



No. 274

March 2023



B 73219

Hindley Street looking east from vicinity of Leigh Street. SLISA B 73219
Coloured by 'A Colourful History' on Facebook.

BOOK REVIEW by Patricia Sumerling

Corinne Hall, *THREE-RING CIRCUS: The dramatic, mysterious and tragic life of Mabel Worley, A Destitute Asylum girl*. Australian Scholarly Publishing Ltd, Melbourne, 2022, pp. 274. \$39.95 (pb)

This riveting family saga was titled *Three-Ring Circus* for a good reason. The story involves the complicated saga of Mabel Worley and several family members involved in vaudeville, circus and other forms of entertainment. Tracking the different lives of family members through these different focuses, has produced a South Australian history that is a rare page-turner. How often has the life of one young woman from the Destitute Asylum filled an entire book? Of more delight to me, is that Corinne Hall, a Curator at the Migration Museum since 2013, was preparing for an exhibition on the Destitute Asylum when she stumbled across Mabel. Beyond the exhibition she continued to pursue her life and the little-known area of the entertainment world from the late 1890s. In this regard, this history contributes to a relatively unknown aspect of a working class way of life.

The saga begins in 1888 when a young woman, Mabel Worley, a single domestic servant, is incarcerated into the Lying-In Hospital of the Destitute Asylum with a handsome donation from the putative father of £150. For this alone, I praise Corinne's curiosity in wanting to know the back story. When she dug deeper, she found a tale of devastation, homelessness, alcoholism and petty crime.

Because Mabel's family were involved in vaudeville and circus life, when she left the draconian institute, through Corinne's research we are able to follow her and later her daughter's travelling life story using archival records of the many

government authorities she became associated with over many years. And we must never forget how Corinne has used Trove to track Mabel's family across the several states. Without the use of this valuable tool, this story would have been all but impossible.

Being a Historical Researcher for almost 40 years and knowing all the avenues one needs to track a life to the degree that Corinne has, one cannot begin to acknowledge the long and painstaking effort she has made. Her reward hopefully, will be that others like me, will seek the book out for its readability and the satisfaction of a story well told. It makes a valuable contribution to Australian social history and is one the most absorbing South Australian histories I have read in recent years.

HSSA AGM : 14th April

The HSSA Council has worked the past year with a bare minimum and will once again appeal to members to consider joining the Council to fill the five vacancies. Nomination forms at April meeting or email us. (Six meetings a year on Thursday evenings).

DON'T FORGET

HSSA Subscriptions Jan - Dec 2023. We need your continuing support to help us to bring to you the latest on SA's history with interesting guest speakers plus keep you in touch with the community of historians and interested individuals.

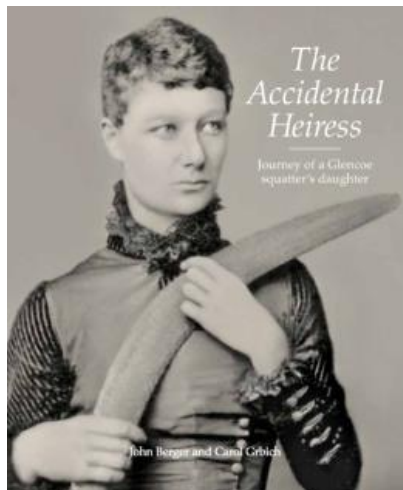
March 31 is the DEADLINE for

- HSSA Grant Scheme applications, and
- HSSA Keain Medal for best history book nominations.

(visit HSSA website for forms and information)

APRIL MEETING: FRIDAY 14 APRIL at 7.30pm
Burnside City Uniting Church, 384 Portrush Rd Tusmore

**Carol Grbich ...ACCIDENTAL HEIRESS: *Journey of a
Glencoe squatter's daughter***



The 7 year old girl who became the heiress to her father's fortune of approximately \$25 million in today's money - made from farming sheep on South Australian land - would have been very surprised had anyone suggested that she might one day be using that wealth in another country for the comfort and care of over 50,000 Australian servicemen wounded in World War One.

Her book has been the subject of four ABC radio interviews and a *Landline* segment which was played on ANZAC Day 2021 and replayed on Anzac Day 2022.

In 2021 the Historical Society of South Australia awarded 'The Accidental Heiress: The Journey of a Glencoe Squatter's Daughter' the Keain Medal for one of the best history books on South Australia published in 2020.

Dr Carol Grbich is an Emeritus Professor at Flinders University

MAY MEETING: FRIDAY MAY 5 at 7.30pm
Burnside City Uniting Church, 384 Portrush Rd Tusmore

**Paul Rosenzweig,
IN OUR NEIGHBOURS' SOIL OUR ANZACS SLEEP:
Honouring Australia's dead buried in Singapore and
Malaysia**

The history of the two post-WW2 Malayan wars – the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation with Malaysia – is not well known. One key point that distinguishes these campaigns from the Vietnam War and consequent conflicts is the reliance on the imperial wartime policy of removing the fallen to the nearest Commonwealth country for burial. As a result, today 50 Australians remain at rest overseas (in Malaysia, 37 and Singapore, 13), and none have graves in a war cemetery. The repatriation that was offered to the families of the fallen from the Vietnam War has not similarly been extended to these Australians.

The SA & NT Branch of the National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association Australia Inc (NMBVAA) has gone to great lengths to correctly record the details of the 71 Australians fallen from the era of these wars, including two South Australians, and to correctly identify them on a plaque in the Heroes Memorial Park in Kuching, Sarawak (installed in 2016, amended in 2019) and other memorials.

Paul Rosenzweig OAM FMHSA, a volunteer author/historian and currently President of SA&NT Branch, NMBVAA, is a retired Army officer with 32 years' service, retiring in 2011 with the rank of Major (Royal Australian Infantry Corps). He has actively promoted commemoration and reverent reflection through his Facebook site 'Thanks Digger'.

WALKERVILLE BOYS' HOME,

AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT aided by an HSSA grant Lyn O'Grady

Most of us have had happy childhoods so it is hard to comprehend what it is meant to be brought up in an institution. As local historian I had fielded many and varied queries for information but one day someone asked to be put in touch with former boys from the Walkerville Boys Home. I knew of a book written about the Home, called *Kennion House, a Hundred Years of Children* by Elizabeth Bleby, and that the Home had closed sometime in the 1980s. So, by placing an advertisement in the local paper and on various websites relating to the 'forgotten children', we [members of the Walkerville historical society and Walkerville Council] organised a reunion at Walkerville Hall.

The Reunion

We anticipated more attending on a long weekend but only a dozen people came, some with their wives. There was time for sharing stories before lunch and during a walk through the old building, then being used as classrooms for St Andrew's School but now demolished.

Once I started hearing their stories, seeing the affection they had for the Home, the fact they would return as young adults to visit the staff and see who of the 'family' were still there, it dawned on me that they see this old building just like we would our family home. The other boys were their family, the matron and superintendent the closest thing they would have to a parent. They knew nothing else.

That day there were some great stories, there was laughter and tales of mischief etc. However, once I was one-to-one with

them, with my recorder and notebook, that's when they opened up and revealed some of the hurt they suffered in one way or another whilst in 'care' and afterwards when they moved out to work. Some of what they were telling me they hadn't even told their family.

Some of the boys I contacted had a terrible time and didn't want to dwell on the past; scarred from being abandoned by their parents; and some were abused or victimized by the older boys. There was one superintendent in charge of the Home for a couple of years who has been the subject of several court cases. In a few cases, there was abuse by outsiders who offered weekend stays. A few had simply blanked out all the hardships and would only talk about the good times. It was their way of surviving.

Early History

By the 1880s the Orphan Home opened in the city and there was a move to introduce 'fostering out' for the many children ending up in the Destitute Asylum. This raised alarm bells with the Church of England Synod, that 'their' children would be fostered with non-Anglican families!

The Walkerville Children's Home was established by the Church of England Synod in December 1886 to care for 'waifs and orphans'. Dr George Kennion, second bishop of Adelaide, and Rev (later Archdeacon) George Dove, the incumbent at St Andrew's Church, were behind the idea. Rev Dove suggested it could be located in Walkerville, his parish was by then well established and the Home would be sure to have a number of good, well-heeled supporters. Also in Walkerville was another Church of England institution, the House of Mercy, a 'penitentiary' for unwed mothers, founded in 1881.

Like with the House of Mercy, a committee was formed to manage the Home, Rev Dove and Mrs Dove, Mrs Kennion, Dr and Mrs Crawly were founding members along with Priscilla Barker and a few others. The committee managed the funds, decided on staff appointments and when it was time for the boys to leave, they arranged their placements (it was rare that the boys returned to their families). A two-storey residence on Smith Street was rented but within a short space of time Robert Barr Smith presented the land title to the committee, all paid up.



SLSA b2460 c1925 Old home on the SW corner of Smith St and Church Terrace Walkerville

Children were admitted from the age of 4. Parents or guardians signed a form relinquishing their child and if they could manage it, paid 5 shillings a week for board, lodging, clothing and education until the age of 14. Then suitable work was found for them, usually farm labouring. They could visit once a month but often this was too distressing for the child and parents soon stopped visiting.

The Home opened with 13 children, girls and boys, and by 1896 there were 34. By 1909 it was decided to just take boys and the girls were taken in by the Orphan Home in Adelaide.

Children were referred to the Home by the church, but final selection was by the committee. Some situations were that the father had died, the mother wished to remarry but the new husband didn't want to bring up another man's child; or the mother died and the father worked away from home; or there were just too many mouths to feed.

During the first 70 years, conditions for the boys were very austere, both physically and emotionally. The food was reminiscent of Oliver Twist – boiled meat broth, bread and dripping and porridge were the main staples. Living conditions were basic. The boys did all the work around the home, they helped to cook, clean, launder the clothes, made their own soap and jam, and went to school and to church. The minister administered discipline and the boys attended every church service on Sunday ie 8:30, 9:30, 11, 4, and 7pm, and every morning during the week. Little or no affection was given, as their future was going to be harsh.

They were educated at first at St Andrews Day School, established in 1850, students paying a few pence each day of attendance. Later they attended Walkerville Primary School.

To be continued next issue



VIRTUAL WAR MEMORIAL AUSTRALIA have moved into offices of Torrens Training Depot (Torrens Parade Ground).

From our new location we will be able to provide access to our researchers, run workshops, conduct memorial tours and expand our program offerings to South Australian Schools. We will also be better positioned to offer support for a broad range of commemorative activities.

Having reached another milestone of the development of an integrated database comprising over 1.5 million individuals who have served the nation in the Boer War, Boxer Rebellion, WW1, WW2, Korea and Vietnam.

We are happy to provide guidance for anyone who wishes to contribute. www.vwma.org.au

FIELD TRIPS & EXCURSIONS

We would like your feedback on excursions you would like to attend. Copy and paste this in an email to the editor (lyn.ogrady@gmail.com) with your preference of events, days, morning or afternoon, we will then do our best to organise. Add your suggestions too.

LUNCH & TALK

Sussex Hotel Walkerville - Wed 10 or Sun 13 Aug

MUSEUM VISITS & MORNING TEA/COFFEE

SA Police Historical Soc Thebarton Police Barracks (the website indicates it is still open - tour min 15 people - \$15 includes Devonshire tea)

Mary MacKillop Museum Kensington

Unley Museum (near Unley shopping centre for a cuppa)

Urrbrae House

Australian Space Discovery Centre - Lot 14 North Tce

Gamble Cottage, Blackwood early Spring

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!

Quiz Night at Enfield Hotel with Ann 'Willsy' Wills OAM Tuesday nights at 7.30pm.

Historical Society of South Australia Inc.

PO Box 519, Kent Town SA 5071

MEETINGS ARE HELD FIRST FRIDAY OF THE MONTH at 7:30pm
Burnside City Uniting Church, 384 Portrush Rd Tasmore

Patron: The Governor of South Australia,
Her Excellency the Hon. Frances Adamson AC

Website: <http://www.historicalsocietysa.com>

Facebook: @HistoricalSocietySA

HSSA COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Vice- & Acting President:

Dr Geoffrey Bishop 8390 3138 gcbishop@westnet.com.au

Secretary:

Dr Bridget Jolly 7200 5455 brimar@esc.net.au

Treasurer:

Ms Anne Bowman 8362 7772 arbowman@adam.com.au

Membership:

Mr Robert Martin 8362 8262
psumerling@optusnet.com.au

Newsletter Editor, Minute Secretary & Facebook:

Mrs Lyn O'Grady 0409305908 lyn.ogrady@gmail.com

Website & Speaker Co-ordinator

Dr Jenny Hein jenny@hein.com.au

HSSA JOURNAL – Chair of Editorial Committee

Dr Christine Garnaut christine.garnaut@unisa.edu.au

CONTRIBUTIONS (no more than 1000 words) & **COMMENTS** are
welcome by 28 April 2023. Email lyn.ogrady@gmail.com

HISTORY SA ----- ISSN 1444-8459