

MIDDLE PARK HISTORY GROUP



Editorial

While the MPHG is not able to meet this April as planned, the committee has been busy. Before the lockdown and since at our desks. The museum program at the Middle Park Primary School began at the beginning of the term but is now on hold.

The book subcommittee met once on 11 March to discuss possibilities for a book on Albert Park. Several ideas for chapters were canvassed and even some authors were lined up.

In this issue we have another article by Sonya Cameron on activities in Middle Park and environs, not 100 years ago but appropriately 101 years ago.

Ruth Stirling has provided answers to the mystery objects in the January newsletter. And I have found another. President Meyer Eidelson's report reflects on our concerns with a personal account.

With luck, we will meet together again soon at the Middle Park Primary School.

Gary Poore

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101 years ago

Influenza epidemic 1919

Sonya Cameron

This regular feature of our newsletter usually takes a look at what is happening in Middle Park 100 years ago. But for this issue, we thought it more relevant to look back 101 years when a pandemic similar to the current one was raging in Australia – namely the Spanish Flu (so called not because it originated in Spain, but due to its first being widely reported there).

“Towards the end of January, 1919, an outbreak of influenza occurred in Melbourne and it rapidly spread throughout the whole metropolitan area. The first wave, which was the most virulent one, reached its greatest height in the second week of February and receded slowly during the subsequent six weeks. It was followed by a second wave of greater magnitude which commenced in the last week of March and attained its maximum height about one month later, after which it receded; though more slowly than the preceding wave. A recrudescence of the disease in a milder form occurred about the

middle of July, but it had abated to very small dimensions by the end of September.” ... “The striking feature of the epidemic in 1919 was the very heavy death rate among persons at the most vigorous period of life.” ... “Approximately 72 per cent of those who died from influenza were between 20 and 50 years of age.” (Source: *Victorian Year Book 1919–1920*, pp. 180–181).

While I have not been able to find a general news item relating specifically to Middle Park, the City of South Melbourne did play a significant role in the provision of two temporary emergency hospitals. This newspaper article concerning the Montague State School appeared in *The Record* on 15 February 1919 (page 2).

The Montague Emergency Hospital was closed on 13 March 1919. However, this closure was only temporary and the hospital had to be reopened in April due to the second wave of the influenza.



Montague State School today

THE INFLUENZA OUTBREAK.

WHAT SOUTH MELBOURNE IS DOING.

Naturally at a time of crisis like the present citizens are anxious to know exactly what is happening around them, and for that reason the report submitted by the mayor (Cr. Cuthbertson) to the council on Wednesday evening is of considerable interest. The report read as follows:—

The equipment of temporary hospital at Montague School was practically completed on Monday, February 10th, and made ready to receive patients on Tuesday, 11th. A male ward with 10 beds, female ward with 10 beds, and nurses' dormitories 15 beds, are complete with all necessary furnishings. Two more wards, providing for another 10 male and 10 female patients, are ready to receive beds and furnishings, which will be added as required. At midday yesterday 25 patients were in the hospital, and there had been no deaths. Electric light has been installed in all wards, dormitories, corridors, etc., and bath with hot and cold water. A horse-drawn ambulance for the transport of patients has been placed at disposal of hospital staff. A nursing sister is in charge as matron. The services of Miss Hodgson (domestic economy teacher) were secured to control the kitchen and laundry departments, and the balance of staff comprises a number of V.A.D. ladies and two male orderlies. Advantage was taken of all voluntary donations, but progress was too slow, and it became necessary to purchase or hire much of the desired material. Approximately a sum of £300 has been expended to date in completing the equipment, and maintenance charges are now running. The control of the

hospital will be entirely in the hands of the health officer (Dr. Cuscaden), and circulars have been issued to all local medical men informing them that patients will be admitted through health officer. A trained nurse has been engaged to visit houses where disease has occurred, and render necessary assistance and advice; she will be helped in this work by V.A.D. ladies. Fifteen patients have been admitted to date—five male and 10 female. Three of these are bad cases. At the present time the inspectors are, wherever possible, making visits to all contacts, etc., and issuing necessary instructions for compliance with Board of Health regulations. The total free inoculation administered at Town Hall to date is 10554, and there has been a gradual decrease in the daily attendance this week. Four hundred and seventy-nine cases have been reported in South Melbourne since outbreak. Cr. Murray Jones has been in daily attendance at Montague street, and rendered valuable assistance. The office staff at Town Hall has been working under pressure for some days, and the officers have cheerfully undertaken the additional work.

Another emergency hospital was opened in July 1919, when the municipalities of South Melbourne, St Kilda and Port Melbourne jointly established the Albert Park Emergency Hospital in the Defence Department buildings in Albert Park reserve. When the Montague Emergency Hospital was finally closed on 12 August 1919, staff were transferred to the Albert Park Emergency Hospital. This hospital was eventually closed in September 1919. During the epidemic the Montague Hospital admitted 617 patients of whom 34 died. The Albert Park Emergency Hospital admitted 38 patients of whom one died. According to the *Victorian Year*

Book 1918–1919, the death rate for the City of South Melbourne increased from 10.55 per 1,000 residents in 1918 to 15.07 in 1919.

To give the 1919 influenza epidemic a Middle Park focus, the following story shows how the epidemic impacted on the life of the mother of one of our members, Max Cameron.

Nancy Cameron was born Nancy Jean Newsome in December 1915. Her father was Charles George Newsome and her mother Olive May Simmons. She had an older sister, Valda, born in 1913. They lived in Dinsdale Street, Albert Park and Charles worked as a boilermaker at the Gasworks in South Melbourne. On 9 July 1919, the Newsome family welcome a baby brother, Alan. But five days later, during the third wave of the epidemic, his mother died of influenza and Alan's death followed on 18 July 1919. The father was unable to care for his two daughters so they both went to different family members to be cared for. Nancy was looked after by her mother's sister Violet, who forever after held a special place in Nancy's heart. The family was reunited in 1921 when Charles Newsome married Edith Cathie, a widow with three sons, and the blended family moved to Pickles Street, South Melbourne. Many years later, Nancy met and married a local boy Hugh Cameron and they moved to Middle Park. It is interesting to contemplate whether, had Nancy's mother not

died of the Spanish flu and the family remained living in Albert Park, would she have ever met Hugh Cameron?????

Maybe you have a family story about the 1919 influenza epidemic that you could share with our members.



Hugh and Nancy Cameron on their wedding day
1938



Mystery object

Something different, common in Middle Park at this time of year. NO, not a corona virus!

Thank you to those who guessed, correctly, the mystery objects published in the January newsletter. For those of you who did not, the answer is on the next page.

Mystery object(s) revealed

Middle Park Baby Sitting Co-op – 1973

Ruth Stirling

Fresh from our honeymoon, John and I moved into our 16-foot frontage terrace house, in Richardson St, Middle Park, in January 1968. The area was considered a slum by some, but it was all we could afford. John liked ‘that bit of land between the lake and the bay’. We paid \$10,000. Both teachers, we had taught in country schools.

We had our first child, Emma Jane, on 6 August 1970. Her sister, Fleur Elizabeth, arrived on 23 October, 1972.

I started to meet other young mums, mainly through the Infant Welfare Sister, Lorna Blair. I soon realised that there were families who did not have the support of grandparents or other family members. My parents were far away at Digby, past Hamilton, in the far Western District. John’s dad was grieving the loss of his wife, who died before Emma was walking. He lived at Elphinstone.

I talked to the mums that I knew about a ‘Baby-Sitting Co-op’ and we met at my house in 1973. My memory is that seven people gathered that day and we made up a plan on how to proceed. We knew of co-ops where the system involved one member acting as secretary for a month and handling all the bookings. Other co-ops used buttons or discs as currency.

John suggested that he could design and make tokens which would be unique to our co-op, which were aesthetically pleasing enough, that members would have them on a shelf and not lost in a drawer. They needed to be long lasting. John and the late Ron Arnott made the tokens shown as the ‘Mystery Object’ in the most recent MPHG Newsletter.

This system meant that a member had a list of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all the families and with 15 hours credit on joining, they were free to contact anyone on the list to negotiate a baby-sitting date.

I remember, that from the first meeting of seven mothers, by the time we launched, we had recruited a total of 12 families. As the group



grew, dads would also babysit. No cautious thoughts of a strange man coming to look after your precious children, ever crossed our minds. Ah, the good old days.

It is important at this point to remind you that all of this was before emails, texts and mobile phones.

There were rules, of course.

Currency of the co-op is the tokens which you receive on joining. Look after them. (15 hour credit)

The tokens must be returned to Ruth Stirling if you leave.

Arrangements for baby-sitting are made on a personal basis between individual members.

Try to give at least one day's notice.

Give approx. time of return - and preferably at the time of booking.

Leave phone number and address with the sitter.

Penalty rates of double time apply between the hours of 5 and 7 pm and after midnight.

If either party is delayed at either end of session, phone contact should be made.

Time will be estimated to the nearest half hour.

Arrange sleeping, food and nappies for daytime sitting. At night, children must be ready for bed when sitter arrives. When older children are staying up, check with the sitter than he/she is prepared for this and instruct children in front of sitter as to retiring time.

No-one should accept sitting when they have a full spike of tokens. Emergencies excepted, refuse and refer them to someone you know is

low on tokens. (Use the grapevine to circulate the above info.)

Provide the sitter with supper and heating. (If late night, leave blanket and pillow) and transport if necessary.

Everyone was clearly happy with these rules, because before 1980 the membership had grown to close to 70 families!

We decided to split the huge group, loosely geographically, so we had Middle Park, Albert Park and South Melbourne. When we split, my Middle Park group was back to about 30, but in a very short time, it was back up to about 50.

Our responsible 12 year old Emma had started baby-sitting after school for nearby friends. Then in 1982, John took up a teaching exchange in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. We lived in a duplex, with our landlady above. John and I could go out knowing Mrs Darby was handy for our girls. By 1983, Emma was in High School and our girls did not need a baby-sitter. We dropped out of the co-op.

But, other people kept the three groups running and there were still baby-sitting co-ops in the 1990s. Julie Nankervis and I looked at old lists and over 100 families were involved, over a period of 20 years.

The contacts and friendships lead to more community participation – Meals on Wheels, Freeway Action, local Council, Play Groups, Toy Library, Toddlers' Music Groups, involvement in the local schools' Councils and Parents Clubs.

Currently, I do not know of any babysitting co-ops in the City of Port Phillip, but would love to hear if there are any.

MPHG President's Report

In my last President's Report I mentioned the extreme challenges Australians were experiencing facing fire and flood. In an incredibly short time these challenges have expanded from fire and flood to fever and financial meltdown. In the media there are currently many history articles seeking to glean lessons from our ancestors' responses to crises like pandemics and depressions.

When I experience anxiety about life events in Aussie, I remind myself of my grandmother's life challenges. Sarah Eidelson (Gestern) 1881–1942 was born in Warsaw, Poland to reasonably prosperous Jewish parents. After marrying Noah Eidelson, the couple moved to Germany to avoid Noah's 25 year conscription by the Czar.

They were compelled to return and eventually prospered. Unfortunately Noah was disabled by a stroke leaving Sarah as the breadwinner for six young children. She opened a guesthouse but World War One intervened and the guesthouse was requisitioned first by the Germans and then the Russians. Somehow the family survived the war and the subsequent 1918 pandemic.

They gradually achieved some prosperity but then the 1929 Depression struck. For a period some of the children were sent to relatives to avoid starvation but the family eventually reunited and began to succeed. Fascism however was on the rise and Poland experienced a wave of anti-Semitism. Three of Sarah's children, now young adults, managed to migrate to safety. In 1939, Russia and Germany invaded Poland and my father Joe was sent by Stalin to a Siberian labour camp. Sarah and her two daughters were trapped in the Warsaw Ghetto after the Nazis attacked Russia. They did not survive, perishing possibly in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising or in the nearby Treblinka concentration camp. In 1949 my uncle Bernard, now safely in Melbourne, brought out my father Joe and my mother Rita, who had miraculously

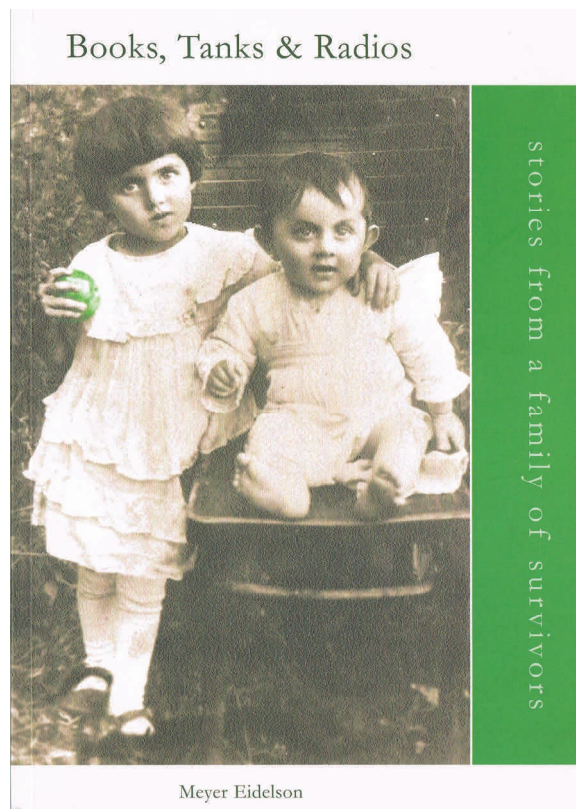
survived.

How did my grandmother Sarah respond to a life fraught with disasters? According to my aunt Franka it was not with fear or flight but with fight. She was an active organiser, worker and parent who met obstacles with a ferocious determination to protect her children and community. Her actions didn't save herself but gained us our Australian birthright.

Reflecting on Sarah's life and values helps me gain perspective on the modern era's trials and tribulations. You can find an account of our family's adventures in *Books, Tanks and Radios. Stories from a family of Survivors* either from COPP libraries or on-line: www.melbournwalks.com.au/holocaust

Meyer Eidelson

President, Middle Park History Group



MPHG meeting schedule 2020

Sadly all meetings for the foreseeable future are postponed. We will let you know when we can meet again.

The committee had planned to have Dr Sophie Couchman speak on **Mee How Ah Muoy – Architect** and with luck this be our first speaker when normal life resumes.

Your MPHG committee

President:	Meyer Eidelson
Vice-President:	Vacant
Secretary:	Vacant
Treasurer:	Sonya Cameron
Liaison officer:	Diana Phoenix
Committee members:	Tony Liston, Gary Poore