

PROJECT DIARY

ORGANISATION: Whitlam Library, Cabramatta

PRIMARY CONTACT: MARILYN GALLO, Heritage Services Librarian

PROJECT: When were each of the 27 suburbs of Fairfield City Council officially proclaimed?

20/8/2015 Week 4

I contacted the Immigration Women's Health Centre in Fairfield, both face-to-face and email. However, they have not gotten back to me and I sense that there is not much I can offer them and not much they can offer me. Thus, I have decided to change my direction and perhaps contact the Fairfield Museum or the closely related Whitlam Library in Cabramatta. My intention was to work with a non-historical organisation, but after approaching the Health Centre, I have come to understand that it is much more difficult than I thought it would be! It is clear that although people may have their own understanding of history, it is more of an internalised, personal one and therefore it is hard to offer my services in a way which complements this form of understanding.

3/9/2015 Thursday Week 7

Today I had a meeting with Marilyn Gallo, the Heritage Services Librarian at Whitlam Library, Cabramatta. She is very enthusiastic to have me on board and we brainstormed a number of ideas. We finally came up with an idea that will be just as useful for her as it will be for me. My task for the next several weeks will be to research the dates of the official establishment of each suburb in the Fairfield district. This will involve collating primary documents which provide clear and explicit evidence. This will mainly include newspaper articles, government gazette articles, records of Council minutes and a number of local history books. This will be a challenge and a great learning curve for me as I learn to independently analyse and use primary documents for something other than an assignment! It does in fact give me quite a big responsibility because the research is going toward something bigger than myself and is being distributed to the wider Fairfield community. My final research project will most likely be a short history of each suburb, with primary source references given.

10/9/15 Thursday Week 8

Research has proven to be quite difficult. Despite several hours of research, I am struggling to find specific information on any of the 27 suburbs. Trove is fruitless so far and government gazettes are similarly vague. Perusing through the secondary sources, such as the the book *Cabrogal to Fairfield City* by Stephen Gapps, has also been unspecific and provides more of a general background of Fairfield. The main challenge is that the Fairfield Council wants primary sources that explicitly show each suburb's proclamation. I will need to arrange a meeting with Marilyn in order to discuss my concerns. Perhaps I will need to consider other avenues of information, such as local council resources and Whitlam Library. Marilyn has also offered access to records of the Fairfield Council minutes, which may be useful and provide more specific date-based information. However, I am very busy with assignments for the next week and will therefore leave it for the mid-semester break.

8/10/2015 Thursday Week 10

Today, I had a meeting with Marilyn at the Whitlam library and discussed my concerns. I also completed about four hours of research. It is clear that it is going to be very difficult to find specific-date based information. This is particularly difficult because the secondary sources often mention a suburb's proclamation only within a greater framework and don't mention a specific date. Understandably, the date which is most known is the one when the township was considered to have been established and for most suburbs, this was during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. If the Fairfield Council was to inscribe the date which the suburb was established under *Fairfield Council* and not just the general date of establishment, there is a risk there of backfire from the public. For example, Cabramatta was officially established as a township in the mid 1880s, but it only became a part of the Fairfield Council in 1946. Realistically, people are more likely to agree with the former than the latter. After voicing these concerns with Marilyn, we came to an agreement that it will be better to focus on the date of proclamation as a suburb in general. Although I will still strive to find the Council dates, I will focus more on the process the suburbs went through in order to become proclaimed as a suburb or township, which will hopefully lead to some dates! The research I completed today was productive. The council minutes proved useful and newspaper clippings from the Library archive provided a load of information on suburb development, particularly in younger areas like Bonnyrigg and Abbotsbury.

12/10/2015 Monday Week 11

After a conversation I had today with one of the heritage librarians at Whitlam library, I am considering changing my final research project. She told me that she was looking for historical maps of Fairfield and I came across an interesting pictorial map which gave an insight into how developed each region was in the 1920s. However, she tossed it aside. I am beginning to think that maybe my final project should be based around primary sources and their insight into local history. Although rough, I am thinking of doing a collection of primary sources with a short description of the story behind it, but as of yet, still not sure. In the meantime, I have collected a lot of newspaper clippings, which provide an insight into how each suburb developed and the politics which surrounded growth. Unfortunately, the government Gazette has provided very little information on any of the suburbs. I have considered basing my project on a social media platform, like Instagram or Tumblr, but given the hefty amount of time the research has taken, together with the big 27-suburb summary I intend to do, I don't have much time. The Whitlam library does have pretty good social media coverage and their website is extensive, so I think I will stick with my summary report.

22/10/15 Thursday Week 12

The Fairfield Council minutes' records are far more extensive than I had predicted. It is going to take a few days just to rummage through half of them! Villawood is a particularly interesting area of research, given its rough history of immigration and violence. The deadline for the research project is approaching so I really need to get my head screwed on and make some final decisions. My classmates' projects have really inspired me to stay away from a traditional essay style and consider a more interactive approach. I am still leaning towards a short summary of each suburb, with primary source references, but will talk to Marilyn about making it available via social media or their website.

26/10/15 Monday Week 13

I have collected information on about half of the suburbs, but unfortunately, most suburbs have multiple conflicting dates. I feel like I am running on a treadmill at times – I find more

sources, but they only create more confusion. I am waiting for Marilyn to get back to me so we can organise to meet up. I am hoping there are still more resources I can access at the library, such as recent local newspaper clipping. Although Trove provides useful information on the older suburbs, it doesn't offer much on the several suburbs established between 1970 and 2000. The local Fairfield newspapers, *Champion* and *Fairfield Advance* may be useful but I don't have access to the archives.

2/11/15 Monday Week 14

Today I had a meeting with Marilyn and discussed my work so far. I have decided to keep my research project as a short summary of the 27 suburbs. Good news is that the library has all the local newspaper archives, which have been very useful, particularly for the younger suburbs. Bad news is that the work is still extremely time consuming. It is ridiculously difficult to find primary sources on a vague date or even worse, when there are multiple, conflicting dates. It has really tested my problem-solving skills (and patience). For example, I spent about two hours just going through maps and trying to figure out when the suburb Prairiewood was proclaimed. It was a matter of finding a map when Prairiewood was present and when it wasn't, and then honing in on the date. Nevertheless, I have come to realise that just providing the dates in itself for my final project is a feat in itself. Marilyn is also going to make my research/final project digitally (and publicly) available by uploading it onto the Fairfield Council Libraries resource page, so it can benefit high school students and local historians. The next two weeks are going to be intense. I hope to visit the NSW library tomorrow and access some electoral archives and maps. I didn't realise how much creativity historical research requires! I have really had to think "outside of the box" when it comes to locating primary sources. When newspapers fail, I look at gazettes, when that fails, I use maps, then electoral boundaries, then building plans, then water and telephone supplies, then bus routes and so on. Interestingly, I have found this process enjoyable because it has opened up avenues of research I hadn't considered when I started. From my conversations with Marilyn and another heritage officer, it is clear they are getting a lot of pressure from the Council to find accurate dates. I didn't realise, but there are already banners in each suburb. The problem is that some of the dates are historically inaccurate. In fact, some of the employees have actually already attempted this project but gave up when it bore little fruit. I don't want to sound ungrateful, but it looks like I got the short end of the stick!

Nevertheless, I will soldier on and continue the research. I am still aiming to complete all the suburbs, but if not, will hand in what I have done. Fortunately, the work I did today was fruitful and I found some concrete dates on a few suburbs by looking at the microfilms of local newspapers and historical maps. I almost felt like crying when I found a newspaper article that explicitly stated the proclamation of the suburb Wakeley!

If there is one thing I have learnt, it's that history isn't a beautifully bound book written by some famous historian. History is the many tedious hours of research, scouring through barely legible newspapers, maps and photographs, only to find yourself exactly where you started. And when you do find that one magical piece of information, it's about knowing what to do with it.