

Friends of Caroline Chisholm

NEWSLETTER

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Our lead article reports on two works of practical charity in Western Sydney: Chisholm Cottage and Caroline Chisholm Centre for Social Justice. Their naming implicitly acknowledges the relevance and worth of Caroline Chisholm in the Australian Church. The objectives and the conduct of the Cottage and the Centre keep alive Mrs Chisholm's twin charisms of practical charity and social justice, and both have a linkage to her own work in Colonial New South Wales, as the article notes.

The other articles in this issue are historical in focus. To Mrs Chisholm's literary output can now be added a short story called "Domestic Life

in Australia". Like her "Little Joe" story, it was aimed at young readers and has a strong moral message, encompassing personal morality and touching on social and political questions of the day. In the newly discovered story, humour leavens the serious message, which was typical of Mrs Chisholm. Glum she was not!

Flora, the Highland beauty who caught Mrs Chisholm's heart, is the subject of the other historical article, or rather her fictitious name is. Caroline Chisholm protected her identity and, it seems, chose a name that would resonate against calumny. The extant historical sources can still tell us more about Mrs Chisholm.

Practical Works of Charity in Western Sydney

Following extensive refurbishment, a new roof and renovations, Chisholm Cottage was officially re-opened on 4 July, 2017. The Cottage provides low-cost, shared accommodation for families and individuals from regional New South Wales who need to stay near Westmead Hospital, while they or their loved ones receive medical services or are in hospital.

Chisholm Cottage was established in 1996 by the Catholic Women's League (CWL) branch in Parramatta, and the CWL conducted it until early 2011, when Sisters of Charity Outreach took over the valued community service and then acquired the building in December, 2016.

From July, 2014 to September, 2016, when the Cottage was closed for the upgrade, 742 adults and 352 children stayed at the Cottage, delivering 1,885 booking nights and saving the guests more than \$70,000 in accommodation costs each year. Bookings have been strong since the upgrade was completed.

There are four separate bedrooms of different sizes, some for a family of three, and shared bathrooms, kitchen and lounge room. The room rates are certainly economical, particularly for Sydney. It's \$60 a night for each of two rooms

(maximum of two guests) and \$80 a night for each of the biggest rooms (maximum of three guests or two adults in each room).



A twin room at Chisholm Cottage, Westmead
[image sourced from the Sisters' website]

Chisholm Cottage has a live-in accommodation manager and a staff of trained volunteers. Overall operations are managed by Sisters of Charity Outreach, a not-for-profit organisation established in 1990. Apart from this "home away from home", it also provides a no-cost transport service for the State's regional families travelling to Sydney for medical care or a hospital stay, a court support program, Time Out— which

Practical Works of Charity in Western Sydney (cont.)

offers respite to carers needing a break, Safe Haven—which gives short-term crisis accommodation and support for women and children escaping domestic violence, and the Visit program offering a one-to-one home visit service to socially isolated people living in Sydney.

The transport service, which is called Country Care Link, and Chisholm Cottage are Sisters of Charity Outreach's core services to New South Wales regional families, said Mr Gary Sillett, the organisation's CEO [sources: *The Catholic Weekly*, 16 July, 2017, page 10, and the Sisters' website].

The St Vincent de Paul Society runs the Caroline Chisholm Centre for Social Justice, located in an industrial area in Mount Druitt. It is a busy drop-in centre for local residents and the broader community and has a diverse range of support and early intervention services.

There's emergency support providing financial aid and food vouchers, budget counselling and arranging payment plans, counselling for emotional and mental health issues, social worker assistance in understanding Centrelink and Family and Community matters, art therapy and other creative activities. The Society's website has the full listing.

Emergency support and the No Interest Loans Scheme are restricted to a defined local area, owing to the Society's wide network of parish



The entrance to the Caroline Chisholm Centre for Social Justice in Mount Druitt [image sourced from the Society's website]

conferences and regional councils which also have those services. According to the Society's webpage for the Centre, there is "a strong relationship working alongside its neighbour Anglicare". Mrs Chisholm would have approved of that as well as the Centre's accent on "social justice".

As recorded in this Newsletter's issue #13, Mrs Chisholm's pioneering work for the poor and distressed was likened to that of St Vincent de Paul, whose charity "was too great to allow him to pass by" [cf. letter in *Australasian Chronicle*, September 21, 1841].

The founding group of five Sisters of Charity and the Chisholm family arrived in Sydney in late 1838, the Sisters on 31 December. Like Mrs Chisholm, the Sisters did sterling charitable work but nevertheless encountered serious difficulties. Such things are, she wrote in her 1842 book, "permitted to try our faith and exercise our patience" [cf. *Unfeigned Love*, page 23].

A New Story by Caroline Chisholm Revealed

The *Australian Home Companion and Band of Hope Journal* was published fortnightly in Sydney from 1859 to 1861. It was launched in January, 1856, and had variations on that title from 1856 to 1858. Published by Henry B. Lee, it was established to promote temperance among young people. Lee was a schoolmaster who was teaching at the Sussex Street Ragged School in 1860 [*Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 July, 1860, page 2].

What did this obscure temperance newspaper have to do with Caroline Chisholm? Well, by digitalizing Lee's newspaper in 2011, the National Library's Trove search facility made the connection possible and thereby produced a minor discovery. Mrs Chisholm's story called

"Domestic Life in Australia" was included in the newspaper's issues from 14 January to 10 March, 1860. None of the major biographies refer to this story, whose publication overlapped that of her better known "Little Joe", which ran in *The Empire* from December, 1859 into mid 1860.

"Domestic Life in Australia" begins with Mr and Mrs Grant and their children returning from a visit to Goulburn. Lucy, their eldest, is with them. The narrative throughout the five episodes is sparse, and much of the scene-setting, journeying and action is related in the characters' asides and quoted remarks or in their conversations. The plot is not complicated, but on occasions there are neat elaborations of

A New Story by Caroline Chisholm Revealed (cont.)

events (some unexpected), mainly in the final episodes.

Upon their return, the Grants find their friendly neighbours and workers have arranged a sumptuous picnic, accompanied by wholesome games, and the good times continued with an impromptu dance and supper at the home-stead. It is left to the reader to infer that this was achieved without intoxicating beverages.

Mrs Chisholm sets her story in a pastoral ideal of families living self-sufficiently on their own allotments, a familiar aspiration for many new immigrants at the time, and the reader in 1860 might also claim a realizable one if the Government acceded to the cry of "Open the lands". The story-writer becomes somewhat didactic on the harmonious inner workings of family life, and speaking truthfully is heavily emphasized in the early episodes, especially regarding prospective beaus.

Once the essentials are in place, Mrs Chisholm then relaxes her authorial reins and lets the story strike its own pace. Lucy and Mr Graham are stepping out together. The romance is, of course, very chaste, but her parents are uneasy, Mr Grant even confiding to Mrs Grant that Graham "is indeed a dangerous man". As matters unfold, he is shown to be a two-timer lacking honourable intentions.

The story moves along with Graham's departure from the district after those intentions have been sufficiently revealed to the 1860's reader. Mr Dally, a young and decidedly decent fellow, intercepts Graham and challenges him to a fight. The romantic potential of Dally is implied but not developed — this is commendable authorial restraint!

Graham accepts the challenge, and we are told it was a vicious fight. Mrs Chisholm gives few details of the fight, but once it was over her story-telling excels. It does so when she returns to her considerable talent for reporting speech and light-hearted humour, to which is added an element of farce, including an escaped lunatic.

Graham, badly battered in defeat, was put in the care of two servant girls, whose banter carries the fourth episode. One is a "grave looking English

girl", and the other a "merry eyed Tipperary girl". Together they agree to concoct a letter to Lucy, ostensibly written as Graham lay on his death-bed. Graham has feigned sleep or a faint, as the Irish girl tends to his wounds and the English girl writes the letter.

In between sponging blood, the Irish girl cuts locks from Graham's thick black hair and hacks at his beard and "magnificent whiskers", all the while talking. "Well, say 'that wretch, Mr Dally, way-laid him on the road with one hundred and fifty men; set upon him like savages and nearly murdered him.'" The English girl protests, "Stop, stop; I can't say one hundred and fifty; you know there were only seventy men present at the fight."

"That's true enough," she replies, "but do you think I was never in a row at home . . . [m]any a good one, and I know the *Times'* method of doubling the number". She continues, "Though he cannot last much longer, and is near death, he looks as beautiful as ever, only there are a few cuts; his arms have been savagely broken".

"I won't write that last, for the doctor says only one arm is injured", counters the English girl.

"What does that signify in writing a love-letter? A queer sort of letter you'd make of it, if you only put down the truth; is not the sweetest part of a love letter, which sets your heart beating and guessing whether it is true", responds the Irish girl.

The would-be nurses leave the room, locking Graham inside, "their hands full of the trophies of their mischievous revenge". When they were some distance from the house, "they gave way to uncontrollable fits of laughter, in which a dozen, who had been listeners, heartily joined".

Among them the consensus was: "It's no more than he deserves for breaking Miss Lucy's heart; he'll not be able to go to Sydney now, or show himself here without his whiskers." The final episode extends this notion of just deserts, but it is Graham himself who brings that about by looking and acting like a madman. Mrs Chisholm's story has a very satisfying, if farcical, ending.

Rodney Stinson

Confidentiality and the Naming of Flora

At the beginning of her 1842 book, *Female Immigration Considered*, Caroline Chisholm undertook to use honourably the “many secrets” she learned during her work of the past few years. These secrets extended to the names of individuals she assisted in that work, through the female immigrants’ home and elsewhere. Yet her book refers five times to Flora, the young Highland beauty who had emigrated with her mother. Mrs Chisholm met and talked with them on her visits to the government-operated immigrants’ barracks in the latter half of 1840.

On the second and third visits, the book relates, she warned the mother to be wary of an older male, whom she termed “a gentleman”. She surmised he was intent on the seduction of the young woman, who “was all innocence — and her mother all hope”. Mrs Chisholm’s subsequent enquiries confirmed that the older male was married and had some means and that no-one associated with the barracks could exclude him. It was then that Mrs Chisholm admitted she “was obliged to leave Flora to her *fate*” [cf. *Unfeigned Love*, page 20].

The narrative to this point had five asterisks instead of a name for the young woman. Why would Caroline Chisholm have introduced the given name of Flora? The asterisks established the young woman’s anonymity, just as the book’s convention of underlining (for example, Mr _____) ensured anonymity to individuals whose actions were not laudable. Recourse was also made to fictitious names [cf. page 69].

It seems clear that Flora was not the Highland beauty’s real name. Flora is a pretty name, but it wasn’t all that popular, although Mrs Chisholm’s book acknowledges the gift of “Baxter’s Call to the Unconverted” from someone called “Flora Fraser” [cf. page 68]. For the reasons given above, this would not have been the Highland beauty.

In Roman mythology, Flora was the goddess of the flowering of plants, and she possessed eternal youth. The Highland beauty acquired eternal youth, simply because she had died in

either 1841 or early 1842, as can be inferred from Mrs Chisholm’s meeting with her (Flora’s) cousin [cf. page 49]. That connection is strained because Mrs Chisholm is unlikely to have studied Classics and classical allusions were not a feature of her writing.

She was, however, an avid reader of newspapers and journals and was well-informed on social, economic and political issues. In August, 1839, the Sydney press published the first of many accounts of a scandal in Queen Victoria’s Court and its acrimonious consequences. Lady Flora Hastings, an unmarried lady in waiting to the Queen’s mother, was falsely accused of “being with child” and banned from the Queen’s palace.

Lady Flora could restore her reputation only by accepting a “most revolting proposal”: medical examination by two doctors. They concluded “there are no grounds for believing pregnancy does exist, or ever has existed”.

Lady Flora’s swollen abdomen was due to a diseased liver, which brought about her death in July, 1839. The cause of death was confirmed by an autopsy, fortifying her reinstated reputation.

The controversy in England swirled into 1840. The Queen herself was “booed when out riding, hissed at Ascot and mocked with cries of ‘Mrs Melbourne’” [cf. www.irishtimes.com/news], Lord Melbourne being the Prime Minister and her confidant. The Sydney press continued to publish into mid-1840 detailed news reports on the calumny of Lady Flora and its sequelae.

Caroline Chisholm’s choice of Flora as a fictitious name for the Highland beauty was made in its aftermath, when the memory would still have been fresh. The Highland beauty had been seduced and then abandoned by her seducer after she fell pregnant. Mrs Chisholm stood by her, dissuaded her from suiciding and found her lodging in early 1841. The Highland beauty’s life was cut short, but she lives on in Mrs Chisholm’s book as Flora, her dignity and reputation restored. “Alas, poor Flora!”, she wrote, “many loved you” [cf. *Unfeigned Love*, page 49].