



**Altona Laverton  
Historical Society Inc.**  
PO Box 236 Altona 3018

# NEWSLETTER

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Kim Reilly

2025 has got off to a remarkably busy, but exciting start with our Devonshire Tea event in March drawing in large groups of people from far and wide. Our volunteers have enthusiastically conducted tours for schools and various groups from across Melbourne, all marvelling at the interesting and surprising history of Altona and the Homestead.



As we move into the Heritage Festival, we are anticipating more people will visit to look through the Homestead and hear our volunteers talk about its colourful history of the past 180 plus years. This year, as well as our guided tours of the Homestead, we are partnering with the Seabreeze Quilters who will demonstrate hand sewing and machine sewing using our two treadle machines for guests, demonstration skills from times when home sewing was both a necessity and a hobby.

Our Family Research is gaining interest with people across the breadth of Hobsons Bay calling in to chat about their family research stories, to find out research hints and gain insight, from our experts, about getting over stumbling blocks that we all face in putting our family tree together. We are sharing the pieces of information that we hold to move their family tree in the right direction.

Our keen volunteers have been working with a local theatre production based on the lives of two key characters of the Altona Hospital, Ivy Weber, and Sylvia Koch/Cook. Our research team has been busy scouring through new and old materials that residents have donated to the Society and items which have been sitting in our archives for quite some time, it is amazing what a fresh pair of eyes will find.

All these enquiries and finds continue to lead us to new stories about the historical events and the early families who shaped the area of Altona, Laverton, Seabrook, and Altona Meadows. A day does not go past that we are not learning something new.

We are a small but enthusiastic committee and organisation if you are looking to be a part of this dynamic group, please contact us via our website at <https://alhs.com.au> - it is a great way to learn more about this great city in which we live. You only need to put in a small amount of time, of which some tasks can be done at home. Visit soon and talk to us or send us an email, we would love to hear from you.

## Ivy & Sylvia



The Altona Community Hospital stands as a monument to the resourcefulness of the community of Altona and its very progressive think pioneer residents. But change needs a catalyst for change, someone to lead the change and someone to make it happen.

Local production house, The Werkz, of Dramawerkz Theatre Inc, is a youth theatre company that is based at the Louis Joel Arts and Community Centre in Altona. This centre is the reincarnation of the Altona Community Hospital, a fitting location for a production about Ivy & Sylvia.

'Ivy and Sylvia' is an imagined conversation between two real-life nurses, who served the local area in the first half of last century. It is the story of two women who had different approaches to a shared goal. The goal to providing improved and local healthcare in Altona during a time of economic recession, putting women when many others refused, and working tirelessly with little to no recognition of their efforts.

Written by Mia Boonen, this two-woman play depicts a meeting between these two characters in the present day, as they haunt the former Altona Hospital and ponder their lives, their aims, what they gave up and what they achieved in the pursuit of their goals for women's health. Ivy & Sylvia is a show that weaves together imagined conversations with real-life historical records, piecing together the life's work of two women who had a significant impact on the Altona community, and recognising the untold stories of historical women throughout time. I cannot think of a better way of recalling history for a modern audience.

The creative team for this production is: Mia Boonen: Writer, and plays Sylvia; Scarlett Rose: Designer, and plays Ivy; Azmy Azurite: Dramaturgy and Direction; and Amelie Barham: Production and Direction. Hobsons Bay Community Fund provided the backing for this project, which ran from 21 to 29 March 2025, and well done to them for recognising the incredible talents of The Werkz.

***Graeme Reilly (ALHS 2025)***

## Madame Weigel's Journal of Fashion

While searching through the archives, at the Homestead, we came upon several boxes of fashion magazines dating back to the early 1920's. So, what are these magazines and who is Madame Weigel?

Let us start with the latter and work our way back to the magazine. Johanna Wilhelmine Weigel, née Astmann, was born 11 February 1847 in present day Poland, and known professionally as Madame Weigel, a designer and publisher of dressmaking patterns in Australia. She left for New York as a young girl, and became a designer for McCall's Patterns, where she met and married German born engineer Oscar Weigel. The couple immediately left for Australia aboard Mysore, arriving in Melbourne on 4 March 1877 for a six-month honeymoon.

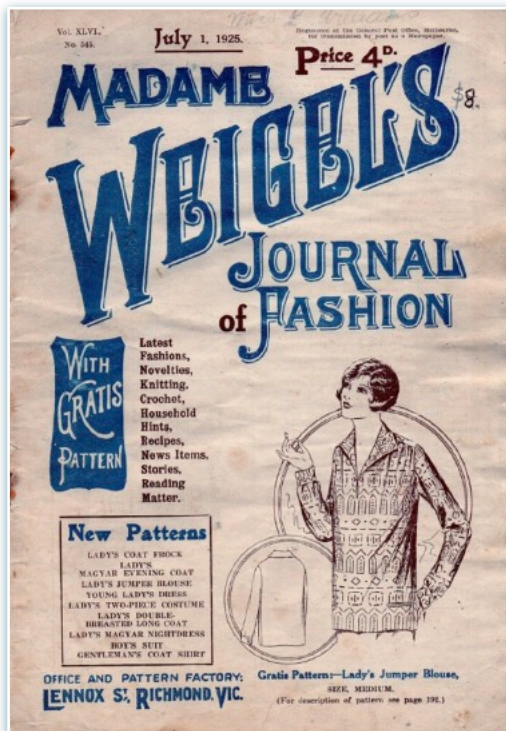


Johanna (Madame) Weigel (left) and her companion Sarah Nielson

Oscar and Johanna quickly became part of the Melbourne social scene, and Johanna began cutting paper patterns for Melbourne friends who admired her dress sense. Within a year, with the help of a few staff in a small house in Fitzroy, she was producing patterns and marketing them mail-order as "American Paper Cut Patterns".

Astounded by the requests for her patterns, and realising the business opportunity that it now presented, Johanna and Oscar decided to stay in Melbourne, Australia.

In 1880 she began publishing a monthly "Weigel's Journal of Fashions", edited by her accountant, Mrs Thompson, touted as the first to be all-Australian in content, production and printing, combining general information, stories and information about merchandise, with illustrated descriptions of the latest English and American fashions, adapted for Australian conditions.





Later that year Johanna was publishing the magazine from Sydney, where she had a retail establishment at 313 Pitt Street. Around 1885 Johanna built offices and a factory at 229 Lennox Street, Richmond where they printed the tissue-paper patterns on their own machines.

Weigel retired from active involvement in the business sometime around 1910, and the couple spent much of their time in world travel. Oscar died in 1915 in Los Angeles, where the couple had gone either on business/pleasure trip. By this time, the business was selling over a million patterns a year. Following Oscar's death, Johanna returned to Melbourne and lived for some time in St Kilda. In 1926 Madame Weigel Pty. Ltd., began with partners Johanna Weigel, Charles Reynolds (a machinist who had been with Johanna from the early days), and George Humphries. Johanna died on 10 January 1940 at her suite in the Oriental Hotel, in Collins Street, Melbourne. She was 92 years old. The business that she had started continued until 1969 due to the move of more women into the workforce and the desire for home dressmaking declined.

530 MADAME WEIGEL'S JOURNAL OF FASHION. July 1, 1925.

**Ladies!**

Why not appear your best at all times? Good Clothes are a big asset in commanding attention. Why not make your own and have better Clothes at half the cost?

**Parker Stores Dress Model**

Will solve your difficulties. Every model is a Friend made. Buy one and join the ranks.

Expanding Models . . . . . 65/-, complete  
Non-Expanding Models . . . . . 32/6 complete, with Wire Skirt,  
Without Wire Skirt . . . . . 25/-

**The Parker Stores,**  
274 P.O. PLACE (Near Buckley & Noon's Ltd.),  
MELBOURNE.  
WE INVITE INSPECTION.

**AN AMUSING INCIDENT.**

A very amusing incident which involved a constable, a passer-by, and a stray pig, was enjoyed by my friend in Gladstone road, Gladstone, N.Z. It was just at dawn when the policeman heard some street clatter, stopped a half-grown black pig. As it required more than one man to arrest the vagrant, the constable asked the help of a passer-by, and after an exciting chase, the pig was caught.

The next problem that arose was what to do with such an extraordinary prisoner, and as there was no alternative it was decided to take it to the police station. There the pig was put in the only safe place of custody—a cell. Much mirth was afforded the police official by an animal so captivated, and soon that one head of man was innocently associated with the affair. Many old identities were asked to inspect the "prisoner," with a view to his identification, as the story passed round was that a fellow without any visible means of support had been locked up, and as he would give no name nothing could be found to lead to his identification.

When the matter arrived with the inquiry, "Had the police seen anything of a stray pig," the police appeared to be astonished at such a question, and they soon changed over to their own alleged predicament, is having a "prisoner" without any identification. In turn, the owner, who claimed a substantial period of residence in the town, proved obliging. He agreed to accompany them to the cell and render what help he could. When the cell door was thrown wide open the constable stared with amazement, for there was the pig with his front legs up on the bank and his head lowered.

Laudably: "What part of the chicken do you prefer?"  
Insolently: "A little of the meat, please."

**MADAME WEIGEL'S  
CATALOGUE  
OF  
PATTERNS  
GIVEN  
FREE  
WITH FIRST ISSUE TO EACH  
NEW SUBSCRIBER  
OF MADAME WEIGEL'S  
JOURNAL OF FASHION.  
OFFICE AND FACTORY,  
LENNOX ST., RICHMOND,  
VICTORIA.**

So, knowing that these magazines are a valuable look into the fashion, lifestyle, and views for and of women up to the early part of the twentieth century, we now look to ensure that these artefacts are catalogued, digitised, and archived for generations to come. We are about to start the task of sorting each of the magazines and recording which issues we are holding.

*Graeme Reilly (ALHS 2025)*

## References

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- Dictionary of Biography: Weigel, Johanna Wilhelmine (1847–1940). National Centre of Biography, Australian National University. Retrieved 18 October 2018.
- Phillips, Bronwyn, The Australian Women's Weekly, 15 March 2024.
- Richmond Guardian ,27 January 1917. p.2

# VALE

## *Roger Thomas Blair*

9<sup>th</sup> March 1937-22<sup>nd</sup> March 2025

It is with sadness that the Altona Laverton Historical Society notes the passing of long time member Roger Blair a local resident who contributed to the activities of the Society as a friend and member .

He was a family man with many interests and a participant in a number of sporting activities including Tennis, Football with Altona and Yarraville teams ,and a proud supporter of the Footscray Football Club ,now trading as the Western Bulldogs.



He was also a member of the extended Twentyman Family who were past residents in the Altona Homestead, and attended a recent family function at the Homestead

He will be sadly missed by all.

