

WHO IS ON THE COMMITTEE?

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:

PRESIDENT/SECRETARY

GLENN DICK

glenn dick@outlook.com

0411 840 940

VICE PRESIDENT/

TREASURER

DAVID BAWDEN

dbawden77@gmail.com

0412 011 292

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

LYN WORKMAN

STEVE O'CONNOR

HONORARY MEMBERS:

ANNA UNDERWOOD:

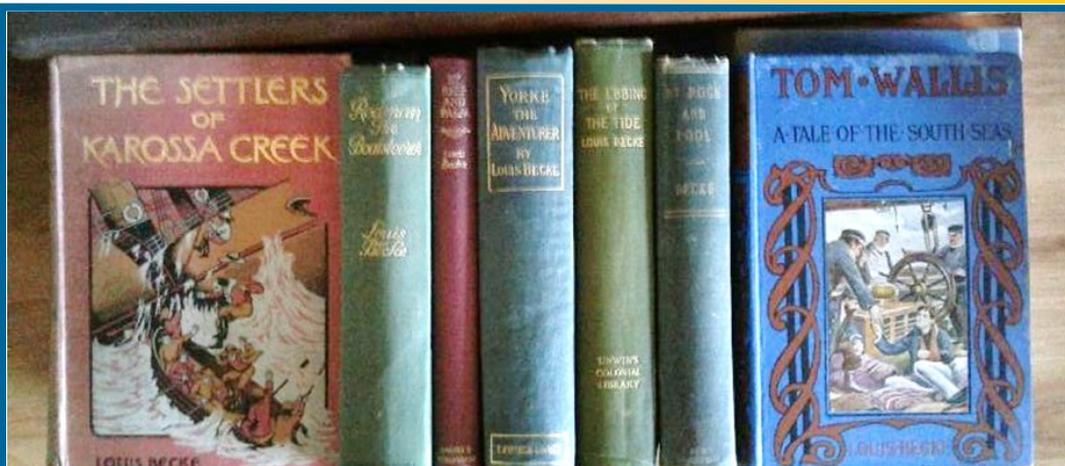
Family history; W.A.

ALLEGRA MARSHALL:

Becke historian and attendant to his grave at Waverley Cemetery, Bronte, N.S.W.

DR. CHRYSOPHER SPICER:

Cultural historian, author and Senior Research Fellow at James Cook University, Cairns, QLD.

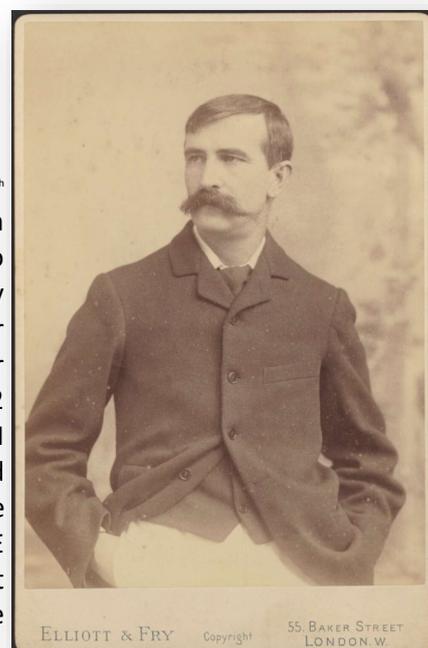


THE LOUIS BECKE SOCIETY (PORT MACQUARIE) INC.

PRESIDENT'S "DESPATCHES"

by Glenn Dick

Having just completed our first AGM on Sept 27th 2020, we can all look back a little and reflect on our achievements these past 18 months and to consider the way ahead. We have made a very good start. I would like to congratulate our second committee for their commitment to our mission/aims and objectives for the next 12 months. In my report for the AGM 2020, I presented the case that we are focused and intent on gaining Becke's deserved place in the Port's history. We are grateful to all LOUIS BECKE SOCIETY members in the quest to arrive at that goal, however long it takes. The future contributions may be made by linguists, historians, humanitarians, genealogists, literary and ethnologists as well as our associated members. No doubt it will vastly increase the desire to learn more so as to retain and keep the 'stone fires' alight with regards to the First Peoples of the Pacific; Becke witnessed and recorded their plight over the years. It is up to individuals on how we interpret and justify his legacy, both in Australia and Oceania.



Louis Becke sailed to London in 1896 and this studio photo was taken at 55 Baker Street. The studio was owned by Joseph Elliott and Edmund Fry. Their business operated from 1863 through to 1919.

Portrait of Louis Becke 1896 [picture]/ Elliott & Fry. Used with acknowledgment of the National Library of Australia
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-136625909>

I emailed DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS in the USA (April 2020) to purchase a copy of "Bad Colonists". These are the South Seas Letters of Vernon Lee Walker and Louis Becke (by Nicholas Thomas & Richard Eves). I found the letters very interesting and felt the authors' comments and interpretations - of these two "salty" (Walker and Becke) South Pacific British subjects - highly critical. In my opinion, they were young men trying their luck in the vast Pacific region. I felt that both Becke and Walker didn't really know what to expect. It seems to me that they drifted into the Islander lifestyle of the era. Thank heavens Becke followed on with his dedicative, descriptive and creative writings, otherwise we would have ended up with sanitised versions

PRESIDENT'S "DESPATCHES" continued

making reference to company ledgers, missionary teachings and the schematic visions of the major colonizing empires throughout the Pacific. Walker was never in the realm of Becke. Both were "bit players" in the Pacific! Becke's mettle was to be tested, adventurer to author, both came hard but he was up to the challenge and the "cross-over". He knew Walker and wrote about him.

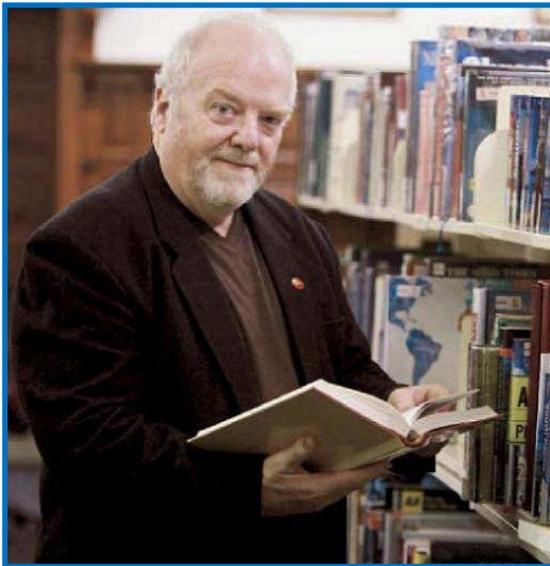
Recently I purchased from GYAN, India (New Delhi) a hard-back copy of Becke's "Neath Austral Skies" costing AUD\$30 plus \$10 postage. I am very happy with the quality and presentation. GYAN republishes Becke's titles in either paperback, hard cover or leather-bound. I have built my collection of 25 titles (mostly first editions), purchasing from antique, rare and second-hand bookshops from Australia, United Kingdom, USA, Canada and New Zealand etc, averaging AUD\$80 plus post. A number of Becke's rare titles are just too expensive, so I'm 'picking the eyes' out of GYAN. Happy hunting if you are buying. (Note: very slow postage times at present!)

In the near future, I will be designing the Society's letterhead and logo. The logo will be a separate artwork which will present for use on future merchandising items such as canvas bags, hats, stickers, posters, collared cotton shirts and mugs and so on.

Let's paddle out into the lagoon and even venture to the outer reef..... where the pearls lay!

Glenn Dick

Louis Becke: Australia's greatest writer of the Southern Pacific—Dr Chrystopher Spicer



Dr Chrystopher Spicer
Cultural historian, author and Senior
Research Fellow, James Cook University,
Cairns, QLD.

In January 1896, Table Talk magazine journalist Bernard Espinasse extolled author Louis Becke as, "the Homer of many a Polynesian Odyssey yet to be written." The journalist saw a tall, thin, brown-haired, tanned and tattooed man sitting across from him, whose rather care-worn face was framed by a short beard. Sitting with his seven-year-old daughter Nora on his lap, Becke's dark eyes would light up every now and then during the conversation with "uncanny brilliance," revealing to Espinasse a repressed, pent-up energy that caused him to speculate on what those eyes must have seen. Becke was at this time revelling in the runaway success of his first volume of short stories about the South Pacific, *By Reef and Palm*, which had been followed by his first novel, *His Native Wife*, in October 1895. He had then completed a second volume of South Pacific stories, *The Ebbing of The Tide*, which would be published in March. Although hailed as "the Rudyard Kipling of the Pacific" by the Melbourne Leader in December 1894, Becke never warmed to the actual writing process: thinking about it was easy enough, he grumbled, but it was putting the words on paper that this traveller, South Pacific island trader, sailor, adventurer, and now author found so difficult.

Louis Becke was born in the town of Port Macquarie on the North Coast of New South Wales in 1855, the ninth of twelve children. His father, Frederick Becke, was Clerk of Petty Sessions and Registrar for the district and his mother, Caroline Beilby, was the daughter of well-known Sydney merchant Charles Beilby, who in 1837 owned 190

acres of Middle Head and Georges Heights. Later educated at Fort Street School in Sydney, Becke had left Australia for San Francisco as a teenager and, after returning home, had later sailed to the South Pacific where he lived and worked at intervals between 1872 to 1891, including working for a few months as clerk and trading manager for the notorious blackbirder and smuggler 'Bully' Hayes. Although a myth eventually developed that Becke was arrested and tried for piracy because of that work, and Becke was as willing as anyone else to promote that story, that never happened: he was merely questioned about his possession of a small ketch for which he duly produced the correct paperwork. After he returned to Sydney, Becke was working as a stump-grubber in 1893 when the editor of the Sydney Bulletin, J F Archibald, overheard him one night telling stories about the South Pacific in the bar of the Coogee Hotel. Archibald promptly invited him back to his house for a few days and encouraged him to begin writing his stories for the magazine, and the best of those were included by Becke in his first collection, *By Reef and Palm*.

Swept up by the wave of success, Becke left for England shortly after the *Table Talk* interview, and was there celebrated by such major literary figures as Kipling, Joseph Conrad (whose first book had appeared the same year from the same publisher) and Arthur Conan Doyle. Only Kipling, said one reviewer, equalled Becke in his command of realism. Robert Louis Stevenson had died the year *By Reef and Palm* was published, and subsequently Becke was hailed by critics as Stevenson's successor as a writer of the South Pacific region. In fact, some noted, Becke was more entitled to the crown because he had lived and travelled in that region more extensively than Stevenson.

Becke was fortunate to have begun writing at a time when stories of this region were being perceived by readers, critics and publishers as a distinct genre, incorporating elements of romance, realism, literary fiction, popular adventure, and of the robinsonade, those many stories written over the years about island castaways, colonizers and treasure-seekers based on the format of Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel, *Robinson Crusoe*. The genre's popularity in the late nineteenth century coincided with the South Pacific area's significance, not just as a place for tourists, traders and adventurers, but as an area for Australian, German, French and American colonial expansion. Yet, although he was writing within the genre of the imperial frontier adventure-romance, Becke was a realist whose stories often reveal the deterioration and collapse of that romance, of the perceived heroic colonial attitudes and ideology of imperialism. His writing exposes the sordid nature of the exploitative trade in island people and resources and the culture of violence that underlay so much of those activities. Drawing on his years of extensive experience working and living within the South Pacific region, Becke was able to bring to his fiction a sharp realistic edge that spoke of a region that was once innocent and full of beauty but which was now being overtaken by corruption and greed, white colonialism, warfare, moral decadence, decay, and even death in the form of disease introduced by the very missionaries who had come to 'save' the region. Although the popularity of the South Pacific tale genre had begun to fade by the time of his death, by then Becke had an international reputation as an author of its heyday that endured for some time afterwards.

As well as markets in England and Australia and Europe, Becke kept his eye on the populous American market that was always hungry for something new. *By Reef and Palm* was quickly published in America, where it was praised by Mark Twain, only a few months after its British release. Becke released a further four titles in 1896 after *The*

Although a myth eventually developed that Becke was arrested and tried for piracy because of that work, and Becke was as willing as anyone else to promote that story, that never happened: he was merely questioned about his possession of a small ketch for which he duly produced the correct paperwork.

Ebbing of the Tide, including two historical works co-authored with James Jeffery, and most of these were published in America shortly after their release in the UK. No wonder he complained about the pressure of writing! By 1909, some fifteen Becke titles could be found on bookshelves in America, many in stylish bound editions published by Lippincott. As well as his writing for Australian publications such as The Bulletin, Sydney Evening News and Town and Country Magazine, and for English magazines such as Pall Mall Magazine and the Illustrated London News, many of his articles also appeared in American newspapers such as The New York Times and journals such as Cassell's Magazine. Becke quickly became equally as popular in America as he was back home in Australia and in England, particularly after the New York Times published a review of By Reef and Palm in January, 1895, that hailed Becke as "a great man," from the pages of whose book "there shines, clear, though faint, the light of genius." Soon, he was the best-known Australian author of that time in America, so highly regarded that Bookman claimed in 1899 that it was enough to just announce a new book by Becke because reviewing it was superfluous. These reviews and comments confirmed his authority as a writer of the South Pacific region, culminating in his invitation in 1901 by Putnam's in London to write the introduction to their new edition of Herman Melville's Moby Dick.

However, by 1906 Becke's writing was suffering from comparison to his more successful competitors, such as Joseph Conrad, and from changes in literary and thematic taste. It is also quite possible that Becke, often pressed for money, had flooded his market with too much material, not all of which was of equal quality, and stories once seen as fresh and original now seemed conventional and old-fashioned in the light of a new century. Nevertheless, Becke's work remained popular for many years after his death, enough that between 1924 and 1926, Lippincott in collaboration with Unwin and Thomas Allen of Toronto produced a series of uniform editions of Becke's work, including some titles not previously published.

On the morning of February 18, 1913, after battling cancer and the effects of tropical illnesses for some time, Becke was found dead in the York Hotel in Sydney, seated at his desk with the pages of a story on which he had been working in front of him. After some money was raised by friends, he was buried on a high point in the Waverly Cemetery that looks out across the Pacific that he loved. Now, Becke's wide-ranging body of work is being re-appraised for its ethnographic and historic value, along with its significance in the Australian literary canon, as he becomes recognised as one of the great writers of the tropical island imaginary. During his lifetime, Becke was witness to an extraordinary cultural transition within the South Pacific region that was all too often tragic, violent, and exploitative in sharp contrast to the beauty of the islands, the people, and the sea around them. There will never be another South Pacific like it, and there will never be another writer of that time and place like Louis Becke.



"There will never be another South Pacific like it and there will never be another writer of that time and place like Louis Becke."

TREASURER DAVID BAWDEN'S CONNECTION WITH LOUIS

The first school report I ever received was from Corrimal East Primary: "David would do better if he didn't daydream out the window all the time"! Anyway, that daydreaming developed into an adventurous spirit after watching James A Michener's TV shows, Adventures in Paradise with Adam Troy sailing his schooner Tiki 111 around the Pacific Islands. Villains, beachcombers, maidens, it had the lot! So, in the early 1970s whilst working for Elders as a Stock & Station Agent in Nyngan in NSW, I found an advertisement looking for young men to take on a six year contract with the Department of External Affairs to become Patrol Officers in the Territory of Papua & New Guinea. Several months later I found myself daydreaming again – at Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands of PNG. During my eight years there working as a "Kiap" (PNG Pidgin for Patrol Officer), I met a guy who used to specialise in English Literature. He told me about Louis Becke, how he was born in Port Macquarie and about his books. This interested me enough to track down Becke's first book "By Reef and Palm".

After leaving PNG in the late 70s and moving to Port Macquarie, my collector DNA kicked in and I went on to collect all of Becke's books. I always harboured a desire to promote his short stories on the east coast in the local high schools.....perhaps this time is getting closer!

Collecting the books was an interesting project. No email then or Internet- just letters and brochures from book sellers around the world. It was made all the more difficult in the early days from the remote and isolated areas of the PNG Highlands. I completed the collection in the early 1990s. I felt a closeness to Becke and his stories especially ones relating to his early days around Port Macquarie before his time in the Pacific Islands.

Becke was a mate to Henry Lawson with whom I also have a cord of association. Lawson lived for a time in Mudgee only about 2kms away from where I grew up and lived on our family farm. Lawson wrote two poems/stories that caught my attention. One is called "The Days that We went Swimming"- where Lawson writes of Farmer Kurtz. (This is my mother's family who came out from Germany and reportedly introduced Chardonnay grapes to Australia via their vineyards at Mudgee.)

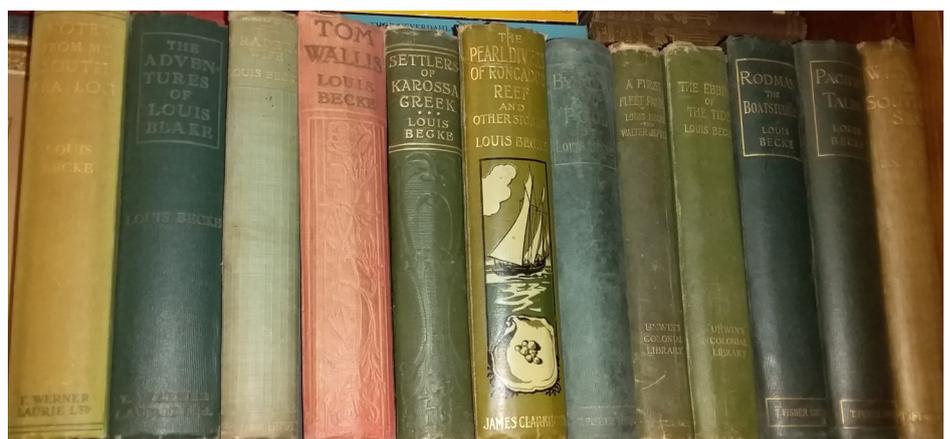
The other Lawson connection was his story, "Mount Buckaroo". Our farm ran onto Mount Buckaroo, and I spent a lot of my youth hunting and exploring the mountain - Slim Dusty also sings a poem about it. Lawson also wrote a poem for Becke after he died in 1913.

I always thought I was alone in my appreciation of Becke. Even after living in Port Macquarie these past 40 years, there is a street named after Becke and nothing else!! Louis Becke, in his day, was an international author, it IS strange that no one seems to know anything about him. So, my desire is to promote Becke's short stories to the local high schools.....perhaps this time is getting closer!

Hopefully the Louis Becke Society will change that! Thank you for joining again to help achieve our goals and welcome to our new members. A reminder that our membership runs from June to June each year. Attached you will find a Membership form to send on to prospective newcomers.

David Bawden

"...my collector DNA kicked in and I went on to collect all of Becke's books."



THE LOUIS BECKE SOCIETY (PORT MACQUARIE) INC

A NOT FOR PROFIT COMMUNITY PROJECT

To foster a greater recognition and understanding of the life and writing of the “adventurous” Australian author LOUIS BECKE, born Port Macquarie 1855 and died in 1913 in Sydney. Recognized internationally within his lifetime, he writes mainly about his 20 or so years travelling in the Pacific during the 1870’s-90’s as well as historical accounts of Colonial Australia.

Louis Becke wrote six books altogether in collaboration with Walter James Jefferey.

Due to this writing load, he spent six months staying at the Royal Hotel in Port Macquarie in 1895 to write two of these books.

A First Fleet Family was published in April 1896 and *The Mystery of the Laughlin Islands* was published in June 1896. He also wrote *Pacific Tales* which was published in the same year. This gave Becke the funds to travel to Europe.

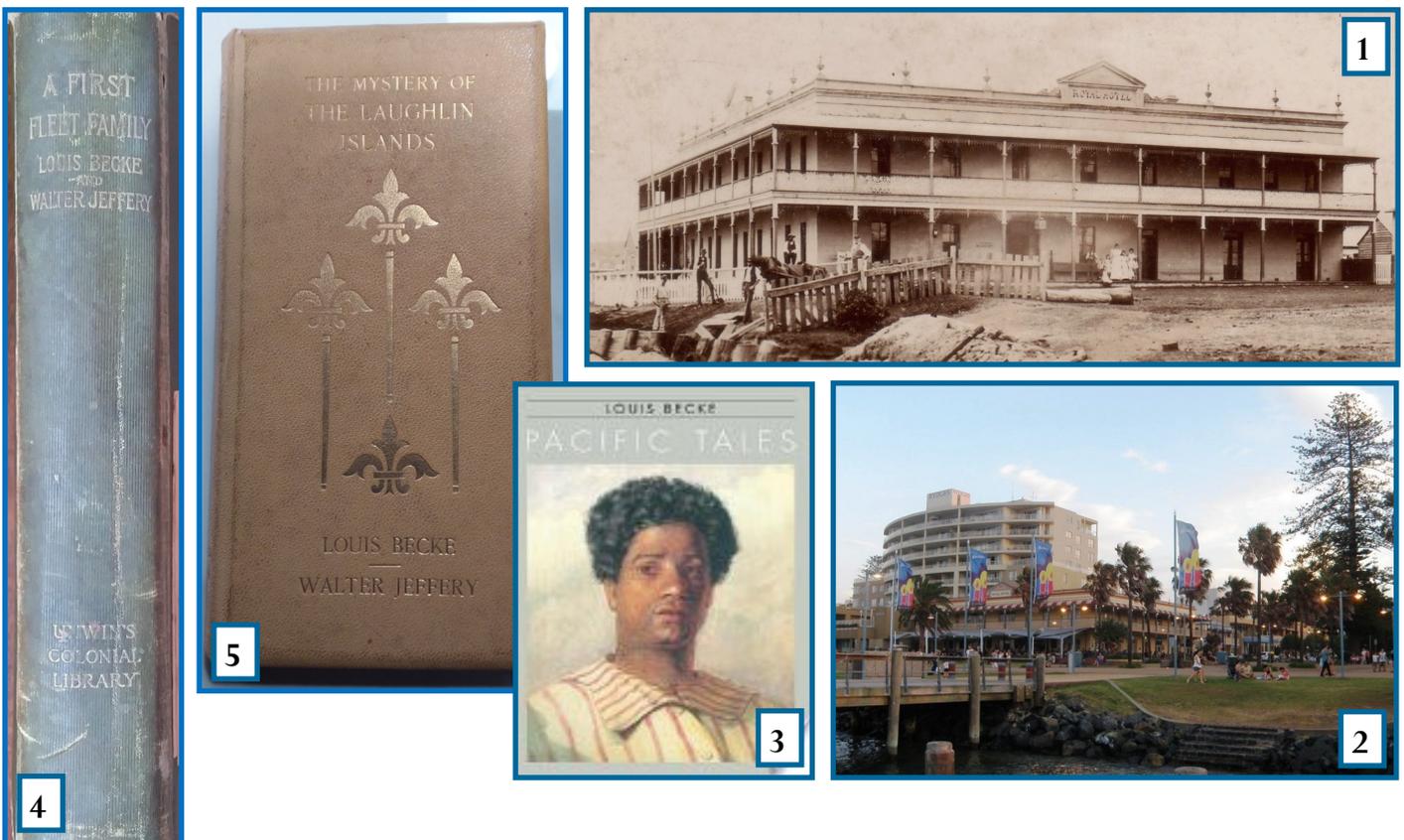


Photo credits (clockwise): 1—Photo of *Royal Hotel* circa 1890, courtesy Port Historical Museum and David Martin; 2—current photo of the *Royal Hotel* courtesy Allegra Marshall; 3—cover of *Pacific Tales* courtesy of Anna Underwood; 4 & 5—cover of *A First Fleet Family* courtesy Allegra Marshall and *The Mystery of the Laughlin Islands* courtesy David Bawden.

PORT MACQUARIE CELEBRATES!

From 2018 to 2021 Port Macquarie is commemorating the town's milestone period in the region's history.

It recognizes two key dates in Port Macquarie's early European history, the year John Oxley and his team of explorers surveyed the region for European settlement (1818) and the year Port was settled by the British as a penal settlement (1821).

David Martin has a book to celebrate the last 200 years. It comes highly recommended and takes the reader on a tour of the coastal settlement of Port Macquarie with photo comparisons of the past and present. To purchase a copy, David can be contacted on portmacquarie200@gmail.com

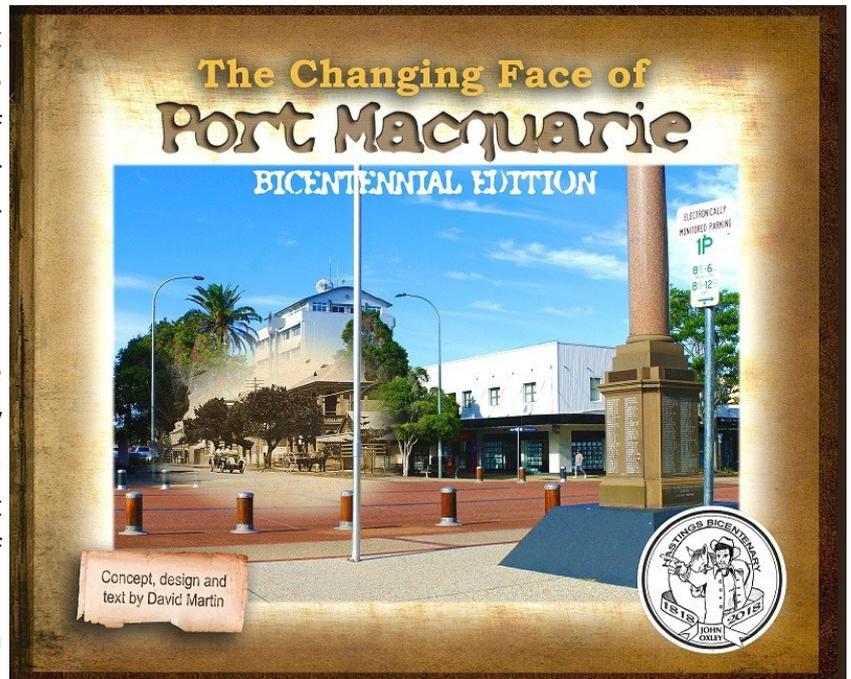


Photo of Changing Face of Port Macquarie

FUTURE NEWSLETTERS!

- Highlighting Allegra Marshall - discoverer of the Becke grave at Waverley in the mid 80's
- Becke's burial place and his grave restoration project at Waverley
- Anna Underwood - descendant of Louis's brother Cecil Aubrey
- Alrema, one of Becke's daughters - a champion female surfer
- Becke's sister Frances Emily marrying Pasquale Torzillo (famous harpist from Italy)
- Places where Becke lived in Sydney
- Louis Becke South Sea Artefacts at Powerhouse Museum now the Museum of Applied Arts Museum

For future events in regards to Bicentennial Celebrations in Port Macquarie in 2021, check this website for updates: <https://www.pmhc.nsw.gov.au/Community-Culture/Arts-Culture-and-Heritage/Port-Macquarie-Hastings-Bicentenary-2021>

The Louis Becke Society needs more members to be able to commence various short and long term projects. We would really appreciate it if our existing members could please recruit some new members!

Please contact David Bawden. dbawden77@gmail.com

ALWAYS AN INTEREST IN LOUIS BECKE

The article by Linley Rogers published in the Port News in 1968 shows that there was always an interest in Louis Becke. Louis was firm friends with Alfred Edward Pountney, the founder of the newspaper which was first printed in 1882.

• TO THE EDITOR

LOCAL MAN PRAISES LOUIS BECKE

Port Macquarie News, Tuesday, Jan. 23, 1968

Sir — I was very interested to read the letter (P.M. "News", 4/1/68), by Mr. W. Thomas regarding Louis Becke. I also am surprised that his books have not been reprinted or adapted for film production.

It seems that literary critics have ignored or depreciated Louis Becke's works but I am in accord with the views expressed in the Pacific Island Monthly, Oct. 1956 i.e.: "The literary world may find their Pacific through the pages of Melville or Stevenson; but in an atoll trader's home or the cabin of a copra schooner, the only island book one will likely find is an obviously much-read Becke."

Surely this is the testimonial that really counts.

Returning to Australia in about 1931 after spending a couple of years in a then lovely little backwater in Fiji, I paused to look in a bookshop window in Adelaide. My eye was caught by the titles of two books — "Pacific Tales" and "By Reef and Palm" by Louis Becke.

Then I did not know who Louis Becke was but I purchased "Pacific Tales".

The next day I was back to buy the remaining book. So impressed was I by the fidelity of island atmosphere and the understanding of the people by the author.

Such sureness of touch could only have been acquired by someone who had lived with the people, learnt their language and

customs, knew their thinking and had also lived persona grata with many of the colourful white characters of the period.

Now I feel fortunate, having collected over volumes by Louis Becke including about eight first editions and one or two autographed copies. I do not aspire to any literary qualifications but have most well known works by Stevenson, Melville, Jack London and Conrad — all so much acclaimed.

However to my mind Lewis Becke made a clear place for himself as a storyteller of life in the Pacific, which he knew from end to end as no other author ever has, in a period of change from reckless and desperate lawlessness to that of established law and order.

Port Macquarie should be very proud to claim him as a son who achieved no mean place in Pacific literature, in spite of the critics and I think it would be very fitting for a memorial to be designed to perpetuate his memory.

Mr. Thomas may be interested in a copy of a paper entitled "Louis Becke — a prelude to Biography" read before the Australian Society of Book Collectors by J. W. Earnshaw. This includes a tribute in verse by Henry Lawson.

Yours faithfully,
LINLEY W. ROGERS,
18 Mort St.,
Port Macquarie.

Louis Becke was a friend of "News" founder

With interest being currently expressed in the writings of Louis Becke it is worthy of note that he and the late A. E. Pountney, founder of the Port Macquarie "News" were firm friends.

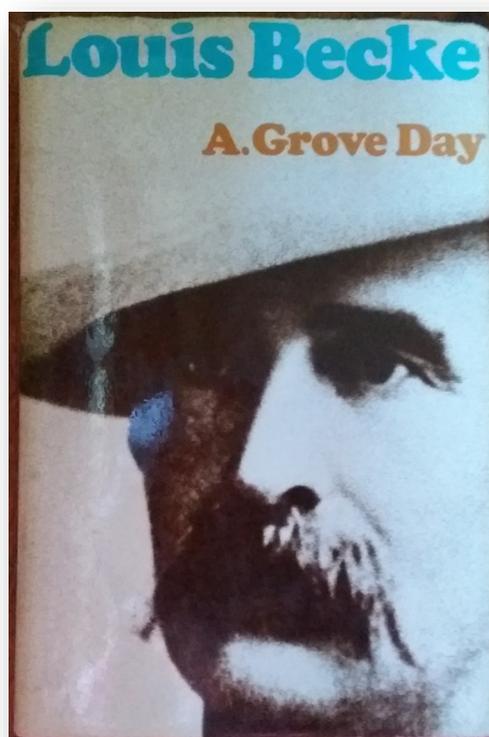


Image of Louis Becke by A. Grove Day [Twayne Publishers. NY 1966] courtesy Allegra Marshall.

This Newsletter has been prepared and edited by Allegra Marshall & Anna Underwood and kindly typeset by Gregory Ross, (President of the Friends of Waverley Cemetery; Waverley Cemetery is where Louis Becke is buried).

Louis Becke has many readers in Australia and around the world. His books are very collectable items. For general enquiries, please contact Allegra Marshall on legropeoz@hotmail.com or Anna Underwood on anna.underwood@bigpond.com