



The  
Historical Society  
of  
South Australia  
Inc.



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# THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA Inc.

Institute Building, 122 Kintore Avenue, Adelaide 5000.

## OBJECTS:

- (a) to arouse interest in and to promote the study and discussion of South Australian and Australian history,
- (b) to promote the collection, preservation and classification of source material of all kinds relating to South Australian and Australian history,
- (c) to publish historical records and articles,
- (d) to promote the interchange of information among members of the Society by lectures, readings, discussions and exhibitions,
- (e) to co-operate with similar societies throughout Australia,
- (f) to do all such things as are conducive or incidental to the attainment of the above objects or any of them.

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## COUNCIL:

PATRON:	Sir Walter Crocker, K.B.E.
PRESIDENT:	Mr R.J.P. Nicol
VICE-PRESIDENT:	Dr A.J. Stimson
SECRETARY:	Miss M. Roberts
TREASURER:	Mr D.J.H. Manuel
MINUTE SECRETARY:	Miss T.M. Donnellan
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY:	Mrs E. Ulbrich
JOURNAL EDITOR:	Dr J.D. Playford
NEWSLETTER EDITOR:	Ms D. Torpy
MEMBERS:	Mr R.M. Gibbs, A.M. Mr R.H.B. Kearns, M.B.E. Mr B.J. Samuels Ms P. Sumerling

WORD PROCESSING: Miss V.J. O'Neill

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FOUNDED IN 1974

COVER ILLUSTRATION  
TREASURY BUILDING 1858

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Friday, August 2 (8.00 p.m.)  
Venue: State Library Lecture Theatre  
(Corner North Terrace and Kintore Avenue, Adelaide)

### **Max Fatchen: Childhood Days on the Adelaide Plains**

Max Fatchen is known to most South Australians for his contributions of verse to the Advertiser. Though now retired he was a well respected journalist and literary editor with the Advertiser. He has lived in South Australia all his life and will no doubt have an interesting perspective and be able to give all members an insight into earlier years in S.A. Max Fatchen is always entertaining and witty. A night not to be missed.

Friday, September 6 (8.00 p.m.)  
Venue: State Library Lecture Theatre

### **Patricia Sumerling: The Darker Side of Motherhood**

A socially taboo and historically overlooked subject, Pat will offer insight into infanticide and abortion in Adelaide 1870 - 1910. The subject of an Honours thesis, it is part of women's and social history that has come to light in the last few years. This promises to be an interesting meeting - Don't miss it.

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### **\*\* FUND-RAISING TOURS \*\***

**NEXT TOUR: SUNDAY AUGUST 18 (2.00 P.M.)  
to  
THE TREASURY BUILDING**

(Assemble outside the King William Street entrance.)

The Society's last fund-raising tour introduced over 100 members to the halls of our legislature. It proved a fascinating and informative afternoon. No doubt a similar experience will be had by those who take the opportunity to explore another historical government building: the treasury building. Although this building was begun in 1858 it was not completed for nearly 20 years (1876) a fact belied by its architectural uniformity. The tour will include the Old Cabinet Room, gold smelting room and courtyard. Members and their friends are welcome. (A donation to assist the Society's work would be appreciated.)

\*\* Members are invited to make suggestions to the Society for possible fund-raising tours of areas of South Australia they would like to explore. We are most interested in your ideas.

## REPORT ON COUNCIL MEETINGS, MAY AND JUNE 1985

The old Council met for the last time in May, the new Council taking office following the Society's postponed AGM. The AGM was held on Friday 7 June before the regular monthly meeting, and in the absence of discussion from the floor the formal business was quickly concluded.

At the meeting of Council on Thursday, 13 June 1985, the President, Robert Nicol, welcomed Pat Sumerling, Deborah Torpy, and Margaret Roberts as new members. Debbie and Margaret have agreed to take on the offices of Newsletter Editor and Secretary respectively, Geoff Haines having resigned these positions after a year in which he devoted a lot of time to the Society's work. In order to ease the burden on the new Secretary, Enid Ulbrich, the retiring Treasurer, accepted the new position of Membership Secretary. Tess Donnellan has agreed to stay on as Minutes Secretary for Council. A society such as ours has an enormous amount of ongoing business and we hope in this way to spread the burden of work around as much as possible.

The office holders for 1985 - 1986 are therefore: Robert Nicol, President; Tony Stimson, Vice President; Margaret Roberts, Secretary; Enid Ulbrich, Membership Secretary; Deane Manuel, Treasurer. John Playford is editor of the Journal and Deborah Torpy of the Newsletter. Pat Sumerling, Dick Kearns, Ron Gibbs and Brian Samuels make up the other positions on Council.

Apart from general business - regular reports on finance and publicity, correspondence, organization of forthcoming meetings and field trips - Council in May and June spent some time considering reports by Ron Gibbs and Dic Kearns on the Society's J150 project. Members will remember that this is a facsimile edition of the South Australian Gazette and Colonial Register newspaper from 1836 to 29 December 1838. I hope to include a fuller report in the next Newsletter.

Tony Stimson

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### CHARLES TODD AND ADELAIDE'S TELEPHONES

In his report for the year 1883-84, Charles Todd, Postmaster General and Superintendent of Telegraphs, noted with some satisfaction the speed with which Adelaide's new telephone network had been put together. He was at pains to point out that the telephone itself was only a few years old:

'... in 1877, or late in the preceding year it first became practicable to talk by electricity, and convey speech to a distance so that even the speaker's voice could be recognized. The telephone, like the telegraph,

supplied a want which the utilitarian spirit of the age at once recognized. Like the telegraph, too, great effects are produced by means the most simple. In the one a few strips of zinc and copper supply the force which flashes our thoughts over hundreds and thousands of miles in time inappreciable; in the other, a short coil of wire, a small magnet, and a thin disc of iron vibrate our voice to distant friends. That results so marvellous should be obtained with such simple appliances constitutes one of the greatest triumphs of modern science. The instrument soon passed out of its initiatory and experimental stage, and on the subsequent discovery of the microphone, began to be availed of for commercial and domestic purposes. Private wires were run in all directions, and what are known as telephone exchanges were established, the United States taking the lead of all other nations.<sup>1</sup>

Todd was quick to see the potential of the telephone. In January 1878, before the invention of the microphone, and using telephones of the Bell type manufactured in his department's workshop, he communicated with a colleague at Kapunda. Shortly afterwards he presided over a successful trial between Semaphore and Port Augusta, a distance, he noted, 'by wire of 240 miles.'<sup>2</sup> Other experimental trials followed, some involving concert performances with singers and accompanying instrumentalists eighty miles apart. In one concert an Adelaide audience listened no doubt with some difficulty, as a violinist at Kapunda accompanied a singer at Willunga.

The first practical use of the telephone followed in September 1880 when the central police station was connected with the office of the Superintendent of the Fire Brigade. A second line linked Government House, Adelaide, with the Governor's summer residence at Marble Hill, thirteen miles away. Even before it was open Todd was urging a grander scheme upon the Morgan ministry. The government, he said in a minute dated 23 September 1880, should press ahead with 'the construction and general administration of telephone lines, including also the management of what is known as a telephone exchange ...' rather than leaving the latter to a Telephone Exchange Company, as the Victorian Government proposed to do. The South Australian Government soon adopted Todd's recommendations. A sum of £3,000 for preliminary work was incorporated into Loan Act No. 189 of 1880, and in 1881 legislation was steered through parliament.<sup>3</sup>

The Postmaster General now set about building his telephone network. A few years later he wrote:

'Great care was taken at the outset to adopt the best description of instrument. We obtained, in the first instance, a number of instruments of the most approved type from England, carefully selected at my request by Mr. Joseph Oppenheimer, a gentleman of large experience, who

afforded much valuable information on the subject. These, amongst others, comprised - The Gower-Bell, British Post Office pattern; Theiler's transmitters, Crossley transmitters, Patterson's transmitters, Preece's telephones, Swiss telephone receivers, Graham-Bell receivers (ordinary form), Siemen's loud-speaking telephones, with reed call ... After a careful trial, it was decided to adopt the Blake transmitter, magnet call-box, and Swiss and Pony Crown telephone receivers.<sup>4</sup>

These instruments did not find their way into many offices and houses. When the Adelaide exchange opened in May 1883 there were just 48 subscribers, though another 21 joined at Port Adelaide exchange when it opened in September. The following regulations then came into force.

1. Persons may become members of the telephone exchange, at Adelaide or Port Adelaide, on payment of the following subscriptions, viz., for any radial distance from the telephone exchange office not exceeding a half a mile, £12, and for any additional quarter of a mile or part thereof, 25s.

2. For this subscription each subscriber will be provided with on complete set of instruments, connected by a special wire with the telephone exchange to which he subscribes. An extra charge will be made for extension bells and any additional instruments ...

6. For an additional subscription of £9, a subscriber to one exchange will be allowed the following privileges:-  
(a) He may communicate with the subscribers to both telephone exchanges (viz., Adelaide and Port), and all subscribers will be able to communicate with him ...

7. The use of a wire between Adelaide and the Port exchanges must not, as a rule, exceed fifteen minutes at any one time, and may be limited in the aggregate to one hour in any one day ...

8. The Adelaide Telephone Exchange will be open at all hours, but, except where special arrangements are made, the Port exchange and the suburban offices will only be open between the hours of 9 a.m. and 8 p.m., or 6 p.m. on Saturdays, and will be closed on Sundays ...

11. No charge will be made to subscribers ordering a cab through the exchange ...

CHARLES TODD  
Postmaster-General and Superintendent  
of Telegraphs.

General Post Office, Adelaide,  
September 7th, 1883<sup>5</sup>

The number of subscribers increased slowly. Eighteen months after the opening of the Adelaide exchange 223 were listed there and 43 at Port Adelaide, and twelve years later the total stood at only 730. This may have been due in part to an audibility problem; the poor quality of the transmitted sound was such that in the early 1890s 'whispering trumpets' were issued to some subscribers. No doubt this was enough to deter many potential subscribers but many more would have been put off by the sheer cost of joining an exchange. In 1896 the annual rental of £12 represented almost a quarter of the annual wage of one of the young women who worked in the exchange as a telephonist, and it is worth remembering that 12 was the rental for subscribers within half a mile of the G.P.O.. Calls were free in those days. Not surprisingly, business houses, government offices and doctors were prominent among those who subscribed. As one telephonist later recalled, 'it was a very progressive company which possessed as many as two telephone lines.'<sup>6</sup>

She had joined the exchange in 1896 as one of 12 telephonists who worked under the immediate direction of a female supervisor. Something of the monotony of their work was captured in a photograph - it was later reproduced on the front cover of the 1983 Adelaide Telephone Directory - which shows them sitting bolt upright at the switchboard under the supervisor's watchful eye. They were of course expected to know practically all the numbers by heart, for '... no subscriber would dream of asking for the person he wanted by number,' but he would have to wait when Todd descended upon the exchange. He would summon all the staff together and the board would go unattended, blinking lights and all, until he had finished.<sup>6</sup>

1. 'Report on the Post Office, Telegraph, and Observatory Departments,' S.A.P.P., 1884, No. 191 p. 176
2. loc. cit.
3. loc. cit.
4. ibid. p.180
5. ibid. pp. 180 - 81
6. Advertiser, 9 August 1939. See S.A.A. Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 2, p.100

Tony Stimson

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#### FOLLOWING PIONEER PATHS

Members researching their district's history and needing direction to sources of information and demonstration of skills needed to research may be interested in the W.E.A. course "Following Pioneer Paths"; a guide to South Australian Historical Research. Conducted by Margaret Ragless in two 5 hour sessions, Saturdays October 19 and 26, 1985. Details from Workers Educational Association, 223 Angas Street, Adelaide. Phone 223 1272.

## HISTORY AS IT REALLY WAS?

Every November markers in Australian History (Matriculation) slog their way through about 1700 papers. Occasionally they come across monumental howlers which are not, to be fair, indicative of the general standard. But they are fun.

I have culled these from John Mitchell's short article 'Not only Ned Kelly but also Ronald Biggs', History Forum, Feb. 1982. They were committed/perpetrated by students in the 1981 examination.

Tony Stimson

Aboriginal boys had initiations which made them worriers.

Governor Goyder's attempt to concentrate settlement by what he called Goyder's Line. This was a circle around Botany Bay at 250 miles radius and was divided into 19 blocks.

Whitlam was arrogant, intelligent and talented but not experienced and he demanded loyalty from his government but gave little and he was always immaculately groomed.

Australia started off civilized and just got more modernized.

Wakefield's main aim was to get people within 15 miles of the train line.

Riots (on the goldfields) often occurred, some civil but many brutal.

If you look at the Burra cemetery you will find an incredibly high immortality rate among the children.

Waltzing Matilda tells how a jolly swagman used to spend his time sitting by a billy bong.

We have our national symbol of a tall lean bronzed wide hatted horseman followed by 2 aboriginal trackers and a bunch of kangaroos.

.. a tall bronzed man sitting tall in the saddle followed by his faithful aboriginal tracker followed by a herd of kangaroos to a pub with no beer.

The soldiers fought against the Germans in the first world war and surprisingly they were determined to kill any Nazi in sight as they marched into Galipoli.

Squatters mainly concerned themselves with pasturization.

Australia is a small country with many people.

Many small farmers had convict origins, which was like a course in farming.

There were limited squirmishings with the aborigines.

The W.A. govt. started drilling on scared land.

(re WW.II): Australia was in trouble herself of falling under the Domino Principle.

Australia was told by the British army that they were to go on to Gallipoli and take it over. When the Australians did this it was thought to be such a great thing that they called it Anzac Cove and ever since that encounter it has been remembered as Anzac Day.

Before the gold rushes people in Australia were respected if they had money, but during the rushes they were respected for what they were. You could turn up at the rush flat broke and still be respected.

The Australian dream is a triple fronted brick veneer home. I don't think this dream has taken away from 'mateship' a man's home is still his castle, where better to entertain family and friends.

Bushman poured up and shared possessions and money. They had a strong plutonic relationship.

The Chinese caused concern as they liked to wok (sic!) six days a week.

After such a hard and harsh introductory of women into Australia, it was no wonder women married young and gave themselves heart, soul and body to their husbands. He was the one who brought home the bacon and the father of their children.

The bushman became a legend. He was free, nomadic, worked hard, but played hard too. His mate was the most important thing in the world. Next come the horse. Because of a short supply of women.

The Cornish were renowned for their pasties which they made for the men, down in the tunnels.

Both the Chinese and the Cornish were very different people and they both served to contribute something to the Australian society. Chinese seemed to have contributed racism and cornish, the Cornish pasty and carrots.

The governors were told to stop squatting but it was an impossible task.

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## MURDER AT THE "BUSHMAN'S CAMP".

"Needle and thread, good wife. Fetch me needle and thread quickly," Robert McPherson's voice called with urgency. 'But the stitches which Robert applied were not in time, and the gushing lifeblood of the dying man was not to be staunched. Within minutes a still body lay beside the walls of the Bushman's Camp Inn at Wellington, and thereby hangs a macabre tale, which began with a friendly drink and ended on the long drop on the scaffold in early Adelaide's Gaol.

The story of Wellington, known to local aborigines as Wirrum Wirrum, began in 1839, when John Morphett claimed the seventh Special Survey, under an arrangement which allowed early purchasers to select 4000 or more acres from 14000 to 16000 acres in localities to be specified by the purchasers. This practice came to be known as 'peacocking'.

The survey, known subsequently as the Wellington Special Survey had been specially selected by Morphett in the belief that a town of major importance was certain to grow in the vicinity of the site where the waters of the Murray find their way into Lake Alexandrina. The Murray at that time was visualised as the natural and inevitable outlet for the future produce of central, and to some extent, of eastern Australia. And it was great expectations of this kind which led to the early foundation of the town of Wellington, on the land purchased by Morphett for the English Association.

In the same year Charles Bonney overlanded the first cattle from Victoria to South Australia, crossing the River Murray a few miles upstream from the proposed town site, thus setting a pattern which was to develop into a thriving industry, and see Wellington grow into an important crossing place in the space of a few years. Following hard on the heels of the tumultuous roaring times of the Overlanders and their herds, came the days of the Victorian Gold Rush. Wellington was then considered an important post on the overland route to Victoria. It was indeed, at that time, the only road by which parties could go, who for private reasons wanted to make their exit from the colony.

When gold was discovered, Wellington became 'the gateway of hope' for many thousands of South Australians bitten by the gold bug, who headed for the Victorian diggings, and the main job of the police at the river crossing place was the recovery of stolen horses at the ferry, because many were 'borrowed' by diggers anxious to reach the fields. (And incidentally, it was by the old Wellington ferry that Inspector Alexander Tolmer's Gold Escort brought into South Australia nearly \$2,000,000 worth of the precious metal.)

William Wright was one such would-be miner, who with a companion decided to walk through the area then known as the

Desert to reach the fields. Walking to the diggings was no uncommon occurrence; at one time it was reckoned that over 1000 people were travelling by 'Shank's pony' at the same time.

But, to get back to our story. Sometime in February 1853, William Wright came to the Bushman's Camp Inn, then carrying on a thriving trade on Wellington's eastern bank. The two men began to drink, and after a while a quarrel broke out when Wright accused his companion of picking his pocket. Following him outside, William became violent, drew a knife from his pocket, and stabbed the alleged offender in the throat, inflicting serious injuries which severed the carotid artery and jugular vein, after which he fled the scene and headed back for the river and the ferry.

This was when mine host McPherson, quickly on the scene, called to his wife to bring the needle and thread, and having received these items promptly set to work; the severe wound of the injured man was quickly stitched together and washed. However these ministrations were to no avail, the wounded man lasting only a short time before he expired. McPherson, obviously a man of action, followed Wright and caught up with him at West Wellington, whereupon he disarmed the man and, the local police being absent, took him into custody, handcuffed him, and put him in the police cell.

In due time William Wright was brought to trial and showed a total indifference to the dreadful situation in which he found himself, "leaving the dock to all appearances utterly careless as to the awful fate which awaited him." His legal representative had pleaded for a charge of manslaughter (with the penalty of transportation for the term of his natural life). It was claimed that the crime had been committed in an outburst of passion, and could not be classified as murder. In the midst of a good deal of controversy a verdict of guilty was returned - guilty of the murder of a man unknown.

On 12 March 1853, in the fashion of the day and apparently accepted with equanimity, the following newspaper account of Wright's last few minutes on earth appeared for readers' consumption:

"About 7 o'clock on Saturday morning a strong detachment of the 11th Regiment, under the command of Major Moore, were marched to the Gaol, and took up a position inside the gates. A body of the Metropolitan Police under Inspectors Stuart and Alford was also in attendance and formed a cordon in front of the gallows. The number of spectators prior to 7 o'clock was exceedingly small, not 30 persons being present. A great number, however, reached nearly 1,000 by 8 o'clock. A large number of the spectators were children, and we regret to say that the number of females was almost as great as that of the males. At 8 o'clock

precisely the unhappy culprit made his appearance at the foot of the fatal tree. A few seconds sufficed for the executioner to adjust the cord, the cap was then drawn over his eyes, and almost instantly afterwards the bolt was drawn. It was so instantaneous, and except for the usual muscular action, there was no movement of the body after the trap fell. After it was hanging an hour it was cut down and removed in a shell to the Gaol. Dr. Moorhouse made a cast of Wright's head. Wright was about 45 years of age, and nothing more is known at present of his history previous, more than that he had formerly been transported from England."

Today at Wellington a pile of vacant-eyed ruins is all that remains of the once prosperous 16-roomed Bushman's Camp Inn. Wright, unmourned and dishonoured, occupies an unmarked grave within the precincts of the prison walls.

So ends an unlovely story of our pioneering forebears, a story which reflects the callous attitude of the good people of Adelaide, who turned up at public hangings (usually held at 8 o'clock on a Saturday morning) regarding the degrading spectacle as part of their weekend's entertainment. A few years later the ghastly practice was abandoned, and the coup de grace was at least given a degree of privacy, when it was held within the gaol itself.

One mystery remains: the identity of Mr. X who died at Wellington that day never was discovered.

Jean Schmaal

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#### INTRODUCING MRS. JOHN LAING

Sometime during the year 1876 the Howard family arrived in South Australia aboard the ship 'Lightning'.

With them came "Mrs. John Laing", not just another pioneer, but a lovely silvery-pink hybrid tea-rose which had already been winning prizes at the Chelsea Rose Show. Howard eventually established himself as a florist and nurseryman at Blakiston in the Adelaide Hills, and it was here that he discovered the fodder plant for which he is best remembered.

The plant became known as subterranean clover, and it brought about revolutionary changes in farming.

Today descendants of "Mrs. John Laing" are well and thriving in several parts of South Australia, including Mr. Walter Duncan's flourishing rose nursery at Hughes Park, near Watervale.

Jean Schmaal

#### ST. MARY'S ON THE STURT

Many members will know of one of South Australia's oldest Anglican churches and cemeteries, St. Mary's on the Sturt on South Road. The church and cemetery date from the late 1840s and are both an important part of the state's heritage. They form an example, rare in South Australia, of a traditional European graveyard surrounding a church.

Questions have now been raised about the future of both the church and the cemetery and the parish has called for suggestions. I am sure all Society members would want to see the complex preserved.

If you have ideas about how this could best be done, let the parish council know. If you have any queries, Society member Margaret Ragless may be able to help.

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#### NORTH ADELAIDE IN 1871

North Adelaide is a very pleasant suburb. The air fresh and good the place well supplied with water (a great advantage in our thirsty climate) with gas too, and with everything that families require. Sidney's house will be within easy walking distance of his office, about 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> miles from it, and omnibus and cab fares are very small to and from North Adelaide, so the trouble and cost of horses can well be dispensed with. The walk between North and South Adelaide is great part of it through Parklands for those who prefer grass and trees to the high road, and a very pleasant walk it is. Had it been anything like the nice place it now is eighteen years and a half ago we should I think have endeavoured to settle there. It was devoid of trees, a large hot dusty hill. All the water save that caught from the clouds quite brackish and water works and gas works unthought of. There were but two or three houses except cottages in those days, and an unsightly place it was. It is rather aristocratic now, at any event there are many large and costly houses built in and about the neighbourhood with shrubberies and gardens and all appliances to make them pretty and comfortable, and many smaller ones are pretty and comfortable too, as I trust Sidney's will be when he and his family are settled in it.

(Caroline Clark to relatives in England,  
19 May 1871. SAA PRG 389/1)

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\*\*\* STOP PRESS \*\*\*

Forthcoming Exhibition

IN MEMORIAM

THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN WAY OF DEATH

Members who enjoyed the July meeting and exhibition of 19th century funeral paraphernalia may appreciate the opportunity of more time to look at the many items which were on display. Robert Nicol is arranging an exhibition of his collection together with many photographs and other items not previously displayed, at the Flinders University of South Australia. An exhibition catalogue will also be available.

Venue: The Flinders University Art Museum  
(Park in Car Park 5 and follow the signs)

Admission: Free

Dates: From August 7th (official opening at 1 p.m.)  
to  
September 3rd

Information: Dr. Mian, Flinders University, phone 275 2695

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