NORM ROBINSON

The society extends warm congratulations to Norm Robinson who was awarded an Order of Australia Medal in the recent Honours Listings. Such an honour, given for services to conservation and the environment is, in the opinion of the Illawarra Historical Society, richly deserved and long overdue.

LOCAL HISTORY QUIZ

Answers to questions from last issue:

1) The present Wollongong Bowling Club was constructed in 1956.
2) The man who lived at Whiteheath, Lake Illawarra and pioneered refrigeration techniques was Eugene Dominic Nicholle.
3) The Wollongong Town Hall Pipe Organ was designed by the same man who designed the Pipe Organ at the Sydney Opera House. No society member has yet come up with his name.

THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN WALDRON, 1834
(Yet Another Version)

Whilst many members of the Society would be aware of the circumstances surrounding the death of Captain Charles Waldron at Spring Hill in 1834, having read W.G.McDonald’s definitive account (refer In the Matter of Captain Waldron. Deceased, IHS, 1972), they would also realize that there has always been some controversy surrounding this incident from our early history, with many different stories circulating.

It is generally agreed that Captain Waldron died of a stroke on 28 January 1834, brought on by an incident involving himself, his wife, and two female convict servants (Sarah McGregor and Mary Maloney) which occurred on 14 January 1834 (refer Macdonald, Op.Cit., for a fuller description). However the actual details of that ‘incident’ remain confused, with a number of varying accounts existing.

Mr. McDonald’s book gives both the ‘official’ and ‘carving-knife’ versions of the story, his detailed research putting to rest many of the sensational claims made over the years regarding the events surrounding Waldron’s death and the subsequent pardoning of the two convict women accused of perpetrating this dastardly deed. Whilst his reading of the official records cannot be questioned, many doubts still exist in the Author’s mind regarding the official version of the cause of Waldron’s stroke, and what really happened at Spring Hill House on that fateful day.

Alexander Stewart, in his Reminiscences of 1894 (refer Reminiscences of Illawarra by Alexander Stewart, Illawarra Historical Publications, 1987) gives the ‘expectorating’ version and hints at the ‘mutilation’ rumours, both of which were vigorously denied by Waldron’s descendants at the time, including Alfred Adolphus Waldron, a son of the Captain, born on 7 January 1834 (or December 1833?), just a week before the incident.

The recent publication of The Paulsgrove Diary, Illawarra 1833-34, (IHS, 1989), with an introduction and notes by W.G. McDonald, again raises the issue of what, if anything, the Waldron family had to hide concerning the Captain’s death, for a section of the Diary dealing with the incident had been removed. An annexed note by Mr. E.J. Brady, who had been given the Diary by his aunt Christina
Waldron, stated: “A page relating to the death of Captain Waldron at Spring Hill was I believe removed by his son (my uncle Henry Waldron) before the book came into my possession. E.J.B.”

Mr. McDonald, in his introduction to the transcription of the Diary, states regarding this note: “The [note] was a little more evidence that the atmosphere of sinister mystery surrounding the Waldron murder case was largely created by Captain Waldron's own family; why they should have created it is a mystery, for there was nothing in it of which they had any reason to be ashamed.”

The reason for the mutilation of the Diary by Henry Waldron may lie in the version of the circumstances surrounding his father's death contained in a book by Richard and Ray Beckett, titled Hangman - The Life and Times of Alexander Green, Public Executioner to the Colony of NSW (Nelson, Sydney, 1980). Within the chapter entitled 'Drudges, Prostitutes and Free Spirits', the authors give the following rather sensational account of the affair, introduced in the context of a discussion of Sarah McGregor's narrow escape from the noose at the hands of Green:

“Sarah McGregor, aged 19, arrived on assignment at the Spring Hill property of former army captain, Charles Waldron, on 7 January 1834. At the age of fifteen, while in the position of nursery girl in Liverpool, England, Sarah was convicted of shoplifting. On 4 April 1830 she was sentenced to seven years' transportation, but the sentence was reduced to three years' hard labour abroad - although she had had previous conviction at the age of fourteen for an offence unknown. Perhaps being able to read and write had helped her. She arrived in Sydney by the transport Kains on 11 March 1831. Sarah had long light-brown hair, brown eyes, and was just over 5 feet tall. After spending some time in the Female Factory (her other movements are not known), she ended up at Waldron’s property.

Waldron, although almost sixty, decided to take advantage of more than Sarah’s literacy, and immediately began to have a passionate backstairs affair with the girl. As usual, the pair thought they were unobserved; but, as usual, they were wrong. The mistress of the house, Jemima Waldron, was, on 7 January, the fateful day of Sarah’s arrival, lying in confinement at Spring Hill giving birth to her twelfth child, which turned out to be a son.

On the afternoon of 13 January she left her room to take air, and almost caught her husband and Sarah in the act. She said nothing, but the following morning she told Sarah to scrub the 60-foot-long homestead verandah. Not only did Sarah skimp the job but she left ashes from her pipe all over the boards. When Mrs. Waldron inspected the cleaning job she instructed Sarah to do it again; Sarah told her to go to hell.

Mrs Waldron called for her husband, who ordered Sarah into the kitchen. Sarah not only refused to go: she told her mistress that the ex-captain had been her lover and, in the final triumphant gesture, lifted her skirt above her waist and shouted, ‘This is what he has been busy with.’ Ordered again to go to the kitchen by the enraged Mrs Waldron, she shouted, ‘May every curse fall on you and yours and on that bloody old soldier.’ Then she did go to the kitchen, which stood apart from the rest of the house, followed by Charles Waldron and another Female Factory consignee, Mary Maloney.
According to later court reports, there was no clear evidence of what happened in the kitchen; but amid a general screaming and shouting Sarah was heard to cry: 'You bloody old soldier bastard. May hell bugger you and all your family turn to sodomy.' Waldron was then seen to fall backwards out of the kitchen, followed by both Sarah and Mary, who tore at his face with their nails and at the same time attempted to bite him. He collapsed outside the building and lay quite still. His wife rushed to him and screamed at the two women, according to evidence given by male assigned convicts: 'What have you bitches done to him?' In reply Mary Maloney, mimicking Sarah's earlier gesture, picked up her skirt and exposed herself to the waist. Waldron then managed to stagger to his feet. Assisted by his wife, he walked as far as the house, where he again collapsed. Four hours later he was paralysed down the front side of his body. He remained in bed until 28 January when he died.

Both Sarah McGregor and Mary Maloney were immediately arrested and charged with murder and brought to trial on 23 February. Crowds fought for places at the Sydney Criminal Court. The most spectacular witness on the first day was Jemima Waldron, who walked the length of the court room dressed totally in black, with her newest child, totally in white, cradled in her arms. She kept the baby in her arms as she gave evidence. The Jury of seven military officers found the two women guilty without even leaving the box, despite evidence brought forward that Charles Waldron had died of a stroke, and not from the blows of the pair. The Jury added a rider, 'that when the offence was committed, fatal effects were not contemplated'. Both women were sentenced to death.

Once lodged in the death cell Sarah announced she was carrying Waldron's child. The court empaneled a jury of matrons to examine her and to determine whether her story of pregnancy was true. Those who sat on this jury were named as a Mrs Curtis, Mrs Ann Gordon of the Parramatta Female Factory, Mrs Murdock, Mrs Bolton, Mrs Burns, Mrs Chandler, Mrs Dowling, Mrs Bailey, Mrs Le Brun, Mrs Long, Mrs Hawthorn and Mrs Levy.

The court was reconvened and Sarah was escorted by the ladies to a room near by where they examined her physically and orally. Their verdict was, 'Not quick with child to the best of our opinion'. It was, Judge Burton commented, not good enough. The answer had to be either yes or no. The female examining jury retired once again and came back with a new answer: 'To the best of our opinion, not with child.' Sarah was sent back to the death cell. The Sydney Herald commented after this verdict: 'How regrettable this is ...... these two young, good-looking women, one of them of such mildness of countenance as to render a conclusion of her disposition to commit so horrid a crime quite irreconcilable ....'

But the government under Bourke was not the same as it had been under Darling. Before dawn on the morning of the hanging the Executive Council met under the chairmanship of Bourke: the death sentence was set aside and both women were to be detained at the Governor's pleasure. Seven and a half months later, at the Port Macquarie women's penal settlement, Sarah McGregor gave birth to a son. The name of the father was not recorded." (Beckett, op.cit., pp.61-64)

Whilst the substance of the above account may be correct, it does vary with the official version on a number of points.
It suggests that Captain Waldron was having an affair with Sarah McGregor.

* The case was held on Saturday, 22 February, not the 23rd.

* The jury did retire, at 7 o'clock that evening, for approximately half an hour, before returning to present the guilty verdict.

* According to Jemima Waldron's testimony at the trial, Mary Maloney was the party guilty of not scrubbing the verandah and leaving ashes scattered about.

* The evidence that Captain Waldron had died of a stroke was not brought forward at the trial, but on the following Tuesday, at which point Judge Burton immediately informed the Governor, Richard Bourke. The Executive Council was convened, and decided 'that a full statement should be laid before the King, and the prisoners respited until the pleasure of His Majesty was known'. The women eventually received the King's pardon.

There are other discrepancies, however even the account presented by Mr McDonald in 1972 contained a number of incongruities. As regards the Captain's intimate liaison with Sarah McGregor, and Jemima Waldron's knowledge of the affair - if true, it would explain a great deal of the subsequent mutterings and scandalous gossip surrounding the whole incident. It would also explain Jemima's antagonism towards Sarah at the trial, for it was her flirtations which had resulted in the death (intentional or not) of Jemima's husband, leaving her to care for a large family.

Unfortunately the above version merely adds to the list of 'truthful' accounts of Captain Waldron's death already available to us. Whether the real truth will ever be known is doubtful, for how are we to decide, when considering events which occurred over 150 years ago, whether a person lying or not, or whether an official court record or newspaper report is to be believed. After all, perjury and sensationalist newspaper reporting have been with us for many years.

Michael Organ

**ELECTRIC POWER SUPPLIES IN THE ILLAWARRA**

The industrial archaeology sub-committee of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Region of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) is undertaking research into the generation and distribution of electric power in southern New South Wales. The area we are most interested in is that area that was supplied by the Public Works Department of NSW.

Our survey covers both the utility power houses (eg PWD steam and hydro), municipal power houses (eg Moss Vale steam and Bega Valley hydro) and the industrial and mining systems, particularly those that supplied power for domestic consumption.

We are researching the data available from publications such as W.A. Bayley's "Black Diamonds" and his various district notes, local newspapers and data available in the Local Studies section of the Wollongong City Library.

Electric power was first supplied to Wollongong on 3 February 1912 from a steam power plant owned by a Mr Christensen. Christensen was joined by a Mr Tynan in February 1913 and the venture became the Wollongong Electric Light Co. We are not sure where the plant was built but from the scant newspaper reports we presume it was between Gateway and the RSL Club.