

Dandenong, VIC, Austalia

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Convention Ground Ownership Account

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AN ACCOUNT OF THE CONVENTION GROUNDS, DANDENONG.

by W.C.C. (Bill Carroll)

It has been on my mind for some time to write a short Account of how we came into possession of the Convention Grounds, Brady Road, Dandenong, in order that those who come after us may be acquainted with the facts concerning this property, and our conventions there.

In the year 1913, at the close of the Convention at Crocknacrieve, County Fermanagh, Ireland, my wife and were asked to go to Australia to succeed Wilson and Mrs. McClung in the oversight of the Lord's Work in Victoria. Wilson and his wife were then to go on to New Zealand to take over similar responsibility there.

We sailed on the Orient liner "Orsova" towards the end of that year, and were welcomed in Melbourne by Wilson and Mrs. McClung, and also by our good friend, Major Pinchen, who brought us to his home in Grice Street, Essendon, where he then lived. I will ever be grateful to these friends for their welcome and help in those first days in a strange land.

It was easy for us to love Australia and its people, for although our ties were many with the old land, we brought our hearts with us, and we were soon perfectly at home in the new surroundings.

After a short visit to Tasmania, we got an opening for a Tent Mission in North Geelong early in 1914, where the Lord sat His seal upon the Gospel message, which in weakness and fear, and much trembling, we brought to that City.

The Victorian Convention in that year was held in the early Autumn on the property of Ernest Millard, at Clayton, and also on the following year, 1915, about the same time. This property was very small and exposed to adverse weather, and were it not for the fact that Percy and Mrs. Cameron were then living at the "Tower House," a large residence nearby, where there was ample accommodation, it would have been very difficult to make suitable arrangements.

– 2 –

In view of this, and the certainty of numbers increasing in the years following, I found myself looking earnestly to the Lord for some other more suitable provision for the assembly of His people.

At that time the Work was in its infancy in Victoria, and there were not many suitable and central places where Conventions could be held. We were, therefore, more than ever dependent on the Lord's help and guidance to open up our way, and find a resting place for us.

This came from quite an unexpected quarter, when David Fletcher came and told me that he would put his little farm on the Stud Road, Dandenong at our disposal. I remember cycling out to see the place, and while there was no doubt about the heartiness of Dave and his wife to give of their best, the place was too small to lend itself to any development in the Work later on.

Adjacent to this property was the farm of Oakrise," owned by Miss Rose Field, of Dandenong, and Dave found that this farm could be rented for a term, He told me that he was willing to sell his own property, and rent "Oakrise," if it was suitable. This place was in an ideal position, but had been neglected, the only real difficulty being the short term which was available,

This difficulty Dave placed before me, and in his own words he tells me I replied, "Take it, Dave, if God provides for us for two years, He will also provide when the time is up."

This farm was then taken over and the first Convention held there in 1916. The place was entirely without farm buildings) and we had to depend upon tents for meetings, etc.

Two large marquees were made by the Workers, one for Dining, and the other for Meetings, A portable kitchen was also built by some of the friends from Melbourne, which was the only substantial structure on the place. For sleeping accommodation we introduced a system of small tents, 10' x 12', which would hold four comfortably, to be supplied and owned by the various

– 3 –

families, or four friends in partnership. This system has had remarkable success, and is continued to this day.

We were quite happy under these conditions, except for a certain uneasiness through a possibility that the property would be sold eventually, and in order to be prepared to some extent for this, I asked Major Pinchen to purchase the six acres now known as Pinchen Park, fronting Brady Road, and adjoining the Convention Ground, so that in the event of having to move, we would have some place to store our Tents, Seats, Beds, &c. This he gladly did, obtaining this property for One Hundred and Fifty Pounds.

What we feared now came as a reality, and "Oakrise" was sold to a Mr. Barton, who I believe just intended to improve the place and resell it, as he mentioned to me that he would be willing to "sell" if we could find a purchaser.

This did not seem very likely, and though Mr. Barton was very considerate in giving us plenty of time, we prepared for a removal of our plant to Pinchen Park before Convention time came on. Meantime, Dave Fletcher was able to rent a property some miles away, and we very sorrowfully saw him and family having to leave "Oakrise."

At that time we were conducting a Tent Mission at Kew, and were staying in a rented room not far from where the Mission Tent was pitched. We had many visitors, and one afternoon Mrs. G. Quick called to see us, and in conversation the matter of "Oakrise" and Convention was discussed, and she told us that she had just inherited a legacy from her father, and would willingly purchase "Oakrise," if it could be bought.

This kind offer relieved the situation considerably, and we agreed to approach Mr. Barton, and make him an offer for the property, and this was done without delay.

Fred Quick and myself interviewed him direct. His Terms were high, but eventually were brought down to Fourteen Hundred and Fifty Pounds, at which figure "Oakrise" passed again

– 4 –

into hands that would use it for the furtherance of the Lord's work.

Mrs. Quick agreed to reinstate Dave Fletcher as a tenant at a yearly rental, which arrangement was continued until he was in a position to purchase the place later on.

I should mention that the property now known as the Cottage Paddock was then in the hands of James Lothian, and eventually went on the market, and was bought as a gift to the Convention by J. Favalora, who some time later joined the ranks of the reapers on the harvest field.

The question of Title and Ownership now arose through this circumstance, and also through the death of Major Pinchen, and on obtaining legal advice from the firm of Rodda & Ballard, of Melbourne, both of these properties, viz., Pinchen Park and the Cottage Paddock, in all twelve acres, were signed over to Percy Cameron, Charles McInnes, and A. H. Schulz, under the control of a Deed of Trust.

We were now free to improve these properties by planting shelter belts of trees, repairing fences, and making an avenue from the Camp to Brady Road. This work was carried out gradually from year to year, and only those who knew the paddocks in their original state can have a true estimation of what has been done for the comfort and welfare of the Lord's people, when they meet there at Convention time.

At first there was little shelter for the tents, and the large marquees were especially very exposed to severe gales from the north-west, and we had a good warning of possible disaster at the close of one Convention, in seeing how unavailing were our efforts to prevent one of the large three masters come crashing to the ground in a severe gale, and the canvas torn to ribbons. A number of small tents were also wrecked in this storm. This forced us to see the danger that women and children were exposed to by having no place of shelter, should a similar storm visit us in the night time. The outcome was the building

– 5 –

of the present Dining Shed. All the labour in connection with this building was voluntary, and except for some preliminary preparations, done inside of one week.

During the years as they went by, our preparation for Convention was ever looked forward to eagerly by the workers as a time of spiritual refreshment and happy fellowship.

Mr. and Mrs. Quick came for many years to camp with us and entered in heartily to all arrangements, also helping with the work that was being done.

I would like to make it clear that for many years the whole of "Oakrise" farm was in one Title, and held in a yearly tenancy by David Fletcher from Mrs. Quick. This arrangement was very satisfactory to all parties, but as time went on, and Mrs. Quick's health began to fail, she could see these pleasant conditions might not be permanent. So she approached me one day with the suggestion that she would like the portion of "Oakrise" farm used for convention, to be held under a separate title in the hands of Trustees for that purpose. This seemed to me to be a wise and generous provision for the future, but on reflection, I advised her to leave the property in her Will to some member of her family. This suggestion she was definitely opposed to, and therefore, I felt it would be wise to have Mr. Quick's approval before taking any further steps in the matter. So I wrote him, stating the position, and expressing my fears as to the possibility of future complications. Without delay he replied as follows:

16 Watt Street,
Box Hill.
21-11-30.

My dear Bill,

Mrs. Quick showed me your letter, and I can assure you that I am completely in accord with the intended trust. The only other way I could suggest is for the transfer to be completed now, instead of leaving it by Will. This, however, is immaterial,

With Christian love from us both,
I am,

*yours in His fellowship,
Geo. J. Quick.*

– 6 –

Mrs. Quick's wishes were then carried out, and a separate Title obtained for about eight acres, which, in conjunction with the Cottage Paddock and Pinchen Park, would give ample room for the use of the Convention.

The Trustees suggested by Mrs. Quick were George Quick, Con. Doecke, A. H. Schulz, and these three names were inscribed on the Title of the eight acres taken off the "Oakrise" property, and held under the same conditions as the titles of the Cottage Paddock and Pinchen Park. Mr. Quick's much regretted death soon after necessitated the appointment of a new Trustee to fill his place, and Bert Allsop, then living in Melbourne, was asked to undertake this responsibility, which he gladly agreed to.

The Convention Grounds were now held under three separate Titles, and with two separate sets of Trustees – an arrangement which was somewhat complicated, but unavoidable at the time. Later, we were able to simplify this, and have the whole twenty acres under one Trusteeship.

The numbers now attending Conventions had increased very much, and our large marquee, which had stood the test of many years, was so to speak, "on its last legs," and altogether too small for the meetings. The question was, should we make, or purchase a new one, or build a shed with open sides suitable for meetings, and as a store for the seats, beds, and other furniture used at Convention.

After much consideration of the pros and cons of the matter, the latter course was adopted, and proved to be a wise choice then, and a source of great comfort since.

Preliminary arrangements having been made, and material assembled, on Monday morning after the Convention closed, willing helpers began the work which was completed on the following Saturday afternoon.

The value of this building from every angle is beyond

– 7 –

price, as the work of preparing for Convention, and clearing up afterwards is cut in half, if not more.

Our next problem was caused by the World War 2 coming on, during which there was a very real danger of a Japanese invasion sooner or later. All properties suitable for military encampments were commandeered, and one day, without notice, a military unit marched into the Camp, and took possession.

I got a telephone message to come out and meet the O/C., which I did immediately, and when I saw those men prepared to give their lives in the defence of their homes, families, and country, I felt we could do no less than give them freely the use of all our equipment that would be of service to them. This, they appreciated very much, and when they left us we had no regrets for having been generous in our attitude, excepting the fact that the military occupation prevented the use of the Camp for one year's Convention.

Since that time no other changes of any importance have taken place in connection with the grounds or Conventions, except that owing to numbers increasing greatly, we found it necessary to have three Conventions at the Camp instead of one. This has proved very satisfactory, reducing labour very much, and enabling all members of a family to attend full time without undue difficulty.

For a number of years, our water supply was barely sufficient for our needs, and had to come through "Oakrise," from Stud Road, in three-quarter inch pipe, which, in some places, was badly corroded. We found that the main on Stud Road was too small for a larger service, so were compelled to consider getting our supply from the large main on Gladstone Road.

This was a very big undertaking, and required considerable thought and preparation, but it had to be done, and was done in a surprisingly short time with the aid of many willing helpers. We had now an ample supply of water for all possible needs, and the water worries of the past were over. Plans of the layout of the piping and tape were drawn, and are kept in the Office for reference. It might be well to mention here that the Council, and Water Rates, which are a charge upon the property, are paid annually from the Office at Convention time, so as to relieve the Trustees from this responsibility.

While Mrs. Quick lived, Dave Fletcher's tenancy was secure, but at her death, the farm of "Oakrise" passed into the hands of the Doecke family, who while very considerate and thoughtful, seemed anxious to sell the property, as they were now living in South Australia. Several attempts were made in this direction, and Dave, as a result, felt very unhappy at the prospect of losing the home in which he had lived for so many years.

I assured him that the Lord can overrule in these matters, which vitally concern His Kingdom, and before long, he was enabled to make an offer to buy the property, which was accepted.

His marriage to Louisa Zantuck assured us that there would now be a permanent home in connection with the Convention Grounds, which would be of great comfort and help to us.

The simplification of the Trusteeship had now to be considered, and it was clear that, although there were still three Titles operating, the property was rated by the Shire Council as ONE. It was, therefore, thought advisable to place the whole Trusteeship in the hands of three local men, and upon the retirement of Bert Allsop and Con Doecke, the following men viz., Percy Cameron, A. H. Schulz, Gordon Gunst, kindly consented to accept this responsibility, and were appointed to this Trust.

In the event of any change being necessary through the lapse of time, retirement of any of the Trustees, etc., the Deed of Trust provides that the new Trustee be appointed at the discretion of the "Overseer for the time being" of the Christian

– 9 –

Assemblies in Victoria, and that the Trusteeship shall always consist of three of our brethren, who are members of the assemblies, and who willingly accept this charge.

In the preceding pages, I have endeavoured to set forth as simply and clearly as possible a record of create in connection with our Conventions on the property at Brady Road, Dandenong, where I trust the Lord's people will continue to meet from year to year in harmony and peace, enjoying the gracious provision God has made for their bodily and spiritual welfare.

It has ever been a task which my fellow workers and myself have loved to do what we could to ensure this, and the unknown future lies safely in the hands of Him who careth for "His own" through all the changes of Time and place, and who is surely working ever, for the good and happiness of His people, now and evermore.

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