

Albury & District Historical Society Inc

October 2024

No 660

Wiradjuri Country, PO Box 822 ALBURY 2640

<https://alburyhistory.org.au/>

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Toufie Nesire with his delivery van circa 1930

Next Meeting

Wednesday, October 09, 2024

7.30 pm, Adamshurst, Albury

Topic: Adamshurst

Speaker: Fr Peter MacLeod-Miller

ALBURY LIBRARYMUSEUM

Uiver stories:

**Celebrating 90 years
Until November 3.**

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PRESIDENT'S NOTES FOR OCTOBER

All who attended our September meeting enjoyed a fabulous talk by Yvette Nesire-McNeil. Yvette demonstrated to us just how important the family historian can be. The pleasure, joy and sense of belonging felt by the family members in attendance was obvious to us all. I commend the article in this Bulletin to you.

This Bulletin is due to be sent to members on or about October 2. It was on October 2, 1824 that Hume and Hovell set out from Appin to commence their epic journey of discovery. The bi-centenary commemoration has begun!

On Wednesday October 9, Fr Peter will host members at Adamshurst. We are grateful to Father Peter for his generosity and very much look forward to this special event. Adamshurst is a private home and therefore we will not be extending our usual invitation to the public.

We will take our stall to the Uiver Open day on Saturday October 26 and to the Albury Show on Saturday November 2.

The action continues during the week commencing November 10. Our major event will be the opening ceremony for the new landscaping and interpretive signage at the Hovell Tree on Saturday November 16. The Hovell Tree is where the Hume and Hovell Walking Track terminates. A second major event will be our meeting on Wednesday November 13 featuring a panel of Dr Bruce Pennay, Kat Kitch and Peter Harper to discuss various aspects of the Hume and Hovell expedition followed by a Q&A.

Tickets for our December dinner meeting will go on sale at our October meeting. I know that there will be a high demand for tickets to hear Deborah Lawrie discuss her journey to become Australia's first female pilot of a major commercial passenger airline.

Thank you to all members who have paid their subs for 2024/25. A reminder to members who have not yet paid, your subscription is now overdue. You can pay by cheque to Albury & District Historical Society, PO Box 822 Albury, or direct deposit to BSB: 640 000 Account: 111097776, singles \$30, family \$35, an extra \$12 for a posted Bulletin.

2024/25 Subs Overdue

Following their mother, Granny Nastas Keamy (Keimi), Saleemy Nesire, Marion Haddad and Kathrina Dihood departed the disintegrating Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century.



A 'grainy' photo of the three sisters

By 1910 the three sisters settled in Albury, and on October 15, 2023, one hundred and forty descendants gathered to celebrate the lives and achievements of these remarkable women.

Mt Lebanon

Lebanon as we know it today did not exist at the time our relatives travelled. The cities of ancient Syria were under the control of the Ottoman Empire

and the region that our ancestors came from was known as Mt Lebanon.

Due to the growing political and religious factions, conflict, violence, and social upheaval within this region, thousands of people were looking for a better life by seeking passage to the countries of the New World: Brazil, America, Australia and New Zealand. The journey made by many Syrian families who travelled at this time is also the story of our family.

The Journey

The opening of the Suez Canal provided an opportunity for people from the Middle East to make the sea journey to the New World. For our three great, great grandmothers this would have meant travelling either by land or by sea from Mount Lebanon to the Port of Beirut and then on to Port Said in Egypt.

It seems that once the women were at the crowded wharf at Port Said, those who were travelling to the New World were placed on the next ship available and off they sailed. Once out in the middle of the ocean, with destination "Australia" marked on the luggage, the women reached the Port of Melbourne with no husband in sight and not much chance of knowing where the men went!!

In Australia

The first Lebanese in Australia were called Syrians, or sometimes Ottomans and the White Australia Policy in 1901 defined those from Mt Lebanon as foreigners and they were thereby rejected for naturalization. Knowing too well the dangers of war from their homeland experience in the Middle East, and realizing the growing tensions in Europe towards World War I, family members applied for citizenship but were initially rejected. With persistence, hard work and growing trust from the community, recommendations came from local police, court dignitaries and their neighbours and Australian citizenship was eventually granted.

In Melbourne

The story of a man called Peter Callil Fakhry provides evidence of what Syrian travellers encountered when they arrived in Melbourne. Peter Callil left Bcharre, Lebanon, in 1881, and he thought he was going to Al Na-Yurk (New York), but he actually found himself in the City of Melbourne.

Peter prospered in Melbourne and by 1884 Peter opened 'Latoof and Callil,' a small warehouse in Exhibition Street, Melbourne, where he supplied goods to Syrian and other hawkers.

Hawking

The first hawkers sold small goods such as ribbons, material off-cuts, sewing needles and pins, cotton thread, thimbles, razors, handkerchiefs, underwear and other small items of clothing that could fit into a travelling case. The hawker's case was soon replaced by the hawker's horse and cart, until the motorized van became the hawker's modern mode of transport in the 1920s.

Each of the Syrian migrants to Australia created their own opportunities when they hit the road as hawkers of goods, firstly in Melbourne and then to suburban and rural areas throughout Victoria, South Australia and southern New South Wales.

The Lebanese ('Syrian') hawkers soon saw greater opportunity, and became the town-based store keepers who not only made, but supplied their goods to the Chinese and Indian hawkers who did the travelling work. The early Abikhair store soon acted as a regional wholesaler for the regional hawkers.

From Melbourne to Albury

The husband of Rubye Abikhair, Eddie Batrouney, served on the Albury City Council and received an OAM for



community service. Eddie described the journey the Lebanese made to Albury in an article he wrote for the Albury & District Historical Society Bulletin in 1987. He states that “the 1895 to 1903 Federation Drought left few watering spots on the trek from Melbourne to Sydney so the mighty Murray River with its certain supply of water made Albury a very attractive resting place along the way.”

In this same article, the Sarroff family is named as the first Lebanese family to settle in Albury 1891, followed by the Said Milham Abikhair family in about 1896 and then the Betro Abikhair family. The full list of Lebanese arrivals includes the families of Saleemy Nesire, Marion Haddad and Kathrina Dihood.

The youngest sister Kathrina Keamy

It is known that Kathrina came to Australia with her mother Nastas Keamy and her young niece Amelia Nesire. Kathrina soon met Khalil (later known as Joseph), most likely in Melbourne and they wanted to marry. Granny Keamy wanted to stop the union as the Keamy family was Orthodox Christian and Khalil was Moslem.

The family story tells us that Granny took Kathrina back to Lebanon, and that Khalil (Joseph) followed them and converted to Christianity so that they could marry (Dihood family sources).

Family stories, death certificates, naturalization papers and newspaper clippings confirm that Kathrina and Joseph come back to Australia with their eldest and new born son, Assid in 1899 and made their first home in Melbourne.

Joseph was known to have originally been a school teacher by profession, but later became well known in the Seymour district as a commercial traveller for Latoof and Callil. He opened a business at Kilmore and Yea before moving to Mansfield, where he remained for 17 years. Alongside Kathrina, their family and businesses were well respected everywhere they lived.

Joseph and Kathrina returned to Albury in 1927 and built the Ritz Palace. Their two sons, Fred and Joffre served during the War; their daughter Rubye Dihood went on to run a clothing business in Olive St Albury. The eldest son Assid remained in Melbourne.



Kathrina & Joseph

The middle sister Marion Keamy

Marion's husband Hebe Haddad had travelled before her to the New World and landed in Brazil. He is reputed to have begun work on a coffee plantation and become very rich. Marion leaves Lebanon thinking she is following him but her journey on the “Austral” lands her in Melbourne in 1896 with one child, her eldest, Effie. We do not yet have a clear understanding of how Jamilie, Marion's second daughter came to the country. Family stories tell us that Marion does not hear from Hebe again for nearly thirty years.

Marion, has some trouble at the Port of Melbourne and is nearly jailed. After a few language difficulties, she is initially looked after by the Salvation Army.

Like many others, Marion is soon approached by the growing merchandise company Latoof and Calill, who set her up with a case of goods to sell. Marion begins hawking in Melbourne with her daughters in tow, and there meets Antonia Abikhair.

Marion's daughter Effie is spotted by Antonia Abikhair and he asks Marion to look after her and goes on to marry Effie in 1902. On moving to Albury, they first locate in Townsend St before moving to Dean Street. Lorna Metry, Antonia and Effie's granddaughter has helped trace their movements through the streets of Albury.

“At the beginning the families lived in Townsend St. By 1911 they were living in Olive St where the Centrepoin Complex is now. By 1927, AM Abikhair built 477/479 Dean St. He also owned several houses In David St but he had to sell them to the NSW Government to build the Albury Public School.” (Lorna Metry)

Antonia is known as AM Abikhair and is the brother of SM Abikhair who built the famous shop on the corner of Olive St and a distant relation to Betro Abikhair who built the Regent Theatre.

AM Abikhair is first recorded as a Hawker and then becomes a draper and manufacturer and importer of goods. Upstairs the 477-479 Dean St



A M Abikhair, 477-479 Dean St
'Then & Now'

buildings became the AM Abikhair Warehouse where the women of the family made clothing and organized goods for the hawkers to sell. Marion Haddad was also named as a hawker in her own right on the list of hawkers for North Eastern Victoria.

Such was the significance of Marion Haddad's place in the development of AM Abikhair's businesses, that Marion Haddad became known as Granny Abikhair, a title that later passed on to her daughter Effie.

Stories of Marion at the Port of Melbourne might suggest that she was the feistiest of the three sisters and this story from Lorna Metry might also suggest Marion had the measure of Betro Abikhair.

"Early mornings Marium Haddad would go for a walk. At the time, Betro Abikhair was building the Regent Theatre and she would see him up on the scaffolding and would shout out to him, in Arabic, to come down and he would. She would tell him if he fell, he would not see his building completed. His wife would hear the noise and would get angry with Betro, telling him, I tell you to come down and you take no notice, but come Mrs Haddad, you obey her like a schoolboy." (Lorna Metry)

Marion was a most fascinating woman; intelligent, strong, caring and very hardworking. She became the key contact with the Orthodox clerics who came to conduct the religious ceremonies for the Lebanese community in Albury.

As well as taking her place in the leadership of the community, Marion's reputation was equally well known by those in need.

"All the swag men in the depression years knew Marion. She could not give them work but would give them a slip of paper to take to the Riverina Café with a cross marked for her signature and she would pay for them. Some days there would be six or seven men she fed in this way." (Lorna Metry)

The eldest sister Saleemy Keamy

We know that Saleemy is the eldest daughter of Granny Keamy and was married in Lebanon at eighteen years of age to Norman (Nassem) Nesire. Norman was a police officer for the Ottoman Empire as superintendent for the village of Dhour Choueir in the Mt Lebanon region. It is known that Norman died in Lebanon and so Saleemy came to Australia as a widow.

Saleemy departed from Port Said in Egypt and arrives in the December of 1910 on a large passenger ship called the Nera. These shipping records were waterlogged and so aren't digitalized, but this ship and this date are confirmed by Saleemy's naturalization papers.

Saleemy travelled with her younger daughters Mary and Adele. Her eldest daughter Amelia had travelled out with Granny Keamy and Kathrina before 1900. Saleemy's son Toufie travels to Australia in 1925 with his wife Foutine Farrah and their two children Norman and Evon. Toufie soon arranges for Foutine's brother Karl Farrah to come to Australia and Karl goes on to marry Saleemy's daughter Mary.

Throughout her life, Saleemy was affectionately known as Granny Nesire. There is evidence, that when in Albury she lived first in Townsend St, then worked as a storekeeper in Kiewa St in 1913. There is also a reference that says she sets up a shop in Olive St before moving into the Dean Street shop around 1920.

Her daughters Amelia Corban, Adele Buckley, Mary Farrah and son Toufie Nesire soon have residences and businesses side by side and across the road from Saleemy's first shop.

At the time of her death in 1953, Cliff Chamberlain from radio 2AY paid a personal tribute to Saleemy Nesire, "a grand old lady, granny was a hard worker, a solid citizen who won the respect of all."

Faith and Ceremony

Keeping the traditions of their Syrian Orthodox faith was a very important way the Keamy family remained connected to each other and their Lebanese roots. They held their religious ceremonies in their homes and over the years, priests came from Melbourne and Sydney to conduct the Syrian Orthodox Baptisms by Immersion, Funerals and Marriages.

Reports of their elaborate weddings featured in the Border Morning Mail as hundreds of locals would gather to catch a glimpse of the wedding party. In later times the Rector of the day at St Matthews Anglican Church in Kiewa Street Albury, allowed the Syrian Orthodox Lebanese to use their church and welcomed their priests.



Nesire's Drapery, 471 Dean St

Commerce and Business

When the early Lebanese first came to Albury, the main centre of commerce was close to the river in Townsend Street. Official family documentation records that family members lived or worked in this area in the early 1900s supported by the Abikhair and Saroff families.

But due to consistent flooding, businesses relocated to above the flood level and established themselves along Kiewa, Olive and Dean Street. By the 1920s Townsend Street ceased to be the major commercial area.

Lebanese families followed this path and moved to Kiewa St or Olive St before settling into their longstanding businesses and residences in Dean St.

A walk along Dean St reminds us of the enormous contribution the extended family has made to the development of the business centre of Albury. Perusing the list of businesses shows the close connection branches of the family maintained with each other as they lived and worked side by side.

The Albury LibraryMuseum has a project planned to gather the history behind the shops in Albury and the Keamy family list provides a good start. Further research would be needed to establish the exact dates for the establishment of each of these premises.

Some of these properties have remained under family ownership and have only been sold during the last 10 years. The Farrah, Abikhair and Metry families still hold some of their original properties.

Hospitality

When Joseph and Kathrina Dihood came back from Mansfield and settled in Albury, they bought George Malouf's drapery business in 1924, which was located at the present site of the Commonwealth Bank in Dean St.

The Block, next door to this building and contained the Ritz Ballroom, was built and owned by Joseph and long remained pivotal for the family and community social culture in Albury. This Ritz hosted many weddings, balls and community gatherings. It was later sold to Mr Norman Jacobs, and managed by many people over the years which included Joseph Dihood's great grandson, Douglas McGuinness. A visit to the current Bended Elbow site shows this grand venue, and the wonderful long-standing contribution the Dihoods have made to Albury.



Dihood's, present site of Commonwealth Bank;
The Block which housed the Ritz Ballroom.

After World War Two.

It is known that many in our family and the rest of the Lebanese community offered hospitality to the American service men after World War II.

My father, Victor Nesire, told me that after the War his parents provided hospitality at the 466 Dean St premises for the American servicemen passing through. The family was given an official thank you gift for their contribution. This very unusual gift, a sculpture made of American Bison horns, has recently been donated to the Albury LibraryMuseum. My cousin Alana Nesire tells me her father, Allan Nesire used to talk about always having service men stay at the house. Toufie would pick up the men from the Albury Train Station and house them for several days before taking one group back to the train and picking up a new group.



Jim & Vicki Bacash

Further research is needed to understand this period in Albury's history.

Hospitality lived on.

Through Saleemy Nesire's grand daughter, Victoria Corban, another long standing Albury hospitality venue was born. The Cedar, at 610 Olive St, was established in 1968 and became the largest wedding reception venue in Albury. Best known for hosting wedding receptions, Balls and New Years Eve celebrations, Jim and Vicki Bacash also catered to many service clubs, such as Lions, Apex and Rotary. The Albury Wodonga Development Corporation held its first meeting there in 1973. The Cedar functioned as a reception centre until Charles Sturt University purchased the site in 1990.

Ongoing family contributions

From the early 1900s the early Lebanese migrants and their families worked hard, built long lasting businesses and became respected members of local communities.

Their children were educated locally, excelled in business, the arts and sport, and their involvement in civic life and the social activities of the town meant that “foreigners” from the Mountains of Lebanon became solid members of their new Australian communities.

Generations of the descendants of Saleemy, Marion, and Kathrina, the Nesires, Farrahs, Doumanis, Mannerings, Abikhairs, Metrys, Batrouneys, Mellicks, Assads and Dihoods have continued to contribute to the commercial, cultural and professional life of Albury right up to today.

It is our hope that the inspiring stories of our great grandmothers are known and recognised in the history books of Albury. Saleemy, Marion and Kathrina have indeed generated a rich legacy for this city.

LOCAL LEBANESE BUSINESSES

Dean St

- 441 Michel & Antony Metry, Anthony’s Shoe Repair.
- 442 Marza Beca: Fruit Shop & Milk Bar.
- 449a Susan Collins (Phil & Norma Assad bought Eddy Buckley’s shop then moved to a bigger shop)
- 449 Eddy Batrouney: Fruit Shop and Estate Agency. Later auction rooms at 457 Smollett St.
- 463 Jim and Vicky Bacash Pie and Hamburger Shop.
- 466 Nesires: Toufie, Foutine. Established: 1928.
- 468 Adele and Wahdir Buckley, Fashion Shop. Established: 1928.
- 469 Farrah’s Ladies and Menswear Shop.
- 470 Amelia and Werhard Corban. Established: 1931.
- 471 Saleemy Nesire’s Drapery & Dressmaking, then later Farrah’s Ladies Wear and Menswear.
- 473 Neif and Jamielie Assad Drapery Store.
- 473A AM Abikhair family property.
- 474 Mary and Karl Farrah. Estestablished: 1930.
- 477/79 At different stages these buildings housed Antonia and Effie’s Drapery shop and Mary Haddad fruit shop, Marza’s Hat Shop. AM Abikhair factory was in the front half of the upstairs building.
- 480 Dihood’s The Block including the Ritz. Later became the Bended Elbow.
- 482 Dihood and Son’s, “The Busy Drapers” on the site of the Commonwealth Bank.
- 483 Farrah’s Man’s World.
- 487 Philip and Norma Assad moved to this address, Susan Collin’s Frock Salon.

Olive St

- 567 Kathrina and Joseph Dihood’s home. Dihood’s owned the two Units.
- 571 Joffrey Dihood’s unit. Rubye Dihood’s Parisienne Fashions was later built at the front.

Lavington

- Victor and Jacqueline – Jacqueline’s Frock Salon
- Gwen and Tony Abikhair – Tile shop.

Wodonga and Wangaratta

- Allen Nesire’s “Paula Gaye” Fashions, Wodonga & Wangaratta.
- Eddy Buckley established Ordette’s Fashions in Wodonga.
- There are also family businesses in Henty, Junee, Mansfield, Gilgandra and Melbourne.

A HERITAGE SNIPPET FROM JENNY

On her recent trip to Singapore, Jenny Romero found some useful quotes on heritage from Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore from 1959 to 1990:

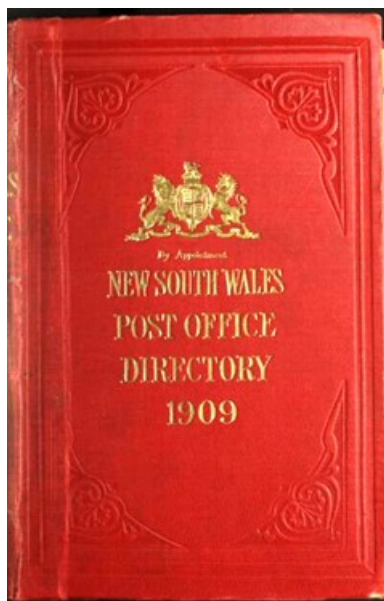
“We made our share of mistakes in Singapore. For example, in our rush to rebuild Singapore, we knocked down many old and quaint Singapore buildings. Then we realised we were destroying a valuable part of our cultural heritage, that we were destroying what tourists found attractive and unique in Singapore. We halted the demolition. Instead we undertook extensive conservation and restoration of ethnic districts such as Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam and of the civic district, with its colonial era buildings ... The value of these areas in architectural, cultural and tourist terms cannot be quantified only in dollars and cents.” 1995

“Heritage is not something that is static, lying hidden to be discovered, admired and conserved. It is part of the lives of people, and it shapes the ways a people meet new challenges and helps them adapt and survive.” 2005

The Wit and Wisdom of Lee Kuan Yew (1923-2015)

WISE NEW SOUTH WALES POST OFFICE DIRECTORY

The [New South Wales Post Office Directory](#), also known as Wise's Directories or Wise's Street Directories, was published in Sydney from 1886 to 1950. The Directory is now available on the TROVE website for most of the years from 1909 to 1950.



The directories include: Sydney and Suburbs, with a street index, and street by street listings of all houses and the householder of each address.

There is a Country Directory section that lists people alphabetically for each town together with their occupation and an overall Alphabetical Directory of people in Sydney, its suburbs and the NSW country areas.

Separate directories are there for Trades, Medical, Legal, Ecclesiastical, Educational, Local Government and Pastoral. The directory includes advertisements – all with useful information, often including names of people and places. The directory is searchable, useful not only for finding names, but also places, occupations and other information.

Follow the links to access Albury directories for each of the years listed below:

[1909](#) [1910](#) [1911](#) [1912](#) [1913](#) [1914](#) [1915](#) [1916](#) [1918](#) [1919](#)
[1920](#) [1921](#) [1922](#) [1923](#) [1924](#) [1925](#) [1926](#) [1927](#) [1928](#) [1929](#)
[1930](#) [1931](#) [1932](#) [1933](#) [1934](#) [1935](#) [1936](#) [1937](#) [1938](#) [1939](#)
[1940](#) [1941](#) [1942](#) [1943](#) [1944-45](#) [1945-46](#) [1947](#) [1948](#) [1950](#)

VILLAS IN FITZROY

Spotted by Peter Harper in Charles street Fitzroy, two villas, one named Albury Villa, the second Wondonga Villa that have survived there for about 150 years. An

auction advertisement in *The Age* of August 23, 1877 described Lot 1, Wodonga Villa as “a substantial brick residence of five rooms,

with stabling, bath, large yard and every convenience. Lot 2, Albury Villa, also containing five rooms, &c.”

The stone mason made an error, adorning the second villa ‘Wondonga,’ while *The Age* had ‘Wodonga.’



SATURDAY, 25th AUGUST.
At Four o’Clock, at the Premises,
Wodonga Villa and Albury Villa,
Charles-street, Fitzroy.
For Positive Sale, to Close an Account.
J. ROBERTSON and Co. are favored with instructions from the owner to sell by public auction,
Lot 1. Wodonga Villa, a substantial brick residence of five rooms, with stabling, bath, large yard and every convenience. Lot 2. Albury Villa, also containing five rooms, &c.
These properties are well worth the attention of capitalists, as they are a safe and sound investment, each producing a rental £1 weekly.
Titles under Torrens Act.
Terms: Fifth cash; balance at 3 months, bearing 8 per cent.

A RED LETTER DAY!

ONCE IN A HUNDRED YEARS!

“A City in the Making”
“**VALLOMBROSA EXTENDED**”

ALBURY’S LATEST MODEL SUBURB
RIGHT IN THE HEART OF BEAUTIFUL ALBURY
48 BLOCKS, SHOP & RESIDENTIAL SITES

ALBURY PAPERS ON TROVE NOW INCLUDE 1953

The *Border Morning Mail* for 1953 is now available on the Trove website. We recently ordered the BMM for 1954.

One hundred years ago, October 1924, this advertisement for East Albury’s Vallombrosa Estate appeared in the *Albury Banner*.



Click on the link or use the QR code:

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TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO – THE HUME & HOVELL EXPEDITION DEPARTS FROM APPIN

Two hundred years ago the Hume and Hovell expedition party met at Hamilton Hume's house in Appin, south-west of Sydney, setting out on October 2, 1824 for the Gunning district to explore south to Bass Strait.

The Royal Australian Historical Society commissioned this memorial in 1924 to commemorate the centenary of the expedition. The monument was erected at the site of the home of Hamilton Hume. Stone recovered from the ruins of Hume's house at Brookdale Farm, adjoining the monument, is said to have been used in the monument.

The inscription reads: "To commemorate the Hume and Hovell Expedition. Site of the home of Hamilton Hume. Starting point of the expedition to Port Phillip, October 2, 1824. RAHS."

More information on the expedition can be found on our website – follow the link [Hume & Hovell Expedition](#).



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Meetings: Second Wednesday of the month
(except January) at 7.30 pm usually at the
Commercial Club Albury.

The Committee meets on the third
Wednesday of the month at 3 pm
at the Albury LibraryMuseum.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

Single: \$30 Family: \$35

Corporate: \$100

Note: There is a \$12 surcharge for
mailed Bulletins.

Research undertaken, \$25 first
hour. Enquiries in writing with \$25.