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Brighton Beach, Wollongong

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Illawarra Historical Society

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Description

A.P. Fleming (1969), Brighton Beach, Wollongong, Illawarra Historical Society, 1969, 14p. At the eastern junction of Cliff Road and Harbour Street, Wollongong, there is a small public reserve which has been named by the Council of the City of Greater Wollongong "BRIGHTON LAWN PARK." The reserve was granted for Public Recreation on September 19, 1906, as "BRIGHTON LAWN." It slopes eastward to the little beach known as "BRIGHTON BEACH" and this latter title today popularly includes the reserve. Directly opposite on the north-western corner of Cliff Road / Harbour Street, now occupied by cottages and flats, stood the "BRIGHTON" HOTEL, licensed 1854 as the Black Swan and demolished 1923. The genesis of this paper was the query "did the locality derive its name from the beach or the hotel?" A search in the Sydney newspapers of the 1830/40s period showed BRIGHTON to be applied to Wollongong as early as 1838 whereas the hotel was renamed the Brighton in 1856.

Publisher

Illawarra Historical Society, Wollongong, 14p



LOOKING NORTH, SEPTEMBER, 1969 — N. H. ROBINSON

The wording on the wall reads:

BRIGHTON LAWN RESERVE
DEVELOPED BY LIONS CLUB OF WOLLONGONG, 1964

BRIGHTON BEACH WOLLONGONG

by

A. P. FLEMING



AN ILLAWARRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

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"BRIGHTON BEACH, WOLLONGONG"

*Based on a talk to the Illawarra Historical Society,
Wollongong, N.S.W., on Thursday, 6th March, 1969,
the Author being the Honorary Treasurer of the Society.*

This edition of 750 copies.

*A. J. Fleming
1/12/69*

BRIGHTON BEACH, WOLLONGONG

Introduction:

At the eastern junction of Cliff Road and Harbour Street, Wollongong, there is a small public reserve which has been named by the Council of the City of Greater Wollongong "BRIGHTON LAWN PARK."

The reserve was granted for Public Recreation on September 19, 1906, as "BRIGHTON LAWN." It slopes eastward to the little beach known as "BRIGHTON BEACH" and this latter title today popularly includes the reserve.

Directly opposite on the north-western corner of Cliff Road/Harbour Street, now occupied by cottages and flats, stood the "BRIGHTON" HOTEL, licensed 1854 as the Black Swan and demolished 1923.

The genesis of this paper was the query "did the locality derive its name from the beach or the hotel?" A search in the Sydney newspapers of the 1830/40's period showed BRIGHTON to be applied to Wollongong as early as 1838 whereas the hotel was renamed the Brighton in 1856.

(Immediately west of the lawn and fronting Harbour Street were the rail tracks of the Osborne-Wallsend (Mount Keira) Coal Company (1861) and The Mount Pleasant Coal and Iron Mining Company Ltd. (1863). The rail traffic ceased in the mid 1930's.

On the south-western corner of Cliff Road/Harbour Street is the Drill Hall, erected 1858 as a Court House and used as such until superseded by the present building in Market Street, 1887. The Wollongong Gaol erected 1859, demolished 1921, was built



LEFT: GAOL; MIDDLE: RAIL TRAFFIC; RIGHT: BRIGHTON HOTEL. C. 1900.

around the Court House, some of the stone walls of the former being used in the cottages in Harbour Street.

The railways, Drill Hall and Gaol are mentioned for completeness but their various stories are not considered in depth in the present exercise).

"Brighton"

The name is from the parliamentary/county borough and seaside resort of East Sussex, England. With a population of some 163,000 it is 51 miles by road or rail south of London.

It is first mentioned in the Domesday Book as "Bristelmestune" and over the centuries by 1816 had evolved into "Brighthelmston."

In 1750 one Richard Russell published a work on the medical benefits of sea water. Russell chose Brighton to put his theories into practice thereby receiving credit as the innovator of sea bathing.

The town became more popular with the arrival in 1783 of the Prince of Wales, later Prince Regent and King George IV. His patronage over a period of 44 years gave a continuing impetus to the town as a resort of the "haut ton." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

Brighton is synonymous for watering places and pleasure resorts over the world, so with the birth of Wollongong it was not surprising that the name should be applied to the district. As the English Brighton is 51 rail miles from London, so is Wollongong from Sydney, distant enough for the "change" prescribed by medical men to this day.

Although Brighton has not attained postal status in Illawarra it is established in N.S.W. as the Sydney seaside suburb of Brighton-le-Sands., i.e. Brighton on the Sands.

In the 1850's and 1870's unsuccessful attempts were made to name the Balgowlah/Manly area Brighton. The principal promoter of the first attempt was one Henry Gilbert Smith who had extensive holdings in Wollongong, mainly in the eastern end of the city south of Crown Street.

Brighton, however, has found favour in all Australian states except Western Australia as the name or part thereof of towns or suburbs. Victoria leads with 6, Tasmania 2, Queensland and South Australia 1 each. (*Australian Post Office*).

Early References:

The first Europeans to tread the sands of the little beach are unknown. Possibly Bass and Flinders (1796) or survivors of the *Sydney Cove* (1797), but most probably runaway convicts or boot-legging cedar getters.

1815 saw the first approach to Illawarra from the west by Dr. Charles Throsby which culminated in the famous meeting of

December 2, 1816, to mark out the original land grants and effectually organise settlement.

By 1826 a military detachment was located at Red Point on police duties. The detachment was transferred about 1829 to the Boat Harbour as the little bay north of Wollongong Head (Fiaffstaff Point) was called.

With the first settlers and military came the merchant marine. As early as 1831 the cutters "*Bee*" and "*Fanny*" of approximately 14 to 30 tons were trading to Wollongong. The paddle steamer "*Sophia Jane*" paid its initial visit in 1834.

The ships discharged their cargoes in the sheltered bay off Brighton Beach. With the population increase the weather hazards demanded improved harbour facilities leading to the construction of the first basin. "Illawarra Settler" writing in *The Sydney Herald* of March 3, 1834, complained the "harbour or bight is neglected and will be rendered useless by the practice of throwing in ballast. The majority of the vessels are employed in carrying away cedar."

James Gormley, M.L.C., writing of the early 1840's on page 15 of his book "Exploration and Settlement in Australia" noted:

"At Wollongong . . . our vessel anchored some distance out (there was then no wharf or jetty) so the passengers were taken from the ship to the shore in a boat. There was a heavy swell . . . the waves breaking on the sandy beach in front of where the . . . Government buildings (principally military barracks and offices) stood. When the boat touched the sand in the shallow water, one of my sisters . . . took me into her arms and attempted to wade to dry land . . . a wave came up behind us and knocked my sister down, so we both got a thorough wetting."



"Boat Harbour, Wollongong." From the painting by Conrad Martens, 1835.

The harbour work begun in 1837 was completed in 1844 at a cost of £3,500 (\$7,000).

Prior to the opening of the basin the adjacent area was referred to as "The Boat Harbour" or "The Beach." In a lecture to the Illawarra Historical Society, May 2, 1968, "More deadly than the male: the strange end of Captain Waldron," the speaker, W. G. McDonald, mentioned the Captain's proposal to send his recalcitrant servants "to The Beach" presumably to the seat of authority, i.e. the Government settlement (1831). The "Paulsgrove Diarist" of 1833 refers to visits "to the beach" with the inference they were excursions to the centre of social life.

Brighton Applied to Illawarra/Wollongong:

C. W. Gardiner-Garden in his valuable "Port of Wollongong" credits Governor Bourke 1831-8 as giving Wollongong the title of "The Brighton of N.S.W." Mr. Garden is now unable to cite an authority for this statement and the present writer has not found any confirmation. It is suggested that the statement has been confused with Bourke's immortal description of Illawarra as "The Garden of N.S.W."

The earliest reference of Illawarra/Wollongong described as "The Brighton" of "anything" is an advertisement in *The Australian* of October 23, 1838, by a Sydney Auctioneer, J. T. Wilson, which is reproduced:

Wollongong

J. T. WILSON

HAS much pleasure in announcing to the Australian World that he has received instructions from the Proprietor to dispose of, by Private Contract, and if not shortly sold, to bring to the hammer on an early day, of which due notice will be given,

A Beautiful Cottage

erected on a half acre Allotment in the flourishing and daily increasing

TOWNSHIP OF WOLLONGONG

so justly celebrated for its salubrity of clime, and as the resort of the

HAUT TON OF AUSTRALIA.

The Situation is beyond description healthy and delightful, and its proximity to the Beach renders it peculiarly available for exercise, either pedestrian or equestrian. The surrounding country is studded over with the Villas of the most respectable part of the community, and thus if the purchaser should desire to recruit his health during the

SULTRY SUMMER,

he can steal to his Cot, and though in retirement, may by the excellent Society of the neighbourhood be kept from "ennui," so frequently complained of in many parts of the Colony.

J. T. W. must not omit to point out the circumstance of its being in contemplation to establish this as one of the Watering places of this rising country; indeed Wollongong has so long been celebrated for its

SEA BATHING

that some of the wisest heads of New South Wales have years gone by foretold that it must eventually be the

BRIGHTON OF AUSTRALIA,

and there is sufficient land for the establishment of a Splendid Garden.

large enough to supply the Family with every description of Vegetables. The Title is unexceptionable, and all particulars may be learned at the Offices, 74 George-street.

The comment "some of the wisest heads of New South Wales have years gone by foretold that it must eventually be the Brighton of Australia" is of interest, but one wonders how much of it is auctioneer's licence? It has not been possible to identify the "wisest heads."

A news item of February 2, 1841, in *The Australian* has two paragraphs:

"This picturesque district (Illawarra) will, it is hoped, become the resort of our Sydney fashionables and well deserve the appellation of the Brighton of N.S.W."

"The newly arrived immigrant or small capitalist would find good quarters here and never regret having made Wollongong the home of his adoption."

128 years later these remarks are still valid.

An interesting footnote is an advertisement in *The Herald* of May 10, 1856, for the sale of "Brighton Villa." The property was described as "30 acres more or less, well stumped, fronting Mount Keira Road." Vendor unstated. Mt. Keira Road is some three miles from Brighton Beach but it is an illustration of the popularity of the name.

In the 1880's, some 50 years later, Wollongong was frequently referred to as the Brighton of N.S.W. and/or Australia.

With a sense of local pride following the comparative rapid development of Dapto on the establishment of the Smelting Works *The Illawarra Mercury* of January 23, 1890, made a plea for Dapto to be recognised as the Brighton of Illawarra!

The paper of July 31, 1908, maintaining this theme in a news report of a proposal to enlarge the Austinmere (now Austinmer) Church of England, commented:

"With the advent of an increasing number of visitors from Sydney during the coming summer, provision should be made for their attendance at Church.

That Austinmere is destined to be the Brighton of N.S.W. has been publicly acknowledged by the city press."

The Brighton Hotel:

Wollongong grew around the harbour or beach and many hotels or inns displayed their signs at one time or another in the neighbourhood.

One hotel was the Black Swan which received its licence late in 1854 or early 1855. *The Herald* of December 28, 1854, advertised "allotments for sale next to the Black Swan. Frontage to sea and within half a minute walk to Harbour." The Archives Office of

N.S.W. shows the licensee as William May Howell, Harbour Street, (No. 933-17.4.1855). *The Herald* advertised the hotel for sale on October 19, 1855.

The paper of March 4, 1856, carried two advertisements by "E. Johnson (late of Sydney)", the first advising "that he has succeeded Mr. Howell in the Black Swan Family Hotel . . . and the hotel has been refurnished." The same day he advertised it as "Johnson's (late Black Swan) Family Hotel," i.e. he had changed the name.

The Archives Office (No. 541-15.4.1856) gave the licensee as "Edward Johnson—Brighton—previously licensed" but Johnson regularly advertised his hotel as "The (late Black Swan) Family" until July 4, 1856. There is no advertisement until September 10 of that year when the following appeared:

"Brighton Hotel, Wollongong. Visitors to Wollongong will find that this Hotel is the only one having a frontage to the sea. Persons in delicate health can at this establishment have the advantage of Private Apartments, opening to a lawn, thus avoiding the fatigue of ascending a flight of stairs. A general table, on the continental system, has been introduced with a view to accommodate those not requiring private apartments, and to whom economy is a consideration. A person is always in attendance on the arrival of the steamers, and passengers arriving by the night boats will find coffee ready prepared. The Brighton Hotel is the first nearest the wharf. E. Johnson, late of Barrack St., Sydney, Proprietor. N.B. Good stabling, saddle horses and carriages for hire."



Brighton Hotel, Wollongong

J. P. GALETTI, Professor

From the foregoing it seems Johnson legally changed the name to the Brighton in April 1856 but for reasons of his own did not actually adopt it until September of the same year.

One reasonable assumption is that without regard to Johnson's personal desire it became popularly known as the "one at the Brighton."

The *Mercury* of January 1, 1919, commenting on the closure of the hotel, said it was erected 1819-1829 as a bonded store. The paper of August 6, 1934 reprinting the "Reminiscences of Alexander Stewart" (1894) said "C. T. Smith built the middle portion of what is now the Brighton Hotel."

The hotel was extended on the east and west by J. P. Galvin (infra) in 1885.

A water colour by Georgiana Lowe, afterwards Lady Sherbrooke, circa 1842-1850, shows two buildings near the beach. One of these is probably C. T. Smith's store and the other the hotel. In this regard, C. W. Swancott in his recently published "Manly" says Henry Gilbert Smith owned two hotels in Wollongong, one of which he let to Howell, i.e. the Black Swan.

The two Smiths, unrelated, both held extensive property in Wollongong and have been confused more than once before and after Alexander Stewart.

The Bathing Machine:

Edward Johnson (supra) launched a public bathing machine on Brighton Beach and *The Mercury* of February 10, 1857 noted:

"The bathing machine . . . appears to have caught on. The proprietor announced he was prepared to permit adults to bathe for 1/- (10c) each or 6 for 5/- (50c) . . . Children under 12, 6d (5c)."

The paper commented further:

"It would be interesting to note how many adults in Wollongong would pay 1/- for a bath at the present time."

How many today?

He named the machine "Mermaid." It measured 10 ft. x 5'6" and was fitted with seats. It was run down to the water and the occupant after undressing could either "dunk" inside or swim out. Claimed to be the first in Australia, it had a short life, whether due to modesty or fear of sharks by the clients has not been stated.

Licenses:

Johnson's tenure was short as he advertised it "To be let or sold" on March 3, 1858, as was the case of further licenses. There were a number in the 1860's, the only one with any length of occupancy being one Neil M'Ara who described himself as "late

of the Brighton Hotel, Cabinet Maker and Undertaker, Market Square.”

The Mercury of May 31, 1870 referred to “the house formerly known as the Brighton Hotel” and in August reported it was being used as a school. The only licensee to have a reasonable stay being a Mrs. Pike after it reverted to an hotel.

John Patrick Galvin

The Mercury of December 7, 1880, announced the hotel had been bought at auction on the third of that month by J. P. Galvin of the Cricketers' Arms for £1,000 (\$2,000). It was to remain in the control of the Galvin family until it closed its doors in 1919, 38 years.

The Cricketers' Arms originally licensed in the early 1860's as Elliott's Family Hotel stood at the south-east corner of Crown/Corrimal Streets, now Dwyer's car park. *The Wollongong Argus* recorded the transfer of the licence to Galvin on April 9, 1878. The licence expired in 1909 and the building after use for various commercial enterprises was demolished in 1943.



JOHN PATRICK GALVIN IN M.U.I.O.O.F. REGALIA.

The Brighton catered for the travelling public of Wollongong until the surrender of the licence in 1919. The surrender was due principally to the need for expensive repairs which were not economical in the face of the gradual shift of the population to the west following the coming of the Sydney/Bomaderry railway in 1888. The Illawarra Steam Navigation Company terminated its passenger service to Wollongong in 1898.

John Galvin died July, 1917. He had served Wollongong well as Mayor (two terms), Alderman, President of the Hospital Board, President of the Ambulance Class, founder of the Loyal Illawarra Lodge of the M.U.I.O.O.F., and on the sporting field as cricket administrator and player. Possessing a fine tenor voice he was a chorister at St. Francis Xavier's Catholic Church and freely gave his talent in the cause of charity.

Born in Wollongong, the family resided for a time in Galvin's Lane, now Coombe Street. A plasterer by trade before entering the hotel business, apart from a few years in Wagga, his life was spent in Wollongong. His married Miss Copas and there was issue eight children. Miss Mary Ann Galvin (Polly) the second youngest child, now 83 years of age, lives at 12 Smith Street her cottage carrying the name "Brighton."

Reference has been made to the singing ability of J. P. Galvin and the gift was inherited by two of his daughters, Catherine and Polly.

Beautiful Illawarra. Brighton Beach, Fortress Hill & Brooker's Lookout.



C. 1905.—MESDAMES KEOGH, FAEHRMANN; BOY; MRS. OLIVIER; MR. ASCHAM.

Under the professional name of Kathleen Morven, Catherine later Mrs. G. McFeely, later Mrs. J. Nuttall, was to win acclaim for her magnificent contralto voice. Her first husband, George McFeely, killed in World War I, was a Sergeant-Major of the Lifeguards who came to Australia as a military instructor.

Polly was the first singing teacher of the Christian Brothers' College, Wollongong, for the period 1927/1937.

Their mother for many years was the organist of St. Francis Xavier's.

The Argus of August 22, 1883, reporting gas was being laid on in the town noted the Brighton was the first household connected. Gas and candles lighted the hotel until demolition.

Shortly before expiration the licence was transferred to Tooth & Co. Ltd.

Some of the iron lace of the old hotel remains on a house at the north-west corner of Campbell/Keira Streets.

A final point of interest—although there is no connection with the two hotels—the Brighton name is retained in the Illawarra by the New Brighton hotel, Kiama, licensed many years ago.

Further References:

Over the years the narrow strip of land between the beach and the colliery railways received notice in the local press as the Brighton Reserve, Lawn or Esplanade.



LOOKING SOUTH, C. 1900.

In 1880 the Borough Council agreed to place a few seats near the hotel and above the cliffs on the hill along Cliff Road both locations being favoured promenades.

As a result, *The Argus* of January 20, 1881 printed a letter from "Agenda" who wanted to know:

“Where are the Police on Sundays that they do not watch those persons who will insist on bathing . . . in view of our public walks. Our Senior Sergeant . . . should have a member of the force . . . look after the Brighton Esplanade as far as Fairy Creek. Then how nice for the nurse girls and other killing [?] young ladies to have Robert with nice white unmentionables and white gloves . . . watching those wicked bathers with one eye and the girls with the other. What a time Robert would have and how popular our Esplanade would become.”

Early in 1881 the Esplanade was enclosed with a “neat and durable fence.”

A proposal by the N.S.W. Government to put a small building on the Esplanade for use as a Customs House was bitterly opposed by *The Argus* of December 12, 1880 which described it as a “shanty.” The proposal also came under fire from the Borough Council.

The opposition was apparently without avail as the Customs Office was transferred to the Court House (Drill Hall) when the new palace of justice was opened in 1887. The “shanty” on the lawn was annexed to the rear of the stone building.

Old photographs show a small building facing the Harbour Street junction in front of the present toilets, this building being used for the signalling and points working of the railways.

Acquisition by Borough Council:

The lawn and adjacent esplanade became a recreational area. The Town Band gave concerts, afternoons and evenings, the local Volunteer Artillery used it as a parade ground, horses were given a



LOOKING NORTH, 1904.



BEATTIE'S COACH HORSES. C. 1890.



LOOKING NORTH, 1916-1921.

High School in the middle distance opened 1916. "Bustle," right rear, demolished 1921.

dip, children played on the beach, adults promenaded and doubtless an enthusiastic patron or two of the old Brighton "slept it off" under the pines. These trees were planted in the 1870's.

In 1901 Archibald Campbell, M.L.A., the local Member, asked the Government to place the Brighton Lawn under the care of the Borough Council for the benefit of the community. Nothing was done until 1906 as the lawn was part of the land vested in the ill-fated short-lived Wollongong Harbour Trust (1889-1895). The Government Gazette of October 10, 1906, advised:

"Reserve 40908 at Wollongong, County Camden, Parish and Town of Wollongong, area 2R 37P, notified 19th September 1906 for Public Recreation and known as 'BRIGHTON LAWN.' Trustees Council of the Borough of Wollongong. MS 1906 - 17095."

Modern Improvements:

In the 1950's with the steady growth of tourist traffic, two service clubs, the Apex and Lions Clubs of Wollongong, interested themselves in the reserve as part of their civic projects.

The Lions Club project of 1961-6 followed some Apex endeavour.

The Lions (1961-4) worked on the lower level on which is the children's playground equipment and to the east of the present amenities block. They cleared, planted lawn, laid concrete paths and steps, diverted a stormwater drain from the middle to the eastern end of the beach, finally providing the playground equipment and seats.

In 1965-6 they extended their efforts to the south of the road to the harbour, the area previously used by the Illawarra County Council as a pole storage. A lawn and shrubs was planted, fencing and shelter sheds erected to form an attractive site.

The park was officially opened by Jorge Bird, of Puerto Rico, a Vice-President of Lions International, August 17, 1966. Named Belmore Basin Lions Park it was then handed to the City Council for public use. The park contains a tree planted by the then President of Lions International, Dr. Walter Campbell, August 21, 1965.

Conclusion

Today without the sounds of ships' bells, locomotive whistles and the traditional "time gentlemen please" Brighton Lawn Reserve is a quiet playground for children, a picnic area for families and a haven for those who wish to sit quietly reading or meditating, effectually meeting the purpose for which it was granted in 1906, public recreation.

Note.—Decimal equivalents are shown in brackets after the former £.s.d. The purchasing values, of course, are not comparable.

Acknowledgement:

Material from the books and newspapers consulted is mentioned in the text. However, the standard works listed hereunder have been particularly useful:

JERVIS, J.—“Illawarra - A Century of History”, R.A.H.S. Journal, Vol XXIII; unpublished “History of Wollongong” and Miscellaneous Notes both in the Reference Section of the Wollongong Public Library.

COUSINS, A.—“The Garden of N.S.W.”

*GARDINER-GARDEN, C. W.—“The Port of Wollongong” (Second Edition, 1959).

*McDONALD, W. G.—“Earliest Illawarra by Its Explorers & Pioneers.”

*Illawarra Historical Society Publications.

I am very grateful to the Reference Staff of the Wollongong Library: Miss M. E. B. McDonald (Archivist), Misses C. Bubb, A. Mortimer, J. Roberts, who cheerfully made search and brought items to notice; Mr. C. Slater who toiled manfully in copying work.

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My sincere thanks to you all.



ALSO BY THE AUTHOR:

- 1966—"THE ILLAWARRA TOLL BARS" (Kiama and Russell Vale) — 30c.
- 1967—"THE PIONEER KEROSENE WORKS AT AMERICAN CREEK (Mt. Kembla)" — 40c.
- 1967—"THE ALBERT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, WOLLONGONG, 1864-1908" — 40c.
- 1968—"OLD MARKET SQUARE - HISTORIC HEART OF WOLLONGONG" — 50c.
- 1968—"PIONEER PARK" (The Old Church of England Cemetery, Wollongong) — 50c.
- 1968—"THE INTERNATIONAL ABORIGINAL CRICKETERS v. ILLAWARRA (1867)" — 40c.

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ILLAWARRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FOUNDED DECEMBER 5, 1944



The Society was founded for the advancement and study of Australian history in general and that of the Illawarra District of N.S.W. in particular.

These aims are attained by the holding of monthly (except January) and special meetings; the collection of documentary material and artifacts; excursions to historic sites; publications of local interest; and maintenance of a folk museum depicting life in by-gone Illawarra.

Monthly meetings at the meeting room, Town Hall, Crown Street, Wollongong, at 8 p.m. first Thursday of the month. Special meetings either by request or when considered necessary, at the Town Hall or other appropriate venue.

The Society's Museum at 11 Market Street, Wollongong (Beach end) is open 2-5 p.m.:

November-May—Daily except Christmas Day, Good Friday.

June-October—Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday, Public Holidays.

Special openings, day or night, by arrangement.

Admission nominal. Official parties from schools and kindred societies, free.

Visitors welcome at all Society functions.
