

A GRAFTON PIONEER

Henry August Volckers

By "Graftonian"

I am quite sure Graftonians, will be interested in an account of the mode of life, and character of one of Grafton's most discussed and worthy pioneers.

Those who knew him, will most likely be able to correct, or add to the information given herein.

The writer knew Mr. Volckers intimately from childhood until 1908, and these reminiscences cover that period.

THE late Henry August Volckers was a native of Germany. Here are his qualifications in alphabetical order.

Well educated, he was an arboriculturist, a botanist, churchman, florist, linguist, nurseryman and seedman, also a vigneron.

This is the man who has made a contribution to the history of Grafton, of the highest value to the city.

Mr. Volckers came to Australia and settled in Grafton during the pioneering period.

He opened a business and nursery in Prince street, situated between the present Fire Station and Apps' Garage.

The shops comprised two houses, separated by a narrow lane. The verandahs

were on the line of the inner boundary of the footpath.

On these open verandahs he attractively displayed his flowers, plants, seeds, etc., in trophy style.

Business Expanded

AS his business expanded, he had two other gardens and nurseries. One with frontages to Mary and Queen streets, known as Doberer's Gardens, and later, he procured a property with frontages to Bacon, Cranworth and Oliver streets, where he had an attractive garden, and where he resided at the time of his death.

At times he had four and five employees. His employees all lived with him. After the death of his first wife he was very lonely and

wife he was very lonely and was glad to have their company.

As they were all single and had no family ties, they were treated as members of his household. They all had a common dining room, and had their meals together. There was a large cellar underneath one of the houses, which was furnished as a dining and rest room, for the hot summer weather.

It was Mr. Volckers' custom to rise before day-break every morning, winter and summer, go for a swim in the river and return to work in the garden until breakfast time.

In his earlier years, he occasionally swam across the river and back again.

The writer once asked him why he rose before sunrise, swam and worked while Grafton slept. In reply, he repeated a verse of a hymn, as follows:

"Awake, my soul, and with the sun,

Thy daily stage of duty run,
Strike off dull sloth, and joyful rise,

To pay thy morning sacrifice."

Enjoyed Work

THIS man worked from sunrise to sunset, was full of energy and enjoyed work. He would have spurned a 40-hour week with an impatient gesture.

This pioneer was a non-smoker, but though he was not a total abstainer, he seldom, if ever, drank intoxicating liquors, but made chili wine, a non-intoxicant, which was his beverage and which he sold in his shop as a cordial.

Mr. Volckers was a dispenser of charity. He was good to the poor, the aged, the sick and little children.

His Christmas gifts were distributed far and wide.

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Here is a story of a Methodist minister, a Roman Catholic priest and a Lutheran layman. They

were the Revs. J. W. Holden, Father J. Bean and H. A. Voickers.

Acts Of Charity

THE clergymen were in the habit of buying flowers, fruit, vegetables, etc., from Volckers, asking him to deliver them to the Benevolent Home, the hospital and private homes of needy families, with the request that their names were not to be divulged as the donors.

Without their knowledge, Volckers, knowing that these were acts of charity, sold the fruit, etc., to these clergymen at half price, and always added a gift parcel of his own, when delivering the orders.

Hence, each of these men was endeavouring to carry out the teaching of Christ, "When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what the right hand doeth that thine alms may be in secret."

But, naturally, good deeds, however secretly they may be performed, cannot be hidden for any length of time and tribute must be paid to this trio of Grafton citizens, who graced their citizenship with deeds of charity and kindness.

Was Up-To-Date

MR. VOLCKERS was an up-to-date business man, always introducing new varieties of plants, etc.

Here are two instances. He was the first to introduce Rhodes grass. He had a sample plot in Oliver street, on the Lutheran

street, on the Lutheran Church property now a part of the High School grounds. The grass grew to the height of 6 feet, was attractive and presented a good business proposition in the sale of seed. Farmers from all over the district flocked to see the grass. He also introduced a unique rose — the Convent Rose. The rose was a bright pink, very closely petalled, not unlike a large zinnia, with a distinct white crucifix on the surface of the bloom.

This can also be said regarding Grafton's street trees and his advice and choice of trees for the council.

Question-Answer

HERE is a pertinent question — Who designed and inspired the arboreal streets of Grafton and planted up till and including Jacaranda Avenue, all the trees in Grafton's streets, parks and church yards?

Here is the answer—Grafton's arboriculturist, H. A. Volckers.

This is the history as far as I understand it.

After Grafton was gazetted a Municipality in 1859, Volckers privately approached the aldermen and other prominent citizens with in effect, this proposal:—

(1) That Grafton streets, being such wide thoroughfares, could be beautified by planting rows of trees on each side.

(2) That the council build tree guards and prepare the soil for tree planting.

(3) That aldermen and others contribute a tree as a gift to the town and that he also supply a quota of trees, the council to pur-

trees, the council to purchase the balance of trees needed.

(4) That if these trees were procured at his nursery, he would plant them and prune them until they had reached maturity free of charge.

Evergreen Trees

WHETHER the trees were planted during the time of the first council cannot be stated with any degree of certainty.

However, Mr. Volckers, in his reminiscences states, "The Municipal Council decided that only evergreen trees, consisting of camphor laurels, pittosporum, red cedars, silky oaks, pines etc., should be planted alternatively."

He also stated: "The council erected the enclosures. Most of them were made and erected by Mr. Lamann, a local builder. The first trees were supplied by Messrs Bawden, Fisher, Meillon, Brown, Hill and Donaldson."

Here you have the history of the genesis of the tree lined streets of Graf-

ton, due to the influence and inspiration of Volckers.

HE further writes: — "There is one noteworthy tree in Fitzroy street, the only specimen of its kind among the Grafton trees.

Though planted at the same time as the others, it is far behind them in growth and size. It takes its own time to come to maturity, which may mean some 200 years. The students of natural history should surely go and behold it on the south side of the street, opposite the "Argus" office.

It is the cedar of Lebanon.

It is the cedar of Lebanon. I hope some of the students who read this will take an interest in this historical tree, which may grow on even when the younger readers of this shall have finished their course of life.

This tree is still living and is close to the Grafton Club. I understand that

Mr. Volckers procured the tree in Palestine especially for Grafton street planting.

Prophetic Vista

AS Mr. Volckers advised the council to plant the Jacarandas in Pound street, the council giving instructions to him to supply and plant them, it is of interest to note his reference to these trees thus:—"There are 240 trees planted in Pound street. The section from Mary street, to the Pound street bridge has been planted and unlike most of the other avenues, all are of the same species namely, jacaranda mimosafolia.

Judging by the look of the trees now in flower one can easily imagine what a grand and wonderful sight it will be to see a double line of them in bloom.

Visitors will be astonished and delighted at the sight, unique in the Commonwealth and the very trees will welcome our visitors, strewing a carpet of flowers in their path.

This was his prophetic vista of the future thoroughly fulfilled in the annual Jacaranda Festival.

As Mr. Volckers designed our arboreal streets, making Grafton an arboratum, i.e. a botanical garden for the cultivation of trees, surely we will perpetuate his name and work."

It has previously been suggested that some tang-

ible memorial should be erected to honour the man who has brought Grafton into prominence, but this has been given no public ventilation.

Civic Pride

MR. Volckers was a man with a full-orbed civic pride. Tasks he performed for the council free of cost, in attending to street trees were:—

(1) Replaced young trees that had died or were stunted in growth.

(2) Pruned trees regularly and after storms toured the streets, removing damaged branches.

(3) Weeding the plots and repairing tree guards, in case straying stock injured the trees.

(4) Watered trees regularly.

This to him was a "labour of love" and he was delighted to do it.

Mr. Volckers was a prominent layman in the Lutheran Church, at times conducting services and preaching both in the English and German languages. Sunday for him was a day of worship and rest.

He worshipped at his own church in the morning and at the Methodist Church for evening services. He had his regular private devotions, reading the scriptures and prayer.

He was fond of hymn singing, a favourite being:—

"Jerusalem, my happy home,
When shall I come to thee?
Thy vineyards and thy orchards
are
Most beautiful and fair,
Full furnished with trees and
fruits,
Most wonderful and rare.
Thy gardens and thy gallant
walks,
Continually are green.

walks.
Continually are green.
There grow such sweet and
pleasant flowers
As nowhere else are seen.
Quite through the streets with
silver sound.
The flood of life doth flow;
Upon whose banks on every side
The wood of life doth grow.
God grant me once to see
Thy endless joys, and. of the same
Partaker aye to be."

