

LAST MEMORY OF BELMONT METHODIST CHURCH

Alma Missen (nee Ruffin)

(Transcribed by Ian Henricus, November, 2017)

Soon after we arrived at 15 Church Street, Gwen and I were in bed when there was a knock at the door. Mum answered it find Evelyn Sprake (later Rowlands) and someone else who had come to see if they could borrow Gwen, about 4 at the time, to take part in an item they were preparing for a concert.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

I remember superintendents Mr. Bedgood, Mr. Bill Neill, Mr. Tom Keal, and later M. Leigh Hair and Mr. Eric Lyons.

Teachers I particularly remember are Miss Bernice Sprake and Miss Margaret Neill (later Mrs. Stephens). Margaret was a pianist and also the organist at church.

Sunday was a full day with church at 11 o'clock, Sunday School at 2.30, after a walk around Belmont to follow – up to Scott Street to look at mostly empty paddocks, then church again at 7pm and after hymn singing around the piano after that. For a number of years there was nothing in Regent Street opposite from the church from the fire station (now a Chinese restaurant) to the corner of Church Street and down to our place. Mr Wilson, the policeman, lived on the corner of Regent and Church Streets across Church Street from the church where Mrs. Creati now lives. I only know the Methodist Hymn Book we used until the AHB was produced but I can remember Dad complaining that the harmonies had all been changed from the old Methodist Hymn Book.

SUNDAY SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS

It must have been in the late 30's and early 40's during the war that Sunday School exams were arranged from Melbourne and sent all round the State. We were coached for the exams and I can remember going as part of a group to Mrs. Helmores in Mitchell Street. On the big day we assembled in the hall with pencils, rubbers, etc, were handed the official examination papers and set to work.

SOCIALS

As teenagers we had a lot of social evenings when games were played. There was no dancing as that was not allowed on church property. But there was a lot of fun. We used to go by tram to other parts of Geelong too – to Pakington Street (now St Phillips) and Ashby (now closed). At the end of the night a large group of us would walk all the way home. Imagine doing that now!

ANNIVERSARIES AND TEA MEETINGS

Each year in November the Sunday School anniversary was held with a platform graduating up to a great height. This was filled with children from Junior and Intermediate departments in the morning and they sang the special hymns, which had been learnt for weeks before. These were often from 'Joyful Voices'.

The afternoon was for the smaller children in the Kindergarten and Primary Depts. The evening service was mainly for the older ones in the Bible study. Often a special preacher was invited such as the Rev. Cliff Wright, director of the Young People's Dept. Most of the girls had a new dress for the occasion. Tea Meetings were great occasions when trestle tables were put up and usually the hall was crowded. Tickets were sold and the church ladies worked very hard to provide food for everyone. A concert followed the meal.

Sunday School prizes were presented each year. These were often books, which were often bought from my grandfather, George Rawlings, who had a bookshop up the hill in Mooroolool Street, where Belchers Arcade is now. A lot of Methodist Sunday Schools in Geelong bought the prizes from him. Books were much cheaper in those days.

As a teenager I taught in the Primary Dept. under Miss Goodall and played the piano. Later I taught in the Junior Dept.

When about eighteen I began to play the organ for church as a part of a group who shared the playing. Marion Morrison (later Allen) was one and Josie Walker another. When not playing I sang in the choir and can remember singing Caleb Simper's 'The Rolling Seasons' I think for a Harvest Festival.

The choir was placed on a platform across the front of the church. Members entered the church from the Guild Room where they gathered. Entering the church was precarious with about 4 narrow steps to negotiate. Harvest Festivals were always special with the space behind the Communion rail piled high with fruit and other produce which proved something of a temptation to some choir members in the front row. It wasn't long before the other organists were not available and I continued on my own playing for the 2 services each Sunday. There was usually an anthem at night too. The Rev. Harold Freeman was minister at the time (1946-51) and used to send one of the children round to me with the hymns for Sunday on Saturday afternoon, after which I would go to church and practise.

The organ was against the wall behind the choir with the organist facing the back wall and using a mirror to see the conductor who at the time was Mr. Arthur Foster, and to know what was happening in the congregation. The basses sat on my left and Mr. Sid Johnson always sat next to the organ and opened the hymn book at the first hymn. The tenors sat on my right and the altos and sopranos were across the full width.

*I think it was the late 40's that the Junior Tennis Club decided to put on (I think) 2 musicals over 2 years. Mr. Carter Hirst trained the Junior members including lead Pat Hirst (now Mrs. John Rankin) and Lorraine Dunn (Now Mrs. Cliff Rankin), Lorraine Hirst (Brame), Faye Leeder (Harper). One musical was called Gypsy Gay but I am unable to remember the title of the other one.

A little while later Gwen Foster (now Enterkin) gathered together a Children's Choir which took part in the Methodist Eisteddfods, which were held at the time. The Choir did very well, winning the Sunday Schools Choirs and although I cannot remember where the heats were held the final was held at the Melbourne Town hall. I accompanied the choir and being on the stage at the Melbourne Town hall was nerve wracking.

* It was always quite a job to keep up the standard and have 2 anthems ready for each Sunday. In those days there was always a good congregation at evening services.

Something I have realised is that I have played every Induction Service since that for the Rev. Colin McCrae (1951-57). Although not the official organist for all that time, I have played for the Inductions. The induction I remember the most is Graham Lehmann's (1968-75). There was a thunderstorm with heavy rain just as all the officials including the Rev. Norman Kemp were to go to the front of the church from the Fellowship Room to process in. Instead they entered through the side door. Graham was always amused by the anthem that night, "Come O Thou Traveller Unknown". The service during which the site of the new church was dedicated was held on the first Sunday after we arrived back from our honeymoon and we are shown in the movie films walking along Regent Street afterwards.

I wish I had kept a list of all the weddings and funerals I have played for over the years - now over 50 years since I started.

(Italics mine)