



Balwyn Historical Society Newsletter

June-July-2018

Meetings

Thursday 14 June 2018 – 8 pm

Speaker:-Helen Page

Topic - Boroondara Cemetery: Returning it to a Garden Cemetery

Helen Page, a horticulturist, has been on the Boroondara Cemetery Trust for 6 years. She has encouraged the Trust to dedicate more funds to the horticultural aspects of the cemetery. She has also worked with the Friends of the Cemetery with gardening working bees.

Note there will be no meeting in July

Thursday 8 August 2018 – 8 pm

Speaker: Richard Peterson

Topic: Bungalows in Balwyn

Richard Peterson is an architect and conservation consultant. During his long career he has published 6 books and many articles and papers. He will speak about Balwyn's rapidly disappearing Californian bungalows.

Thursday 13 September – 8 pm

Topic: Back to the Flicks

A presentation by the Cinema and Theatre Historical Society of Australia will take you on a step back in time when a night out at the 'flicks' was a special occasion. Hear about the development of the picture palaces of yesteryear in Balwyn and nearby suburbs.

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

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

BHS Membership 2018-2019

Membership fees are due on July 1. The fee will remain the same for the 2018-2019 financial year.

\$25 - single membership

\$35 - joint membership i.e. 2 adults at the same address.

A renewal form accompanies this newsletter.

You may renew your membership at the next meeting. Payment may be made by cash or cheque (payable to *Balwyn Historical Society*). It would be helpful if you could place your payment in an envelope marked with your name(s). Otherwise please send the completed renewal form together with a cheque to **The BHS Treasurer, Balwyn Evergreen Centre, 45 Talbot Ave, Balwyn 3103.**

For membership enquires contact Barbara Russell – 9857-6416

Recent Speaker – Isabel Simpson

Isabel Simpson's engaging and beautifully illustrated talk began with information about David Mitchell's background and business ventures into brick-making, quarrying and building. She then outlined John Monash's early years in Dudley Street, West Melbourne. Mitchell's daughter, Helen Porter Mitchell, had a similar upbringing and later rose to fame as the opera singer Dame Nellie Melba.

David Mitchell is remembered as a renowned builder of numerous iconic buildings in Melbourne including the Royal Exhibition Building, Scots' Church and St Patrick's Cathedral. General Sir John Monash excelled as an engineer being responsible for many projects including the Outer Circle Railway before becoming one of the Australia's military leaders in World War 1. Dame Nellie Melba's illustrious career as a world renowned opera star is still celebrated today. Her house and garden in Coldstream, not far from Lilydale, attract many hundreds of visitors each year.

Pre Meeting Speaker – Peter Binks

Peter Binks, one of our oldest members, held a very interesting conversation with a group of members before our last meeting. Among other things he spoke about his early life in England, the trips he made with his father to Europe and his migration to Australia. Peter and his wife became very involved in volunteer work after they arrived in Australia and over many years they worked with a number of organizations. Peter was very involved in the Puffing Billy railway, the Kevin Heinze Garden Centre and in training and mentoring paraplegic workers. His life spanning more than 90 years has certainly been a very full and varied one.

Balwyn Historical Society - Contact details

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

| | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| President | Marilyn Poole | 9857 7565 |
| Secretary | Pat O'Dwyer | 9836-3652 |
| Treasurer/ | Barbara Russell | |
| Membership | Judith Cleary | |
| Archivist | Pam Herrington | |

| | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Newsletter | Pat O'Dwyer | 9836-3652 |
| Web manager | Sharon Bondy | |
| Resource Assistants - | Heather Alford | |
| | Lynette Wooley, Deidre Wooley | |

German-speaking immigrants – the Finger family (part 3)

By Marilyn Poole

Introduction

This article is the third in the series on German-speaking immigrants. The first focussed on Christian Benjamin Finger, the patriarch, who owned land in Hawthorn, Richmond and Doncaster and a market garden in Balwyn. The second article focussed on Carl Heinrich (Henry) who was an orchardist in Deepdene where he built a 2-room house and raised children then moved to Doncaster. Henry retained land on Balwyn Road and later Whitehorse Road until his death. This third article in the series is about Ernst Ferdinand, eighth child of Henry and Caroline.

Ernst Ferdinand Finger (always known as Ferdinand Finger)

Ferdinand was born on the 20 October 1870 at Doncaster, Victoria, the youngest child of Carl Heinrich (Henry) Finger and his wife Caroline Aumann. He attended Pastor Max von Schramm's Lutheran school in Doncaster (Dovile 2003 p. 309). On his father's death in 1884, the Doncaster property was divided between Ferdinand and his older brother John. Ferdinand left school in order to help his mother Caroline and brother John Traugott Finger run the orchard established by his father (Ibid). Ferdinand showed great promise as an orchardist at an early age by growing lemons 'budding onto orange seedling stocks raised by his father' and 'established the first two acres of lemons grown in the Doncaster'. (Ibid).



*Original homestead of the Finger family, George Street, Doncaster.
Source State Library of Victoria, creator John Collins 1907-2001 photographer*

On 21 September 1892 Ferdinand married Luise Auguste Fankhauser at Doncaster. Luise, born 23 November 1871 was the second daughter of George Fankhauser and his wife Johanne Louise Neumann of Belmore Road, Balwyn. Ferdinand's sister Martha was married to Luise Auguste's brother George Friedrich Fankhauser (Ibid).

Ferdinand and Luise lived at the Finger homestead. Married life began in difficult economic times. The land boom of the 1880s was followed by a land bust of the early 1890s. Then came a Depression. Irvine Green (1985 p. 21) wrote 'Banks failed and family savings were lost; sons left home to look for work in other states and families who had lost their homes, moved in with relatives'. However, people working on the land were able to cope better than many living in cities. They were able to live off the land 'and there was always a demand for the food they grew' (Ibid). The Government encouraged employment by offering a bonus for every new acre of

orchard planted. 'Wages were cheap, so a man who employed labour had a financial advantage' (Ibid). Ferdinand Finger was astute, worked hard and weathered the difficult economic times.

Ferdinand and Luise had a family of eight children. As well as family commitments Ferdinand, a young man in his twenties, became an authority on citrus fruit growing. In 1896 an article in the *Leader* (Saturday 8 August 1896 p. 14) said:

There are many fine orchards in the Doncaster district, and amongst the good ones must be numbered the plantations of Messrs. J. and F. Finger, who are brothers and occupy adjoining blocks. The former owns 60 acres and the latter 70 acres under trees and vines, and in each case the management of the plantation reflects great credit on the owner. Dealing with the larger orchard, namely that owned by Mr. F. Finger, the chief noticeable feature is the splendid plantation 12 acres of orange and lemon trees that are now in full bearing. The orange trees in particular are immense specimens, nothing that I have seen in Victoria being equal to them, except some of the trees in Mr. Brien's orangery, near Wangaratta'

In 1898 *The Australasian* (Saturday 26 November 1898 p. 13) referred to the 'model citrus plantation of Mr Ferdinand Finger which consists of about 20 acres, three fourths of which are planted with lemons and the rest with oranges, a few shaddocks etc'. The newspaper article went on to say:

'In addition to citrus trees, Mr Finger grows largely cherries, plums, pears and other fruits. His estate is in three portions; about 100 acres are already planted, part of which is full bearing, the remainder consisting of young trees; there is already nearly another hundred acres, about two miles distant, nearly ready for planting. Mr Finger intends if possible to keep pace with increasing demand for fruit by annually enlarging his acreage'

A similar article in the *Leader* newspaper (Saturday 10 December 1898 p. 10) discussed the irrigation problems in growing citrus fruit. Ferdinand and his late father were credited with the idea of building dams at the top of a rise and distributing the water to fruit trees from there. Ferdinand was quoted as saying "however much water you may have at command, there is no reason in wasting it". The newspaper article commended Ferdinand's method of distribution of water as 'simple, economic and effective'. *The Leader* commented 'of the several fruits grown by Mr Finger, the lemons and oranges, which cover about 20 acres of a slope with a north-easterly aspect, receive the most attention in the way of irrigation' (Ibid).

Ferdinand played a major role in community life. He first stood (unsuccessfully) for the Shire of Doncaster council in 1893 a year after his marriage (*The Reporter* Friday 1 September 1893 p.3). However, in 1894 he was successful and was Shire Councillor from 1894-1908 and Shire President from 1905-1906 (*The Reporter* 6 February 1908 p.2). During his term as Shire Councillor, Ferdinand represented the Shire at the opening of the First Federal Parliament in May 1901 (Dovile, 2003 p. 309). His other interests were the Doncaster brass band and the Cricket Club (Ibid) and the Doncaster Rifle Club where he was vice-president (*Reporter* Friday 30 August 1901 p.2).



Ferdinand Finger and his wife Luise Auguste Fankhauser.

When he was Shire President, Ferdinand was prominent in addressing various groups connected with fruit growing such as the Victorian fruit cooperative (*Reporter* Friday 29 September 1905 p. 4) and attending local functions such as the annual picnic of Doncaster East school (*Reporter* Friday 5 April 1907 p. 4). Luise was also active in the community.

Ferdinand (like many land-holders of the period) bought and sold property. In *the Reporter* (19 December 1902 p. 2) Mr F. Finger was reported as being the purchaser of the largest portion of John Towt's estate in North Balwyn securing lots 1 and 7 comprising about 130 acres. A year later some of his Doncaster land was for sale *The Reporter* (Friday 20 November 1903) stated: '*Mr Ferdinand Finger's orchard property of 96 acres at Doncaster, near Blackburn. The property included an area of 76 acres in fruit trees viz 41 acres apples, 18 acres pears, 8 acres lemons and 5 acres each of cherries and plums and is probably the largest area of fruit trees in one line that has ever changed hands in the district.*'

In 1906 *The Reporter* (Friday 23 February 1906 p.2) said '*Cr Ferdinand Finger, president of the Shire, intends sailing for Europe on 7th March for six months, accompanied by his good wife. The genial president has well-earned his holiday, and we wish his good lady and himself a really good time.*' While overseas, Ferdinand and Luise visited Quirl, Silesia where Ferdinand's grandparents Christian Benjamin and Caroline Friedericke Finger had built a farmhouse and raised their family. It is interesting to see the similarity in building styles between this farmhouse and barn and the homestead built by Henry Finger in Doncaster in 1870.



Ferdinand and Luise in front of his grandparent's farmhouse in Quirl, Silesia in 1906.

The Fingers were a well-known couple in Doncaster, it was reported in “Doncaster Doings” in *The Reporter* (Friday 27 July 1906) that ‘Preparations are in progress to give a public welcome home to Cr. and Mrs Finger, who are expected back next month from a trip through Europe’. Ferdinand gave an interesting address later that year at the meeting of the Doncaster Fruit Growers’ Association on fruit growing and fruit markets in other lands (*The Reporter* Friday 2 November 1906 p. 4). Apparently after his address there was a long discussion on the ‘harassing provisions of the Commerce Act’.

Ferdinand sold other orchards in Doncaster, the *Rochester Express* (7 April 1914 p.2) reported that ‘a young 200-acre orchard at Doncaster belonging to Mr. Ferdinand Finger has been purchased by a syndicate for £20,000. If this be correct, it is the largest transaction in orchard property yet effected in Victoria. The orchard lies to the west of Doncaster, in the direction of Balwyn, and is acknowledged to be a very fine property’.

Ferdinand sold 99 acres of orchards in Doncaster and bought 200 acres in North Balwyn. According to Dovile (2003 p. 309) the boundaries of the land in North Balwyn were Doncaster Road, Balwyn Road and Greythorn Road’. In 1908 Ferdinand recorded his intention to resign from the Shire of Doncaster council (*Reporter* Friday 3 July 1908 p. 7). In 1909 Ferdinand and his family moved from Doncaster to live for a short time in Barkers Road, Kew. Ferdinand rode his bicycle every day to work in his orchard in North Balwyn. He built a large house consisting of 10 main rooms on this land which he named *Tannenwald*. The house was completed in 1911 and surrounded by a large garden (Dovile Ibid).

The land in North Balwyn was bought after the collapse of the land boom for £20 an acre. According to Dovile (Ibid), the land was later sub-divided during 1918-19 into 746 residential blocks. Ferdinand retained 15 acres around his homestead for a lemon orchard. “Finger’s lemon orchard” was located behind Maughan’s wildlife sanctuary which some readers may remember. As his large family grew up and left home the orchard fell into disuse and Ferdinand concentrated on growing flowers which he supplied to florist shops in the city ‘and fruit of unusual varieties to well-known fruiterer, Jonas of Collins Street’. (Ibid).

Ferdinand and Luise both spoke and wrote German and encouraged their children to do so. Dovile (2003 p. 310) comments that during Pastor Fehlberg’s ministry at the Lutheran church in Doncaster (about 1915-16) the use of German for services was reduced (no doubt due to anti-German sentiment during World War I). Ferdinand preferred church services to be in German and so he and his family worshipped at the German Lutheran Trinity Church in Parliament Place, East Melbourne where Ferdinand was a Trustee and an Elder. Ferdinand and Luise supplied flowers for church decoration and the Christmas tree for family services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day (Ibid). In 1953, Ferdinand was there for the centenary celebrations of the church which had counted Baron von Mueller as a member (*The Age* Saturday 19 September 1953 p 18).

People from German speaking backgrounds were often considered somewhat suspect during World War 1. At the Box Hill Police Court in 1917 a young unnaturalised German who came to Australia in 1913 was residing with Ferdinand in Doncaster Road, North Balwyn. Oscar Werner Steward Biese was charged with having failed to comply with the provisions of the war precautions legislation. He had written a letter to his parents via an aunt living in Switzerland which she would then send on to Frankfurt, Germany. His excuse was that he had unknowingly failed to comply with regulations. The letter was translated and found to be a simple letter to his father and mother and did not convey any information giving military advantage. However, an offence had been committed and he was fined £10, ordered to enter into a bond of £100 and also awarded costs of £5/7/6 (*Camberwell and Hawthorn Advertiser* Saturday 30 June 1917 p. 5)

A family notice in *The Argus* (2 July 1946 p.2) announced the death on July 1, 1946 at her residence at McShane Street, North Balwyn of Luise Auguste. She is buried at Boroodara Cemetery. Ferdinand was alone in *Tannenwald* and decided to build a pair of two-story maisonettes to the west of the homestead. *Tannenwald* was eventually sold and St Aidan's Presbyterian Church now stands on the site. Ferdinand married Adeline Mathilde Wallent on 2 September 1950 at the German Lutheran Church, East Melbourne (Dovile 2003 p. 309).

Ferdinand was an astute business man and bought land in many different places including Upper Beaconsfield, Lysterfield and Pakenham. Different family members lived there from time to time (Ibid). He also owned a home at 39 Wattle Road, Hawthorn which stood on the land his grandfather Christian Benjamin had owned and cleared in 1850 (Ibid p. 310).

Ferdinand died on 18 April 1956 at a private hospital in Kew and is buried in the Boroondara Cemetery. His second wife Adeline died on 25 August 1973 in Cheltenham, England (Ibid).

NB

Tannenwald was the name of Ferdinand's house in North Balwyn and is the German term for a fir forest. Ferdinand may have been thinking of the pine trees used as windbreaks for the orchards. In 1896 his brother John Traugott Finger travelled to Europe and collected pine seeds to grow as windbreaks for his own orchard in Doncaster.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Glenda Dovile for her help and generosity in supplying family photographs.

Sources

Camberwell and Hawthorn Advertiser Saturday 30 June 1917 p. 5
Dovile, G. 2003 *The Fingers of Australia and Silesia 1703-2003*
Green, I. 1985 *The Orchards of Doncaster and Templestowe* DTHS
Leader Saturday 8 August 1896 p. 14; Saturday 10 December 1898 p. 10
Rochester Express 7 April 1914 p.2
The Age "Churches that Kept Pace with our History" Saturday 19 September 1953 p 18
The Argus 2 July 1946 p.2
The Australasian Saturday 26 November 1898 p. 13
The Reporter Friday 1 September 1893 p.3; Friday 30 August 1901 p.2; 19 December 1902 p. 2; Friday 20 November 1903; Friday 29 September 1905 p. 4; Friday 23 February 1906 p.2; Friday 27 July 1906; Friday 2 November 1906 p. 4; 5 April 1907 p. 4; 6 February 1908 p.2; Friday 3 July 1908 p. 7