

Celebrating 150 years at Bellbrae

The Uniting Church of Australia

One might well ask that when the The Uniting Church of Australia only came into being on 22 June 1977 how can it be celebrating 150 years. Equally you might reflect on the fact that the Bellbrae Township was only gazetted on 19 September 1922. Neither of these dates was 150 years ago.

The answer lies in history, the history of the town and the church. In the first instance Bellbrae was called Jan Juc prior to the name change and as such white settlement in Jan Juc goes back to the 1840s. When the Shire of Barrabool was formed in 1865, the Parish of Jan Juc was part of the Coastal Riding.

In the second instance The Uniting Church came into being as a result of three denominations joining together - Congregational Union in Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia, and the Presbyterian Church of Australia. One of these, the Congregational Church, opened the first church building in Bellbrae in 1865, some 150 years ago.

Jan Juc Congregational Church

On Sabbath last (7 May 1865) the New Congregational Church at Jan Juc was opened, the services being in the morning, by the resident minister, the Rev Jas. Apperly; in the afternoon, by the Rev. Mr Cuttle; each service being very fully attended. (Geelong Advertiser 10 May 1865)

The Wesleyan Methodist Church was active in Geelong from the late 1830s. The history of the South Geelong Uniting Church, formerly Methodist was published in 1990 with a beginning date 1839. Regular Wesleyan services were advertised in the Geelong Advertiser from 1841. In Irving Benson's book, A Century of Victorian Methodism, published in 1935, the author wrote about 'Class Meetings'. These were 'an open fellowship of believers in prayer, meditation and praise' supported by nearby churches.

Jan Juc Methodist Church

A Wesleyan Class Meeting was held in Jan Juc in 1866 but it has not yet been established if this was the first. There was a Wesleyan Chapel in Freshwater Creek by 1867. In March 1868, permission was given by the Geelong Methodist Circuit for the building of a church in Jan Juc. On 5 May 1868, 'Rev James Bickford paid a visit to Jan Juc where a new Wesleyan congregation is in the course of formation' (Geelong Advertiser 8 May 1868).

In that same year, two blocks were gazetted by the Colonial Government for a Wesleyan Church (at the current UCA site, the corner of Anglesea and School Road). The building was completed in 1869 and services were then conducted twice weekly.

The Congregational Church closed in 1895 while the Methodist Church opened its door to many from various denominations and flourished on into the 20th Century. A new building, the current one was built in 1957 under the leadership of builder, Eric Lyons. His son, Kevin, an apprentice to his father at the time, helped in the building and was responsible for building the communion table. Kevin is planning a visit to Bellbrae one coming Sunday, with his friend, Don Ayre.

Special Service & Lunch will be held on Sunday 1st November 2015