

ADJUSTMENT: A Nissen hut at Gepps Cross in 1963, the woolsheds at Rosewater and the Glenelg Hostel shop. Pictures: Migration Museum photographic collection, courtesy Heather McCooke and Barbara Reis.

Waiting rooms for a new life

Life in SA's migrant hostels after World War II was a mixed experience, writes Jill Pengelley

POST-WAR migrant life in hostels is explored in an exhibition that opens at Adelaide's Migration Museum on Saturday.

Senior curator Catherine Manning says that after World War II, hundreds of thousands of migrants passed through South Australia's migrant hostels. These were at Rosewater, Finsbury/Pennington, Woodside, Gepps Cross, Elder Park, Smithfield, Gawler, Glenelg, Mallala, Whyalla, Woodville and Semaphore.

"If you were a displaced person or a migrant on an assisted package scheme, you more than likely went through a hostel," Ms Manning says.

"The shortest would be one night, but we've found records of people who stayed at least five years. That wasn't meant to happen but it did."

A housing shortage and a

lack of building materials made it difficult at times to move new arrivals through the hostels.

Ms Manning says the exhibition used photographs and oral and written histories provided by migrants.

At the Rosewater hostel, previously old woolsheds, former residents told of a baby bitten by a rat in the night. It had come up through the gaps in the woolshed floor.

While most were happy to be making a new start in Australia, many complained about the bland food and communal living arrangements. They had to share bathrooms and a dining room and were not allowed to cook for themselves.

"A lot of people have strong memories about the food," Ms Manning says.

"Some of the people from Europe were used to making more interesting food."



STARTING OVER: Jean Lamb, right, and friend at the Gepps Cross Hostel, circa 1952. Picture: Migration Museum photographic collection, courtesy James Lamb



TRANSITION: An immigration hostel bedroom (c. 1948).

Replica on show

THE Hostel Stories exhibition, which runs until October next year, is the product of an ongoing research partnership between the University of Adelaide and the Migration Museum.

Included in the display will be a replica corrugated Nissen hut, similar to those used at many of the hostel sites.

The Migration Museum, at 82 Kintore Ave, City is open 10am to 5pm weekdays and 1pm to 5pm weekends.

A hostel resident's diary of a journey

CHRISTIAN Roth recorded in his diary his family's journey from Germany and their settlement in Adelaide.

While Christian lived at Glenelg, he visited his family, housed at Woodside, at weekends. Eventually his family was able to join him at Glenelg.

Christian was overwhelmingly positive about Australia - except for the food served at the hostels.

Daughter Heidi Brasse (formerly Roth) has translated a few portions.

Wednesday, March 21, 1956

[After leaving Bonegilla via Melbourne by train]

At 8.30am we stopped in Balhannah. The women and children had to leave the train here, and they were picked up by bus to be taken to the Woodside Holding Centre. We men, including the

wives of the men who went to [work for] the Railway, continued on by train. At half past nine we arrived at Adelaide Railway Station.

Here, those of us who had been offered work by private companies were picked up by a gentleman from the Employment Office. Four of us were sent to the one company; a man from the Employment Office took us there by car and subsequently to the Glenelg Hostel. As far as we could tell from the car, it seems like a nice city.

Saturday, March 24, 1956

I did my first 4 hours of overtime today, paid at an extra rate of 50 per cent. In the evening we're going to Woodside by bus to our loved ones. But how are they accommodated? There is no comparison with us in our hostel: food that you could throw to the pigs and the beds

squeaked like mad. The countryside here, though, is really rather beautiful.

Saturday, April 7, 1956

We have been in Adelaide, or Woodside, for three weeks now. Work is still the same - cleaning corrugated iron.

The pay hasn't changed much either - currently £13.4.6 gross. Deduct tax and the hostel costs and there's not much left. The bus to work costs 10/- (per week), to Woodside there and back at the weekend 9/6 plus the bus from the city to the hostel 2/4, then there's nothing to save.

Well, it's only the beginning. Once my English language ability has improved, things will get better. I hope to earn more as of next week.

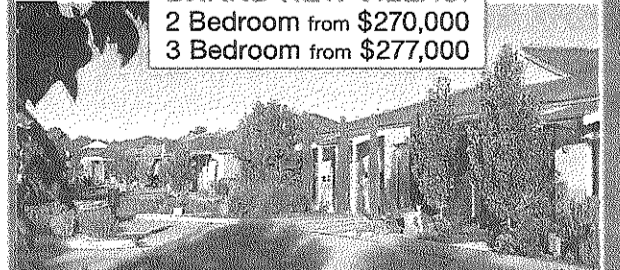
From Monday I'll be working as a sheet metal worker. I go to English lessons twice during the week.

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