

ALEXANDER SPEERS (1825-1889)

Warrandyte pioneer's lasting legacy

Alexander Speers was born at sea while his mother was on a ship somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean. He married Ellen Leatherbarrow in Lancashire, England in 1847. They migrated to Australia in 1848 and Ellen died nine years later in Hawthorn, leaving Alexander with two small girls. Two of his children had also passed away by this time.

Alexander soon married again, this time to Bathia Divertie nee Rhind, herself a widow and a housekeeper with one child. They went on to have another nine children together.

Alexander was a skilled blacksmith for Langlands Foundry South Melbourne and in the goldfields at Warrandyte where there was demand for normal blacksmithing and the repair of mining equipment and tools. In 1866 he purchased land by selection in Warrandyte, Parish of Bulleen and named the property "Rosebank" where he established an orchard and a blacksmith shop.

In 1870 he purchased three blocks of land in the main street of Warrandyte and established a house, general store and post office, with daughter Ethel later becoming postmistress in the building which now houses the Warrandyte Historical Society and Museum. Another block was donated for religious purposes and the Gospel chapel was built there after the Presbyterian Church was burnt down in the 1939 bushfires. A memorial window is in the current building in Bathia's memory.

Alexander died at Rosebank on 25 July 1889. According to the death notice placed by his wife, Alexander's death was caused by an unnamed but long and protracted illness. He left his estate, consisting of 4,000 pounds, and 300 shillings in real estate, and nearly 500 pounds in cash, to his much loved wife.

His widow Bathia passed away in 1910 and was mourned by her large family who had mostly settled around Warrandyte.



Post Office 1906

Source: Warrandyte Historical Society Archives

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Jan is a professional historian who has worked across the fields of heritage, education and tourism. She has taught at several universities, including Monash University where she delivered the master of public history course. She is also a former Chair of the Heritage Council of Victoria. Jan was appointed to The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust in 2010.



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