

# KANGAROO GROUND

## CHRONICLE

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NEWSLETTER OF THE  
ANDREW ROSS MUSEUM INC

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## IN THIS ISSUE

- Paul Sly describes the discovery of the Albert Jones photographic plates in the early 1970s. Read his account in “I Was There” on Page 3.
- Cover Picture. Is this Isabella Donaldson, one of Kangaroo Ground’s first white settlers? See Page 7.
- *Gleniffer Braes* a homestead in Flat Rock Road is almost 100 years old. Read its story on Page 8, compiled from recollections, documents, and photographs gathered by its occupants, the James Family.
- Diana Bassett-Smith reviews 1999, a successful year in the Museum’s history, in her Secretary’s Report on Page 1.
- Was history being made in Kangaroo Ground 100 years ago? Find the answer on Page 11.
- Are our gums in good condition? Peter Bassett-Smith has a look at them on Page 5.
- In her *Chatterbox*, the Secretary reports on the latest developments at the Andrew Ross Museum and introduces several of the Museum’s hard-working volunteers, on Page 12 .

At the Annual General Meeting, held last March, Diana Bassett-Smith provided the Secretary's report. The report, mentioning many of the previous year's developments, is here printed in full.

## SECRETARY'S REPORT

The Board has been working steadily towards our goal of accreditation. It is a long, slow, and time-consuming process. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May, assessment of our activities will take place.

The volunteers who give of their time on Sundays, and other days when we will open by appointment, now include two new helpers, Mardi Gething and Noel Williams. My thanks to you all.

A review of the comments in the visitor's book in heartening, they are so positive and appreciative.

Mick and Margaret Woiwod and Jennine Taylor have slogged away at cataloguing, a slow and tedious job and so necessary for the museum's objective.

The events held during the past year were successful and enjoyed by all. Many requests have come in for a repeat of the cemetery tour, so we shall keep it on the agenda.

Opportunities exist for helpers to attend day and half day seminars and courses on how to run a museum. Last year I was invited to attend a course in Museum Management run by Deakin University at Melbourne University. It was comprehensive, intense, most interesting and helpful. I hope I am able to put it to good use. So many participants have the same problems as we have here at the Andrew Ross Museum: a shortage of volunteers, space and funds.

Last week a large rock was placed beside the Donaldson Oak. Our thanks to Keith Jocelyn for his generosity. A bronze plaque acknowledging the source of the Oak will be unveiled soon

by Bruce Nixon. This is planned as the next event on our program. Maybe the accreditors will attend?

The fence between the side paddock and the school grounds has been removed, and this opens up the vista, parking becomes more obvious, and security may be better. The Stevenson vine on the fence line has not been affected. Mike, from County Evelyn Estate Winery, came at a moment's notice and pruned it back. Suitable support will be provided for it.

Again thanks to the Williams family for the mowing, and to Len Muir for the gardening.

The visit to the Shire of Nillumbik by The Governor of Victoria, His Excellency Sir James Gobbo A. C., included the Museum. It was a very happy occasion.

Membership is steadily increasing, and we ask you all to encourage others to become supporters and members, especially those of the up and coming generation.

The sharing of the Museum's activities by the school is really appreciated, and we look forward to the next event.

The *Chronicle*, edited by John Austin, is a never-ending source of history and anecdotes of Kangaroo Ground. Thank you John and all subscribers and contributors.

The heritage of Kangaroo Ground is fragile. An example is the removal of ancient hawthorn hedges near the store. Please remain vigilant in the preservation of time-honoured and irreplaceable landmarks.

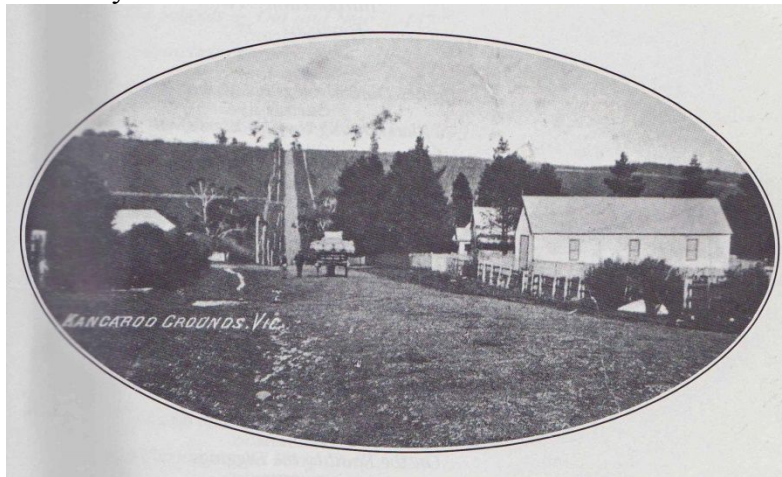
To all the Board, thank you for the help and support you have given me. And too, for the hours of help and generosity to the Museum.

- Diana Bassett-Smith  
Secretary

## I WAS THERE

Much was lost in the Kangaroo Ground district in the 1960s. Two devastating bush fires destroyed some of the oldest homesteads and farm buildings. Soon after, however, there was a gain. Under the floor of a house in Wattle Glen in the early 1970s, boxes of photographic plates dating from the 1890s were discovered. The labour of extracting what was undamaged, processing, copying and displaying began. Eventually a comprehensive and detailed pictorial record of the Kangaroo Ground district as it was one hundred years ago was revealed. Mining scenes, bridge building, bullock teams, winding country roads - these were amongst the subjects depicted in the photographs. Some of the photos reproduced with astonishing clarity. All were and are of great interest.

Paul Sly was present when this discovery was made. He tells the story....



Main Road, Kangaroo Ground, c.1906 (courtesy Jones/Sly Collection)

“Alex Spark, my grandfather, bought the house and property from the widow of Albert Jones. Caring for the property had got beyond the old lady. Her daughter had married and moved to northern Victoria. Everything was very run down. There were old car parts lying about, old tools, even a forge that had been part of a blacksmith set up.

“During the clean up, a little area under the house was explored. Harold Sly, my other grandfather, was by now on the scene. Many years earlier he had worked on Albert Jones’ orchard property. He remembered that Albert Jones had set up a photographic studio under the house. Yes, here were some of the old cameras. Yes, here was some of the processing equipment. Yes, here was the tiny hole in the wall through which he aimed the camera to photograph local bird life. And this stack of Kodak boxes in the middle of the floor? Well, they contained the original photographic plates.

“When examined, many of the plates proved to be damaged beyond repair. Water had run under the house and spoilt the boxes of plates that were at ground level. Water had also entered the area from above. Many of the photographic plates had become stuck together. Generally, only the inner plates in some of the boxes were undamaged.

“It was decided to keep the boxes of photographic plates.

“Harold Sly, my grandfather died soon after this. Alex Sparks, my other grandfather was soon able to organize a photographic exhibition. It aroused great interest. There have been other exhibitions since then. Framed copies of many of the photos were made available for sale.”

Nowadays, the Albert Jones property *Golden Glen* still remains in the Sly family. Carefully tended and restored, it might provide a subject for a future article in this *Chronicle*.

Not all the surviving plates show outdoor scenes. Albert Jones also photographed wedding and family groups - subjects which possibly provided enough income to pay his photographic expenses. Meanwhile, walk into Anne and Bob Moloney's Kangaroo Ground Store, turn and look at the wall above the door, and you will see several framed Albert Jones pictures for sale.

“Since then,” Paul Sly comments, reflecting on the discovery made when he was a young schoolboy, “I’ve always examined everything carefully before destroying it.”

- John Austin

## WHY GUMS ARE GUMS

When the young Joseph Banks sailed from England on the *Endeavour* he was already a much travelled 25 year old. At that time a popular medicine and the oldest drug known was tragacanth, dragon's blood or gum dragon.

Nearly two years later, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1770, when Banks landed with an escort on what was to become Botany Bay, he observed and entered in his journal that one of the species of trees “was yielding a gum much like *sangius draconis* (dragon's blood)”. From that day on our eucalypts have popularly been called gums.

Incidentally, the dictionary definition of eucalypts derives from ‘well covered’, as each of its flowers has an operculum or lid instead of being covered with petal-like sepals. A prominent example being the blue bum, *E. globulis*.

Some years ago I asked a young friend if he would name two gum trees growing in our garden. To my surprise he politely

declined, murmuring something about the wrong time of year or the likelihood of hybrids. He is now a professor with a Ph. D thesis on *The Eusclyptus obliqua*, the not uncommon Messmate Stringbark, the base of one side of the leaf not being quite opposite the other.

The ABC *University Of the Air* helped or perhaps confused me with the advice that to identify a eucalypt correctly one needs to know: -

- 1 The character of the bud groups, 1, 3, 7, or more.
- 2 The nature of the fruit, i.e. Gum nut.
- 3 The nature of the bark.
- 4 The shape of the juvenile leaves.
- 5 (produce your magnifying glass) The shape of the anther.

One day, shortly after we moved to Kangaroo Ground, a quietly spoken man called and asked if he might leave his bee-hives among our trees. I accepted happily, saying there were plenty of yellow box gums. When he asked “where?”, I waved my hand indicating all our few acres. He looked somewhat askance and to use his own words said emphatically, “They’re not yellow box, they’re bastard box”. True enough, I soon found, to be more polite, that they were Long Leaf Box, or *E. geniocalyx*.

Moral. If you want a quick run down on gums, then consult your nearest apiarist or read their Victorian Society's book, also see the excellent Nillumbik Shire booklet *Live Local, Plant Local*.

Note.

Latin. EU + Greek Kaluptos = covered.

EU prefix = well

- Peter Bassett-Smith



## MYSTERY PICTURE FROM THE PAST

She features on the front cover of this edition. She comes to us via our Chairman, Bruce Nixon. She came to him from New Zealand, from descendants of the Donaldson family, Kangaroo Ground's earliest landholders. Who is she? Bruce received a photocopy of the original likeness. The likeness is one of a pair. The other is believed to be of Alexander Donaldson (1817-1875). They are in a double frame, hinged together.

Alexander Donaldson was a life-long bachelor. Who would be likely to occupy a twin group with him? He had two sisters, Isabella (1815-1877), and Margaret (1821-1895). Margaret became Mrs Alexander Cameron in 1848. Likenesses of Margaret, at the age of the lady in our cover photo, would have shown her with her husband not her brother. They would not have been depicted separately, but together in one frame.

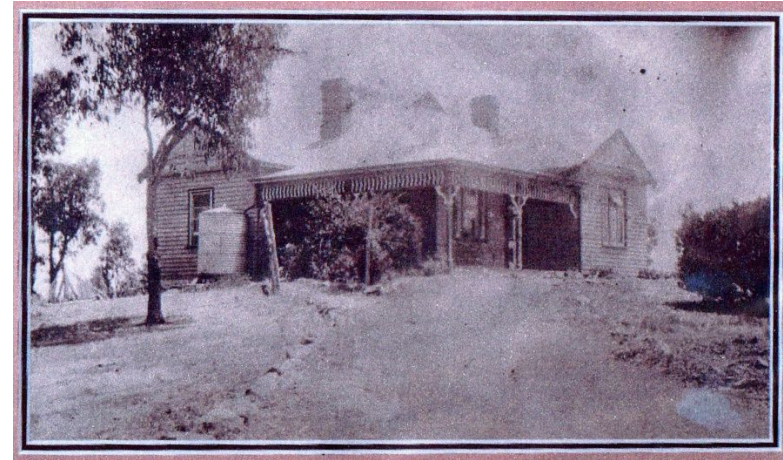
Eliminating the younger sister, leaves the elder sister Isabella Donaldson. Like Alexander, Isabella never married. The lady depicted here wears no wedding ring. Her clothing and hair are of 1850s style. Isabella at this time would be in her late 30s.

Some letters written by Isabella survive, and one of them provides helpful evidence. Writing to her brother John, 12th March 1857, she refers to a mutual friend who had "sent down his likeness by the same person who did ours". The first studio portrait service, using the daguerreotype process, opened in Melbourne in 1845. From all this it might be concluded that a likeness of Isabella existed in the 1850s. Accordingly, it seems not unlikely that this is it.

Isabella Donaldson occupied *Kangaroo Hall*, the homestead built on the first permanent square mile land holding at Kangaroo Ground. One wonders how she would view the prospect of having her address changed to Research.

## HISTORIC HOMESTEADS

### Gleniffer Braes



Gleniffer Braes c. 1910 (photo courtesy K and J James)

The *Gleniffer Braes* story begins in Scotland in the 1850s. Living in the industrial town Paisley were John and Jeannie Macgibbon and their young family. One of the town's most famous sons was Robert Tannahill, the weaver poet. Included in his verse is a tribute to the Braes o' Gleniffer, a fine viewpoint to the south west of the town.

The Macgibbon family sailed for Australia in 1854. At the time the eldest son of the family, John, was five years old. More than fifty years later, when he became owner of a thirty-seven acre property in Flat Rock Road, Kangaroo Ground, he named it after the distant hills he remembered from his childhood back in Scotland.

By this time he had long been in the public service and had risen to become, in 1898, Secretary For Lands. At about this time he acquired the Flat Rock Road property under crown lease. A five room house was built on it in 1905. The property was purchased, as an original crown grant, in 1910 for about 16/- an acre.

John's own eldest son occupied the homestead and managed the orchard at first. When this arrangement proved unsatisfactory, John's brother-in-law Frank Charlton took over.

The Macgibbon-Charlton connection arose in a remarkable way. John's first wife died in 1892, leaving two children. Prior to her death she expressed the wish not only that her husband should remarry but also that he marry the young woman she selected for him.

"She is Lizzie Charlton, the young woman who plays the organ at the Christmas Hills Church."

Neither John nor his second wife Elizabeth ever lived at *Gleniffer Braes*. Their residence was in Rathmines Road, Auburn. During Frank Charlton's years as manager, relatives young and old used the property as a holiday place - one where there was always plenty to do if you wanted to lend a hand.

Frank kept a work diary during the years 1913 to 1918. It is said that John Macgibbon took great delight in this property. It mattered not at all to him that the orchard never realised a profit.

John Macgibbon died in 1939 aged 90. His heirs retained the property, as a holiday venue, until 1960.

... ..  
After about sixty years of occupation by the Macgibbon family, *Gleniffer Braes* passed into the ownership of Lester and Joyce Albery in 1960. During their occupancy, one room of the house was enlarged. The orchard had long since disappeared. When they sold the property in 1987, they divided it into two: the half where the orchard had been located near the corner of Moonlight Road, and the half further north containing the house.

... ..  
Keith and Joan James purchased the half containing the homestead in 1987. During their occupancy, an additional four rooms have been added, the garden extensively landscaped, and the whole property lovingly restored and improved. The original lining board interiors still exist in several of the rooms. The original chimney still exists too, serving back-to-back fireplaces. Today the *Gleniffer Braes* homestead stands as one of the best preserved and most attractive historic residences of Kangaroo Ground.

- John Austin

(photo content not available)

## KANGAROO GROUND 100 YEARS AGO

- A gold rush at Kangaroo Ground? There was a small scale one during 1900 when news of “some good prospects” spread around the district. A dozen or more claims were pegged out at “Stony Creek, below Weller’s Hotel”. Does anyone in 2000 know this location?
- Meanwhile John Weller, the local blacksmith, was succeeding with his poultry. At the Victorian Poultry Kennel Club’s Show at the Melbourne Exhibition Buildings, he secured a first and a special prize for his Minorca cock bird and a first prize for his Minorca hen.
- Gaming and violence. In the Eltham Court of Petty Sessions, the former licensee of the Councillor’s Arms Hotel, Watson’s Creek, was charged with permitting an unlawful game to be played on his premises at Watson’s Creek. Apparently the gaming and its outcome sometimes became violent. The former licensee claimed during his trial that he had had his leg broken by one of the gamblers during a scuffle. Does anyone in 2000 know where the Councillor’s Arms Hotel, Watson’s Creek, was located?
- The *Evelyn Observer* reported that a quiet wedding took place at *Wippell Vale*, the bride’s residence. The groom was Mr H Charles Hansen and the bride Miss Eva Smith.
- J H Greenaway, the honorary president of the Kangaroo Ground Cricket Club, announced a concert to be held in the Kangaroo Ground Hall. Admission one shilling for adults, children half price.

## SPRING CHATTERBOX

### Know Our Volunteers

Until **Claire Watson** came to live in Kangaroo Ground some forty years ago, she had never lived in one place or country for much longer than two years. Of Belgian extraction, although not born in Belgium, she lived with parents whose work involved their living in many countries. Claire was always feeling that she was living where she didn’t belong. Living in Kangaroo Ground banished that feeling. She soon felt that she had come home, and could belong to her little bit of earth at the Bend of Isles and to this community for the rest of her life. Here her children Mandy and Sue grew up. When their interests linked them to the Kangaroo Ground Pony Club, Claire became its first Treasurer. Many of the original members remember her soft international accent as she wrestled with the books.

Claire generously gives of her time as a volunteer at the Museum for the Sunday afternoon roster. She also assists with the detailed job of cataloguing the archives, and when there is a function Claire may be seen serving tea or coffee or providing a helping hand.

Helping with the Museum, according to Claire, is her way of expressing her appreciation of the home and district she has come to love.



Claire Watson

**Jannine Taylor** has lived at the Bend of Isles for ten years, and her son Dylan attends the Kangaroo Ground Primary School.

Jannine is a busy person, for she is completing a Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of Melbourne with a major in Archeology.

For the past two years, as a volunteer she has brought her expertise to the aid of the Museum in involving herself weekly with the cataloguing of the archives. You will also meet Jennine on function days helping wherever a spare pair of reliable hands is required.



**Jannine Taylor** (left)

**Eleanor Fowler** has been a volunteer at the Museum for four years. She is one of the regulars who open the Museum between 2 - 4pm on Sundays. As well, she is a willing helper at functions and behind the scenes chores.

Eleanor and her husband Chris live with their two sons at the Bend of Isles. The boys attend the Kangaroo Ground Primary School. In addition to helping at the school, Eleanor works part time as a Social Worker.

Her interests include local history, people's stories including those from her own family in New Zealand, and she enjoys collecting copies of old photographs of her relatives.

- Those who have stopped by at the Museum lately will have observed the transformation of the garden surrounding the school. The blossom is out, the grounds are looking very inviting for the children to play in, and the setting of the Museum looks so much more inviting. Congratulations to all at the school.

**Eleanor Fowler** (right)



- Recently I received a letter from Bill Baly who formerly lived in Moonlight Road, Kangaroo ground with his wife Judith and family. They now live in N S W. Bill has sent me some of his writings on the district. More about this later.
- We have had a dry winter, the fire season looms, the heritage of the district can again be threatened. It is not too early to start taking stock and preparing for summer. The horrific fires in America are a timely warning.
- The Board is watching the issue of boundary changes closely. Our dismay at the proposal has been well and truly noted by the Shire of Nillumbik.

- Diana Bassett-Smith



