

BUNGALOWS OF ST ALBANS



Joseph Ribarow
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Corrections and amendments

If you wish to correct any errors in this publication, or want to suggest any other amendments, please contact the publisher at the above address or leave a message for the author at www.historyofstalbens.com

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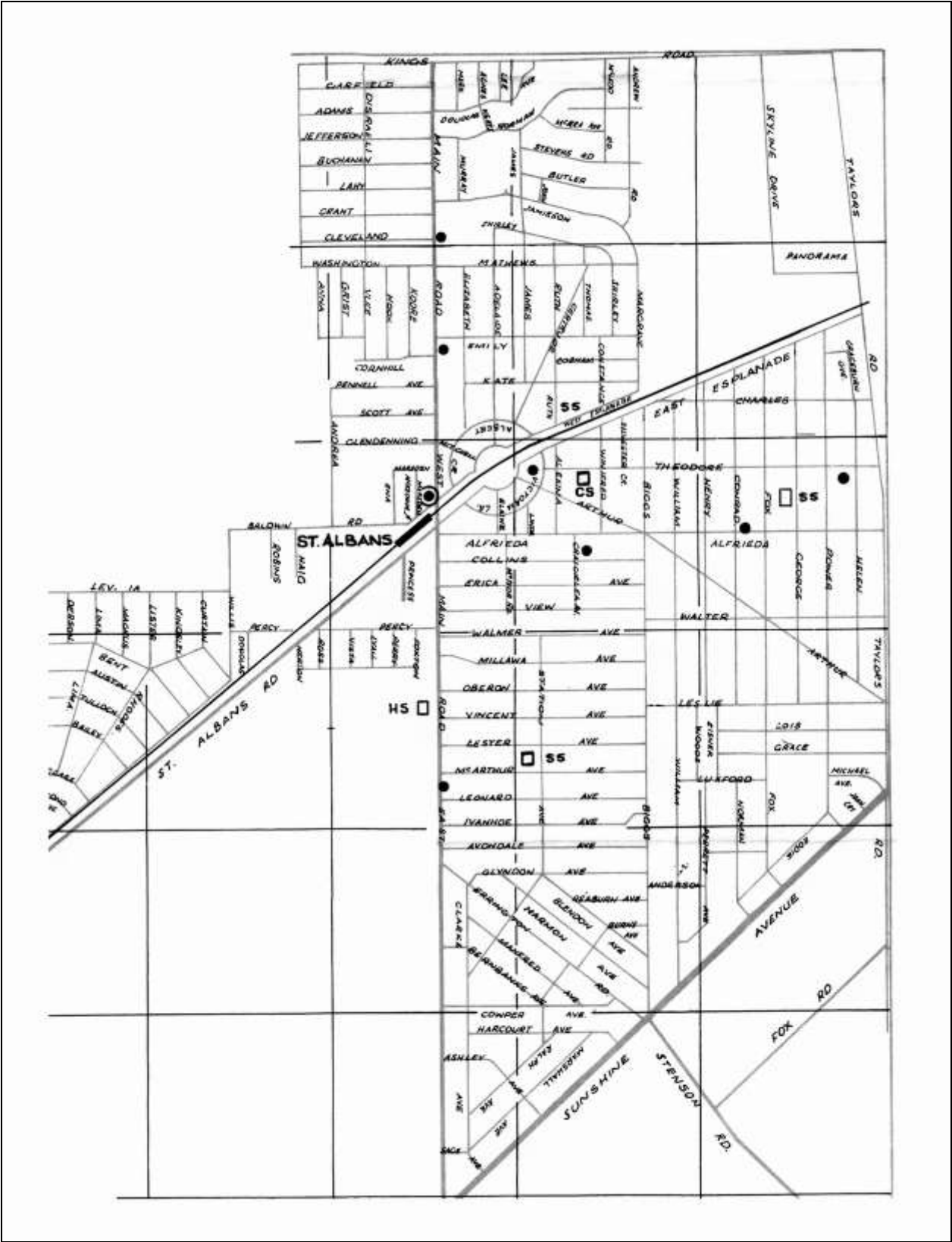
Eddie Lacinski's article is available at <https://greataustralianstory.com.au/story/st-albans-then-and-now>.

Front cover

The Rust family building their bungalow in St Albans in the 1950s. Image from the collection of Christel Huwald née Rust.

With the help of other migrants, dad soon built our first residence in Australia. It was a one room bungalow, comprising a main bedroom, my bedroom, kitchen, dining room, lounge room and bathroom all in the same room. The framework was clad with packing crates from Ford Motor Company in Broadmeadows, insulated with old newspapers and finished in cement sheets with a corrugated iron roof. It was home and it was great.

Eddie Lacinski
St Albans Then and Now
31 July 2016



The township of St Albans circa 1960

Preface

This publication is about the people of St Albans and their bungalows in the 1950s. In the aftermath of WW2, many European refugees were looking to settle overseas and many were sponsored to come to Australia to work with post-war national and industrial developments. After completing their two-year stints working under the government's direction, they were eager to rebuild their lives independently. They wanted work and a plot of land where they could build their home and raise their family in peace. Many came to St Albans because land was available and affordable. It helped that their compatriots were also arriving here as it provided a familiar social and cultural buffer. I was from one of these migrant families.

St Albans in 1950 was a small, semi-rural village of 850 people with lots of empty paddocks. Soon these paddocks were sprouting bungalows and half-houses galore. Many of the migrants did it from the ground up, because they dug holes for the foundations and built their basic home themselves. By 1960 the population had increased to 7,000 and by 1970 it was 20,000 – it was an incredible growth rate that was completely unexpected. And though it was noticed at the time, the history of these settlers and their first homes has not been officially recorded.

The purpose of this publication is to give voice to some of this history of settlement and these articles are mostly from personal perspectives. Recollections by earlier residents include Evelyn Mullenger, Mary Smith, Mavis Hunter, John Stevens, Gavan Aitken, Kevin Jarred and Jimmy Knowles. Lorna Cameron, Bev Toogood, Lynette Cox and Fred Barlow are Aussies who moved here during that era, while John Thornton and George Eisner were bungalow builders of the time. However, the majority of stories are by new Australians, like me, who came here with their families and still have vivid memories of their early experiences. I have included an overview of the bungalows phenomenon from a broader historical perspective as a background to these stories.

Fifteen years ago, my good friend Nick Szwed said we should write a history of our colleagues who attended St Albans High School because most of that legacy documentation had been lost. Since then I have been recording oral history and Nick has accumulated an extensive collection of photographs. We collaborated on the history of St Albans Secondary College for its 50th and 60th anniversaries, and many of these articles are excerpts from those and related consultations. Thank you to our old friends and the new contributors who submitted stories during 2018.

The history of bungalows and half-houses of St Albans is a significant aspect of the district's heritage. These oral history stories and iconic photographs are a unique collection and I hope they bring back memories.

Joseph Ribarow
December 2018

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Bungalows of St Albans

The genesis of St Albans as a neighbourhood occurred in November 1868 when the Closer Settlement Board acquired the Keilor-Braybrook Farmers Common and offered the land for selection. The Farmers Common straddled the municipal boundary between Keilor and Braybrook. This was a major part of the acreage that was later known as St Albans, but at this stage it was referred to as being part of the Keilor Plains. The Farmers Common was surveyed into 68 allotments of about 80 acres each and the local population was soon about 200 according to the Victorian Municipal Directory.

One condition of this land allocation was that a house had to be built on the property, so there must have been at least 68 houses in the new district. The most basic temporary housing at the time was probably the ubiquitous tent, though shepherds' huts were of rougher construction, being mere humpies made of scrap materials. John and Bridget Foley came to Keilor in 1854 and lived in a tent with several children for four years, and that was probably not unusual for the era as tent cities were the main accommodation options at the gold diggings.

Some of the early settlers in the district built in stone because it was available all around them and had to be cleared from the ground before it could be cultivated. Building houses, sheds and fences was good use of the stone and available just for the labour of picking it up. James Joy's house in 1858 consisted of 4 rooms: a kitchen, a lumber-room, a bedroom for the men, and a bedroom for the women. When Isabella Williams arrived with her father and family in Melbourne in 1840 they lived in a mud hut and then a timber house of only two rooms on the bank of the Yarra River. When Isabella acquired her Keilor-Braybrook Commons selection in 1868 her stone building comprised of 3 rooms. The Davis brothers along Taylors Road built their house of corrugated iron – it was undoubtedly a quick and cheap way of meeting the Settlement Board's regulations, but it was never their permanent accommodation as they were residents of Werribee.



The first St Albans Primary School 1880s in a rented cottage showing typical housing architecture pre 1900.

The next stage of development for St Albans was in 1886 when Alfred Henry Padley and the Cosmopolitan Land and Banking Company bought much of the land along the railway line and subdivided it into residential allotments. The company paid for the railway station to be built and named it St Albans, hence the district became known as the township of St Albans. They also built several display houses as an indicator of the type of discerning professionals they wanted to attract as buyers.

Padley and his company were land boomers who were hoping to capitalise on their speculations but their venture collapsed with the financial crisis of the 1890s and the population numbers declined to about 120 people in 38 households. Padley's "grand mansion" from that era still exists and is now the Catholic presbytery.



Padley home in Winifred Street, built circa 1887

The Closer Settlement Board repurchased much of this land and new selections were offered in 1905 as small farm allotments of "good agricultural and grazing land" from the Overnewton Estate. This sale attracted a new generation of settlers and a village developed around the railway station. It was a time of growth in residential housing as well as community facilities and business construction, and the population increased again to 200 people.

Little has been written about the local housing regulations during this era though they obviously existed. Generally speaking, building only part of a house and living in it was not permissible under the building regulations. However, over time Keilor Shire Council adopted a flexible approach to this requirement, which had a major influence over new housing developments in the district. This became especially noticeable in the 1950s when thousands of European displaced persons came to St Albans because building a part house – the St Albans bungalow – was an affordable proposition for them. But the origins of this started much earlier.

The first easing of regulations occurred in March 1924, when Cr. Frederick Stenson, the President of the Keilor Shire Council, brought before the members a matter that was agitating residents of St Albans. He said that Alexander

Dickson was contemplating the erection of a shop in St Albans that was to be built for a green grocery. Another contractor had in view a butcher's shop, but both would be unable to proceed with the work if the council's by-law, compelling only brick or concrete buildings, was enforced. He thought the council should assist the contractors in the matter. Mr Andrew, the shire secretary, read the by-law and building regulations, and advised the council that they had power to vary, and suggested that he be empowered to give the necessary permission for the contractors to erect the buildings in wood. The authority to give that power to the secretary was then carried unanimously.



The second St Albans Primary School early 1900s

The term bungalow for housing in St Albans was already in use in the 1920s. In 1926 Walmer Coleman was advertising houses and land to rent in St Albans and referred to: "New Tiled-roof Bungalow, 5 rooms, bathroom, washhouse, close station, 25/-." ¹



Coleman bungalow on Pinnacle Estate 1920s

Then an even more important decision was made in March 1938, when Cr. Fred Stenson supported "the progressive construction" of a house at St Albans. This would allow the owner living in a portion of the building for 12 months while he proceeded with the completion of the whole. The application was by Robert Francis Sulman, and the proposed building was in Gertrude Street. It was mentioned that Sulman had a wife and two young children, implying this

was a genuine request to accommodate a young family. A plan was submitted, revealing that two rear rooms were to be erected first. Cr. Stenson said the council had refused similar applications in recent months as those to whom permission had been granted to erect houses on a progressive basis previously had not come up to scratch. In this case, however, the owner had given him the assurance that the building would be completed in 12 months, and he consented to put this promise before the council.

The proposal was debated and generally there was much sympathy for it. Cr. James Stevens argued that council should encourage people who were struggling to make a home. Cr. Dickson stated that in the building boom, tragedies occurred when people built houses and later found out they could not pay for them. Cr. Stenson said he would be prepared to amend his motion so as to require three rooms to be completed before the house was occupied: two front rooms and the kitchen. The motion was then agreed to. This was the start of a flexible building code that continued to evolve. The local population had increased to 600 people, so it was an expanding village.

In 1942 the War Workers Housing Trust wrote to local councils proposing to rent bungalows to people in Footscray, Sunshine and Essendon so as to accommodate workers as boarders. Essendon council wanted to have the bungalows built under the supervision of local councils and for councils to have the right to order their removal after the war.² The proposal was considered by the St Albans Progress Association and they decided to ask Keilor Council to oppose anything that tended to lower the existing building regulations.³ However, these building innovations must have proceeded to some degree as in 1945 a "portable bungalow" was offered for sale in Sunshine and described as "10ft x 8ft, lined, furnished, good bargain."⁴ The population continued to increase during the decade and between the late 1940s and 1952 it was about 900 people.

The housing construction debate continued in the 1950s even within Federal Parliament by Mr Harold Holt who was the Minister of Labour, National Service and Immigration, when questions were asked about the sub-standard houses erected in various parts of Braybrook Shire by European migrants. Mr Holt said that "*the councils concerned, out of their genuine desire to help migrants, may have aggravated the position by condoning sub-standard living conditions in the first place.*"⁵ It was a time when the Braybrook Shire Council was refusing some

² Sunshine Advocate 7 August 1942 p3

³ Sunshine Advocate 14 August 1942 p1

⁴ Sunshine Advocate 28 September 1945 p4

⁵ Sunshine Advocate 27 October 1950 p5

¹ Sunshine Advocate 4 September 1926 p4

applications for temporary housing:

"The Council spent a good deal of its time at Monday's meeting on this subject of temporary housing. An application was received from a person living at Ringwood, who wished to erect a bungalow on a site in St. Albans and live there while a house was being built. Some councillors considered that the applicant was a genuine case and favoured approving, but it was carried that the request be refused. 'If this request was granted, what proof have we that New Australians wouldn't see the bungalow and think it was alright for them too', said Cr J. McDonald.

*"Cr Castley said that the Council had to be consistent while Cr Parsons said that it was not practicable to draw a line of demarcation so the safest thing was to stick to Council regulations. In view of the assurance given by the applicant that the whole of the stumps of the house would be put in within seven days of commencement and the frame within one month, the request should be granted, said Cr. Dobson. Each case should be dealt with on its merit and he had no qualms about this one."*¹

Regarding proposals to erect a building such as a sleepout, workshop or other sub-standard dwelling and occupy it as a dwelling whilst a house to conform to the building regulations of the municipality is being erected, in 1951 the Sunshine council issued requirements that the builder must:

- Submit to the Building Surveyor of the City a plan and specification of the proposed house.
- Such plan must be drawn in ink to scale and must show the ground plan of the house and its position on the land – distance from front and side fences, etc, and the front elevation.
- When the house has been passed, and consent for the erection of the house given, if the applicant desires to reside on the premises in temporary quarters, he must first complete the erection of the framework of the full house (if the building is of a type for which a wooden framework is necessary).
- If the proposed house is to be of brick or concrete, the applicant must at least complete the foundations before residing in temporary quarters on the block of land.

Moreover, the council did prosecute some migrants for non compliance with the regulations, such as Leo Dobes of St Albans (q.v.). In the meantime relatively small bungalows were being offered for sale during the 1950s through the local newspapers:

- Bungalow 12 x 8, iron roof, lined, £30.
- Bungalow for removal, 20' x 10', fully lined, louvre windows, best offer.
- Bungalow, 16 x 8, weather board, gal. iron

roof, for removal. 13 West Esplanade St Albans.

- St Albans: Part House, 3 rooms, unlined, on clean land. Cash or terms on £165 dep., bal. over 2 years.
- Two blocks of land, each 50 x 150, St. Albans, one with bungalow 16 x 12, £300 the lot or best offer.
- Auction - Lot 36, Oberon Ave., St. Albans with new 2-roomed Cement Sheet Bungalow on nice block 55' x 155'; Elec. light on, water available, road made, 3-mile station, shops, etc. Chance For Beginners. Terms: Cash or £100 deposit then £4/£5 per week Principal and Interest at 5% till paid off. Clear Certificate of Title.²



St Albans bungalow 1950s © Hannelore Boehm

The St Albans bungalow of the 1950s, sometimes referred to as a skillion, was a small building usually of one to three rooms in size. However, the word bungalow also referred to larger buildings, e.g. from the 1920s there are references to 5- or 6-roomed bungalows.

A skillion was a lean-to attachment to the back of the house providing accommodation. There were some 2- and 3-roomed bungalows that were advertised in the Age in the 1930s and there were some ads for small houses of 3 rooms in the early 1940s. There was a high demand for housing after the war and people advertised for rooms, part houses and half houses. Rental in St Albans was difficult because it was always an area of high home ownership rather than a rental market.

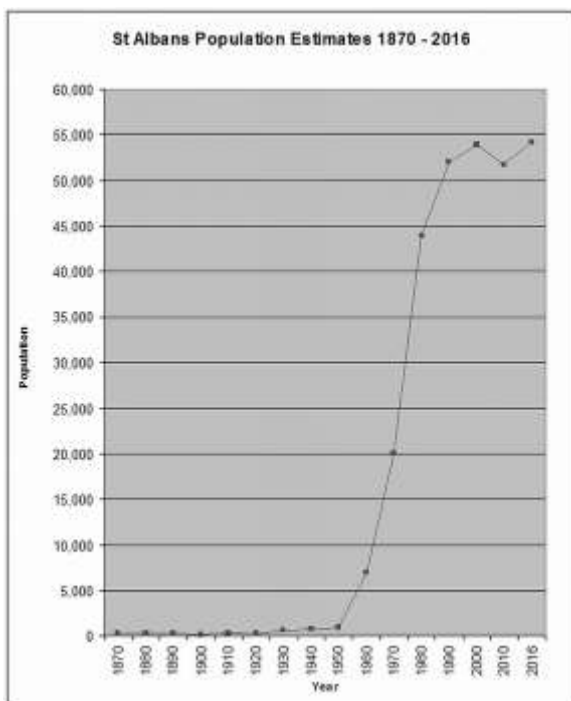
The St Albans bungalow was often described as being sub-standard and having cramped living conditions, but this was not an unusual experience for the new arrivals because that is exactly what they had experienced in the refugee camps of Europe and the migrant hostels of Australia. Often there was little privacy because people were living in dormitories or quarters with thin wall partitions, and occasionally just a blanket between families. The communal dining room was acceptable but the communal toilets and bathrooms less so. Wives and husbands were sometimes separated

¹ Sunshine Advocate 27 October 1950 p5

² Sunshine Advocate 21 May 1954 p2

when men were sent to distant regions for work. At the Broadmeadows camp there was a row of conjugal tents with a wooden pallet and piece of linoleum on the ground for a bit of marital privacy. People also experienced financial problems because the accommodation was not free and after paying the hostel fees there was often little left in the pay packet. Though the migrants endured these conditions they were happy for the opportunity to leave and start a new life independently.

After WW2 ended, the 1950s saw a rapid population growth in St Albans as refugees and migrants moved in and started building their bungalows. The population that had been reasonably static at under 900 residents for a decade was suddenly over 5,000 and reached 7,000 by the end of the decade.



St Albans was still expanding in the 1960s. By 1970 it was over 20,000 people so the growth had been phenomenal, and it was all due to the post-war migration program. Most of the early housing was of weatherboard and fibro-cement construction but a decade later the new housing estates were featuring bricks and mortar. They were double or triple-front brick veneers complete with big windows, tiled roofs, concrete slab front porches and brick front fences with wrought iron gates. No one was building one-room shacks any more.

The land east of the high school had been open paddocks and then the new housing developments started there in the 1960s¹ and

¹ The Main St Albans Estate east of the high school was advertised about 1962. The vendors were Main St Albans Investments Pty Ltd and the managing

gradually the whole area between Main Road East and Furlong Road from the high school to the Errington Road was filled with new settlers and second-generation St Albans residents. Further east up to McIntyre Road it was still all open paddocks.



Main St Albans Residential Development 1960s



Housing in St Albans Main Estate 1960s

The Stevens' Edenhope farm in Main Road West was subdivided in the sixties and that became the new residential growth area on the western side of town, the Stevensville Estate. That's where the technical school was built.

The late sixties was also the time when the old bungalows and part houses were being targeted by Keilor council for non compliance with the building code. The building permits for part-houses had been granted for a temporary period of occupation during which time the

agents were Alfred Grant Pty Ltd of Queen Street Melbourne. They ran advertisements in the Age.

owner was required to complete the rest of the house, and most people did finish their homes within a few years. But twenty years later there were still some of these “temporary” structures dotted around the town and a few were still there after forty years.

In 1964 the Keilor Council started its “war” against sub-standard houses in St Albans with twelve being targeted for action. Council decided to forward information about the properties to the Housing Commission with the aim of issuing demolition orders. The houses were located on the eastern side of town in Alfrieda, Collins, Erica, Vincent and Walmer streets.¹

The population continued to grow – by 1980 it was approximately 44,000 and by 1990 about 52,000, but the growth was reaching its peak. By the turn of the century, the year 2000, the population of the “old” St Albans district had reached its peak of about 54,000 people.

In 2018 there are at least two bungalows still standing in St Albans that appear to be pretty much in their original condition from the 1950s era. One is on the Sunshine side of Main Road West and the other is on the Keilor side of Main Road East, so it seems that the City of Brimbank is still being flexible in applying its building code.



St Albans bungalow 2018



St Albans bungalow 2018

These days we are still constructing a variety of bungalows around the suburbs of Melbourne as desirable and flexible accommodation options, but we now call them granny flats.

¹ St Albans Observer 17 September 1964 p1



Frederick Stenson was a Keilor Councillor from 1907 to 1947. He came from England in 1888 to help his uncle at his St Albans vineyard that evolved into an apricot orchard. He was an active community leader and was the de facto Mayor of St Albans. He received a Gold Albert in 1932 for his service to community.



Eva Leah Shiner wed Fred Stenson in 1899, worked on the family farm and raised daughters Alice, Mary, Emily and Winifred. Eva was a supporter of the St Alban the Martyr Church and also of her husband’s council work. She died in 1945 after a long illness, at the age of 75 years, an early pioneer in the district.



Jack Honey was the son of local poultry farmers in Main Road West and worked as a blacksmith with the railways. He wed Winifred Stenson in 1943; their children were John, Frederick and Gwen. Jack followed in Fred Stenson’s footsteps by becoming a Keilor Shire councillor for St Albans and died of a heart attack in 1991.



Eric Alan was a Polish engineer who came in 1950 and ran a bicycle and sports shop in Alfrieda Street. He served for many years on Keilor Council – he was elected in 1965 and was mayor in 1968. In 1976 through the Age he protested about the sacking of the Council and the appointment of an administrator to run the council’s affairs.



Alfred Henry Padley was a land boomer from the 1880s. His name became significant in local history as the man who subdivided a thousand acres of grazing land on the Keilor Plains around a little-used railway stop, paid for a station to be built, and then named it St Albans.

Evelyn Mullenger



In 1949 my family moved from our home in East Esplanade to work on some larger properties in country Victoria. Our schooling needs then forced our return to St Albans in 1950. My father, Fred Mullenger, had land on the corner of William and Theodore streets.

In our absence, a section of this land had been rezoned from residential to light industrial.

Money was scarce, building materials were expensive, and my father was not a handyman, so he was not able to build our new home. Instead, he chose to move a part-house onto the middle of the five blocks that fronted Theodore Street. Keilor council allowed you to live in a part-house and it was cheaper and easier to move an old one than build a new one. Our part-house was the size of two bungalows and was the old "Tea Rooms" bought from Gertie Gillahan's petrol station near Sunbury on the Calder highway opposite Shandon Primary School. The Tea Rooms were two large rooms and two small rooms comprising a store room and a bathroom. My father then built a tin shed behind these to have a kitchen with a wood stove and a storage area. The toilet was a can in an old tank. The larger room was divided into sleeping areas screened off with wardrobes. The family consisted of three children (Evelyn, George and John) plus mum and dad (Flo and Fred Mullenger).

There was no demand for the light industrial land in St Albans at the time, so Fred arranged to swap that land for labour and material with two of his old friends, a builder (Fred Barnard) and a plasterer (Stumpy Martin), who used the land to store materials. In return they helped dad to renovate the Tea Rooms into a three-bedroom house with a dining room, kitchen and laundry. The new toilet was a separate little building but there was still no sewerage.

Fred sold two blocks next door to the Bajzik and Reitter families, who were recent immigrants. The blocks came with the shell of a bungalow already built and the men slept in these shells while completing the buildings into liveable homes for their families. Mum cooked the men's evening meal because they had no kitchen facilities. When the families moved in there were no fences except for the wire fence around Fred's horse paddock. It was great for us kids because we all played together and developed friendships and strong bonds that still remain today.

Emily Hall told some lovely stories about St Albans houses. If somebody got married – timber was so scarce in the early days and in the

depression – if you weren't using a room that room would be dismantled and given to the newly married couple, and somebody else would give another room, and they actually made up a home. There just wasn't the timber around.

My memory is that a bungalow is something that you had at the back of the house, something like a sleep-out. My father lived in a bungalow at the back of his parents' place when he was first married and when my brother was a baby. But the St Albans bungalows that were built were something else. Often they were just two rooms on their own. They had weatherboard on the side and cement sheet on the front so that it could be extended, and a door in the back. The bungalows put up next door to us in Theodore Street had virtually nothing in them, they had no facilities. They had to get water because that wasn't laid on; water wasn't a given and many people didn't have water for a long time. They had to carry water from their neighbours in buckets on trolleys.



Haumann home Alfrieda Street © Kon Haumann



Olga Kukiel & son Ivan, Henry St. 1950s © Ivan Kukiel

They put in a window in the cement sheet wall so there was a view to look out to the street. The bungalow was placed towards the back of the property so that the house could be extended in front of that – they were to be the back rooms of the house. It was really like a closed-in veranda with a door in it. The roof had the slope on it to be the back of the house. The men who lived next door to us worked very hard getting the money together for timber and putting in the window to look out to the front, putting in benches and wardrobes etc. One family had four children to fit in, so there were six people to be living in these

two rooms. The other family had five children. There was an outside toilet, and they built a little room onto the toilet so that they had a little storage area, somewhere to keep things. There were no fences, so it was sitting out in the open. There were no steps leading up to the bungalow, it was often quite high off the ground, you had to build steps to get in. There were no floor coverings or things like that, so the men had to make them, then the women and children moved in.

I think the initial purchase of the land and the bungalow came together as one item, but it was not liveable. Maybe our home was not liveable at first by Australian standards because the kitchen was in the shed, but what we were living in was a palace compared to a bungalow because that was very hot; it had a low flat roof, there was no insulation, no trees, and built on land that was very stony. It was very hard clay soils, it wasn't easy to dig, and to put a garden in without water was very difficult. There was no mains water laid on, but some people had a line that you could tap into. I think our neighbours tapped into the line that was coming to our house so they were able to get water. People further up in Theodore Street were not so lucky and they had to carry water for a long time until the water pressure was good enough to take to all the housing.

(Edited excerpt from article published in *St Albans Oral History From The Tin Shed Archives*, 2004.)

LAND LAND LAND LAND LAND
 ST. ALBANS Pinnacle Estate: 450 Large
 Home Sites, 4 minutes station. High, un-
 dulating, well-drained land. Water and
 E.L. on estate. A few homes already
 erected. Government approved prices, £20
 to £65. A number of blocks ready for
 home building specially reserved for service
 and ex-service personnel who guarantee to
 build within 12 months. Selling very rap-
 idly.
 SPENCER JACKSON, 341 Collins St. MUM727

Pinnacle Estate ad in *The Argus* 6 May 1946

Mavis Hunter née King

Things were bad in the Depression years about 1930–36. I remember horses using some of the empty Coleman houses as shelters because people couldn't afford the repayments and just walked out.

I married Bill Hunter in 1943 and we wanted to build our home, but it was a very difficult task and took us a long time to get started. This was during the war. There were no new houses being built, and there was very little building material available to build your own. Dad bought the block of land in Erica Street for £35. There were four blocks and the agents said, "Why don't you buy the four?" Dad said, "No. I only want one for my son-in-law and daughter." So he bought that and we paid him off because we didn't have the money. We built our house in stages. One of the chaps with whom Bill worked would come on the weekends and help with the house construction. Bill had subcontracted a lot of the

work, but at least we could pay for it at the time because Bill was working a lot of overtime.

The Nobels munitions factory had had a big explosion and Mr Dickson's son-in-law was killed in that explosion. Bill worked weekends a long time. He said the explosion might not have been good for others but it was good for us because the overtime helped us build the house.



Horse riders in Kings Road © Bernie Kokot

We didn't get into the house straight away; it must have taken two to three years to build it. We finally got into the house in 1955. Even then we had tin over many windows because we couldn't get windows. We lived in the back of the house and worked on it whenever we could. Mr Timothy Quinn in Millawa Avenue did our plastering. Bill worked for ICI for over thirty years. He got the bricks for the fireplaces from there because they had bricks left over from making some chimney stacks.

When my father Les King sold off the milk round, he and my mum Ethel moved back to the old farmhouse in Main Road West (Grandma's old house) and built a new house next to the old one for themselves, and one on the other side of the road for Dad's sister, Auntie Mag. Later he sold the old family home to John Thornton. He was the man who started building half-houses for the many migrants coming to St Albans and all around. Mr Thornton developed the farm into housing lots for the migrants at that time and introduced half-houses to St Albans, which helped people to settle easier. Then when they paid off that half they added the front of the house. It was great to see the finished houses. These migrants made St Albans.

(Excerpt from article published in *St Albans Oral History From The Tin Shed Archives*, 2004.)

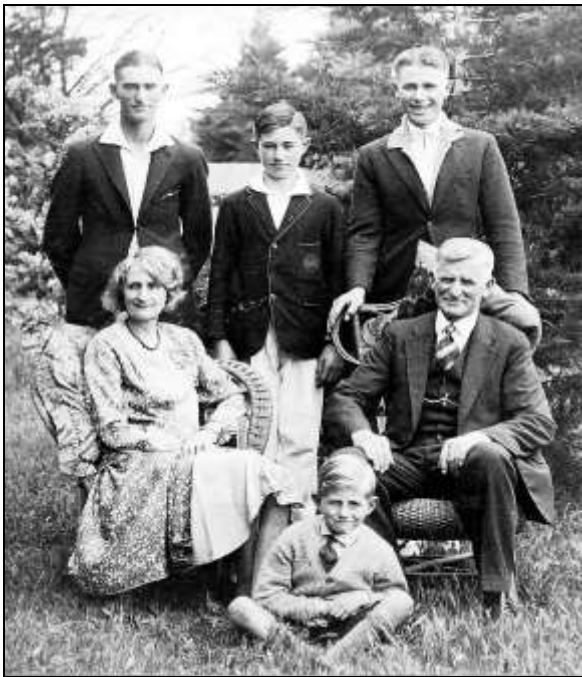
John Stevens



The old subdivisions gave new birth to St Albans as migrants from 1950 onwards advanced out into the west of Melbourne. Unimproved blocks of land despite a lack of all facilities – we could say no facilities – were

rapidly taken up because of the low prices compared to the south-eastern suburbs. In those days everybody was going to the south-eastern region. People came to St Albans and saw so many rocks and the wind sweeping over the plains and thought no-one could live under those conditions.

Buying a part-house on these lots on convenient terms gave migrant families a base from which they would assume an Australian way of life. Blocks, which had been virtually unsaleable from the collapse of the land boom in the late 1890s right up to the Second World War, were regularly sought by migrants looking for a new start after their suffering in Europe.



Stevens family Main Rd West 1930s © Karen Bugeja

For some years the Board of Works permitted trunk services from the water mains. There were a few mains along the arterial roads but if someone bought a block of land along Henry Street where there was no water, to give you an example, you could dig a trench about two feet deep, you put galvanised pipe along. If you put a big enough one in you could sell off the right to tap into that to someone else. That's the way things worked. I can remember as a kid when they put the mains along Main Road West. The sustenance workers dug the trench for the main. I can see the stones there and the wall of those trenches as they picked their way through and got that water out.

The SEC was quick to respond when there was demand for their service.

The years from 1950 to 1956 saw a great development by business houses and people migrating to St Albans and we started a timber yard as a family business in response to the renewed demand for housing. Land in the old sub-divisions that were virtually unsaleable

before the war (offered for as little as eight pounds a lot) increased to 750 pounds by 1960. My dad had in excess of a hundred lots. Before the fifties my father was trying to sell some of his blocks and had erected a big billboard in Footscray advertising housing land for sale in St Albans. But the demand just wasn't there at the time and after six months he hadn't sold even one block so he had a think about it and decided on a new strategy. He put up a new poster across that billboard that said 'STILL A FEW LEFT'. And he still didn't sell any.

I remember when we finally started to sell these off. It's the thing that led me into being a real estate agent eventually. We had these lots and mum didn't know much about them. Dad had died, but we knew where they were because we still had to pay the rates on them. Things were so bad that dad might pay half the rates, I remember that, and the other would remain swinging. I don't know how those things were managed at that time because everybody was just poor - poor, poor, poor. That's the way it was. He bought his farm from the Closer Settlement Board and he bought this farm over this way and he had all these lots. Mum would say, 'When are you going to stop buying this land?' He said, 'You and I may never see it.' That's the story, that's the way it went.

When I started selling I didn't know anything about titles, I didn't know anything about mortgages or anything at all. I remember a solicitor rang up saying there was a mortgage on a property and I didn't know how to answer him. It occurred to me in later years that it didn't matter what was owing per lot on those blocks of land, because we were getting so much for them then we were able to pay out the arrears and the interest and everything, because we had title for every one of them, no trouble at all. Title for every one! It was amazing.

By the sixties, town planning authorities took a positive attitude to the rapid building growth in St Albans. The building of commercial premises in Main Road East and Main Road West had to be set back twenty feet from the front building alignment of the block, whereas before you could build a shop right up to that. That's why you have that in-and-out business in Main Road West in particular, how some of the shops are set back. The ones that are still sitting out, like the Slavonia Butchers and Kerr the Chemist's building, are the ones that were built before the new regulations came into force.

With the depression some twenty-five years behind, the time was ripe for a permit to subdivide the old farm into the new Stevensville Estate. Lot sizes were more commonly 50 by 150 feet, whereas the subdivisions in St Albans in the late 1890s comprised of many lots of 66 by 132 feet, and sometimes more than 132 feet. There were still many of these large lots still

available in St Albans. By the early sixties Stevens Brothers had built another retail store between the old Mechanics Institute and Self Brothers in East Esplanade. Neither of these large business premises is occupied by their original families. It could be said that the headaches and the heartaches at the turn of the century from 1890 to 1910, which was lots of unimproved land in abundance but no takers, became the base for migrant development, particularly in St Albans, to the joy of all concerned.

(Excerpt from article published in *Stories About Albans Celebrating 125 Years*, 2012.)



Stevens' family Edenhope home in Main Road West

PROPERTIES FOR SALE

HOUSES	VIEW STREET £1,550	FOX STREET £2,550
MAIN ROAD WEST This great house is available for sale at a price of £1,550. It has 4 bedrooms, a large kitchen, and a full bathroom. The house is in excellent condition and is ready to move in.	BEAVER STREET £1,500 This property is available for sale at a price of £1,500. It has 3 bedrooms, a large kitchen, and a full bathroom. The house is in excellent condition and is ready to move in.	LAND This property is available for sale at a price of £2,550. It is a large plot of land, suitable for development or as a hobby site.
SCOTT AVE £4,700 This property is available for sale at a price of £4,700. It has 5 bedrooms, a large kitchen, and a full bathroom. The house is in excellent condition and is ready to move in.	MAIN ROAD EAST This property is available for sale at a price of £1,500. It has 3 bedrooms, a large kitchen, and a full bathroom. The house is in excellent condition and is ready to move in.	CHURCHILL STREET £1,900 This property is available for sale at a price of £1,900. It has 3 bedrooms, a large kitchen, and a full bathroom. The house is in excellent condition and is ready to move in.
THEODORE STREET £3,700 This property is available for sale at a price of £3,700. It has 4 bedrooms, a large kitchen, and a full bathroom. The house is in excellent condition and is ready to move in.		

Home Improvements. Additions, Alterations, Concreting, Plastering, Plumbing etc. All available on easy terms and
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D. L. G. STEVENS

302 MAIN ROAD EAST, ST. ALBANS
 PHONE 396-2261, 396-2333 A/HAZE MURRAY STEVENS 296-2174 or 396-3038

For Sale ★ To Let ★ Wanted

TWO CHOICE HOME SITES One in East Esplanade, 6 1/2 acre plot, partly paved, clear of trees, good soil, 5000, lotus. One in Peter St, 6 1/2 acre plot, partly paved, large garage, 5000, lotus. END DISCOUNT FOR CASH	THIS WEEK'S SPECIAL Two three bedroom houses, in Rock View on the beautiful Park Estate of the newly-developed estate of 2000. You only have to make one trip to the estate to see the work on THESE 20 GREAT SITES.
--	--

WANTED: Good clean home sites in the price range £1,400 to £2,400. Please phone or call with particulars to this office
Phone: 396-2154, All Hours

WANTED: Part-lease or small lease on 1/2-acre to 1/2-acre for your own home, we will trade. Call or phone for full particulars. Our service proposition will give you the best value and money at a price you can afford to pay and we provide the necessary finance for the very best.

FOR SALE: Really nice home in Woodford Dr, Woodford Park Estate, Peter Street and well known site is laid to mature in 18 1/2 and known estate, Price 5000.00

FOR SALE: Very clean home in Greenlands Street, £1200.00. Move now available. Finance for your own home.

FOR SALE: Investment block - 100ft x 60ft, 20 ft above sea level, 1100 sq ft, easy access and low upkeep. 2000 sq ft at each level 60 ft.

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 20-22 EAST ESPLANADE
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6' - 13/6
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Cr. Harold Easton



Cr. James Eddie



Agnes Stevens



Cr. James Stevens



Cr. Bert Moffat

Mary Smith



Mr Walmer Coleman's story was very sad because he took the risk to develop housing in St Albans but the economy beat him. The land boom was on between the two world wars and some farmers subdivided their land for housing. Along Main Road East there were street signs from Walmer Avenue to

McIntyre Road. That was all the McKechnie farm and was being subdivided as the Pinnacle Estate just after we arrived. The subdivision was all home lots with little redgum surveyors pegs. The salesmen used to go all over Victoria trying to sell these blocks of land to farmers as an investment.

They were looking at time payment: so much deposit, so much repayment. Some paid cash. That's when Walmer Coleman bought those blocks and the development was pushing ahead in 1926-1927. Coleman applied to Keilor Council for 360 tree guards because he was going to plant gum trees throughout the estate and the council agreed. That's when most of the people who had been brought out by Nettlefolds were buying those homes, and they had no roads, no water, no lights, and no drainage. But they did have tree guards with young trees in them. Of course we only had tank water and the trees died and the cows knocked down the tree guards. In the depression we had a wonderful time taking all the street signs, the surveyor's pegs and the tree guards for wood to go with the cow manure for the copper water heater.

The problems of the Pinnacle Estate were again highlighted in the 1940s when Coleman's proposed sale of land on the estate was blocked by the Federal Treasury supposedly because the titles were not properly consolidated. Heaven knows what was happening there because Keilor council was in favour of the sales and even approached local MPs for support. The sales were eventually allowed to go ahead and this time Coleman was advertising 450 large home sites just four minutes from the station at government approved prices from £20 to £65. Unfortunately the forties were not fantastic for real estate either, and John Stevens tells a story about his father trying to sell land about this time without any success. It wasn't till the migrants came in the fifties that real estate took off.

The McKechnies (John and Annie) came to St Albans about 1910 and owned the land between Biggs Street and Main Road East from Walmer Avenue right up to Errington Road. That

was their farm, which they used for grazing rather than farming. If you went past there in the forties you would see mainly empty paddocks. One of their girls was my teacher at the primary school in 1928 and that was Gwen McKechnie who married Frank "Bulli" McCreery in 1937 and they took up farming at Diggers Rest.

The McKechnies did three or four subdivisions. The last one they kept so many acres around the house, and that's where Walmer Avenue and these buildings came in. My parents lived in Walmer Avenue. My brother bought a block for £20 and he came over to us and said, "I've just bought a block for £20 in Walmer Avenue." The road wasn't made at the time; that was made by the men in the depression. Eric approached Margaret McKechnie and said he was interested in a block of land. Even at £20 it had to be saved for, because the basic wage was £4. He said: "If I sell some land for you, can I charge £22 and keep the £2." She said: "Oh, no, don't do that; but I'll give you the £2." We sold enough to at least buy the second block for ourselves. One of the blocks we sold was to Lorna Cameron. Jack Cameron worked with Eric at Wiltshire Files, and that's how we sold them their block of land. That was a long time ago.



Wilhelm Stein repairing potholes © Mary Smith



Stein family Millawa Avenue © Mary Smith

Up to the late 1950s, St Albans houses were almost entirely on the Keilor Council side, the municipal boundary being Main Road. It was known as Boundary Road for a long time but in 1941 the Keilor council changed the name to Main Road East and Main Road West with the division being at the railway crossing.

The Percy Street houses were the first new houses on the Sunshine side and were built

there when Nettlefolds began their factory at Albion and brought out experienced tradesmen and women from England. They came here in the mid twenties about the same time that we did. The people wanted to live away from the factory and some settled around Percy Street in St Albans, including the Hooks, Hales, and Judds. They had fairly big houses for the times and the road was paved and footpathed, so it was very important in those days. However, these half-dozen houses at the end of Errington Reserve were the eastern edge of the development in that neighbourhood and stayed that way pretty much until the 1950s. That area went ahead after the high school was built nearby in 1956. Hook, Hale, and Cornhill are some of these families who are now commemorated through local street names. Dennis Rogers' mother was a Hale.

Another area settled a little bit later was Pommie Paddock where the King family established their farm opposite the old Stevens' homestead on the corner of Jamieson Street and Main Road West. This is where the Bedford, Moseley, and Crosby families settled. John Thornton was the builder who started that development by buying the King's old farm and building half-houses for the migrants who were starting to move into the area. Richard Thornton was the son and would have been my age. He was working with his father as a building contractor from Main Road West. The Thorntons were from Balwyn and Ripponlea but must have bought land locally because they were selling it under Mrs Thornton's name when the migrants came here in the fifties.

(Excerpt from article published in *St Albans Oral History From The Tin Shed Archives*, 2004.)

John Thornton

John Thornton and his son Richard John Thornton were building contractors who started building half-houses in St Albans and Sunshine during the 1950s under the name Thornton & Co.

The father, John Thornton, was an estate agent from North Balwyn who was selling properties on behalf of Mary Thornton, widow of Ripponlea, who presumably was his mother or other relative. He was selling land locally as early as 1951 when a block of land in Henry Street was sold for £140 to Ziva Ribarov of the Watsonia Migrant Hostel. The son, Richard John Argyle Thornton, was managing the local office from premises at 126 Main Road, St Albans.

Thornton & Co's major development locally started when he bought Malcolm and Lucy King's farm along Main Road West and developed it into 241 housing allotments. It is said that he introduced half-houses to St Albans for the migrants who started arriving at that time. It was not without controversy. The farm was in the Sunshine municipality and some Sunshine

councilors were most unhappy with Thornton's tactics as it was alleged he approached the Labor caucus without the other councilors being present, but the caucus were opposed to the subdivision because the land was subject to flooding and the proposed development was not adequately drained. Other councilors were supportive of the proposal given that a neighbouring subdivision had already been approved. The matter was taken to the Board of Works and the Town and Country Planning Authority for their expert advice. The amended plans were approved in July 1951.

In October 1952 Council refused Thornton permission to erect a two-room dwelling in St Albans for advertising purposes because the structure conflicted with the Uniform Building Regulations. Thornton seems to have circumvented the impasse through a "work in progress" strategy, at least in advertising:

*"House, 5 roomed W.B. being erected, two rooms completed; water and electricity available. £470 inc. land. Material to finish building supplied at mill cost when required. Thornton, Kings Farm, Main Road West, St. Albans."*¹

Thornton also subdivided land in North Sunshine and the friction continued when police were called to the Sunshine town hall after a council meeting in March 1954 because of alleged intimidation. The dispute was about Thornton building a part-house in St Albans without a permit and council taking a long time to resolve an inspector's recommended prosecution for sub-standard construction.

Whatever else was happening, Thornton was spruiking his constructions with all the mod cons:

*"The 3rd of 62 Homes. Hurry, these are selling like hot cakes. Warwick Road. North Sunshine: Beautiful 4 room W.B. Dwelling with the following features: terra cotta tiled roof, E.L. HWS. SSS. built-in bath. elec. 3 plate stove: elec. copper rotary clothes hoist, built-in cupboards, cement troughs, fully fenced. Deposit: Ex-servicemen and Housing Co-op. £450, others £800."*²

It is not known how long Thornton & Co were active in St Albans, but they were definitely early participants in the bungalow building era.

The 3rd of 62 Homes

Hurry, these are selling like hot cakes.

WARWICK RD., NORTH SUNSHINE

Beautiful 4 room W.B. Dwelling with the following features
Terra cotta tiled roof, E.L., HWS, SSS, built-in bath,
elec. 3 plate stove, elec. copper, rotary clothes hoist, built
in cupboards, cement troughs, fully fenced.
Deposit: Ex-Servicemen and Housing Co-op. £450,
others £800.

R. J. A. THORNTON, Estate Agent,
126 MAIN ROAD WEST, ST. ALBANS — MW 0648

¹ Sunshine Advocate 21 November 1952

² Sunshine Advocate 26 March 1954

The 8th of 62 Homes

BEAUTIFUL FOUR ROOM W.B. DWELLING with the following features:- Tiled roof, E.L., H.W.S., S.S., built-in bath, elec. 2 plate stove, elec. copper, rotary clothes hoist, built-in cupboards, cement troughs, fully fenced.

DEPOSIT: Ex-Servicemen and Housing Co-op £450
Others, £800.

IMMEDIATE VACANT POSSESSION

R. J. A. THORNTON, Estate Agent

MAIN ROAD WEST, ST. ALBANS — MW 668



Richard John Thornton & Elizabeth Todd 1953

Lorna Cameron



Jack and Lorna Cameron 1945

From New South Wales we decided to return to Victoria. Housing was pretty desperate wherever you were after the war and we decided that the accommodation opportunities would be better for us back in Melbourne, particularly since I was pregnant again and would need help with the toddler and a new baby. So we stayed with my parents in Preston with two young children. At least I had mum and dad to help out, even though it was pretty cramped. Jack was working hard in factories so I started looking out for the possibility of having our own home built, an increasing necessity for our family of four. Jack found a steady job at Wiltshire when we were living in Preston, and I learnt about an affordable

housing scheme from a Scottish migrant – I think it was put forward by the shires of Braybrook and Keilor, mainly in Sunshine and St Albans – where you could get a permit to build a garage type structure by promising to build a house after two years, during which you were let to live in it. I eventually found a site in St Albans. The prices were reasonable for quarter-acre blocks on a road being paved with asphalt, and only 900 yards from the railway station.

In 1949 we bought our block in Oberon Avenue from Emily Nicholls of Millawa Avenue. The price was £52/10/- with a deposit of £5 and the balance due in thirty days, with a clause to take over the balance owing for construction of the road. Our assets were £100 in cash and we were entitled to £60 as a war gratuity towards the house construction, so we made our commitments. My father helped us build a 24 by 12 foot sleep-out of material from large packing cases and fibro cement, with a fireplace lined with galvanised tin at one end; it had a porch 10 foot by 5 foot. We moved in without water or electricity, no lining, but a fence of barbed wire on three sides, palings at the back. Les was three and Garry under two. We survived in this for about two years until the house was finished. I have lived in this property ever since.

We found wonderful neighbours in the Yeomans family who had a "Coleman" house built before the banks failed in 1928 with about thirty others scattered about St Albans. No building had gone on for the depression years and WW2 as materials and tradesmen were scarce. However, there was an expanding secondary industry partly begun in war time and migrant men and women filled the labour force, but there were no factories at all in St Albans, you had to go Sunshine or Footscray for a job.

I came to St Albans in 1949 with my husband, my two young sons and little else, particularly in the bank. At the time the place was a village of about 900 people. The public facilities were the St Albans Primary School, the Boys Club, the Mechanics Institute (which was burnt down later), two churches, and the post office was in the newsagents. We had bought a block of land for about fifty pounds and put an unlined fibro-cement three-roomed bungalow on the back of it. The timber frame we obtained from dismantling old car packing cases and that was one of my jobs, helping to pull out all the old nails from the packing cases. There were no built-in conveniences at the time; it was outdoor toilets for everyone. Materials and skilled labour were very scarce and it took quite a time to have a house built. Uncle Arthur was contracted to build the house; Jack, Gramps, and others helped with putting in the stumps. In 1951 the family moved into the frugal weatherboard house, with Jack's mother moving into the small bungalow. She came in 1951 and stayed with us until she died.

When we moved into the house Elaine was six months old, Garry was three years, and Les was already five years old. The house had the basics and we couldn't yet afford any floor coverings. Furniture was also scarce and when you were tired there was nowhere to sit on except the beds. Someone had told me about Kirks Bazaar, where I bid for and got knocked down to me a couple of lounge suites with recliner chairs and with paying for the cartage fees the whole lot cost me 30 shillings. Later we also got a radiogram for the house when some one who owed Jack some money couldn't pay so gave him the radio instead.

(Excerpts from article published in *St Albans Oral History From The Tin Shed Archives*, 2004.)



St Albans bungalow 1950s © Hannelore Boehm

AUCTION — Saturday, 29th May, 11 a.m.
 ON THE PROPERTY
 (or previous Private Sale)
Lot 36, OBERON AVE., ST. ALBANS
 with new 3-roomed Cement Sheet Bungalow on nice block 50' x 150'. Elec. light on, water available, road made, 1-mile station, shops, etc.
CHANCE FOR BEGINNERS
 Terms: Cash or £100 deposit then £4/15 per week Principal and Interest at 5% till paid off. Clear Certificate of Title.
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FOR ONLY £250 DEPOSIT
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Inquire for further details.
SEVERAL PLANS TO CHOOSE FROM
 Prices range from £2,500 INC. LAND

KEITH MANN Fairline Market
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 ML9395 - St. Albans - ML9395

Leo Dobes



As far as our involvement with St Albans, it was early in 1950. We came to Australia like practically every-body through Bonegilla and that was in March 1950. My wife Maria was pregnant. They sent me to work for the Victorian Railways as a super-numerary

labourer. They intended to send my wife, because she was pregnant, to the Mildura camp and it was a bit of a problem. I was supposed to earn seven pounds and ten shillings a week. I was supposed to pay for board at the Williamstown Hostel three pounds ten a week, and three pounds ten for my wife at the camp in Mildura. Of course that would leave me with practically nothing.

Now that we had come here I was living in the Williamstown Hostel while my wife was still in Bonegilla waiting to be sent to Mildura. At that time somebody mentioned to me that there are some jobs available for women at the Windsor Hotel as maids with accommodation. Because accommodation was the biggest problem.

The Immigration Department told us ... actually we were given to understand as soon as we found some accommodation for our wives and the children we can have the wives brought from Bonegilla or from anywhere free of charge, and everything will be fine. Unfortunately in those days there were no flats, there were only rooms available for people who wanted to live like couples or single people, and it was no problem for them. But nobody wanted to take a woman who was pregnant because the problems with a new child were really out of proportion. Nobody wanted to take it on. Therefore about three or four of the women with the same problem were brought from Bonegilla to Melbourne. My wife, because her pregnancy was not showing, was accepted in the Windsor Hotel as a maid and was given a room, which was fine. I was living at the Williamstown Hostel. Of course you can't live there forever and I was searching for something.

Some people advised me the best thing would be to buy a block of land, put on a bungalow with a plan that you're going to build a house later on, and everything will be fine. Therefore I went and saw an agent who was advertising land in St Albans and I bought this block of land for £75, on ... I'm not quite sure whether it was £15 deposit or £20 deposit, but something like that.

I was earning £7/10/- per week, but I was

getting quite often overtime on Saturdays and Sundays. Then I was searching for somebody who would be willing to advance the deposit to build a bungalow. The bungalow cost £50 to £70. It was ten by twelve feet, cement-sheet outside, no inside lining, and that was all. I had a lot of problem to persuade Custom Credit to lend me the money on a bungalow that will be built on the land that I haven't paid off yet. Somehow it all happened fine.

Just before the baby was born we moved here. I had to build a toilet just outside, which you know they used to bring some steel buckets and they put it always on the head and were carrying it outside. I had to build the toilet, which took me a long time because I never had a saw or a hammer and nails in my hand. It really took me a lot of time before I built the toilet and therefore my wife had to use the facilities at the St Albans Railway Station about one kilometre away before we were able to use our own here.

At the same time I drew the plan of a home which I intended to build and put a little bungalow on the property just to use as temporary accommodation, but unfortunately the local council for some reason wanted to stop building the bungalows. Therefore they went down hard on people, and I was one of them.

the next street, who was a very nice person, helped me to build an extension to the bungalow so we had a little bit of a kitchen to that little ten by twelve feet.



Dobes granny-flat bungalow 1980s © Leo Dobes



Leo Dobes (R) with Rosalie & Paul Osicka (L)



Leo Dobes building house Ross St. 1950s © L Dobes



Dobes house completed Ross St. 1950s © L Dobes

I was the first and last who had the misfortune to be brought before the court for building something that was not allowed. It was silly and stupid. Meanwhile, an 'old-timer' from

When Maria brought the baby back home after two days in hospital there was a note that we had to go to court. That was for unauthorised building, for erecting a building without a permit. It was silly and stupid. I should have told them it wasn't me that erected the bungalow it was the firm, but I wanted to protect everybody because everybody was very nice to me. In the end we were fined twenty pounds. I was given about two months to pay.

What was very nice of a lot of people in St Albans they brought us baby clothes and the people around were very helpful. We just have to say we were living in a place that everyone was helpful. It was a small village. I think St Albans had 700 inhabitants at that time. That's what I was told. There were three shops here. One of them was Mr Self and his sons. There was Mr Perrett; he was also a postmaster. There was a greengrocer and his name was Clarence Moffat. There was an Australian butcher where they now sell the pet food.

At that time they also started to build bungalows. There was another interesting case in our street. As I said before if you were able to secure some accommodation for your wife and children the Immigration Department brought the wife and children with the train and taxi to your abode.

One Estonian fellow had a block of land on the corner of the street and he bought two boxes from Volkswagen. He put them up there and he mentioned that he had a place of abode. His wife came down here and she was living in the two boxes with him, all clean and nice, and they wanted the children to come back.

The people from the Immigration Department came down one day. He was at work and of course her English was as good as your Chinese. Therefore they came to see my wife and those two chaps were laughing their heads off. This is the accommodation. Anyhow, they let the children come down. Well why not if they wanted to live there and were able to do so? He wasn't the only one. He was one of a few who was using the VW boxes as accommodation and why the hell not when some Australians used to live in tents. There was a man here living in a tent. There was another one living here also in a tent but that was later on.

(Excerpt from article published in *St Albans Oral History From The Tin Shed Archives*, 2004.)

George Eisner

George (Jiri) Eisner was of Czechoslovakian background and arrived in Australia on 28 January 1950 with wife Vlasta and daughter Helen. They departed on the Dunkald Bay from Naples, Italy, on 29 December 1949 and arrived at Freemantle in January 1950. Their daughter Irene was born locally. They settled in Collins Street, St Albans, where Eisner's initial foray into business appears to have been as an employment broker. Perhaps this didn't succeed as only one advertisement has been found in *The Age* for 23 August 1950:

OUR Team of Home Workers is able to solve your Staff Shortage and help you in several branches of production. Write your offers or questions to G. EISNER, 51 Collins-street, St. Albans.

Eisner obtained his real estate and business agent's licence in April 1952 and the family became naturalised citizens in 1954. His role in St Albans started earlier because in June 1951 he was in contact with Keilor council on behalf of other new arrivals regarding the erection of pre-fabricated houses.

*"Mr G. Eisner, acting on behalf of his fellow countrymen, explained in a letter to the Council, that these structures were intended for use on the completion of permanent residences, this explanation is being borne out by the many residences now in the course of construction."*¹

He was a new arrival with extra initiative because he was soon writing to Keilor council about improvements to the streets and drawing

attention to the unemployment situation in St Albans. He started off working as a real estate agent with Frank Horsfall of Horsfall Homes in Footscray but then set up his own business from a small office in his back yard. As his business progressed he employed a secretary and book-keeper and had a large advertising sign on a shed at the railway station. Most of his media advertising during 1953 and 1954 was through *The Age*. He was selling land and building one- or two-roomed bungalows that he advertised in the *Age* as "small houses". You could buy one for £110 deposit, move in within two weeks, and pay the rest on monthly repayments. A three-room bungalow might cost you £500 and take two years to pay off at £5 per week.

*"Small houses vacant. Close station. 25 minutes city. Deposits £110, £140 £160 (according to size), balance on easy weekly payments. Each small house is ready to move into within 2 weeks and being constructed as a solid part of a permanent house, can be extended any time to fully sized modern villa. 800 similar homes already completed and occupied by nearly 4000 people is our best recommendation. Ask for free catalogue and inspections. G Eisner. 51 Collins St., St. Albans."*²

This advertisement was from 1954 and it is interesting to note the claim that 800 "small houses" had been built and housed 4,000 people. It is not clear if this was for St Albans alone or included other parts of Sunshine, where it was estimated there were 1,089 part houses or rooms under construction in the municipality.³ If Eisner's figures are correct they equate to a household size of 5 people per bungalow, which fits in with much of the oral history from the time. The St Albans population was estimated to be 5,500 at the time⁴ which suggests the district already had more the 1,000 households.



Bungalow of St Albans 1950s © Kon Haumann

Eisner wasn't a builder himself but would sell you a land and bungalow package and have other people erect the building. You could just about do it in a weekend if you had a good team

¹ *Sunshine Advocate* 15 June 1951

² *The Age* 20 November 1954 p41

³ *Sunshine Advocate* 1 October 1954

⁴ *St Albans Progress Association* May 1955

because with the smaller one-roomed structures as soon as you got twelve stumps into the ground you were off. There were other builders who were doing similar work and of course it provided employment for the migrant men and the returned servicemen who went into the building trade. There are stories of them sometimes building on the wrong block because of confusion with the boundary pegs and sometimes they were built across other people's land. With the larger designs there was a kitchen in the middle and a bedroom at each end. These weren't even half-houses but they were a start and people moved in and extended when they could, sometimes taking many years to complete the construction.

Jimmy Knowles, a local community leader, says that Eisner was a clever businessman because if he had options on several blocks of land in a street he would build on every second or third one and thus increase the value of the vacant lots in between. Others remember Eisner being a tough business operator who would initiate repossession action if you got behind in repayments for your land or bungalow purchase.

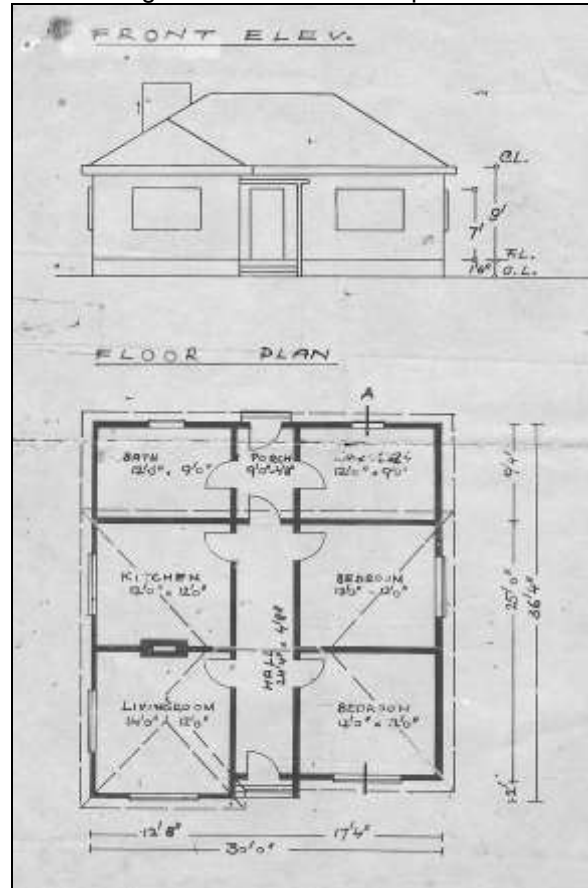
Not all the new constructions complied with the building regulations and sometimes Keilor ordered the demolition of sub-standard houses:

*"Keilor Council on Tuesday carried a motion ordering the demolition of three one-room structures erected as dwellings in Collins St., St. Albans by New Australians. Cr. H. Easton said that when the migrants bought the land from Mr. G. Eisner, a St. Albans agent, they told him they were not interested in his type of house and were going to erect garages and live in them. They disregarded advice from Mr. Eisner to contact the council. Cr. Easton added that the building inspector had confirmed that the structures were jerry-built. Earlier in the meeting there was criticism of part-houses being erected at St. Albans and the building inspector was asked to report on the matter. Cr. McNab said that people were building these places and then selling them and letting others "carry the baby." Cr. Easton said he was reasonably happy with the efforts of the people of St. Albans who had been allowed to build part of their houses. "The population of St. Albans wouldn't be a quarter of what it is if the council hadn't helped by giving people a chance to get a roof over their heads."*¹

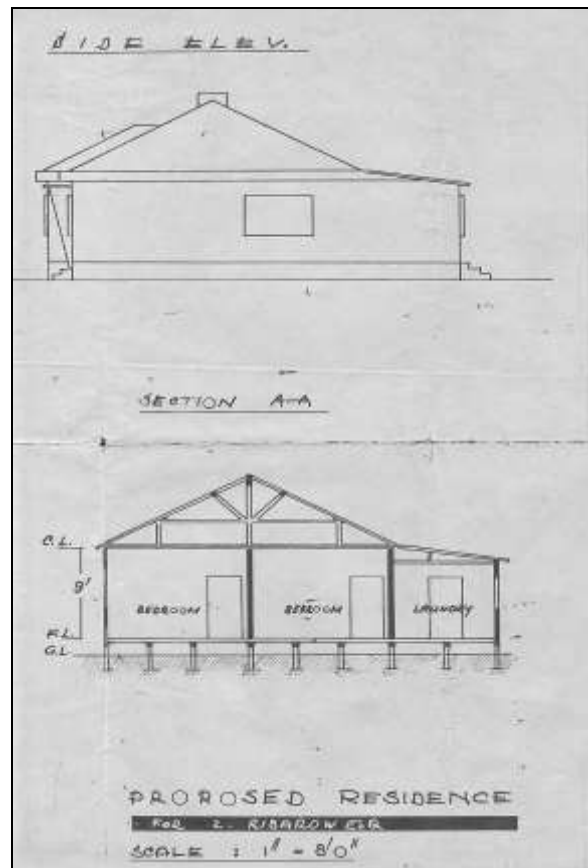
The Eisners experienced a major disaster in 1961 with the death of the two daughters and attempted suicide of the mother, Vlasta, who was charged with murder. She was later determined to be unfit to plead and was detained "under supervision during the Governor's pleasure". Vlasta Eisner died in 1966 at age 44 years.

George Eisner left the district and started a new life as a builder in Mansfield where he had established the St Albans Ski Club. He married

Elaine Whittacker in 1966 and they raised two sons. George Eisner died on 18 April 1998.



House plan for Lot 8 Henry Street © J Ribarow



House plan for Lot 8 Henry Street © J Ribarow

¹ Sunshine Advocate 7 May 1954

— AUCTION SALE —

SATURDAY, 13th JUNE, 1953
 AT 11 a.m. ON THE PROPERTY
EAST ESPLANADE, ST. ALBANS

On behalf of Executors of Estate of Louisa Hounslow dec'd.
**Central Shop Site 66' x 165' together with
 W/B Dwelling, 4 rooms therein**

This property offers an opportunity to secure a first class
 business situation in the centre of vastly improving and
 thriving suburb. Dwelling subject to tenancy, 21/- per wk.

Terms, one tenth deposit, balance cash 30 days.

Solicitors: Messrs MADDEN & CANDY,
 443 Little Collins Street, Melbourne.

Particulars From
W. J. BELL, Auctioneer
 15 SUN CRESCENT, SUNSHINE — MM 1121.

Fred Barlow



Fred Barlow was born in Melbourne on the 25th December 1920 and married Gwladys Latch in April 1943. They moved with their two children to St Albans in December 1949. Fred is remembered as the iconic milkman of the fifties doing his pre-

dawn deliveries by horse and cart. After the war Fred worked at Smorgans Abattoir and when the family moved to St Albans in 1949 he worked as a cleaner and the local milkman for 14 years.

I left the navy in 1947 and we were staying in a bungalow at the back of the wife's people in Nixon Street, Sunshine. We stayed there for a while but later we got lodgings over at a place in Argyle Street Moonee Ponds, and we stayed there for quite some time. But the landlady wasn't very pleasant so we moved next door. I worked with Dick, who was the nephew of the lady next door to this boarding house, and she let us put a caravan in her back yard. We only had two children then.

I was still working at Smorgans. We had two rooms there in Moonee Ponds and a bitch of a landlady and she put us out or we got out, one of the two or a mixture of both. And we went next door into the caravan. The lady next door to boarding house let us put a caravan in her back yard. Spicer was their name. We lived in this caravan for about 9 months. We had a sheet of canvas from the roof over to a shed and that was about 6 feet wide. That was our annex and Gwlad used to cook in it. Then we got a housing commission house over in Richelieu Street, Maidstone.

When we moved to Maidstone we never had much in the way of furniture or anything else, so we got our first lounge suite when Rimfire won the Melbourne Cup. I was fortunate enough to get it in the sweep and I won £30. One of the

fellows I was working with at Smorgans was telling me about a block of land he bought out at St Albans.

I got out of the navy in November and Jeff Latch and his brother Brian said to me, "Well, you're not going to get a job anywhere else over Christmas because everything closes down." So he said, "Come with me and I'll see if I can get you on at Smorgans." Which he did, and George Smorgan said to him "Yes, send him out and I'll start him on Monday." So I went out on the Monday and I started on the 'chain', on what they call the 'spreader'. I finished up working there for ten years. I was only going to go there over the holidays, but I was earning good money there, so I couldn't see any point in leaving. To get a boilermaker's job ... I had a boiler attendant's certificate and I also had a machinist certificate but they paid less money than I was getting as a slaughterman at Smorgans.

So when my workmate told me about this block of land he'd bought for £50, I said that sounds fair enough to me, and I went out and had a look at the land and then bought a block. This was in 1949 and I was 23 years old.

I went out and bought it on my own. In those days the father was the head of the family. He did whatever he wanted to do, more or less. We were living in Maidstone, so I got the bus to Sunshine and the train from Sunshine to St Albans and walked across from the St Albans railway station.

I then took the wife out to see the block and she nearly fainted. It was through waist-high grass from the St Albans railway station round to Percy Street. That was the street that Sands' place used to run off. It took us half an hour to find the pegs that marked out the block. But anyway, as I said to her, she wanted a house and this was the best that we could afford. There was a builder up there who'd started building homes around St Albans, and I had a talk to him and he said he could put me up a three-bedroom, weatherboard home for £1,400. So I signed up with him, but I don't remember his name; it would still be on the plans. I signed up for the house and it had all the mod cons, including a copper and a hot water service. I don't think it was electric, so it must have been wood-fired.

There was no septic sewage; there was an outside chemical toilet to start with. There was no water laid on and no gas. Ken Mansfield had a house behind us and he let us connect up a hose to his outdoor water tap. We had a 44 gallon drum at the back door on a stand with a tap in it and we used to fill the 44 gallon drum up and use the water as we required it.

There were no roads and no street lights. The mail was delivered on horseback by Mr Eric Perrett. Self Brothers and Goddard had a little country store and a milk bar alongside. They were the two main shops: there was a butcher

shop and Eric Perrett's little store in which he had the post office attached to. I think it was Hampton who had a clothing store on the corner of the main street, Main Road East.

We eventually got street lighting. The wife's biggest thrill was getting the hot water service. When she spoke about the house to anybody she should say "and do you know that I only have to turn the tap and I've got hot water." We never had refrigeration at the time; we had an ice-chest, for which Self Brothers and Goddard used to deliver the ice in the back of a covered-in truck.

Life in St Albans was hard but it was happy. We had the best times of our life there.

(Excerpt from story first published in *Stories About St Albans Celebrating 125 Years*, 2012.)



Marriage of Fred Barlow & Gwladys Latch © J Barlow



Streetscape in Beaver St. 1950s © J Barlow



Jeff, Gwladys, Glenda and Fred Barlow © J Barlow

Nick Szwed



My parents were born in Belarus which was under Polish rule at the time and when they were about 18 years old they were forced by the Nazi invaders to work in Germany to assist with their World War 2 effort. My father was Michael Szwed from the Ukraine and my mother was Maria Chudzinska from Belarus. They met and married while in Germany and my elder sister Kathy and I were both born in Germany.

When the Nazis were defeated my parents decided to go to South America to join some relatives. Belarus was now under Russian communist control and my parents had heard stories that anyone who helped the Germans was sent to Siberia.

Unfortunately my Mum was told she could not go on a long ocean journey in her pregnant state, so they missed the boat. Dad was furious with Mum and stressed out a bit while waiting. He was worried that the Russians would track him down and escort him to Siberia.

By the time I arrived my parents had decided to go to Australia because they had heard some good stories about it and, I suppose, because it was so far away from the Russians. We travelled on the *Hellenic Prince* which was previously an Aussie warship and arrived in Melbourne on 24 April 1950. We then travelled by train from Station Pier to Bonegilla and spent a couple of months in the migrant camp that had been established in the army barracks. From there my parents headed off to work in Mildura and spent a year based in another camp near the airport. My sister Luba was born in Mildura.

My dad then headed to Melbourne for better paid work in a factory in Footscray, because he wanted to earn more money so he could buy a block of land and start building a home. In the meantime the rest of the family stayed in Mildura. This family separation through work was experienced by lots of other families.

Dad soon heard that land was very cheap in St Albans and bought a block in Beaver Street. Most people were building small bungalows but my dad decided to build a full house. First of all he bought a car crate and set in on the block as his temporary abode and work shed. Then Mr Leo Dobes, a neighbour, drew up the house plans and with the help of friends dad started building. It was slow going and mum was concerned at what he was up to down south. So he finally came up to fetch us and in April 1951

we moved to St Albans into the house that dad had built.

We had very high expectations for our first house and were thoroughly let down as we stood in front of a half-finished construction site. The back part was habitable but the front part was without a floor, just open floor joists with a plank across that you could step on. Anyway, it was ours and that was special. So we started off in two rooms – like a bungalow.

My first memories of St Albans are of a small village where you soon got to recognise everyone you saw and there were lots of paddocks to explore. My brother Victor was born soon after we came to St Albans.

One day a friend of mum's arrived crying because she could not afford the rent and was being evicted. Well, there was no hesitation, they would have to move in with us and each family could have a room.

I started at St Albans State Primary School in 1955. I cried on my first day because after our first assembly everyone just walked away and left me standing there. I didn't know what I had to do or where I had to go. I was confused and just stood there and was left behind. The teachers had to get my big sister to console me.

After school we'd go home, have a snack and then go outside and play with the neighbourhood kids and on weekends we would go and explore the paddocks.

St Albans State School was filling fast so some of us had to move into a temporary school in the St Albans Hall in East Esplanade opposite the railway station. We then went off to St Albans East when it opened in 1956.

My dad was unemployed at one stage when I was at primary school. There was a school excursion one day requiring a sixpence from each child. I didn't have it. Mr Carney, the Head Teacher, came to me and asked why I didn't have my 6d. When I told him my dad was out of work Mr Carney told me to get on the bus. This act of kindness still brings tears to my eyes when I think of it.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 years*, 2016.)



Szwed family Beaver St. 1950s © N Szwed



Szwed family home Beaver St. 1950s © N Szwed

Auction — — — Auction
SATURDAY, 24th APRIL, at 2 p.m.
ADELAIDE ST. ST. ALBANS
 (off Kate Street and close Main Road)
VACANT POSSESSION
PARTLY CONSTRUCTED
— TILED W.B. VILLA —

Comprising lounge, bedroom, kitchen, lined with plaster sheets and fitted with four power points and Simpson El. 3-plate stove. Other fittings not connected. Plans of 2 roomed villa available
 LAND: 64' x 165'
TERMS: £200 Deposit, Balance 30 days.
 In its present form this property is quite habitable, and provides an excellent chance for an energetic young man or builder to purchase close to Railway Station, shops and schools.

Further particulars
ALF GREENWOOD
 (William F. Hogg, Auctioneer)
 138 BARKLY STREET, FOOTSCRAY — MW 1144.

AUCTIONS

Saturday, 2nd June
 1.45 p.m. In a seated Marquee
 on the land.
Main Road West,
St. Albans
42 SPLENDID
HOME SITES

Excellent position in good home area; right at station and shops. Water & Elec.
Solicitors:
HODGSON & FINLAYSON
 360 Collins St., Melbourne
 Further particulars:
SHALLARD BROS.
 Auctioneers, Real Estate
 55 Leeds St., Footscray
 MW 2044

Real estate advertisements from the Sunshine Advocate in the 1950s

Saturday, 5th April on the property
Cr. Main Rd. West & Glendenning St. St. Albans
 IMMEDIATE VACANT POSSESSION
MODERN BRICK VENEER HOME

First class home containing three bedrooms, lounge, kitchen and laundry. Elec. copper, bath heater and Briar sink heater.
 A well situated home close to Railway station and shopping.
 Road made. Land 60' x 120'
 Title Certificate Terms £250 deposit, balance 30 days.

SHALLARD BROS. Auctioneer
 55 Leeds Street, Footscray MW 2044 MW 5924
JAMES A. FOX
 264 Hampshire Road, Sunshine, MW 9123
 Agents in Conjunction

Vanda Viti



After Broadmeadows, in 1954, the family moved to St Albans to be close to where the other Fiumani families already living there in their huts and sheds. For many years St Albans was famous for its half-houses, huts, and sheds. In retrospect I must admire the

women who managed a full and happy life living in such humble dwellings. The migrant men went to work to get enough money to add another room to the bungalow. The children? We were happy. We were loved, secure, and well fed, and we had no idea of deprivation or poverty ... but you would have thought that Sunshine Council would have made some effort in providing some gravel on our muddy roads. We were a migrant community – quite ignored.

I loved St Albans. I arrived in time to start Grade 5 at St Albans Primary School. After having become quite expert at wagging classes for three years at St Pauls in Coburg and Westbreen in Coburg, I had finally arrived at a school I loved. A girl called Switlana came up to me on the first day of school: "You're new. Well, you can be my friend." She was the most popular girl in the school with a following of over 15 kids. She was confident and articulate and she looked like my image of Snow White. We had a wonderful time at primary school and became best friends for many years to follow.

My father was working at the Maribyrnong Munitions Factory. Though my father was an experienced diesel mechanic, in Australia he worked as a labourer and process worker in the factories. Many years later he changed to the Pram Factory. As he used to say, at first he was making bullets to kill all the people, and now he was looking after their babies by making prams.

My mother worked full-time as a house-wife without any of the modern conveniences. She was boiling the laundry in the copper, making all our clothes, and living in a tin garage that was partitioned into a kitchen, a bedroom for five kids, and the master bedroom. We lived like that for about two years while my father, the neighbour, and my older brother were building the home.

It was interesting, those days. We loved it, because kids will love anything as long as they are well fed and loved and happy. As long as you have these you don't care where you live.

My father, my brothers, and some neighbours got our house completed to lock-up stage in 1957. There was a tradition in St Albans that when the house frame was up and the roof pitched, someone would place a bunch of

flowers on the highest point. At that time St Albans was full of flowers on rooftops. Our house being at lock up stage meant that we could live in it, although there were no internal walls. My mother partitioned the bedrooms with sheets, and for the first time in my life I had a bedroom of my own. # 2006

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Vanda Viti and new family home 1950s © V Bogнар



Vanda Viti and new family home 1950s © V Bogнар

Les Thurgood



Dad came to Australia on his own in 1949 to find a place to settle and build a home. As an independent migrant he had to have suitable housing for the rest of the family before the Australian government would let them come over, because they were not eligible to be

accommodated through the migrant hostels. Dad was at first boarding in St Kilda and working as a draftsman with John Thompson Australia, the boiler makers, and working as an actor with the National Theatre or the Union Theatre, which is now the Melbourne Theatre Company. He had his trade to earn a livelihood but he was an actor for all of his life.

He nearly bought a house in Fern Tree

Gulley, but it was too far from the school and the railway station. Then he found a block at North Balwyn, but it cost three hundred pounds and he would have had to build in brick, which he couldn't do himself and couldn't afford a builder. Then he heard about St Albans from a worker colleague and bought a block in Walmer Avenue for one hundred pounds. He liked the area because they had electrified the railway line from Sunshine, the land was cheap, and you could build a weatherboard house.

He obtained a loan from the Altona Co-operative Building Society and started building the house on the weekends, riding his bicycle from St Kilda. He mentioned that the road from Deer Park was very rough and often the wind would howl down making it a tough ride. But he was young and tough and if he had a performance scheduled he'd cycle back to South Yarra or wherever to put on the show. He's written about the ninety stump holes that had to be dug for foundations and eighty-nine of them had solid rocks that had to be extracted. I think Alan and Clarice Quinn who were across the road helped with that and there was another chap two doors up, Les Stewart, who also helped. Dad obviously became friends with the neighbours. His mates from the cricket club and the theatre helped with the framing and plastering. The window frames and some of the roofing was made from car cases that he got off the wharf. The house was built as a complete house so we didn't go the way of a lot of the refugees who came from Europe who started off with a half house and then built the rest over time.

My mother Mary came out with the children a couple of years after dad, when the home was ready for occupation. We left England in November 1950 and arrived in January 1951 and moved into our new home on 2nd January 1951. Myself and my brothers were all born in England and I had my seventh birthday on the ship on the way out. We settled into 1 Walmer Avenue, which wasn't far from the primary school and just half a hop, step and jump from the high school when it was built.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 years*, 2016.)



Nevil Thurgood & children 1950s © Les Thurgood



Thurgood home Millawa Ave 1950s © Les Thurgood



Mary Thurgood with children 1950s © Les Thurgood

Julian Castagna



I was born in the village of Montona in the province of Trieste, Italy. My mother and my father arrived in Australia in 1951 under refugee status with no money. They brought with them the clothes on their backs and a copper pot for cooking polenta, which I still have. My parents came from a tiny village where making a living in Italy's post-war conditions was difficult; migration was a solution accepted by many. I'm struck by how courageous they were: they didn't speak the language; they didn't have any money, nor did they understand the currency; they didn't have jobs; they didn't know where they were going to live; they didn't even have a friend. My mother never forgot that there were only two countries in the world who would take people without 'papers': America and Australia – and with the polenta pot in her hand and me and my father flanking her, she thanked God for both of them.

My father was Pietro Castagna who was a

stonemason, and in Australia he worked in a factory at first and eventually as a brick layer and a sort-of builder – not a big-time one. We settled in Main Road West, St Albans, at first in a one-roomed bungalow which my father built and which ended up housing the now six of us till my youngest sister was born five or six years later. Being a stone-mason my father had the skill to build a brick house for us whereas many other places were being built of weatherboard. He worked in a factory on night shift so he could build the house in daylight hours.

My father thought that hard labour was what you did to get on, whereas I always said success is in the head – anyone can do physical work but very few people can think. My father didn't really want me to go on at school as he saw that I had abilities to help his business grow. My mother is very bright and understood that education was very important.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Castagna family Main Road West 1950s



Castagna family Main Road West 1950s

Kon Haumann



We arrived on the ship Fair Sea in Melbourne on 29 March 1954, after a five-week journey from Bremerhaven in Germany. My parents were George and Magdalena Haumann, my twin brother was Joe and my younger brother was Gerry. We were of German ethnic background and had

been living in a northern province of Yugoslavia when the war started. We were imprisoned before escaping to Switzerland. After a few weeks at the Bonegilla migrant camp in northern Victoria, we came to Chelsea and were living in a boarding house that was supported by the Catholic Church through Charitas. My twin brother, my father, and I got a job at the Victorian Railways, through Charitas. We were five weeks at Bonegilla and we moved to Chelsea for six months until October.

At Chelsea we were in a boarding house, the whole family, until my father found that new Australians were starting to come to St Albans as the land was cheap. The place in Chelsea was the second house from the beach and I used to go to the beach every day.

We came to St Albans in October 1954 and were living in Alfrieda Street. I didn't like it at all once I saw all the unmade roads and all that. At nighttime when you went to see friends, trying to avoid one pothole you jumped into the next pothole. There were no graded roads, no roads for years, only tracks for some trucks or cars.

The family bought land in Alfrieda Street. Originally there were two blocks of land, with a bungalow on the corner with an empty block next to it. The family home was built on that, and it took a number of years to complete as we had to finance it ourselves. It was not easy to get finance from the banks in those days.

When I moved to 106 Alfrieda Street in 1954, the corner here, we were the only ones with water. There were bungalow buildings in Collins Street, Erica Street, and View Street, and further up. They used to come to the corner here and get the water with buckets and carry them home, usually twice a day. When the family home was finished around 1959, we had the hot water tank up on the roof, but we didn't have the electricity meter as there was a delay in getting them. So we still had to make hot water for the bath in the copper tank that was out the back. We had to light a wood fire and when the water was hot we carried it with buckets into the bath. Everybody had to heat their own water.

In 1960 my twin brother Joe got married and he, his wife, and later his son lived in the family

home for three years, until he had his house built across the road.

In 1964 I worked as a part-time real estate agent, as a subagent for Willmore and Randall in the city. I was selling blocks of land in Clifton Springs, Chirside Park, and the Ninety Mile Beach. I thought I was doing that well until I met my wife-to-be, Marianne Gampe. I was trying to sell her land and I stopped there. That was it, no more after that.

I got married in 1964, ten years after we arrived in Australia. When we got married there were no reception centres, and if there were any their cost would have been way out of our reach. The most common places used were the public halls or town halls. I remember the first wedding I went to was in 1963 at Williamstown Town Hall, and the boys sitting on one side and the girls on the other. When they said "come and get it" and they put out all the little pies and sausages, and everyone rushed over to the food first come first served basis. I was too slow, didn't get anything. On our wedding we had the reception at the family home with eighty-six people or so. My brother's wedding was also in the family home.

I married Marianne Gampe in February 1964 and we moved into the bungalow. In June 1964 we decided to build a new brick veneer house. The bungalow was moved to the back of the block and the new house built in front. It was finished in October in time for our first daughter, Caroline, who was born in December 1964.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Oral History From The Tin Shed Archives*, 2004.)



House construction Alfrieda Street © K Haumann



House construction Alfrieda Street © K Haumann



Alfrieda Street looking north © Kon Haumann



Putting on the rafters © Kon Haumann



Alfrieda Street looking south © Kon Haumann



Putting on the rafters © Kon Haumann



Images from the Kon Haumann Collection © K Haumann

Lynette Cox



Both my parents, Jean Thomas and Russell Cox, were born and raised in Sunshine, so I am definitely an Aussie girl. Dad's father had moved from Ballarat as a young apprentice with Sunshine Harvester. Mum's family owned a butcher

shop in Sunshine. Both families were of English stock. The earliest arrival was a family of seven who arrived by ship at Geelong in 1852; one child died and another was born during the voyage from England. The family then drove by bullock dray to the goldfields at Ballarat. The latest arrival from overseas was my maternal grand-mother who migrated from Scotland with her parents around 1910. Her father was a Swedish sea captain who'd lived in Scotland, overseeing a country estate, prior to migrating to Australia. They settled in Bacchus Marsh where he managed the local racecourse.

Mum and dad met at McKays where they both worked, dad as a toolmaker and mum in the pricing section. Before their marriage in 1947 mum and dad bought a block of land in Percy Street St Albans with the aim of building a house once they could afford to. At the time these blocks were about half the price of those in Sunshine and Albion.

As was customary at the time, mum left her job once they married, and to save money, they lived with dad's parents in Albion, occupying separate rooms at the back of the house.

I was born at the Sunshine hospital in 1949. In 1951 dad started building our house in St Albans, a two-bedroomed weatherboard home. He and his father did the construction themselves, a task which took twelve months of weekend work. We moved there in 1952 just before my brother Robert was born. Some years later the third bedroom and back verandah were added.

At that time older established houses stretched from the tennis courts on the corner of Main Road East and Percy Street down to our block. Around the time our house was built there was rapid development going on in the area due to post-war migration and within a few years houses stretched all the way to St Albans Road and behind us to the High School.

As a young child I remember lots of open space, the grass and the Scotch thistles, the creek over the road (later filled in), Errington Reserve around the corner, bike riding, and playing cricket in the side street – good places for playing.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years*, 2016.)



Beaver Street 1950s © Leo Dobes



Bungalow in Alfrieda Street 1950s © K Haumann

Bev Toogood



We moved to Beaver Street in St Albans in 1954, and I think that was because there was cheap land available to build your own home. My father used to ride his bike from Maidstone every weekend to build the house in Beaver Street. There was an old guy who lived around

the corner in Percy Street who was also building a house. Every weekend that my father came up there was a bit more timber missing, while this old guy kept building his home without any timber in sight. My dad used to say, "I think the old so-and-so has been pinching my timber."

It took dad years to build the house, so while he was building we lived in the three rooms at the back, like everybody else did, in a skillion.

When we first moved here there was nothing here. From where we were in Beaver Street there was nothing opposite us looking to the east; nothing at all. I could see from our front door right across to McIntyre Road because it was all paddocks. What's more I used to stand on the back porch and wave to my visitors on the train as they were going, because there was nothing more than a few houses in that direction.

There were only a few houses in Beaver Street. Keith Tully was one of the boys; he went

to the tech school. Jeff Barlow was in our street, though we didn't have much contact with them. His sister, Glenda, joined the Navy.

There were some buildings along the south side of Main Road. Nearest the station there were two or three railway houses, then the old espresso bar which was back from the road, about where Daniella's is now located. That's where all the boys from *The Untouchables* used to hang out for their coffee. That was the gang back then, in the Georgie Biris days. They used to wear leather jackets with "The Untouchables" written on the back. They were harmless, but it was the era of the bodgies and the widgees.

After the espresso bar there was a house occupied by a Polish lady, and Dr Rogozinski ended up working in the back of that place before he opened up his surgery further along the road.

Then came the Gross's home, then the Hounslow's – there were about four of these very fancy looking homes. Then came the garage, which was where Safeways has their car park. That was a long time ago.

I remember when the Europeans started moving into the area. Mrs Babicz was across the road from us, and she had two girls, Maria and Stasia. Before they came we never had anything like *paćzki* or Vienna bread. Because both their parents were at work, Maria and Stasia weren't allowed to come out of the house after school, so we would talk to them through their front window. They'd say, "We'll give you *paćzki* if you give us an Australian something." We'd swap through the window. My parents wouldn't have dreamt of buying a Vienna loaf.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Bev Toogood (centre) 1960s © Bev Smith

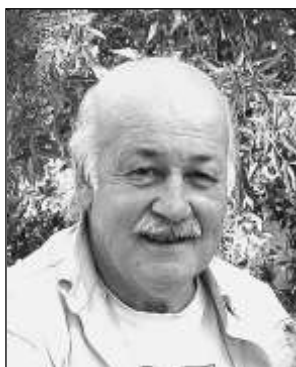


Railway houses Main Road East & St Albans Rd.



Hounslow home Main Road East © Wendy Taylor

Bernie Kokot



The Kokots arrived in Australia in Fremantle on Anzac Day 1950 as Polish emigrants, including me at the age of four with mum and dad. At first we lived at the Bonegilla barracks near Wodonga. In 1951 the old man bought a block in Scott Avenue St Albans, which was just vast flat pad-

docks. Given a tall ladder, one could have a 360 degree unobstructed view, the only land-mark being the old railway station and the ICI Munitions factory on Ballarat Road in Albion.

My early recollections are about me being sent to the Railway Station with two buckets to bring back water to our block, the frequent explosions at the ICI factory and ammo storage bunkers in the paddock across from our bungalow, and after heavy rain, the quagmire of our Scott Avenue and Andrea Street corner. I forget how many times the nightsoil (dunny) truck got bogged and I can still picture the postmen, John Doherty and later Mr Battye, battling through the mud to far-spread mail boxes.

That was about the time the first house was being built behind our block and another half way up Glendenning Street. Dad's Polish friend Janek and a Mr Nosal were from Pennell Avenue. The late Mr Eugene Czyzewski lived at 43 Pennell Avenue and they were my mum and dad's closest Polish friends. Mr C was connected

with the Polish community in Victoria. Another good Polish friend was a Mr Mielewski who was a St Albans Polish community figurehead in the fifties. He used to organise a lot of bus outings and socials for us migrant families to, say, Daylesford and apple picking at Bacchus Marsh. I think he was also a committee member of the Polonia Soccer Club.

I recall our bungalow had a kitchen sink (concrete wash trough) and bench inside behind the window. The rest was open plan but comfortable, with a lino floor, the walls Masonite lined. We had a small wood stove that used briquettes. Lighting was by kerosene lantern and cooking on a small single burner Primus. The toilet was the iconic Thunderbox near the backyard chook shed. The pigeon coop provided some memorable meals!

Our back yard had a veggie patch with fruit trees and garden growing prolific from mum's gardening skills gained as a young woman working on a collective farm in the Ukraine. We had a variety of fresh veggies, berries and a grapevine. Invasive rabbits were more than welcome as an addition to the cooking pot! Sunday was always home grown chooks.

In those similar years many of us moved from our fibro bungalows into recently built houses. Our first block was at 1 Scott and diagonally opposite us was a second home at 3 Pennell Avenue where our first neighbours lived - they were Chas and Jean Roberston and son Ron. They moved from Essendon into their self-built cottage. A great Aussie friend Chas Robertson (owner/builder) helped many migrants. They were dinki-di Aussies and advanced my parents' English-speaking skills in addition to what Mum and Dad were picking up listening to an ABC Radio program that on various nights had Polish and German language programs with English explanations.

They were building brick foundations for their house in 1951 and I was sitting in the wheelbarrow watching them. This was the day Mr Robertson told me to barrack for the Essendon Bombers.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years*, 2016.)



Playing street football 1950s © Bernie Kokot



Bernie Kokot on building site 1950s © B Kokot



Kokot family's new home © Bernie Kokot

Betty and Phil

In 1951, Betty with her husband Phil and their two children came from England by boat to Australia under the assisted passage scheme. They were the type of immigrant that Australia was trying to recruit. That is, they were of British stock, young, healthy, and with trade skills that could be put to immediate employment. They were not refugees or displaced persons, just ordinary working class people who were modestly but comfortably settled in their accommodation and lifestyle.

Betty and Phil had to wait for six months before their place on a boat was available. The assisted passage cost them only £10 per adult and the two children were included for free because they were under fourteen years. The balance of the fares was covered by the respective governments. The passengers from England were all family units, but along the journey they stopped to pick up 350 men, part of a contingent of Maltese nationals from a similar recruitment scheme that Australia had arranged with the Government of Malta for that year. On board the ship there were about 500 children who received classes for 3½ hours a day.

The ship landed 31 December 1951 and the passengers were taken to the Bathurst army camp west of Sydney. The area was a lovely place. Betty saw possums for the first time and the family were impressed by the novelty of the surrounding countryside. However, the camp itself was substandard and not at all like they expected, just wooden huts. They had been told of beautiful hostel accommodation comprising of two bedrooms, a living room, and a private bathroom, but with a communal kitchen and dining room. There was also the claim that there would be child-minding facilities. Here they were half a mile from the kitchen and while there was plenty of food it was an odd combination: half a pound of cheese, grapes, bread, eggs and bacon. It was also half a mile to the toilet block, which was rather primitive and without privacy as there were six toilets in a row without any divisions between them. Betty found the camp to be substandard even as a temporary place.



Kokot family's new home © Bernie Kokot



Bernie Kokot in backyard 1950s © B Kokot

Residents had to take on compulsory jobs on short notice, which saw some people head off to the mines of Newcastle to serve their stint.

On 17 January 1952 Betty's family were taken to the Brooklyn Hostel in Melbourne and Betty cried when she saw that they were being expected to live in converted wool sheds. She could not believe that this was the accommodation that they were expected to live in. They were taken to a hut at the far end of the compound and opened the door to their allocated three rooms, of which two were bedrooms. There were no outside windows, they were separated from the neighbours by only a single masonite panel, and the ceiling was of open wire netting that did not even conceal the unlined roof of the wool shed much further above. There were fourteen of these wool sheds in toto, each divided into a series of rooms. Neighbours had their radios blaring loud enough that there was no sense of privacy. They were told the canteen was open for a meal so Phil took the children there while Betty stayed behind and cried until she could compose herself to make the best of it.

The family decided to move out as soon as they could afford to find a place elsewhere. It was not easy, but with both of them working they had the incentive and the opportunity to aim for something better. They ended up staying a whole year in the hostel before they had saved enough to even consider becoming independent.

Private accommodation was not easy to find at that time. The effects of the prolonged depression had meant that little new housing stock had been built, particularly in the western region. Apart from the financial considerations, it was still very difficult to obtain building materials for new homes. In response the federal government had removed the import duty on pre-fabricated houses and then decided to subsidise each prefab house that was imported into the country by the state governments. It was still not enough to cope with the demand. In the early fifties it was acknowledged that the housing shortage was a major social problem, and that this caused many broken marriages, preventable illnesses, and nervy children. Newly married couples and immigrants were lucky to be able to rent a room or two, often at a relatively high rate. No wonder that many turned to building their own little bungalow in places like Sunshine and St Albans.

Betty and Phil moved to St Albans in 1953. They bought a block of land in Power Street for £160, available on £30 deposit.

From George Eisner our family ordered a three-room bungalow for £500, available on £100 deposit. It took about two years to pay it off at £5 per week. They also bought a water tank as there was no mains water to the property. Although no one offered any help to them, they

did not feel a lack of assistance either, just that Betty did not want to go out to work and leave the children on their own, as they were more isolated out here. They were happy to have their own land, cook their own food, and hear no noise from the neighbours. They lived for five years in the bungalow before selling it and moving to a bigger home in Henry Street. They have lived there ever since. #

(Betty and Phil – not their real names – were interviewed by Lorna Cameron circa 1988 for the St Albans oral history project. Interview transcribed by Lorna Cameron but not previously published.)



Granny Lewis's bungalow Walter St. ©Wendy Taylor

Helen Vasjuta



When we first came to St Albans late in 1951 it was mainly open paddocks. There were about eight families in our little area of Henry Street. Opposite us there was a small farmlet, or the remnants of one with a few horses and a pond on the corner. This was the

type of property that was now being redeveloped into residential blocks, and before long that's exactly what happened to this one. Further east over Leslie Street was some grazing land still in use with a few sheep visible if we ever explored down that way, and at times I remember the farmer growing grain of some sort in those fields.

Our home was a one-room bungalow, which eventually became the bathroom. It was made of weatherboard and cement sheet and was completely unlined on the inside. The four of us lived in just that room for some time, before dad built an extension. We didn't have any water connected at first and had to fill our bucket from Mr and Mrs Melnik's place two houses away as they had a connection in their front yard.

My brother and I made friends with Veronica from next door and we'd have fun playing together. We were never allowed to stray very far from home. On some of the fun days we did simple things like sitting on the nature strip about

a hundred yards away from home, backs against the old corrugated iron fence of the farmlet across the road, picking bachelor's buttons or wild daisies and making dandelion chain necklaces like mum taught us. The profusion of yellow flowers was delightful and we chanted some now-forgotten nursery rhyme.

There was the small farm property still fenced off across the road. This was an old chook farm that belonged to the Lewis family but I don't think it was operating when we moved there. Occasionally we saw a horse roaming in the fenced paddock opposite us. We were delighted when we would hear a meadow lark and spot the little bird hovering above us in the air. It was a tranquil scenario. At the corner of the crossroad of Henry and Walter streets the farmyard was screened off by corrugated iron fencing adjacent to a pond. The house itself was in Walter street and flanked by rows of large pine trees, and a couple of really tall gums in the centre of their large back yard, which was an unusual sight in the area as there were very few trees visible to us.

Life was even rather funny when you look back. I remember getting a real shock when I first went to school, because I hadn't realised that there was another language. Around our little neighbourhood there were only a few houses, all with people of European background, and we could all understand each other to some extent because we grew up hearing different languages – usually there were some common words and people often spoke several languages anyway. At that time we were too young to realise that they were different languages although we had been told that people came from different parts of the world. However, countries meant nothing to us.

School was different, because it was probably the first time I would have heard English. When I first went to the St Albans Primary School in 1953 I didn't know what was wrong, because I could see that the teachers were talking, but it didn't make any sense to me. It was almost as if I had been struck deaf.

That first day I came home at lunch time. I didn't know what I was supposed to do, and when everyone rushed out at lunch-time I thought they were going home, so I left as well. I had a vague idea where to go and when I got near the church I felt relieved, because mum had taken us to church and I knew where our home was from there. Mum was surprised to see me and took me back. I've always remembered this day as my introduction to Australian education, and I think it's a good story to tell about how you learn about life even when you don't know what to expect.

I was transferred to the new school in Station Street when that opened up in 1956, and then went to the Sacred Heart school in 1957.

My brother and I also went to Polish classes at the Sacred Heart Church during 1957 and 1958. These Saturday classes were run by the Polish nuns from Essendon. Mum liked to see us doing our homework at the kitchen table, and Joe and I both enjoyed drawing pictures and the colouring-in exercises. We stopped going to the classes when we were put into the children's home, and we never did go back.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Ribarow family Henry St. 1952 © J Ribarow



Ribarow home Henry St. 1960s © J Ribarow



Veronica & Helena near half house © J Ribarow

Cathy Hatjiandreou

After living a few months in Richmond we moved to St Albans and lived under the most arduous conditions. We left Greece from a suburb of Athens that had electricity, running water, even a stove and a fridge. We came St Albans ... oh well, what a hell hole! We had no electricity, no running water and no windows, because dad

couldn't afford windows at the time or the payment for the connection of the services. The part house had two rooms and he created a little shed at the back that was the kitchen. We cooked on a kerosene stove. It was very cold and so we had a kerosene heater. I recall one day that the heater caught on fire. Luckily we were in the house and managed to douse the fire, but all the smoke and fumes made the room even darker.

Because we didn't have electricity we had one of those kerosene lamps. One day, Michael being a naughty boy as he was as a young kid, he thumped it, so you can imagine what followed.

We were five people in those two rooms. That was the situation we were living under until dad managed to gather up enough money to extend. At that point my mother wasn't working and he was still paying off the loan for our fares. Finally we got electricity and we saw the light ... then came water.

Water was another saga. The school was opposite, so my grandmother and I used to get some big casserole pots and cart water backwards and forwards from the school. That was the water we had initially. I don't know how long that went on for, but for me as a young kid it seemed like a lifetime. Mum couldn't understand how people lived here. In Greece she had electricity and a refrigerator and here we had blocks of ice being delivered for the ice chest.

The other thing about St Albans at that time and for many years later was the wonderful roads that we had, those beautiful tree-lined streets, they were just something else; spectacular stuff. If mud skating had been a sport we would have been champions. During that time it used to rain consistently. This was a time when lots of adjustments had to be made.

How can I forget the dunny ... most times overflowing and the repercussions when our playful, young dog would chase the dunny man. These experiences are unforgettable!

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Kopmann family 1950s © Sylvia Bluemel



Kukiel home Henry Street 1950s © Ivan Kukiel



Zvaigzne family 1950s © Dace Fitton



Cathy & Michael with Ivy & Olga Zeros 1950s



Annie van der Voort in backyard © Theo van der Voort

Tania Korinsky



Like so many others, we started our life in Australia at the Bonegilla migrant camp. My parents finally scraped together enough money to buy land in St Albans, and built a modest home of two rooms complete with wood stove for heating

and cooking. Washing was done in a copper outside and bathing took place in a large aluminium tub, often outside when the weather permitted.

I have memories of long walks to the Maribyrnong River with family friends and swimming in the water holes. In the evenings, our parents often visited neighbours or friends, and I can remember playing on the floor in the same room as the adults, and just seeing various legs under the table as we played. You heard voices and stories being exchanged among the adults, and it seemed that people were happy and contented to some degree. They were safe, independent, could find work, and had a roof over their heads. Their children could be educated and live safely in their new environment. Pleasure was found in simple activities and there were always other parents and children around. So we have mainly wonderful and happy memories of our earlier childhood.

Life became a little more challenging when our Mother died at the age of 32 (due to the effects of high blood pressure). Her funeral was attended by many people — testament to her friendly and generous character, and the community we lived in. She had come from a well-to-do family and I often marvel at how she adapted to life in a place like St Albans, cooking on a wood stove, getting the iceman to deliver ice for the ice-box and trying to keep things cool in the blistering summers, washing sheets and clothes in the copper, and working night shift in the canteen at The Herald newspaper in the city. Nevertheless, she always made time for her family and others, no matter what. Christmas was always a special time, with white linen table cloth, candles, huge Christmas tree, carols, special food and drink, and those without family or a place to go were invited to join us. All this in the small room that served as a living, dining and bed room for parents! The other room was occupied by us three children and the wood stove. When we added to our living space by having a small one-room structure placed next to the bungalow, instead of it being used by the family, our parents installed a homeless and jobless compatriot! He repaid them by giving us three children basin haircuts while our parents were away!

Father made a living by cutting wood (on the land he bought near Kyneton) and delivering it to the locals, so we had a sense of community and belonging right from the start. He then started a saw-milling business, supplying timber for housing. Again, looking back, he simply adapted to the new reality, and never really complained that his teaching and educational qualifications were not recognised here. He was not alone. There were many who had been writers, poets, teachers, engineers, and professional people, but who ended up in factories, labouring jobs, restaurants, and other low-paying industries in order to put food on the table and ensure their children got an education.

We were lucky also that our parents never forgot their heritage and told many a story of life in their respective home countries, giving us a concrete sense of our heritage. Curiously, we just accepted our two realities and identities.

After Mother passed away, Father decided it was time to put his efforts into activities aimed at countering the Communist regime in the Soviet Union. He spent many hours and his own money funding such activities, including the publishing of a Russian-language newspaper, which he sent around the world — some of his readers were Igor Sikorsky (of Sikorsky helicopter fame) and remnants of the Russian Imperial family in France. Donations sometimes dribbled in, but were mainly small, and Father took a job at a printing factory to supplement income. Thus, money was always in short supply for paying electricity bills and buying clothes, but he felt it was his duty to follow this path, after his experiences of growing up in the Soviet Union and the fate of his family. With an unbroken line of priests (since the introduction of Christianity in Russia in 988 AD) on the male side of the family, and also including poets and architects, the family's fortunes suffered after the Russian Revolution in 1917.

After many years of struggle, sleepless nights, and hard times he finally chose to switch to teaching in 1970 — at St Albans High School! — after his qualifications were finally recognised through Melbourne University.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years*, 2016.)



Edith and George Korinsky 1950s © T Korinsky



Edith K. with children in Circus East © T Korinsky



Family car in Millawa Ave © Tanya Korinsky

Barbara Teichmann



My family was from Berlin and we came to Australia in December 1959. I think we migrated to Australia because of my father's adventurous nature and I guess due to my mother's courage to follow him to the ends of the earth.

That's really it, mum came because dad wanted to go. We migrated through an arrangement with the Catholic church. We came to Melbourne and were meant to go to Bonegilla with the rest of the group who came with us, but we stayed in Melbourne because my sister Wally contracted measles and had to go to the infectious diseases hospital in Heidelberg. An ambulance came to the ship and took her and my mum to the hospital. The rest of us went to the Broadmeadows hostel.

My mother always said that the experience of being taken into the unknowns of an unfamiliar country was really horrific, because we didn't speak any English except the chorus from "My Bonnie lies over the ocean". After arriving at the hospital my mother had to leave my sister there and try to get to where we had been taken. They had told the nurses at the hospital to put mum in a cab and have it take her to the Broadmeadows hostel to join us. Mum

was in the cab trying to memorise where the hospital was located. She had an address but it meant nothing to her, so she thought of remembering some signs to help her identify the location in future. She saw a distinctive sign on some overhead wires and thought she would remember if she saw it again and carefully copied it down. It was DANGER.

I think we were in Broadmeadows hostel for about six months. My dad was a bricklayer and he went to work on the Snowy Mountains scheme because they were looking for bricklayers. He actually flew there and I remember us waving him goodbye. He was there quite a while and was making good money, but we missed him. My mother got a job in the hostel as a cleaner in the kindergarten.

On board the ship we had made friends with the Haase family - Chrystal Haase went to school with us - and they had gone to Bonegilla. While they were there they met this couple from St Albans who were holidaying in the area. Mr Schwabe was a builder in St Albans who invited them to come and live in St Albans because he had a bungalow he could rent them. So Mr Haase brought his family to St Albans and started looking for my family. He found us in Broadmeadows and suggested we come to St Albans because there were lots of Germans settling there. That's what we did. There was a Mr Setek who was a real estate agent and he rented my parents a bungalow in James Street. Then my parents bought a block of land in Glyndon Avenue St Albans, where they are still living. They had a house built and we moved there in 1961. It was just a little three-bedroom brick veneer and I don't know how we all fit in, but we did. My parents are still there.

Both my parents worked. One worked afternoon shift and one worked night shift. For a while dad worked as a bricklayer and was doing paving at Melbourne University. Then he worked in a factory in Albion, and that was Spaldings, and later he went to Nylex. Mum worked in a carpet factory known as Olympic Cables. Then they both worked in Malley's in Sunbury for a while. They were both hard working while we girls just grew up and went to school.

When I was in primary school in Germany I learnt some English, but it wasn't really proper English because it was taught by teachers who had never been in England who had been taught by teachers who had never been in England, so I couldn't understand anything when I got here but it didn't take me long to pick it up. I'm a talker and a reader, so that probably helped me. In 1960 when we were at Broadmeadows I attended a primary school and then I went to St Albans Primary for a couple of months when we moved to James Street. After that I went to the high school, which was in 1961.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Ursula & Heinz Teichmann & children © B Wheeler

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Stefan Czyz



My parents, Ruth and Stan Czyz, migrated from Europe in 1950 travelling by ship and I remember from conversations with them that because the boat we were in (the Fairsea) was always rocking to and fro I lost my ability to walk and reverted to crawling again. It took me a further year before

I decided that Australia was stable enough for me to restart my walking skills. The family Czyz

came to St Albans in 1954 and stayed temporarily with Tadek Ziola and his family in Scott Avenue. Later we moved to a wooden shack at the back of the family Dobrowolski's place in Pennell Avenue and shared their back yard with their bee hives. The Dobrowolski children included Tony, Helga, Rose, and Roman (a huge guy), who introduced us to the delights of rock 'n' roll and Elvis Presley. We lived with the Dobrowolskis for about a year and started going to the primary school classes that were being held at the old Mechanics Institute Hall in East Esplanade.

In 1956 we moved to a bungalow at 36 Theodore Street, which became our permanent St Albans family home. The three-bedroom bungalow became very crowded when my grandmother and Onkel Johannes joined us later in 1956. Richard and I were sharing a bedroom with grandmother, "Oma", which was the only way we could all fit into our small bungalow.

In the late 1950s people were very social. They would frequently visit one another sharing some wine and beer, some music and some light social chat and the children easily occupying themselves with simple activities. The Bajzaks were our neighbours, as were the Mullengers. Fred Mullenger had three blocks of land and a big shed where he, as the local blacksmith, would shoe horses. He did horse shoeing for the whole district at the time, or so it seemed to us as we loved to watch him fitting them onto the horse's hooves.

The Strehlings were another local family. Eddie became a prefect at St Albans High and trained as a teacher. He became the principal at Macedon but unfortunately died of a heart attack at the relatively young age of 48. Walter, his younger brother, died even earlier, at 34 years. I believe the Strehling sisters, Katie and Bernadette, are still alive.

The Slawiczkas lived on the corner of Biggs and Theodore streets. Recently they built a lovely brand new home in their back yard for their retirement years. Not far from us but across the railway line lived Ahmed Ajayoglu. Ahmed's parents ran a chook farm opposite St Albans primary school and then they added a tuckshop to the site. It started out as a wooden shed selling all the kinds of things we the children of the '50s liked: four 'n' twenty pies, lollies loose in a bag, and coke in a real glass bottle. I remember paying 1 shilling or 10c for a pie and a coke.

St Albans in the 1950s and 1960s was a fast growing suburb with muddy dirt roads, hundreds of workers cycling to the station, families starting to own cars and those new black and white TVs and transistor radios. Open gutters (with those wiggly red worms) started disappearing with the upgrading and tarring of streets. Children made their own billycarts, bows and arrows, had rock fights, bonfire nights, and you could buy your "crackers" at the local milkbar where you could

also purchase the most delicious milkshakes. Most children walked to school or rode on their single-g geared bikes. St Albans was a very hands-on and vital place welcoming all groups of migrants as they arrived. In the 1950s it was the Poles, Germans, Greeks, Maltese and Dutch who came plus many nationalities who followed.

As Richard and I were growing up my father (Stan) obtained work with ICI-Nobels as a boiler attendant and held that job for the rest of his working life.

My mother worked in a variety of jobs. She was the manageress of Deer Park Groceries, worked in the office at Myers, then had several miscellaneous jobs, and finally was employed for ten years as a teacher aide at St Albans North Primary. She was active in community affairs, being the Secretary of the St Albans Senior Citizens Club for many years and President for a while. She organised many of their outings and interstate trips.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Ruth Czyz with bicycle 1950s © S Czyz



Richard, Stefan, Ruth Czyz 1950s © S Czyz



Stan Czyz in Theodore St. 1950s © Stefan Czyz

Peter Nowatschenko



We arrived in Australia in 1949 and went to Bonegilla. At that stage I was the only child, as my brother Paul was not born until 1953. From Bonegilla we were moved to a hostel in Williamstown near the Kororoit Creek. I don't remember too much about the hostel, but I do remember one day the creek flooded so badly that everything around us was floating. In the first few years both my parents were working in factories. My mother worked at a canning factory, I think it was Smorgans in Footscray, when we had already moved to St Albans. I remember a lady in Kodre Street was looking after me when both my parents were at work. I know of other mixed-marriage families where the mother was German and it was common for them to speak German at home, but we always spoke Ukrainian, except for a few words here or there.

My parents bought a block of land in Main Road West, number 402, it was opposite Cornhill Street, just opposite from where the Barbopoulos shop was eventually built, but at that stage all there was there on the corner was a pond. I remember it because you could hear the croaking of the frogs late into the night.

My dad built the first house himself; it was a simple shack. All he had was the material from the packing cases of motor cars, so that's what he used, and lined it with tar-impregnated

material over the outside to make it waterproof. We lived in there until he could build the house itself. One time our shack nearly burnt down because the kerosene stove fell over and things started burning. I think it was only saved because mum threw a blanket over it and smothered it in time. At that time we were on the edge of the settlement on the western side of the railway line. Further west from us there was only the stone fences and paddocks of grazing farms.

As a young boy the eastern edge of my world stopped at the railway line – there were some houses between us and the railway, and there were also some shops this side of the line, but we never crossed over onto the eastern side.

I think my father took about three years to build the house. He worked night shift so that he could work on the house during the daytime. He worked in several factories over the years, but always mainly in Footscray, West Footscray or Tottenham. I remember being with him during the day when he was building, so maybe my mum was still working at that time. I think she stopped working when my younger brother was born. Dad would buy the timber from the Stevens' house. They had a farm further west of us in Main Road West and they sold timber and supplies from there. Later on they opened up a building supplies place over the other side of the railway line in East Esplanade.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Nowatschenko family in Alfreda St © P Nowatschenko



Alfreda Street in the 1950s © Kon Haumann

Sylvia Bluemel



My parents were Wilhelm and Margaret Kopmann who came to St Albans in 1954. I was 8 years old and their only child. We came from Germany and migrated on the MS Skaubryn through the Suez Canal and it took us 6 weeks to get here. For us children on the ship the journey was wonderful but for the

parents it was terrible because they were so sick. We arrived at Station Pier in November 1954 and were transported by train to the migrant hostel at Bonegilla. I don't know how long we stayed at Bonegilla but the men were soon allocated jobs in different parts of Victoria. My father went to work at the railways in Newport and that's why we ended up in the western suburbs. At first he was a labourer but then he became a clerk in the office because he was able to type. After we came down to Melbourne my mother went to work at Dunlop in Montague on the process line. A lot of the ladies went to work there.

My father was always a skilled typist as far as I remember because in Germany he ran his own business and typing is something he did for the paperwork of record keeping. He was a miller. In the place we were living he had these milling machines milling grains of various sorts.

From Bonegilla we were sent to the Maribyrnong hostel in those rounded Nissan army huts. Everyone settled into the work the government had given them and life progressed. When my parents had saved enough money we bought some land in St Albans and built a house. That was probably in late 1955 and we stayed there until 1959.



We were at 25 Manfred Avenue, next door to the Heymig family who had a bungalow. Jutta was the daughter and we've been friends ever since. Jutta and her parents came on the same ship as we did and that's when the friendship started. There were a lot of other people from

that journey who ended up living around St Albans, so we formed a little clan. People wanted to settle close to others they could understand and relate to.

I don't know why my parents chose to settle in St Albans. I assume where to settle was something that was discussed by the people on the ship and in the migrant camps in Bonegilla and in Maribyrnong, because when people were moving to a new area they didn't want to be alone. In that sense the Germans were the same as the Italians and the Greeks in clustering together in certain areas. I suppose, too, that St Albans being close to the Maribyrnong hostel might have been a factor

When we moved into our house it was only half finished – I think they called that “lock up stage”. The house was made of weatherboard with a tiny walk-in hall, two bedrooms, the lounge room, the kitchen which was the hub of the house, and the laundry which was out the back. My father built on as he could afford it and my mother helped with what she could. One day she was on the ladder with a broom holding up a piece of cement sheet that dad was nailing under the eaves when the sheet slipped and hit her in the corner of the eye. She was lucky not to lose that eye. When we were building the verandah at the front we threw all the building rubble into a heap at the front door and poured concrete over it to make our verandah base.



The power was not connected to the street when we came. The only heating in the house was a kerosene heater that was also used for cooking. I remember the stink of the kerosene. There was a trick to getting the heater lit and keeping it lit. We had water connected but that was just at the front of the property. You'd go out and get a bucket-load and bring that in. There was a bathroom but I don't remember much about it.

The little house was beautiful. It wasn't the basic bungalow that you saw around the district.

My father built the house in that shape with the angled roof at the front because he tried to make it look as German-like as possible. It had the push-up windows. At the start everything was unpainted and the walls were unplastered. It was a lock-up stage shell and not all the rooms had floors, only the ones we lived in. It was bare floorboards until they could afford lino. But it was lovely. We did have electricity after a while.



Images from the Kopmann archives © S Bluemel

St Albans was lots and lots of paddocks with bungalows. People lived in those bungalows because they couldn't afford to build a whole house. They were made so that they could live and be safe in a part of the building and when money became available they built on the rest of

the house. In those days that was quite good. I actually adored living there because you formed friendships. The streets were unmade and there were lots of paddocks. Sometimes there would be a grass fire and you would have to get the old Hessian bag and start whacking. It was a bit different to now. It was a good time to grow up because you were safe, not like now. We used to play outside all the time with the local kids. We had bikes but my bike was put together from many parts. My mum and dad used to take it on a Saturday and go up to St Albans and load the potatoes and their shopping onto it and push it home. One day the bike had had enough and broke in half. It was a home-made job with different parts welded together. It got fixed so I was back on my bike.



Mr Kopmann on bicycle 1950s © Sylvia Bluemel

At first I went to the old St Albans West Primary School. It was a long walk going all that way. We used to go as a group and Jutta would go with me. There was safety in numbers and in those days you were safe. My parents left the house early to go to work, perhaps 5.30 or 6am, so it was up to us kids to do what needed to be done – feed the chooks, prepare the meal. We lived next to each and we looked after each other. If mum and dad came home and stuff wasn't done ... watch out.

I started at the old primary school in 1955. It was an old and very cold school. In the winter there was a fireplace in the corner.

When the new St Albans East Primary School was built I started going there, and that would have been in 1956. I was in grades 4 and 5 because we had composite grades and they would grade you on how well you were learning. Language was never a problem with me because I learnt the language very quickly. Bonegilla had English lessons up to a point but not a lot. I went to Maribyrnong Primary School for a while when we were at the Maribyrnong camp. The kids there thought this was great because this girl doesn't understand any English, so they taught me all the bad words. You can imagine what I learnt and it wasn't funny – you thought you were speaking proper English but you weren't.

I don't think my story is any different from anyone else's because we went through the same experience, growing up in St Albans. I still have an attachment now. I remember the bazaars being held at the primary school and the pony rides. My parents never went to the school. My father was very strict but he didn't want to be involved with the school. Though he did come to school to take photographs of the pony rides and things like that, he never went up to speak with the teachers about my educational progress. That was totally up to me. If my report card wasn't good I was in trouble. He always made sure that homework was done, except he would teach me the German way, in mathematics, for instance. The outcome would be the same but the method was different. The teacher used to say that I had cheated because you had to do it the English way not the German way. The same thing happened at the high school. There were things I couldn't do and he would teach me the German way.



Back yard of the Kopmann home 1950 © S Bluemel

The main thing I remember is the sense of community in our neighbourhood. The kids got on really well and we looked after each other. The other thing was safety. You could take off all day and your parents didn't have to worry about you, which is totally different now. There was the freedom of being allowed to do what you wanted to do. You knew everybody, even up the street and up at the shops.

(Interview conducted in September 2018.)

Steve Kozlowski



I was born on 1 January 1944 during the war somewhere in Poland. When I asked my mother where I was born she said I was born in the forest. I said surely there was a house or hospital or something. She said no, I was born in a forest. We came to Australia in 1950 and

we spent two and a half years in the Bathurst migrant camp in New South Wales. From there we ended up at Rushworth between Bendigo and Shepparton but I can't remember how long we stayed there.

We came to St Albans mid 1952 because I was enrolled at the St Albans Primary School in June 1952 and I have a photo of me in Grade 3A in 1953. We would walk from Cowper Avenue to the school five days per week. It was a good walk. We formed a walking bus, starting with my sister and I at our place and picking up two or three extra pupils at points as we walked along, until finally there were about thirty of us. On the way back it was the reverse and the number diminished as kids dropped out on reaching their home. It was good.



Michal & Weronika Kozlowski with children © S Kozlowski

I'm not sure why we moved to St Albans. It might have been through a relative who was here before us. I think my father bought a block of land from Keith Mann who had a local real

estate agency in Main Road East. I think my uncle got my father to come from Rushworth to look at this block of land in St Albans. We got off at the Albion station and walked around looking for this block of land that they had no idea where it was located. It was getting dark and where we slept I don't know, but it might have been a car crate. Anyway, the block was at 14 Cowper Avenue in St Albans.

My father got a job at Wunderlichs the asbestos products factory in Albion and worked there all his life. As with all the European migrants, you saved your money and bought a bit of timber and when you had enough timber you put up a wall frame. Then you saved some more money and did it again. When the weekend came everyone was helping each other building their homes. One had to put up the wall frame and another had to do something else. They helped each other. That's the way it worked.

When we came to Cowper Street the house was probably two rooms and that was built by my father and other people. My parents slept in one room and we kids slept in the other. Then another room was built so the boys and girls would have separate bedrooms. Then more was added and it became a full house. I think the whole house took less than a year to build. When the frame was up the first thing they did was put a branch of a tree up on the top of the roof. That was a tradition. I could never find out why, but that was a tradition of the Europeans.

We didn't start off with a bungalow because dad built a square building. I'm not sure where he stayed when he started building but there was an old wooden car crate in our back yard that we used as a shed so perhaps that was dad's first sleepout. One started off with one or two rooms and that's where we slept while the rest of the house was being built. I didn't think of it as a bungalow because bungalows were three rooms longwise. I don't know how people lived in them. The toilets were always outside and the dunny man would come once a week. How many times the poor guy was followed by dogs who wanted to attack him. It was not an easy job.

Our little neighborhood was the area between Cowper, Bernbank and Manfred streets. We were a very multicultural neighbourhood with people of several nationalities. In our area we had Dutch, Russian, Ukrainians, Polish, a couple of English and there were the German people; the Italians came a bit later.

The roads were unmade. When it rained it was mud. When it was hot it was hot. We didn't have fans, we covered the windows and accepted it. We managed. There were a couple of dams in the paddocks. Sometimes the whole family might be sitting around one of these dams, but if you went in for a swim you would go in clean and come out covered in a film of grey

clay. There was a dam near where we lived – it's now a playground. There was a swimming hole at the river at the end of Biggs Street. Once we discovered that there was a river nearby it became a meeting place for most of St Albans. Some of the swimmers were reckless because they would jump in without checking for hazards and come out with a split head.

My parents had a veggie garden and grew what they could to sustain themselves and there was the occasional fruit tree. Most people had something in the ground and shared what they had. If the neighbours' kids were around when tea was served they also got a plate. What people had was shared. Sometimes when the evenings came and it was nice and clear one of the neighbours played the banjo and that music went right across the paddocks. You could hear it a kilometre up the road.

Bonfires were popular. Between the Oldaker and the Crossland families there were about five vacant blocks and when bonfire night came everybody brought everything out – old furniture, you name it, was put on the bonfire. All the families would come out and it was an outing for the night. They'd take out their chairs and sit back. The Dutch people would be playing their banjos, the kids would be cheering, the fires would be going, and someone would be dancing. That's the way it was.

(Interview conducted in September 2018.)



Nuffield car crate shed 1950s © Steve Kozlowski



The Hoods & Humber Snipe © S Kozlowski



Dirt racetrack Sunshine Ave 1960s © Otto Czernik



St Albans from Sunshine Avenue © Kon Haumann

Joseph Ribarow



We came to St Albans during 1951 from the Watsonia migrant hostel with few possessions. Our end of Henry Street was mainly empty grass paddocks without any significant geographic features. Our new home, or perhaps new room

is a better term, was all of 12 by 9 foot in unlined weatherboard, a bare wooden floor and a corrugated tin roof. That was home for the four of us.

At the end of our street there were still some farming paddocks with fieldstone fences topped with wire. Sunshine Avenue further away was an old road of bluestone blocks rumoured to have been built by convict labour, but local historians say it was built in the depression of the 1930s by unemployed men working under the government's Sustenance Work scheme. The surrounding land was still used for grazing, mainly some sheep as I recall. I also remember some crops growing in the fields near Green Gully.

Our home site was one of several in the immediate neighbourhood that had recently been sold to European migrants. Water was not yet connected to our site, but the neighbour two blocks away had a tap in the front yard and we would fill our bucket from there. At the time there

was no electricity at all in the street. It's your typical "we did it rough and tough" story that people have heard before, and we weren't the only ones experiencing it. We had a kerosene lamp for light and a single-burner kerosene-fired Primus stove for cooking. Mum used that simple kerosene stove for years, well into the 1960s.

The roads were just dirt tracks and the open drains were interesting biological breeding pools in the summer and opportunities for miniature boat races and other water sports in the winter.

My father worked mainly as a labourer and process worker in various factories, and at times he was also unemployed. For a while he was with the farm harvester factories in Sunshine; the changing names of H.V. McKay, Sunshine Harvester, Massey Harris, Massey Ferguson were a source of work for many men in the area.

For a while he was in Borthwicks, a meat processing plant in Braybrook, where his position was a slaughter labourer and he operated one of the blood byproduct boilers. He took us down there one year for the workers' family Christmas party and showed us his work section. It was probably in 1957.

Sometimes my father was unemployed but I don't think I was really aware of this. I was only aware that when he was at home he would be working on the house. He would also take on odd jobs for friends and would often be paid in kind rather than money, and sometimes that would be in wine or beer, which mum wasn't too happy about. I think goods for labour barter was how we got the radio. It was an old valve radio with a 78 RPM record player in the top. I think dad liked to listen to the news.

The St Albans men would exchange labour amongst themselves, particularly with the house building. Most of these men built their own houses and would help each other with the hard bits that needed extra hands, for example, the wall and roof construction. There would always be a celebration when all the rafters were installed – a shrub or branch of a tree was raised and prominently displayed on top of the roof to proclaim that another house frame had been successfully completed.

Dad was a natural builder. His first job was to line our room with masonite. It was light and probably relatively cheap, although at the time it was also a case of using what was available anyway. The other things he built quickly was the work shed and chicken shed in cement sheet.

The first stage of the extension house was the kitchen and small entrance separating it from the existing bedroom. So now we had a bedroom, a kitchen, and a small middle room with wardrobe space. It all looked so big in comparison to what we'd had that we were all impressed by the extra space.

Then dad started on the rest of the house. He dug all the foundation holes for the stumps,

and the growing layer of bearers were also all his own work. Mum would help with the parts that she could, for there was always a spirit line or end of a long plank to be held.

Mum, Helen and I would help with holding up the weatherboards while Dad nailed them in place. We eventually helped to nail down some of the floor boards, which was also a rewarding team job. Dad would use the floor cramps to compress the series of boards until they were a tight fit and we would all hammer in nails along the pencil marks. Teresa was too small to take part. It was fun working together this way. Dad died in 1958 before he had finished the internal lining of the rooms. My sisters and I would play in the unfinished sections of the house by dodging through the walls and climbing them when mum wasn't looking.

There was no sewerage, just a typical out-house that was often built by the home owner. Unknowingly we had already joined the race for the great Aussie challenge of the idiosyncratic dunny. In fact it wasn't till the 1970s that the sewerage was connected to our neighbourhood.

There were about eight families in our little "village". To the west we had a Ukrainian couple, Josef and Maria Kiezyk, and their young son, also Josef. Next to them a Polish man with a German wife, Mr and Mrs Melnik. They had no children with them and it wasn't till many years later that Mrs Melnik was able to bring her daughter out from Germany. To the east of us was another Polish and German couple, Mr and Mrs Hoffman, with a young daughter, Veronica. Past them was a Russian couple, Mr and Mrs Dalinkiewicz, with children Nick, Victor, and Zina. Behind us all there were three occupied properties: a Yugoslav man married to a German woman, then the Kasjans, a Ukrainian couple with children John, Michael, and Stefania. There was a Lithuanian family at the end. This little hamlet of houses remained unchanged in the early fifties, but eventually other houses started to be built around us.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Ribarow family Henry Street 1952 © J Ribarow



Aniela Ribarow and children © Joseph Ribarow

Phillip Spivey



My family together with lots of other young families from the United Kingdom arrived at the Port Melbourne, Victoria, Australia in January 1955. I was a seven-year-old Pom from Hull. John my elder brother, my baby sister was Sue, and I had just spent a long

but exciting nine weeks at sea on the last voyage of the MV Georgic, a troop carrier from World War Two.

We had travelled from the freezing cold of Southampton UK via the Canary Islands, Cape Town, and Fremantle, and yes, suddenly the blue skies and warmth seemed to make that long journey all worth while.

Our family had come to Australia to start a new life after the bad times of the Second World War. Mum was Sylvia Mead from London and Dad was Harold Spivey from a farm in Yorkshire where his father had Clydesdale horses.

Dad's philosophy in life was to always try to benefit from experience. He would say: "Try and learn something every day, because you never know when you'll be able to use that knowledge to help somebody else." My father gave me a hard time at times but that saying has been an important guide to my way of fitting in with people, because we all need to get on with each other on this planet.

Dad and Mum's friends, the Dickinsons, had migrated three years earlier and had settled in

Newport. They nominated us for a fifty pound government Assisted Passage. So for that first year in a strange land of heat and flies we lived with them in a small detached garage. Dad and Mum eventually found the deposit on a block of land at 13 Shirley Street, St Albans, as that was the only suburb in Melbourne they could afford.

Dad got a job at Taubman Paints in Sunshine and in April 1956 we moved into our new St Albans home which was only half a house. Mum also worked, and she had a position as a typist with HBA in Melbourne.

Back then in St Albans there were no made roads, no buses, no sewerage, no street lights, no TV, and we couldn't afford bikes. The nearest railway station and shops were two kilometers away. Walk everywhere was the buzz term.

In those early years I attended St Albans Primary School, which is located alongside the Bendigo railway line. Sometimes I would sit and watch the trains and wonder where they were going, and later when I learnt the names I used to dream of far away exotic country places like Wycheproof, Echuca, Warracknabeal and Mildura.

As well as attending primary school I also remember attending Sunday school classes that were run by Mr Lake in the old Baptist centre.

All us kids hated St Albans because there was nothing to do, and with both parents working you had to discover ways of entertaining yourself. We weren't allowed to stay in the school ground after the school was closed for the day but of course we still wanted to play. One day I sneaked back and was swinging on the monkey bars when I fell and broke my collarbone. Some teachers were still at school and had to take me to hospital to have it set, and for many weeks I was wearing a brace while it healed.

Some teachers inspired me. Mr Cove, a lovely man from Camperdown, encouraged a love of the Australian bush, its history, and the early pioneers, and I still retain that love of the countryside. The Headmaster, Mr Magnusson from Bendigo, invited our family up on the train for the weekend. He took us to some old gold mines and to Echuca. That was the start of my discovery adventures that have continued to this day.



Spivey family bungalow 1950s © Phillip Spivey

My brother and I occupied ourselves by going exploring, and often my sister would come

along. A favorite spot was around the McAuley farm in Taylors Road. His farm had lots of delights for young lads to experience and he was good humoured enough to put up with us. I liked his pet galah called Charlie. Mr McAuley had sheep on his property and he had three stud Merino rams in a small paddock near the house so he could keep an eye on them and guard against them being stolen.

When I was at primary school and mum was working my chores were to feed the chooks, get the carrots, and peel the veggies before dad came home from work. One day my young sister called out because there was a snake between her and the house and she couldn't get past. I finally was able to get around her and the snake and got a length of wire and killed the snake.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Spivey family car and bungalow 1950s © P Spivey



Harold Spivey with children 1950s © P Spivey



Shirley Street in 1950s © Phillip Spivey

Images © from Kon Haumann's St Albans collection

Frans Janssen



I am unsure of the reason for my parent's migration, though I do remember hearing Mum and Dad talk about family issues. They had considered going to America, but decided to come to Australia. There are no memories of the trip. I did have a birthday on the Red Sea on our

way to Australia. This was when I got a stuffed dog for a present. I managed to keep that dog until after my first year of marriage when the real dog we got shredded it when he found it in the cupboard.

Dad was a fully qualified electrician in Holland and he also owned an ice-cream shop which Mum ran for him during the week, he worked there on weekends. On arrival in Australia he was told his qualifications were not recognised and he would have to return to school to obtain qualifications. Dad went to school and obtained his B-Grade license, meaning he could not work alone, he would need to be supervised by an A-Grade Electrician. He would need another year to get his A-Grade; he was disheartened and didn't want to waste time as he had to earn a living to support the family. Mum had been the primary support while Dad went to school. Dad was offered a partnership with a friend in an Electrical business but he would need to get his A-Grade License. Dad declined and then commenced work for the SEC at their Yarraville Depot. He stayed with the SEC until retirement.

We initially lived in a small cottage in Alexina Street. When we moved in we only had the clothes which were in the luggage for the journey to Australia, all the rest of our belongings were in a large crate which still had to arrive.

The cottage consisted of three rooms, a small back room with two bunk beds, a central living room and a small kitchen at the front. When we moved into the cottage we went to a farm somewhere near the northern end of Arthur Street and got straw. This was used to fill large sacks and was to be our mattresses until the rest of our luggage arrived. There is only one memory burned into my mind from this time. It was the night after our crate arrived and Dad had started to unpack and move items into the cottage. The kids slept in the two bunks, sister on the top bunk and my brother and I shared the lower bunk, Mum and Dad slept in the living room. That night I woke feeling something move across my chest, it was an enormous spider about the size of an adult hand. It crossed over

me then across my brother's chest and onto the wall, at which time I woke my brother. We screamed for Dad. He got a hammer and hit the spider. I can still remember hearing the cracking sound. Dad said it was not a local spider as it was too big; it could have entered the crate at any of the ports the ship had stopped at on the journey. I still have an aversion to spiders.

Dad purchased a block of land in Erica Street with an option to buy the block next door. This option he allowed to lapse, much to his regret years later. Dad commenced building the new family home. I don't have many memories regarding this time. There is one which is more of a memory of what I was told years later. We were always told not to play in the house frame while Dad was building, but as kids do, when no-one was looking we did. One time I was knocked unconscious by a beam that had dropped from the rafters. I was leaning over a floor joist and it hit me on the back of the head and rolled me over the joist onto the ground. Dad raced me to the doctor, where I was revived. Appears it was lucky I was swinging on the beam and was rolled over - least resistance, least damage.

The house was designed and built by Dad. The house was an L shape with a garage offset at the back. The garage also contained the laundry which consisted of a copper boiler and two troughs with a clothes roller between. There was a path next to the garage leading to the outhouse, which was behind the garage. Dad put scoria down this path so that anyone in the outhouse would be warned if the nightsoil collector came. The back yard contained a chook pen and a vegetable garden. We tried to grow fruit trees for years without much success.

Mum and Dad lived there until circa 1973 when they bought a home in Rosebud.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years*, 2016.)



Juliana Janssen with children 1950s © Frans Janssen



Frans Janssen in Erica St. 1960s © F Janssen

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Heymig family home Clarke Ave © Jutta Szwed

Otto Czernik



My family heritage is of European origin, with a Ukrainian-Polish father and a German mother. I was born in Germany in 1948 before the family migrated to Australia in 1950 under the sponsorship of the IRO. My father, Wladimir Czernik, was born in Lvov in 1911 and grew up in that

area that had been part of Poland for centuries, but was taken over by the Russians and annexed to Ukraine. My mother, Annalise Hellmuth, was born in 1927 in the Hessen region of the Central German Uplands. Her parents were farmers in a small village called Alten Bauna, just south of Kassel.

Mum and dad married in 1947 and I was born in 1948. Mum and dad decided to emigrate because much of Kassel had been destroyed through the war and the political turmoil in Poland and the Ukraine meant it was impossible for dad to return there. So, in 1949 they were accepted by the IRO as part of the program for resettling displaced persons.

On the third of March 1950 the family arrived at Station Pier, Melbourne, on the US-registered ship the Heinzemann. Passengers were taken by train and bus to Bonegilla on the New South Wales border for processing, before being transferred to other regional centres.

Dad and some of the other men were sent off to Williamstown to start their two-year work contracts while their wives and children went to Broadmeadows. Basically, dad worked for the PMG digging ditches and laying cables. Mum sometimes talked about the hardship that separation created for families. There was little privacy for individuals or couples in these camps. The women would sleep in dormitories while their men lived many miles away closer to their work during the week and would return on the weekends. The camp had rows of tents lined up along one side and couples had to take turns using these for a bit of marital privacy.

After a while some of the women got fed up with this arrangement, and mum was one of them who said she wanted to normalise family life by moving to where dad was staying. The authorities in Williamstown were not happy when mum and a friend turned up demanding to stay with their husbands, and threatened them with deportation. When the women called their bluff the authorities had to back down. Eventually some suggestion was made about the possibility of sharing a caravan nearby.



Conjugal tent at Broadmeadows 1950s © O Czernik

while before being asked to return to Masseys. He retired at the age of 65, and then died of a heart attack in 1982 at the age of 71. My mum died in 2000 at the age of 73.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Otto & Helen Czernik Fox Street 1950s © O Czernik

In 1952 the family bought a plot of land in Fox Street. At that time this area was just open fields. The house site was near the corner of Fox and Theodore Streets, and in between was a low point in the otherwise flat landscape. This would flood in the wet weather into a large pool being fed by water flowing across the paddocks from Taylors Road. Sometimes the only way to get across the flooded road was to take off your socks and shoes, roll up your skirt or trouser legs, and walk across barefoot.

Building the home started with two small structures: one was the laundry, bathroom and kitchen, while the separate bungalow contained two small bedrooms. Gradually the rest of the weatherboard house was added on. Dad did most of the work himself. This is where the friendships established in the hostels proved their worth as several families helped each other in the tasks of building, the men taking turns to work on each other's houses.

There were very few shops then. A number of houses or bungalows were being built around the place, many of them by Mr Eisner who was one of the few builders in the area.

I started at the old St Albans Primary School in 1955 and was there till mid 1958. I don't remember many specific events, though it wasn't all fun and games. I've always tended to be a quiet person but I soon learnt you had to defend yourself when you were picked on in the school ground – having your head thumped into the metal taps by someone when you were having a drink was not a very friendly experience. My sister Helen lost the sight of one eye in her first year at school when some boys threw an explosive device they'd made into the shelter shed and a piece of metal pierced her eye.

Dad worked as a machinist with Massey Ferguson for over 25 years as a fitter and turner, then worked at Mitchells the Brush People for a



Fox Street in flood © Otto Czernik



Fox Street in flood © Otto Czernik



Alfrieda Street half house 1950s © Phil Cini



Otto Czernik (L) Fox Street 1950s © O Czernik



Otto and Wladimir Czernik 1950s © Otto Czernik

Dace Zvaigzne



As IRO refugees we were first taken to the Bonegilla reception centre. We were there for a little while and might have been at Red Cliffs for a while and then ended up at Somers Camp at Westernport Bay. Dad was working on the railways around Sunshine and Newport. That's when he

bought the land at St Albans and started building. He must have bought the land from the Kings because their house was next door and we shared a slight boundary. We would walk over to their place to get cream – we were just tiny kids but we'd walk over with a little jar to

their back door and get cream from "old" Mrs King. We were in Kodre Street and right near the King's house. That might have been about 1951.

When we first came to St Albans we were living in a little shed at the back of the block that we later used as the laundry and bathroom. Then my dad started working on the permanent house and drew up the house plans by himself; he was a clever man. We have a photo of him erecting the building frame. After he built a half house he built on again. He did nearly all the work himself but there were times when a working bee was organized with some of the other Latvians. This was especially so with putting up wall frames and the roof because that was a difficult job for one man.

Mum would do a lot of cooking and the men would come for the day to finish off the framing. Dad could do just about anything and perhaps that was because of growing up on the farm where you had to be self sufficient. He could build and he knew a little bit about electricity and plumbing. I think it was definitely the farming background.

Dad used weatherboard for the outside of the house, which was typical for most of the houses that were built locally in the fifties. Mum clad the building after dad died because she couldn't manage the repainting and external maintenance.

I remember walking to school and there being huge smelly gutters with ice on them. The roads were unmade, which was a huge thing, and I also remember playing in the streets. Another thing we did a lot was roam the paddocks: our road was unmade, not many houses, there was a creek that flooded occasionally in winter. We used to walk (my sister, Yvonne Correlje and her sister Karen, and myself) even past St Albans West School. There were some paddocks, surrounded by dry stone walls. I have a beautiful memory of wheat harvesting one summer. They used a team of about four horses, probably Clydesdales. It was such a magnificent sight. Those open paddocks have been filled with houses for a long time now.

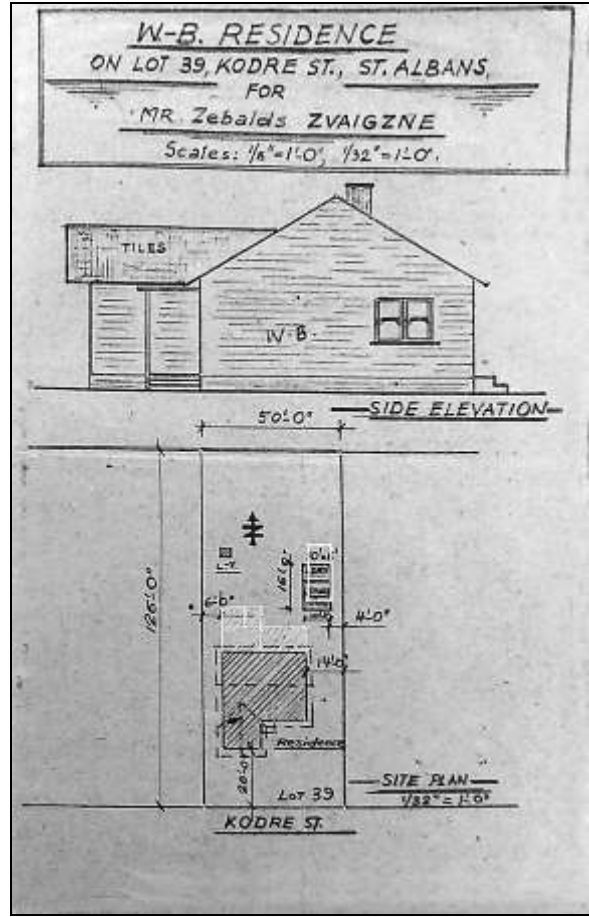
(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years*, 2016.)



Dace and Velga Zvaigzne 1950s © D Fitton



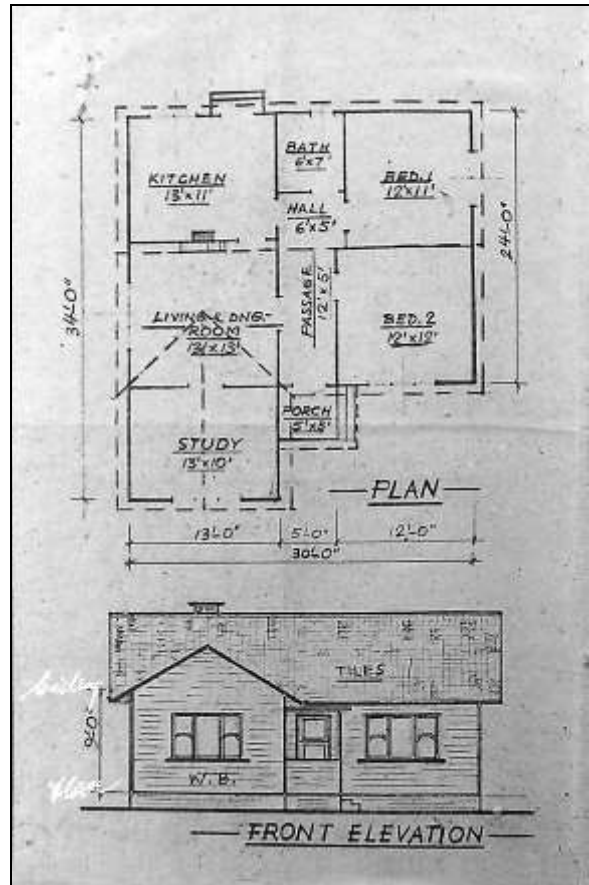
Zebalds Zvaigzne building home 1950s © Dace Fitton



House plans Kodre Street 1950s © Dace Fitton



Zvaigzne family 1950s © Dace Fitton



House plans Kodre Street 1950s © Dace Fitton



Zvaigzne family Kodre St. 1950s © Dace Fitton

Yvonne Correlje



My family came to Australia from Rotterdam in Holland, but the family origins on my father's side are from France in the time of the religious wars that followed the French revolution. We arrived in Melbourne in 1954

on Friday 5 December, the day on which the Dutch celebrate St Nicholas Day. We don't celebrate Christmas with gifts, we celebrate St Nicholas Day. Christmas is dinner with the family. On Monday I went to the old primary school in West Esplanade. It was horrendous because I didn't speak any English. I had gone to school only for a couple of months in Holland. My brother and I had gone to a Montessori kindergarten in Holland, this was very progressive and my mother initiated this. Therefore for us to go to kindergarten on the boat seemed to me a backward step, besides the kindergarten on the boat was run like a little prison, I told my brother this so we escaped.

In Holland, school started in August or September, but I broke my collarbone and that interrupted my education and I didn't have much of an introduction to schooling there. When we arrived in St Albans I think my mother had had enough of me with six weeks on the ship and having to cope with three little children, so she was happy for me to go to school immediately even though the school year was virtually over.

So it was off to school on Monday to the St Albans Primary School. I had this little girl appointed to sit next to me and help me with the assimilation process, but because she couldn't sit with her friend she refused to talk to me. I spent a very unhappy two weeks at school before the end of year break up. I had no idea what was going on because in Holland we had a long lunch hour when everyone would go home for lunch. Here we had all these bells and I didn't know what they were for, so it was just miserable and I didn't learn much English. Then during the school holidays all it took me was six weeks and I knew the language.

At first we were living in two little bungalows in West Esplanade. After a year my parents had saved up enough money to buy a block of land in Ruth Street and my father built two rooms: a kitchen and a bedroom. The kitchen was everything in one, including kitchen, lounge room, and laundry. We all slept in the one bedroom. It was very difficult for my family to save that money. My mother hardly worked at all in the getting paid sense. My father was a carpenter and one of his earliest jobs was to work on the Snowy Mountains scheme. That helped bring in some

money even though the family was separated.

When he returned from the Snowy Mountains my father worked as a carpenter around the area and went into partnership with another Dutch man by the name of Kropman. They set up a building company and worked as builders in partnership for a long time. Kropman had two sons, Anton and Peter, who also started working in the company when they left school. With the company proceeds now covering three of the Kropman family they were going ahead, while we were still struggling with only one income. The financial situation of the partnership became unsatisfactory and to comply with legal requirements the partnership was disbanded. My father then continuing working on his own.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years*, 2016.)



Correlje family 1950s © Yvonne Correlje



Yvonne Correlje with horses 1960s © Y Correlje



Yvonne Correlje with horses 1960s © Y Correlje

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Marin Gunew



We came to St Albans in 1951 from Germany. My parents were Dimiter and Ursula Gunew and my sister was Sneja. It so happened that one of my mother's great uncles – my mother came from a very old, titled family in Germany called von Stein – was

living in St Albans. The great uncle was Wilhelm von Stein, who called himself Willy Stein over here. He came to Australia in the 1880s and was actually one of the pioneering farmers in the sugar industry up in Bundaberg, but that didn't work out for him. His daughter lived in St Albans since and her name is Mary Smith. These relatives helped us come to Melbourne.

My father got a position with ICI as a research chemist even before he left Germany, because that's what he was, a research chemist.

We originally stayed with Willy Stein's son, who lived in North Balwyn. Through Mary's husband, Eric Smith, we bought a block of land in St Albans on the corner of Oberon and Station avenues. My father sold some chemical glassware he had brought out from Germany to his employer (ICI) and with that money built the first two-and-a-half rooms of our house.

I started school in 1955 at the old school near the railway line. Then, at the start of 1956, I was one of the first students to go to the St Albans East Primary. In those days there was lots of space; you could see from our house all the way to the railway track. You could see all the old steam-driven wheat trains coming down the track. One of my earliest memories is the milkie coming round; this was the days before the use of milk bottles. He used to come with a horse and dray and a one-pint ladle, and you'd go out with your container and he'd scoop out the number of pints that you wanted.

My images of the early days was the wide open spaces, the opportunity, the freedom, the ability to be a kid. It didn't provide anything that

wasn't there but it tempered the whole lot into a workable alloy. There was a sense of community – not the artificial, highly-organised community that is engineered these days, but the genuine, spontaneous interaction of people. I remember one windy day my mother was struggling to take down the washing from the line when the two Self brothers happened to be passing by doing their deliveries. They just hopped out of the truck and helped her bring the washing in.

These were the days when things weren't available. European-style delicatessens were not available, so getting capsicums, eggplant, and even olive oil was a real fight. Therefore you'd have some enterprising chaps coming round selling this type of goods from the back of their car. These hawkers were not popular with the Traders Association because they claimed it took business away from local suppliers. There may have been a bylaw prohibiting hawkers, but if that was the only way to get the food you were accustomed to, then people thought so be it.

I always consider myself to be incredibly fortunate that I was able to see the dying days of a different era before we came into the opulence of the '50s and then the cyber space of the '05s.

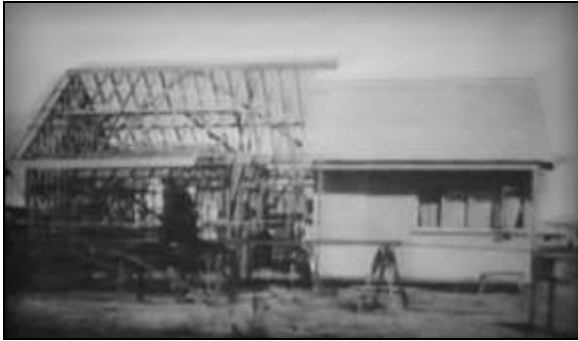
My father, Dimiter Stefanov Gunew, was fortunate that he had a fairly high degree from the technical university in Munich. When he applied for his qualifications to be recognised at the university here, they would not acknowledge his degree. At the interview he said his qualifications were equivalent to a Master of Science. They laughed at him and said he'd be lucky if they recognised him as a Bachelor. He applied to the Royal Australian Chemical Institute, which was the governing body of work in chemistry, and some weeks later a letter arrived at our place recognising him as a Master of Science. That was the calibre of his work.

He became a research associate with ICI and he spent the rest of his working life there working on analytical chemistry, pushing the limits of many of their so-called forensic and biogenetic advances that have been made over the years due to techniques that were pioneered by my father and other people. He worked in a field called chromatography, which is a very, very high quality method of analysis used in many different fields. ICI still holds some patents that he developed. My father died in 1980 at the age of 60. He was looking forward to his imminent retirement, and had a little property in Healesville all ready, when he passed away.

My mother, Ula Zimmerman, was born in Berlin but ended up in Munich after the war. She was already a trained medical lab technician and radiographer when we came to Australia. She worked most of her life in the paramedic field of x-rays with the TB bureau, which no longer exists, then with private practices, then in 1958 she changed over to the new field of electro-

encephalography, which is monitoring the electrical impulses between various areas of the brain and from the wave shapes generated determining the presence of epilepsy, the focus of abscesses, tumours, etc. She ended up as head of the unit at the Children's Hospital prior to retiring. Both my parents were fortunate in that they worked in the fields for which they had trained overseas.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Gunew home Station Ave 1950s © M Gunew



Gunew home Station Ave 1960s © M Gunew

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Bungalow in Henry Street 1950s © Ivan Kukiel



On the doorstep Henry Street 1950s © Ivan Kukiel



Back yard near water tower 1950s © Ivan Kukiel

Vera Jurasov



My parents migrated to Australia in 1949 after the World War Two. Mum was pregnant with me when they travelled here and I was born in April that year. They came from Germany: Mum was German and Dad was Russian. Dad had lived in both the eastern

and western regions in Russia – initially east of the Urals but later in Minsk where we still have some relatives. He took the opportunity to get out of Russia after the war and ended up in Germany. He met Mum in Germany and experienced the construction of the Berlin wall and the partition of the country into the eastern and the western zones. Mum was in East Germany, in the Russian zone, but she was always crossing the border.

My parents came by boat to Australia and ended up at Bonegilla. My mother was Irmgard Nowak. I think her parents may have originally come from Poland but she was from Magdeburg, which is on the Elbe River west of Berlin; it was bombed very heavily during the Second World War so anyone who survived that would have to consider themselves lucky to be alive. She was born in 1927 and was just a young teenager when the war started.

My father was Wasily Fedor Jurasov. He was born in 1910 and was from Vladivostok, which is on the extreme eastern end of the old Soviet empire. He studied at university level in Russia. When they arrived at Bonegilla, Dad was assigned to a poultry farm at Kyneton and Mum was in the house doing all the housework. So yes, I was born and lived the first two years of my life in Australia on a chook farm. Then we moved to St Albans, which was a lot of empty paddocks at the time but an affordable opportunity for the new Australian settlers. Dad found employment in Melbourne with the land surveying section of the Treasury Department in the Treasury buildings. The cartographic section was later part of the Department of Crown Lands and Survey and some of the maps that he compiled are at the State Library. He worked for a long time in topography, creating maps that looked like photographs because he was such a perfectionist. Some of the maps he created were based on aerial photographs taken by the RAAF.

After moving from Kyneton in the 1950s I lived in St Albans until I got married, in fact. The old St Albans was just paddocks. To start off my parents bought a bungalow and then my father finished off the rest of the house himself.

We lived very close to the school in West

Esplanade – we were in number 25 which is about a two minutes' walk away.

I started at St Albans Primary in 1955. The Grade 1A teacher might have been Mrs Shuffrey and there was also a Miss Nightingale with Grade 1. I recognise a number of faces from those early class photographs, including Peter Szarko, Michael Martignoles, Stefan Czyz, Joachim Simovic, the girls Margaret, Sophie, Heidi, Karen, Mary Ganger, and Bianca. Mr Enright was the teacher in the 1957 class. Ahmed Ajayoglu used to live just down the road from us and we became friends, so of course I remember him.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years*, 2016.)



Irmgard and Wasily Jurasov © Vera Jurasov



Entertaining the kids Fox St. © Otto Czernik

John Simovic



My parents were Stevan and Adelheid Simovic who came to Australia in 1950. My father was a POW in Germany for four years – he had been in the Serbian King's army when he was captured and sent to work on a farm, which was the best thing

ever. My mother was German and they obviously met during dad's time on the farm. They married and I was their only child, born in August 1948. We came to Australia in December 1950 and like many other immigrants at the time started off in Bonegilla. My father was then assigned work with the Victorian Railways at the Newport workshops, which is how we settled in Melbourne's western suburbs.

We moved from the Bonegilla hostel to Williamstown and were living at that hostel for a time before buying land in St Albans. I imagine that some of my father's friends and work colleagues had bought land there so we followed them. We moved to St Albans probably in 1951 or 1952 and my mother still lives here since that time. My father and his brother bought land next to each other so it was a little family cluster.

My uncle was a carpenter and established a joinery and cabinet works factory in Constance Street near the St Albans primary school. He worked from there for many years making kitchen cabinets and such. He also did sub-contract work for the Stevens brothers when they were selling land and housing packages; he built a lot of houses in the area. His wife became very sick and my mother looked after her for a while before she died. People of their generation often did not go to the doctors so readily. My uncle eventually moved to a farm in country Victoria and gave the house to his daughter who still lives there. He loved the farm life.

When we arrived in St Albans we were living in Pennell Avenue and there were only a few houses around us. At first we were in one of the half houses, a bungalow, until we had the money to extend. We lived there a while and then moved to Scott Avenue where we built a new house and sold the Pennell Avenue bungalow. In our neighbourhood there were only a few houses, one general store and one car that I remember. Perrett's was the closest general store not far away from us in Main Road West but later the Barbopoulos family established their milk bar on the corner of Cornhill Street. The Stevens family were the big land owners in the district with their old farm along Main Road West – the sons established several local businesses

and also sold real estate.

There was only one primary school and that had over 40 nationalities enrolled when I started; definitely multi-cultural. I remember Ahmed Ajayoglu and Peter Barbopoulos from primary school days. Ahmed was across the road from the school with their shop and the little chook farm.

A few years later the St Albans East Primary School was established and a lot of my classmates from the eastern side of the railway line left for the new school, but I stayed. We met up again when we started at St Albans High School in 1961. The best years of our lives were in primary school where you had your friends, you played outside and life was simpler; there were no computer games – our electronic entertainment was the radio and then black and white TV came along. I think we had a good group of people at the Primary School and also at the High School.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years*, 2016.)



John Simovic and classmates 1960s © J Simovic

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Alfreda Street 1954 © Kon Haumann

Henry Goralski



My parents were Mila and Henryk Goralski who were of Polish background. I was born in Belgium in 1948. At that stage mum and dad had been pushed around Europe trying to avoid going back to the Communist controlled areas, so they never saw their

families again. That was a conscious decision. They could have taken their chance with the Russians but they didn't want to. That's why they ended up as displaced persons in Belgium.

The only job my dad could get was working in the underground coal mines, which was very dangerous work because mines could explode without any warning. But the pay was very good and he worked there for two years. By refugee standards I suppose they were reasonably well off – his pay was good and they could afford a lot of the creature comforts. Then the Belgians started putting on pressure for them to move on because they were experiencing their own population issues.

My parents saw some advertising about "Come to America" or "Come to Australia". My dad tells me he wasn't sure what he signed but he paid the relevant number of British pounds and we ended up on a ship when I was one year old.

We landed in Sydney. Part of the assisted package deal was that you spent two years working for the Commonwealth, in the sense that they would allocate you specific work and you were supposed to stick with that. While my mother, sister and I were in a camp in Bonegilla, dad went up to Northern Queensland and started felling the rain forests to open up the land for more sugar cane. He spent great amounts of time away from us. His half sister who lived in Melbourne corresponded with us and convinced us to come down to Victoria.

At the end of Dad's two-year work contract we went down to Melbourne and lived with his half-sister in Yarraville. Then Dad heard there was a chap from Sunshine selling land reasonably cheaply in St Albans, so he borrowed two pounds to put down something on deposit without even seeing the land. He then had to borrow more money for a bungalow, which was built with unlined cement sheet walls and an unlined roof of corrugated asbestos sheets.

We moved into the unfinished bungalow that had three very small rooms with a kitchen in the middle, the main bedroom to left, and a smaller bedroom to the right. There was no water tap or electricity inside so we would have a wash when mum heated a pot of water on the methylated

spirits primus stove. We lived in that bungalow for more than three years before my parents were able to afford improvements.

I can recall that the laundry copper used to heat water and boil the whites was in the back yard and on windy days the pole that propped up the washing line often fell over, scattering the still wet wash over the muddy ground. One photo of mum with the laundry was taken when we upgraded the old washing line to a new Hills hoist. Wow!



Mila Goralski at Hills hoist 1950s © Henry Goralski

Another Polish family lived in a bungalow behind us and the father used to be a heavy drinker. His wife and two children left him and on a night when mum and dad were still at work (remember afternoon shift 2-10 pm?) my sister and I heard him banging nails to secure the door and windows (he had visions of the devil coming to get him). He then fell asleep and an errant cigarette started a fire. We alerted the neighbours but the fire brigade was too late to save him.

I went to St Albans Primary School near the railway line and would have started in 1955. I remember sitting on the floor of that old school and the teacher let us listen to some of the 1956 Olympic Games from Melbourne. That's a vivid memory. I only stayed there until grade two and then in grade three I moved over to the Catholic school and did my Communion.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Krystyna & Henry Goralski, Arthur St 1950s © H Goralski



Goralski siblings, Arthur Street 1950s © Henry Goralski

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Czernik family bungalow 1950s © Helen Hoskin

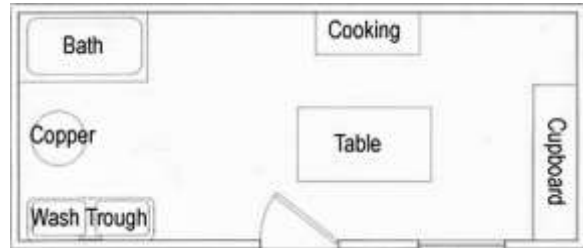
Helen Hoskin



I was born in Melbourne in 1951. My parents came to Australia in March 1950 with my brother Otto, who was 16 months old. My mother was Annelise Hellmuth (who was born in 1927) and my father was Wladimir Czernik (who was born in 1911). Mum was German and my Dad was Ukrainian-Polish. He

met Mum during the war when he was sent to work in her village in Germany.

After arriving in Australia the family first lived in migrant camps at Bonegilla and Broadmeadows, then moved to 149 Fox Street, St Albans. We lived in a bungalow which was only the sleeping quarters of two bedrooms for the four of us. Then we had a one-room shed that comprised of a kitchen, bathroom, and laundry. It was made mostly of cement sheet and didn't have much room so it got pretty crowded with everything and everybody in there. I still remember the kitchen table which Dad obviously put together – definitely not your modern table with elegant legs and matching chairs. Mum would boil the water in the copper for us to use the bath and do the washing.



Amenities bungalow floor plan 1950s

I don't remember a fridge or cooking facilities. And naturally we had the outside dunny, waste being collected once a week.

Dad slowly built onto the bungalow. It still amazes me how he knew what to do. Nothing seemed too difficult: building the frame, putting in windows, doors, plastering, plumbing, and flooring. It all seemed to come naturally.

The good memories of my childhood include always having neighbouring children to play with. Fox Street back then was an unmade road and with not many cars around we could play there safely. (My parents never had a car.) Mum had a great garden of veggies and flowers. She always kept chickens and slaught-ered them herself. After she'd killed them she'd dunk them into hot water to make plucking easier. I remember that smell of wet feathers – not nice. My family was very sociable so we often had other families visiting us. I recall dad putting

on records, the old 78s. Memories flood back if you hear one of those songs, mainly in German.



Anna and Helen Czernik © Helen Hoskin

Billy carts were a big thing – all in a row we would go on adventures, taking our snacks with us (usually one biscuit). When I look back now time had no limit. We played ball games in the street, also played marbles, skipped, and rode bikes. Of course we had no TV, so we made our own fun. I think I was about twelve when we finally got a television.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Czernik home in Fox Street © Helen Hoskin



Party time at the Czernik house 1950s © H Hoskin

Irene Jozwik



My parents were Anna and Henry Jozwik, from Poland. I am the eldest child, with a sister named Janine and a brother called Joseph. My parents may have been of Polish background but I was born in Wagga Wagga, Australia. My father landed in Melbourne in June 1948.

He was sponsored under the IRO group settlement scheme. He must have gone to Bonegilla at first, because I remember my mother talking about it. Our real introduction to Australia was through the migrant hostel in a little town called Uranquinty. It had been an air force base and the buildings were the typical corrugated iron construction. From Uranquinty my parents moved to Benalla, and from there they bought a block of land in Glendenning Street, St Albans. Here they had to build from scratch. This was in 1954, so we came just as the area was starting to grow.

After my father arrived in Australia he was contracted to work for the SEC, where he worked for many years. When we lived in St Albans my father worked at ARC Steel works at Albion, which was close to home. We didn't own a car so dad had to walk and use public transport. Luckily, Glendenning Street was close to the St Albans station and ARC was close to the Albion station, which was a bonus for dad going to and fro from work.

The house in St Albans was built in stages, one room at a time. My first memory was when there were three rooms: a bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen. My mother Anna was a stay-at-home mum and I remember her cooking on a primus stove, the type that people now use for camping. She cooked for the whole family on this one burner. I don't know how she managed.

Another difficult task was doing the laundry. Mum had to light the copper tub – which was situated outside – and then put the clothes in the tub and bring the water to the boil. A thick long stick – like a baseball bat – was used to poke the clothes down as they rose up while the water boiled. The stick was also used to lift out the hot clothes that were then placed into a tub of cold water to be rinsed.

When more rooms were added to the house mum finally had a laundry and a twin concrete trough was installed. Now mum could do the washing indoors using the tin scrubbing board to rub the tough stains out from the clothes. Eventually the concrete tubs were replaced by stainless steel ones, which are still in the house

today. The scrubbing board and copper tub were replaced by a wringer washing machine.

In the early days we used to have an ice cabinet, which was used to keep the food cool. I remember we had ice delivered to the home. The ice was in one BIG block - about 12 inches long and 10 inches wide and thick. Sometimes the block had to be smashed into smaller pieces to fit inside the cupboard; any tiny bits that were on the bench the three of us kids would scoop up and put into our mouths. That was our ice-pole – no flavour, but a treat for us.

The ice cabinet lasted for a year or two when eventually the yellow Astor, the round-shouldered, solid-style fridge arrived. My parents bought it second-hand for 25 pounds and were very proud of their purchase. Even the neighbours came to have a look at this modern electrical appliance. This fridge lasted another 20 years before mum decided to replace it with a more up-to-date type.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 50 Fabulous Years*, 2006.)



Elizabeth Virant at outside laundry 1950s © M Virant



Bungalow with chooks © Hannelore Boehm



Home of Aileen & Don Hodder, MacArthur St 1950s

Glenn Hilling

Although I have flashes of a life before we lived in St Albans, my clearest memories begin after my parents moved into a three-roomed bungalow in St Albans in 1955 after paying the deposit of £182 on the total price of £885. Our home was at 33 Fox Street (near Arthur Street) later to become 79 Fox Street when the street was extended. Our family transport was a BSA 500 motorcycle with sidecar.



Mary Hilling with son Glenn 1950s © G Hilling



Glenn Hilling at 33 Fox Street 1950s © G Hilling

These were pioneering days in Melbourne's wild west. Although only eleven miles from the city centre and linked by an electric rail service, St Albans was an isolated place, an outer suburb with about 1000 inhabitants, most of them immigrants from war-ravaged Europe. Sprawling across the flat, wind swept Keilor plains, houses were scattered here and there, like islands in a vast sea of grass and weeds. Few trees had survived the farmers who had preceded the advance of suburbia and any trees that had the temerity to poke up above the grass were promptly pruned to ground level by the council.

Our blue weatherboard and fibro cement house stood on Fox Street, which for many years was merely a gravel road. The drains were open ditches on each side of the street bearing a delightful green scum on the surface emitting a lovely aroma. The toilet was an outhouse and on cold, windy nights it was a frightening journey to the toilet for a child with a vivid imagination. Each week the dunny man replaced the pan and every morning I was pleasantly woken by the clip clop of horses' hooves and the clink of bottles as the milkman did his rounds.

The house grew from these humble beginnings. First was a laundry at the back and next, a kitchen and bedroom at the front. Finally, a lounge and another bedroom at the front.

When sewage arrived in 1975, the toilet moved inside and with it the expression "the call of nature" lost a lot of its meaning.

I had no brothers or sisters but I always seemed to be in the company of animals, both domesticated and wild. We had a succession of chickens, cats, and for about ten years a pug named Julius. And there were the snakes.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Secondary College Celebrating 60 Years*, 2016.)



Glenn Hilling in back yard 1950s © G Hilling



Gravel road of Fox Street 1950s © Otto Czernik

Thea Dukic



I arrived from Holland in 1958 when I was fifteen years old. I came because my father wanted to come here. My mother didn't want to come but he always talked about it for years and years. I think he talked about it when he was a little boy. My auntie said, "Your dad always wanted to come to Australia and he used to talk about it." My mum said no because she had her family there. She finally agreed but she was never happy. I think it's hard for old people, coming from another country. I didn't like it, I hated it. I got off at Port Melbourne and I thought it was ugly looking.

First we went to Bonegilla, then we came to Maribyrnong, then to St Albans. Bonegilla was nice. We were there for six weeks and then seven months in the Maribyrnong hostel. When we were in Bonegilla my father left to find a job. He was a cabinetmaker and worked in the city at first, then in a few different places mainly around this area: Sunshine, Tottenham. He found a job alright at the time, no problem. He was forty-eight years old and was a handyman – well, he built these houses. He built the house in George Street; it's getting old. They did a bit of work around a bit, but my father liked it.

I think we came to St Albans because a friend of my dad's knew Mr Stevens of Stevens Building Supplies. They had property all over here; they had some bungalows and we ended up in Walter Street.

We were in the bungalow because we wanted to get out of the hostel. They took all my dad's money for board. I found a job while I was still living in the hostel and they found out about it. My father was paying board for us and the manager in the office there said, "You're working aren't you?" I said yes. I was only getting a few

pounds which I gave to my parents. The hostel took nearly all my money. I thought that's really unfair. We were getting up early and working all day and they took my money and they took most of my dad's money. That's one of the reasons why people had to get out of there. My father reckoned that was stupid, but there was something going on there. A lot of people complained that they were trying to get as much money as they could from the migrants. I don't think it was managed very well at that time.

The food was alright. Even my brother said a few years ago that we probably had better food there than we had in Holland. We were pretty poor there; we had just enough. My dad always worked but there wasn't a lot of money, and you rent. Nobody bought a house. My parents had four children at that time. My image of Australia was that it was big. There was more food, but I wasn't that mad about it.

We moved into a bungalow in Walter Street and there were six of us altogether; there were the parents and four children. My mother had another child here but we were already in George Street. We were in Henry Street for a while living behind some Dutch people on the corner of Arthur Street. Across from where the Greek Orthodox Church is there was an old weatherboard house, and some friends of my parents were there. There was a small bungalow in the back yard there and they had made it more livable. We moved there while we got some money together and then bought the land in George Street and moved into a garage. My father converted it into a little house. It was quite nice and then my mother had another child. I lived there about another year. So I've always been in the same area.

My father and my husband built this house together. My father built his own house and my husband helped him build it. My father said that was his dream. He said he had the dream that he was coming to Australia and that he was going to build his own home. And he did it. He did achieve his dream.

(Excerpt from story published in *St Albans Oral History From The Tin Shed Archives*, 2004.)



Lorenz & Katrin Schwab, Errington Rd © Lilli Schwab



Vennik home front entrance 1960s © Anna Frost



Car and houses in Erica Street © M Trzaskoma



Galea home in Station Street © Edwin Galea



Czyz home Theodore Street 1950s © Stefan Czyz

Gavan Aitken



I came to St Albans with my family in 1949 when I was ten years old and nothing ever happened in any great haste in those days. The population of St Albans was only 800 or 900 people and there might have been ten shops near the railway station. Migrants from continental Europe started coming to St Albans

in the 1950s. Some – like the Steins and the Farrugias – came much earlier, but for St Albans it was a real population boom in the 1950s due to the exodus from the migrant hostels at Brooklyn or Maribyrnong, and as far away as Somers, Watsonia, and Bonegilla.

I was living in Main Road West and we saw the migrants move into the area and start building their own homes. You could see these wall-frames going up all around you and the migrants helping each other out. As one basic frame was finished they started on the next one. The frames were made of green timber and you had to let that season for at least six weeks and then finished off with the cladding, which was mostly weatherboard or cement sheet. Occasionally something went wrong or perhaps the money wasn't there so you would see the exposed stud walls on part of the house left untouched for years. In the mid 1950s Keilor Council ordered the demolition of a few one-room structures because they were jerry-built but apart from that the small bungalows were a success.

The population growth was amazing. When we came in 1949 the population was not even 1,000 people. Then the migrant families started arriving and every week there was another family or two setting up house. It was a growth that no-one had foreseen. James Eddie was an astute man and as a councillor when he saw the population treble over twelve months he predicted that the New Australians would soon outnumber the older settlers. He was right.

Most of the early housing was of weatherboard and cement sheet but the new housing estates were of bricks and mortar. The late 1960s was also the time when the old bungalows were being targeted by Keilor council for non compliance with the building code. The building permits for part-houses had been granted for a temporary period of occupation during which time the owner was required to complete the rest of the house, and most people did finish their homes within a few years. But 20 years later there were still some of these "temporary" structures dotted around the town, and a few were still there after sixty years.

(Oral history discussions conducted in 2018.)



Mary & Alby Aitken w. Julie and Gavan © G Aitken



Alby Aitken with Balinga Lad 1930s © G Aitken



Julie Aitken in a troting spider © Gavan Aitken

Kevin Jarred

My father, Arnold Jarred, came to St Albans in 1947 and built a house in Walmer Avenue. He was from Horsham and came to St Albans for work. He'd been knocked back from going to war for some medical reason – unfortunately a lot of men are the same, you don't get over it, you don't bother going to the doctor – anyway he was dead at the age of 56.

He came here in 1947 and bought a block of land in Walmer Avenue and built a shed while he was building the house. We were backwards and forwards. I've always claimed we moved here in 1947 because we did even though we moved backwards and forwards a bit. I was only seven at the time.

We moved down here permanently in 1948. My father was building the house whenever he could. He had a greyhound called Woomera Girl. Whenever it won some more floorboards got put

in another room or the spouting was put on around the outside of the house. That's the way they did it in those days. You didn't go the bank because you were frightened of banks of what they did and so forth.

My father worked at ICI and then got a job selling real estate at Meallin in Footscray in about 1953. He bought his first car in 1954 and started operating from home but he was still working for Meallin. He worked from the front of the house in 13 Victoria Crescent. In 1952 we'd moved over from Walmer Avenue to Victoria Crescent and lived next to the Selfs. We were at 13 Victoria Crescent and my dad owned the block next door which he sold to Lew Self. That must have been in the mid 1950s because it was there for a couple of years before he built on it.

I was the first paper boy and telegram boy this town ever had. I was working for Mr Perrett who had the general store in Main Road West. When I started the town was growing with all the migrants who were coming here and I was just a 12 year old kid that was always full of energy and started selling papers from the corner of Main Road East and East Esplanade. Then they eventually put a kiosk at the old railway station and asked if I wanted to go in there.

My father was an estate agent from about 1957 until he died in 1960. He was involved with Meallin in Footscray and also worked as an insurance agent for the Royal Insurance Group. There were insurance and the fire and general was real. I wasn't the first insurance agent in the region because real estate agents would write insurance in those days, including people like John Setek. Jim Knowles's father was an estate agent and he would write insurance policies too. There were quite a few who did that. I started doing that in 1960 and worked in that field for many years, but then technology overran me and in 1997 I finished up. The computer age has changed things because there's no such thing as an insurance agent any more as when I started. Now it's all direct or done through a brokerage arrangement.

St Albans was a great place to grow up. A lot of people knocked it but it was a good place.
(Oral history discussions held in 2013.)



Backyard with chooks 1950s © Hannelore Boehm



Zvaigzne family Kodre St. 1950s © Dace Fitton



Czyz back yard © Stefan Czyz



Czyz front yard © Stefan Czyz

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Insurance papers for Z Zvaigzne © Dace Fitton

Jimmy Knowles



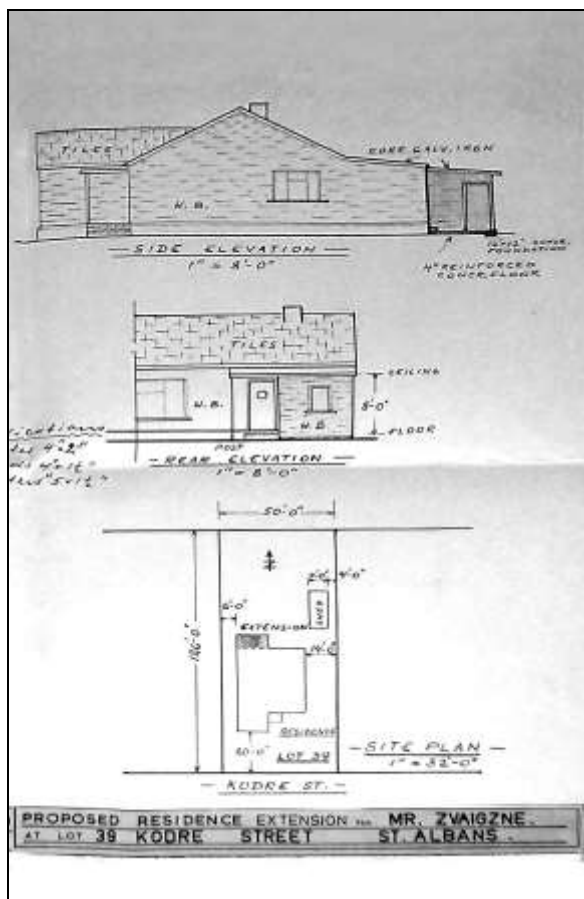
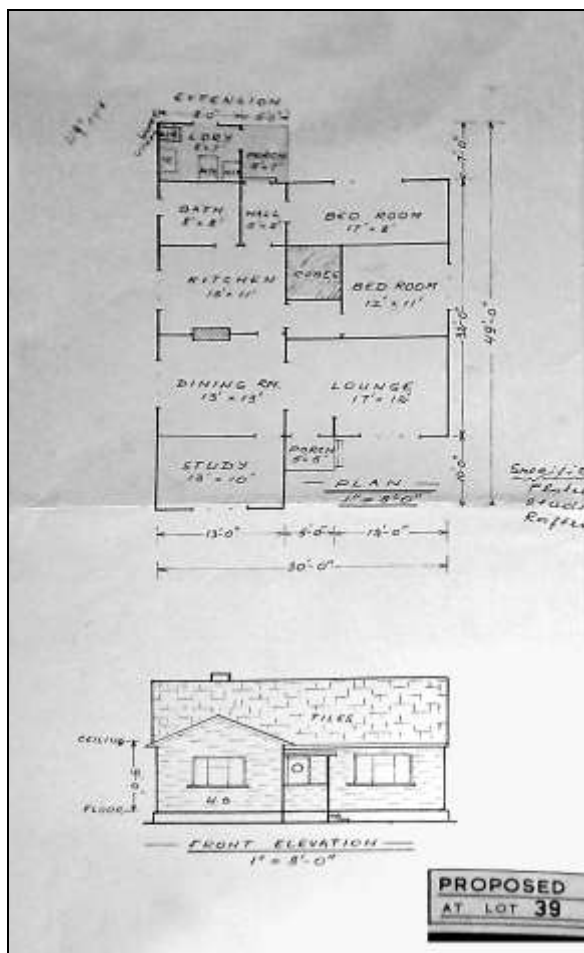
My father came to St Albans in 1938 and went into the real estate business. I think it was because he wanted to do something different after he came back from the war. He was one of the Rats of Tobruk and when he came back he was instructing cadets from Xavier, De La Selle,

Wesley College, and so on with physical education. When he got out of the army he first went to work at Dycraft in Ballarat Road, then worked as a commissionaire in the city, but he didn't like that, so he decided to take out a real estate agent licence. The work as a commissionaire was like a door keeper, opening doors for people coming in and out of a building in the city. That was pretty boring. The real estate business was much more challenging. He operated from home in East Esplanade.

When dad opened up his real estate business I left my employment and started working with him. My job in a lot of cases was going with people to find out who owned the piece of land that they wanted to buy. You might have a German person, for example, who wanted to buy a particular block but didn't know the process or couldn't speak the language properly so they needed a hand. At that time you would go over to the council and they would give you the book to look at yourself. It was extraordinary the amount of land that was owned by the Catholic church, and it was the same at Sunshine as it was in St Albans. We would look in this book to find the name of the owner and then go and ask them if they wanted to sell.

So, despite what has been written elsewhere, my father was the first real estate agent in St Albans and then Jimmy Fox came along but he was based in Sunshine. In fact it was from Jimmy Fox that my mother and father bought the land in Main Road East. What really kicked St Albans off was George Eisner and the era of migrant settlement. George wasn't an agent at the start but he was a very shrewd businessman and land dealer. At that time land was very cheap because you could probably buy land at about £25 or £30 a block. He would pay options on every second or third block and build it up, which of course increased the value of the ones in between. He was pretty shrewd. There was a very sad ending to that family with the death of the two daughters.

Townsend was another guy developing half houses. He was about the same time as Eisner but mainly on the west side of the railway line



where Thornton was also developing housing.

The fifties was a time when land and housing was in demand because new settlers were moving to the area. The £50 house block of the early fifties was starting to get a bit more expensive. By the mid fifties some of the inner blocks were selling for £200 to £300, a three bedroom house near the railway station with electricity connected could cost £1,000, or a well located and more extensively fitted out house could have an asking price of £2,600. Real estate was starting to move.

(Excerpt from article published in *Stories About St Albans Celebrating 125 Years*, 2012.)



Myrtle Knowles with Bill, Jimmy and May © J Knowles



Knowles and Penlerick children © J Knowles

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BLOCK of land, fronting Berkshire Road, 5 mins bus, e.l., water, made road, Inquiries this office.

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PART house, £250 cash, bal. £3 weekly, particulars. Nice home close Stn., shops, R.C. Church, £2,950. Dep. £800. Terms arranged. — Wanted, Land and Homes for sale, St. Albans and surrounding districts — H. C. Knowles, St. Albans Real Estate, 382 Main Road East, St. Albans. MW 0630, MW 0624.

Ad in Sunshine Advocate 13 August 1954

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Anna Frost



My family is of Dutch origin and we came from Rotterdam to Australia in 1955 as assisted migrants under the Australian and the Netherlands governments' migration agreement. I remember that because it was the year before the

Olympic Games were held in Melbourne. My father was Pieter Vennik and my mother was Femmigje Mulder. I was born in 1944 and was ten-and-a-half years old the day we left home, and I am now 68. There were six of us who migrated – as well as Mum and Dad there were my brother Jan who was the oldest of the children, my older sister Cornelia and my younger sister Geesje. My other brother Peter and sister Hilda were born in Australia.

The only person that my father knew in Australia was a man in Perth, so that was not much help when we came to Victoria. The conditions of the supported migration scheme meant that my dad had to work for two years in the jobs that were arranged for him by the government. We first went to Healesville and I think that was because work was available there.

My dad was a cabinetmaker and French polisher and I still have some tables and chairs that he made. Dad had done some training as an electrician and then cabinetmaking, but was told that in Australia he might have to work in a semi-skilled capacity. My sister Corrie was quite well educated and had started working in Rotterdam as an apprentice saleswoman, but the only job that was available for her was in the Healesville laundry, which is still there. My Dad and my sister Corrie had already learnt some English but the rest of us didn't. Another condition of the migration scheme was that we had to learn to speak English.

Then we moved to 59 McArthur Avenue at St Albans and my father worked at Sunshine Cabinet Works. My parents tried to start a business on their own but they didn't have the money so that's why he ended up working for Sunshine Cabinet Works. He also built the rest of the house as we lived there.

There were other Dutch families who settled locally. Henry van der Kruijs drowned while trying to save a child at the St Albans swimming hole and his wife Maria had to bring up eight children on her own. At least the whole community rallied to provide some financial support through their crisis. Another family was burnt out. A Dutch club was formed in St Albans

to help people make friends and socialise especially for the wives who were stuck at home on their own during the day. They used to have singalongs and hold Christmas functions.

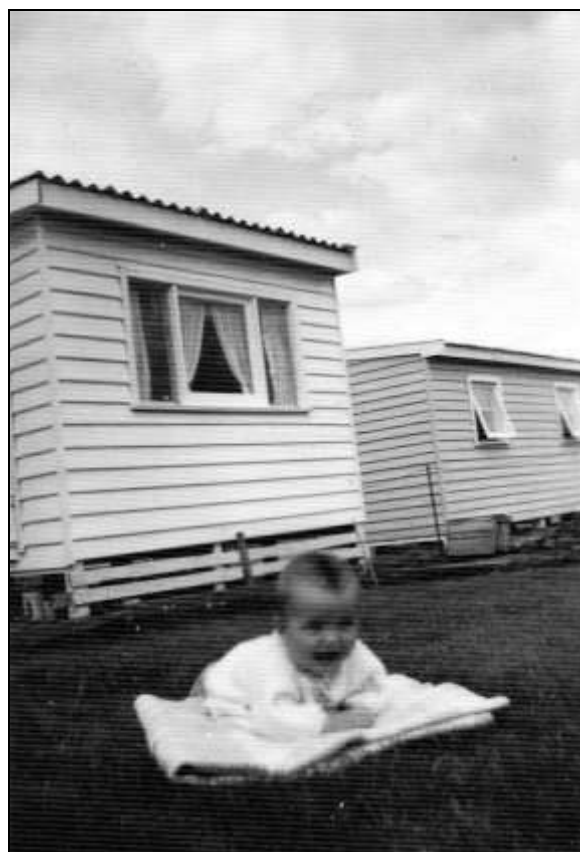
Martin Los was an optician and ran a small business from his home on the corner of Main Road East and Oberon Ave. Mr Coort was an auto electrician and had his workshop in Main Road West.

Mr Elzinga and his family also migrated from the Netherlands. They moved to the Footscray area before their home was built in St Albans. That was in the early fifties. He was a painter by trade and worked at a paint shop in St Albans. His first name was Fonger and his wife was Sjoukje, so they became known as Fred and Jill. I believe they had two daughters and a son. They were connected with the Presbyterian church in East Esplanade where I was married.

I remember Mrs Agnes Stevens was a lovely and generous woman who worked very hard as a volunteer. She gave us woollen blankets against the cold and I've heard that she helped many people through her work with the school and the church. Her sons John and Doug were also nice and they were also helping people in the area. They became local businessmen and real estate agents.

When I started at St Albans High School the headmaster was Mr Barker. Mr and Mrs Barker were an English couple, I believe, and lived near the school. I stayed at High School until I was 14 and then it was off to work.

(Interview conducted in 2012.)



Vennik family home 1950s © Anna Frost



Pieter Vennik building home 1950s © Anna Frost



Huwald family 1950s © Horst Huwald



Femmigie Vennik with laundry 1950s © Anna Frost



Huwald family 1950s © Horst Huwald



Vennik family 1950s © Anna Frost



Pieter Vennik building home 1950s © Anna Frost



Huwald family building bungalow © Sylvia Bluemel



Huwald family 1950s © Horst Huwald



Cutting timber in the 1950s © Anna Frost



Huwald family building bungalow © Horst Huwald



Kopmann backyard 1950s © Sylvia Bluemel



Huwald family 1950s © Horst Huwald



A Reinisch & G Haumann 1950s © Kon Haumann

Alie Missen née de Vries



Six weeks after their arrival in Australia the de Vries family travelled by train from Albury to Spencer Street and boarded a train to St Albans. The journey from Melbourne to St Albans took 35 minutes. When we arrived at St Albans Railway Station the family

looked around quite eagerly. It was at this time we experienced a huge culture shock – this was supposed to be the destination after so much travel – the comparison between the harbour City of Rotterdam and the quiet, isolated country-life setting of St Albans was vast. Apart from the small railway station, a few weatherboard houses were visible, as was a barber shop on the corner of West Esplanade and Main Road West and a bank building was spotted a few yards down the unmade road. While we were walking to Adelaide Street we passed a couple of shops and one had a dwelling house on the side. There were some trees; one was a palm tree with lots of little birds, tall yellow grasses, green thistles, soil and more soil.

The young people of the family went exploring in the next few days. We discovered two churches, one paddock named a reserve, a few railway houses, a shed named a fire station, a shed named a police station, and a weatherboard hall named a mechanics' institute. The peace was ear shattering.

John and Kitty bought an allotment of land in East Esplanade, St. Albans, with the view in mind of building a house on the block in the near future. The land was sold to them by Harold Knowles whose home was a couple of doors away. Mr Knowles, who was a real estate agent, sold the block for £400 at a time when other blocks were sold for about £150 per lot, because it was claimed that the block was on a Government Road and they would never have to pay for road making costs, only for footpath construction. This proved to be a furphy, because when the road was finally constructed extra money had to be paid because the city engineer considered that a concrete road surface was the way to cope with heavy traffic.

Another Dutchman, Tony Mom who had been a telephone mechanic in Holland, did a short course on arrival in Australia and was permitted to work as an electrician in Australia. With so many bungalows being built in St Albans and living on the other side of town, he used to call in at my parents' place in East Esplanade for a morning cup of coffee and cake. Tony Mom decided that he would have to move to St. Albans for this is where his work was, but alas availability of accommodation was non-existent. So my parents offered Tony, his wife Nel and their two children accommodation; the front section of the house my father had built with the

help of Kees Kropman and Anton Correlje. The last two men were builders and did sub-contract work. Mr Kropman had been a carpenter in Holland but Correlje was only capable of building framework.

One thing led to another, with other Dutch migrants arriving, settling into part-houses and communicating with each other. Others called in at my parents' place where there was always a cup of coffee or a cup of tea available and some of mother's apple cakes, shortbreads and other cakes to be had. One day it was decided that a Dutch social club should be established in St Albans partly because the Dutch women were homesick and there was nothing to do in St Albans, apart from housework. Women lived in total isolation, after the children had left for school they were left on their own, more or less in a paddock. Attending church on Sundays was the only time of the week women could dress up.

(Extract from Alie Missen's manuscript *A St Albans' Migrant's Story*, 2000.)



De Vries family Adelaide Street 1953 © Alie Missen



Dutch social club St Albans 1950s © Alie Missen



Dutch social club St Albans 1950s © Alie Missen



St Alban the Martyr Church 1950s



St Albans Presbyterian Church 1950s © Karen Bugeja



Perrett's Store in Main Road West © John Perrett



Self's General Store East Esplanade © Brenda Payne

Michael Virant



The Virant family along with families from many nationalities arrived in Australia under the International Refugee Organization's resettlement program of Displaced Persons after WW 2. The air passenger manifest shows that the Virant family departed Bremen, Germany on the 22 October 1950

destined to Sydney and then transported to the Bonegilla Immigration centre in Albury, Victoria.

My earliest recollection was travelling from Bonegilla to St Albans by train at night with my sister and mother. My father had been sent to the Newport railway workshops six months earlier under the Commonwealth Employment Scheme as part of a compulsory two-year obligation to repay the transport and accommodation costs of resettlement.

My mother, sister and I were released from Bonegilla and travelled to St Albans to join my father who had built a two-room bungalow in his spare time after working at the rail yards. I remember the journey because of the noisy rattling of the train and the overhead light being on all the time as it was a long overnight trip to Spencer Street station and then onto St Albans station where we were picked up the next morning by my father. Apparently my sister and I travelled together in a large suitcase as there were no sleeping facilities on the train.

My earliest memories of our new home at 12 Thomas Street St Albans (which my father bought from Eisner Real Estate for £100) were of unmade roads with open smelly gutters and surrounded by empty paddocks full of snakes and other vermin.

The bungalow was freezing in winter and sweltering in summer. Fortunately my father and several of his new work mates (who were also IRO displaced persons) banded together and formed a small co-operative whereby they extended their respective bungalows one at a time which made life a bit more comfortable.

My mother hated St Albans and suffered badly from homesickness and the deprivation of the most basic of facilities she had grown accustomed to back home in Germany. I recall that there was no electricity or running water in Thomas Street when we first arrived. Imagine the hardship for my mother who had to cart water from Ruth Street where there was a reticulated water supply. Cooking was done on a Primus kerosene pump up stove as was lighting at night. My father built an outdoor toilet and

laundry and I remember my sister and I bathing in the concrete laundry wash trough.

We lived in the bungalow until I started school in an annex of the town hall in East Esplanade. My father had by then managed to save up enough money, after paying off the Government, to engage two local house builders. Building materials were delivered to the site and the builders arrived on their bikes carrying their building tools. It took a year to complete with two bedrooms, a kitchen and lounge and the bungalow which was attached to the new house became a bathroom and laundry.

At the same time more people arrived and more bungalows were being built in Shirley Street. Keilor Council upgraded the roads, water and electricity were connected, but it would take years to get the sewerage connected and the open smelly drains enclosed.

I now reside in Williamstown and at age 70 am blessed with good health. I recently returned to St Albans and visited 12 Thomas Street where the memories all flooded back.

(Article written by Michael Virant, 2018.)



Outside the laundry 1950s © Michael Virant



Laundry day at Thomas Street © Michael Virant



Virant bungalow in Thomas St. © Michael Virant



Outside laundry 1950s © Michael Virant



Elisabeth Virant & the builders © Michael Virant



Juliana, Elisabeth & Michael © Michael Virant

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Silvio and Pina Polzella



Silvio Polzella was born on 11 February 1928 in Morcone, Italy. After his primary education he served a year of military service and then worked as a farm labourer. In 1951 he applied for an assisted passage to Australia under the Migration Agreement between Italy and Australia, which was approved, with a comment that applicant "appears a decent type". Silvio left Italy on the Neptunia on 8th December 1951 from Napoli and arrived in Australia on 4th January 1952, so he travelled for 24 days to get here. After arriving he went to the Bonegilla Migrant Camp for a short time only, then to Tasmania, but he then chose to live in Victoria and settled in St Albans.

Silvio wanted to buy a bungalow and a friend who also lived in a bungalow offered him a loan of money as a deposit. He was a very good man who was very trusting and Silvio worked hard and paid him back bit by bit.

He prepared a home at 17 Eisner Street St Albans for his sweetheart, Pina Sperenza, to come four years later. He did a lot of work on the bungalow as did a lot of others. These immigrant neighbours became lifelong friends.

Giuseppina "Pina" Speranza was born 18 March 1933 in Italy and travelled on her own to Australia on a ship called the Surriento to meet up with and get married to Silvio Polzella and start a new life. They were childhood sweethearts. Pina arrived in Australia on the 28th March 1955 and married Silvio on 30th April 1955.



Pina and Silvio Polzella in 1955 © Sandra Polzella

She was a dressmaker in Italy and was very lucky that her family had been able to put her through schooling. In St Albans she made clothes for all her children and many others in the area.

Four years into paying off the home loan the bank collector came past as they did on a push-bike and my mum would say to dad why don't we pay the loan off. My dad responded, with what money? My mother pulled out a bag and said with this money. Every week my father would give her X amount of money for food and bills and she managed to save a few dollars every week for four years to pay the bank loan. She was a hard working woman. Both parents were hard working individuals who worked until they retired.

Silvio worked as a machinist during the week and on weekends he worked on the house. He got his lumber and hardware from Stevens' hardware which was next to the SSW supermarket. The purchases were usually on tick to be paid later on; this was the case for many others too in St Albans. When you think of it, Stevens' hardware helped build St Albans. Silvio had lengthy conversations with Mr Stevens on how he was turning this bungalow into a bigger house. When Stevens passed away my dad said his funeral was absolutely packed as everyone knew him; he was a very respected man.

From starting their life together in a bungalow, Silvio and Pina extended it into a full house where they raised a family of four children.



Pina Polzella, Eisner Street 1956 © Pat Polzella

Silvio also contributed to the community by helping to build the first Sacred Heart Catholic church with the other migrants.

The Polzella house was one of the first to have electricity in Eisner Street. One neighbour came up and asked Silvio how come he had electricity and the neighbour didn't, even though he had already been in his bungalow for three years. My father helped the neighbour to get connected and made a newly-found, life-long friend. (This couple became my babysitters when my mum went to work.)

Pina and Silvio made friends with their neighbours who were migrants from many parts of Europe. One of their early photos in front of their bungalow shows a group of friends who met through the St Albans Italian community.



The group of friends in this photo include (left-right) Giulio Campano, Pina Polzella, Silvio Polzella, Giovanni Di Rico, Maria Di Rico, Rocco Borelli, and Rocco Carullo. Margaret Giudice, who is now the Mayor of Brimbank, is the daughter of Giovanni and Maria Di Roco. As well as her municipal work, Margaret has been a supporter of the Migrant Resource Centre for many decades.

Pina Polzella lived the rest of her life in St Albans until she passed away at age 77 years on 13th November 2010, and was buried at Keilor. Silvio survived another five years after Pina, and passed away at age 87 years, on 16th August 2015, peacefully, surrounded by his children and grandchildren. His remains were also buried at the Keilor cemetery.

(Article written by Sandra Polzella, 2018.)



Silvio Polzella at bungalow entrance 1950s © S Polzella



Eisner Street in the 1950s © Sandra Polzella



Pina & Silvio Polzella dressed up 1955 © Sandra Polzella



Pina Polzella in Eisner Street 1950s © Sandra Polzella

Theo van der Voort

In February 1952 we migrated from the Netherlands to Australia. My father was Gysbertus "Gijs" Adrianus van der Voort, so in Australia he became known as Gordon. My mother was Johanna Maria née van den Brand and she became known as Annie. I was Theodorus "Theo" only five years old, and my brother Hendrikus "Henk" was seven years old.

I believe we arrived in Sydney by ship with only a little furniture and not much money. From there we were taken to the Bonegilla migrant camp near Wodonga alongside the Murray river, and with the help of Father Maas¹ we survived. From the Bonegilla camp we ended up in the Maribyrnong camp near Footscray, Victoria, where I remember we had to line up to get our food each day.

While staying there, my Dad and with the help of Father Maas, they found a little house behind a bigger house in Carrum, for little rent. While living there my brother and I went to the Carrum Catholic school, which was about two kilometres away, and the only transport we had was to walk to school. It was a very long walk at such a young age.

During the day my Dad had to go and look for a job and I remember him coming home many days quite disappointed, until one day it was all smiles – yes, he'd finally found a job in Footscray. My Dad was a carpenter, and this job was with Horsfall Homes, which was based in Barkly Street, Footscray.² Horsfall must have got the contract to build bungalows in St Albans, and that's where we ended up.



Van der Voort (R) & Van Kuyk © Theo van der Voort

¹ Rev. Leo Maas was a Dutch chaplain in Victoria who assisted Dutch Catholic migration. He established the Father Maas Scheme of Dutch hostels in Kew and Daylesford and an orphanage in Bacchus Marsh. He was made a Knight of the Order of Oranje Nassua, which was a Netherlands award akin to the OBE.

² Frank Horsfall was a builder in Footscray from the 1930s and was building 'sleepouts' in the 1940s and 'villas' in the 1950s. He established his Horsfall Homes company in 1950. George Eisner acted as a local agent to build bungalows in St Albans.



Gordon van der Voort 1952 © Theo van der Voort

I believe the first two bungalows that my Dad built was one for our family at 40 Henry Street, and the other for my Dad's work partner, Harry van Kuyk, at 38 Henry Street. When these bungalows were finished I believe we moved in straight away from Carrum. That was probably mid 1952 because that's when my brother and I started at the primary school. While my Dad was working he was able to pay the bungalow off.

This bungalow did not have water, we had to go across Arthur Street which was a dirt road at that time to get water from a tap on a block there. I remember we had no stove, no fridge, and we cooked on a primus which was only big enough for one pan. I also remember we obtained an ice chest, whereby the ice man would bring a block of ice to put in the top of the ice chest. We also had the milkman with his horse and cart delivering three bottles of milk each day, each bottle had one pint in it.

Our toilet was in the back yard, which we had a dunny man pick up the pan each week. What a terrible job.



Theo and Henk ready for school © Theo van der Voort

I also remember we had to go to school in the public hall on East Esplanade almost next to the grocery store which was run by the Self brothers. I started at the state school and then after a short time in early 1954 I was able to attend the Sacred Heart school in Winifred Street, St Albans. My Dad helped build part of the church or hall with two classrooms in it, while other classrooms were being built. During my

primary school days I also became an altar boy. After finishing at Sacred Heart, I had to travel by train to Sunshine Tech, because there were no secondary schools in St Albans.

After six to ten years my Dad started to build onto the bungalow, with a lounge, kitchen and bedroom. We had unmade roads and dirty gutters along the road, where all the waste water would go in. My parents and all migrants had it very hard in those days. I grew up with Germans, Greeks, Maltese, Dutch, Italian and many more nationalities, all going through the same challenge.

As I said, my Dad's first job was for Horsfall Homes in Footscray. He must have worked for them for about four to five years. During this time he helped a lot of Dutch people who migrated to Australia, and with the help of Horsfall Homes and George Eisner as the local real estate agent, bungalows were built and ready to move in even if not finished. Dad also picked up lots of families from the port of Melbourne and airport, including the Nijholt family, van Koolen family, Schneider family, van Rulen family and many more.

After leaving Horsfall Homes in 1957 he had many business contacts, so he was able to get his builders licence and started working as an independent builder. One of his first jobs was to build a couple of substations for the State Electrical Commission, one in Sunbury and the other in Croydon. After these jobs he got jobs building houses for clients in Sunbury and also two jobs in Croydon, but most of his jobs thereafter were for constructions in Sunbury and the Gisborne area. My Dad also helped a lot of people in St Albans finish off their unfinished bungalows.

In 1962 I started my four-year apprenticeship as a carpenter-builder with my Dad, so I worked with him in the business and my schooling was at the Footscray Tech.

After seventeen years my parents and brother went permanently back in January 1969 to the Netherlands because my mother was very homesick. In the seventeen years she was in Australia she went home to her family on her own for holidays about ten times. I had married in October 1968 so I stayed and continued working locally as a sub-contract carpenter.

In 1981 my wife Alice and I moved to Seaspray in Gippsland on the Ninety Mile Beach and we've been in Gippsland ever since.

Mum and Dad with my brother had returned to the Netherlands for good, but in early 1989 Mum and Dad came back for a three-month holiday. While they were here my Dad had a heart attack and died on 27 March 1989. He was 66 years of age – too young. We buried him in Australia, which he loved, at the Altona Memorial Park cemetery. Mum then went back to the Netherlands on her own. My Dad had a very busy life in Australia. He worked hard for the

family during the day and did the office work at home in the evening.

(Written in 2018 by Theo van der Voort, now almost 72 years of age.)



First car Hillman 1953-54 © Theo van der Voort



Van der Voort & Van Koolen families © Theo van der Voort



Annie with Theo & Henk © Theo van der Voort

Aida and Philip Xuereb



Marriage of Aida and Philip 1952 © Carmen Hickey

My parents were Aida and Philip Xuereb who migrated from Malta in the 1950s. My father was born in 1928 and grew up in an orphanage in Valletta, Malta. His mother died when he was very young and his father couldn't look after the children. Dad never spoke much about it so we didn't really know much about dad growing up. While in the orphanage he learnt his trade as a cabinet maker, so they did prepare him for life to that extent. Then his father died when Dad was 17. Dad left the orphanage in 1949 to join the army and that was after the war.

Dad met Mum while he was in the army and they married in September 1952. I was born in 1953 and at that stage Mum and Dad were contemplating migration. The plan was for Dad to come out first to see if Australia was the place for them. He came out on his own in 1954 to scope out the lay of the land and supported himself by working in rural Victoria laying railway lines. He returned to Malta and then brought out my mother and I in 1955. We came out on a ship that sank the year after our journey, so we were lucky. Originally we lived in Collingwood and Richmond and then we came to St Albans.



Dad applied for a job at the PMG but didn't get it, so he said to the employment officer "You put posters up all over my country saying come to Australia which is the land of opportunity. What opportunity? I can't get a job here." Dad was then handed an envelope and told to read it, which he did,

because one of the good things that happened in the orphanage was that they taught him to read and write in English. This was the beginning of a 30-year career with Australia Post. He started as a postman in Richmond and later worked as a supervisor in the CBD. He was

trained on the job by Alan Reeves and they formed a friendship that lasted for over 60 years.

When Dad brought Mum and myself out from Malta he didn't have permanent accommodation for the family. Our first place in Collingwood was above a fruit shop which was not the best. Dad was soon told to find somewhere else or Mum was going back to Malta.

Next day he was delivering mail to an address with a Maltese name and noticed that they had a sign advertising a room for rent. They were Charlie and Lorla Cutajar. He told them that his wife and daughter were coming out and asked if he could rent the room. They said yeah, but he forgot to mention that Mum was pregnant. So that was two families with six kids between them in the one small house. Three days after we moved out of the fruit shop the place burnt to the ground, so the family was lucky to have avoided that disaster.

We stayed with the Cutajars for a while and became good friends for over fifty years. They ended up moving to Kingsbury and it became a weekly ritual that they would drive out to St Albans on a Sunday to visit our family.



Xuereb bungalow in East Esplanade © Carmen Hickey

We moved into a bungalow in East Esplanade on the corner of Conrad Street. When we were in Richmond we were living with the Reeves initially. They bought a bungalow in St Albans and that's the reason we came to St Albans because Mum wanted to maintain a connection with the Reeves. They were Alan and Bernadette and we became their neighbours. They moved first and we followed and bought the place next door.

The Reeves were very well known in St Albans because they were good dancers and established ballroom dancing classes at the old tin shed on Errington reserve. They had 14 children who all went to the Sacred Heart school. A lot of their kids were the same age as us and went to the Catholic school so we all got on together. Bernadette has now passed on and Alan is getting on in years.

In St Albans we soon got to know all the neighbours and they all were very friendly and

helpful. All the children walked to school and never worried about playing outside. My parents never had a car so whenever we went anywhere it was always walking or by train or a ride with somebody.

There was a chook farm across the road from us owned by the Murrells. Mildred was the matriarch and we always knew her as Nana. She'd make sponge cakes and all this Aussie style food that mum couldn't do. There were lots of sheds out the back of their farm with chickens and turkeys. The turkeys frightened me a bit but I loved to go and see the baby chicks just after they were born. Nana was white-haired and a beautiful old lady. We didn't know our real grandparents so we always knew her as Nana. I remember she had three sons: Jim and Fred and Percy. Her husband must have died early because we never knew him.

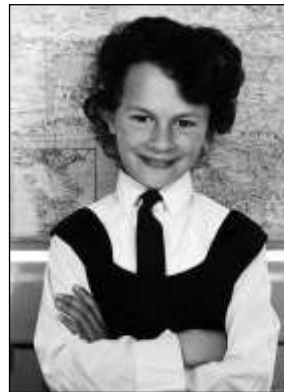


Xuereb family in 1950s © Carmen Hickey

When we started in the bungalow there were five of us – mum, dad, myself as the eldest child, then Monica and my brother, and then my younger sister came along. The bungalow had three rooms: the kitchen with the table in the middle, the dresser on one side and the sink on the other; the main bedroom was my parents' room where they slept with my baby brother; and what was supposed to be the bathroom my dad converted into a bedroom with bunk beds – he built a wardrobe and with a curtain it was a room divider. The dunny was outside. We had the copper for hot water and a steel bath. When the kids were young the steel bath would go on the table and the hot water from the copper was brought in and that's how we bathed.

When I was young St Albans seemed to very vast, especially when you walked everywhere. Our bungalow seemed to be the end of St Albans on that road by the railway line; it was all pretty empty past our patch of housing.

We spent a fair bit of time down at the river which was a popular spot for a lot of people. That was quite a walk. There were horses still around at the time and you'd see kids riding their horse down the road or in the paddocks. Conrad Street and Main Road and others were unmade roads, with just a gravel topping. But they were happy days and seemed to be uncomplicated.



I went to the Sacred Heart Catholic school right through from preps in 1959 through to grade 6. Sacred Heart was very multi-cultural. I remember the Herald-Sun did a front page spread about the school because there were so many nationalities. My favourite all time

teacher was Miss O'Brien, who was my preps teacher; in those days a child did not know or refer to a teacher by their first name. Her parents were Mary and William O'Brien who lived in Winifred Street

Most of the kids thought Sister Charles was a stern teacher; she had the senior students and all her classes were big. The parish held an annual fete about November which everyone enjoyed with carnival rides and horses. I also remember a carnival that I attended in West Esplanade where they had camels and the kids got to feed the young ones.

As a young girl I started dancing with the ballet school which met at the back of someone's house. It might have been Carol Martin's place in Leonard Avenue. That seemed to be far away at the time. I went to the ballet school between the ages of 7 and 13. A lot of girls went to that dancing school.

After finishing primary school at Sacred Heart I went to the Marian College in Sunshine through to 1972. That was my regular morning routine for years: walking to the station, catching the train, walking to the school.

The early days were fun days. Dad was a carpenter by trade and he built a cubby house in the back corner of the yard with a little table and chairs. It was special and we loved it. When the Cutajar children came on Sundays we had our little tea parties in there. That's what amused us.

In the early 1960s we ended up selling the bungalow and moving to a bigger place at Sylvester Crescent, which was just around the corner from the Catholic church and school. We lived in Power Street for a little while when the

house was being built in Sylvester Crescent. The old bungalow sold and mum and dad had some friends who lived in Power Street with a four-bedroom home and only one son, so we lived with them for a few months.



Mum was so happy about moving into the new house. It was her pride and joy and she always said she'd live there till the end. It was a bigish place for the time: there were three bedrooms, a kitchen, a lounge-dining room, and later we extended the meals area. It was three times bigger than the

bungalow we had been living in. Some of our visitors thought it was a palace because it looked bigger than normal.



Aida Xuereb with children © Carmen Hickey

My mum had so much pride in her family and her little plot of land. She worked very hard through paid employment, doing the housework and growing vegetables in the back yard. She enjoyed roller skating and we have a photo of her roller skating down the driveway. She was a gentle, kind person but she loved watching the hurly burly of World Championship Wrestling and Roller Derby and all the characters.

One year there was a fire at the back of the garage. We had one of those old brick incinerators and were burning some papers when the wind blew the curtains out of the garage and they caught fire. By the time the fire brigade came the garage was gone and I lost all

my schoolbooks and my childhood toys including one of the first Barbie dolls. Dad lost all his carpentry tools. He'd built all our furniture. He'd built all the kitchen cupboards for mum and the kids' bedroom furniture. He did a lot of odd jobs to supplement the family income.

In those days you bought things on lay-by. Mum and dad bought their new furniture locally. There was the Paterson's Furniture Store and Stevens also had a new home wares store in East Esplanade. Everything was put on lay by. They bought lounge furniture and carpets. Mum took a lot of pride in their house, as did a lot of the migrants who came to St Albans.

Dad worked the night shift with the PMG in the city. He'd leave home about 10 o'clock at night to work the night shift. He did that for years and years. He'd come home early in the morning and sleep a few hours and get up around midday. Then he would often work in the garage before going to bed fairly early and then getting up to go to work again.

Mum worked at ICI for many years in the detonator department. It was hard work because ICI was full of dangerous chemicals. Our neighbour John Gigacz was an industrial chemist from Czechoslovakia who also worked at ICI. They were a lovely family. Mum worked at ICI for many years before moving on. Her first job had been as a tea lady and people couldn't understand how well she managed that because she couldn't read or write, even in Maltese. She was quite young during the war and was taken out of school to help support her family. She was working when she was 13, so she only had an elementary education but she could add up and manage money. If any money went missing, she would know about it.

After she finished her job as a tea lady she found it hard to get other work because she wasn't literate. That's why she ended up working at ICI. She left ICI when my sister was born; she wasn't supposed to be working there when she was pregnant but because she was so little it didn't show. Then she got a cleaning job with the ANZ bank in the city and did that for years. She loved it because she said it wasn't that hard because it was cleaning offices which was no big deal, vacuuming and dusting and picking up papers. I'm sure it was easier than ICI, and less dangerous than working with chemicals. I've often wondered about that because in 1989 both my mother and my sister were diagnosed with cancer within three months of each other. They had the same type of tumour. Fortunately my sister survived but my mum didn't and died in her early fifties, which is much too young. My sister was in her early twenties and never was a smoker when she developed cancer.

Dad was very active. He retired from full-time work at age 65 but kept working as a volunteer. He was with St Vincent De Paul for 20 years. He

worked with the soup kitchen and was distributing sandwiches in the housing commission area around Footscray. I sometimes went with him to St Bernadette's in Ballarat Road to prepare sandwiches. He'd done a fair bit of work early on at the Sacred Heart because of his carpentry skills, such as maintenance work on the buildings.

What impressed me was that many of the migrants had lots of skills. They might have been self taught but they were always willing to have a go at just about anything – carpentry, mechanics – a lot of it seemed to be self reliance, the determination to improve and not be restricted by lack of money. You did a lot of work yourself and you learnt along the way.

Another family I remember from the old neighbourhood are the Barnards. Fred was a builder who did a lot of work for the Sacred Heart parish. When the Gigacz family bought their property in Sylvester Crescent they were soon in real trouble because the builder went broke so the family were left with nowhere to go. The Barnards lived in Winifred Street and Fred built a lot of houses in St Albans. Anyhow, Fred told John Gigacz not to worry as he would take over the construction for them. That's the way things were – people would pitch in and help.

My father sold the old family home in 1998 and decided to retire to an apartment in the city, where he moved to in 2002. In 2008 he underwent open heart surgery and spent the next decade in very active ways mainly working as a volunteer with St Vincent de Paul and traveling several times on visits to Malta. He died on 3rd April 2018 due to liver cancer at the age of 89 years. His funeral service was held at the Sacred Heart Church.

(Article written by Carmen Hickey née Xuereb, 2018.)



Carmen Xuereb at circus 1950s © Carmen Hickey

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Newspaper advertisement from the 1960s

Virve Kivi

My family came to Australia from Sweden in 1960 on the Kirribilli under the general assisted passage scheme. My parents were Heinrich Kivi and Kyllikki Ihanelma née Hämäläinen and I am Virve Lisbeth Kivi, born in 1954 and five years old when we arrived.



Kivi family en route to Australia 1960 © Virve Curtis



Kivi family en route to Australia 1960 © Virve Curtis

My father was an Estonian war refugee and my mother was Finnish. She and my father had been pen friends and she eventually travelled to Sweden where they married. I'm an adopted child. My birth mother is Finnish and went to Sweden when she discovered that she was expecting – her parents never knew about me – where she remained and eventually married.

We were at Bonegilla for three weeks, then at Maribyrnong Hostel before moving into our tiny weatherboard home at 127 Power Street (near Charles Street) before Christmas of 1960.

As space was not an issue on the Kirribilli, my parents were able to bring a number of larger items to Australia: a television, a treadle sewing machine, my mother's bicycle, and my father's moped which he rode for a few years until we acquired a car. Everything else was bought on hire purchase.

At first we lived with a Finnish family a few house-blocks away, Unto and Helmi Hietala, while our house was being built. I recall the smell of the timber frame and playing there.



Kivi home in Power Street 1960s © Virve Curtis

Although my memories are fragmented and incomplete, certain memories or impressions have remained with me. Our first Christmas was not like the ones I'd had in Sweden. As I recall, I received a brown vinyl school bag and a wooden pencil case and somehow sensed that Christmas was never going to be the same again. I think there were grass fires in the paddocks towards Taylors Road that year.



Kyllikki & Virve Kivi in back yard © Virve Curtis

We had an outdoor toilet and briquette water heater that needed firing up on a daily basis if hot water was to be had. As I recall, the man who made the weekly deliveries of briquettes in his truck was Mr Melbourne who also collected the outdoor toilet pans. Although I lived in fear of the latter occurring at an inopportune moment, it never did.

Other memories include no telephone until many years later and walking everywhere, including the SSW store with my mum wheeling the bicycle, handlebars laden with shopping bags on the return trip. One obvious thing was the lack of trees in St Albans and the western suburbs in general. Walking everywhere in the heat of summer in those days would have been much relieved by some leafy tree canopy! In comparison, Sweden and Finland were prolific in their greenery. I suspect the lack of trees in our new land had a subconscious affect on me as I still have a sense of forlornness about the place. To our delight, in time the SSW stocked foods favoured by Finns including rye bread, pickled herrings, dill cucumbers and salami.



Kyllikki & Virve Kivi at front door © Virve Curtis

Another memory involves the family next door whose two girls often did the laundry. One day the older girl came running to get help as her sister had caught a finger in the clothes wringer. Without a telephone or access to a car, I don't know what mum did but the finger was saved.

Dad built a sauna that had a wood-burning stove and stones on top. We collected the stones from the paddock on the other side of East Esplanade and the Sydenham railway line. Water was thrown onto the rocks for steam but some were volcanic rocks and exploded when heated. In lieu of the traditional birch branch whisks, eucalyptus branches were bound together – the scent was amazing. We had many 'sauna nights' and I find it hard to believe that so many people could fit into our small house.

There were about ten Finnish families living within a few streets of each other in those early years and, as mothers and fathers all worked, everyone helped each other with child minding and the menfolk pitched in and laid the concrete driveways. The names of those I can remember

include Ryhänen, Karvanen, Mäntyvirta, Ristel, Bister and Helenius.

The Ryhänen family had also come to Australia in 1960 and lived near us in George Street. In the early days the two families often got together on Saturday nights and their daughter Merja and I would sit around listening to the adults talk – I have always loved stories of the ‘olden days’. I was intrigued by war stories and grew up knowing something of the fate of Jews. My mother’s father tended towards the ‘reds’ in the civil war of 1918 which is known by many names, including the war of independence. One of mum’s aunts was a member of the all-female unit of the paramilitary Red Guards – if caught, these gun-toting women clad in men’s clothing were shot. I’m told the aunt was very fortunate to survive. I also grew up knowing about the Soviet invasion of Estonia. What is a country to do, capitulate or fight? What was Finland to do? The Western allies were aligned with Stalin and between them carved up Europe. After a short period of peace after the 100 day winter war (1939/1940) the Soviets invaded again in 1941.

Sadly, Merja and her intended, Manfred, died in a car accident around 1982. The other couples in the accident were John Swieboda and his wife Anna, and Mario and Doris who were school friends of Merja. Sadly John and Doris died and as I recall, the two survivors sustained serious injuries.

Dad worked as a machinist at Massey Fergusson for many years until a large number of employees were retrenched around 1970, but he was lucky to find other work. The day my mother went to look for work I was left in the care of Mrs Ryhänen. I’d never been separated from my mother before and ran after her, screaming for her to take me along and was rather smug when she didn’t get work, a situation which quickly changed.



Virve & Kyllikki Kivi in back yard © Virve Curtis

Mrs Ryhänen and my mother worked in many of the same places, including Spencer Street (Southern Cross) Station in the cafeteria, clearing tables and the like, which both women reported was filthy when they started but a different matter when they left. Mum also worked

at Nabisco Biscuits and Tom Piper and her last place of work was the Red Book Carpet factory at Tottenham where she worked the afternoon shift for many years.

I attended the St Albans North primary school from 1961 to 1966. The principal, Mr Blain, was a kindly gentleman who used to hear the kids read aloud in his office. My reading always achieved full marks but I’m sad to say my reading comprehension took longer to develop.



Virve Kivi at St Albans North Primary 1961 © V Curtis

Around 1968 we moved to the other side of St Albans to Orford Street in the new estate east of the high school.¹

Other Finnish families moved to St Albans in the late sixties, but the flow of Finnish migration slowed in the early seventies and some people then eventually returned to Finland, including my daughter-in-law’s maternal grandmother and my parents (1994), who are buried in the cemetery at the Turku Cathedral where mum had been confirmed in the thirties.

Although my family was never involved, many Finns belonged to the Finnish Society of Melbourne. The society was established in 1958 and had a hall in Altona North and, judging by their Facebook page, remains a vibrant and active community.

From the mid-sixties we attended the Finnish Pentecostal Church, which in the early days consisted of a handful of people who lived across Melbourne and had a lot of house meetings. I’m still friends with my childhood friend Raiji née Villstaedt from that time, whose family lived in Nunawading. The parents of my daughter-in-law Rebekah have kept the Pentecostal Church going in Melbourne and whilst its numbers are dwindling, the churches in other cities including Brisbane and Canberra continue to flourish.

I attended St Albans High School from 1967 to 1971 and was Form Captain in 1B. During this time I ‘hung out’ with another Finnish girl, Pirjo “Piipi” Dyser, whose family came to Australia in 1967. We were in the same class until fifth form in 1971 but we lost touch when I left school at the end of that year. Other Finnish kids at the school

¹ The housing development east of the high school was known St Albans Main Estate in the early 1960s and was later known as Sunshine Park.

included Tuula and Merja Helenius, Simo and Timo Hakala, Mervi Mantyvirta, Merja Ryhanen, and Paivi and Anne Tammilehto.



Virve Kivi at St Albans High School 1967 © V Curtis

Regarding the social movements and politics of the sixties, I've always been somewhat conflicted: I gather these movements arose as a backlash against the 'boring' fifties and associated materialism and the Vietnam war. I think that far from being boring, the fifties gave people a sense of stability and normality and I can't say my family was exactly boring.



Miss Landon & Virve Kivi, St Albans High 1971 © V Curtis

A teacher at high school who had a profound effect on me was Miss Landon, whose first name I don't recall ever learning and whom I only had in fifth form. Miss Landon was a Canadian and a fantastic teacher but none too pleased when I left after year 11 (1971) to go nursing!



I started my nursing training at Footscray and District Hospital (now Western General Hospital) which in those days was an on-the-job, three-year course of theory and practice in the hospital nursing school and on the wards. I would like to think that Miss

Landon would be rather pleased that I went on to complete my nursing degree and also some further studies.

As I've looked back over some of the old school magazines, I'm impressed by the literary skills of the contributors, amongst them some former classmates: surely a testament to those teachers who instilled a thirst for learning but also the intelligence and aptitude of the large numbers of students whose first language was not English and did not speak English at home.

Some years ago, a Finnish academic was in Australia doing research on the educational outcomes of the children of Finnish immigrants. My Finnish childhood friend Raija and I were interviewed as part of the project. I received a copy of the findings, but as my Finnish is very rudimentary I didn't get much from it except that educational outcomes of immigrant children are generally very high.

The older I get the more convinced I am that there are fewer than six degrees of separation.

My husband Paul and I moved to Adelaide in 1975 as newlyweds and lived in Bridgewater, in what's known as the hills. We discovered that a friend of ours (Leonie née Carrick) and her three siblings, Noline, John and Wendy, had also attended St Albans High School. Leonie started at the school in 1959 and appears in the class photo of that year. I think I came across the names Ribarow and Szwed in some of the class photos with one or other of the Carrick children.



Leonie Carrick and Virve Kivi c.2000 © Virve Curtis

Leonie's husband Jim is a builder and built our house in Adelaide, where we lived for 14 years and where our three children, Olivia, Nathan and Brendan, were born. All are married and Paul and I have nine grandchildren who are aged between 3 and 18 years.

We returned to Melbourne in 1989 with Paul's work and have lived in Donvale since then. I always managed to get nursing work and it was a given that our children would go to university, which they did: Olivia (who has four children and an ex) completed a BA and later a teaching degree and teaches primary school; Nathan studied chemistry and continues to work in this area but in sales; and Brendan did a double degree in commerce/engineering and

later completed an MBA and continues to work in this area.

My Finnish daughter-in-law Rebekah (née Suomalainen) grew up in Craigieburn but both sets of grandparents lived in Broadmeadows. Her paternal grandparents were very involved in the Finnish society. Rebekah's brother-in-law, Ian (Ismo) Vainikka, is the minister of the Lutheran Church in Melbourne. It is called the Mikael Agricola Finnish Lutheran Church and is the oldest Finnish church in Australia. It was established in 1961 in the aftermath of Finnish immigration into Australia and named after Mikael Agricola, a student of Martin Luther and the father of the Finnish language. I've also read that it's thanks to the church that Finland has had 100 percent literacy for over a century.

My other daughter-in-law (née Rybar) and her family are from Serbia but are of Slovakian ethnicity. Her family moved to Australia about 1990 and settled in the eastern suburbs. Her three siblings were all born in Australia.

In 2010 I made contact with my biological mother and my three half-sisters, and in the following year we all met in Sweden at our mother's house. My son Nathan with Rebekah and their two children were with me and what a surreal and truly amazing gathering it was! Sometimes I wonder what path my life might have taken had we remained in Sweden.

I'm still working in the health area and these days it's for the Australian Government through the Department of Health.

I recently visited our old family friend, Mrs Ryhänen, who still lives in their little weather-board house with its picket fence in St Albans. She is now in her nineties and still has a wonderful memory. The roof of our old house is visible from her place but the former home is unrecognisable although the original concrete driveway remains, albeit crumbling away like my memories of the old place.

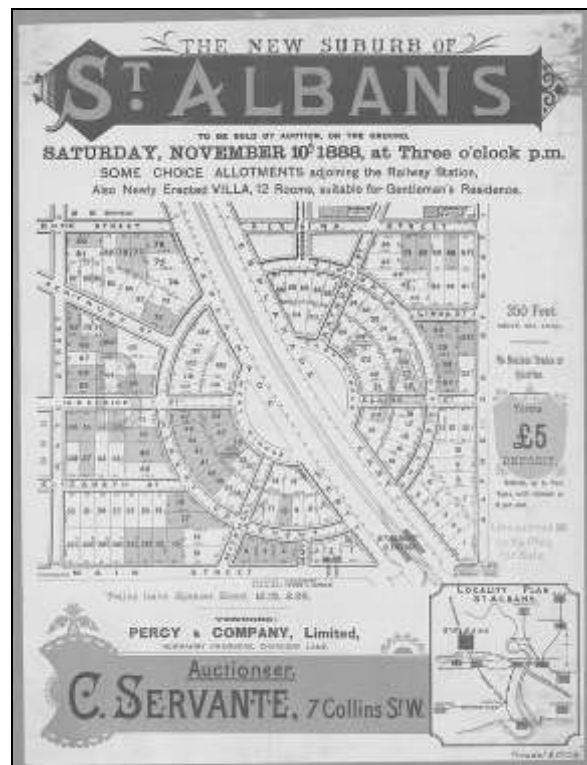
(Article written by Virve Curtis née Kivi, 2018.)



Paul and Virve Curtis with grandchildren © Virve Curtis

Keighlo

Keighlo – pronounced “ki lo” – is one of two surviving properties from the land boom era prior to Federation. It was built in the 1880s for Alfred Henry Padley who was the managing director of the Cosmopolitan Land and Banking Company. Padley was a land boomer who purchased many of the small farms along the railway line and subdivided them for resale as the “New Suburb of St Albans”. Padley's company paid for a railway station to be built and named it St Albans, which is how the neighbourhood acquired its name. Padley's grand manor was meant as a showcase residence for their land speculations but the economic recession of the 1890s intervened and the company went into liquidation.



The New Suburb of St Albans 1888. SLV Dyer collection. <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/131998>

In 1902 Keighlo was bought by John Ellis who was a Melbourne plumbing supplies merchant. He did not stay for long and sold the property to Fred Stenson who lived there for the rest of his life.

Frederick Charles Stenson came from England to St Albans in 1888 to work on his uncle's farm on the Maribyrnong River.¹ He married Eva Leah Shiner of Melbourne and they settled in Biggs Street. Then in 1907 they bought the Keighlo property where they raised four daughters and it was their home for the next 50 years.

Stenson was elected to Keilor council in 1907 and represented the district for 40 years. His work with groups such as the Progress Association,

¹ Refer to chapter in *St Albans Pioneers: Settlers and Speculators from the 1860s*.

the Mechanics Hall Institute, the Anglican Church, the school committee and several other groups meant that he was able to promote the interests of ratepayers in a comprehensive way.

He became involved with the building code especially with regard to housing in St Albans. In 1924 he was instrumental in Council amending the building code for commercial premises to allow timber construction. In 1938 he supported the progressive construction of homes to allow people to live in a partly-built house while the rest of the house was being finished. It was the start of the St Albans bungalows.

Stenson retired from council in 1947 and passed away in 1958. He had sold Keighlo to the Sacred Heart parish and at that stage the once grand home was quite run down. The Catholic Church decided to renovate the manor and use it as their presbytery for the clergy. Fred Barnard carried out the refurbishments and Keighlo is once again the grand showpiece of old St Albans architecture.



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Keighlo in Winifred Street circa 1917

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Keighlo in Winifred Street circa 1950s



Keighlo as Sacred Heart Presbytery 2018



St Albans in the 1950s © Mick Trzaskoma

The Freeland House

This house at 16 Arthur Street is one of two surviving properties from the land boom era prior to Federation. It was probably built in the late 1880s and local history references state that the original property owner was Mrs Clara Clarke. Alfred Henry Padley was the managing director of the Cosmopolitan Land and Banking Company and probably built the house as one of their showpiece dwellings for their land sales. His mother-in-law was Mrs Susanna Clark and Mrs Clara Clark née Tate was his sister-in-law.

A sketch of the facade of the house is included in the St Albans History Society's publication "St Albans the First 100 Years" as one of the district's earliest house designs.

The property was later occupied by James and Emma Blount who ran a wood and coal yard. The family came to St Albans about 1919 and in 1924 they were advertising the property for sale. The property did not sell and was then advertised again in 1926 with grander detail:

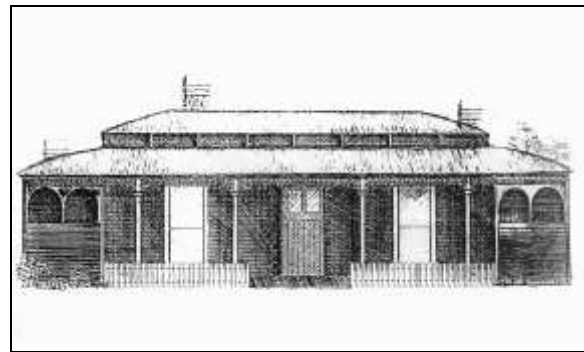
*"Saturday March 13 At 3 o'clock. On The Estate Blount's Electric Estate St. Albans Right Close to St. Albans Railway Station. Substantial D.F. W.B. Villa Residence Containing 6 good rooms, 20 ft. x 14, 11 x 14 ft 6 in., etc.; Bedroom, pantry, cupboards, etc. Extensive Outbuildings Fowl Pens, Cow shed, Buggy shed, Garage, etc.; 8 large Tanks, with land about 1¼ acre; also 12 Choice Building Allotments With Frontages to Arthur, Alfrieda and Alexina Streets. Note.- The property will first be submitted as a whole in one lot. If not sold will then be offered as follows: Villa Residence, with Land, 1¼ acre, and the 12 Allotments Singly. Exceptionally Easy Terms for the property if sold in one lot, ¼ cash deposit balance over 5 years, 6½ per cent. interest. For the allotments £5 deposit per lot. Balance 20/- per month, 6½ per cent interest. This Sale affords investors a great chance to secure subdivisional proposition, or intending home builders an opportunity to select a choice building allotment right close to railway station with direct electric service to Melbourne."*¹

The property became known as "the Freeland house" through oral history tradition. Jack Freeland was one of six children born to Elsie May Scown and John George Freeland who was from Horsham. Jack married Doreen Callanan in 1938 and settled in Moonee Ponds before moving to St Albans in 1949. Jack was a butcher and they had a small piggery in Fox's lane as well as the Arthur Street house. There were at least three daughters: Carmel (1938), Rhonda Doreen (1945), and Yvonne (1946). They must have moved away from the district in the 1950s as Jack Freeland was living in Richmond at that stage.

The Gibson family rented the house and were living there during the WW2 era. They

were a large family who came about 1940 from Sheep Hills in the Woomera; the father was Stanley Robert Gibson who was a motor mechanic and the mother was Evie Schmidt who was the eldest daughter of Mr and Mrs Charles Henry Schmidt of Kellalac. The Gibsons' lease was terminated in 1953 when Freeland was granted an eviction order against them.² The Freelands returned to St Albans and lived there in the 1960s through to the 1980s. At that stage the house was looking somewhat neglected. Nevertheless, Brimbank City Council's Post-contact Cultural Heritage Study identified it as of local historical significance as one of the few surviving buildings which reflects the late nineteenth century development of St Albans.

The property has since been renovated and is now being used for religious purposes as the Chùa Hoàng Pháp Buddhist temple.



Freeland house design – St Albans History Society



Freeland house, Arthur Street³



Chùa Hoàng Pháp Buddhist temple 2018

¹ Sunshine Advocate 13 March 1926

² Sunshine Advocate 25 September 1953

³ Brimbank City Council Post-contact Cultural Heritage Study



Alfrieda Street 1960s © Kon Haumann



St Albans in the 1950s © Kon Haumann



Motorbikes and bungalows © Hannelore Boehm

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