

How to 'dispose of' a quilt



The quilt moved through four stages of ownership, from the Busy Bees to the Donaldson family to the Scots Church, and most recently to this Society. How did each owner pass the quilt on to the next?

The deputation of two ladies in August 1895 told the Shire Councillors their plan: the autograph quilt is to be 'disposed of on the art union principle'. Similar to a raffle, this principle required subscribers to contribute funds to a creative project; thus they became eligible to 'win' the finished item, usually via a lucky draw.

The Busy Bees completed their quilt in February 1896. Our research has not yet discovered how much money was raised for the Scots Church, or precisely how the Bees 'disposed of' the quilt. We have not found any newspaper announcements or advertisements, nor any coverage of a social event where the quilt was handed over to the winner. However the quilt's history revealed that a member of the Donaldson family was the recipient.

The finished quilt travelled long distances after that time. It was taken to Opotiki in the North Island of New Zealand by a branch of the Donaldson family who migrated there in the early 20th century.

George Donaldson (1919-2011) seems to have been the last New Zealand owner.

The quilt returned to Australia in 1990 when George and his family donated it to the Scots Church in Burgundy Street (now Heidelberg–East Ivanhoe Uniting Church). It was often referred to as the Donaldson quilt because of that family connection. The Church cared for the quilt as an historical artefact, recognising it as a significant heritage item.

In June 2018 the Church kindly donated the quilt to our Society. We are researching its stories and have listed it with the National Quilt Register. We welcome additional help with this ongoing project.



Members of Heidelberg Historical Society discuss the Busy Bee Signature Quilt with members of Heidelberg–East Ivanhoe Uniting Church during a handover event at the Church in June 2018.



Art unions, raffles and the law

Art unions began in the 19th century as a method for supporting artists and promoting artistic taste and appreciation. Members of the union invested a small fee, then received a chance to win a work of art through a prize draw. Australian artist Arthur Streeton used the concept to fund his artistic practice during the 1890s.

Art unions were controversial because they were akin to lotteries, especially if the prize could easily be converted to cash. Lotteries and any game of chance with a monetary prize were illegal under the Victorian *Police Offences Act 1890*.

Providing the activity was registered in advance with the Attorney-General, the Act exempted art unions where the prize was a genuine artwork and bazaar raffles where the proceeds went to charity. The Act also tolerated raffles 'of a private nature'. The courts were often lenient in sentencing infringements relating to art unions because of the charitable purposes involved.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria took a stronger view. In 1892 and again

in 1895 it spoke out against raffling at church bazaars. In October 1896 the Church joined 200 representatives of religious and temperance organisations in 'a monster deputation' to the Premier, urging the government 'to see that the law against lotteries was rigidly enforced'.

Nevertheless, Presbyterian and other communities continued to raise funds for their charitable purposes via raffles and art unions, with signature quilts a popular prize. Examples from quilt raffles in country Victoria include:

December 1895: Branhholme Presbyterian Church raised over £33 for the names and over £8 from tickets in the raffle.

February 1896: Portland Ladies' Benevolent Society raised just over £12, and Lancefield Presbyterian Church raised almost £33.

The people of Queenscliff planned a Summer Fair for January 1895. They discussed making an autograph quilt, hoping to raise £50 by recruiting 1,000 names at a shilling per square, and another £50 from disposal by an art union with 100 members each paying 10 shillings. (This ambitious project may not have been completed!)



The new Scots Church

After Reverend Fraser's resignation and retirement at the end of 1897, the Heidelberg and the Templestowe congregations reconciled their differences and worked together for the next 62 years.

From 1898 to 1902, Reverend George MacDonald guided the reunification of the combined Heidelberg and Templestowe church. Two congregations reported 175 people attending services. Two Sunday schools, with 10 teachers and 20 scholars, had an average attendance of 35. Two senior members who had resigned abruptly in 1895 were re-elected as elders and became active again with the Sunday School.

A new church to replace the ageing Scots Church in Jika Street was still urgently required. The large site intended for the new church in Burgundy Street was an asset. In 1898 the Trustees received permission to mortgage the land, or sell part of the land. In late 1900, a portion of the land was sold to John Donaldson of *Bellevue*, Ivanhoe, long-term supporter of the church. This transaction provided funds for the new building.

The foundation stone was laid on 8 December 1900; the new church opened on 14 April 1901.



The Scots Church in Burgundy Street early in the 20th century.



The timber Sunday School adjacent to Scots Church, with teacher and scholars, c.1904.



The *Bellevue* Donaldsons

In 1857, John A Donaldson (1827-1905) left Kangaroo Ground to visit Scotland, returning with his cousin and new bride Anstruther Davidson (1827-1864). A shrewd property investor, John expanded his holdings in Kangaroo Ground and also purchased an additional 57 acres (23 ha) of farmland, fronting Waterdale Rd in Ivanhoe and running down to Darebin Creek, next to his brother James's property. There John built *Bellevue*, a stately two-storey mansion with a large garden and a huge circular aviary. He and Anstruther had three children: Margaret (1860-1940), James (1862-1882) and John (1864-1961), but Anstruther died soon after her son John was born.

Four years later, the widowed John married Isabella Cantlay (1843-1931) and the couple went on to have a long marriage and a large family with 10 children surviving to adulthood.

In 1899, their eldest daughter Isabella (1869-1900) married Reverend George MacDonald (1864-1939), minister of Scots Church after Reverend Fraser retired. The following year the couple had a son, Oliver Flett.

Isabella died a short time later, probably from complications following the birth.

In 1902 George MacDonald married again, to Isabella's half-sister, Margaret Alexander Donaldson. According to a family story, this type of marriage was illegal in Australia at that time and so the couple went to New Zealand to marry. Australia actually did not prevent the marriage of a widower to his sister-in-law, but such marriages were frowned upon here by some Presbyterian congregations. They took the little boy Oliver with them. Subsequently they had a daughter of their own, whom they named Isabella. George MacDonald died in 1938 in New Zealand.



Bellevue, c.1890, possibly Isabella Donaldson in the front.



The *Wellington House* Donaldsons

As well as land parcels in Kangaroo Ground, James T Donaldson (1832-1916) inherited some 92 acres (37 ha) of farming land on the Darebin Creek, Ivanhoe, in 1856. There he established his farm and homestead *Wellington House*.

A passionate gardener, James meticulously laid out the grounds around the house.

In 1873, he married Jane Thomson (1832 -1877), daughter of a Kangaroo Ground pioneering family. The couple did not have any children. Jane died just four years later. In 1886 James married a second time, this time to Caroline Tiley (1851-1930). Again no children came from this marriage.

Caroline's twin sister, Emily, married William H Clinton in 1886. They had a daughter [F15] Caroline (Carry) Emma Clinton (1879-1947). In 1909 she married Jack Thomson, a nephew of James' first wife Jane Thomson. Following her uncle James' death, Carry and her husband lived with Caroline Donaldson at *Wellington House* until her aunt's death. The property was subsequently purchased by the City of Heidelberg.

In 1954 the house was demolished to make way for the Ivanhoe Aquatic Centre.



Wellington House was renowned for its gardens.



James and Caroline Donaldson with niece Carry Clinton (centre) on the bridge over Donaldson Creek, Ivanhoe, c.1900.



The New Zealand Donaldsons and the return of the quilt

In 1907 James Thomas Donaldson (1884-1961), one of the youngest of John and Isabella's ten surviving children, visited New Zealand, perhaps to catch up with his eldest sister *Maggie* [K2] and her husband, Reverend George MacDonald. He called in at Opotiki, a little coastal town on the Bay of Plenty, North Island. Attracted to the region, James subsequently established there a large dairy farm, *Ivanhoe*. He married a local woman Sue Curtis Hill (1895-1993) in 1915.

The couple had four children including George Alexander (1919-2011). The family returned to *Bellevue*, their home in Ivanhoe, Victoria, in 1927 and the two younger sons attended Scotch College in the mid 1930s. The children greatly missed New Zealand and the family went back to their Opotiki farm in 1940.

After James relocated to New Zealand, *Bellevue* (inherited from his father) was let to tenants. In 1958 the house was sold as it had fallen into disrepair and the upkeep was too costly. Demolition and new developments followed.

It is not clear when the quilt was taken to New Zealand or by whom. We do know, however, that members of the Donaldson family held it in New Zealand up to 1990. The quilt may have been a treasured keepsake that was taken to Opotiki as a memento of the family's Heidelberg connections.

In 1990 James' son George Alexander Donaldson returned the quilt to the Scots Church (now Heidelberg–East Ivanhoe Uniting Church).

We believe that George A Donaldson, great-grandson of Kangaroo Ground pioneer James Bruce Donaldson (1787-1856), attended the 150th Anniversary service for the Scots Church with his wife Elizabeth.

This photograph shows George speaking during the 1993 service.

He is standing in front of a memorial plaque honouring his grandfather, John Donaldson (1827-1905).





Deciphering the Donaldsons

The Donaldsons were great supporters of the Scots Church but their presence on the quilt is often cryptic, disguised by initials.

Central *I Donaldson*

F17 *Isa Donaldson*

Isabella Leslie Donaldson (née Cantlay, 1843-1931), second wife of John Donaldson,

OR their daughter, Isabella Ann (1869-1900).

Probably both women were involved but it is not obvious which one was the Busy Bee named in the Central square.

Central *M Donaldson*

Margaret Alexander Davidson Donaldson (1860-1940), eldest child of John Donaldson and his first wife Anstruther Davidson,

OR Mary May Davidson Donaldson (1874-1924), half-sister of Margaret; daughter of the same John Donaldson and his second wife Isabella,

OR Mary Ann Donaldson (née Bennell, 1864-1934) wife of John Anstruther Davidson Donaldson and therefore sister-in-law of both Margaret and Mary.

A number of squares with the surname initial given as 'D' could represent Donaldson family members, including these brothers of Margaret and Mary:

B15 *A.R.T.D.*

Probably Alexander Robert Thomas Donaldson (1877-1955), a son of John and his second wife Isabella Cantlay.

A10 *J.A.D.D.*

Probably John Anstruther Davidson Donaldson (1862-1961), youngest son of John and his first wife Anstruther Davidson. In 1890 this John Donaldson married Mary Ann Bennell, daughter of [E2] *S Bennell* of Fitzroy. By 1895, Samuel was living in the bayside suburb of Sandringham. John and Mary Ann gave the name Muriel to their eldest daughter (b.1891), so [B14] *Muriel / Sandringham* might be a relative.

There are two other Bennells on the quilt:

B Bennell [K10] and *Mable Bennell* [L4].

We presume these squares recognise members of the extended Bennell family. Joshua Bennell, a builder from Clifton Hill, constructed the new Scots Church in Burgundy Street which opened in 1901, and the adjacent manse.



The dedicated Scots Church members

Just as their pioneering parents had been strong supporters of the Presbyterian Church at Kangaroo Ground, the Donaldsons at Ivanhoe were steadfast and generous members of the Scots Church at Heidelberg.

The brothers John (b.1827) and James Thomas (b.1832) both held various positions in the church at different times including that of trustee, elder and manager. Similarly their families were active in many aspects of congregational life. John's wife Isabella was, for example, a long-standing member of the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union.

In late 1900, when the new church came to be built in Burgundy Street, John bought some of the church's land there for £616.

The proceeds helped pay for the new building. James donated the church bell and pews.

After the church opened in April 1901, John erected a manse on his block at his own expense, leasing the building to the church with the option of purchase at a future date.



Our research continues

There are many squares where we know little or nothing about the people represented. Who were [J3] *Joe Ausom*, [B12] *Rudolpho Natali* and [N1] *Mrs G. Wilson / Stapleton*? We seek your help in identifying them and their connections with the other people on the quilt.



There are also squares that we find hard to decipher and to connect with actual people:



On the left, [B1] might be *JS Whalley*. In the centre, the monogram at [K7] might be for *CS* or *SC*. On the right, [C15] might be *Kenneth Blunt / Geelong*.

Can you help us add to the information already gathered about the people and places connected by the Heidelberg Busy Bee Signature Quilt?

You can comment on each square of the quilt via: heidelberghistoricalsociety.com.au/hhs/quilt.php We welcome your suggestions and any information you can add to our current knowledge.

The Heidelberg Busy Bee Signature Quilt is now listed on the National Quilt Register.



ABOUT EXPLORE RESOURCES ADD QUILTS

Heidelberg Busy Bee Signature Quilt



Register No.	1335.2019.HHS
Owner	Heidelberg Historical Society Inc.
Location	Heidelberg, Victoria, Australia
Maker	Busy Bee society of the Scots Presbyterian Church, Heidelberg
Origin	Heidelberg, Victoria, Australia
Pattern	Signature, Community, Embroidered, Motifs or Names, Pieced, Rectangle
Date	1896
Dimensions (H x W in cm)	247 x 213

Explore other fascinating Australian quilts online: www.nationalquiltregister.org.au