



ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC BULLETIN

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516

REPORT ON THE AUGUST MEETING (10/8/11)

Members and guests were treated to a thoroughly professional and entertaining presentation by Dr Rosemary Farrell on Chinese influence on Australian circus history especially the Nan-jing Project at the Flying Fruit Fly Circus.

In the absence of our President Chris McQuellin who was enjoying a motoring holiday in USA, Vice-president Joe Wooding chaired the meeting.

Following Dr Farrell's address, several members recounted experiences with circuses. Joe & Jill Wooding spoke of being taken to a circus in Beijing. They were astonished by the whole experience especially a performer who treated the audience with a never-ending shower of playing cards, several of which they still have.

June Shanahan remembered having to take her sister to every circus and rodeo that came to town. She also remembered Sor-lies, a travelling vaudeville theatre that set up its tent near the Albury railway station. Wirth's Circus travelled by rail. The elephants would be unloaded and walked to the circus site at the CBC football ground in South Albury.

John Craig recounted an occasion while working for Albury City Council, going to Noreuil Park while a circus was setting up. He watched Radio 2AY announcer Laurie Henry, in the empty Big Top, pre-recording a commentary complete with lions roaring and other sound effects. Later that evening John listened to a 'live' broadcast of the circus performance!

In the Members' 15 Minutes segment, Joe Wooding had two items related to the *Uiver*. The first was a pot of Dutch Hy-

NEXT MEETING

WEDNESDAY

14 SEPTEMBER 2011

7.30pm at Commercial Club
Albury

Speakers: Duncan Rolley

22 years of paper conservation:

A look at conservation practice
in regional Victoria (and the
world).

*Members may wish to bring a
paper based item for
discussion.*

MEMBER'S SURVEY

What do you think were the five
most important events that de-
termined Albury's history?

For example: Building Hume
Dam; National Growth Centre
& AWDC; Linking of the NSW
& Vic Railways?

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Cossor.

Bulletin Editor: Doug Hunter 02 6021 2835
<djhjrhlaptop@bigpond.com>

ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC

PO Box 822 ALBURY 2640

Journals, Stock & Meeting Greeter: John
Craig

Membership list & Bulletin dispatch: Ray
Gear

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

Single: \$25

Family: \$33

Corporate: \$50

Research undertaken \$25 first hour.

Enquiries in writing with \$25

History Meetings: 2nd Wednesday
of the month 7.30pm at Commercial
Club Albury.

Committee meets 3rd Wednesday of
the month 5.15pm at Albury
LibraryMuseum.

A&DHS website:

www.alburyhistory.org.au

cinths which he grew from bulbs obtained from Mrs Thompson in Guinea Street. The original bulbs were part of a gift from Holland to the Reis family. Most were planted at the Albury Racecourse in 1935, but are now gone. Joe's second item was a *Border Morning Mail* report of Mr Bill West erecting an aircraft beacon on a 60 foot mast on the roof of his garage in Kiewa Street. The beacon flashed ALBURY in Morse Code.

Jan Hunter advised that planning was well advanced for the Bus Tour of houses in North, West and Central Albury to be held as a History Week activity in conjunction with the Art Deco Exhibition at the Library Museum and the Art Gallery.

Eric Cossor read from an extract from the *Argus*, 30 August 1920 giving an account of the crash landing of Lieutenants Ray Parer and John McIntosh in a single-engine Airco DH.9. The plane developed engine trouble and they were forced to put down in a cropped paddock. All went well till the plane wheels sank into the rain effected paddock and the plane flipped over. The pilots escaped injury, but the plane was damaged.

Parer and McIntosh were competing for a prize offered by the Australian Government in 1919 for the first Australian airmen to fly a British built aeroplane from Britain to Australia. They reached Darwin on 2 August 1920 after an epic 206 day flight. They took a further 29 days to reach Melbourne where they were welcomed by the Prime Minister and awarded a consolation prize of £1,000. The £10,000 prize was won by Ross and Keith Smith in a time of 27 days 20 hours.

SUMMARY OF THE ADDRESS BY ROSEMARY FARRELL

Dr Rosemary Farrell is a freelance academic who works for the theatre and drama departments of the University of New England, Latrobe University, Swinburne University and the education department of Charles Sturt University.

Rosemary performed with the Albury-Wodonga Flying Fruit Fly Circus and Hot House Theatre productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and did some training with a Chinese trainer then. She has a keen interest in theatre and started performing when she was five – Rosemary is descended from a

theatre and circus family, the Woolford family circus which performed in what is now the United Kingdom between 1801 and 1830s. Louisa Woolford is the most famous performer of that circus and she married Andrew Ducrow in 1832. Louisa was an equestrian and an acrobat who performed with Astley's Circus in London in the 1820s. To commemorate her fame, Wedgewood produced a figurine of Louisa Woolford balancing on a galloping horse in the nineteenth century. In some ways circus is in Rosemary's blood.

Rosemary completed her doctoral thesis on



the history of Chinese acrobats in Australian circus in 2007 and has several academic publications on the subject. Her research included writing the only history of the Nanjing Project that occurred in Albury Wodonga in 1983-1984 and was repeated in 1985-1986 and involved the children from the Flying Fruit Fly Circus.

On Wednesday night 10th August, 2011, Dr Rosemary Farrell presented to the meeting a history of Chinese acrobatics in Australian circus that included a crucial Albury Wodonga connection to the Nanjing Project. The talk was titled, 'Sweat from the Bones: Chinese circus meets the Flying Fruit Fly Circus'. It was accompanied by images from the

project that included children/teenagers from the Flying Fruit Fly Circus as well as their Chinese trainers who came especially to train them and other Australian performers in Chinese acrobatics. There was even a commemorative stamp printed by Australia Post in 1997. It has three Albury teenagers performing in a Chinese hoop diving act with Circus Oz performers. An interesting connection to circus in the nineteenth century was Rosemary's discovery of the first Chinese acrobats to perform with Ashton's Circus in Yackandandah in 1857.

The talk included a brief history of the Flying Fruit Fly Circus and its involvement in the Nanjing Project that was a joint People's Republic of China and Australian government cross-cultural training program in 1983. It ran for three months and cost \$100,000 some of which came from the Albury City Council and the Wodonga City Council.

There were seven Chinese trainers, one Chinese Australian interpreter and ninety-seven Australian participants. Scott Grayland, Nicci Wilkes, Per Westman, Tanya Lester, Mary Cominos, Natalie Dyball, Heather Tetu and Matt Hughes were Albury Wodonga teenagers in 1983 and their stories featured in the talk. Rosemary also told some of the stories of the Chinese trainers, specifically Lu Yi and Lu Guangrong, who indicated that there was a lot of pressure on them from China to make the training program successful. The only remaining t-shirt from the project was also exhibited as an historical artefact. It had one of the mottos of the project, 'Persistence leads to success' printed across it.

The talk highlighted the extreme commitment of the Flying Fruit Fly children/teenagers and the Chinese trainers. It included descriptions of their experiences of training their bodies to perform extraordinary acts of tumbling and balancing. Many described the way that they learnt skills at the project was important to the way they learnt other skills later in life.

The talk concluded that the Nanjing Project was crucial to the development of circus skills in Australian circus from the 1980s. Without it, Circus Oz and the Flying Fruit Fly Circus may not have continued or developed their international reputations and the hundred or more circus training programs across Australia would not have developed. Albury Wodonga has an important role in the history of circus in Australia.

VOLUNTEER DEFENCE CORPS (VDC) IN THE ALBURY DISTRICT

Recently the Society has had a number of enquiries about the VDC in the Albury Area. Captain Phillip Heywood of *Hawksview* near the Hume Dam was appointed to raise the unit in the early days of the Second World War. This brief history was found among his papers. It is undated, but probably written for Colonel James in 1942. It is typed on very thin paper; the text has faded and the document is barely readable.

[The document has some military abbreviations such as R.S.S. & A.I.L.A., Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia; Maj.Gen., Major General; Brig.Gen., Brigadier General; C.S.M., Company Sergeant Major; Maj., Major; Col., Colonel; Capt., Captain; Lt., Lieutenant; O. i/c., Officer in Command; 2 i/c., Second in Command; Battn, Battalion; Coy, Company.]

The early establishment of the V.D.C. 1940

On the evening of Belgium's capitulation [28 May 1940] a meeting of all Albury citizens was called by the president of the Albury sub branch of the RSS & AILA [Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia] (Mr Clarie Bowring) to petition the Federal Government to form a VDC of men over military age for the Home Defence of Australia. Upward of 200 men attended this meeting. The outcome of this, and no doubt other similar meetings held throughout Australia, at the same time, was that the Albury sub branch of the RSS & AILA were asked to forward the names of all returned men willing to serve in the VDC. These men did not want to wait, they wanted to select their leaders and start on training, in fact they almost wanted to go into camp with the 2/23rd Battn [Battalion] then encamped at the Show grounds.

On July 5th, 1940 Maj. General Gordon Bennett wrote to me asking if I would organise and command the VDC in this Area. July 11th 1940, I was appointed to the Command of the Area R.9. The whole of N.S.W. was divided into Areas commanded by Major General. Gordon Bennett and came under the Eastern Command.

Area R.9 embraced that area bounded by the Murray River on the South from Wymah to the junction of the Ovens and Murray Rivers thence North [to] Mahonga Station thence East

to Garryowen, thence South to Wymah. These boundaries were not rigid but were governed more by where the various RSS & AILA sub branch member were drawn from. In this area the main centres were Holbrook, Albury, Howlong, Corowa and Walbundrie. At all these centres meetings were called, the purpose and requirements of the Corps were outlined to intending volunteers, and enrolments commenced. At this time all the information and requirements I had was very small and vague, but enthusiasm and spirit of the old service man was so great that by the 31st of July parades had been held at Albury, Culcairn, Holbrook and Walbundrie. At these parades I was greatly assisted by CSM [Company Sergeant Major] Strickland of No 5 Guard 12th Garrison Battn, who gave up much of his leave recreation time in helping in the task organising the recruits into the new formations and drill to them, and also for making what stores and equipment as he could get available. This fine instructor soon left his mark, and it was to the VDC a great loss when he was moved by promotion to a higher post. He took with him the sincere good wishes of the VDC especially the Albury Unit.

It was soon seen that the Area would have to be organised on Battalion lines so keen was the enthusiasm and spirit of everyone concerned, and where it was expected platoons might be raised, companies come into being.

It was not long before there was a demand for text books, stores and equipment to train these men, a small issue of text books were made available. One set per unit as the various centres were then known as. Stores and equipment, it came to a case of grab what you could for the Commanders, and possession became 9 points of the law. A fixed syllabus for the whole Area could not be laid down, lack of uniform equipment, different time and periods of training. These men were to be trained to Deny, Delay and Destroy the Enemy, to rely on themselves and cooperate with their own forces, if called upon to do so.

The first appointments in the Area were as follows:
 Area Commander July 11th 1940 Capt P H Heywood
 Area Adjutant & Acting 2 i/c [Second in Command]
 July 20th 1940 Lt L A Heath

Area	Intelligence Officer	Flying Offr	A Newnham
Area	Q.M.	July 31 st 1940	Mr Tom Oldfield
Albury Coy [Company]	O i/c [Officer in Command]	July 31 st 1940	Lt J Whitehead
"	2 i/c	"	CSM H.Coglan
Walbundrie	O i/c	"	Lt A R Townsend
"	2 i/c	"	Mr C Howard
Holbrook	O i/c	"	Lt N Ross
Culcairn	O i/c	"	Mr W R MacEwen
Later formed into a Company under Lt W R Raper			
Corowa	O i/c	July 31 st 1940	Capt D.Kemp MC
	2 i/c	"	Capt. E.Wintercook

To these names should be added N Harvey, Albury Coy Clerk; the veteran Jim Brian of Allans Flat, who from the very first was always outstanding for his keenness and example as to what a VDC man should be. There were many others who at the beginning took a keen interest in the Corps, and helped in all ways they could.

Some 2000 miles were travelled by myself alone to start the Corps and to hold the first parades in the various centres. No one those days kept any record of telephone calls and postage, or how much petrol was used, so long as the Corps was put on active and sound basis.

On August 5th 40 I received Maj Gen Gordon Bennett's congratulations on the rapid results and progress made.

On February 9th 41 the VDC in Area 9 had their first public parade, when headed by the Albury Town Band they marched through that town to their Review parade ground to be inspected by the new Commander, Brigadier General J Heane C.B. C.M.G. D.S.O. Here a full Ceremonial Parade was held. I enclose a copy of the letter I received from Brig Gen Heane. [Regretably, the letter is unreadable.] Corowa was the only unit not represented in that parade.

On August 1st I received notification of the transfer of the Area R9 together with other territory from Eastern Command to the Southern Command. That part of Area S12 transferred was attached to Area R.9. The two companies transferred to the Area were under the command of, Henty Mr Rutherford of Henty and Lockhart Coy under Mr Smith of Lockhart. The Henty Coy had made great headway with their signalling and had brought out their own Heliographing instrument. This instrument was too valuable to be lost and Albury under the guidance of Mr Newnham soon had a number of improved instruments in use.

After a conference with Brig Gen Foott, at which I was able to give a good deal of information, and late[r] another at which Col [Colonel] James OC [Officer Commanding] L of C [Line of Communication] Albury [was present]. This Area plus the two companies at Lockhart and Henty came under the command of Col Shannon, Commander of the North-Eastern Group and were known as the 3rd Battn.

I would here like to mention the very generous help given to the VDC in the Area by Col Hore, Maj [Major] C. Covell and their staff of instructors of the OTS [Officer Training School] Bonegilla. Especially Maj Covell who for nearly 12 months hardly missed a Saturday afternoon and a Wednesday night to help with the training of the VDC. Also the 2/23rd Battn AIF in supplying instructors and equipment. Their only regret was that they could not make equipment available to all the units throughout the area.

[Following is a copy of a one page document included with the history of the VDC written by Captain Heywood]

MOBILISATION CODE NO 1
SECRET

AREA H.Q.
ALBURY
2.4.41

The following CODE will be used for ordering MOBILISATION of the V.D.C. in this Area.

All Unit Commanders and 2 i/c will acquaint themselves with these instructions.

1. HEAVY RAIN EXPECTED

On receipt of this message Unit C.Os will warn all members of their Unit to stand by and see they have their Arms and Equipment ready especially the Transport O i/c.

2 ROUGH WEATHER COMING

Those Sections & Guards with special posts & guards allotted will take up their positions.

3 GENERAL FLOODING EXPECTED

This will signal General Mobilisation throughout the Area.

4. On RECEIPT of the ORDERS: Unit Commanders will report same to AREA H.Q.

In case of ORDERS 2 & 3 completion of operation will be reported to AREA H.Q. Immediately Unit C.O. will acknowledge receipt of these instructions by return post.

[Signed] P H Heywood Capt O i/c AREA R9

Copies sent to O i/cs

Culcairn
Albury
Corowa
Walbundrie
AREA H.Q.

WRITER'S PRIZE WINNER

Congratulations to Jan Hunter who has been awarded equal First Prize in the 2011 *Sabretache* Biennial Writer's Prize. The competition is conducted by the Military Historical Society of Australia (MHSA).

Jan's essay was on the Mate's Comforts Fund Communiqués. The essay will be published in the next edition of the MHSA journal *Sabretache* and Jan will be a speaker at the Biennial Conference to be held in Canberra in 2012.

ALBURY IN WARTIME

Snippets from *Border Morning Mail*
Saturday 28 February 1942

TRENCH DIGGERS MISFORTUNE

While digging trenches at the High School, Ian Chick, a pupil, accidentally received a nasty

wound in the leg when hit with a pick. He received treatment at the Albury hospital, where four stiches were inserted in the wound.

TRENCH DIGGING AT HOSPITAL

Men who can wield a pick or handle a shovel are wanted this afternoon at the Albury hospital to dig slit trenches. They should report there at half-past two. It is hoped that there will be a big team so that the work can be completed in the afternoon. They will enjoy a welcome break during their arduous job as the members of the W.V.S. have agreed to come along and provide them with afternoon tea.

DEAN ST. WASTE COLLECTION

Business houses in Dean st are reminded that this morning another collection of waste paper will be made. Collectors will begin their activities at the post office at 10 a.m. and will work up and down Dean st. Firms are requested to put waste paper in bags on the footpath and for each full bag collected an empty bag will be left in its place. Saturday morning collections will be a regular feature from now on.

HELPERS WANTED

More voluntary helpers are required at the waste products depot on Tuesday and Thursday to assist in pressing paper. The depot is at the rear of Champions on the corner of Kiewa and Stanley sts. In future only consignments of two tons will be sent away at a time to enable the committee to avail itself of the special freight concessions from the railways. Owing to the loss of the rubber supply from Malaya, the collection of rubber



Bill Washington came across this photograph showing two drays crossing the Murray River. Caption on reverse of photo: Grandfather, Jack Thatcher and son Johnny at Doctors Point. Good brickies loam from opposite bank.

tyres and old rubber has been made imperative. If country people have waste products they are asked to leave them at the Albury depot. People living in the area where the council garbage van makes its weekly collection on Monday are asked to have their waste products suitably packed and placed by their dust bin.

SCHOOL COLOURS & ATHLETICS

Contribution to Albury High School magazine *The Southern Cross* by Hillary Chubb 3A, 1950.

My father Mr A J Chubb related to me the following story of the origin of the High School colours and the first school Athletics Carnival in Albury.

"In the year 1903, nearly fifty years ago, there arrived in Albury from Inverell (NSW) a new headmaster, Mr William Roberts, to take charge of the Albury Superior Public School (they called us the Asps). It was the same school that is known today as the Albury Public School. As there was no thought of a High School here in those days, it was quite a distinction and privilege to be in Fifth Class, which was in charge of our Head, and what a likable head he proved to be.

"Hardly had he commenced duties when he decided to hold a School Athletics day in Albury, and did we pupils respond!

"In due course the day arrived, and after months of hard practice and training, the first Albury School Athletics took place on the old Albury Showgrounds in the year 1903, and at the suggestion of our Head, the school colours were Red and Black.

"Our champion of the day was a lad named Ossie Barkley. He had a beautiful stride, and in style action and physique he was comparable to our John Treloar of today. He was a nervous type, halting in his speech, but certainly not so in his gait. What a shame it is that some of these lads do not train on after they leave school.

"Our Relay Races were a thrill and were the first ever to be held in Albury.

"The Carnival attracted comparatively more people than those of today do and believe me we boys took advantage of it all and "showed off" before an appreciative audience.

"The large attendance of spectators was due no doubt to the day being a Saturday and also the inclusion in the program of several spectacular class displays.

"For instance the Single Stick Squad (Fencing as it is now called) must have been an attractive show. About fifty boys, all in white, with red and black ties and with red and black ribbons on the rapiers, went through the several exercises which may have lasted for half an hour or more overall.

"Then we had the dummy rifle drill, all the rifles being beribboned to give the black and red effect. The fifty lads in this turn all whistled a waltz tune which kept them in rhythm with the work.

"The display of club swinging by the same sized class was most impressive, all the clubs being covered with silver paper, bedecked with the ever popular red and black ribbons.

"This too, applied to the Dumbbell drill, which event

finished a never to be forgotten day.

"And so I conclude my story with all due reverence to a grand Headmaster, William Roberts, and founder of School Athletics in Albury and the originator of the good old Red and Black."

JINDERA MUSEUM VISIT

On Sunday 16 October 2011 we are visiting the Jindera Museum. Meet there at 2 p.m. Admission \$3, plus \$3 for afternoon tea provided by the Museum.

Some of us are going to meet at Jindera Pub at noon for lunch prior to Museum visit. Anyone requiring transport, make request at October meeting.

Museum requires numbers no later than the October meeting (12 October), or telephone Jill Wooding 6021 4887 prior to that date.

MOTORING IN ALBURY-WODONGA

Darryl Starr has just released a new book: *Spirit of progress: 110 years of motoring in Albury-Wodonga 1900-2011*. Darryl has been writing about cars - on and off - for 45 years. He has been the motoring editor of *The Border Mail* for all but eight of those years. Over those four-plus decades he has driven just about every make of car ever made and has also been involved in motor sport in both circuit racing and rallying. Available from *Border Mail* offices \$30

CORRECTION

On page 2 of Bulletin 515, our speaker Nancy Sarre mentioned a friend of her mother's, Kit Mill. This should be Kit Nell.

Antiques & Collectables Valuation Day

Saturday, 1st October 2011
10am to 3.30pm.

Art Space, Wodonga
Cnr Lawrence and Hovell Streets, Wodonga

Have your treasures valued by Elizabeth Stevens, well known antique dealer from 2UE's Antiques and Collectables program which is heard through 2AY Albury. Elizabeth is a qualified antique dealer, diamond valuer and gemmologist.

Cost: \$5 per item

Enquiries – (Uta) 6024 1079 or (June) 6025 1324

Conducted jointly by the Wodonga and Albury Historical Societies in conjunction with City of Wodonga for 2011 Senior Celebrations