

PADDY'S SWAMP, PUNTERS, PLANNING, AND PEOPLE

By K.A. Austin

An Address delivered at a Meeting to consider the formation of a Historical Society at the Caulfield Town Hall on 12 July, 1972.

A little over one hundred years ago, on the 27th of June, 1872, the Caulfield Shire Council held its usual regular meeting. Less than a year before, the area had been elevated to a Shire from its former more lowly status as a Road District in the Parish of Prahran. At the meeting, the President, Mr. Thomas Watts, and Councillors Lloyd, M'Laren, Stephen, Nelson, Ellis, and Webb were present. Proceedings were soon enlivened through the presentation of a complaint - a fairly common occurrence at meetings of early Local Government bodies.

A Mr. Crosbie had written complaining that two drains ran through his property, and requesting that the water be made to flow into one only. The necessary work was ordered to be done, the cost not to exceed £5. Mr. Crosbie's initials were not stated in the report of the meeting, but he could have been Mr. John W. Crosbie of Murrumbeena Road, who became President of the Shire in 1875.

The Councillors, as they worked through an agenda of about thirteen items and a handful of accounts, could not in their wildest dreams have imagined the enormous growth of Municipal business that was to occur over the next one hundred years. As we are now, they were then in the forefront of Time, but merely engaged in steadily improving a pleasant rural countryside for the benefit of the residents, using the democratic processes that had been perfected in their British former homeland during a thousand years or more, from the days of the Saxon Moot, if not earlier.

They were not to know that the Audit Fee they fixed in 1872 at £3/3/- would rise to \$2,172.00 in 1972; that the Charity Grant of £20 they appropriated then on the basis of £5 each to the Melbourne and Alfred Hospitals and £5 to the Ladies Benevolent Society, with £5

retained, would appear on the Estimates in 1972 at \$3,000.00; that a century later a normal Council meeting would deal with an agenda of 122 items, and a Finance meeting would pass accounts totalling over \$286,000.00, in contrast to the £130/12/1 passed at the meeting of 27th June, 1872. When the Councillors ordered tenders for the erection and lighting of two lamps in the Glenhuntly Road, they could not foresee that in 1971/1972 street lighting would cost the Caulfield ratepayers \$98,000.00, and that the £56 voted specifically for road maintenance would be contrasted with the vote made in June, 1972, at \$2,226.00 for that purpose. After all, there were only 181 property owners or occupiers listed in Caulfield in 1872. Today, the population totals approximately 79,000, of whom 43,000 have the necessary property or occupancy qualifications which entitle them to vote.

The spectacular contrasts highlighted in the above comparisons relate, of course, only to the scale of operations. They do not reveal the increased range of functions for which the present-day Council is responsible. At the meeting in 1872 other familiar matters were dealt with. One was the recommendation by the St. Kilda Council that £100 be spent on the "boundary road" (Hotham Street). The matter was afforded the traditional treatment of being "referred to the surveyor." Another item was the decision to reprimand by letter the Rev. H.B. Macartney, Jnr., incumbent of the Church of England, and the Railway Company (strange partners in Municipal crime!) for "constructing crossings without permission." But the Councillors would have been surprised to know that such matters as the provision of libraries, tourist resorts, aerodromes, electricity supply, infant welfare centres, ambulance services, and unemployment relief, would be added to the list of Municipal powers in response to a century of progress in technology and social thinking.

Despite all this, the awe-inspiring thing about Local Government is the continuity of functions, in which, to quote a recent statement by Professor Manning Clark, "the Present is a mirror of the Past." For example, in 1872, "some necessary repairs were ordered on the Warren's-road" (North Road), and the

tender of J. Ilbury was accepted for Mirumbeena-road (sic), £26," as the report put it. It is perhaps exasperating to find that one hundred years later the Caulfield Council is still messing about with both those roads - Murrumbeena Road cost \$26,816.00 in 1971, and work on the North Road, for which a contract for \$228,403.00 has been let, is still going on.

Quiet and slow-moving as Municipal affairs might seem to us to have been a century ago, time does not stand still, and in their own way the Councillors of 1872 were already conditioned to change. They had lived through the incredible Gold Rushes, which had multiplied Victoria's population sevenfold in a decade, they had seen the coming of railways and the transport revolution effected by the coaches of Cobb and Co. Only five days after the Shire Council meeting referred to, the first overseas telegram had reached Melbourne. Even if the actual use of the service was for the wealthy only - a telegram to London cost £9/11/- for twenty words - the feeling of isolation from world affairs was gone, and this event alone was to accelerate progress. The Colony was poised for another period of development, the full force of which would be felt in the 1880s, and in which Caulfield would share.

A study of the "Australasian" weekly newspaper suggests that the main pre-occupation of Melbourne's citizens in 1872 were the turf, parliamentary proceedings, the police court, and cricket, in that order. Other items of topical interest were the progress to completion of the Overseas Telegraph Line, and the mounting criticism of Baron von Mueller, Director of the Botanical Gardens, over his attitude to landscaping. In at least two of these popular matters - gardens and the turf - Caulfield was soon to play a significant part.

In response no doubt to local requests "A Caulfield Racecourse Recreation and Public Park Permanently Reserved", as the Prahran Parish Plan dated 3 May 1882 calls it, was gazetted in 1879. Also in 1879, and possibly connected with the reservation of the Racecourse, the railway was extended from South Yarra to Oakleigh via Caulfield, and opened for

traffic on the 2nd of April. In the same year, the area fronting Balaclava Road and appearing on old maps as "Paddy's Swamp" was gazetted as "Public Park and Watering Place." Today, as Caulfield Park, it is used by ten cricket clubs and many other sporting bodies.

Although like other Municipalities Caulfield was later forced to follow the precedent set by Prahran in 1882 and repurchase land for public parks, the securing in the 1870s as Crown Land Reserves of the Racecourse and Caulfield Park areas totalling 209 acres was a far-sighted achievement, which gave Caulfield more than half the total area of its present parks and gardens. For this alone, the present Caulfield citizens should rise and call their forefathers blessed, and following their example should strive to do as well when using their rights under modern planning legislation to preserve their environment for the future.

It is hoped that this fragmentary dipping into Caulfield's past and present situations might encourage others to search for and find some satisfying aspects of Caulfield's history to explore and record in detail. How virgin bush became farmlands, how farmlands were replaced in a century by 18,000 houses and 1,400 shops, how the five-acre property owned by G.B. Hailes in 1872 became part of the Grimwade House of today, how a Shire's annual revenue of a few hundred pounds grew to a City's budget of over two million dollars, how Paddy's Swamp became Caulfield Park - these and other broad and detailed questions, together with the stories of the men and women who lived, worked, and made things happen, form the subject matter of local history as it concerns Caulfield. May the proposed Society, as it explores, records, preserves, and publicises the great human story which is the history of Caulfield, have every success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Author wishes to thank the following for help generously given:

His Worship the Mayor of Caulfield, Councillor F.A. Arden, the Deputy Town Clerk to the Caulfield City Council, Mr. Kerry Wilson, and the staff of the La Trobe Library, in particular Mr. J.R. Thompson.