Barossa leader's legacy of goodwill

Franz (Frank) Otto Rothe
Community leader
Born: October 29, 1908; Barossa Valley
Died: February 8, 2005; Tanunda

FRANK Rothe was a Barossa Valley man who devoted most of his 96 years to his community. His influence was behind many improvements and innovations which Barossa people now take for granted.

He had the ideas and he got them up and running.

In the 1940s, he saw that a home was needed for older people, particularly unmarried daughters whose family home was lost to them when their parents died; also for the elderly who could no longer cope on their own.

He put his idea into action and the Tanunda Lutheran Home was opened in 1952, the first aged-care facility in the state. He was inaugural honorary administrator and, for 27 years, secretary/treasurer of this now flourishing community institution. He became a resident himself in 2001.

Frank's parents were living with paternal grandparents when he was born in their farm homestead in a small, German-speaking community. Thus, as he began to talk, it was in German, reinforced at the German school when he was old enough to walk the 50km there.

He never forgot his first language or its culture. Out of school, he helped on the farm with the dairy cows, pigs, bees, poultry, fruit orchard and vines, continuing full-time when he left school in late 1921.

In 1924, he was sent to Immanuel College in North Adelaide, but stayed for only a few months before going to work for his uncle, Max Riedel, as a law clerk in the office of Heuzenroeder & Heuzenroeder in Tanunda. Included in his duties was secretarial work for the local newspaper, *The Barossa News*, where he later became a director and eventually chairman until the paper was sold in the 1980s. It is now *The Barossa and Light Herald.* Frank stayed with Heuzenroeders for 50 years. Then he ran his own successful real estate business until finally retiring at age 79.

Frank had many interests: gardening, cars, fishing on the River Murray, but his greatest passion was for music and singing. His mother said she could hear him before she saw him because he was always singing.

In 1927, he joined the Tanunda Liedertafel as its youngest member, and later was secretary/treasurer for 26 years. The singers and their families enjoyed regular evenings of music, food and wine so much that Frank suggested opening them up to the public once a year for a special Liedertafel evening. He was given the task of developing the idea and the first Kaffee Abend in 1948 was an instant success. Now held on the third Friday evening in November, it is an important annual event in the Barossa calendar.

Frank was made a life member of the Liedertafel and was honoured by the Deutscher Sangerbund (German Singing Society) for his 70 years' service to the Liedertafel.

He appreciated the strong musical tradition of the Barossa – and, to nurture it, created endowments in perpetuity for annual music scholarships for Faith Lutheran Secondary School and the Tanunda Town Band.

He was enterprising even when at school when he and a friend successfully bred and traded French long-furred rabbits. He had an unerring flair for business which he brought to his many community activities. They included being chairman of the Barossa Mutual Benefit Society, the first MBS in Australia.

He also served as a justice of the peace and on the committees of many community organisations. He was a member of the Lutheran Church and held positions at state level and in his own church of St John's in Tanunda.

For seven years, Frank courted Melva Heinrich, of Bute, marrying her in 1937. They had two children, Ian and Carmen, and shared a happy and full life with them and the grandchildren. After 60 years together, Melva died in 1997.

Frank's interest and love for the Barossa never waned and he is remembered by Barossa people with appreciation, affection and respect.

Carl Lindner