

MIGRATING TO ST ALBANS IN THE 1950s A FAMILY PERSPECTIVE



Author - Alie Missen

ISBN

Published by

Joseph Ribarow
historyofstabans.com.au
5 Harding Street
Ascot Vale Victoria 3032

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the people who provided images used in this publication, including the collections of Alie Missen, Kon Hauman, Emily Hall, Gavan Aitken, Norma McKay, Gwen Kratsis, Lorraine Williams, Bernie Kokot, Sylvia Bluemel, Nicholas Szwed, Gwyneth Vynner, Karen Bugeja, Brenda Payne, Mary Smith, Ray Chatterton, Steve Kozlowski, Christel Huwald, Yvonne Correlje, Christine Laskowski, Joseph Ribarow, Otto Czernik, The Tin Shed, St Albans Primary School, St Albans High School, Sacred Heart Primary School, Victorian Heritage Database, St Albans History Society, Heritage Council Victoria, National Library of Victoria, State Library of Victoria, Trove (National Library of Australia), National Archives of Australia, Google Maps.

Front cover

Stenson Road near the Maribyrnong swimming area. Photo from Alie Missen.

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

The differences in our surroundings took a few years to come to terms with, before being accepted as the norm. The conversion of thinking from the Dutch language into English took two years to accomplish. In due time, the family members attended naturalization ceremonies held in the Old Shire Hall, Kennedy Street, Keilor. For the duration of their lives, the older members of the family felt they had one foot in Australia and the other foot in The Netherlands and made many overseas trips.

Alie Missen nee de Vries

FOREWORD

The de Vries family came to St Albans in 1952. It was an era of major change for the semi-rural village at the end of the suburban railway line. In the early 1900s, St Albans had a population under 300 which grew to about 900 by 1950. It was a 'sleepy' village because of its small population and the lack of any major industries. No one could have predicted the amazing growth that would soon occur.

From the late 1940s, Australia had been actively recruiting migrants for its much needed labour force on the land and in the factories to boost its economy, and the Government supported and benefited from the Australian Netherlands Migration Agreement. The Dutch community in St Albans was not a large one but have left their footprints in time. On arrival, these families were required to work as directed by the immigration authorities for at least two years; after that time, they were free to settle wherever they wished. Many migrants were initially accommodated through Bonegilla near the Murray River, and then relocated to where work was available.

In the western suburbs there were migrant hostels at Altona and Maribyrnong. The advantage of moving to the west of Melbourne was that work was available in Sunshine and Footscray which was on the trainline from St Albans, and both locations were close enough for men to cycle the distance. Probably the biggest district employer was Sunshine Harvester Works, and others included Nettlefolds and the John Darling Flour Mill where Jan de Vries obtained his first employment.

The migrant hostels became transition stages for regional settlement. St Albans was attractive because land was cheap and building regulations flexible, particularly in Keilor. A family could move into a small temporary abode while they built their permanent home in stages as money became available. Soon people were moving into car crates, caravans, garages, and one or two-room bungalows. Real estate agents saw opportunities and visited the hostels, spruiking the benefits of this wonderland of opportunity.

In 1950 the population had been static at about 900 people and eight shops clustered around the railway station. Suddenly there were five extra families per week arriving and making their presence felt. The local primary school became so overcrowded that excess pupils were bussed off to Deer Park, Albion and Footscray. The pressure was relieved somewhat when the Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School opened in 1954 with 95% of their student intake being of migrant background. The Dutch community started their own social networks soon after arrival, to support social isolation. A club was formed using the Mechanics Institute Hall, and by 1954 there were some Dutch church services provided by Rev Guersen at the Presbyterian Church.

By 1956 the population was already 4,500 and there were 21 shops. New schools were being planned and built - the St Albans East Primary School and the St Albans High School started. The growth continued, and by 1960 there were 7,000 people and 78 shops. By 1965 the population was already 12,000 and still growing.

The Dutch community had a quiet presence locally, partly because of their small proportion of the population, though as Alie states, gradually the Dutch people integrated and assimilated with the existing community. The new settlers were productive: Gijs van der Voort was building bungalows, as were Kropman & Correlje, Harry Coort was a local motor mechanic, Tony Mom was an electrician, Fonger Elzinga was a house painter who became a store manager. Pieter and Johanna Ermstrang had a slightly more exotic presence; they came to Victoria as cooks with the Dutch Olympic team - they settled in St Albans and established the Olympic 1956 Pastry Shop in East Esplanade, which became a popular venue for pastry delights. Pieter also was a keen soccer follower and helped establish one of the first soccer teams in the district. One major disaster was that Henricus van der Kruys drowned at the popular Stenson swimming hole while saving a young girl from drowning.

Dutch women also made their mark, sometimes as their husband's business partner; e.g. Johanna and Jilt Epema were share farmers. Nell Mom was the first woman to be elected as Secretary of the St Albans Soccer Club. Evelyn Vroom became Professor of Informatics at the Central Queensland University. Thea van den Kuyl started as a sales assistant at Hamptons Menswear but, like her father, developed her artistic hobby in painting and portraiture, and her largest mural "Visions of St Albans" graces a wall at the Tin Shed.

Documenting this history has been problematic. The old St Albans State School may have been one of the first local organisations to publish their history in 1969. The Sacred Heart Catholic School did theirs in 1978. The St Albans Railway Centenary Committee took a broader perspective in 1987, which led to the formation of the St Albans History Society. Although the presence of 'ethnic' groups was acknowledged in these publications, and sometimes quantified, little detailed history was taken. At this stage 293 people of St Albans were from The Netherlands, just 0.6% of the population.

Alie may have developed her interest in local history about this time as she certainly recorded family activities during the 1960s and preserved letters from that era. This came to fruition decades later as she started to document not only her own family history but also more general local developments. She made connections with both the St Albans and the Sydenham history societies.

Her available documents appear to have been written over the last 20 years; for example, her transcript of Colin Missen's story of early St Albans is dated 2005. One of her substantive publications was "Sydenham Memorial Moments" in 2008. Several of her manuscripts about St Albans have not been published in the mainstream, though her collaborative work with Tom Rigg from the History Society about the Errington Reserve centenary was published by them in 2010.

I met Alie in the early 2000s when I was writing about the St Albans Community Youth Club - she had joined some of their activities in the 1950s and was on the Committee of Management briefly in the 2000s. When my colleague Nick Szwed and I started documenting the history of St Albans High School, we were able to collect personal accounts from Dutch students from the 1960s, about a dozen of them.

Alie gives us a more detailed account of one Dutch family in particular, her own. She has also documented a talk given by her brother-in-law, Colin Missen, as well as her own presentation to the students at Kealba High School. Three of her books have been published: the ones on Strathmore, Sydenham, and Errington Reserve, and another one 'Nathan Story' which she edited. Her manuscripts about her family history and a couple of others have not been officially published.

Alie and I occasionally discussed the need to document local settlement perspectives. As Nick Szwed said, if we migrants don't write our own stories, we can't expect others to do it for us. Alie's health in the last decade has not been particularly good, and neither that of her husband, Kevin, so her recent history output has understandably diminished. She gave me copies of several of her manuscripts and told me to do what I could with them. They deserve to be preserved as part of our history, which is why I have decided to publish them. I have edited the documents somewhat, and added footnotes and extra photographs.

Alie Missen nee de Vries, passed away in May 2025:

Beloved wife of Kevin. Loved mother of Geoff and Bronwyn, mother-in-law of Cathrine and Derek. Adored Grandma of Makayla, Kiara and Hannah (dec). Nieces (honorary daughters) Karen, Veronica and Susan. Forever in Our Hearts. A private funeral was held as per family's wishes.

Joseph Ribarow
June 2025

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DE VRIES FAMILY: A ST ALBANS' MIGRANT'S STORY



This is the story of a Dutch migrant to St Albans. It begins with the death of Jan (John in English) de Vries who died in Ferntree Gully in 1980. The story is about his past and starts when he was born in 1913 at Leeuwarden in The Netherlands. He was the youngest of nine children. As was normal in this period he and his siblings assisted with the earning of incomes. Jan's mother had a grocery store which she ran with the assistance of her children; they lived in the dwelling on top of the shop premises. The father was seldom home as he was a property assessor and travelled around. After leaving school Jan began to work in a flour mill, a trade he followed throughout his working life.



When Jan was just 16½ years old he met and fell in love with Tjitske Landstra (known as Kitty) who was just six months younger. The meeting was one of love at first sight for them both, but they did not marry until they were 21 years old which was the age they could get married with their parents' consent. Without their parents' consent they would have had to wait until they reached the age of twenty-five. Jan and Kitty married in 1935 at the local Town Hall and, as was the custom, sought the church's blessing after the formalities at the Town Hall had been fulfilled.



In time they became the parents of four children, Aaltje (Alie), Jan (John), Albert (who died at a very young age) and another Albert. In his early married days Jan showed his concern for children and his involvement in community affairs, concerns that were to remain with him over the years. In The Netherlands he was a volunteer organizer of youth groups and used to encourage the young people to come to him or his wife if they were in need of assistance. He was a friendly person, a good orator and able to assess other people's needs.



In 1952 Jan and his family migrated to Australia and it was in September of that year when Jan and Kitty, together with their three children, said goodbye to The Netherlands, their family members and friends. It had taken two years of the filling in of forms, physical examinations, listening to advice, loads of correspondence, brushing up on the English language and not least of all with very many tears, the family embarked on the S.S. Fairsea at the Dutch-America Line Quay in Rotterdam. In their hearts, the thought of ever being able to return to the country of their birth did not exist. It was presumed the departure was to last for the rest of their lives. They said goodbye to the lives they had lived in the past.

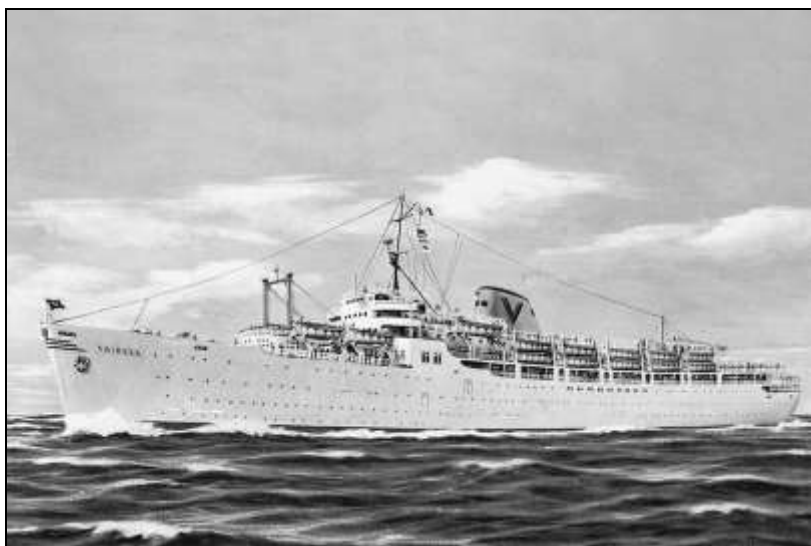


Before they were allowed to board the ship, everyone had to wipe their shoes on a cocos mat that had been saturated with a disinfectant.¹ Then father, mother and their offspring clambered up the gangplank to seek out their cabins, at least that is what they thought.

The ship had been built of steel, but it was not the largest one they had seen. Having lived in Rotterdam for the past seven years prior to their departure many ships' comings and goings had been viewed and this city was after all one of the largest harbour cities in the worlds. They were used to seeing floating cities, including huge battleships from other countries. They were also used to meeting and seeing people of all races and colours. Once on board, they were greeted by one of the

¹ This was common practice at the time and was an attempt to minimise the risk of bringing infections on board.

ship's crew who directed them to their designated locations. With astonishment it was discovered that they were being accommodated within in a large hold and not inside a cabin.¹ Surely, the holds of a ship were for cargo and not for human beings? The men and boys over six years of age were taken to a hold in the bow of the ship whilst women, youngsters and babies were guided to a huge hold in the stern of the ship. The allotted bunks did not have a privacy curtain; the scenario was a sea of bunks with miniscule headspace. The sleeping quarters on board were similar to a convict ship's bunks; one bunk atop another. If you accidentally sat up straight, you were certain to hurt yourself. Steel hurts so much more than wood. The lack of privacy was very difficult for the women and especially so for young girls.



Postcard of Fairsea <https://museumsvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum>

Hygiene on board was poor. For example, when the waiters placed freshly washed dishes onto the dining tables, they used the tea towels wrapped around their perspiring necks to dry the dishes. There was no air-conditioning on board ship. The ship's passengers did not have the comfort of a fan to cool off. Very few portholes could be opened and only one in every ten lifeboats was seaworthy. (A decade later, a waterfront union in Western Australia refused to let the ship leave Australia's shores because of inadequate lifesaving provisions.) Insufficient lifejackets were provided. This became known when an 'abandon ship' safety drill was carried out soon after sailing. In our group, there were three lifejackets short for the passengers who had been told to assemble near a designated numbered lifeboat. Apart from this shortcoming, there were more passengers than could be accommodated in the lifeboat. When the crew was asked "What will happen in a real emergency?" they replied: "Some of us will have to enter the water and hang onto the lifeboat's ropes." This was a far from reassuring thought.

The food was shocking, one piece of fresh food (a small apple) during the duration of the seven-week voyage. Reports by migrants who had voyaged on other vessels proclaimed the goodness of their meals. The food on the Fairsea without a doubt was different, for today's soup was yesterday's leftovers.

There were 1,300 passengers on this voyage. Much later we discovered that permission had been obtained by the shipping agents for the transportation of only 1,100 passengers. The ship was registered in Panama and carried the Panamanian flag, but was owned by a Greek ship owner (Onassis in fact).

¹ The Fairsea was huge, a converted troop ship with no cabins, just big open spaces with triple decked bunks, so cramped you couldn't sit up straight in them. Men were assigned to one section, women to the other. The toilet and shower facilities were one long one, and everywhere you went there was an awful reek of 'White King'. People threw up because of the smell not just the swell! Fank Kriesl 1951. <https://museumsvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/resources/journeys-to-australia/>

The system for bunk bedding of the family unit of course meant a physical separation for husbands and wives. This separation was especially difficult for young families. Adult public demonstrations of affection were unusual at the time. Provision of space for luggage (except an overnight bag or a small suitcase) had been allowed and everything else had to be taken out and returned to luggage holds incessantly by the ship's crew, many of whom came from Goa.

There are memories of social evenings and games organized by the passengers to alleviate boredom; of men having arguments over seating arrangements and of seasickness once we neared the Gulf of Biscay where the sea became rough. The youngest son Albert became seasick and this lasted during the whole of the voyage and he lost a lot of weight. In turbulent weather the water of the ship's one small swimming pool was pumped out. Youths had seized this opportunity to sneak bread rolls from the dining tables and have bun fights inside the empty pool - until caught and told off by the crew.

Meal times were divided into two sittings so everyone could eat. The first sitting gong would sound and then there was a rush of people to the dining areas. The second sitting passengers would then rush to sit and occupy the recently vacated deck chairs and other comfortable chairs for half an hour. This procedure was reversed when the second sitting gong sounded. Adult passengers displayed quite a bit of aggression over the seating arrangements and the obvious lack of seating availability for all passengers at the one time. Laundry facilities were another cause of friction amongst the passengers. The laundry consisted of a small cabin-sized room and was in use all day and most of the night, by passengers and the crew as well.

During the voyage the ship anchored near the Suez Canal whilst waiting to traverse through this canal where young male swimmers tried to climb the ship's thick mooring ropes in an effort to board the ship. Some passengers went sightseeing. Small change was thrown overboard by the passengers and youths then dived and retrieved the coins. Very many small craft were seen bobbing up and down in the areas around the vessel. The small craft contained men and displayed goods for sale such as Moroccan leather pouches and purses.



Souvenir boats from 1950s Sylvia Bluemel collection

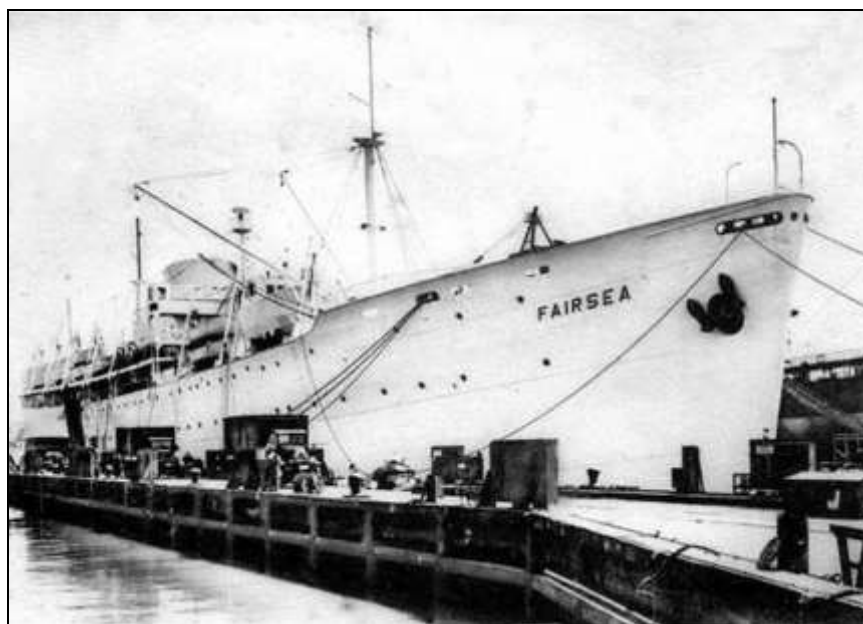
After the slow trip through the Suez Canal, we crossed the Pacific Ocean. This was the most tedious part of the voyage. The lack of ventilation on board and the boredom affected the passengers. The weather was extremely warm and humid and the voyage seemed a never-ending bore until we set our sights on the coast of Western Australia.

Everyone on board cheered up when we finally arrived at the Port of Fremantle in October 1952. Rotterdam seemed a lifetime away.

At Fremantle the weather was also warm but bearable, perhaps caused by a sea breeze. Most of the passengers disembarked to go sightseeing, anxious to catch glimpses of their new country and extremely curious to find out what Australia was like. Not much was known about Australia and the information given both at schools and the Australian Embassy at the city of The Hague mainly covered the Australian flora, fauna, the country's vastness, the capital cities, the names of the rivers and the weather.

The writer's first impressions of Australia were ones of warmth, space, quietness and old-fashioned buildings. This was the first time we had seen buildings and shops with verandahs, a feature only observed in Wild West American movies. To our great delight we were able to buy some fresh fruit and sweets for the younger members of the family. The oranges were particularly welcome and tasted delicious. After the sightseeing tour of Fremantle, we re-embarked and the ship hauled up her anchor and sailed for the Port of Melbourne.

On nearing the Port of Melbourne, passengers started gathering their possessions and it was very obvious that they were quite jittery. Advice given by Dutch-speaking staff at The Hague Embassy had been thoroughly chewed over - advice included the inability to obtain spare parts for appliances in Australia, the unavailability of many household items; we were told Australia was 50 years behind Europe's progress and other negative advice. One thing mother took no notice of and that was that her Singer treadle sewing machine was going or she would not be.



MV Fairsea 1950s - ANMM Collection Gift from Barbara Alysen

The above advice was the reason most people had either disassembled their furniture before packing it in crates or had purchased new furniture and arranged for the retailers to have it packed in crates ready to be shipped out with them. Some crates, however, had to be sent later because the ship did not have enough space for all the crates belonging to her passengers.

Our family had furniture, bedding, lots of linen goods, kitchen appliances including dinner and tea services, clothing, books and other items crated by the shipping agents including mundane things as clothes pegs, buckets, cutlery, a kerosene heater, rugs, blankets and cooking requisites. Mother was worried we might have to go camping out in the bush with kangaroos, snakes and other unacceptable animals. Fortunately this was not so, but nevertheless other migrants also had the concept of kangaroos hopping around in the City of Melbourne. The unknown quantity, Australia, did not appeal to everyone - at least not my mother and no

doubt to many other women. Perhaps some youths appreciated the adventure more than most. So many people had become unsettled because of World War Two and the future of their home country was gloomy. This lack of housing (some cities like Rotterdam had been completely gutted during the war) and employment opportunities for so many did not exist. Indonesia wanted its independence from The Netherlands; the United States (McArthur) with the support of the Australian Government implemented this. Looking back to 1946 it is only recently that Indonesia appears to be finding its feet so to speak and hopefully prospers. Indonesia's independence struggle has resulted in huge numbers of Indonesian people (in some cases the population of complete islands) migrating to The Netherlands. This contributed to those people who were already living in The Netherlands starting to look for opportunities outside their country of birth.

As stated the general knowledge about Australia was very limited in 1952 - partly because of the perception that the country's only links were to Great Britain and other Commonwealth countries to some extent, but in the main Britain was Australia's main foreign contact source. This concept of self-imposed isolation may have had its origin in the fact that Great Britain, despite being located within Europe, has never considered herself as being a part thereof. As indeed, Australia did not consider herself a part of the area wherein it was located. Australia had very little contact with other countries except the mother country for which she paid dearly during World War One.

After John de Vries' decision to emigrate, he had learned that the Australian Government was actively seeking and sponsoring New Australians.¹ By the time he had filled in application forms to be accepted as an immigrant, he was forced by the Dutch Government to sell his home. He was told it was a prerequisite to my parents being able to be considered for emigration. The Dutch and Australian Governments had a financial agreement whereby Australia funded migrations, either fully or partly. Therefore the only conclusion can be reached is that the Dutch Government pocketed the proceeds of the sale of our home (minus the cost of our fares of course). The Dutch Government was even petty enough to withhold child endowment payments because 'Dutch emigrants were not permitted to take any Dutch money out of the country'.

Another stated requirement was that John de Vries would have to be classified as an unskilled worker; this happened after he had been denied prospective emigration status because he was 'over skilled'. A difficult to understand logic; the reverse is much easier to understand. In order to qualify as an 'unskilled' worker, friends and employers were persuaded to document false references.

The original documentation supplied to the Immigration Department in The Hague set out the following information: J. de Vries had completed a course at the Groningen University in Agricultural Science, had a Commercial Business Diploma and was experienced in cereal, oat, flour milling, dry pet food manufacturing, plant manager in the Nederland Graanproduction N.V. at Rotterdam (a subsidiary of Quaker Oats Ltd.) and had been a police constable, had been an employee of Koopmans Factories at Leeuwarden. His activities and interests were listed as a committee member of a youth club, a long distance walking club, music, reading, fives-ball, sailing, fishing, swimming and mention was made that he had been a resistance fighter during World War Two.

In contrast, the 'unskilled' application stated that J. de Vries was a factory worker in a flourmill and loved playing cards and was interested in youth work.

It took two years to finally obtain permission to migrate and this came about through the

¹ Australia signed a migration agreement with The Netherlands government in 1951, and by the end of December 1957 about 37,000 Dutch migrants had settled in Australia. Many went through Bonegilla, Australia's first and largest migrant reception centre at the time. Migrants from Holland constituted one of the largest groups that were accommodated there.

assistance and intervention of the Returned Servicemen's League of Australia. ¹

Finally, after seven long and dreary weeks, the ship anchored and we had arrived at Station Pier, Port Melbourne in October 1952. Government officials and church representatives boarded the ship. Small card tables had been set up for them and the boarding party interviewed everyone on board. Passports were checked. Albert and John Jnr. had been included on mother's passport as they were both under sixteen at the time. The officials assured themselves that we had received chest x-rays and health check-ups prior to leaving The Netherlands.

There were two church representatives present - one was Minister Geurs (i.e. the Reverend Geurs) who was a minister of religion affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in Australia and in The Netherlands belonged to the United Reformed Church of Holland. The other church representative was Father Leo Maas (i.e. the Reverend Christianus Leonardus Maria Maas) from the Franciscan Order of the Roman Catholic Church since renamed the Catholic Church. Both of these men were eager to counsel the newly arrived emigrants, as well as doing the groundwork so they could form their own congregations in and around Melbourne, Geelong, Dandenong and Ballarat.

After the officials had satisfied themselves that everything was in order, we were told to board a wooden train standing on a track at the end of Station Pier. This was an unusual sight and our first view of a 'red rattler'. The train was old, painted red with wooden benches, unusual windows with pull-down-blinds, neither heating nor cooling; one must expect differences in strange countries, a thought that had not occurred at the time.



HMAS Kanimbla with displaced persons boarding the train for Bonegilla 1950s

The journey to Bonegilla, for that was our destination we were told, took six hours with one stop at Seymour where we were allowed to leave the train. We were exhausted, hot, hungry and thirsty by the time we arrived at a railway siding near Albury/Wodonga for it had been a long day. This siding was set in a cutting a short distance south of Tallangatta Road, it was a platform guarded by some red gum trees. It was here that we had to board a bus that took us to the Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre.

Bonegilla had been purchased in 1940 when the Defence Department purchased 619 acres and established Bandiana as a training camp. A number of Infantry Units were trained there. These Units went on to see a great deal of active service in the Middle East and later in the

¹ John de Vries had been a member of the Underground Resistance Group and a pro tem policeman, which was a temporary position held by men of the Resistance Movement who were asked at the end of the war to form the initial police force.

Pacific war zones. Raised locally in August 1940, the 2/23rd Infantry Battalion named 'Albury's Own' trained at Bonegilla before leaving Australia late that year for the Middle East and eventually fought at the famous siege of Tobruk. The Bonegilla Centre has also handled more than 320,000 migrant people. In 1971 it was closed, but since then its use has been reverted for army purposes and then being closed again with only a small area reserved for defense purposes.

On arrival at the centre the migrants were allotted a hut for the family's use. The hut consisted of two separate sections with a separate outer access door. The building was constructed of galvanized tin with two doors and small windows set up high in the walls. The shed was unlined and contained single steel beds, one chair and a small cupboard. The laundry facilities were housed in a separate hut and the ablution block was a decent walk away. The huts were fairly spread out, with sparse outdoor lighting, consequently a nighttime walk was scary, especially so after attention had been drawn to the presence of poisonous snakes and spiders.

The first couple of days we were happy to be together again as a family unit, which we had not been since leaving Rotterdam seven weeks ago. The discovery and use of the mess hall does not recall pleasant memories. The hall was extremely basic, even more so than the huts and was hardly functional. One section also served as a shop counter of sorts; we were able to buy biscuits and other small items to eat.

The prepared food was mediocre and tasteless. After having suffered the deprivation of food during World War Two some credence must be given to the following remarks. Cabbage served should have been named cabbage soup for instance, only salted butter was available (foreign to our tastes), bread was different (we were used to soda bread), meat was sweeter and was sheep meat (also foreign), and a different variety of potatoes, but the main problem was evident in the preparation of the food by the staff. It was just as well that we were able to supplement our food with purchased food after settling in and receiving a small weekly allowance. This allowance was most welcome for the Dutch Government had not allowed us to take any money out of the country except for a few miserable hundred pounds.

Frequently, people from the migrant centre took a bus ride or hitched a ride to Albury where purchases of fresh fruit and personal needs could be made. The local Albury people were very friendly, helpful, and never hesitated in offering car rides to Albury, thus saving the cost of a bus fare.

About one week at Bonegilla, boredom set in again. It must not be forgotten that all we had was either a small suitcase with some clothing or a large bag with personal possessions. The crates were of course not made available to us, so there was very little to occupy the mind with. Fortunately, there was a branch of the YWCA in the camp. Its staff, Red Cross volunteers, organized activities for migrants where possible and an approach was made to them about being able to keep occupied. After supplying personal details, the writer was asked to teach English to a small group of females and also John Jnr gave some help with the organization of volley ball games with the Italian single men who had arrived shortly after we did.

It was not only the children who had become restless; John senior started seeking potential employment opportunities in his newly adopted country. He had stated that he was not fussy about the kind of work on offer; anything would do to start with. The Bonegilla Centre's employment office, however, had no available jobs for him. The only positions available were for house servants. The writer was offered a job on a farm as an artisan, but my parents were adamant that this was totally unsuitable (apart from the vocation, the position was hundreds of miles away in the country).

In the end, John Senior had decided to hitch-hike through New South Wales as there were a couple of flour mills in that State. He received a reference from the Reverend J. J. Mol who was the Minister of the Presbyterian Church of the Migrant Centre at Bonegilla.¹

¹ Reverend Joannis "Hans" Jacob Mol was chaplain to immigrants at Bonegilla from 1952 to 1954.



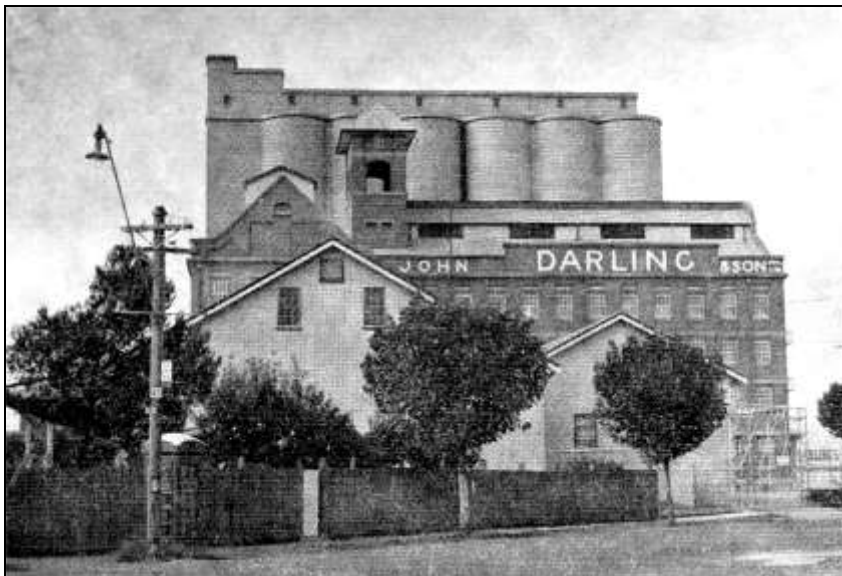
Bonegilla settlement camp 1950s c/- Kon Haumann archives

After traversing through New South Wales no job was found - there were no vacancies. Even in Sydney a large city by anyone's standards, a labourer's job was unavailable. It had been pointed out to him that Australia was in the midst of a depression and unable to sell wheat and milled products locally or overseas. It took him three days to walk and hitchhike back to Bonegilla. Not to be deterred, John Senior decided to hitch-hike to South Australia having heard that there was a flour mill in that State. He reached Adelaide and walked around trying to obtain any kind of work. Again unsuccessfully. There simply was no work available.

After failing to get any kind of work in South Australia he started walking to Melbourne and was nearing Norlane near Geelong when he was offered a lift by a Presbyterian Minister who was on his way to Melbourne. The Minister suggested my father should try to get a position at the John Darling & Son Pty. Ltd. flourmills at Albion near Sunshine.

The Minister whose church was located in Anderson Road, Sunshine, dropped dad off at the flour mill and also wrote down the address of a boarding house in Sunshine in case he was successful. It was here that dad was finally given the job of packer man. A packer man's job is the worst one in a flour mill; for as the finished flour product comes down a wooden chute, a man stands close by with an open hessian bag on top of a pair of scales. When the required weight has been reached the bag is sewn up by hand and removed, making way for the next one. After a while the packer man looks like the abdominal snowman. Nowadays this job is done mechanically. Nevertheless, father was very pleased he had finally secured work, for he boasted that before immigrating he had never lost a day's work for any reason.

The John Darling flourmill is a prominent feature of the Albion skyline. It has been placed on the heritage list and is situated alongside the railway line, opposite the Albion Railway Station. It does have its own siding similar to other mills. John Darling had arrived in Australia from Edinburgh, Scotland in 1855 and dominated the flour milling industry in the latter part of the 1880s. He became a manager of the grain and flour merchants Giles and Smith and then transferred to the wheat and grain company R.C. Bowen and in 1867 purchased the business and operated it as John Darling and Son. In later years his son, John Junior managed the company. At one stage he leased over 4,000 acres of land from William Taylor and combined the growing, the reaping and the production of the finished product.



John Darling Flour Mill at Albion

Before John de Vries could start at the flour mill in Albion he had to return to Bonegilla. This time he did not mind spending some money to buy a train ticket because there was light at the end of the tunnel for him and his family. In order to leave the Bonegilla Migrant Centre the Commonwealth Employment Service had to fill in the form. Next he secured a lodging place

with a Mrs. Ascher in Anderson Road, Sunshine, until such time he was able to find local accommodation for his wife and children.



This accommodation was found after speaking with a fellow worker, Mr. Jozef Skwarlo,¹ a Polish migrant who had built a cement-rendered house at Lot 62 Adelaide Street, St Albans (nearly opposite the first school house that had started in the 1880s), who needed to rent out part of his house. Father inspected the house and thought it suitable for his family. The rent was £3 (i.e. \$6) weekly and neither bond nor key money was required. The average weekly wage at the time was £7 (i.e. \$14), but John earned more because of the overtime he worked. The house was a terrific improvement compared to the hut in Bonegilla.

The families occupied half a house each. The bathroom and laundry facilities were shared and a long narrow passage served as the dividing line between the families. As was common in Australia in the 1950s, the ablution facility was a separate entity at the rear of the 150 feet long allotment of land.

So, six weeks after the arrival in Australia the de Vries family travelled by train from Albury to Spencer Street (renamed the Southern Cross Station) and boarded a train to St Albans. The journey from Melbourne to St Albans took 35 minutes. When we arrived at the St Albans Railway Station (then located on the north/west side of the main road railway tracks), 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.



St Albans Railway Station 1950s

Apart from the small railway station, a few weatherboard houses were visible, as was a triangular-shaped 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. Whilst we were walking to Adelaide Street (no taxis at the station then), we passed a couple of shops; one had a dwelling house on the side. There were some trees; one was a palm tree with lots of little birds in them, tall yellow grasses, green thistles, soil and more soil.

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

¹ Jozef and Hilde (Hilda) Skwarlo emigrated in 1950; they did not have children at the time. On arrival, Jozef was sent to work for the Victorian Railways but he later became a press operator. They became naturalized citizens in 1959 with their address listed as 30 Adelaide Street, St Albans.



Main Road West St Albans 1958 State Library of Victoria
MMBW collection <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/994622>



St Albans Post Office 1950s c/- Gwyneth Vyner



St Albans Police Station 1950s c/- Gwyneth Vyner

The differences in our surroundings took a few years to come to terms with, before being accepted as the norm. The conversion of thinking from the Dutch language into English took two years to accomplish. In due time, the family members attended naturalization ceremonies held in the Old Shire Hall, Kennedy Street, Kellor. For the duration of their lives, the older members of the family felt they had one foot in Australia and the other foot in The Netherlands and made many overseas trips.

John and Kitty de Vries moved to Ferntree Gully after John's retirement, although he worked as a consultant making occasional trips to Malaya and the Philippines to assist with the installation of new mills, mainly rice mills. Kitty did not 'go out to work'. John had always considered himself to be the family's provider. John died in 1980 of leukemia and Kitty followed him in 1999 as a result of undiagnosed stomach cancer. They had chosen to be buried together at the Ferntree Gully Cemetery.

To follow on to the story of John and Kitty, another aspect of their story is that they too did buy 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 from the de Vries' land. 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', in effect 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 Mom¹ who had been a telephone mechanic in Holland (a specialized course there), 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 Nel² and their two children accommodation; the front section of the house my father had built with the help of Kees Kropman³ and Anton Correlje.⁴ 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 in 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.

Meetings were arranged at the de Vries' home, a committee was formed, and weekly monetary

¹ Antonius Engelbertus Wilhelmus Mom and Pieternella "Nell" Mom came to Australia in 1950 and settled in St Albans in 1952. They had a daughter Mieka Paulina (worked as a tracer), and a son Bert (worked as an electrician and electrical mechanic).

² Nell became a member of the North Sunshine Technical School Parents and Friends Association and the St Albans Benevolent Society. As a young girl in Amsterdam she used to watch her father play soccer and in Australia she followed South Melbourne in Aussie Rules. Her unique feature in local history is that she was elected the first-ever female Secretary of the St Albans Soccer Club.

³ Cornelis Kropman and Alberta Johanna Arends came to Australia with six children. Cornelis established JAC Building Contractors and was working with Anton Correlje. They built a lot of houses around St Albans and were the ones who laid the floor in the youth club. Sons Anton and Peter Anton joined the business after they completed their schooling. Kropman also put the floor in at the old Catholic church.

⁴ Anton and Hendrina Catharina Correlje with their three children arrived in Melbourne on 5 December 1954, Refer to story by Yvonne Correlje in St Albans High School collection.

contributions were collected from members and sub-committees were formed. Some of the sub-committees involved themselves with the presentation of plays, the creation of an orchestra and practice sessions, the forming of a choir and of course practice, a reading club where magazines and books were interchanged, coffee mornings, shopping trips for ladies, and a St Nicholas Day event which was held at the Churchill Reserve in December. A very well-attended concert was held in the St Albans Public Hall, with Dutch girls decked out as singing waitresses attending to tables. Plays were shown in the Church of England Kindergarten Hall which had a small stage that needed curtains which took more than a week to make and hang.

The social interaction was beneficial for all involved in this club, but gradually Dutch people integrated and assimilated with the existing community as Dutch people do everywhere on earth and the club ceased to exist. Similarly the soccer club formed just after the Melbourne Olympic Games ceased, the players joining other clubs, the billiard club was moved to another location; only the card club (klaverjassen) was continued in a different suburb. Currently there is a Dutch club in North Sunshine.

My conclusion is that this true story is not only one of a Dutch migrant family, but also the story of successful immigration from one end of the world to another.

Alie Missen nee de Vries



Dutch community function at St Albans hall 1950s c/- Alie Missen



Dutch community function at St Albans hall 1950s c/- Alie Missen

LETTERS OF COMMUTING VERSUS COMMUNICATION

In the year 1962 a mother and daughter decided to visit relatives in The Netherlands and to rekindle memories they had of Friesland, a northern province.

For many years they both had the feeling of partly belonging in two countries or, as is commonly described, as having one foot in one country and the other foot in another. The cause of these feelings can be attributed to feelings of loss and a definite grief of things and people once familiar and often taken for granted not being available anymore, perhaps never to be. There was also a feeling of insecurity and confusion - the very roots of what was thought you were and were likely to become had changed. Nevertheless it was a surprise to find that thinking in the English language had replaced Dutch and before that the Frisian language. What occurred prior to this was the translation of words and sentences in the mind before vocalising them.

After the decisions to travel overseas and all the arrangements had been fulfilled, mother and daughter boarded a P. & O. vessel named the Strathmore in the Port of Melbourne. We were farewelled by immediate family members and also all the in-laws, held onto paper streamers thrown at us and partly caught and waved goodbye to the family and Australia for three months. Quite unlike the vessel we had arrived on in Australia named the Fairsky, the Strathmore presented us with a magnificent contrast. The food, the service, the accommodation, everything was splendid and to this day all retain happy memories of this sea voyage.

During the three months journey a few letters were posted to and fro between those left behind and the travellers, although frankly more letters were received than posted.

The first letter was sent by John de Vries. The letter was addressed to Mrs T. De Vries, passenger to London, per Strathmore, C/o P. & O. Orient Lines, Tilbury, Essex, England. In fact the first part of the letter was written by Elizabeth, John's spouse at the time, whilst they were living at 66 Ivanhoe Avenue, St Albans. The letter reads:

Dear Kitty and Alie,

Just a few lines to let you know that all is well down here. I haven't received any answering letter to the last one I sent to Colombo. Kevin has sent mail to all the ports en route and hadn't received any either. He's a little worried. The children are getting along very nicely. Veronica has cut her second tooth. She's learning to stand up and I bet by the time you are back, she'll be walking. Every morning at 6:00 AM, she stands up on her knees and wakes Karen up so that she can have a chat. Now here is the nicest news, Johnny has bought me a washing machine, a Hoovermatic. Isn't he wonderful? He wants to put in his say now, so I'll sign off for now. Love, Betty and children.

P.S. Write soon.

Dear Mum and Alie,

Hoping your trip is going well. Anyhow. By the time this letter reaches you, you will be in Pommyland. Dad, Albert and Kevin are getting along fine. Dad will probably be promoted into the Quaker Oats' management, so he will be off shift work. Karen is getting along fine but misses you two. Daily she's walking over to Alie's place and usually when she is missing we find her at Alie's backyard looking at the chooks. Baby is getting stronger in her legs and should be able to walk within a short period.

Dad informed me that mum has been severely seasick. But mum, remember that will most likely get rid of some excessive fat and provided you don't eat too much in Holland, we should be able to call you splinter again by the time you'll be back

Kevin¹ is extremely worried about Alie not writing him and not only does this show bad manners, it also shows not much consideration for a husband who is willing to go through considerable hardship for three months while his wife goes out to enjoy herself. I hope it is not too cold for you two down there, but as May is coming, you still should get a fair share of nice weather. Whilst you are in Rotterdam, will it be possible to get some pictures or postcards from the main points of interest so I can see what it looks like now. Well, hoping you two will have an enjoyable time. I'll close this letter now with best wishes from,

Your son and brother.

P.S. I miss the steak and eggs on Saturday and my cups of coffee. John.

An undated letter, but postmarked 20th of March 1962, written by Albert Devries and addressed to his mother, Kitty Devries, passenger to London P & O Orient Lines, Strathmore, care of the Agent. P & Orient Lines. P & O House, Canby Road, Tawahi Aiden has been copied hereunder.

Dear Mum and Alie

Everything is well at home. But we're starting to miss you more every day. I hope you have received my last letter. And that you are not as sick is that has been made out in some of your letters. Life seems to be a pleasure on the boat. You are having breakfast in bed, beds made up. It all sounds too good, except about the part you wrote to Mrs Mom about sailors preparing the bath [it sounded like one of the sailors had a bath with you at the same time]. Kevin does not know what to do with himself. He walks around like a sick dog thinking about selling the car, going by plane to catch up with Alie. He also buys a Tatts ticket hoping and praying that it will win so he could catch up with Alie on the trip. [He's not the only one around here wanting to win Tatts.]

Life itself is not too bad since the girls are treating me well. And Dad is also very generous and asking me twice daily if I have enough money. Saturday I went to the barbeque in aid of Miss St Albans Quest. I had 27 gallons of beer and were selling tickets at one shilling each for beer, but we bought a roll of 1,000 tickets and used them having free beer - as much as we liked. Lorna Cameron² says she lost Twenty Pounds because of this, but we think she lost a lot more.

Klaus and I are thinking of buying a cheap car for less than eighty pounds so that we don't have to spend Saturdays and Sundays wandering around the smelly gutters of St Albans. We plan to pay a 'small' deposit of fifteen pounds just in case the car turns out to be a hopeless one.

Today is the first day we have bought fish and chips, otherwise except on Sunday we have made our own meals. Sunday, Betty asked us and Kevin to come over for tea, which we accepted. Mrs. Elzinga³ works as a cleaner in Melbourne in the morning and afternoon. She could not see you off, because at the time she had to go and see about a job. I hope everything will be well for you and Alie - do not get seasick.

The next letter was addressed to Mrs K De Vries, C/o Messrs MacKinnon MacKenzie & Co., Bombay, and was dated the 18th March 1962 by John Senior.

¹ Alie de Vries married Kevin Lindsay Missen in 1960; his parents were Roy Missen and Jean McRae. Kevin was from Rockbank and Jean was the daughter of Farquhar and Annie Macrae. Roy and Jean later moved to St Albans to manage her parents' property.

² Lorna Cameron was the co-ordinator of the St Albans Community Youth Club for 50 years. Yearly Miss St Albans Quests were held as part of carnivals held to raise funds for the centre.

³ Mrs Elzinga had to obtain a job - the first paid one in her life - she was a generous person but claimed her husband did not give her enough housekeeping money. So Mrs Elzinga worked as a cleaner and had to travel Melbourne in the morning and afternoon twice daily to the Melbourne Radio Station 3AW, where she worked for many years and was much appreciated as an employee.

Dear Wife and Daughter,

Everything here is as well as can be expected, a little bit lonely, but that is understandable. I'll write the latest news first and that is that I have been promoted. John has been made head miller and I myself am responsible for the complete factory [Quaker Oats Ltd.].¹ My promotion will be announced next week and the financial part at the same time such a promotion accompanies as well as the title. The latter has not been discussed and I have been given the weekend to ponder over the promotion and related issues. At the moment they are economizing so I cannot expect the same increase as I received last year.

I am soaking the wash and this afternoon I shall deal with it vigorously. I have put all the indoor plants outside this morning and hosed them down. Albert is busy with his hobby and is trying to enjoy himself, but I don't think he is succeeding. Kevin has been here this morning together with John and has already departed. The cooking is nearly O.K., yesterday we had pancakes and steaks mixed with everything possible. The employees have been given overalls to wear at work, but do not have to do their own laundry.

The weather here is still nice and if you don't believe this, you can come and check it out for yourselves. You will be welcome and then I don't have to write letters, because there is not enough time in the day. How is your seasickness? Is it a little better? I think you are a bit troubled by what your sister-in-law wrote, but until now I have not received a letter from Leeuwarden, so it appears to be in order. If you yourself write to Leeuwarden they can reply to the ship's address if you give them the details.

Now mum, fortunately the letter is nearly full. I find it easier to talk than to write to you. I think it is much more personal. The greetings from both Albert and me to you, dear wife and Alie. Enjoy yourselves. Many kisses and we hope that all the trouble and discomforts weren't for nothing.

Bye, Mum and Alie.

The following letter was addressed to The English Coaling Co. Ltd., Post Office Box 130, Port Said and was dated the 21st March 1962.

Dear Wife and Alie,

We are almost all right here, the only thing is that I am beginning to regret that I gave my permission² for you to visit that frog land, but the main thing is that you are having a good time.

We enjoyed a meal at John and Betty's last Sunday, but during the day shift, like now, it is utterly boring. Albert is behaving himself excellently and is quite willing to help out. But don't reply to my remarks, because they can perhaps be wrongly interpreted. The housework is hopeless on my part - it is still dark when I go to work and it is dark when I come home. The proposed change in my working conditions has not come to fruition as yet. I had a talk with the Quaker Oats overseas management's representative today and I had to promise not to discuss the changes with anyone except John and to accept the offer of the new position. So, the bomb is ready, only waiting for the fuse to be lit and the wait for the big bang.

Have you recovered from the sea sickness? Or perhaps it is home sickness you are experiencing? Do not spend too much time thinking, but go and enjoy yourself. Perhaps you will never get another opportunity.

The flowers have been watered again. On Sunday I picked some flowers from the

¹ Quaker Oats Ltd. was an American company with numerous manufacturing plants around the world.

² For a wife to be issued with a passport, a husband's approval was required.

garden and gave them to Betty. They were well received. When you are in bed all alone, you are suddenly aware of all the extra space you have. This is difficult to get used to. Kevin is walking around with a heavy heart, so I am not the only victim.

I believe Mrs. Elzinga¹ is sick, so if you get the opportunity write her a letter.

This letter is going to Port Said because Aden does not seem suitable according to the program. Fred de Vries² also visited our factory this week for the repair of office machinery.

Everything is O.K. with his family. So there are no big complaints. Both of us wish you much pleasure and send us a reply, because every day we walk to the letterbox for nothing.

Bye for now; many kisses and lots of love.

The above letter was marked Albert and John Snr.

What follows is a letter written by Mrs Nel Mom of Alfrieda Street, St Albans, and dated the 28th April 1962. The letter was addressed to the City of Leeuwarden. Nel and Toni Mom arrived in Australia about the same time as the de Vries family. At first they moved into her sister's home in Doveton, but because there were more work opportunities for an electrician in the St Albans area, they decided to move where there was work. My father engaged Toni to do the wiring of our house in East Esplanade, St Albans. This was the initial contact we had with Toni and Nel who sometimes used to visit St Albans with her husband. Later on when our new house had been finished, except the front portion of the interior having been painted, the Mom family moved into the front section of our house until the bungalow that was being built for them could be occupied. Many years of friendship followed including camping trips,³ social outings, visiting mutual friends and the like. The Mom family later bought a house in Alfrieda Street on the corner of Reis Street and lived there for many years.

Dear Kitty,

When you receive this letter you will have been some time in Holland and have settled somewhat I think. Through John we are kept constantly up to date and he told us over the terrific reception and both have received. Yes, you probably had an enormous amount of questions to ask and to reply to. How is your mother? I hope that you found her hale and hearty.

This was probably so, for she was one of the people who met your train, wasn't she?

How is Alie? Have you already made day trips? Everything here is going O.K. We brought the family Bleker to the ship on the 9th April. Gerard told me a few days before this, that Vanna had cancer in the abdomen. The specialist at the hospital only gave her two or three years to live. Isn't this horrible Kitty? Of course she is not aware of this fact. She has to enter hospital in Holland at once for treatment and Gerard thinks that the doctors will treat her with radiation. Hopeless isn't it?

It has been terribly hot and dry here until yesterday when it started raining. Last week the temperature was constantly in the 80 degrees with a north wind, luckily you have escaped that, although perhaps you are very cold.

With Easter, Mieke and Greg went to Seymour to Greg's elder brother. They left

¹ Mrs Elzinga lived in Cowper Avenue, St Albans. The family originally flew out to Australia and landed in New South Wales and were taken to a hostel there for migrants. A real estate agent visited the hostel and sold blocks of land to migrant families sight unseen. The family allotment was at the very edge of St Albans at the time.

² Fred de Vries owned three factories on the other side of Melbourne, one he used for the repairing of office furniture and typewriters.

³ On camping trips the ladies would be seen seated on chairs, wearing hats and handbags at the ready.

Saturday and returned on Wednesday which was Anzac Day. I had invited John for the first Easter Day because we were going out on the 2nd Easter Day, but Betty and John had beaten me to it. I have promised John a saucepan with pea soup if the weather gets cold. They do not like tomato soup do they?

On the 19th May, Jelle Wyma will remarry. I don't know if I have told you this. ...

The greetings especially from the families of Correlje, Kropman and Vermolen. They keep asking how you are going. Min Poldervaart is going to Holland for holidays in August. Lien Veldhuisen has also visited my mother and said that mother would not mind coming to Australia next year.

One afternoon last week we called in on Bep in Doveton. We were lucky because there happened to be an open-air meeting for children nearby. A cadet, he was from the Salvation Army, sang so false. He started with the Wilhelmus of Nassau [the Dutch national anthem] and finished with the Internationale. He enjoyed himself so much that he never shut up. Bert said: "I have heard cats at night, but this is worse" - with due respect to the Salvation Army.

Now Kitty and Alie, I hope you have a pleasant time and lovely weather so you can get out and about a bit. In the meantime, hearty greetings from all of us and a strong handshake from - Nel Mom.

The next letter was written and sent by Albert and John Senior addressed C/o James Rawes & Co. Ltd., Post Office Box 122, Lisbon and was dated the 26th March 1962. It reads:

Dear Darlings,

This morning we received your letter and are happy that you are enjoying yourselves, the same cannot be said for us sometimes. Fortunately we are on eight hour shifts this week, because with twelve hour shifts it is far too busy and we have so little time.

It is regretful that your mail did not arrive, because we did write, only to Aden where I missed out because that was not easily reached according to the schedule. But no news is good news, as you should know. The wash is again pure as snow and dry, leaving only the ironing.

Albert¹ wants to leave school and to start working. That is the latest news. I am trying to talk him out of it, but am unsure of success. We can only hope for the best. It is still dry here and we are only allowed to water the garden with a hand-held hose. The cooking is doing well. Last Sunday we again went to John and Betty's and on Saturday we went to watch a soccer [read football] game with the result that Wilhelmina scored 3 goals against George Cross' score of 2 goals. George Cross was awarded a penalty shot but this was neatly punched out of the way by the goalkeeper.

I went with John for a drive in his car last Sunday whilst Betty was preparing the meal. Now, this is about it, enjoy yourselves, many kisses from both of us.

The next letter was dated the 10th April 1962, addressed to Mrs K. De Vries care of her

¹ Albert had initially attended the St Albans State School and was transferred to Deer Park State School because of lack of space with the influx of new settlers in St Albans. Later on after leaving the St Albans Primary School in West Esplanade, he attended the currently renamed St Albans High School where he became a prefect for a while. He left St Albans High School during the months mother and daughter were in Holland. Next he attended the Footscray Technical College that became part of Victoria University, but did not complete his studies there either. Whilst at Footscray he studied industrial chemistry and had carted huge hessian bags filled with rocks, presumed to have been dolomite, to a bungalow at the rear of our home in East Esplanade. Together with a friend they had intended to operate a mine in the Blackwood area. This plan did not come to fruition. In 1974 when the parents moved house to Ferntree Gully, they had to dispose of all these bags, together with numerous test tubes and paraphernalia.

mother's home:

Hallo, Mum and Alie,

Everything is just about O.K. here, only it is a bit quiet and I am counting the weeks when there will be some increase in the activities around here. I have afternoon shift this week and consequently Albert is on his own in the evenings and I am likewise in the mornings.

If you behave yourself you will be allowed to return soon. Yesterday, I did the ironing, mopped the floors and vacuum-cleaned, as well as watered the flowers. Now we have to hope that it will rain this week, because you are only allowed to water the garden between six and eight o'clock in the evenings.

The ferns you took a liking to, turned out to be small wattle trees. I have done some tidying up in the garden, especially the weeds and the garden does not look too bad.

There is not much news to report from here. I have received a card from H. Kuiper, 19 Centre Avenue, Eildon. He has a newborn daughter whose name is Margareta and she weights eight pounds. Everything is O.K. with the mother and daughter.

The family Bleker will be boarding their ship to-morrow, but the wife is very sick and according to rumours she has cancer of the stomach and there is a chance she will not be permitted to board the ship. Terrible, isn't it?

This morning Albert and I had a discussion about you [this is a daily ritual], but this time the trip was under discussion. You have had the opportunity to visit Holland and your mother and you deserved that opportunity greatly, but to return by ship instead of an aeroplane will not be considered and please do not even give it another thought, because we do not deserve that much deprivation.

All the vegetables in the fridge had to be thrown out as well as the tomatoes you had in the fridge for Johnny Stapleton. Eating pork chops or porterhouse steaks, bread and eggs is starting to bore us and to eat at other people's houses is not one of my favourite pleasures. Watched the Wilhelmina' soccer match yesterday and the rest of the time, stayed at home.

Stay in Leeuwarden as long as possible and then come straight to me. Do not get stropopy now, and board a plane straight away, take your time. Now, darling wife, give everyone my greetings and receive many kisses from your husband. I miss you terribly. I don't really like writing such sentiments down, but it is the truth.

Well goodbye and kisses from Albert and John Snr.

On the 13th April 1962, John Senior wrote to his wife in Leeuwarden, the following letter:

Darling Wife and Daughter,

Everything is as it should be here. I did not leave home during the Easter period, gave my car to John for one afternoon and one afternoon to Albert and his friend.

The grass is gradually getting a bit greener because it gets watered every day. How it will be the following week I am not too sure of, because I'll be coming home again at seven o'clock and it is forbidden to water then. We better hope for the best, don't you think?

You are getting terribly spoiled according to your letters. Do not make promises of a future visit, if they want to see you they can send a representative to Australia. How is it over there - do the streets seem terribly small or is there not much of a change? Have you been able to count all the nieces and nephews yet? What do they say about the extra few pounds of weight you have acquired over there? Are the dress colours different over there? How is your financial position - still O.K.? I do not quite understand how, but perhaps you had a secret piggy bank.

There is a bit of trouble with Indonesia and if they should suddenly forbid the landing of aircraft in Asia, then you can return via America - never mind the extra costs. If you happen to visit Rotterdam, and if it is possible, go and visit the Quaker Oats factory and ask for Mr. Van Gemel and give him my regards. He is a nice man and most likely he'll try to speak in English but that does not matter. I personally would be extremely pleased if you brought over my greetings to all of the personnel.

Well dear, it has reached the stage where I can nearly put a dot behind the words, only six weeks to go and then I'll have my bed warmer again.

Albert is O.K. and spends a lot of time in the shed cooking up different chemical cocktails. I believe he is enjoying his studies again.

Many kisses and enjoy yourself as long as you can.

Bye from John Snr and Albert.

The following letter was dated the 17th April 1962 and was addressed care of family members in Leeuwarden. The letters became gradually shorter.

Dear Mum and Alie,

Everything is still O.K. here and we are happy you are having a good time there. At the moment we are home - the three of us. Kevin and Albert are doing the dishes and I am sitting down writing this letter. You have misunderstood the information about Albert. He is still going to school, but to a different one, Footscray Technical College and he is very happy there for the time being.

I am on the seven to seven day shift, so have had hardly any time for anything, but we will press ahead nevertheless. Do not worry, the flowers have again been watered, but things are a bit lonely in the meantime. If you only eat, sleep and work then there is nothing much to tell. I am willing to write more often, but these aerogrammes are too large and difficult to fill in. The letters I receive from you are devilish small, especially for people who travel around the world. There is enough to report on, I would think and expect more comprehensive correspondence. When you return you can of course verbally regale your experiences more fully, especially the first few days when you have returned.

Well, enjoy yourselves and please hurry up a little.

The greetings from Albert, Kevin and John Snr.

Here is where the correspondence eased up.

In 1962 passports described the bearer as an Australian Citizen and a British Subject and mother and daughter were only allowed to stay for one day in England on our way to The Netherlands. We stayed at the Worchester Hotel, took a double-decker bus trip through London and departed from Victoria Railway Station to catch the ferry to Holland.

Hereunder is an insight into how politics influence our daily lives. The passport was valid for the British Commonwealth and all foreign countries, except the USSR, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, Albania, Romania, China, Northern Korea, North Vietnam and Mongolia. How things change over time. In the year 2000 all of those countries are no longer labelled communistic and at the Olympic Games held in Sydney - North and South Korea's athletes marched together under a specially designed new flag.

Letters transcribed by Alie Missen circa 2013



Kevin Missen manager of the Liquor Department Self Bros & Goddard



Self Bros & Goddard Supermarket East Esplanade St Albans



Self Bros & Goddard Supermarket when it was sold in 1988

ST ALBANS: THE WAY IT WAS AND THE WAY WE WERE 1939-1950



It was at a meeting of the St Albans History Society held in the Tin Shed, when Colin Missen¹ was asked to give a 'talk' on St Albans as he knew it. That is when the following notes were taken. At the beginning of his story, Colin Missen stated he had arrived in St Albans in 1942, having previously lived on his parents' farm in Mt. Cottrell Road, Rockbank.

The Missen family's original home was the Rose and Crown Hotel, built in 1860 and which is now being used as the office of a caravan park on the Western Highway at Rockbank. It was in December 1976, when B. & P. Blackmore & Associates lodged the proposal to develop the site into a caravan park with the local council.



Former Rose and Crown Hotel, Victorian Heritage Database



Missen men cropping wheat at Rockbank

¹ Colin Malcolm Missen was born in 1929 to Jean Missen, the daughter of Farquhar and Annie McRae of St Albans who were local pioneers from the early 1900s. Colin's father was Roy Missen whose parents were Joseph William and Margaret Missen of Rockbank. Jean Macrae and Roy Missen married in 1926 and settled in Rockbank and raised three sons. They moved to St Albans in 1942 to manage the McRae family farm after Farquhar McRae became frailer.

Colin and his brothers Mervyn and Kevin Missen had attended the St Albans Primary School for the rest of the year of 1943 after arriving in St Albans. When they lived on the McRae family farm named 'Lynalban', on St Albans Road (now renamed Green Gully Road). Their mode of transport to school was walking and this took quite some time.

There were four teachers at the school: Mr. Lam, Mr. O'Brien, Mrs. Paul and Miss Bailey. There were about 100 pupils. The school was the proud owner of one football and one cricket bat and one basketball. The pupils' main game was marbles.



St Albans Primary School in West Esplanade, St Albans History Society

The central section of St Albans formed part of the Kailor Municipality at that time. Councillors Alexander Dickson, Frank Jolly, and Fred Stenson (for forty years) were some of the names remembered and council meetings were held on Saturday.

In the late forties councillors' names remembered were Harold Easton, Bert Moffat and James Eddie (it was Easton who suggested a road be made across Green Gully). All the councillors mentioned have been Shire Presidents, except Cr. Dickson. The first time Cr. Stenson became President was in 1910.

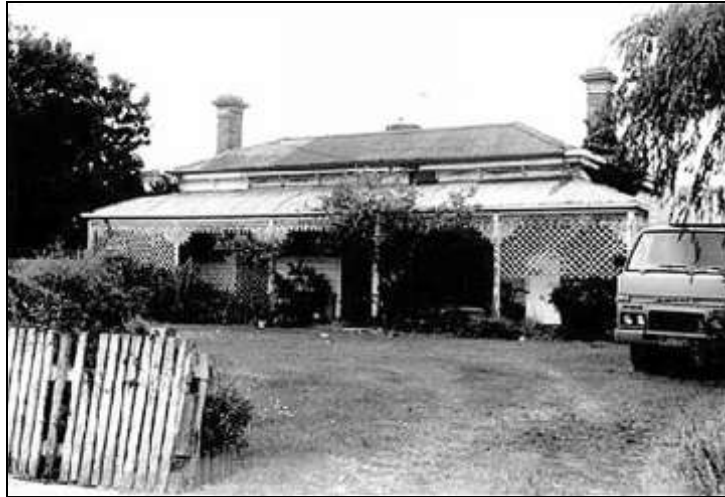
Next, Colin Missen took an imaginary walk around St Albans, starting at Green Gully. There was a sandpit on the right-hand side. This was used as an unofficial tip. There was also a sandpit on the left side as well as a tunnel. At the corner of Driscolls and Green Gully roads an old family member, Bob McRae, lived in a shack. When he was very old, he was burned to death when the shack caught fire.

If you continued into Driscolls Road (which was previously named Fox Road) at the end was Stensons Road. Mr Fred Stenson had an orchard and a Mrs. Dobson lived on a property there. On the corner of Sunshine Avenue lived a Mr. Phil Hill. From Sunshine Avenue west along Taylors Road were the farms of McRae, Anderson, Boyd, Overall, Gilbertson, Finlay McCauley, Griffith, Keith Anderson, Jim Eddie, Fred Anderson, Frank Coleman and Les King.

In later years, after the McRae farm had been subdivided, five acres of land had been set aside as a hotel site for St Albans. This land was situated opposite the present day fire station in Taylors Road west of Sunshine Avenue. The building of the hotel did not proceed and the land was subsequently sold as housing allotments. To the west of this 5-acre allotment was a concrete sheep dip our family had built. Houses have been built over the dip.

Travelling along Arthur Street, the Dennis family (and later Pearton) had a poultry farm, further along came Scantlebury, Elder, Gibsons (later Freeland), Anderson Senior and on the corner of Alexina Street where Pearson, Webb and Tom Smith lived. In Walter Street, Tom Lewis had a

poultry farm, also in the Arthur Street block were Stanfield and Mullenger. As well as these, the names of Myers, Gavaghan, Leckie, Farrugia, O'Hare, Hutson, Bell, White, Stenson, Roberts and Brown lived in this area.



Gibson/Freeland house in Arthur Street c1980 Vic. Heritage Database

(The late Mrs. Jean Missen nee McRae added the following to her son's observations: The families Bell and White both lived in Biggs Street, the families Doherty and Goddard shared one house in West Esplanade,¹ a Mrs. Florence Judd lived where the present Safeway store is located (erstwhile owned by Woolworth), the family Scoble lived near Mrs. Judd.)

The Fitzgibbons (Cyril and Isabella) lived in Station Avenue, as did Mrs. Ruby Turner, the family Smith lived in Oberon Avenue, Mrs. Dobson first lived in Driscolls Road at the corner and then moved to Stenson Road.

Mr. Griffith had three brothers. Mr. Jack Coleman farmed in Taylors Road. The Dennis family lived at the corner of Arthur Street and Taylors Road. The Roberts lived in East Esplanade in a white house next to the old Church of England building that had burnt down. The Ankers lived in East Esplanade. The family Brown lived on the corner of East Esplanade and Victoria Crescent.

There were two churches in St Albans: the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church.



St Alban The Martyr Anglican Church 1950s

¹ The families were related through marriage - Ida May Holmes married Michael Dennis Doherty, and her sister Agnes Elliot Holmes married Alfred Samuel Goddard.



St Albans Presbyterian Church 1950s c/- Karen Bugeja

Once a month an Indian hawker used to call in at his [Colin's] parents' farm to sell his wares and to cook curries for the family.¹ There had been two drownings in the dam in Fox Street. Mr. Kennedy was the man in charge of the St Albans Railway Station at the time. (According to the late Mrs. Jean Missen, the first station master was Mr. Sams, the second Mr. Del Kennedy, the third Mr. Taylor and the fourth Mr. Tom Rigg² - the latter served as station master from November 1971 to February 1988.)



St Albans Railway Station 1950s

The fire brigade was in East Esplanade, St Albans, close to the Main Road intersection abutting the railway line. Firemen remembered were Mr. Bert Gibson and Mr. Harold Easton.

¹ Mervyn Missen said that the Indian hawkers included Fatta Allie (who was from Werribee), Sher Khan, and Abdullah. They all drove covered vans. The usual type of transport for Indian hawkers was a large four-wheeled van drawn by a pair of horses, but some vans were drawn by two pairs of horses.

² Tom Rigg was born in Brunswick in 1932 and was the station master at St Albans for nearly 20 years. In 1986 he formed the St Albans Railway Centenary Committee as the naming of the station and the township occurred in 1887. They published the book "St Albans The First Hundred Years 1887-1987" and formed the St Albans History Society. In the 1980s he worked with the St Albans South Progress Association to name the new station at Furlong Road as Ginifer Station in honour of the late M.P., Jack Ginifer. In 2010 Tom organised another centennial commemoration – the Errington Reserve - with a plaque on the entrance gates, plus a headstone on the grave of Alice Errington and her son. He and Alie Missen wrote the book "The Errington Reserve".



Fire Brigade in East Esplanade 1950s c/- Gwyneth Vyner

Travelling along Victoria Crescent, the following names were recalled - Blain, Power, Batten, McIntyre, Moffat, the McKechnie sisters and Haines (dressmaker). In East Esplanade there was Self's grocery store (originally a milk bar cum greengrocery store - the late Mr. Lew Self originally worked in a bluestone quarry near the present-day St Albans Hotel of which Mr. Frank Jolly was the manager¹).



Self's General Store in East Esplanade 1930s c/- Brenda Payne

James Robb's family were also in East Esplanade next to the Mechanics' Institute Hall which consisted in part of the main hall, supper room, and kitchen.²

The Missen boys used to leave their bikes at the Gibsons³ when catching trains to school or work. The Gibsons lived on the other side of the hall. Next came Main Road East where Mr. Kennedy lived in one of the three Railway houses erected on the southern corner.

A railway ganger lived in one of the houses. (Author's addition: two of these houses had an air raid shelter erected at the rear of the property, which consisted of a mound of soil in which a tunnel was dug, supported by wooden beams.) Henry Scoble⁴ had a car repair business in Main

¹ Frank Jolly was the manager of the Sydenham quarry.

² The old timber Mechanics Institute Hall was demolished in the mid-1950s and was replaced by Keilor Council with the bigger St Albans Public Hall.

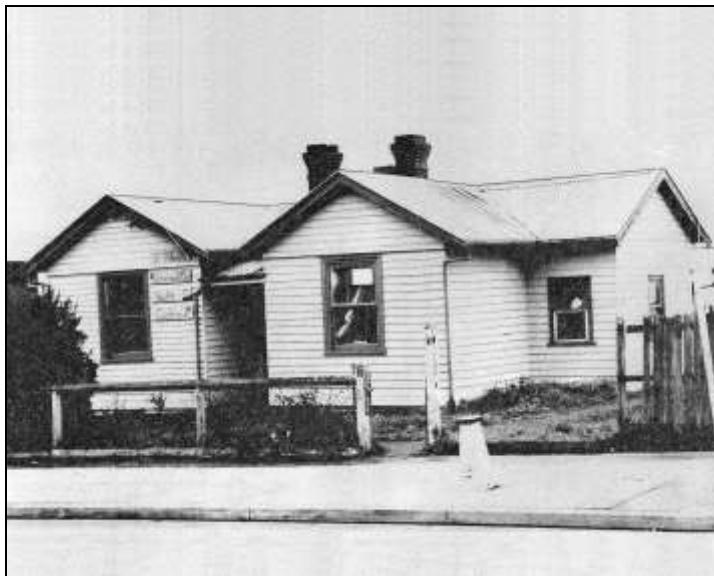
³ Catherine Gibson was the sister of Farquhar McRae and married William John Mansfield of Tullamarine. William Mansfield and his son William junior drowned while trying to cross the river at Arundel in 1906. Catherine married Albert Edward Gibson in 1910 and they were living at 10 East Esplanade, St Albans.

⁴ The Scoble family originally came from Cornwall, England. Henry Joseph Scoble married Dulcie Jean Smith in 1935 and they came to St Albans about 1941. He had enlisted and served in New Guinea. Their children were Irene, Valda, Albert, and Robert. Valda married Ted Whitten the Footscray footballer.

Road East, then there was a cake shop, Judd and Cook came next, then the Errington Reserve and then the tennis court. The Martello shop and Bill Stewart were also located here. In Percy Street, Hook, Pollock and McRae lived.



St Albans Public Hall in East Esplanade 1950s c/- Gwyneth Vyner



Railway Houses on Main Road East & St Albans Road



Shops in Main Road West 1950s c/- Kon Haumann

In Main Road West the names remembered are Richards, Gallagher, the old butcher shop (where the Scobles lived), Claude Cox, then an old shop (Davidson's), Perretts, Moffat's butcher shop, Thomas and Hassett. Also in Main Road West was the Stevens' farm, and the Nat Dale piggery. Alf Watkins lived on the south side; he sold the horse Welkin Sun to the McRaes - this horse came second in the Melbourne Cup in 1952.

Next came Cyril Clements who donated a large parcel of land to the then Keilor Municipality for the residents' use. After Clements came George Scully, who had sheep and cows. The corner of Main Road West and Station Road, the area now named Albanvale, is where the Leckies lived.

Off the main road, towards the railway line, there was a school, Snaith's poultry farm, the Goddard house and a few scattered houses. Hewitt, Wilson, McIntosh (who was doorman at the hall), Patterson and Nicholson lived there.

In the Pinnacle Estate area the following names are remembered, McKechnie,¹ Stein,² Harris, Walker, Cameron, Charles Hogan, Strachan, Turner and Fitzgibbon. In the main, people who used to graze their own house cow used this area.



Willy Stein repairing potholes in Walmer Avenue 1930s c/- Mary Smith

In the Sydenham area there was a chaff mill near the station (some St Albans men worked there), the Scheurer³ shop, school, hall and the Presbyterian Church.

In Pecks Road, there was an old hotel (which had been built by the same contractor who had built the Keilor hotel). The hotel in Pecks Road was used by goldiggers on their way to Ballarat, also by Cobb & Co. coaches, which stayed there. There was a rural fire brigade. This brigade was a voluntary one and run with the help of the Hughes and Landers families.

¹ John and Annie McKechnie came to St Albans in 1910 and supported many community ventures, including the Mechanics' Institute and Free Library, the St Albans Tennis Club, the boys' and girls' Gymnasium club, the school committee, and the St Albans' Progress Association. They acquired several local properties. The McKechnie's estate was bounded by Errington Road, Main Road East, Walmer Avenue, and Biggs Street. The Pinnacle Estate (St Albans East), Nicksons Estate (Furlong Estate), and Nicksons Estate (St Albans West) were all McKechnie's farms.

² Wilhelm and Selina Stein were of German heritage. They came to St Albans in the 1920s with children Alfred, Ferdinand, Mary, and Elsa. Mary married Eric Smith. She was one of the districts' oral historians and in 1986 contributed to the ground-breaking publication "St Albans The First Hundred Years".

³ Fred Scheurer was a Sydenham resident with links to St Albans through work and family. In 1967 he was a real estate agent so he must have disposed of the store by the Sydenham station. That's possibly when he established his real estate business in St Albans on the corner of Collins Street and Main Road East. For some years that corner was known as Scheurer's Corner as a meeting spot for people as it was next to Unger's Milk Bar. Fred's son Noel attended St Albans High School.



Scheurer's Milk Bar opposite Sydenham Railway Station 1960s



Bluestone hotel and Cobb & Co. stop at Sydenham c1940

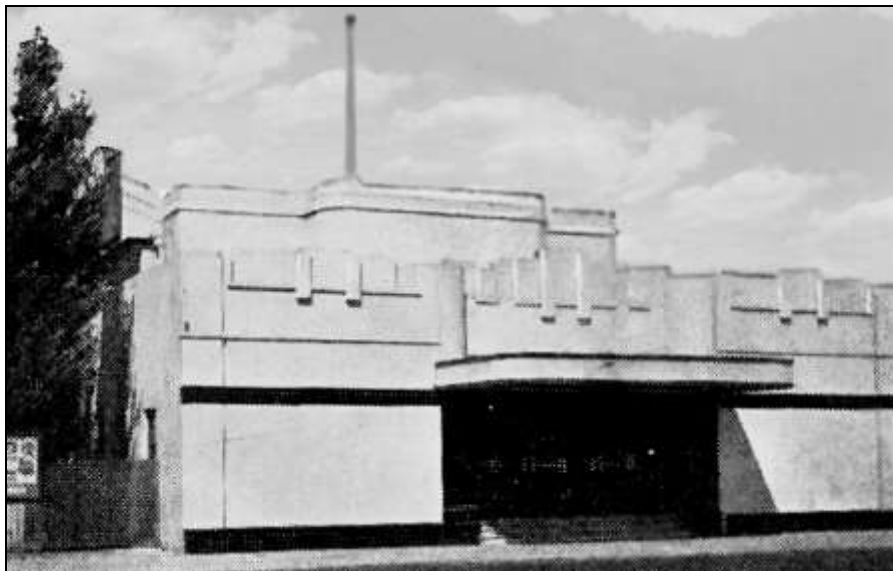


Yates Racecourse Hotel c/- Susan Jennison in 'Keilor Heritage'

In the 1940s Keilor went backwards compared to early days. There was one shop, a post office, a hotel, Fry's garage and shop. The lagoon was opposite, as was Ancrum's car repairs business and the Keilor Pound. The area was used by market gardeners who grew apricots, tomatoes and all kinds of vegetables. As far as Keilor history is concerned, the old post office is where there is now a motel; there was a delicensed hotel (Yates). The Racecourse Hotel had disappeared. The then police barracks and courthouse are now a private residence. There was a blacksmith shop near the motel. There was a slaughterhouse in the Eagling Street area, a butcher shop on the Highway (Macedon Road), and racecourse meetings were held on Christmas Day.



Colin, Kevin & Mervyn Missen with Skipper Hassett 1947



Kirby's Sunshine Theatre, Sunshine Cavalcade 1951

Colin Missen went on to speak about what they (the youths) did in their spare time. There was the St Albans Football Club, we played football or helped on working bees. In April 1921, the St Albans Football Association was formed and this association covered an eight-mile radius. There was a cricket club with a hut on the Errington Reserve. We attended dances at Sydenham, Rockbank or

Melton. Transport was by Doherty¹/Hassett² bus (i.e. at the back of a delivery truck) or by bike. There were occasional sports meetings at the Errington Reserve. On Saturday nights we would go to Kirby's Sunshine Theatre where a seat would cost Two Shillings.

Generalities

Odd items of interest were the calling of the previously mentioned Indian hawker, the baker came from Sunshine (Mr. Tong), Mr. Alex Hassett had a horsedrawn vegetable cart, Selfs delivering of groceries, Self's ice truck, Stewart Anderson delivering milk with a milk cart, the visits by Annie Collingwood, a homeless woman.



Albert Tong with Christine & Margaret, Doherty's Procera Bakers Cart 1930s

Most people had their own house cow and poultry. Paul Spiteri, the Walkers, and Darby Rockett had battles with the Council ranger who impounded or attempted to impound wandering cattle.

How we travelled? We walked, rode a bike, used a horse and cart (mainly Jack Coleman's) to go shopping and sometimes Fred Mullenger's. We used the train service or the Doherty/Hassett bus.

Schooling was available at the Sunshine Technical School, Our Lady's Catholic School in Monash Street, Williamstown High School and the Footscray Technical School and Melbourne High School.

Places of employment were the Sunshine Harvester Works, Spaldings, Nettlefolds, Dragoons Potteries and Wunderlich, also the seasonal farm work.

Constables Power and Shaw did much of their work on foot and by push bike to maintain law and order. They worked from the station in Withers Street, Sunshine. There was little work to be done by them; the painting of the Presbyterian Church on New Year's Eve by local lads or the putting of a potato in a car exhaust were major crimes of the time.

On Sunday afternoons, we would kick a football on land on the northeast corner of Main Road East and Alfrieda Street. Of course, there was rabbiting, fishing and mushrooming. We earned pocket

¹ Michael and Ida Doherty came to St Albans in the 1930s. In 1947 the football club got him to transport players to matches. He had a truck and they'd put seats in the back and they'd drive the players to their matches. They'd also pick up the girls and guys and take them to the dances at Truganina and Sydenham. Ida Doherty was involved with the St Albans Mothers Club. Ida and Michael were the first people to be made life members of the St Albans Football Club.

² Les Hassett was born in Braybrook in 1920 to Mabel Winter and Patrick Hassett, who died in 1931; there were three sons and a daughter. They moved to Theodore Street, St Albans, and established the Hassett store on the corner of Main Road West and Amy Street. Les enlisted in 1941 and is included in the St Albans Roll of Honour. He married Hilda Rose Hobson and they had a son. Les was a good local football and cricket player and was on their committee. He was often known as Skipper Hassett.

money picking apricots and tomatoes at Dodds and would go to the Showgrounds occasionally to watch trotting or racing.

The first new settler in St Albans during the 1939-1945 period to my recollection was a Jan Mikula¹ who lived in Taylor's Road near Theodore Street.

Transcribed by Alie Missen 2005



Sunshine Technical School, Office and Engineering Block



Footscray Technical School Ballarat Road 1938

¹ Jan and Anna Mikula were Polish nationals who came to Victorian in 1950. Jan was sent to Shepparton to the Northern Goulburn Valley Fruit Growers Association, working for the Pickworth Brothers of Tatura. Anna and daughter Irene went to the Immigration Holding Centre at Rushworth. They moved to West Sale by 1951 where their son John was born. In St Albans they settled on Taylors Road opposite the old Anderson farm. Jan worked as a blacksmith. They raised four children from their St Albans home.

ST ALBANS MIGRANT SETTLEMENT 1950 TO 1969

Introduction

This booklet looks at the cultural significance of the old St Albans precinct - specifically relating to its "unofficial" role as a permanent migrant settlement location during the years 1950 to 1969.

It traces the development from the humble half-houses through to completed homes, whilst identifying the trigger that stimulated the population boom resulting in the transformation of St Albans from a small rural town into one of the most unique multicultural communities within Australia.

The booklet contains details about post war housing, the people, the population, the infrastructure, the geography, the services, religion and geography, the recreation the residents of St Albans participated in.

Special thanks must go to Deb Dunn who sought my assistance for the contents in a report that needed to be prepared for the Senior Lecturer of La Trobe University whilst studying Heritage Planning. Some sections of her findings have been included, particularly the interviews.

Unfortunately she found that a complete study was impossible because the suburb of St Albans was at the time an administratively divided community; the northern section came under the jurisdiction of the Keilor Municipality, whilst the southern, a larger rural section, was governed by the City of Sunshine. The two local government authorities have since been amalgamated and became the City of Brimbank thereby providing the opportunity for the provision of a complete overview in the future.

Background

The role of St Albans during the post World War Two years is the focus of this booklet. In the course of two decades through the 1950s and 1960s St Albans was transformed from a small rural community strewn across the harsh Keilor Plains on Melbourne's western extremity, to a thriving multicultural community housing thousands of European migrants and struggling Australian families.

St Albans was never "officially" nominated as a permanent migrant centre, however, the willingness of the Keilor Council to allow half-houses triggered a population explosion. St Albans lacked the infrastructure to cater for development on this scale. Unmade roads, neither mains water nor sewerage, rampant noxious weeds, prickly bushes and snakes greeted new-Australian friends. Ongoing battles with authorities to provide infrastructure was a feature of the time. Together, these migrants and locals built homes, churches and facilities that defined their character and the meaning of "community".

Purpose

The purpose of this booklet is to undertake an assessment of the cultural significance of the suburb of St Albans in the context of its role as an "unofficial" permanent migrant centre in the post World War Two period of 1950 to 1969.

Scope

The booklet documents the post-European history of St Albans. It details the various housing styles constructed in the 1950s and the 1960s and how this reflected the social and even cultural values of the people. It names neither every resident nor home. It looks at an entire precinct that includes the people, houses, streets, infrastructure, geography, services and facilities constructed to serve their needs, relying heavily on oral histories by current and

former residents. It is in part an amalgam of published and unpublished papers by various organizations within the St Albans community. There is little literary evidence of persons outside St Albans recognizing the significant role St Albans played in housing migrants post World War Two, not forgetting the Governments of the time decided only in a few cases where the migrants were to settle down. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Melbourne played a pivotal role in the local community as documented in Kevin Baker's "A Miracle of Faith and Work" by the local Sacred Heart church published in 2004.

Post European Settlement 1824 to 1949

Explorers Hamilton Hume and William Hovell tracked across the Keilor Plains during their historic 1824 overland expedition arriving from New South Wales and reaching the southern coast. Unfortunately, it was later established that Hume and Hovell misread their directional equipment and were miles off course, eventually arriving in Geelong rather than Sorrento.

One hundred years later, the Victorian Government in conjunction with the Historical Society of Victoria assisted by local communities along the route decided to celebrate the centenary by erecting 37 memorials throughout the State. The local example has been depicted.



Hume & Hovell cairn on McAuley farm Sydenham & Taylors roads

A cairn was installed at Taylors and the Sydenham-St Albans Roads intersection to mark the occasion. Students from the St Albans Primary School attended the official dedication ceremony of the monument in 1925 and residents from St Albans and Sydenham provided a bench for residents' use when it was moved to East Esplanade. The monument has since been moved again to rest near the entrance of the Keilor Plains Railway Station in East Esplanade by the Brimbank City Council where it looks totally out of place.

The wind-swept Keilor Plains would hardly have inspired the young explorers. The flat dry windy plains, poor clay soil and lack of water made this region a most unattractive option. However, in the years that followed, various small farms sprung up in the district.

In 1859 the railway lines between Melbourne and Sunbury were opened. Alfred H. Padley of The Cosmopolitan Land and Banking Company carried out the first residential subdivision of St Albans in 1887. Padley actively petitioned the Government to construct a station suggesting that it be named St Albans. He had a vision for the town that he shared in correspondence to the State Premier in 1905: *"Keilor Plains is good sound land and will grow anything if only supplied with water, and sheltered with trees."*

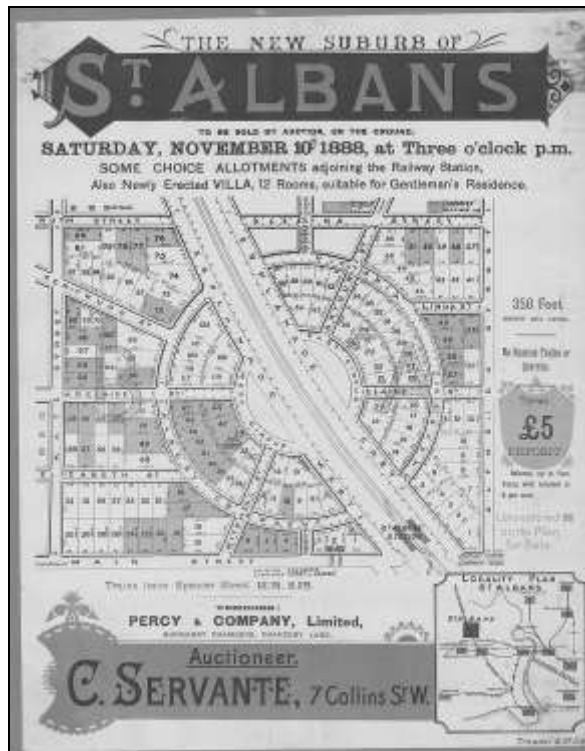
Padley suggested the rockbed that hindered development and drew criticism could be used to construct roads. His investment in the town included the donation of land in West

Esplanade for a school, but Primary School No. 2969 opened in 1889 in a rented house in Adelaide Street. Padley named streets in the subdivision in honour of family members and built a substantive Manor [Keighlo] in Winifred Street.



First primary school in St Albans in house in Adelaide Street 1889

The original St Albans subdivision designed by Percy Oakden featured a unique outer and inner circle road networks dissected by the railway line. The St Albans village plan is included as a Heritage Inventory Site reference H7822-0277 on the Heritage Victoria Register.



New suburb of St Albans 1889, Troedel & Co. lithographer State Library Victoria <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/85428>

Padley's dream to transform the harsh Keilor Plains was short lived. He and his company disappeared from St Albans with the land crash of the early 1890s. Over the next fifty years St Albans struggled through both world wars and economic depressions with little development.

In 1927 a number of substantive subdivisions were approved although not developed because of the 1920s depression. In 1936 electricity was belatedly made available to some residents of St Albans and a water supply was partially installed in 1940. It was to be the last major infrastructure investment afforded the community until the 1970s.

Post World War Two Settlement

In 1950 St Albans lacked the services, infrastructure, amenities or facilities normally sought by a prospective settler family. It had a railway and limited electricity infrastructure but the opportunity of employment by taking a short train ride away for the lucky few. It has been suggested but not substantiated that the Keilor Council created an exemption to building regulations allowing the construction of half-houses.¹ No matter the origin, it is established that half-houses (known locally as bungalows) were permitted, placing St Albans at the centre of a migration boom.

Migrant and Australian-born families swarmed into the town, taking up residence in anything that could be acquired. Over the course of two decades, in conditions that were abhorrent by standards of the day elsewhere in Melbourne, this community constructed homes and a sense of place that still lingers in the hearts of those fortunate enough to have played a part.

Post World War Two Housing

Nowadays it is difficult to conceive that newly arrived migrants lived in such harsh conditions. The authorities of the day largely turned their backs on this community where survival demanded that one made do with available resources. It would be appropriate in describing the housing style of the day to refer to the work of historian architect Robin Boyd² - who set out five principle plan types most common in Australia:

- *Primitive cottage of only two rooms.*
- *Bungalow of four or six rooms with its central passage.*
- *Double-front bungalow with one of the front bungalow walls brought forward.*
- *"L" shape with inverted L shape plan of multiple rooms and main entrance in the internal corner.*
- *Triple-front, in which a multiple-room bungalow plan had a central portion pushed forward.*

Boyd also set out a range of styles describing the exterior of the Australian home.³ In this instance it is appropriate to rely entirely on the post World War Two austerity. Boyd stated: *The most important determinants of this style were shortage of materials and concern to keep costs as low as possible.*

For some migrants, housing in the early years did not reach the standard of the primitive cottage. Car transport cases were purchased from the wharf and dropped on blocks of land as temporary housing. Others lived in sheds; but the most common form of housing was the half-house on stumps.

It was designed as the back-half of the house, sited to allow extension to the front of the home at a later stage. The side and rear exterior walls were clad with weatherboards and the front wall addressing the street with cement sheeting. The skillion roof sloped down to the rear of the property. A rear door provided entry and exit to the dwelling and windows were placed on the side and rear walls.

The interior walls were unclad exposing the studs and electric wiring. When money was saved the walls were plastered room by room or by Burnie Board. Clothes were washed in

¹ Keilor Council Minutes in 1938 approved the resolution. Editor's note - In March 1938 Cr. Fred Stenson supported "the progressive construction" of a house at St Albans which would allow the owner living in a portion of the building for 12 months while he proceeded with the completion of the whole.

² Connah 1988, pages 72-73

³ Connah 1998, page 76

coppers and cooking done on a small electric or kerosene stove. Showers were luxury items and the stand-alone toilet stood ominously in the back yard.

Half-houses lined entire streets in some areas of the St Albans precinct. Remarkably, there are accounts of families sharing these half-houses. Those residing in a half-house intended to create a home over time. For many families this occurred stick by stick.



St Albans bungalow 1960s c/- Gavin Aitken

Long-time resident Julie Aitken¹ can recall men arriving at the Stevens timber yard in East Esplanade each Friday afternoon [payday] to make an instalment on their timber order and riding home on their bikes with a piece of timber strapped to it. A respected local builder at the time was the late Fred Barnard. His son Kevin Barnard recalled migrants calling into Fred's work yard behind his home in Station Avenue asking if he had a "stick" to meet their needs. Fred always obliged and most often took no money for the materials.



Julie Aitken in trotting spider c/- Gavan Aitken

¹ Julie Aitken was born in 1945 to John Albert 'Albie' Aitken and Mary Elizabeth Murray. In 1949 they moved to Station Road in St Albans; that area was mostly grazing paddocks with some piggeries. They moved to Fox's Lane in 1953 and moved again in the 1960s to Main Road West on the corner of Kate Street. Julie became involved in researching horse pedigrees and preparing catalogues for the Australian Trotting Stud Book. In 1973 she obtained a job in Western Australia as a bloodstock sales representative. Her story was written up in the Australian Women's Weekly in September 1973.

Building materials and tradesmen were in short supply in this post war period; however, the biggest hindrance was a lack of money. In 2007 only a handful of such part-houses remain in situ but they can be viewed at the rear of now completed homes. For the people who lived through this tough time the mention of half-houses or bungalows brings forth many stories.

The commonality with every story today is the sense of community residents felt in spite of their circumstances. These humble homes reflected the humility of the people who resided within them. People helped people. Nothing was wasted and progress was celebrated.

One cultural tradition that migrants observed was a unique display signifying they finally had a home. On completion of the roofing frame, all work was suspended and a Christmas tree or branch thereof affixed to the gable. For this was an occasion to celebrate.

Not all residents began their settlement in half-houses; a few were able to afford the double or triple front in weatherboard or brick veneer. The layout would include three bedrooms, kitchen, living and bathroom. In the early 1960s a new brick came onto the market making the dream for a brick home a possibility for many. The brick was the first wire cut brick. It weighed less than the traditional red pressed brick and was substantially cheaper. Many families opted for the brick veneer in a double or triple front style.



Kokot family home 1960s c/- Bernie Kokot



New house design at Main St Albans Estate 1960s

Gabled roofing in cement or terra cotta tile completed the look. Homes were spruced up with the use of inexpensive trimmings. White painted wrought iron lattice work was used extensively as balustrade on porches and as a feature between brick piers in front fences.

Wrought iron gates were installed to match. Others created feature trims with the manganese brick on housefronts, chimneys, garages and fences, but the celebration of their new homes was not complete without the garden treatment. Extensive use of white painted concrete pillars and statues [lions were a favourite] was commonplace. Many migrants sacrificed their front yard for the purpose of celebratory decorative items; making use of the land and cultivating a range of fruit and vegetables in both front and rear gardens. The migrants represented the ultimate model of self-sufficiency. Every inch of the property contributed to the demonstrated productivity of the household. Verandahs and carports constructed of old pipe or similar metal material supported copious vines in driveways or rear gardens.

The back corner of the garden inevitably housed a shed where chickens roamed the floor and perhaps rabbit hutches lined the upper walls. Aviaries were also common in many properties with the breeding of budgies, canaries and finches all very popular pastimes, not forgetting the breeding of pigeons.



Car crate used as temporary abode later as shed 1950s c/- Steve Kozlowski

All of these homes, regardless of the configuration, reflected the people of the day. Beginning with the humble half-house and tracing the journey through to a completed home.

The People of St Albans

The migrants of St Albans came from all points of the globe. Statistically, in the timeline covered by this booklet, the largest group came from mainland Europe.

Elizabeth (Elsa) and Zdenko (Stan) Lenc arrived from Zagreb, Yugoslavia, in 1960 with two small children. They began their life in Australia living in a shed behind their parent's home in Fox Street. Within a year they progressed to a half-house in Conrad Street. By 1963 they had saved enough money to buy a block of land in Oleander Drive on the Sunshine side of the municipality. Faced with a material and tradesmen shortage, Zdenko set about building his own home. Being a qualified electrician he soon mastered the art of bricklaying and together with his young sons built a triple-front brick veneer with a matching fence. Elizabeth and Zdenko admit that life was hard in the early years, but they emphasized that they have never regretted their decision to settle in St Albans. They later lived in James Street on the Keilor side.



Vince Jakob migrated in November 1949 from Austria at age 17 with his parents (Josef Jakob and Marija Kohnc), two brothers (Josef and Stanislav), and two sisters (Stefanie and Hildegard). The family origins were in Slovenia, Yugoslavia. Australian migration officials had decided to split the family on arrival. Vince was to serve one year in the army and one in the navy. His older brother Pepe (Josef) was sent to Adelaide and his father (Josef) to Melbourne to work for the railways and his mother (Marija) and remaining siblings to Rushworth in New South Wales.



Pepe returned from Adelaide and purchased a block of land in Washington Street, St Albans. His father soon followed, buying the block of land behind Pepe's and Vince completed the story by buying a property across the road from his parents.

Vince lived with his parents until he could erect a shed on his block of land where he lived until he eventually built a weatherboard home. He played an integral role in the establishment of the St Albans Soccer Club¹ and speaks in glowing terms of the locals he encountered when he settled in St Albans.

Population and Data

It is difficult to provide precise data in the population of St Albans in 1950 as so few records are available; estimates range from 200 to 1,000 people, but this could not be verified using available data.² It is known that St Albans had one primary school at the commencement of the 1950 school year. A review of records published by the St Albans History Society in 1989 reflects a small school community between 1889 and 1949 and a population explosion commencing in 1950. The records provided a snapshot of the range of nationalities and occupations represented within the school community.

Over the next two decades six schools opened:

- 1954 Sacred Heart Primary School, Winifred Street - this school opened its doors with 165 pupils, 150 from ethnic backgrounds.³
- 1956 St Albans East Primary School, Station Avenue.
- 1956 St Albans High School, Main Road East.
- 1959 St Albans North Primary School, George Street.
- 1968 St Albans Heights Primary School, Stradbroke Drive.
- 1970 St Albans South Primary School, Lister Street.

Whilst school records provide abundant evidence of a dramatic population increase, specific Census data is unavailable as the town was split between two municipalities.⁴ The Shire of Keilor took in the majority of the St Albans population and the balance was included in the City of Sunshine. Notwithstanding the above, extracts from the 1961, 1966 and 1971 Commonwealth Census can assist in establishing a profile of this community.

¹ Both Josef and Vince joined the St Albans Soccer Club. In May 1954 Josef was one of the best players when St Albans thrashed Nunawading 11-0: "Praise must be given to Josef Jakob who managed to keep the forwards well supplied although the ground and ball were very slippery." Sunshine Advocate 14 May 1954 p6. Vince was still involved with the club in 1966.

² The St Albans Progress Association stated the population in 1950 was 850 and in 1955 was 4,500. In 1960 it was 7,000 and in 1970 it was 20,000. According to census data, in 1986 there was a population of nearly 50,000 with 60% living in the Keilor municipality and 40% in the Sunshine municipality.

³ Kevin Baker, 'A Miracle of Faith and Work', Catholic Parish of Sacred Heart/Emmaus, 2004 p49.

⁴ Census data for St Albans is available by analysing postcode district 3021.



Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School 1954 c/- Gwyneth Vyner



New students in new building, St Albans High School 1957

Infrastructure within the Precinct

One of the early drivers for the settlement of St Albans was the railway line. Electricity was supplied to small sections of St Albans in 1936. Neither mains water nor sewerage was installed until the 1970s.¹ A dam and two water tanks and two water stands serviced homes in the district. Dan and Jan Gavaghan² who built their home in Power Street in 1961/62 recall having to install a private line from Alfrieda Street and later allowing a neighbour to share the line.

In 1966 Dan wrote to the Board of Works requesting that a water main be put through their street. Two years later, in 1968, he received a letter from the Board of Works advising that mains water was coming.

¹ A town water supply was partially installed in 1940.

² Janice Mary Barnard married Daniel Nicholas Gavaghan in 1962. Dan worked as a clerk. Jan was a teacher at the Sacred Heart Catholic School; she was the daughter of Fred Barnard who built the first Sacred Heart Church and School.

The first water supply in St Albans was a dam that was built across Jones Creek in the 1880s by Alfred Padley's company – it was on the corner of Fox and Theodore streets. The very first provision to improve water pressure was a water tower with four tanks that had been installed on the corner of William Street and Arthur Street.

Kevin Barnard¹ recalls galvanized pipes being laid above ground on nature strips running the full length of streets with intermittent taps allowing access to newly created lots of land. The only made roads in the area were around the railway station. Locals and migrants endured years of dust and mud before a comprehensive road works program was undertaken in the 1960s with the Keilor Council's sixteen-year road construction plan.

In September 1964 Keilor Council adopted a Ten Year Plan to construct 116 miles of unmade private streets at an estimated cost of sixteen million dollars. In determining the respective amounts to be recovered from each ratepayer, the Council had to take into consideration the frontage costs of the respective affected premises plus the half side depth costs in the case of corner allotments. Also taken into consideration were the benefits derived by the respective premises or any other matters Council considered being proper and relevant.



Water tanks in Taylors Road 1970s c/- St Albans First 100 Years

When, after the road had been constructed, Council received and approved applications from individuals and church groups to close off some street sections within the municipality, there were protestations from those ratepayers who had paid for the footpaths and roads within those sections.

The road maintenance costs amounted to a substantial slice of Council's annual revenue. For instance, by 1966 the total of 46.7% expenditure was allocated to road making and the repayment charges for the loans were not included in this percentage. Many small private street schemes had been proposed over the years and had subsequently been cancelled because of lack of available funding.

¹ Fred Barnard was born in 1911 in Bendigo and did his apprenticeship at McKays in Sunshine. He wed Doris Watts. In 1943 he enlisted with the Civil Construction Corps as a carpenter and joiner. He and Doris moved to St Albans and were living in Station Avenue in 1950 then moved to Winifred Street. Fred is remembered for helping to establish the Sacred Heart Catholic Church and school in Winifred Street, and renovating the dilapidated Keighlo as the new presbytery. Much appreciation of his work is included in Kevin Baker's history of the parish 'A Miracle of Faith and Work'.

After a scheme had been approved, an administrative officer was appointed by the Council to deal with all the paper work and typists' workloads increased tremendously, as did the workload of the city engineers' department responsible for surveying, planning and drawing up of the schemes. No additional staff were employed except for a few student civil engineers and a costing clerk.

The plan for the large scheme came about because Council had been inundated with requests over the years for the grading of road surfaces and for screenings to be placed on the graded surfaces. The Council purchased graders, tractors, water tanks and other machinery to carry out the road works. Most of the screenings of various grading were purchased from Reid's Quarries in Niddrie. Prior to the implementation of this road-making plan, many articles had appeared in local papers. One article addressed to the editor read:

Sir, First of all I would like to thank and congratulate you on your wonderful paper which brings us all the news of our districts and helps so many organizations by publishing our reports. After reading the item in last week's issue about Street Scheme Officially Abandoned, I felt I just had to write in the name of the sufferers. We love St Albans, but this does not mean we will put up with all things. The decision to scrap the street scheme is a hard blow for the people who have been waiting up to nine years for their roads to be made.

No one can imagine what the people have to put up with. The streets are in a shocking condition, especially Adelaide Street. They are just one big mud puddle.

I often wonder where mothers get the strength to push their prams through these streets. To go shopping, the ladies have to carry an extra pair of shoes. There are no footpaths and walking on the road is dangerous because there is hardly enough room for cars to pass. Pedestrians also get splashed from head to toe.

It would be a great help even if at least one side of each road had a footpath, because not everyone can afford a car. We do not intend to give up hope for a made street. Thank you "Observer" for giving such good service to the St Albans people.

The letter was signed 'Mud Puddles Syndicate, St Albans'.



Alfrieda Street St Albans in the 1950s c/- Kon Haumann



De Vries family, Adelaide Street, 1953. House on right had been the first school



Weatherboard house & shop in Main Road West near Amy Street 1920s



Self's General Store that became Self Bros & Goddard 1930s

When finally and after submitting the proposal to borrow such a huge amount a few times had failed, the Governor-in-Council approved the Ten Year Plan. A couple of banks supported Keilor Council with the provision of loan funds and after a loan for a specified amount had been granted to cover a particular section of the Ten Year Plan road scheme, the Town Clerk [nowadays renamed a C.E.O.] had to submit an article to local newspapers expressing Council's thanks to that particular bank for its co-operation. By the end of 1967 approximately 29 miles of private streets had been constructed since the plan became operative at the cost of \$7,041,000. This left Council with another 87 miles of street schemes to carry out.

Because of the Ten Year Plan being carried out, the consequences for new land subdividers emerged where, before subdivisional plans being approved by Council the subdividers had to fund the costs of all private streets within their subdivision. The last subdivision passed by Council without subdividers having to find road-making and drainage costs was John Stevens' application on behalf of his mother Agnes Stevens' aptly named the Stevensville Subdivision in St Albans. Roads and footpaths had to be fully sealed when the next subdivision named International Gardens was submitted on behalf of the Stevens family.

Local Geography

The geography of the Keilor Plains can be described as flat and dry with little vegetation. For many years the district was infested with a range of noxious weeds introduced in the early farming days, including the prickly pear, Scotch thistle, and the African boxthorn that was used to make hedges as fences around paddocks.

Many parts of St Albans had either a solid basalt base or were covered with loose topical stones making the laying of foundations difficult.

The Provision of Services

A range of supplies arrived by horse and cart in St Albans well in the 1960s. They included meat, bottled milk, fruit and fresh bread.

The night-cart man called once a week, briquettes were delivered by Frank Marshall in his old Thomas Ford truck. Eric Perrett ran a news agency, a bank branch and a postal service in Main Road West. The weatherboard Mechanics' Hall in East Esplanade was the venue for many social functions including church services for the Catholics and as classrooms for school students.



Social function at the Mechanics Institute Hall 1950s c/- Norma McKay

Religion

Prior to 1950 there were two churches in St Albans, the Anglican and the Presbyterian. Roman Catholics seeking a Sunday service travelled to Sunshine. The mass influx of Catholic migrants saw the establishment of the Sacred Heart Parish under the leadership of Father Conrad William Reis in 1953. By the following year the parish had a church service in the school building and had a convent. The rapid growth and expansion of the Parish is documented in Kevin Baker's booklet – "A Miracle of Faith and Work". Clearly, the church was central in the lives of the new migrants.



Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Winifred Street



The original Presbyterian Church now Uniting Church



Wedding Group of 1959 in the former Presbyterian Church c/- Alie Missen

The Anglican congregation established the first Kindergarten in St Albans in 1960 with Mrs Arms¹ as the longest-serving teacher and Mrs Goldun² her assistant. The kindergarten provided an excellent service in that it was the very first one established to assist children to learn social interaction skills. A mother's club also meant that mothers could provide funding opportunities for the kindergarten by conducting functions. The mothers frequently met and became part of a small but comforting community.



St Alban The Martyr Church Hall and Kindergarten 1960s



St Albans Kindergarten with Mrs Arms (R) and Mrs Goldun (L) 1960s

¹ Martha Cameron Arms started with the St Albans Kindergarten (also known as Kindy or Kinder) in 1961 and stayed until 1980, which is 20 years of service. With local parents she helped form the district's first Toy Library and Playgroup.

² Lydia Goldun was of Polish/German background married to Zachar Goldun who was a Polish national. They had been based at the resettlement camp in Butzbach, Germany, and came to Melbourne as displaced persons in 1949.

Recreation Provisions

With the influx of migrants in the 1950s came the inevitable demand for recreational activities. This booklet highlights three prominent activities that impacted on the physical built form. The St Albans Community Youth Club, the St Albans Football Club and the St Albans Soccer Club with apologies to the other groups not represented. The history of the St Albans Youth Club is documented in an unpublished paper written by Alie Missen at the request of Lorna Cameron entitled 'The Story of the Tin Shed and Lorna Cameron'. It represents an oral history of the Police Boys Youth Club set up in 1954 from a shed at Errington Reserve in Main Road East and its evolution to becoming the St Albans Youth Club's Tin Shed.

Activities included gymnastics, junior football, softball, athletics, swimming and holiday entertainment. Importantly, it documents the generous community volunteers who gave of their time to construct a suitable building and run activities supporting local and migrant children. It was the merging of the Police Youth Football team and the then St Albans Football Club that produced one of the most successful associations in the town's history.



St Albans junior football team 1950s The TinShed

The senior football team was thrown out of the Footscray District League because they had no junior sides. The two organizations eventually merged and the St Albans Football Club re-entered the Footscray District League. In 1966, the club won its first senior premiership with a mix of local and migrant players. Mounting tensions between the Sunshine Council and the football club over lack of maintenance and sub-standard facilities resulted in the club relocating to Kings Park in 1968. The St Albans Football Club has remained at this site at time of writing.



The Tin Shed (St Albans Community Youth Club) in Main Road East

The origins of the St Albans Soccer Club can be traced back to a group of young migrant men walking to church one Sunday morning back in 1953. The men shared their yearning to play a game of soccer and decided to organize a social game after church. The first match was played in a paddock and the men realized they were going to need a home and approached the Council for assistance. By 1954 with the help and support of their families, 34 young men registered the St Albans Soccer Club.



St Albans Soccer Club 1960s President Peter Ernstrang & Coach Paddy Sloan

Over the next decade the Council moved the club from one venue to another. The club originally entered into the 4th Division Reserve League and this involved travel to alternate grounds.

The boys developed an informal arrangement with Mrs Agnes Stevens, the owner of the local timber yard. The boys worked in the timber yard on Sunday mornings delivering timber and in return Mrs Stevens' son Douglas would transport the players to and from their game in the afternoon on the back of his old tray truck. This was an enduring friendship that continued for more than a decade. In the late 1960s the St Albans Soccer Club was finally allocated a permanent home on the Churchill Estate in Fox Street where they remained for many years.



Married men's football side St Albans 1943 c/- Norma McKay

Comparative Analysis

Comparing the post World War Two settlement of the St Albans precinct is difficult in the absence of a replica situation. Similar settlements have been the domain of temporary migrant camps that inherently operate under a different dynamic because they deal with transient communities. Although one may be able to cite similar individual built forms there is no evidence of anything of the scale, social significance or ethnic mix of St Albans.

Significance and Summary

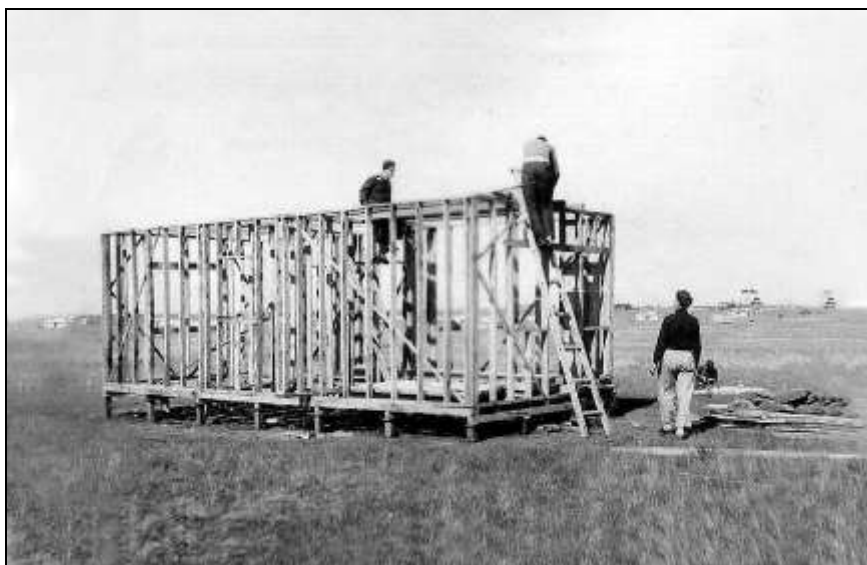
This booklet identifies the mass movement of migrants and locals into the community of St Albans during the post World War Two period. It describes residential housing commencing with the half-house and follows the progression over two decades to the completed brick veneer or weatherboard home. It documents the social values of the community and how this is reflected in the built form. Graeme Davison's booklet states: "*While all holdings contain messages about the past lives of their inhabitants some are simply richer and more evocative than others and so it is with the half-house.*"¹

Vivid images of struggle and hardship are reflected in the simplicity and rawness of the built form. At the other end of the spectrum there is the completed brick veneer or weatherboard, solid, practical and with the hint of celebration and pride reflected in the trimmings.

There is also the range of community facilities within the precinct constructed primarily by volunteer labour, for example churches, schools, youth clubs and sporting facilities. There is abundant evidence to suggest that the cultural significance of this precinct story is one of successful migrant settlement that requires formal recognition.

Statement of Significance

The precinct of St Albans is culturally significant for its role as an "unofficial" post World War Two permanent migrant settlement between 1950 and 1969. In conditions reminiscent of early pioneer days, thousands of migrants descended upon this rural outpost to begin a new life. Stick by stick they converted an endless sea of half-houses into homes creating one of the most unique migrant communities in Australia.



Rust family building their bungalow 1950s c/- Christel Huwald

¹ The Heritage Handbook 1986 page 12

Only a few half-houses remain in situ but hundreds stand at the rear of completed weatherboard homes. A substantive collection of triple front brick-veneers circa 1960 is also displayed.



Bungalow of the 1950s St Albans c/- Kon Haumann

St Albans continues to fulfil its role as an unofficial migrant settlement area with the ongoing influx of new migrants. The primary use and ongoing migrants continues to be the provision of housing and residential living. Formal recognition of the role St Albans played in accommodating migrants both past and present is long overdue.

Whilst there are hundreds of examples of weatherboard and brick veneer homes constructed in the post World War Two period, only a handful of half-houses remain.

If the St Albans precinct is formally recognised as having a significant and cultural heritage to the State of Victoria, it would be appropriate if a half-house could either be built, retained or perhaps relocated to a site suitable for public inspection. A register of families residing in St Albans from 1950 to 1969 could be considered. Perhaps the production of plaques to commemorate the buildings constructed during this period could also be given some consideration.

Community consultation would need to occur to ascertain the wishes of the people with regard to interpretation and display.

A program of community consultation would need to take place as a matter of some urgency. Given the lack of documentary evidence available to researchers the reliance upon oral histories is high. If the interest stimulated by the preparation of this booklet is any gauge, one could certainly assume extremely high community support for further research.

It is important that this booklet is seen as a first step rather than a definitive document. There is a significant body of work that flows from this booklet and will hopefully formally recognize the cultural significance of the 1950s and 1960s and of St Albans and its people.

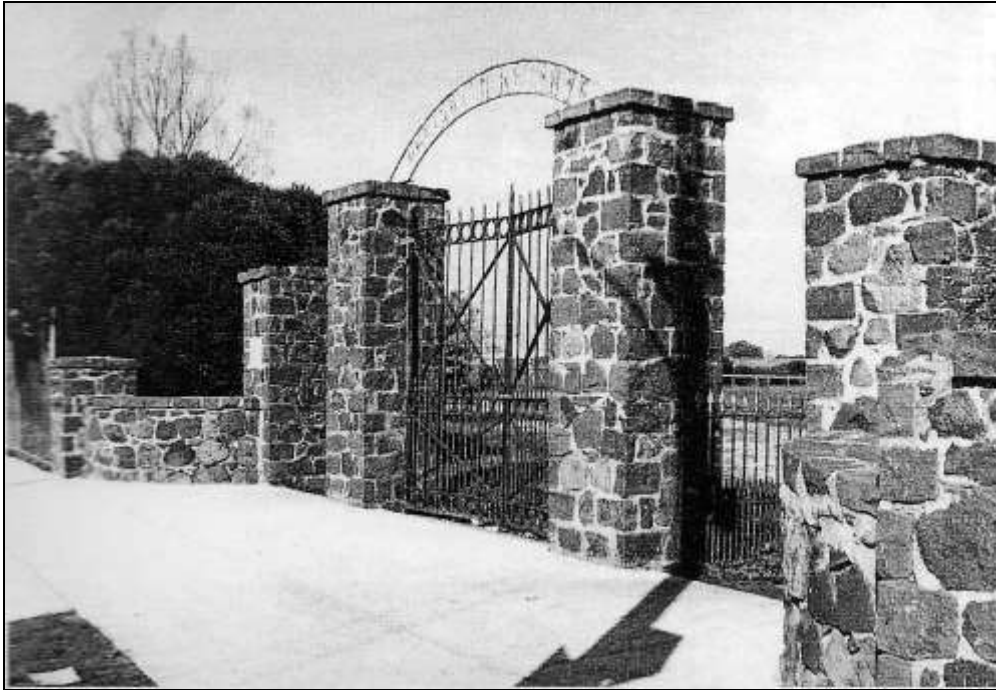
APPENDIX: Some photos appended as reminders.



Main Road West looking west c1955 c/- Kon Haumann



Corner East Esplanade and Main Road East c1955 c/- Kon Haumann



The original Errington Reserve from Main Road East



Likely to be the first brick veneer house in St Albans c/- Alie Missen



Former Local Member Roy Crick with Headmaster James Barker & St Albans High students 1956



Some St Albans Primary School students were driven by bus to Deer Park for lessons 1950s



Farmland view with drystone fences 1960s c/- Yvonne Correlje



Railway shed and station area near McKechnie St & Main Road West 1955 c/- Kon Haumann

Alie Missen 2016

KEALBA: JUST A LITTLE HISTORY

After a request had been received asking for information of the area you were attending schooling, today the writer did some research and came up with the following. The request included social and environmental issues from the early days of white settlement to current issues. If you take note of the information you were given you will not only obtain some historical knowledge of Kealba, but also of the fact that history is created by people. Buildings, for instance, have been built by people. History is about the past, or if you like, events of the past. The environment has been greatly influenced by people and as far as social issues are concerned this is also the result of actions taken by human beings. In fact, every action you or I take results in a reaction. So, let us begin with recorded history.

You know, all the land within Australia originally had been claimed to belong to the Aboriginals because their ancestors had lived in this country for at least 40,000 years. This group of people consisted of tribes or clans, each one with their own language and territory. Sometimes they met with other tribes. This movement was named a 'walkabout'. Early white settlers thought the Aboriginals were lazy because of their need for 'walkabouts'.

Today the picture is totally different in that local people are able to talk in 156 different languages, but in this instance it means that they had to come from at least that many countries. These people are called immigrants and funny enough the Aboriginals were also immigrants for it is claimed they originally came from an area in Malaysia, an Asian country.

The very first white people in Victoria were men who sailed the seas, quite often with their wives on board, and were whalers by occupation, and they harpooned the huge sea creatures. The main reason for killing whales was to obtain blubber. Blubber when boiled down made an excellent oil. This oil was needed for the use in lamps (for there was neither electricity nor gas then). These whalers originally had settled in Tasmania but one of the first known families moved to Victoria. The family was the Henty family who occupied land on the coast near Geelong.

In South Australia was another well-known family of settlers named the Barton family. I am pleased to say that my husband's family married into this family during the early years of settlement in South Australia. It is interesting to note that many whalers came from countries such as America and Canada. They would visit other seaports and either sell the ship's cargo or trade it for another one to local business people.

During this era Victoria and South Australia were united and formed one state named the Colony of New South Wales. It is in Sydney, then the Colony's capital city, that the earliest records are being kept. In the 1850s this Colony became three separate ones, yet all were under the control of the Crown and the Government of Britain who used Australia as a penal colony for a period of time. For trade and jealousy reasons, the British, French, Portuguese, Dutch and other countries wanted to establish Colonies around the world. These countries were also at war with each other. Their people would remove the riches of the countries such as spices, gold, silver, copper, coconuts and timber for little recompense so they could enrich themselves and their own countries.

Once a Colony was obtained, which was in Australia's case done by placing of a flag pole into the ground, it was decided to populate Australia. As the English gaols were overcrowded it was decided that convicts could be shipped here and solve two problems for them at the same time. The prisoners voyaged under terrible conditions, by the way. They were supervised on the ships by retired British soldiers, some of whom remained in Australia in later years, and because they were given land grants by the Crown as well as convict labour they prospered in this country. So gradual settlement of the country eventuated.

The first Victorian sales of land were conducted in Sydney, the capital city. These sales were named Crown sales (meaning that all the land in the country was owned by the Crown and could only be dispensed by the Crown). The name given to the certificates of title of the land

was known as a Crown Grant. A certificate of title is a piece of paper that provides proof of ownership of land. The very first sales and nearest to the Kealba area were the ones by the Foster brothers each receiving many square miles of land. One square mile of land contains 640 acres. There are five building blocks to an acre. One Crown Grant was on the east side of Calder Park Drive (firstly named Fosters Road and before that a surveyor named it "A Road to Keilor"). Another Crown Grant was on the West side of Calder Park Drive at Keilor Park both on the east side of the Maribyrnong River.

The only other nearby early land grant was the one obtained by the McNab family of a property named Oakbank Farm, the first house built by the McNab family,¹ who incidentally bred superior cows and horses, is a small bluestone house which is still in use today as a dairy on the northwest side of the Maribyrnong River, very close to the Melbourne Airport.

It was at the land-selling stage that the Government decided to appoint surveyors in Victoria. Surveyors duties included the mapping of areas suitable for settlement and also roads. The surveyors were paid by the purchasers of land according to the area they wanted to purchase and, of course, surveyed. Many properties cost \$2 per acre, an amount later reduced to \$1 per acre. Men and their employees (mostly convicts) brought cattle and sheep in Sydney that had arrived from South Africa, India or other overseas countries and then drove them along rivers and valleys until they found a suitable spot they could occupy. It was during this squatting phase that a few conflicts occurred between the Aboriginals and the white settlers (although a lot of them were of different colour). Both groups of people needed water to survive and Australia is one of the driest continents on the world and clashes for this resource would seem to have been inevitable. The groups with the largest numbers won the clashes.

The local squatters were the Jackson brothers.² A river, Jackson Creek, running from the Maribyrnong River to Sunbury, is named after them. The land was later secured by another large squatter, William John Turner Clark, also known as Big Clark. His square mile of land was acquired in the area where the Sunbury Township is located. It is often claimed that he named Sunbury, but this is not so. The Jackson brothers were the ones who named Sunbury. Another noteworthy early local was James Robertson and his family.³ This family, however, were not squatters in the true sense. They were farmers who became permanent settlers and purchased the land outright, unlike squatters who obtained a licence to lease the land. The Robertsons named their property Upper Keilor and the homestead is still standing today, albeit in poor condition and may soon hopefully be restored. The house is also a bluestone house and can be seen if you visit the Keilor golf and driving range on the Calder Highway on the north side before you reach the Organ Pipes National Park. The park was also owned by James Robertson in earlier times.

The James Robertson family had sold part of their land to William Taylor,⁴ who, by the way, then built a large castle on the north side of the Calder Highway. The place is known as Overnewton and it is in private hands owned by Doctor Leslie Norton and his family, who run

¹ John and Duncan McNab came from Inverness-shire, Scotland, and bought land in the Tullamarine area c.1849; John had the Oakbank property at Keilor. They bred Ayrshire cattle and Oakbank achieved Australia-wide renown. Ruins of the Keilor homestead are on the banks of the Maribyrnong River.

² Brothers Samuel and William Jackson were known as the Cockney Jacksons. They were friends and ardent supporters of John Pascoe Fawkner in his colonising project for Port Phillip from 1835. The brothers settled on the Saltwater River, which was called Jackson's Creek. Their land was known as Jackson's Run and extended to Sunbury.

³ James Robertson and his wife Margaret Thomson and four children arrived from Scotland in 1841. They settled at Upper Keilor and commenced sheep farming on a large scale.

⁴ William Taylor was born in 1818 in Glasgow, Scotland. He arrived in Port Phillip in 1840 and bought Overnewton at Keilor in 1849. He married Helen Wilson Fisker; they had seven sons and six daughters. He was elected to the Keilor District Road Board in 1861, was chairman in 1863 and president of the Shire Council in 1874-82 and 1884-94. He was one of the earliest pioneers in the area and contributed significantly to the development of the area. His 40 years of service to municipal affairs earned him the title of 'The Father of the Keilor District'.

the castle and garden as a reception venue.

Now we come to the Keilor Plains area named Kealba originally known as St Albans East. The area formed a small part of a farm property acquired after the death of Mr William Taylor, whose death in 1903 occurred shortly after the government of the day enacted a law wherein they forced large landholders to either lease or sell large tracts of their properties in order to establish farming properties in lieu of grazing ones. The Kealba section on which Saint Paul's Primary School is located was once owned by various people. It included a lot where people tried to dig for sand and allotments 1 to 20 inclusive, Section 8. This land covered Main Road East on the south to what is now known as Green Gully Road, originally known as St Albans Road and Taylors Road along the river embankment. The west side of these subdivided allotments was later known as the Churchill Estate, where a soccer ground is in Fox Street. It was presumed at the time that people would be able to make a living on about 20 acre allotments. Local graziers utilised 5 acres of land per sheep.

Apart from the land abutting the river where water was accessible, there was only one allotment that had a small dam and this was on the corner of Sunshine Avenue and Green Gully Road. No houses or cottages were ever built there, except some in what is known as Driscolls Road.¹ Mr Michael Fox, who owned allotments 8 and 8A fronting Stenson Road, had a hut on his land. In 1960, a death by fire occurred in Driscoll's Road on the east side. Mr Robert 'Bob' McCrae, a brother of Farquhar McCrae, owner of the Lynalban farm in Taylors Road, occupied a cabin built by him. One night he fell asleep while smoking. The cabin was burnt to the ground and Mr Robert McCrae lost his life during the fire.



Maribyrnong River swimming spot at the end of Stenson Lane 1950s

Driscolls Road was a new name for the road. It was known as Fox Road in the first instance because Michael Fox owned properties at the southern end of the road. The Fox family over the years has owned many properties within the municipality, yet because of postal services complaints that there already was a Fox Street in St Albans, it was thought prudent to have a name change.

A Mr Jack Freeland and his family occupied a house on the east side of the same road. He sold his property to Norm Purchase who ran a piggery on it. It is interesting that the Freeland family later moved to Arthur Street east side, St Albans, near the Sacred Heart Church in Winifred Street, almost directly opposite the Maria Altar.

¹ Joseph Douglas Driscoll and Elizabeth Emily Driscoll with their three sons were from England and came to St Albans in 1926. They settled in Foxes Lane, which later became Fox Road - it would have been named after Michael Fox who had a property on the north side of Stenson Lane.

At one stage before Kealba High School had been built the properties in Driscolls Road were used by small business owners and farmers. One such owner was Harry Heger, a man of German extraction who had purchased a piggery from Alby Aitken who had a house on the property. Anecdotal history records that Harry Heger used to feed his pigs fish offal from the fish market. Piggery owners used to collect offal from various sources. This one had the unfortunate result of the pigs smelling of fish. Imagine fishy pork - not exactly an inducement to a mouthwatering experience. Harry Heger at times dropped off some of the pigs he wished to sell at the Calf and Pig Market in Market Street, Sunshine. When the auctioneer scrutinised Harry's pigs, he refused to auction them because of the smell.

Another smelly (this time imagined) issue was when council's sanitary contractors¹ purchased some land in Driscolls Road. Since the establishment of closer communities, homeowners used to erect a toilet in their backyards, which was often named 'the small house'. Health regulations in place stipulated that sanitary workers - they were the men who delivered a clean bin on a weekly basis to 'the small houses' - had to collect the full bins and deliver the empty bins very early in the morning. The men would take the full bins to the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works depots (mostly to the Werribee farm) where the bins would be emptied and sprayed with chemicals. The men would then return with empty bins and store them on the property belonging to the Sanitary Contractors in Driscolls Road. Some people objected to the use of the property for this purpose, to no avail.



St Albans streetscape c/- ABC film re Professor Jone's 1967 survey

There were also some chicken farms in Driscolls Road. People reared chickens for a living or as an extra income. They used to trade the eggs for bread in the 20th century when bakers started coming around once weekly, while chickens were crated in lots of up to 50 depending on their size and sent by rail to David Hyland's Company in Melbourne for processing.

On the southeast side of Stensons Road was an 8-acre property; part Lot 4 owned by Mr and Mrs Charles Stenson, who had established the very first vineyard in the municipality. Mr Stenson also owned Lot 3 consisting of 19 acres - this allotment abutted the quarry. Another 25 acres was listed as being in the name of Mr Walter Sydenham. Mr Stenson also built a weatherboard dwelling on his property which ran to the river where he obtained the necessary water for his produce. Mr Charles Stenson later became the owner of Keighly

¹ Cuthbert Trice provided an essential service to St Albans residents in the 1950s and 1960s because he was the contractor for the sanitary pan service. His occupation was usually listed as 'driver' and his sons were listed as 'hygiene carter' or 'sanitary carter'. Trice had enlisted in 1940 and had previously served with 6th Battalion for 9 years. He volunteered for RAAF for two years' service in 1946 and was a Sergeant based at East Sale. He was discharged on demobilization in 1948. The toilet pan service stopped in most parts of St Albans during the 1970s after the sewerage system was connected.

(later to become the Sacred Heart Presbytery in Winifred Street, St Albans), a house built by Mr Alfred Padley back in the 19th century.

At one stage, the farm property was share farmed by Bill Epema,¹ originally from The Netherlands. One day his young son was playing with matches in a hay shed and lost his life in the fire that ensued. A tragedy for this family and a lesson for us.

A distant relative with the surname Sydenham who lived in India during the 1960s claimed to be the heir to the Sydenham Township, mistakenly believing that the Township at one time was in the ownership of this Mr Walter Sydenham who had sold 25 acres previously.

Also remembered is a Mrs Mary Dobson who lived in a weatherboard house on the south side of Stenson Road. The soil was not very good there and she only kept a few cows; her property was near the land occupied by a quarry. Originally, screenings were extracted from this quarry, which were used in the formed roads traversing the municipality. Currently, the quarry site is being used for cement production. Very many complaints over the years have been lodged about the dust, trucks, and blasting noises from this quarry, especially since the area has been transformed into a residential one.

Stenson Road, itself for very many years an unmade road, leads to the Maribrnong River and at one time to market gardens and apricot orchards. The Maribrnong River at one time provided a welcome swimming hole for local youths as well as families on hot summer days when the water supply in the water mains was comparable with hospital drips. Youths used to ride their bicycles, swim, and sometimes climb the surrounding hills infested with Scotch thistles - contact with which is not recommended!



Swimming hole at end of Stenson Road 1950s c/- Nick Szwed

Crossing Sunshine Avenue almost in a straight line from Stenson Road on the other side of the roundabout, was the location of the share farmer's weatherboard house occupied by the Hill family of dairy farmers and hay growers.² They had three sons and one daughter. None of them ever married, so there are no descendants and no one left to tell this story but me. Mr Hill's youngest son Steve, a 14 year old boy, was employed by Mr. John William Mansfield who owned a farming property just north of Arundel Road at Keilor the end that now forms a part of the Melbourne Airport property at Tullamarine. During the early 20th

¹ Jilt Epema and Johanna nee Henstra migrated in 1955 with children Bauke, Anne, Jacob, Dora, Christina and Yvonne, under the Australian Netherlands Migration Agreement. They later moved to Braybrook.

² Phillip and Elizabeth Hill were farmers who came to St Albans in the early 1920s. In 1936 their dairy and its contents were burnt to the ground and they lost a number of chickens as well, but luckily the house did not catch fire though it was quite close to the dairy.

century there was no bridge over which one could cross the Jackson Creek. A smallholding ford of rocks, Bertrams Ford, had been built to retain water on one side and farmers travelling across the creek would use these rocks as a means to cross the river.

Death at Bertram's Ford: 1906¹

They were leading a horse they'd sold to MacRae
Who lived near Saint Albans over Keilor's way.
John Mansfield was driving, his son sitting near,
Young Steven Hill, who's leading the horse, sat in the rear.

Young Mansfield and Steven were mates at the school,
Spent their free time together as a general rule,
So John let him come on the trip cross the river.
His wife wasn't happy: the risk made her quiver.

With a look at the sky and the storm clouds that loomed
She pleaded, 'Don't go now or you will be doomed!'
But John reassured her as they clambered on board,
'We'll be right as rain, crossing down at Bertram's Ford'.

Half way there, the sun vanished - came a curious silence –
Then the sky opened up with murderous violence;
The clouds, basalt black, turned day into night
As the three reached Arundel and turned to the right.

'Young Hilly, don't wind that rein around your arm',
His friend's father said, 'It will bring you to harm!'
Then they ceased this descent, to the right they curved:
The rear of the floodwaters the horses unnerved.

But John urged them on into the current;
Soon the horse lost its footing so swift was the torrent
And the jinker was swept like a leaf in a gale:
Mansfield grabbed for son who had started to wail.

By lightning above and the scene ghoulishly shown,
The three from the overturned jinker were thrown.
Sounds of whinnies and screaming and, 'Where are you, son?'
And the grim reaper's harvest had already begun.

While the Mansfield lad to the murky depths sank
The towed horse's reins dragged his mate to the bank.
The father, now desperate, with a weakening yelp
Gasped, Steve, please Steve, go and get help!

At first, due to shock, comprehension he lacked
But his friend's father pleads soon made him react;
He mounted and thundered away up the slope,
And John dived again, he'd ne'er give up hope.

With the last of his strength, Mansfield surfaced again:
That would have been it - for lesser men,
But for John Mansfield that would not suffice
His son was worth any sacrifice ...

By the time that help came, it was far too late.
Father and son had shared the same fate.
Miss Rowe and a pupils on the morrow
Would share the grieving widow's sorrow.

¹ Poem © by Ray Gibb.

Mr Mansfield and his young son drowned during a crossing of the Creek after heavy rain. The young boy was only seven years old at the time it happened when father, son, and Steve Hill were travelling in a jig across the Creek. The horse pulling the jig slipped, Steve Hill survived because he would have been holding onto the spare horse's rein during his journey to St Albans and the horse saved him from drowning.

Sunshine Avenue, now a busy thoroughfare especially at morning and evening peak times, did not exist, in that it had not been formed even though it had been marked on maps.

Farquhar McRae¹ and family members who, after the release of land for sale after the death of William Taylor of Overnewton, owned that part of Keilor that included Sunshine Avenue, used to travel to Sunshine and Footscray to do their shopping. In order to get to Sunshine on the fortnightly trip, they travelled along Arthur Street, which was then a road with a surface of clay interspersed with large chunks of bluestone, crossed Main Road East and following the road along the railway line to Albion crossed the highway and trailed the long Anderson Road, where they would buy huge hessian bags of flour, sugar and other essentials.

The family followed the same route along the railway line to reach Footscray monthly for items of furniture, clothing, hats, gloves and the like. They travelled by horse pulling a covered wagon. During this period, Sunshine Avenue was enclosed by a wire fencing and used for grazing of animals. As with very many other roads, the main offenders were large land owners who used to include the roads with their own properties.

During the 1950s the land in Sunshine Avenue was used by the McRae family for horse grazing. A horse trainer was employed to train horses for the races in Flemington, Caulfield and other places. It was a wonderful place for collecting mushrooms when in season by the Missen boys. Farquhar McRae was their grandfather. The family had arrived at the Lynalban homestead in 1942 after their grandfather had fallen ill, the boys strictly being kept busy on the farm with cropping, tending 300 sheep, milking 50 cows twice daily, and looking after the horses, of which there were 12.

Kevin Missen recalls that he and his father did the sheep dipping. This was done firstly at Overnewton, but later they had a sheep dip built on their farm. All the milking was done by hand twice a day, seven days a week, and finished about five or six in the late afternoon. Once weekly a sheep was killed for meat, although oftentimes the meat would last a fortnight, it all depended on how many visited. Visitors and workers had to be fed. At harvesting time, a lot of cooking had to be done. They would bake apple pies, scones, biscuits and the like and cook a daily roast. Every morning and afternoon they had a tea break and the days were pretty long from dawn to dusk. Kevin claimed the cooking must have been pretty good, for Sunshine policemen, local members of parliament, and councillors used to call in for a meal or sometimes for morning or afternoon tea.

The horses had to be fed, fencing repaired, wood chopped for the stove that was kept going all the time, getting rid of wild dogs or foxes, dig out the Scotch thistles and other weeds growing on the farm, hand feed lambs or heifers, and look after the farm machinery such as tractors.

Two horses trained along Sunshine Avenue achieved some success. They were named Welkin Sun and Welkin Prince. One came second in the Melbourne Cup and the other won the Caulfield Cup two years in a row.²

As late as the year 2004, there were public meetings held to discuss and argue for and

¹ Farquhar McRae was born c.1860 and came to St Albans c.1907. He married Annie Ritchie - their children were Florence, Malcolm 'Sonny', and Jean. They had a big farm on the corner of Taylors Road and Sunshine Avenue that stretched back to Taylors Lakes; they grew oats and raised sheep, cows and horses. Sundays were open house days – a gathering place for people interested in horses, and they would put on a good spread and hold activities like horse jumping.

² Welkin Sun won the Geelong Cup and came second in the 1952 Melbourne Cup. He sired Welkin Prince who was a dual VRC Australian Cup winner. The horses were owned by Sonny McRae.

against the adoption of another name for the area named Kealba. Some residents sought to have the name change to Keilor Heights, stating that delivery people had difficulty in finding the locality. Did this statement reflect the truth? All one had to do is look at a Melways Street Directory. Besides, it was pointed out that a primary school name, Kealba Heights, was already operative.

Survey Co-ordination Act 1938

NOTICE OF INTENTION TO ALTER A NAME

Pursuant to the powers conferred under Section 28 of the above Act, the Place Names Committee hereby gives notice of its intention to alter the name of the under-mentioned locality:-

Municipality - Keilor

Location - That portion of the City bounded by St. Albans-road, Taylors Creek, the Maribyrnong River, McIntyre-road, Main-road East, and Sunshine-avenue.

Present Name - St. Albans East

Proposed Name - Kealba

Any person who objects to the above proposal may give notice of objection, in writing, stating the reasons therefor, to the Secretary of the Committee not more than two (2) months following the publication of this notice.

By order of the Committee,
C.E.E. BARLOW
Secretary.

LAND AUCTION
SATURDAY, MARCH 22, AT 2.30 P.M.
IN A SEATED MARGUET
KEILOR HEIGHTS ESTATE
On St. Albans and Fox Roads,
KEILOR
(Post Code Keilor 3036)

28 EXCELLENT HOME SITES

Features include Attractive Court Settings. Some allotments have original views overlooking Keilor. 143-acre Council reserve opposite. Most of R.V. Covered. Made to Govt. Rds. Water, Gas & Electricity. NOTE: Education Dept. has reserved 28 acres as site for Primary & Post Primary school. Roman Catholic Church has purchased 16 acres.

\$150 DEPOSIT



50¢ weekly. Incl. ink at 75¢. Cat. qtrly. Bal. 3 yrs. 5% discount for cash.

FOR BROCHURES AND PLANS, ETC.,

STOCKDALE & LEGGO
112 CARROLL STREET, ST. ALBANS (PT. 150)

Just a couple of years ago, people living in Kealba expressed a desire to be amalgamated with the Keilor Township. Kealba, however, became part of St Albans with the implementation of the Closer Settlement Act. Before this, back in the 1800s, this area was called Keilor Commons. For those interested in this locality let me explain that a Commons was an area set aside for a specific purpose. There were farmer commons, school commons, church commons, even road commons. Later on, the word Commons was replaced by the word Estate and later still by Subdivision.

In the area formerly St Albans East as well as St Albans North there were also some smaller acreages of about ten acres where people had built a weatherboard dwelling with a few sheds – had a house cow for their own milk supply and butter and kept chickens for fresh eggs. Chickens were not eaten as much as they are now - a ‘boiled chook’ broken into little pieces to supplement a salad or rice dish would be considered an appropriate meal - in fact the rice dish was labelled as a Chinese dish that went by the name of chop suey.

Settlers at the time of the first great influx of migrants in the 1950s discovered snakes, blue tongue lizards, an incalculable amount of flies, Scotch thistles, boxthorn hedges, a few gum trees, the old palm tree, kangaroo grass, tussocks, onion grass, a few magpies, foxes, a small State School, some weatherboard houses, a few shops, a Mechanics Institute, two churches, one sports ground, a tennis court, a railway station and a railway siding, a galvanised shed named a fire station, a shed named a police station, private water mains, three roads with some large bluestone chips embedded in the soil, a barbershop, a National Bank building, chicken farms - in fact every migrant’s dream who at the time were named New Australians.

Occasionally, people have tried through newspaper articles and official platforms such as Council meetings to change the place name St Albans to something else. One such effort was a change to Brimbank and on another occasion part of St Albans was declared it would be better served by another name. In a newspaper report, Mr Colin Thorpe said the actions of the Kealba area of St Albans’ residents was portraying St Albans as a cultural and social backwater and dividing the two suburbs. “What they’re trying to do is disassociate themselves from Saint Albans as if it’s a bad smell”, he said. Mr Thorpe believed ‘snobbery’

was the main force behind the proposal, which was insulting to St Albans residents.

In the same article Kealba resident Charles Baullo, who proposed the name change, said offending people was not his intention. He said residents saw themselves as being part of Keilor, not St Albans and changing the name to Keilor Heights would better reflect this link and was the original name of the first housing estate in Kealba, he said.

A public meeting was held on the 21st of May 2004. Brimbank's Mayor, Cr. Sam David J.P. declared the meeting open and stated that everyone would be given an opportunity to speak on the subject matter. Also present were Councillors L North, D Costa, and Mutilini as were council employees. The meeting was very rowdy at times looked as if it would get out of hand. The meeting was not chaired properly, with no one in apparent control except some citizens.

The person who proposed the name change also supported the postcode change. The reason for the latter was that there were insurance variances between the two areas, St Albans' residents having to pay a higher premium. Those attending the meeting were advised that the Post Office would not consider a postcode change. As previously stated, the meeting was an unruly one and was chaired in an ineffectual manner. The outcome of the meeting was - no change and to carry on as before.

Some dates of importance to the area have been set out hereunder. They are:

- Braybrook Road District proclaimed in 1861.
- Braybrook Shire proclaimed in 1871.
- Sunshine proclaimed a city in 1961.
- Keilor proclaimed Road District in 1863.
- Keilor proclaimed a Shire in 1871.
- Keilor proclaimed a City in 1962.
- Sunshine and Keilor amalgamated on 15th December 1994 when it was proclaimed as City of Brimbank.

A local newspaper article mentioned that Kealba was the first part of St Albans to have a distinguishing name and that happened because the high school was built in Driscolls Road and had needed a name. It was claimed that counsellor Ciro Lombardi who was school council chairman, had suggested the combination of names of Keilor and St Albans and the name of Kealba was taken up enthusiastically by the area's developer and had stuck. The writer begs to disagree partly with the assumption for the land in question was owned at the time by family members who were desirous of subdividing and having the land sold because farming had become impossible by stress. A couple of variant combinations of the two names were considered at the time. The stress was caused because calves, sheep and goods were frequently being stolen, fires started, shooting parties trespassing at all hours, and many such incidents were endured by the farm's occupiers.

The owners consulted Mr Garnett E Price, then city engineer of Keilor, and Eileen McRae. Together they came up with the Kealba name which was then placed before the local council for a decision. (Other names had been suggested, mostly combinations of the Keilor and St Albans place names.) The council adopted the recommendation contained in the City Engineer's report that 'the new subdivisional area be named 'Kealba'. The developer was informed of the decision, who had advertised the first subdivisional sale as Keilor Heights.

Apart from the quarrying operations mentioned previously, environmental issues have changed over time in that people are far more conscious of the need to consider the environment. Groups have been formed to carry out the planting of trees and the removal of unwanted and inadequately disposed of debris within the municipality. Yet the main cause of an environmental worry in the Kealba area would most likely be the noise emanating from the Melbourne and Essendon airports. Many overseas pilots on 'take off' appeared to ascend their planes immediately, whereas Australian pilots used to wide open spaces fly

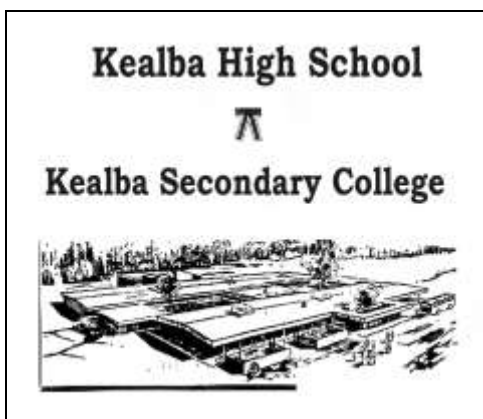
their planes at a lower level on take-off. Of course, the traffic flow in Sunshine Avenue especially is one of nonexistence at peak times; cars have to crawl along to reach the freeway. Noise pollution has increased to a great extent.

In conclusion, I would like to paint a picture of how children were used in the early days of settlement. Children as young as seven years of age were apprenticed to bakers, farmers, brick makers and others for a period of up to ten years. Education was practically non-existent. Families needed a roof over their heads, clothes on their backs and food in their stomachs - nothing has changed in this respect. The roofs were frequently huts, tents, or if they were lucky weatherboard houses. Clothes were made of coarse materials, girls and women wore long skirts not suitable for our environment and there were not so many outfits available for it was not considered necessary and a waste of money. Food consisted (if you were lucky enough to live on a farm) meat with the three daily meals, homemade bread, lard or dripping on the bread, homemade jam, eggs, perhaps some pork if the farm had a few pigs, milk from the cows, butter made from the cream on top of the milk.

If the need arose, the butter would also be sold to get some income. Girls used to help mother at home with the cooking, baking, sewing done mainly by hand, keeping the fire burning all day and night, ironing with three irons on the fire and when hot enough to be used on the garments. What about doing the weekly wash? Hand washing, boiling water, putting in the clothes, stirring with a stick was the procedure. Then scrubbing the clothes on a board and after rinsing, hanging the clothes out on long stretches of steel wire supported by poles in the wind, rain or the hot sun - not a pleasant task. Water had to be fetched in buckets from tanks or underground wells. The Lynalban farm had an underground well made of bricks; the farm had water tanks also. Education for girls? Not on your life! This was not considered necessary, for were not the men the head of the family and the income earners in the family? They were the providers - this was the man's duty. Education for boys? Only if they could not be usefully employed and earn some money to support their families.

To end this summary. I would like to point out that everyone can learn from the past or history as it is named. But only if you're willing to do so and can convince others to do the same. A prime example of people's unwillingness to learn from history is the present economic condition experienced all over the world. Similar conditions existed in the 1890s. It involved excessive borrowing and lending and greed. If you get a chance, borrow not money but a book from your library or search the Internet for information on the financial conditions of the 1890s period and learn a lesson from that, perhaps we will be taking small steps to ensure safety from the same circumstances ever happening again. This was my story about Kealba and the past; it is up to you to provide the future story.

Alie Missen 2009.



PLACES OF HISTORIC INTEREST IN AND AROUND ST ALBANS

Nowhere to go? ... Drive, Walk, Ride your Bike and see these Places.

A.B.C. Radio Mast and the Transmitter Station have been located on the St Albans to Sydenham Road (the road between Taylors Road and the Melton Highway) since the 1930s. There is also a red brick building fronting this road that was constructed for the use of the operators; another smaller red brick building is sited near the main mast. Nowadays, the mast and station are more easily viewed from Kings Road, Delahey. The tower has a height of 225 metres and is visible at night because of the red lights it displays. There is also a smaller steel tower that once occupied a site in Airport West. There are many wires and a huge block of concrete underground put there to stabilize the three towers. The earliest information obtained regarding one of the radio stations connected with this Federal Government site is that in 1924 the Tait family founded on behalf of J.C. Williamson Ltd. the Broadcasting Co. of Australia Pty. Ltd. It was in 1920 that J. and N. Tait (brothers) who were concert producers merged with the J.C. Williamson Operara Company. The five Tait brothers dominated the commercial theatre in Australia until the death of Sir Frank Tait in 1965. The company was granted a licence for 3LO radio in Melbourne. When this station came under the control of government-franchised Australian Broadcasting Company, Williamson's with Allan's and the Age newspaper, were granted a licence to operate 3AR which went on air in 1932 from studios in His Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne. This was Victoria's first licensed broadcasting station that was privately operated until 1929. Later a more modern studio complex was built in LaTrobe Street, Melbourne. The first high school in the St Albans area used the mast as their logo on the school's uniform jackets. Melways Reference 13 G7



Sydenham Radio Station foreman's cottage (L) Victorian Heritage Database

Bluestone Culvert Bridge on Sydenham Road at Delahey. This is one of two bluestone culverts erected when the railway line to Bendigo was being built. It is easily observed from the roadway and is a good example of the craftsmanship and capabilities of masons of an earlier century when these bluestone blocks had to be carved by hand. Melways Reference 3 C11



Railway Culverts Sydenham Road, Heritage Council of Victoria

Sydenham Railway Station, Melton Highway (near the rail crossing) was originally known as the Keilor Road Station for the road to Keilor was via the Melton Highway at the time. During the gold rush days it was also known as Ballarat Road. The station commenced like everywhere else with a siding (which is a banking up of gravel and soil that simplifies the stepping up or down from railway carriages).

The whole of the Sydenham area surrounding the station was known as Overnewton at the time. The Keilor Road Station had opened for business on 1.3.1859. The Station has been heritage listed and has also been rezoned by the City of Brimbank in order to preserve the building. It cannot be occupied at present because asbestos has been used within the building, but has nevertheless recently been improved by the City of Brimbank as has the small garden abutting it. Railway commuters now have the use of the Watergardens Station which is located a few hundred meters to the south of the former Sydenham Railway Station and was heavily financed by the companies that own the Watergardens Shopping Precinct. No doubt when the Government removes the asbestos from the station, it will become an interesting place to visit. Melways Reference 3 D11



Sydenham Railway Station 1928 State Library of Victoria Image H1077



Sydenham railway station 1960s c/- Ray Chatterton

Robertson's Upper Keilor Homestead was built in 1842 one year after the family settled as graziers on the north side of the Calder Highway at Sydenham Park. In the early settlement days the Robertson family acquired numerous land holdings in the Sydenham area many of which were sold to William Taylor. Part of the property is now within the confines of the Organ Pipes National Park that has three heritage listed sites and is another beautiful addition to our city. The bluestone cottage built and owned by the Robertson family is now within the area covered by the Keilor Golf and Driving Range owned by the City of Brimbank and can be viewed. It is currently being used as a clubhouse; hopefully one day to be used as a local museum; although promised renovations to the building have not been carried out. Melways Reference 3 J8



James Robertson's Upper Keilor homestead Victorian Heritage Database

Sheep Dip near Burrowye Crescent, Calder Highway, Taylors Lakes is another heritage listed place to visit. William Taylor often referred to as the 'Father of the Keilor Municipality' had this dip made by his employees. Mr. Taylor was initially a grazier. Sheep needed to be dipped yearly to avoid contracting scabies so most graziers were required to have a place where the sheep could be dipped in water to which arsenic and lime had been added. This is the only sheep dip left in the area; another dip was constructed near Sunshine Avenue where the local police station is located. The latter sheep dip was removed when the construction of houses in Keilor Downs eventuated. Melways Reference 14 E4



Sheep dip on McRae 'Lynalban' farm c/- Alie Missen

Overnewton Venue on Overnewton Road just off the Calder Highway was in years gone by, referred to as Overnewton Castle. The property is in private hands and is being utilized as a reception venue. The gardens are in an excellent condition and are worthy of an inspection. It was in 1849 that the Scottish pastoralist William Taylor built a single-storey colonial style homestead on his 13,000 Overnewton property. Following a three-year visit to Scotland the family returned in 1859 with elaborate plans for a Scottish-Baronial style extension. Melbourne architect Thomas Chalmers Taylors (no relation to the Taylor family) was hired to supervise construction of the new additions. Melways Reference 14 E2



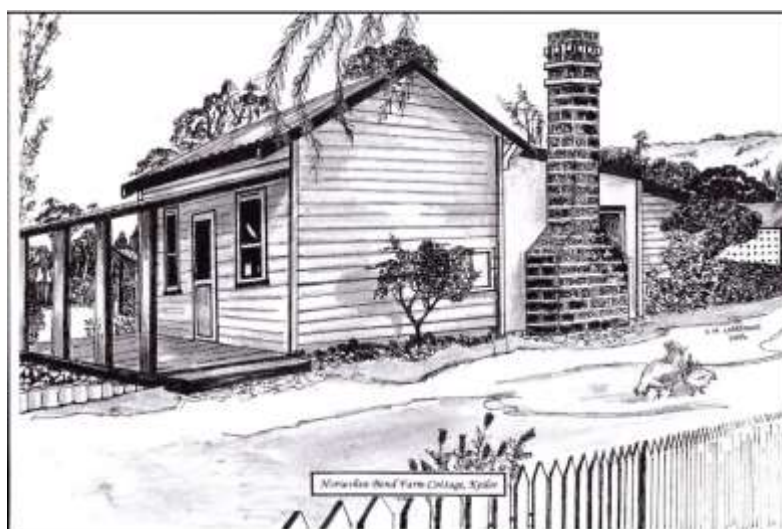
William Taylor's 'Overnewton' home, Keilor Centenary Souvenir 1963

Overnewton Gatehouse on the north side of the Calder Highway and was in time gone by the house of the gatekeeper who worked for Mr. William Taylor. The gatekeeper also was responsible for driving Mr. Taylor's family members to and from the Sydenham Station. The gatehouse has been restored and is owned by the City of Brimbank and operates as a community centre where from time to time art exhibitions are being held. It is well worth an inspection and the location of the building is at the beginning of Overnewton Road where it meets with the Calder Highway. Melways Reference 14 E4



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Overnewton_Gatehouse_001.JPG
William Taylor's Overnewton gatehouse at Keilor

Anderson Cottage is a cottage on Horseshoe Bend Farm at Keilor. It was erected in 1935 by the owner of the farm for his employees, for the farm had hundreds of apricot trees. The current cottage was heritage listed in 2008 and was occupied by Peter Anderson and his family for some years early in the 20th century. The original cottage did not have a verandah as is being currently displayed. It consists of two rooms in the front (both are bedrooms) divided by a small, narrow passage that leads to a kitchen cum living room. It is worthy of inspection if only to ascertain the many functions for which the last area was used. This included cooking, dishwashing, sewing, entertaining visitors, ironing in fact all normal household functions whilst at the same time caring for a family of up to ten children. There was no laundry (this has been added now), for all the washing was done outside – rain, hail or shine. An old underground well was at the rear of the property as are cobblestone sections which extended below the cottage, indicating that a previous dwelling may have occupied the site. The farm on which the cottage stands was, for many years, owned by the O'Neill family. Melways Reference 15 A9



Anderson's Horseshoe Bend Farm Cottage, drawing by Christine Laskowski



<https://www.westmelboumeandbeyond.com/p/horseshoe-bend-farm-keilor.html>

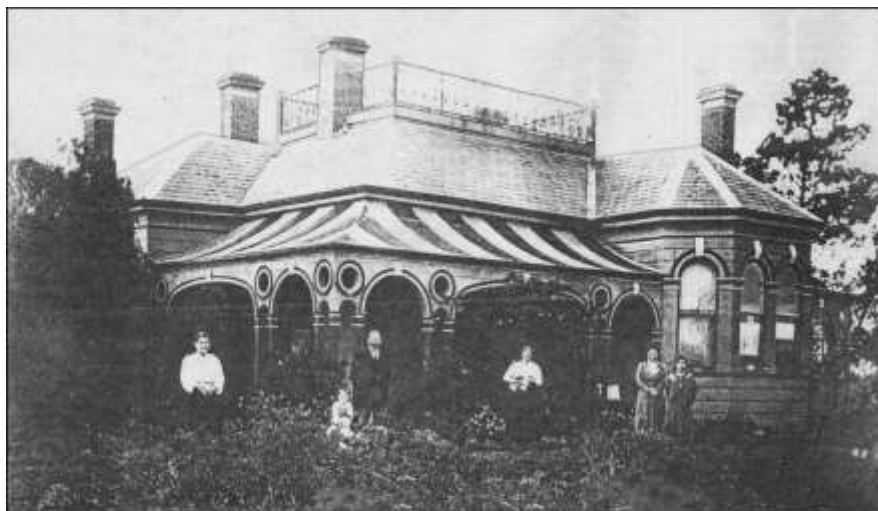
Hume and Hovell Cairn is a cairn erected to commemorate the fact that the explorers Hume and Hovell had traversed the St Albans area on one of their expeditions. It has been made of locally found rocks cemented together with a bronze plaque whereon details have been described. (The inscribed date is incorrect by one day.) This cairn is similar to other Hume and Hovell cairns. The St Albans cairn has followed in the footsteps of the explorers in that this too has traversed over much land. The original site was on the north-west side of Taylors Road (the current ABC site) alongside (west) of the railway line, then was removed

to the north side of East Esplanade (on the other side of the railway line) and when the underpass was built there, it was placed on a trailer (yes it was!) and finally at the end of 2009 it has been placed near the Keilor Plains Railway Station in East Esplanade. The first Afghan persons to settle in Australia were ones who accompanied Hume and Hovell on their exploration; this no doubt was done to take charge of the camels that accompanied them so it may be assumed that they also were some of the first persons to set their sights on St Albans. Melways Reference 13 K9



Hume & Hovell memorial at Keilor Plains Station c/- J Ribarow

Keighlo is the name of a house built for Mr. Alfred Henry Padley when he was the managing director of the Cosmopolitan Land and Banking Co. Pty. Ltd. The actual builder's name is unknown. The house is located at 4 Winifred Street, St Albans, and has been occupied since the 1950s by the priests of the Sacred Heart Mission. Prior to the property being sold to the Catholic Trust, Frederick Stenson owned the house and the surrounding land. Frederick Stenson was a poultry farmer at one stage living in Biggs Street, St Albans. There were about ten poultry farmers in St Albans. Frederick Charles Stenson was the nephew of Charles Stenson¹ who bequeathed the property to Frederick. Both the house and the ground around Keighlo have been well-maintained by its present owners. The house is currently known as the Sacred Heart Presbytery. Melways Reference 14 A11



Stenson family at their Keighlo home 1917 c/- Emily Hall

¹ Please see Stenson Family Farm on page 75.



Former Stenson home Keighlo is now the Sacred Heart Presbytery

St Albans Railway Reserve Grasslands alongside the railway line in East Esplanade is a strip of railway land from the railway car park to the pedestrian railway crossing (near Alexina Street) that leads to the St Albans Primary School crossing and has been planted with native grasses. This area has been heritage listed. It is claimed that those grasses were the ones originally found in the area and not the onion, kangaroo and wallaby grasses we know of. The Grasslands Reserve ends officially at the level of the Railway Ruth Street Pedestrian Gate which is at 18.508 kilometres from the Heritage listed Railway Offices in Spencer Street, Melbourne. Melways Reference 13 K11



https://grassyplains.net.au/upcp_product/st-albans-railway-reserve-grasslands/

The **Anderson Farm House** is located at 100 Taylors Road, St Albans (also known as 100 Anderson Terrace). The Anderson family built their wooden house early in the twentieth century after moving to St Albans from Campbellfield in the 1910s. The house and the surrounding farm were sold for subdivisional purposes and now form part of Keilor Downs. The nearest crossroad is named Packard. This road is the eastern boundary of the former

farm where crops were grown. The farm house is extremely close to Taylors Road caused by road realignment works carried out. The house has been heritage listed and in order to retain the farm house the builders have ensured that the building forms an integral part of units erected at the rear and to one side of the house. The property is not open for inspection, yet can be viewed from the outside thus enabling interested parties to get an impression of similar small farm houses that once occupied the farming areas of St Albans. Noteworthy are the external wooden window shades – a feature frequently used in earlier times to prevent heat entering houses as were the small size of the windows. Melways Reference 14 A8



Anderson farm house in Taylors Road built c.1910



Former Anderson home in Taylors Road, Victorian Heritage Database

St George Free Serbian Orthodox Church is situated on the east side of Kate Street, St Albans near Main Road West. The church has been well-built mainly by the parishioners during the early 1950s who had arrived as migrants and refugees from both Germany and Yugoslavia. The building has been constructed of brick and has copper domes. The church's foundations were laid on a solid basalt base for which the local area is well-known. The church is a credit to its parishioners and well worth an inspection. An adjoining house was purchased for the visiting priest, but this has since been sold and this land together with

another property has been used for the erection of flats. Melways Reference 13 J12



St George Free Serbian Orthodox Church, Victorian Heritage Database

Agnes Stevens' farmhouse although heritage listed was demolished by an unscrupulous builder who wanted to erect units on the land. The home site and trees are located in Main Road West on the corner of Jamieson Street, St Albans. The property consists now of vacant land, except for the trees planted by the family in earlier years. The adjoining property occupied by Scope, a disability service group, was donated by Mrs. Agnes Stevens when it was vacant land. Melways Reference 13 H12



Stevens family's 'Edenhope' property in Main Road West c/- Karen Bugeja

Stensons' Family Farm was located in Stenson Road, Kealba. It was on the south side of Stenson Road; originally there were just a few acres, in later years additional properties were acquired making a total of about 53 acres. Most of the property was covered in apricot trees and it had a small market garden section. Two properties each containing just over 19 acres were purchased in 1880. All of the three properties abutted the Maribyrnong River on the west side. The end of Malcolm Court off Sunshine Avenue pinpoints the location. It was here that Charles Stenson built a weatherboard house for his spouse Emma. In 1879 the records showed that the property had a vineyard; the first one in the Keilor Municipality. Records show that the vineyard's locality was known as Keilor at the time, later the area was referred to as St Albans East and now forms part of Kealba. In later years Stenson acquired the Keighlo house, which was frequently referred to as a manor; this house was occupied by his

nephew Frederick Charles Stenson, his spouse Eva Leah Jane Stenson and family.
Melways Reference 14 H11



Maribyrnong River at bottom of Stensons Road 1960s c/- Otto Czernik



Picking fruit at Stenson's Farm 1920s c/- Emily Hall

Errington Reserve Gates had been erected to commemorate the donation of the Errington Reserve to the citizens of St Albans by Mrs. Alice Errington, who used to live in Albert Crescent near West Esplanade with her son William. The Errington Reserve land was at one time owned by her father-in-law. Her mother-in-law inherited the property and in turn bequeathed it to her son; after his demise it became the property of Alice Errington. The land was given to St Albans residents and was managed by local Trustees; but in later years when private street construction charges had to be paid for in Percy Street and there were not enough funds to pay for the charges, the Trustees of the land transferred it to the City of Sunshine. In 1954 Keilor Council sought part ownership of the reserve in conjunction with Sunshine, this was denied. Currently the Brimbank Administrators have acquired funding to initiate the first stage for updating the reserve and buildings. Melways Reference 26 B1



Errington Reserve was gifted to St Albans people by Alice Errington in 1910

St Albans Community Youth Centre building is in Main Road East, St Albans. Much has been written about the police men and boys' club which was its original name. Two Sunshine policemen, Constables Shaw and Miller, initiated the establishment of a venue in order to keep youths occupied. The building is a Nissen hut built with corrugated iron. It has served very many St Albans' residents as a place of recreation, communication and information. Various groups have used the building during the nearly 60 years of its existence. The building has benefitted by many renovations and additions carried out by local authorities and can be inspected during office hours, similar to most community centres within the Brimbank Municipality. Melways Reference 26 B1



St Albans Community Youth Club cnr Main Road East and Erica Street

St Albans Uniting Church (formerly the Presbyterian Church) in East Esplanade on the corner of Elaine Street, St Albans, is a wooden church built early in the Twentieth Century.¹ A hall had been added at the rear of the building on land that was formerly used for tennis games. The huge gum trees surrounding the church were unfortunately chopped down in 2009 by its present owners, but the original trees on the ground were pine trees. A brick

¹ The Presbyterian Church was designed by Hugo Pfannenstiel of St Albans and built in 1912.

vener manse had been built on the adjoining property during the 1960s. The Stevens family members were very active parishioners and have contributed greatly to the church. Currently the church property is owned by the Uniting Church Trust. In 2012 a new church building had been erected on the former manse site that abutted the original church building. The old church building has been magnificently restored and is a credit to the Uniting Church. Melways Reference 14 A12



Presbyterian church 1950s



St Albans Uniting Church 2025 c/- Google Maps

Written by Alie Missen April 2010

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BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS

