

FOUNDED 1944

Illawarra Historical Society

(Affiliated with Royal Australian Historical Society)

WOLLONGONG

THE MONTHLY MEETING of Members will be held in the Illawarra Institute of Industrial Management Rooms, Central Chambers, corner Crown and Church streets, Wollongong on THURSDAY, AUGUST 2nd, 1945, at 8 p.m.

SPEAKER:

HON. T. D. MUTCH

Vice-president and Fellow, Royal
Australian Historical Society.

SUBJECT:

"HAMILTON HUME'S REWARD GRANT"

The overland journey of Hume and Hovell to Port Phillip in 1824 led to the settlement of the State now known as Victoria. The explorers each received a grant of 1200 acres.

Mr. Mutch will tell the story of Hume's grant and his narrative will include the strange stories of Frederick Jones of Mt. St. Thomas, of "Fisher's Ghost" and of Charles Rennett; the mystery surrounding the grant, and the cause of the feud between Hume and Hovell which lasted to their deaths.

The Monthly Meeting of the Society was held at Central Chambers, Wollongong, 5th July, 1945, the speaker being Mr. John Metcalfe, Principal Librarian, Public Library of N.S.W., and his address was entitled "The Local Historical Collection."

Mr. Metcalfe referred to "Settlers and Convicts" by an Emigrant Mechanic, Alexander Harris, published in London 1847, which described a journey on foot to Wollongong in the twenties. He gave this as an example of an historical source valuable in giving an unusual point of view, in this case that of the free working man or mechanic. He then spoke of the contribution which local history could make to more general history, if it were written against a background of general history and with reference to general values. He quoted from "Local History, how to gather it, write it and publish it," by D. D. Parker.

"Good local history is one of the most effective contributions that can be made to social science. Current problems, if studied only by the method of contemporary observation, lack perspective. The essential problems of social science do not always manifest themselves on large national canvases, nor do the fundamental processes which direct social evolution often originate in capitals and legislative bodies or in national associations. These problems and these processes generally emerge in localities, in communities, and their nature, operation and influence can be studied most effectively only there. No isolated problem or process can be truly understood without a complete and accurate picture of the complex which makes up the environment.

"The effective study of local history is an essential of social science. Without it, primary information of the utmost importance will be unobtainable and, to the degree of that omission, all results will be incomplete."

"Professional historians are critical of the product of non-professional study of local history, often justly so. Its defects, however, are due in part to defective training received in schools and in part to the failure to grasp the importance of widespread work in local history. The appearance of guides for the amateur local historian. The multiplication and growth of historical societies, and the establishment of higher standards for publication are remedying the first of these evils. The importance of more widespread study of local history needs emphasis. While it cannot be maintained that state, national and general history is the sum of local history, generalisations cannot safely be made without taking local developments into account. There is a necessity, then, for mass production of historical writing in which the participation of many people everywhere is required. One can never tell what locality and what circumstance, which has seemed not at all out of the ordinary, may assume a peculiar importance.

The materials of local history could be classified broadly as geographical covering discovery, topographical covering description, historical covering events, political, social, economic. Discovery included observation from outside, from the first charting of the coast to visitors' remarks such as those of Harris in his "Settlers and Convicts." The records of discovery could be collected in some cases in the originals but mostly in copies. Discovery merged into description.

"With an aerial survey as a basis for reference, photographs and other pictorial records of the whole district should be collected, with newspaper cuttings, auctioneers' descriptions, subdivision plans and so on. Biography was a good key to the historical record; the lives of commandants, police officers, magistrates, clerks and teachers who had been stationed in the district should be recorded, and those of local members of parliament. From all this biographical material an integrated and consecutive account of the district could be built up. The history of cultural institutions such as the schools of arts, and economic institutions such as industries, businesses, factories, should also be traced.

Any material which contributed to the record was valuable, and this should not be confused with material which only had associations, sometimes difficult to establish, such as bricks from old buildings. No printed or written material was valueless: newspapers, leaflets, labels how to vote cards, could all contribute to the record and it should be remembered that the present was the past of the future.

It was an important function of a local historical society to ensure the collection of historical material. It should see that material of wider interest went to the appropriate repository, the state archives and the Mitchell Library; it should see that there was an institution to ensure the preservation of local material locally, whatever the ups and downs of the society.

He referred to the example of Grafton where the collection of the local historical society is vested in the municipal council, and the Mayor is ex-officio president or patron of the society. As a result there is a fine collection of material housed in the council chambers in association with the municipal library. This, and the association of the state historical collection, the Mitchell Library, with the Public Library of New South Wales could well be studied. Room was needed and a paid and qualified custodian.

This was common practice in Great Britain. He referred to W. C. Berwick Sayers' Library local collections, London, 1939. All the municipal and shire libraries had local collections to which local historical societies contributed material, and the local public library was the recognised repository for manorial and other local records. As a municipal library was about to be established in Wollongong on a sound basis, under the new Library Act, the opportunity presented itself for an association and for collaboration which would enable the society to achieve one of its first and best functions, the collection and preservation of the materials of local history."