

GEHS 50th CELEBRATION – An Afternoon of Local History

EVENTS IN CARNEGIE

Origin of the Carnegie Name

If I say the name “Dudley”, does this ring any bells?

If I say the name “Rosstown”, does this ring any more bells?

Carnegie was originally named “Rosstown” in 1975 after William Murray Ross, the developer of the failed Rosstown railway and sugar beet production mill. After this failed venture, concerned citizens lobbied for a change of name. There was a move in 1908 to change the name to Koornang, but the Railways objected as it was too similar to Kooyong. The name “Dudley” was mooted, but the Postmaster General objected as there was already the town of Dudley near Wonthaggi in Victoria.

In the long run, Carnegie was chosen in the hope of a grant from the Carnegie Foundation in the USA. It was anticipated that using the name Carnegie might add money and status to the suburb and provide for much needed infrastructure at the time, such as the construction of a library. In 1909 locals saw the Rosstown sign at the railway station being taken down and replaced with the name Carnegie. The name was kept but the money did not eventuate.

Carnegie Railway Station Attempted Robbery and Murder

Although generally a quiet and uneventful place, the Carnegie station was on one occasion in 1934 the scene of a tragic event. I quote from an article in the *Dandenong Journal* of 4th October, 1934 -

STATION MASTER SHOT

Mr. Henry Thomas Norwood, 35 years, the relieving station master at Carnegie, a married man with one child, was murdered on Monday night. The only persons on duty were himself and a junior porter, Frank Morrissey. Norwood had been parcelling money ready for its despatch to the city, when Morrissey had crossed to the down platform to clear the 10.19 Dandenong train. As the train was leaving Morrissey heard a noise, which he believed was the slamming of a carriage door. Two young men on the up platform called out, “Hop over; they’re holding up the office.” Later he found Mr. Norwood lying on his back and groaning feebly – he died a few seconds later and had been shot twice through the small of the back, apparently with a .33 calibre pistol. The money was undisturbed, and the station pistol was fully loaded, and had the safety catch still on.

Floods in Koornang Road

In 1934 there were floods in November, which were widespread across Melbourne. I quote from *The Herald* newspaper of 30th November:

“Storekeepers in Koornang Road, Carnegie, were forced to remove their stock when water invaded the shops.”

My own mother was 10 years old at the time and was living above a shop which her father rented, on the corner of Koornang and Neerim Roads. I quote from a book that my mother wrote called *Twenty Decembers*, which chronicles her life and times from the perspective of the twelve different houses she grew up in from the ages of two to twenty-two. They moved house frequently because of the Great Depression and her father’s search for work. I quote from page 66 of her book:

“In the December of 1934, there were floods in Melbourne, and Koornang Road was flooded. We leaned out the front windows and watched as the water rose, feeling safe in our lookout. George was sent to do a message for Mum and I can see him now, wading down the middle of the road with the basket on his head, knee deep in water. A man yelled at him to get on the footpath as they were going to open the manholes in the road. When Dad came off the train, water was deep in the subway - naturally we children thought it very exciting, we’d never seen flooding before. Dad was telling us of men rolling up their trousers to wade through the water, and some ladies rolling down their stockings and going through the water barefoot. The shops nearer the middle of the street were the worst affected, the water was about 2 feet deep, but at our end of the road hardly anything”.

Again in 1954 there were floods in Koornang Road. I quote from *The Argus* newspaper of 4th December:

“Floodwaters three feet deep brought Carnegie’s main shopping centre in Koornang Road to a halt. About 40 shops, including a new Woolworths store which had been open only 2 days, had water swirling through the doors. Shoppers were stranded for up to 3 hours in some shops. The manager of Woolworths, Mr. P. Dresens, backed one of the firm’s trucks up the back lane and drove stranded customers to non-flooded streets. Mr. Dresens said that he was amazed at the amount of water trapped outside his shop. Some shopkeepers used bags of sawdust at the doors to hold back the water. Cars which were left at the kerb had 16 inches of water in the cabins. Truck drivers spent nearly an hour towing stalled and flooded cars to safety. Every time a motor vehicle would carefully edge

its way through the flood, it would send waves of water rushing into the shops.”

These floods must have been very disruptive for trade for some time afterwards.

Downards Robbery and Shooting

Who remembers the name Downard?

Downards Furniture Removal and Storage was a well-known business in and around Carnegie. In 1960 their Head Office was in the building formerly known as the “Crystal Palace Theatre” in Dandenong Road, Caulfield East, with a seating capacity of 1,250 people.

One morning in 1960 when I was in Grade 4 at Carnegie Primary School, I heard a news report on the wireless before I left for school that during the night W.J. Downard of 187 Koornang Road, Carnegie, had been burgled and shot, not fatally, by intruders. Mr. Downard lived directly behind the school and the two thieves made their getaway down a short laneway and through the school grounds, disposing of a gun and ammunition as they made their escape.

Everyone at school that morning was talking about the robbery. Some kids had found some bullets and had taken them to the headmaster's office. My friend Greg Cook (whose father ran Cook's Motor Body Works in Neerim Road) and I, along with a lot of other kids, started hunting the grounds for the gun, and believe it or not, Greg and I spotted it under a bush quite close to the office.

We ran to tell the headmaster, who had bullets lined up across the front of his desk. We were told not to touch the gun and we were interviewed by the police. It was all very exciting. I remember being very disappointed, though, because I didn't have to go to court to give evidence. I thought it would be a day off school for me. Anyway, it was a very memorable day at school, and was talked about for many days, the story being exaggerated a little more each day.

So as you can see, Carnegie has had its quota of dramatic events, and these are just some that I wanted to share with you today.

Richard Darke
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