the women knew they were first cousins.

On her return from Israel, Jean started planning a celebration for the Berkmans in her home town. In September 2011, Mark, Rivka, their sons and his cousin Dianna Gold, entered a restaurant in St Arnaud, filled to capacity, with his newly-discovered family.

Mark, Rivka and Hadar stopped over in Perth on their way home and we met at the airport, two years after I first contacted him.

On the following day, a third memorial plaque from the Vinnicombe family in Victoria, was added to Pnina's grave which read, "IN REMEMBRANCE OF OUR COUSIN PNINA (PATRICIA) BERKMAN, SADLY UNKNOWN TO US IN LIFE, NOW TREASURED BY THE VINNICOMBE FAMILY."

Memorial plaque from the Vinnicombe family in Victoria, Perth, Western Australia.

I wrote to Mark on completion of my research and told him, "*Your story is one of triumph over tragedy but most of all it's a story of hope. Welcome home my friend.*"

Photos: Courtesy Mark Berkman and Rose Raymen

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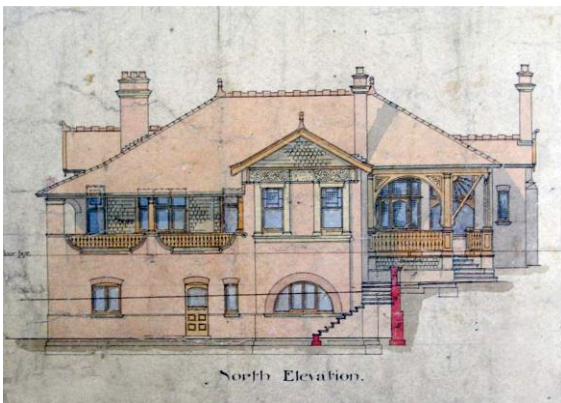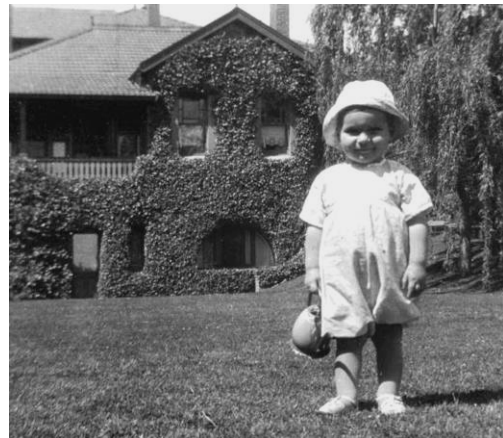
Larino and Maleela

Dear Pat,

I was interested to see the story about *Larino* in the November issue of the BHS Newsletter. There was an error about the origin of *Larino*. The house was designed by Edward Bates, the younger brother of William Bates. The following note deals with the history of *Larino* before it was sold in 1939 for use as a home for refugee children; it may be useful for your archives.

William Bates, b. 1863, was a solicitor and the elder son of the Hon. William Bates, MLA for Collingwood, 1868-1874. Edward Bates, b. 1865, was an architect who started his career as a draftsman in Melbourne's leading firm of architects Reed, Henderson and Smart, which undertook the design of the State Library, the Town Hall, the Trades Hall, the Royal Exhibition Building, and parts of Melbourne University. After Joseph Reed died his partnership had several changes and was reconstituted in 1907 as Bates, Peebles and Smart. In 1926 the partnership became Bates, Smart and McCutcheon.

1892 Plan for *Larino*. Courtesy Bill Mackie

1922 Bill Mackie at *Larino. Courtesy Bill Mackie*

The two Bates brothers married two sisters, daughters of the Hon. Robert Reid, MLC, of *Belmont* Balwyn. When Reid's eldest daughter Kate married Will Bates in 1892 he gave them a block of about 4 acres of land fronting Whitehorse Road, with side fences on streets later named Reid Street and Maleela Avenue. Edward Bates married Ethel Reid in 1897, so they were given a similar 4-acre block, adjoining Will and Kate's block also between Reid Street and Maleela Avenue. Will and Kate named their new home *Larino* and Ted and Ethel called theirs *Maleela*. No descendants seem to have known the origin of these names. A town in Italy near the Adriatic coast has the name Larino, but we have no record that this town was visited by the Bates couple. Maleela may have been an Aboriginal name, like Mallala in S.A., but there is no evidence of its origin. The main entrance (and address) of *Larino* was on Whitehorse Road, but a side entrance to a 4-car garage was on Maleela Avenue, below the entrance to *Maleela*. A Maleela Grove is situated in Rosanna.

Melbourne University Archives has sets of house plans prepared by Edward Bates' partnerships over many years for Robert Reid and members of his family. The initial design for *Larino* was identified by 'W. Bates Bungalow' and with contract date as 8th March 1892. Attached is an image of the north elevation drawing in this sheet of plans. The house was single–storey but with a basement on the north side containing a bedroom, billiard room and door to the garden. A double-storey addition was made to the south side of *Larino* in about 1920, but the north side was unaltered as may be seen in the second image taken in about December 1922 with Bill Mackie (me) in the foreground; at that stage a large lawn extended across this side of the house. In 1926 a large lily pond with a fountain was placed in the centre of this lawn, as may be seen in the photo below.

Photo: Courtesy Bill Mackie - *Larino*

With kind regards,

Bill Mackie

Recent Speaker – Chris Long

Chris Long once again presented us with a meticulously prepared talk on the history of film in Australia – this time concentrating on the films produced by the Salvation Army's Limelight Department in the early 1900s.

During these years the Salvation Army produced films for its own use in recruiting and raising awareness of social issues and it also branched out into secular film-making for government and commercial businesses. These films were shown widely by the Biorama Company as it toured the country. The revenue raised supported the Salvation Army's social work program.

Chris showed us wonderful clips from a variety of films including footage of the Australian Federation celebrations, the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York, the US navel fleet's visit to Australia and the first major natural history documentary film on Australia – a tour of the settlements and natural history of the islands of Bass Strait.

Unfortunately, when the Limelight Department came to a controversial end in 1909 the film studio at 69 Bourke St. was shut down and gathered dust for over 100 years. In recent years it has been restored and opened for visitors as a most interesting museum and collection of film-making equipment.