

MARY SMITH nee STEIN



Today is St Patrick's Day in the year 2004 and I am 84 years old. I am going to trace my memory back to 1923 when we came to live in St Albans. The changes that have taken place during the intervening years include the introduction of cars, aviation, telephones, radio, television, and space travel to name a few. I have been asked to do this, as there are few of us left who have spent a lifetime in St Albans and are still well enough to talk about it.

My father, William Ferdinand Stein, was born in Germany. He came to Australia as a young man after he had completed his education. He had heard about the German Lutheran people who had come to the Barossa Valley in South Australia and to the Western District in Victoria. After travelling a bit he settled in Clifton Hill, Melbourne. He married and started a family, two boys and two girls. The First World War ended and he became a British subject as there was no Australian citizenship¹. Naturally there was some remaining ill feeling against the Germans² at the time – understandably - which made employment difficult to obtain. So he

was delighted when he received an offer of employment from the expanding agricultural factory of H. V. McKay at Sunshine.

My father may have been delighted, but it was quite a shock to my mother, who had just come home from hospital with a new baby. She was used to the modern amenities available in the inner suburbs. Her new home was a run-down cottage on a goat farm in Biggs Street without any amenities in the house or the area. The washing was done in a bucket over some stones and a fire in the back yard. The goats ate everything, even the baby's washing. Mother found it very difficult, she hated it, but later as the accommodation improved she loved St Albans.

Early Settlement

My father in his travels had met the Clarke family and was very interested in their settlement. In the early days large grants of land were given to free settlers in reward for exploration or other things they had done to contribute to the settlement of this strange land. There were two families in this category in this area, the Clarkes, and the Taylors.

The Clarkes had settled on a grant of land and built a fine house naming it Rupertswood. It is now a Catholic college.

The Taylors had a property at Keilor and built a castle, naming it Overnewton. It is still a private residence and a reception centre with a small chapel that was brought from England when the castle was built.

Both of these families played a big part in the development of the area and they were well respected. Sir William Clarke (son of the original settlers) became a wealthy businessman and Sir Rupert Clarke (grandson) a member of parliament.

William Taylor at Keilor was a councilor for years. He was also Shire President and a Justice of the Peace.

My father was amazed on visiting the Clarkes to see the fortifications. Apparently they were afraid the French or the Russians might also want to settle in Australia.

Always on the ready, they had their own army and were very proud of the special repeating gun, called the Gattling Gun. Surely you would realise this would be of little use in such vast lands?

Farmers

For the land to progress the people needed food and for that they needed farmers. So the Government passed the Farmers Land Settlement Act. This enabled the Government to buy back the land from the private owners of these large land holdings and settle farmers who were prepared to work the land on the smaller subdivisions. A number of these smaller farms were

¹ Australian citizenship was introduced on 26 January 1949.

² The Anti-German League was active in Melbourne suburbs, and children as well as adults of German background were victimised whether or not they were German nationals.

established in the area to become St Albans, in different parts later known as Taylors Road, Biggs Street, Main Road, Kings Road, and McIntyre Road. Some of the farmers who settled first were Phil Hill, Peter Anderson, James McAuley, Jonathan Boyd, Malcolm King, Les King, James Stevens, and Farquhar McRae. Most of these grazed sheep and cattle, others were crop or grain farmers, and several were dairy farmers.

Stevens and McRae became local councilors. Mr Stevens was a lay preacher and had a small business in the city, so when necessary he employed English migrant farmers until his sons could take over.

The whole of St Albans to Albion and Ballarat Road was under crops or grains, slowly disappearing on the Sunshine side, where Industries was taking over.

Farmers who came later to St Albans included Mr Philip Rohan (dairy farmer), Mr Herbert Laurie (poultry farmer), Mr Henry Griffiths, Mr James Eddie (sheep, he was a councillor), Mr George Scullie (grazing), Mr Henry Coleman (grazing), the Sassella brothers (grazing), Mr Cyril Clements (pig farmer), and Mr Gordon Calder (orchardist).

Cosmopolitan Land Company

The Cosmopolitan Land Company came to St Albans and built 10–12 houses in different streets. There were no made streets, only on paper. They were in Theodore, Biggs, Arthur, West Circus, and Winifred streets.

The largest house was for the manager of the company, Mr Padley; it stood on a large block of land. It also had a grand garden and only tank water, so a reservoir was built on a low spot of land in Theodore Street, this was to water his garden only. Even in the dry summer no cattle were allowed this until Mr Padley shifted when the company failed. The house was called Keighlo.

Only two of these houses stand today. Keighlo in Winifred Street is now owned by the Catholic Church.

After Mr Padley left, a Mr Stenson bought it, later his nephew Mr Fred Stenson. He also bought land in Biggs Street on the Maribyrnong River and was an orchardist. The other property was owned by Mrs Clara Clark, later by Mr James Blount, who ran a wood and coal yard. It is now owned by Mrs Freeland.

My Memories

Up to this point the knowledge was passed on to me from my father, who was interested about the settlement of St Albans and spent the last 20 years of his life here. My memories start in the early school years. The farmers' families and the town families all became my friends; we all knew each other. We also depended on each other to a degree. That's how small towns are.

The town consisted of a small railway station with two sidings, a quarry, two small wooden shops, a small boot repair shop, two churches, a three-roomed timber school, a Mechanics Institute Hall, a small timber yard, ten to twelve larger houses, and a number of smaller houses on large blocks of land. The total population was about 200.

Later a greengrocer shop started and a butcher shop owned by Mr Irons. Three houses were built by the railways to accommodate their staff.

Perretts General Store

in 1932 that Mr John Perrett was running the General Store. This was one of the original two wooden shops. It was a General Store in every sense of the word. There was sawdust on the floor to prevent the mud from sticking. It had a cellar to keep the dairy produce cool. This was just behind the right-angled counter. Steps led to the lower floor with its many shelves. (No ice or refrigeration those days.)

On the verandah of the residence where the Perretts lived was a public telephone that anyone in the district could use. On the adjoining block was the horse yard, also the cart for deliveries. A big storage shed held chaff and straw etc for animals, chook food, or anything in that line that was required. There was also a wood and coal yard. Deliveries were done twice a week.

The shop itself housed the agency for the Commonwealth Bank, the Post Office, a news agency, and as John Perrett was a Justice of the Peace it also served as his office.

They stocked all kinds of groceries and small goods and dairy produce.

Everything came in bulk those days and had to be weighed and packed. This was done between customers. To weigh everything, he had a large set of scales. It consisted of a box at the bottom, a middle rod and balancing arm with a tray on each arm. There were numerous weights of

different sizes; these were of iron. The weights would counterbalance the weight of the goods required.

One day there was an attempted robbery. Mr Perrett let fly with some weights and the robbers took off.

They stocked small hardware items such as mops, brooms, brushes of different types, buckets, billies, etc. The smaller of these hung from the roof on hooks (as was the fashion). At Christmas these were moved over to make way for some small toys and Christmas stockings.

Mr Perrett, who did the deliveries while his wife Elizabeth minded small son Eric and the shop, died early in life. He was thrown out of the cart when the horse bolted. Eric took over the business with the help of a young lad, Bob White, and later his wife.

When my mother wanted butter she would send my brother or me with a big billy and a wet tea towel.

You never paid cash. You were billed and paid weekly. The man of the house would be paid on Friday. Earlier it was Wednesday, but in quite a few cases he went off to the pub on Friday and the bills never got paid. The union encouraged the employers to change payday to Friday. (No women were not allowed to work.³) It was a social occasion, the men would all meet for a chat. On paying the bill you would be given a bag of sweets, boiled lollies. We would always look forward to Friday nights.

The Perrett family were well respected and joined in the social life. They would go any distance to deliver any urgent phone calls. They will be remembered for their generosity during the days of the depression or days of ill health. They knew everyone and if for a good reason you could not pay your weekly bill they never refused you groceries, you just billed them. There were quite a few people who never ever settled their account.

Mr Perrett bought land in the area and later built several shops. They had only one son, John, who is still living in Alfrieda Street. He had a pharmacy in Main Road West for many years but is now retired. Eric was a Justice of the Peace.



Mrs Magee's Shop

The second shop, Mrs Magee small weatherboard shop sold block cake, biscuits, lollies, some haberdashery, tobacco, cigarettes, etc. Capstan cigarettes were a popular brand; ten came in a cardboard packet. Havelock tobacco was also popular, with a packet of papers, Most rolled their own. Pipe tobacco came in a hard square block. You cut or shaved it off with a pocket knife and filled the bowl of the pipe. Few shops in the country sold cigars, and few men smoked them. We children would buy our father one for Xmas. Mrs Magee would also boil a workman's billy or cut him a cheese sandwich, etc.

³ Up to WWII the norm was that Australian women would do paid work only until they married, after which they took on the full-time role of housewife and mother.

Later this shop was sold to the Self girls. They were good cooks and sold home-cooked pies, cakes, scones, and sausage rolls. It was the start of the Self family's venture into business.

The greengrocery was first owned by Mr Osborne 'Hobbie' Wilson, and later by Mr C Hasset. The bootmaker was Mr James Dunne. The butcher was Mr Irons.

Mr Seton Carr and Mr Charles Dennis made boots from the house in Victoria Crescent. They measured your foot for length and width and made them on a shoe last and a large boot-sewing machine.

Self Brothers and Goddard

As St Albans progressed Mr Lewis Self came to St Albans to manage at the quarry. He lived with his family in the manager's cottage at the quarry (nothing special). He had only been there a few years when he was badly injured in an explosion. It took him a long time to recover. He then had a family of three girls and a boy; two more boys came later. Then the two eldest girls bought Mrs Magee's shop.

When Mr Self recovered a little, he knew he would never be able to do that heavy quarry work again and therefore had to do something different. This did not deter him but encouraged him to explore other occupations that he was able to cope with. He decided to build a shop. He also required a residence for the family.

He first bought a couple of blocks of land opposite the station, a short distance from the Mechanics Hall in East Esplanade.

There were many empty houses in the Walmer Coleman Estate, the reason for this is the depression. So he bought one of these, had it shifted to his land, and he and Norman built a shop. (This compared in size with the other three or four shops.) This first shop was a lolly and cake shop. Shortly afterwards he decided to divide this shop into two - one side groceries, the other as it originally was. Marjory and Mr Self ran this shop.

Another few years went by. Mr Self could see the population was slowly growing and a bigger shop was needed. A larger shop was built more of a general store. Edna was always an ill girl passed away in her early twenties. Marj and Bernice looked after the shop and Mr Self did the deliveries.

The two boys Norman and Dudley started a wood, coal and coke ice round, also ice. You had to get up at 4 a.m. in the morning, drive to Maidstone, queue up to get the ice for the house deliveries. Everyone wanted a modern ice chest.

Meantime Marj married a man who ran a small greengrocer shop in front of a house in Victoria Crescent. He mainly relied on home deliveries. to the farmers. His name was Mr Johnson

All was going well; business was good so there was some thought of a bigger shop. To do this Mr Self's house had to be shifted also Norman's who had got married to make way for the future business and with cars now becoming popular you had to have a car park

Firstly, he bought the petrol pump from Mr Hounslow's small carpentry shop and moved it to the footpath in front of the shop. As was the custom in those days, the cars would pull up in the gutter to get the petrol. The larger shop, a supermarket, was built.

All the family was involved. The boys sold the wood, briquettes and coal round to Mr Frank Marshal. Soon refrigeration was with us, so no need for ice.

The Selfs' supermarket had the largest refrigeration area of a privately owned store in Victoria. This was the time when Coles and Woolworths went into groceries. To combat this, the smaller stores all clubbed together to buy in bulk to match their prices. So big store warehouses were built and the grocers would buy from them, such as SSW (Self Service Wholesalers) whom Selfs dealt with.

Bernice married Alf Goddard, a very clever young local fellow. He not only helped build the shop but helped with the design of the elevators, etc, to take goods from the ground floor to the upstairs storerooms.

Marj retired and shifted to Maidstone with their sons to help her husband, who now was a part-owner of the ice works with his two brothers.

Selfs became Self Brothers & Goddard. The European migration population was having a big effect on the St Albans businesses.

Norman managed the stores and produce, Lance the office, and Dudley the running of the floor area. Drivers were employed for the deliveries. Elsa Fry (my sister) saw that all the shelves were full and priced correctly. Bernice was in charge of the registers and Mr Self would sit in his wheelchair to see all ran smoothly.

Alf Goddard lost his life early in a water-skiing accident at 36 years leaving a family of three girls and a boy. It was a sad loss to the family and the company.

Self Brothers & Goddard were the first to sell petrol in the area. They were the first supermarket in the area. Also the first to realize the many migrants of many countries wanted the foods they were accustomed to. He soon got on to the importers and stocked the shelves plentifully with those continental goods. People came from far and wide to shop at Selfs.

Self Brothers & Goddard had a large staff and employed cleaners, register girls, office girls, delivery men, store men and girls,

The family mixed with people socially. They also played tennis and other social sports. Bernice was a lovely piano player and played for all occasions, especially for calisthenics. They freely contributed to charity or any public function.

Mr Self passed away. The third generation were gradually coming into the business. Norman, Dudley and Marj passed away. There is only Lance now and he lives in Queensland.

From a very small sweets shop to a thriving business in a few years.



The Railway Crossing

The railways ran a steam train to Sunbury, later Bendigo. They made a crossing at St Albans by opening up the fence. They also made a road from east to west. They built a small wooden platform and a signal box. Prior to this you had to flag the train either way if you wanted to get on. There was a steam train service for a very short while.

In 1926 the electric train came to St Albans and wooden railway gates were placed on the crossing, not because of the traffic but to save the wandering stock and cattle from being killed.

A new station platform and signal box were built on the north-west side, opposite the old one. Also a new platform. This was a bad mistake. It should have been an island station. Every time the train came into the platform the gates had to be opened and closed, holding up the traffic by closing the road for the train to go an extra hundred yards across the road.

When a country train was going through, the electric train would have to shunt up the line for a short while and change lines back on the other platform. If you wanted to catch the train you would have to go to the west side to get a ticket and run back to the east side to get onto the train. Finally they realised this as the population was growing. In 1968 an island station was built and the gates only had to be operated for country trains.

In 2000 the electric rail line was extended three miles north and once again we have the problem of this rail crossing. They are still fighting to get the station underground but the cost of this seems to be a problem. They have been protesting for twenty to thirty years.

As a child I had to have a tonsil operation, times were bad. We went by train and had to return by train and go to a friend's place on the opposite side of the station where my father would pick me up and carry me home.

On returning to St Albans, I was pretty sick and my mother could hardly get me out of the train, let alone get across the line and up the road. No travellers to help. In desperation my mother asked the train guard for help. He took a look at me, a big lass, and said "Wait a minute". He spoke to the signal man and the driver, then came back and said get back on the train. They shunted the train up the line towards Biggs Street, but only as far as the crossing near the school so that Mum only had to cross the road carrying me. We struggled home from there, still quite a distance. Fancy that occurring today. A first and last occasion.

Churches

There were two churches. The Church of England was in East Esplanade. It was a wooden building that burnt down and rebuilt. It was on a large block of land and there was a Manse on the property.

They also ran our early kindergarten from there. The country children would leave their horses in the grounds and cross over the line to school.

The Presbyterian Church was another wooden building that was in The Circle. There was a tennis court behind the church where they later built a small hall for Sunday School.

There were no other churches built until the migration era. The two Beck sisters who were teachers held Catholic instructions for children at their house.

School



Mary Stein (with "x" in centre) St Albans State School 1928

Another memory was when the Duke and Duchess of York, the now Queen's mother and father, were paying a state visit to Melbourne and the large country towns on their way to Bendigo.

The school was notified, and we were all assembled on the area in front of the school near the rail line with our flags. When the train slowed down to pass by the Duke and Duchess were standing and waving on a platform built on the back carriage. They must have been quite weary at the end of that journey.

We were also given a flag badge for Federation Day on 24 May.

I suppose our most enjoyable day was our Combined Sports Day. All schools of the Keilor Shire competed at the Keilor sports ground. (St Albans had two teams as it was the largest school.) The other teams were from Sydenham, Sydenham North, Keilor, and Tullamarine. We were taken to Keilor in private cars and competed in all the athletic sports. We were marched in school lots to Keilor Hall for lunch - lots of cakes, sandwiches, and cordial. In the evenings our parents attended a dance to raise money for the school. We also had lovely Christmas parties, including a tree with a small gift for all the children. Speech and prize nights were also held in the St Albans Hall.

There were only two secondary schools between St Albans and Melbourne. One was Williamstown High School, and the Sunshine Technical School built by H V McKay to help encourage apprentices.

Mechanics Institute Hall

The Mechanics Institute Hall was in East Esplanade. The first hall was a wooden one and it burnt down and was replaced. There was only the one hall for years and it was the center of all our entertainment. It had several rooms in front used for a baby health centre and a library, and it could also be used for other Voting was held in the hall, also private parties.

The Catholic community was using it for services, firstly once a month and later weekly. The altar and seating were set up by my mother, Elsa, and me, later by the Gavaghan family.

Meetings were held in the hall. One group was the St Albans Progress Association, a group of businessmen and workers of the district. They worked extraordinary hard. We have to thank them for many of our early amenities

Later, films were shown in the hall and a projection box was built especially for this purpose.

Town Farrier

The town farrier was the man who shod horses. Jim Hutson of Arthur Street was a farrier. He ran his business from a blacksmith shop in his back yard near Taylors Road. Cars were scarce and we depended on horses for transport and farm use. He worked for H V McKays, later for Ralph McKay, making plough shares during the week. He had a coal-fired forge for shaping horseshoes. He also repaired farm implements. We liked to watch him in his leather apron trimming the horse's hooves and placing the red-hot horseshoes on the hooves to get the shape on the anvil.

Mr King the milk man would bring his horse to Jim after he had finished his round. Mr King lived in Kings Road. Jim had his smithy in Arthur Street. Certainly, both of these are near Taylors Road but two miles apart. After the horse was shod, Jim would take the horse out of the yard, at a given time to be sure there were no trains when the horse crossed the rail lines and let him go. All that was needed was for Mr King to have the gate open and a bale of chaff nearby. The horse never once strayed.

Quarry

The quarry was near the present southern end of the present railway station. The manager's house was near the line. The actual quarry hole was where the small soccer ground stands. It had its own loading rail line. There were lots of quarries in the area: St Albans, Sunshine, Sydenham, Melton, and Rockbank. The area stands on a bed of bluestone.

Mr Self was the last manager of the quarry. He was badly hurt in an explosion and never worked as such after. He couldn't earn a living for a long time and later went into business.

When you got off the train you could see for miles the bluestone walls around the properties. These were good fences at no cost, only time and labour. They were freestone walls, one stone placed upon another. The farmers had trouble with the hunters. They were after rabbits who liked to the walls to hide from the ferrets. The hunters would then pull the wall down to get the rabbit, and the cattle could out the poor farmer would then have to chase the cattle and rebuild the walls. Rabbits were a large part of our diet during the depression. Their skins were dried on a triangular wire frame and sold for felt hats.

Bluestone blocks were used for building houses and many of the early big churches, public buildings, also hotels. These were made of bluestone square spalls. This was a very hard trade; it was done with large spalling hammer. The Melbourne town hall and the cathedrals are built of blue stone. Crushed bluestone is used for rail lines and roads.

Errington Reserve

The rail crossing (Main Road) was built it ran right through the Errington property on the east side. This was cut in two. Later the family gave the area on the Sunshine side to the people of St Albans for a sports and recreation ground. It was first managed by a small number of businessmen, later the council took it over. Firstly it was just a paddock fenced by a wire fence; and later a fine sports ground. A fine set of memorial gates made of bluestone were erected with a sandstone memorial plaque; unfortunately, the words carved on this have weathered and are now not legible. I feel it was about 1939. I remember when they were opened. I was at a gymkhana to celebrate the occasion and was about 16 years old. There are three fine tennis courts also a fine oval for football, cricket etc, a tennis club house, a scouts hall facing Percy Street, and the community hall known as the Tin Shed. This ground was used for many things: bazaars, music or band concerts, carols, fetes, etc.

A story worth being told I feel is about 8-10 years ago. McDonalds fast food chain offered the Council a high price to take over the tennis court section on the corner of Percy Street and Main Road East for fast food. The Council was in favour of it. They would build flash new courts over near the pub on the soccer ground. The St Albans History Society heard of this and contested it. They wisely suggested another site for Maccas and won the case. This sort of victory is rather rare.

Roads and Streets

At first the only properly made, sealed roads in St Albans were in Percy Street alongside Errington Reserve, and no more were made for quite a while. The English migrants who built larger houses in Percy Street applied to the council and were granted their request in 1930 at the price of constructing the road. The general road in the area was plowed and formed. Rough metal was spread in this and rolled over continually by a heavy steam roller. These surfaces were so hard on

the occasional car or horse and cart, the driver preferred to go either side. In winter the area each side became a very rough and rutted area.

During the depression councils were asked to give the unemployed some casual work in making roads. The men worked on these schemes for a few weeks for vouchers and handouts. There was a deal of bickering in such schemes, some of it very humiliating, so much so that an unemployed bank manager took his life, leaving behind a wife and five children.

The only subdivision before the Depression was Pommy Paddock, an area in Main Road West opposite the Spastic Society [Scope]. This was settled by English migrants; they were referred to as whinging Poms. Next came the Pinnacle Estate, which was the dream estate of Walmer Coleman. There were no other subdivisions for about twenty years.

The only road from St Albans to Sunshine was McIntyre Road. Later came the Sunshine–St Albans Road. Both are now extremely busy arterial roads.

Pinnacle Estate

Between the First World War and the Depression there was a land boom. Farmers' land was subdivided into streets with posts and street signs, and pegged out into housing lots; these covered large areas. One of these was the McKechnie property from Walmer Avenue to McIntyre Road.

Mr Walmer Coleman bought a number of these blocks and built his dream estate, the Pinnacle Estate. He built about forty houses over a number of streets: some in Walmer, Millawa, Oberon, Station, Vincent, and McArthur. He built weatherboard houses, The cost of the land was almost as expensive as the cost of the weatherboard house. These were quite modern and were financed by the State Savings Bank of Victoria. (Not any more.) The houses had three bedrooms, a large kitchen, lounge, passag, inside bathroom, and a laundry built on the back of the house. There was an outside toilet. The bathroom had a white enamel bath and hand basin. The washhouse had a wood-fuelled, bricked-in copper, and a pair of cement wash-troughs also known as tubs. The kitchen had an enamel sink and a wooden draining board. There were no lights, no water, no built-in cupboards, no drainage, and no streets (only on the plan). But they did build tree guards and plant trees where the roads were to be built. The cattle knocked the tree guards down, the trees died because no one could spare the water in summer to water them. When it rained the streets became heart-break streets.

The Pinnacle Estate was a nice modern settlement. Nettlefolds were bringing workers out from England to work for them. A lot bought these on a small deposit and monthly repayments. They had a few years of pleasure, and then the Depression came. They lost their jobs and could not find another, and they had to walk out of their houses because they could not keep up the payments.

The fences fell down, and the sheep and cattle used the properties for shelter. They shared them with the swagmen. A lot of the blocks of land had also been sold. The land salesmen toured Victoria with glossy pamphlets selling these blocks to the farmers as an investment. They also lost them. The council sold a lot of these blocks for the back payment of rates. Some of the houses were sold after the war for £300 for house and land.

We rented one of the houses for about ten years. It was only a short run to the station to go to work across the paddocks. On Sundays we would climb on the fence and look to the station to see if our visitors were coming. There was nothing between the station and Walmer Avenue but paddocks. The mushrooms grew well in the paddock. The first house was one lonely bungalow built by the first migrant.



Electricity

In 1930, electricity came to a limited area of St Albans. Street lights were a real luxury. We were able to go out at night without falling over a bluestone boulder. No more kerosene lamps. And electric stoves—at last we could have a meal without heating the house in summer.

Rarely did we go out before at night. One time my mother, sister, and I were returning from a yearly outing when my mother injured her foot on a big boulder. At eight years of age I had to find my way home in the dark and bring my father back with a hurricane lantern to get us home.

Another incident occurred one evening when we had an old lady visitor. My father told my brother to take the lantern and see her home. As a fourteen-year-old my brother hated this sort of task. It was not long before he was back, so Dad said, 'Why are you back so quickly?' He replied, 'I got a bit ahead and she fell over a cow. I wasn't going to help her up.' Dad wasn't impressed and was annoyed that he had to find her and see her home. (A true story.)

Water

Water was always a problem for the St Albans as the township and the farmers relied on tank water. The farmers had a dam for the cattle and most had an underground well for the household. This kept the water cold. The houses mostly had two tanks made of galvanised iron' especially the rented premises. On a hot, dry summer, people even though they were very careful and economical in bathing, washing, etc, ran out of water. The women could wash the clothes only once or twice a week. The water would then be used for baths, then to wash the floors, and after that on any garden that we would be lucky enough to have.

One of the farmers realised the people's plight so he devised a mobile water tank. Every country town had a water pipe and stand at a handy spot in town; nearby was a water trough for the animals, especially the horses.

Mr James McAuley, a farmer of Taylors Road, placed a large square iron tank on top of a flattop lorry drawn by two horses. He would fill up at a price, cart the water to the householder, and fill their tanks. The price was 30 shillings (\$3) a load, which was nearly a week's wages.⁴

Some relief came when a water tower was built on the road to Keilor [corner of Arthur and William streets]. The reason for this spot was it was the highest spot in the town. St Albans was very flat. The tower stood about opposite where the elderly citizens hall now stands.

The tower was of metal and quite high for the fall to let water run. Eight galvanized tanks stood on a metal table on top of the stand.

It served the people of growing population for only a limited time. After the population explosion of the European migration, water was once again a headache. In 1970 a large modern water supply was built off Taylors Road.

Sydenham Radio Tower

The radio transmission tower for 3JO and 3AR was built on the McAuley property on the corner of Taylors and Sydenham roads. There was a house and work area in the one building.

The tower was quite revolutionary. It's made of steel and is 650 feet high. The base stands on a steel ball, which replaces the need for a very wide base. It moves a little with the wind but handles it better. There is a safety light on top for the safety of aeroplanes. It was built by Kelly and Lewis of Dandenong. My brother, Alf Stein, helped to machine the base. It was considered quite an engineering feat. You can see it for miles.

Quarter Mile Bridge

The Quarter Mile Bridge was built pre the Second World War as an alternative rail route going north. It is only a railway bridge. Previously all trains heading north had to go through the closely populated areas of Essendon and Moonee Ponds. The bridge was used extensively during the war. A man lost his life in the construction of the bridge. It crosses the Maribyrnong River at the end of Main Road East. (Approximately.) We children loved to walk down there, have a swim in the river, and play under the bridge. There is a sound walkway built under the decking of the bridge. We would dare each other to be under there as the train passed overhead. The bridge is said to be higher above the water than the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

⁴ It is not clear which year this refers to. In 1920 the average weekly wage for male adults in Victoria was £4/6/- with annual increments rising to £4/18/- in 1925.

Progressing

This is probably a good point in my story to mention how the early farmers, their families, and early settlers contributed to the town's amenities.

Mrs Errington made a big gesture with her gift of land that is now a very fine sports and recreation area, known as Errington Reserve.

Mr Les King was a dairy farmer who also donated land at the breaking up of his property, which became the Kings Park Reserve sports ground. It has an indoor bowls hall, football and cricket grounds, and a club house. Mr King was always interested in local football.

Mrs Stevens donated land for a hospital. This was not big enough, so a Spastic Society home and workshop was built there.

Cyril Clements, a Kings Park farmer, also donated land for recreational use.

Mr Clarke of Biggs Street was a businessman who built a residence and mens and boys wear shop. He was the owner of a Padley house. He ran a club where you paid a fee each week and could have any clothes when needed.

The Stevens family were in Main Road West. They owned land in East Esplanade, so quickly built a timber yard and hardware shop. You could also pay as you built. This helped the big demand for part houses at the time of European migration. The Stevens family also had real estate in Main Road and a furniture store in East Esplanade. They also became builders and built quite a few houses.

The Boyd-Knowles family started two shops in Main Road East. Mr Knowles was an estate agent and his son Jim also became an estate agent. Daughter May Stevens built flats.

The Knowles family built and ran a reception place on the corner of Arthur and Alfrieda streets. Mrs Knowles did the cooking, and the sons and daughters formed a band that played the music.

Eric Perrett built several shops. He had the general store during the Depression years when many people could not afford to pay for their groceries. He billed them and many never paid these bills, but no one was left without their groceries.

John Perrett established a chemist shop

Self Brothers & Goddard built four shops in all from a very small to large supermarket. They were the first to have refrigeration and were the first to stock a large quantity and range of foods for all nations. They also employed quite a lot of local workers.

Mrs Lorna Cameron contributed to the community centre for approximately fifty years.

Sorry if I've omitted anyone, but my age should excuse me if I have.

The Depression Years

The Depression years were difficult for people all over the world, and we were not spared. Men of all trades, labourers and professionals, lost their jobs and became unemployable even though most were prepared to do anything. Consequently, Australia had swagmen and hawkers.

The hawker was a man or woman who went from house to house with a case, small cart, or even a pram, selling almost anything: clothing, haberdashery, liniments, salves, etc. In St Albans we had an old lady (or so she appeared to me) who pushed a pram full of small goods. She walked from St Albans to Melton and back, camping at night in a farmer's shed or in a clump of bushes. Everyone knew 'Old Lil'.

When a man lost his job (women were not allowed to work) and if he could not afford to pay rent or to make the payments on a house, many became swagmen. Sometimes they moved in together to help each other, and the men took to the road. A man would take his swag: a rolled blanket, frypan, a small pot or billy, and a plate and mug of enamel or tin. He would head for the country and walk for hours and miles and call on the farmhouses looking for work. He would cut a week's wood for a feed and a sleep in the farmer's shed. He would do any casual or seasonal work for a very meager return.

The men lined the streets outside factories in case a job was vacant. Day after day. No employment offices or dole as we know it. There were a few jobs created cutting trees in the forest. Men lived in camps, in huts that included married and single quarters.

The councils were asked to make roads and employ a few men for a few weeks. They made these roads by manual labour, using wheelbarrows, picks, and shovels. It was hard work but men were very anxious to get a few bob. A lot of competition caused ill feelings. One man, a bank manager, was so humiliated he took his own life, leaving a wife and four children.

The husband or wife would line up once a week for a handout: a few groceries, men sometimes got an army jacket or a pair of trousers. No money anytime, or free medical care, or

medicines. This ended just as the war started. Really, the coming of the war made work, and of course the services took the men.

Recreation

We only had the one sports ground and that was the Errington Reserve in the early years. We had our football, cricket, and tennis. To swim we would walk or ride our bike or horse three miles down Biggs Street to the Maribyrnong River. Walk down and later up the steep. During the depression years this was a popular area for our weekend entertainment. It was a lovely spot shaded by trees. There also were trees hanging over the river to swing from or dive off. We would take lunch, also light a fire between some stones to boil a billy or throw some small spuds (small potatoes) into the hot coals to cook.

Mr Stenson's orchard was nearby. The boys would I'm sorry to say raid his orchard for apricots. Stolen fruit is always sweetest.

The first swimming baths were built at Footscray in the thirties. Later a pool was built at Sunshine, and then [1971] the one at St Albans.

Cricket was also played on Sundays. Our popular station master and his son both played, and they were both named Del Kennedy. There were only four trains on Sunday, so Mr Kennedy was able to play cricket. If he was batting when the train blew its whistle he would run the short distance to carry out his duties, and young Del would take over the batting.

Social Life in the Thirties

Growing up we enjoyed the school life: concerts, bazaars, fancy dress balls, etc. As we became teenagers there were dances at the St Albans hall. We had two very good piano players who would play for a very small fee. We would also travel to country dances in nearby towns like Sydenham, Keilor, Diggers Rest, and Sunbury. We would go together in groups, sharing a ride with anyone who had a car. We were quite happy to contribute for the cost of petrol. Mr Self had a large Studebaker car and he would lend it to his son Norman. He always had a very full load. No seatbelts in those days.

We danced until the dot of midnight. Then everyone would stop and stand on the spot while the English national anthem was played. The ladies would then provide a lovely, home-cooked supper.

Films were shown in the hall, usually week nights. My brother helped with the projector. This was specially built on for that purpose.

The Tin Shed

This was a small Quonset or Nissen hut with a round roof, an ex-army building. Constable Dave Power from Sunshine Police applied for and was granted permission to purchase this hut and erect it on Errington Reserve. He founded the St Albans Boys Club. The first President was Des Hutson. This hut burnt down, so a larger one was purchased. The St Johns Ambulance also used the hut, but I'm not sure which one. They were led firstly by Joan Patterson and later by the Knowles boys.

The new hut later had a bluestone front. It became a community hall and is still used as such. now 50 years on.

There is a side story ... My husband Eric worked with a colleague who, knowing Eric lived in St Albans, wanted to buy a block of land and build a house. This was soon arranged by a visit to Miss McKechnie. The man was Jack Cameron. With growing boys, Jack and the boys joined the football club. Lorna was interested in most things. Jack opened a toy shop in Main Road East. He was also a traveller for a toy company. He was killed in a car accident in life. Lorna Cameron worked for the school library for a while. She has always had an interest in anything connected with St Albans, but her life's interest has been the Tin Shed.

War Years

We had hardly recovered from the depression years when World War Two was declared. I remember that day clearly. My brothers, their girlfriends, and I all attended a dance in Sydenham on the Saturday night. On the Sunday we were listening to the new Console radio I had bought for my parents when the program came to a sudden halt.

An operator said, "We will now hear a special report from Australia's Prime Minister, Mr Menzies." Silence. Then ... "As the Prime Minister of Australia it is my very sad duty to announce that England has declared war with Germany. So now Australia is in a state of war."

It went on for six years. All our boys joined up and the girls in the land army, also as drivers for the military, etc.

The 8th Army soon sailed for England to fight in Crete and Greece. Also in the desert. Later to come back to Australia to join the forces fighting the Japanese up north. We all had someone in the forces, and many lives were lost.

My brothers both joined the navy. One was on HMAS Shropshire, the other on HMAS Westralia. At the end of the war he sailed to Japan to the signing of the peace treaty.

We at home worked seven days a week doing war work. We worked for the Red Cross rolling bandages, knitting socks and jumpers for the services, helping to pack food parcels, and saving our hard-earned money to buy War Bonds.

When our boys went off to war at eighteen, some at sixteen, we gave them a lovely send off. The council gave them a fountain pen, hoping they would write. If they were lucky to make it, we also welcomed them back.

I married during the war, as many of my friends did. Most stayed after marriage with their parents as there was very limited access to other accommodation. I was lucky. An acquaintance of my parents had a daughter and son-in-law who were both overseas. The daughter was a nurse, the son-in-law a prisoner of war in Germany. They wanted a young couple to look after their house. My husband was not medically accepted as a soldier as he'd previously broken a leg and it was left badly twisted, causing a limp. (No good for marching.) He worked at war work. So we were happy to look after the house and garden. The owner was Archie Noble from Sunshine. He was always known as an entertainer, a good musician. While a prisoner of war he was one of those who worked on digging the escape tunnels. He returned home later, but I'm sorry I have not heard of him since.

We hoped that World War One was the war to end all wars. It was followed by World War Two, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Desert Storm in Afghanistan, and now the war in Iraq. Australian troops have participated in all of these wars.

Life was settling down as the boys came home after the war. Their jobs were supposed to be waiting for them, but this did not always happen. A rather difficult situation I suppose. Some of the firms who employed the boys subsidised the wages to make up any loss of pay through joining the services. After returning home many went back to classes to learn a trade. Quite a few became carpenters and built their own houses.

We started building our own house. Everything was difficult to get at first, so it was a pretty drawn-out job. A builder and friend Mr Dickson, who lived in Main Road, assisted my husband to build the house to lock up stage. We subcontracted tradesmen to do their jobs and did quite a lot of work ourselves. We could get flooring for two of the rooms, so we moved in. You were then allowed to live in an unfinished house so long as you did so much towards finishing it every six months. Those days we only had the country toilet. We decided to apply for a septic system toilet. St Albans is clay soil, which means bad drainage, but as we had a very large block we were granted permission. Another first for St Albans.

The European Migration

The war was over, first in Europe. The war with the Japanese came to a sudden end with the invention of modern technology - the Atom Bomb. *May it Never Happen Again.*

The war in Europe had ended a while but the misery continued. Thousands of Displaced Persons all over Europe had no homes and many children didn't even know what a home was. There was a call for help, and Australia offered to do its share.

The migrants who arrived here were first referred to as New Australians. They came in boatloads knowing very little about this country or its people. Australia was unprepared to say the least, but did its best. Anything that was possible to turn into a camp or an area of residence was converted: army camps, wool stores, army buildings, anything available. Even the Williamstown Racecourse. These buildings were divided into livable lots with plywood. There were communal showers and laundries. Also, in the earlier days, there was one large, communal eating area with the meals supplied. Heating was difficult. Cooking was difficult. A lot of the camps were in country areas. The migrants were taken from the boats and put on trains for the country camps. The schools in these areas were small, so pre-fab rooms were quickly added. Men had to serve a two-year contract to work where the government felt they were required most.

One successful project was the Snowy Mountains Scheme, one of the biggest engineering jobs in the world. It was a hydro-electricity scheme for Victoria and New South Wales powered by

water. Villages of huts were built to house the migrants as they arrived, single men's quarters and family areas. There were people of all nationalities and skills, tradesmen and labourers. It was bitterly cold. There was snow in winter, and it was hot, very hot, in summer. The camps, the school, and the eating hall had to be set up first. The forests were cleared and the roads formed for people to travel about, but mostly they were there for the huge amount of materials that had to be transported and the very large equipment required to build an underground power station, etc.

These projects sound difficult at times, but overall it was one of Australia's success stories. It was the camaraderie that kept these people going. They had a reunion a year or so ago, fifty years since it started. It took years to build and the friendships that were formed will last forever.

Settlement in Towns

Many migrants settled in towns where work was available. There were industries in Sunshine and Footscray, and the electric train ran from these areas to St Albans. Council allowed part houses to be built in St Albans. Land here was cheap. Houses were impossible to buy or rent. So they came to St Albans. They had done their two-year contract and were very sick of communal living. The food was a problem. So many different nationalities, different food and many ways of cooking food. Our food did not appeal to them, so their goal was to live as a family again.

St Albans went through a population explosion: streets and streets of part-houses, everything pushed to bursting point. Only the one school but fortunately it had a very large area playground. This was quickly filled with pre-fab school rooms. Any hall or available building was turned into school rooms. It was very hard to enroll your child. My daughter started school during that time. The Catholic Church had just finished a building that was a church, hall, and school. It was fully enrolled in no time. Teachers were scarce. New schools were built everywhere, primary and secondary. But it took time to get materials and builders.

Our house was finished and our neighbours were moving into their part-houses. We soon became friends. On Saturday night or Sunday they would come and bring their different foods. We would have some music. The Aussies would play the mouth organ and there was always someone who had an instrument. What lovely nights. We would turn on a barbie ...

My husband had a small utility. When someone's friend or family wanted to shift to their part houses, they would get my husband to shift them. They mainly had one or two huge wooden trunks and a few other things.

To cater for this population growth, more of everything was required and the shops to sell them. The Stevens family were early farmers who also had some land in East Esplanade. They quickly built a timber yard and hardware store, later also a furniture shop. The Knowles family bought land in Main Road and built two shops to sell manchester and ladies and children's wear. Mr Self and his sons built a larger grocery store. And so the town progressed, with local shops stocking most things.

A post office was built in Main Road West near the station in 1955. Mr Frank Curtin was the Postmaster.

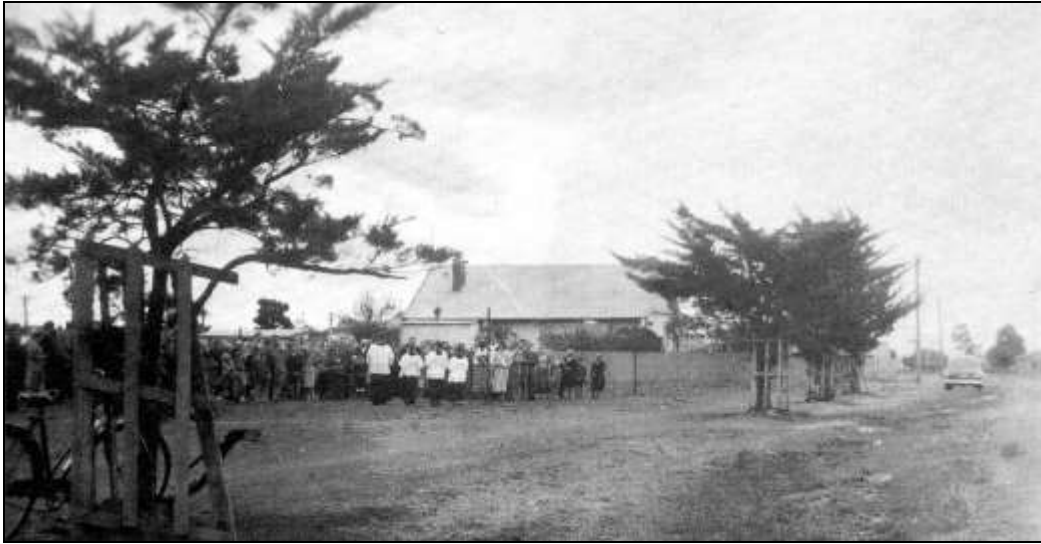
Catholic Church

This was the era of the Catholic Church in St Albans. A lot of the migrants who came here in the early days were from Malta and Italy, and they were of the Catholic faith. There was no church or school.

Mr Stenson's wife had passed away and his daughter had married and left. Their home Keighlo in Winifred Street was now 70 years old, and this once grand Padley home was now in a state of disrepair. Then the Catholic Church purchased it and land around it and a paddock of land opposite it with a small house on it.

Keighlo was renovated and our first Parish Priest moved in - Father Con Reis. A group of volunteers, men headed by Mr Fred Barnard, built a temporary building in Winifred Street: a church, a hall, a school. One of these volunteers had very bad health but he worked laying bricks from a wheelchair. Mr Harold Tolhurst. They were a group of very hard-working men who worked for years for the church. The Sacred Heart Parish began.

One special day each year was the celebration of Christ the King. On that day the children of the school gave a display of physical education. A bazaar followed, with spinning wheels and other competitions. The men had the Ugly Man competition and the day ended with the children competing in sports. The money raised went towards a better school and a church.



At Easter time on Good Friday, the Stations of the Cross were celebrated around the different the different areas in the paddock opposite where the school was to go. The procession of parishioners was led by Father Reis and the Atlea boys.

A new group of classrooms or school was built on Theodore Street. The first Sacred Heart School in St Albans. The sisters who taught and managed the school came from Sunshine by train until their accommodation was built. The first Sisters were Sister Clare and Sister Francis. They were assisted by several lay teachers: Jan Barnard Gavaghan and Maureen O'Brien. Mrs O'Brien ran the tuck shop. There was an the old cottage on the paddock - they held gatherings of the young people, also the Children of Mary, and the men of St Vincent de Paul.

After the new school opened a school assembly was held and photos taken. Enrollment was 165 children but only 15 were Australians.

In 2004 there are now three parishes, each with their own church and school. There is a Catholic Church and a big college in Sydenham and in St Albans. Sacred Heart has a new church in the same grounds as the presbytery and college. (Keighlo stands proudly.)

Unmade Roads

New subdivisions were still being released with unmade roads. These included Stevensville (the old Stevens farm) and the two Nicksons Estates on Furlong Road and St Albans West, which were both part of the McKechnie farmland. These were the earlier ones. Later came Kings Park Estate, Albanvale, etc. These early subdivisions were called heartbreak areas because there were no made roads or footpaths and in winter they became real quagmires. Then the councils passed an act that all future subdivisions had to have roads, footpaths, and drainage from the start.

The train services had improved.

The population grew from 100 in 1910 to 200 in 1930, to 1,000 in 1950 in 1950, and 13,000 in 1970. Soon it doubled and is now over 50,000.

A police station was built.

The different nationalities were building their own churches and quite a few migrants started their own businesses. Quite a few migrants started their own businesses.

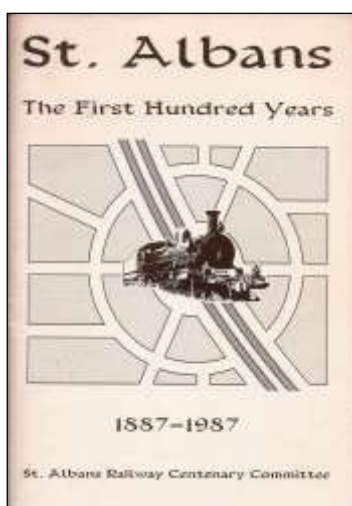
A market was built in 1970 and the Catholic Church expanded.



Fred Stein repairing potholes in the road

Railway Centenary

The centenary of St Albans railway station and the township was celebrated on Australia Day in January of the year 1987. How this came about was a schoolchild was asked to write an essay on the history of St Albans. This child probably was the daughter or son of one of the European migrants. She went to seek information from the stationmaster, Mr Tom Rigg. He had not worked in St Albans that many years so he contacted the railways department for information. He was interested in history and later published a book on the development of the Ginifer Railway Station. The initial inquiries made him realise the township was also approaching its centenary, so he went about forming a committee to help organise a celebration. The group became the St Albans Railway Centenary Committee. The Committee wasn't very large but they were all workers. They decided the town should celebrate the occasion, and it turned out to be an extremely successful day. Our finances were nil, so Mr Rigg sold a few soft drinks to pay for our postage. We ended up with a profit of \$4,000 from the sale of books etc.



During this time a book of St Albans history was published, its title being *St Albans the First Hundred Years* (now out of print). It was the first and as yet only book on the history of St Albans, and it was welcomed by the schools, etc. A small, hard-working committee was formed to do this, and we sold the book on the street corners and from door to door. The mainstay of this group was Mr Rigg, our historian, and Mr Michael Guiney of the railways. Joan Carstairs did the editing and photography, Christine Dennis the artwork and design, and Mary Smith (Stein) the oral history parts. Joan Carstairs is very interested in history and genealogy; she has since published several books on local history.

After the centenary celebrations ended the committee then formed the St Albans History Society. Most of this committee are now retirees so it has folded unfortunately. The book is factual and very informative, from the open spaces to the 1970s.

Year 2004

After more than 50 years of migration and growth, we have a modern suburb and at present we are experiencing the second land and housing boom. The rail line has been extended to Sydenham and runs every quarter hour. Deer Park, St Albans, Sunshine, Sydenham, and Keilor have all become one collection of streets and houses, and we are now under Brimbank Council. We have a good bus service to meet all trains going in every direction. Electricity and gas extend everywhere. We have a modern water supply in Taylors Road that can cope with the demand for water reticulation and sewerage disposal. There are good roads and footpaths throughout. There are

churches, mosques and temples for all denominations; also some church colleges. There are good roads and footpaths throughout. There are shops for every need including supermarkets, restaurants, fast food chains, and several major shopping plazas. There are sports grounds and facilities for all sports, and a leisure and swimming centre.

Fifty years after the early migration few part-houses remain. The third generation is now with us and attending our schools. The early migrants have given all their working lives to Australia. Many returned home to visit but few stayed there.

Remaining History

In the year 2004 we have little to remind us of the early pioneering years. The Church of England was built in 1910 and the Presbyterian Church was built in 1919, so they are part of the original era. There are only two houses left of the ones built by the Cosmopolitan Land and Banking Company. Keighlo is now the Catholic Church presbytery. The other one is Mrs Clara Clark's house, which has had several owners. Mr Blount used to operate a coal and coke business from there. The house was later owned by Mrs Freeland. [Has been redeveloped as a Buddhist temple.]

Of the early farm settlement houses, the McKechnies' house still stands in Main Road East (in poor state). The Andersons' house in Taylors Road is well preserved and is now surrounded by units. There is a very small house in Walter Street that used to belong to Grandma Lewis. The original memorial gates on Errington Reserve are still standing.

Many streets are named after the pioneers: Mr King, Kings Reserve, Kings Park School (High and Primary), Kings Road.

There are very few people who are related to the early settlers and still living in St Albans. Mavis Hunter (King) had grandparents who were early farm-settlers on both sides of the family, the Andersons and Kings. Her children and grandchildren still live locally.

Mr John Perrett is the grandson of the original John Perrett who ran the first mixed business in the area.

Iris Brown's father came from Ballarat with the McKays to Sunshine; Iris is still here.

Mary Smith and Elsa Fry, the two Stein girls, are still here, and also their children and grandchildren.

George Power still lives in Collins Street.

Jack Roberts is a grandson of the Boyd family, who were early farmers.

Another is Doris (Tong) Majewski. Albert Tong and his family were early English migrants who had a bakery delivery round with a horse and cart. Later they delivered fish. Doris is one of the third generation and still lives in the original family house.

Mary Smith, oral history project 1986, 2004.



The Stein family of St Albans