

## Aussie Story and Book Launch

An occasion with a difference was mounted by the Uniting Church SA Historical Society recently. About 100 people attended the launch of Rev Ted Curnow's book entitled, *Bible Christian Methodists, 1850-1900, A Biography of Chapels and their People* at Church of The Trinity, Clarence Park. It is a story that tells of pioneering families during the colonial era and of early church planting by the Bible Christian church across South Australia.

President of the History Society, Val Canty, provided opening remarks and read greetings from the Moderator of the Uniting Church, Dr Deidre Palmer. A large portrait of Rev James Way, the first Bible Christian Superintendent minister in Australia with his whiskery beard, graced the platform and overlooked the occasion. The book details the history of many small country chapels built on the 'pennies and prayers of the poor' amid isolation, sickness, sacrifice, exciting revivals and growth.

After bringing greetings from Scottish historian Professor David Bebbington, Rev Robert Evans from NSW, who has written extensively on revivalism in Australia officially launched the book with a prayer of dedication. He said that unlike some denominational histories the book did not tell a partial story of sectional growth, rather every aspect was covered. Leaders in all three of the Methodist denominations from 1850 to 1900 called for repeated revivals and rejoiced in the blessings which followed from those which happened. Evans exclaimed, "and it worked!"

Vice President, Dr Judith Raftery, who had assisted with the publication process said the book filled a gap and helped to redress an imbalance in the case of the largely under researched smaller denominations and movements.

In response, it was said that noted historian, Geoffrey Blainey, had pointed out that "Next to the Government the Church was arguably the most influential institution in Australian history". Today in secular Australia sadly Christian memory is in danger of being lost but it was pointed out that we could not afford to live on the memory of Christendom alone. If the new book was to have lasting significance readers needed to allow the Holy Spirit to speak through the stories of faith and sacrifice embodied in pioneering Aussie saints who had entrusted us with a sacred gospel.

Before enjoying an appropriate afternoon tea that included Cornish pasty, Dr Raftery introduced a hymn from the old Bible Christian hymn book (No 445) that perfectly expressed the faith and courage of early Bible Christian missionaries and preachers "O for a faith that will not shrink, though pressed by every foe". It was a positive occasion of which Superintendent Way probably would have approved.

Edwin (Ted) Curnow October 2015.



Ted and Beryl Curnow at the launch

Copies of the 655 page book are available at the History Centre for \$50, or \$66 postage/packing.

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The success of the campaign was in no small way affected by the support of the Festival of Light. The motives of the parties who coalesced around this issue may be questioned by some but the experience had taught the churches the reality that politicians always have to face – that unity is strength and disunity is a guarantee for failure. On this occasion the churches took a stand out of concern for people and ordinary people rallied behind them. *Keith Smith*

**About Keith:** Rev. Keith Smith was ordained by the Methodist Church in 1957. After some years in the USA, he was appointed to the Pirie Street Church in 1965. From 1969 to Union in 1977 Keith was Director of the Department of Christian Citizenship and from 1974 his department

included Christian Education. From 1978 to 1985 Keith was minister of the UCA Unley Parish, during which time he was Moderator of the SA Synod in 1979-1980. He later held positions with Eldercare.

The Society has several papers produced by Keith, including the story of the Pirie Street congregation, *Methodist Pilgrimage via Pirie Street*. We appreciate the importance of his work which provides insights into several key points of transition in the life of the Church in SA.



# UCA Historical Society Newsletter

## December 2015

**Editorial:**

### TIME AND PLACE...

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The celebration of 50 years' ordination service was held Kent Town church on Sunday, 8 November when the Rev Professor Andrew Dutney was the guest preacher.

Andrew compared the patterns and routines of local congregations 50 years ago with present-day challenges. He suggested that 50 years ago ministers were trained to serve and meet conventional expectations; today the demands and routines for ministers are very different. Major changes have taken place in Australian social life and interpreting and living out the gospel in the life of our congregations is both challenging and demanding.

Contextual settings of place are often understood as locations and are defined by the terms we use—urban, rural, remote or inner city. Often these descriptions carry implied social identity—middle class, industrial or poor and struggling.

Historical locations of time are also contexts, as we speak out of our own time and not for other times. As the Church faces up to present ministry opportunities and discerns future directions, our experience of the past is carried forward in

our memory.

History matters because we learn from past experience. We discover insights from those who have met challenges before us and often what is introduced as a 'new' idea has been well and truly tried before!

The Uniting Church SA Historical Society is committed to assisting the church learn from experience and discover how past time informs the present.

This edition reports on one of our major publishing achievements for 2015 (page 4) and we include on page 2 an overview of our programme for the year ahead. Add these dates to your diary now.

We welcome the contribution of the Rev Keith Smith who reflects on the "No Casino" campaign of 1974. Still today a church alliance draws attention to the power, influence and impact on family life of the gaming industry. A lesson indeed from the past on how governments and the community at large become complicit in an industry that exploits individuals and creates dependency. *Dean Eland*

### Special points of interest:

- 2016 Programme
- The Casino Story
- Book Launch

**The UCA History Centre at  
44A East Ave Black Forest is open  
on Wednesdays, 1- 4 pm  
[closed from 10 Dec. until 3 Feb]**

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8297 8472

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historicalsociety.unitingchurch.org.au



## OUTLINE 2016 PROGRAMME

**History Writing Workshop. Sunday, 10 April, 1.30–4.30 pm, at Church of The Trinity, 318 Goodwood Road, Clarence Park.**

A team from History SA will lead us in looking at

- Interpreting and writing history,
- “What is Good History”,
- Writing history books,
- Writing history for online,
- Writing interpretive panels for exhibitions and heritage trails.

This practical session will assist authors in their task and provide guidance on research sources, editorial conventions and publishing procedures. It will be very useful for those applying for history grants and others researching local histories.

**History Festival. Religion in State Schools: past campaigns and present challenges. Sunday, 29 May, 2–4 pm, at Woodville High School.**

The focus of this event is the story of the attempt to establish Religious Education in state schools in the 1970s, using an innovative new curriculum, following the demise of the moribund old RI system.

Three people who were involved—Malcolm McArthur, Alan Nennes and Peter Russell—have written papers on various aspects of the saga and the Historical Society is publishing their papers as a book, to be launched at the

### Volunteers needed. You can help.

Volunteers play an important role in the Society by assisting with the growing collection of archive and historical material. The History Centre at 44A East Ave, Black Forest is open every Wednesday afternoon and responds to enquiries from families and congregations



event. Peter Russell will speak about the third part of this project. We also have invited Dr Don Hopgood, who was Minister of Education at that time, to take part.

This event will be held at Woodville High School in the Learning Hub. The Principal, Meredith Edwards, will welcome guests and share her experience as an advocate of a multi-faith approach to religious education in schools.

**On 19 June the AGM of the Society** will be held at Church of The Trinity, 2.30–5 pm. Our guest speaker will be the Rev. Professor Andrew Dutney, Past President of the UCA Assembly and Principal of Uniting College for Leadership and Theology. Afternoon tea will follow.

**41st Anniversary of the West Lakes congregation** on Sunday 25 September at 2 pm. The Rev. John Watt, founding minister will speak about some of the key insights and convictions that led to the formation of this congregation. This meeting at the church on Bartley Tee West Lakes Shore will follow their “Back to West Lakes” anniversary service Sunday morning and midday lunch.

**Revivalism in South Australia** will be the theme of our last meeting for the year (date to be decided). Two researchers will be our guests—Brian Chalmers and Jenny Hein.

who are researching their local histories. Current volunteers are pictured:

(back row) David Hilliard, Dean Eland, David Greig; (front row) Gaye Brown, Val Canty, Judy Eland, Glenys Edwards.

To enquire about what volunteering at the Centre involves, phone Val or Gaye at 8297 8472 on Wednesdays or e mail [ucsahist@chariot.net.au](mailto:ucsahist@chariot.net.au).

**History Centre Summer Break.** The Centre will be closes from 9 December reopening on Wednesday 3 February. Any enquiries can be emailed to: [ucsahist@chariot.net.au](mailto:ucsahist@chariot.net.au)

**The Council of the Society is:** Val Canty (President), Judith Raftery (Vice-President), Dean Eland (Secretary & Editor), Gaye Brown (Treasurer), Brian Chalmers, Glenys Edwards, Barbara and Ken Hayes, Doug Hosking, Norah Norris.

## You win some ..... The Casino Story

### Introduction

The sixties demanded a shift in the churches’ priorities from questions of personal morality to community concerns such as world poverty, peace and war and family life all of which encompassed issues of social justice. Moves in 1974 to expand gambling through the establishment of a casino demanded a response from SA Christians. Due to a vigorous and well-researched campaign, Don Dunstan’s proposal was defeated and withdrawn for more than a decade - until 1985.

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By the time the 26th and final year of Tom Playford’s “benevolent dictatorship” unfolded, it had become obvious to many commentators that “Honest Tom’s” tenure was drawing to a close. While many subscribed to the view that he had been the best Labor Premier that the Liberals had produced and they appreciated his single-minded pursuit of State development, his views on social issues were seen to be too close to those of the “wowsers”, i.e. the Methodists and other non-conformist Christians. After all, he came from a long line of Baptists!

For years, the problem for the Opposition had been the tired leadership from their “true believer” style front men. These became the rather unimpressive leaders of the new government when Playford finally fell. However, Donald Allan Dunstan was in the wings and he was full of ideas for breathing life into Labor and at the same time dragging South Australia into the twentieth century. One of his ideas, which they tried out before he became Premier, was to hold a referendum on the liberalizing of gambling laws.

In spite of a vigorous campaign by the churches, the electors showed that they were ready for a change. Only the Lutheran-dominated electorate of Kavel had a majority opposed to the move.

Emboldened by their overwhelming success in the referendum, Dunstan’s Government put forward a proposal for a casino in the Railway Station building next to Parliament House on North Terrace. Despite the discouraging result in their previous campaign, the Methodist Conference decided to mount a vigorous fight and drew together a “No Casino” Committee and offered its meagre “Fighting Fund” (set up years before by a seasoned campaigner, Rev. Harry Woollacott) to assist with expenses.

A five-fold strategy was adopted by the Committee consisting of

- \* Research of the casinos in Hobart and Las Vegas in the U.S. where reports of criminal activity appeared to be a concern.
- \* Investigation of the corporate structure of Federal Hotels which was the ‘front’ for the Tasmanian casino at Wrest Point.
- \* Publicity around the slogan “No...No...Casino” and a miniature Petition for submission to Parliament through local members.
- \* A Protest March to a Rally at Light’s Vision.
- \* Lobbying of individual Members of Parliament

The strategy was to distribute “Mini-Petitions” (octavo size) and Bumper Stickers to the membership of supporting churches providing a user-friendly means of communicating the views of

ordinary people many of whom had a different attitude to a casino, compared to their earlier support for relaxed gambling controls.

When the debate started in the Parliament, it became clear that every member was anxious to declare their position. Obviously the “conscience” vote would be very close. The Deputy Premier’s speech was memorable for its clarity and its brevity. Dr. Don Hopgood rose to his feet and said “Mr. Speaker I am an old-time Methodist and a long-standing socialist. For those reasons, I oppose the Bill.” With that terse masterpiece of political rhetoric, he resumed his seat alongside Premier Dunstan.

Still further drama lay ahead. The Speaker, Terry McRae, had expressed concern during lobbying about the possible involvement of criminal elements in the operation of a casino. At that time he gave an undertaking that if we could provide firm evidence of criminal activity associated with the Hobart casino, he would vote in the negative.

Painstaking research on the web of world-wide partnerships in Federal Hotels eventually supplied the evidence we needed. At the very death-knell, Terry McRae was a satisfied and, as good as his word, he voted against and the Bill was defeated.

### Reflections on the process

The Casino Bill marked a watershed in the way in which electors communicate with their members. It also highlighted that not only church people have concerns about issues such as the proliferation of gambling, and many will join a coalition on one issue on which they hold strong views regardless of religious persuasion.

For decades. Christians, and Churches in particular, with concerns about societal issues had relied on electing “good men” to Parliament in the belief that they would vote according their conscience and so uphold Christian values in legislation. Many of these people had marched in lock-step with Tom Playford. Names well-known in church assemblies could be found on both sides – Jeffries, Colin Rowe, McEwin, Verran, Russack, Pearson, Makin, Frederick Richards, A. C. Catt, Moses Gabb – to name a few. Their number had been diminishing as the years passed. Democracy took on a new form. The concerned members of congregations became the foot soldiers in the battle and their role was to enlist those in their community who shared their concerns, regardless of their beliefs (if any). The mass media had become a powerful influence, spreading information, arguing the case. In this case, the “mini-petition” proved to be a winner.

A similar attitude was needed in contacting MP’s. Those who are not against us, can be for us. They looked for cogent arguments, not religious clichés.

The consequences of the Casino debate were far-reaching. A proposal which expressed the new ethos in the community, which should have been a pushover, was not only defeated but for the next 10 years, the Parliament declined to entertain the idea.

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