

## Emily Stenson



Emily Leah Stenson was born on June 16, 1904. Her parents were Fred and Eva Stenson (q.v.) of “Keighlo” in Winifred Street. It was the grandest house in St Albans at the time and remained so for many years. Fred Stenson was the longest serving councilor in the district and the whole family<sup>1</sup> was involved with the Anglican Church of St Alban the Martyr, which was only a short distance from home. Her most dedicated contribution to the parish was being in charge of the Guild of the Sanctuary for many years and as a regular church organist, for which she provided a continuous service until 1965.

Emily started at the St Albans Primary School in 1910 and finished in 1919. There were few employment opportunities for young women in the district, but her parents had an orchard and no sons, so it was only natural that Emily and her sisters would work on the family farm. As has been noted by a niece, the Stenson girls worked as hard as any man.

Emily’s great contribution to local history was her involvement with the St Albans Railway Centenary Committee, which was formed in 1986 and published “St Albans The First Hundred Years 1887-1987”. Much of the oral history information for this book came from Emily and her good friend Mary Smith. Emily also shared a number of family photos from the early 1900s, and some of these are now appreciated as “iconic” historical images or early St Albans.



Emily Leah Stenson married Frank Hall in 1942. In 1968 they were living at 182 Williams Street St Albans, near the water tower on the corner of Arthur Street. Frank Hall was from Sydenham. He worked as a labourer and helped out in the family orchard. He has been described as being a “character” who liked to socialise and have a drink or two, but at times these interests clashed, and he was occasionally charged with offensive behavior for his imbibing. You could get fined £2 in default 14 days’ imprisonment for that, so it was not a light punishment. On one such occasion he said he would take the pledge and he was allowed time to pay the fine.

Frank Farrugia remembered him with as a colleague with some fondness:

*Ben Hall from Sydenham was a local character. He was actually Frank Hall, but we called him Ben Hall for obvious reasons. He married Emily Stenson who was one of Fred Stenson’s daughters, and they were all Church of England parishioners and non-drinkers, whereas Ben was a boozier. He would come past our house when we were in George Street to borrow Mrs Stenson’s horse and dray to go to the pub. It was a flat dray with a bench seat and sides. Ben used to go the Keilor hotel and have his drinks. When it was time to head for home the horse knew the way so you would hear this thing coming past and Ben yelling out “Get going!” but when you looked over you couldn’t see anyone in the driving seat – he was lying down in the back.<sup>2</sup>*

Frank Hall died in April 1974 and was buried at the Keilor Cemetery.

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<sup>1</sup> The story of the Stenson family is included in *St Albans Pioneer, Settlers and Speculators from the 1860s*.  
<sup>2</sup> Recollections of Frank Farrugia 2012.



In her later years Emily Hall moved to the Grantham Green Hostel in Kealba. She kept in contact with her church community with the help of carers such as Lorraine Williams who would drive her to the church. Emily Hall nee Stenson died in October 2000 at the age of 96 years and was buried at Keilor. She was said to be the oldest sur-viving original resident of the suburb. Over 80 friends and relatives farewelled her at the St Alban the Martyr church.

The former vicar of the church, the Rev. Stuart Young, shared memories of Emily's life with the congregation.

*When she was 79, people would find Em still in the shed, arms in a chook pellet bin or in the jungle that lay between the shed and her back fence, chasing the chooks, some of which would fly into neighbours' yards – and she would give them 'what-for'. Her trademark saying would be: 'Silly sausage', first to her dog Ruff*

*and then, through the dogs, to you. Mrs Hall was a woman he had got to know, love and respect as a friend, who held a special place in the church and the district. She married at the age of 38 years and six months in 1942, at the height of World War Two. In her kitchen was a rare photograph of the original timber St Alban the Martyr Anglican church, in the building of which her father, Fred Stenson was deeply involved. She was the third of four daughters — and almost the son Fred never had.<sup>3</sup>*

Emily Hall's niece, Gwen Kratsis nee Honey, also had fond memories of her aunt:

*Aunt Em lived alone for many years with her dog and a back yard with chickens. When she worked on the farm in Stenson Road she worked as hard as any man. She loved going to the Senior Citizens Club as a social outing. I would take the children to her house on Saturdays and she would really spoil them. Aunt Em was the last of the Stenson daughters to pass away. She died about 2000 not long after mum. The reverend gave a fantastic ceremony at her funeral as he visited her every week for years and years and knew her like family.<sup>4</sup>*



Emily Hall with niece and nephew © G Kratsis

<sup>3</sup> Unattributed, undated cutting from local paper.

<sup>4</sup> Gwen Kratsis in *St Albans Pioneer, Settlers and Speculators from the 1860s*, 2013, p141.



St Alban The Martyr Church, St Albans, c.1960



Funeral service for Emily Hall, 2000

Article prepared by Joseph Ribarow 2020.  
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