

Historical Society of the Northern Territory

Patron: The Hon Austin Asche AC

NEWSLETTER MAY & JUNE 2016

PO Box 40544, Casuarina NT 0811

Mobile: 0487 413 709

www.historicalsocietynt.org.au

Email: hsnt@iinet.net.au Newsletter Editor: Bev Phelts

HSNT Committee – President: Earl James; Vice President: Bev Phelts; Secretary: Janie Mason; Treasurer: Rosemary Chalmers; others - Brian Reid; Alan Powell; Judy Boland; Clayton Frederickson; Matthew James

President's Message from Earl James



The great search for **permanent accommodation** for your Society has finally come to an end. On 28th April the property at 1/16 Charlton Ct, Woolner was transferred into the name of the Historical Society of the NT. For this we must once again say 'thank you' to our anonymous donor without whom this would never have happened. Full marks must go to your secretary Janie Mason for the time and effort she has given to making this happen. Her dedication to the task was unstoppable. I would also like to thank our lawyer member and former councillor, Nick Johansen for the time and effort that he has given in acting as our conveyancer during the negotiations and the finalisation of the purchase contract.

We now have something in the order of about 90 sq. metres of air-conditioned floor space to play with plus two dedicated car-parking spaces. Your Council has advised the National Trust that we will be moving out of Audit House by the

end of May and newly elected Councillor Matthew James has volunteered to organise all the heavy work. We probably will have to allocate about 15 sq. metres of floor space to permanent storage but the rest will be available for meetings and display of product. Initially the space will be furnished with whatever we have on hand until the Council has had time to decide what is required and to make application for a grant to purchase it. We hope to have a grand opening sometime in June.

The society's **Financial Balance Sheet** now looks very healthy. We now have total members' funds amounting to \$387,301. Of course this includes the value of the office premises at \$265,184 and that of Stock on hand at \$34,646, but with cash reserves of \$64,485 we are in a fairly secure position. Of course that position will only remain viable if we continue to sell our product, ie our publications. This is something all members should have a hand in. There is not much point in continuing to publish if we are not selling our product. I urge all members to advertise, in their own way, the availability of the wealth of historical reading that is available at the Society's website. Authors of publications are also urged to make an effort to promote their own books. I have been speaking at Rotary Clubs and Probus Clubs marketing the book that I recently wrote. As a result we have had two reprints since June last year. To continue being successful we must market our product.

Membership of your society remains steady even though payment of annual subscriptions is slow. Today we have 103 financial members; 19 who were financial last year and who, hopefully are simply laggard in paying their dues; 8 who have not paid their subs since 2014, and I am concerned about this. What are we doing wrong?; and 5 who seem to have lost interest since 2013. The Society's rules state that "a member shall not cease to be a member until three years in arrears". This means that at the end of this year 5 members will be struck off the record unless they show some interest and pay something. I for one would welcome them back for even one year's payment. Membership is a vital aspect of the life of every organisation such as ours. I call on you all to introduce a new member. If you wish to pay by bank transfer the details are - Historical Society of the Northern Territory, BSB 065901 (CommBank) Account: 000901407. Make sure you put your surname "SURNAME" and "MEMBERSHIP" against the deposit.

The planning of this year's **July Field Trip** is progressing well thanks to the hard work of V/Pres. Bev Phelts. Part of the Society's remit is to study aboriginal as well as the European history of the Territory. This year we have organised a trip to Maningrida. Already we have the promised assistance, as guide and raconteur, of Ms Helen Bond-Sharp who lived there for 20 years and recently published a book about the community. Accommodation, camping sites and local guides have been solved but the worst problem seems to be the timing of the tides over the East Alligator and other smaller rivers. Finally, If you are a regular reader of my ravings, and I hope you are, you will remember that before the annual general meeting I **appealed for help** from members to ease the burden on Councillors. Last year we had 12 Councillors. Now we have only nine. They need assistance with organising monthly lectures, selling publications at public events, helping the Secretary, the Treasurer and the Membership Director, and finding copy for the Newsletter editor. As a result of my appeal I have had just one response and that came from Heather Sjöberg. Thank you Heather. Even though she is only here for half of each year, she has answered the call. She is prepared to do whatever she can in the time available.

When will you answer the call???

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Friday 27 May - National Trust & Historical Society Talk at Burnett House – 5.30 for a 6pm start.

The speaker will be Dr Clayton Fredericksen who will talk about Fort Dundas, Melville Island: First British Settlement in Northern Australia. Dr Fredericksen is an archaeologist who in the late 1990s and early 2000s, conducted a series of excavations at the Fort Dundas site.

Entry: \$2 for members, \$5 for non-members. Food and drinks will be available to purchase

Telephone enquiries to Julie: 8946 6835 BH, 8927 9459 AH

Members and guests are reminded that food and drink cannot be taken inside Burnett House

Wednesday 1 June - Launch of *Know Where You Stand: Fannie Bay and Surrounds*

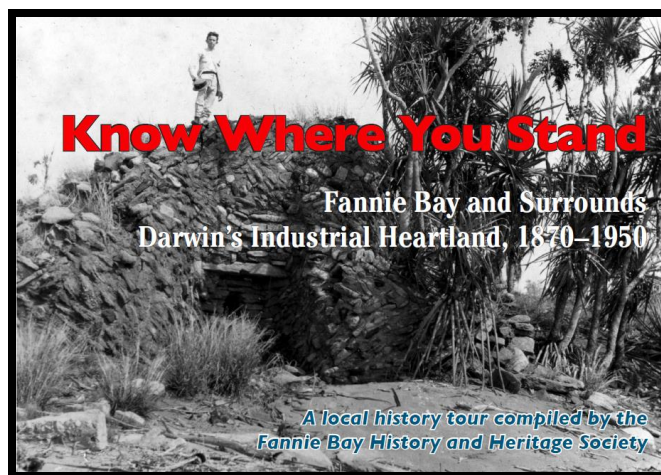
The launch will be held at Lake Alexander picnic area at 5.30pm

The booklet is a publication by the Fannie Bay History & Heritage Society. This booklet will introduce, or re-introduce, many historical locations in and around Fannie Bay.

Locations described are largely accessible to the public. They can be visited using public transport, on foot, or by bicycle or car. The map shows the location of sites and, in conjunction with the contents page, the reader can decide which places are of interest.

There are visible physical remains at some sites, but none at others; some locations have interpretive signage. But by slowing down and imagining, the past may come to life.

The booklet will be on sale for \$10.



RSVP for catering purposes please by Friday 27 May 2016.

Email Info.fbhhs@gmail.com or phone 89 851983 and leave a message.

Sunday 19 June – Anglicare NT Event

“Music from Moscow”, a fundraiser concert will be given by the Australian Doctors’ Orchestra at 2pm in the Convention Centre.

Tuesday 28 June – Chief Minister’s History Book Awards

At Parliament House 12-1.30pm.

Saturday 23 July to Sunday 25 September – Cartoon Exhibition

“Behind the lines” an exhibition of the best Australian political cartoons from 2015 will be on display at the Museum and Art Gallery, Conacher Street, Fannie Bay.

22 – 24 July - HSNT Field Trip - Darwin to Maningrida

The following is a draft only and it will be finalised closer to the date.

Friday 22 – Show Day

For early-birds, the Border Store at Cahills Crossing is a nice place to have breakfast/morning tea. The store has toilets & sells tea/coffee and food from the Jabiru bakery. Another option for morning tea is 15mins on the other side, just before turnoff to Oenpelli. There is a lagoon in an attractive setting.

9am Muster at Cahills Crossing and cross over. (low tide is at 6.45am)

1-2pm Lunch somewhere along the way

5pm Arrive at Jinka/Djinkarr Outstation which is 18kms south of Maningrida.
Meet landowners Leila & Wayne and set up camp for 2 nights.
Djinkarr is in a beautiful bush setting overlooking the stunning Tomkinson flood plains with glimpses of the Liverpool River and sunsets.
The outstation has toilets & showers and will cost \$20 per person per night.

Saturday 23 July

Day at Maningrida

Helen Bond-Sharp who lived in Maningrida for 20 years and is the author of *Maningrida: A History of the Aboriginal Township in Arnhem Land* will be our guide. Points of interest are the site of the leprosarium (there are no remnants/footings left), the sawmill, old buildings that have been refurbished and are still in use eg. the Fisheries Building.

8am – Depart Jinka for Maningrida

9am - Visit the Djomi museum, the art and culture centre and the Babbarra womens culture centre.

The museum holds photographs and Aboriginal and Maccassan artefacts. The art and culture centre sells Aboriginal art; and the womens culture centre sells unique lino and screen print fabrics, tablecloths, homewares, fashion accessories and art.

All three organisations have opened especially for the HSNT and it would be appreciated if everyone could purchase an item (big or small).

The day will be flexible as we have to work in with Helen and staff.

Lunch will be on the verandah of the art centre. Bring your lunch, drinks and other requirements.

Sunday 24 July

Return to Darwin or elsewhere at your own leisure – Note that Cahills Crossing low tide will be at 8am.

Information

Maningrida is 500km east of Darwin and 300km north east of Jabiru. At the 2006 census, the town had a population of 2,068. Please remember that alcohol cannot be taken into Maningrida.

Your group must be self sufficient as we have been told that there will be no supermarket/cafes open at Maningrida on Saturday 23. Unless you like bore water, bring enough drinking water, food and repellent.

Fuel will be available at Jabiru and the Border Store. In Maningrida, opal and diesel are available from Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation Fuel. It is manned Saturday until 2pm. It offers 24 hour service but you will need to use your credit card/efpos to access fuel.

Singles/doubles looking for a ride and willing to share costs - we can try and find you a share 4WD. If you have a spare seat or need a seat, please let Bev know.

If you are interested in coming along, please advise by Friday 24 June as the Society needs to arrange permits. Permits are free but participating persons will need to provide names of their group and vehicle details. There is a cost of \$40 per person for two nights at Jinka Outstation. Payment will need to be made to the HSNT prior to departure. Contact Bev Phelts on 0417868827 or email hsnt@iinet.net.au

Sunday 21 August – Art Exhibition

“The Nature of Paper”, an exhibiton of work by Winsome Jopling using Territory sourced materials featuring Territory themes will be on display at the Museum and Art Gallery, Conacher Street, Fannie Bay.

5-7 October, Phillip Island, Victoria - Victorian Museums & Galleries Conference

The Victorian Museums & Galleries Conference is back in 2016 and will be held in beautiful Phillip Island at the Cowes Cultural Centre on 5-7 October. Under the central theme of ‘Future-proofing’, the Conference will consider the challenges facing museums and galleries, and focus on innovative ways to achieve financial, social (succession planning, staff training), and environmental sustainability.

The event will include traditional keynotes, interactive discussions, lightning talks, focused parallel sessions, and a discussion panel. Topics to be covered include: the impact of climate change on museum buildings and collections, developing regional audiences, interpretation and

storytelling, and adapting to change. For more information about this event, visit the Museums Australia VIC website.

Let's Talk About the Murrnji by Earl James

For years I have dreamed about driving the old Murrnji Stock Route from Newcastle Waters to the Old Top Springs. I did so in the mid 1950's as a passenger in a truck carrying stores to the Hooker Creek aboriginal settlement (Lajamanu Community). It was the end of the Wet Season and the driver was cautious about using the Dry River Road because that track could have been anything but dry. I was young and adventurous and the cattle were starting to move down the stock routes so I accepted the offer of a free ride just to see what the country was like. I don't remember a thing about that trip.

In my senior years I often thought about retracing some of the old stock routes, especially the Murrnji, which have all been out of use for at least half a century. So I did some research, only to find that most of these old historic passage ways had been given to either the Aborigines or the local Pastoral Leasees. They are now criss-crossed by fencing and are very difficult of passage for those who have no need to be there. But the Murrnji still fascinated me. Reading Darrell Lewis's *The Murrnji Track – Ghost Road of the Drovers* (2007) convinced me that driving the track would be a major expedition not entered into lightly. Lewis did a lot of work in 1991/92 along the track, recording what was left of the bores along the way. He recommended that a large number of bores be nominated as Heritage Sites. This was implemented in 1998. I don't think he drove the length of the track because he describes it in the book as overgrown. If he did he would be the last person on earth to do so. I think he probably drove some of it in the 'downs' country near Newcastle Waters and in the savannah land in the west but the lancewood and bullwaddy country in between would have stopped him. There, he must have traversed the Buchanan Highway and branched off left and right at appropriate places and bush-bashed until he found the sites he was looking for. This gave me an idea for a field trip for members of the Historical Society. Perhaps we could spend a long weekend doing what Lewis probably did.



Two weeks ago during the May Day long weekend my son Matthew and I set out to reconnoitre those heritage listed sites along the Buchanan Highway to see if such a field trip would be practicable. In one respect we were pleased - there were tracks to all of the sites except one. In another respect we were disappointed – there was very little to see at most of them. In most cases the original windmills and tanks have disappeared. The bores are still there and are being used by neighbouring cattle properties, but the original infrastructure has been replaced by modern pumping equipment. Where the original still exists, it is buried under long grass and vegetation regrowth.

However all was not lost. We found the Murrnji and bore to be a reasonable camp site where could spend time searching for the marked trees that found. We found an old aboriginal well, now known Scobies Rockhole, just a kilometre off the road. A the other bore sites which are only a kilometre or two road could be worth a visit. The site of the old Homestead, about 20 kilometres from Top Springs is excellent camp site beside a large waterhole. There of a drover on the Buntine Highway near the turnoff to the Old Top Springs Roadhouse. And the ruins of the old roadhouse are worth a look. Sufficient to say that a three day field trip could be planned to look at these features and we will continue to think about it.



Waterhole members Lewis as a couple of off the Illawarra an is a grave

HIGHLIGHTS OF PAST EVENTS

Good Night All About: Reminiscence of Life in Darwin and the Northern Territory 1937-1946 by Hilda Abbott was launched by our Administrator's wife, Mrs Marie Hardy on 4 May.



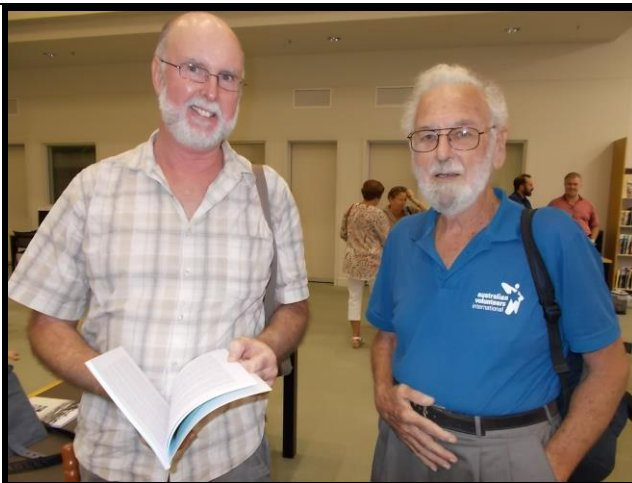
From left: Dr Brian Reid, Earl James, Dr Lyn Reid, Marie & John Hardy & Wendy James



Editor of the book, Stephen Ashford, his granddaughter Bec Ashford & Mrs Marie Hardy



Mrs Hardy launching the book



Craig Bellamy & Fred Mitchell



Jane Farr & Penny Baird



Dr Val Asche, Jan Hills & Austin Asche



Jared Archibald & Dr Tom Lewis



Stephen Ashford book signing



Administrator John Hardy & Dr Brian Reid



Mrs Marie Hardy & Dr Val Asche