

Carlton Community History Group

Carlton Chronicles

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Dancing at Louisville

In the last years of the nineteenth century, ballroom dancing was very popular, and in Carlton there were several studios where dancing was taught. One of these was in a hall on the corner of Amess and MacPherson Streets, North Carlton, built in 1890 by 25 year old Louis Alfred Soumprou, who modestly named it *Louisville*. Louis had been born on the goldfields near Creswick where his family ran a store for many years. In 1875 his father Louis Bernard Soumprou moved to the city and opened a wine store in Lygon Street, Carlton, on the site now occupied by Jimmy Watson's wine bar. No doubt Louis junior learned the ropes of that trade but his interests lay elsewhere, in teaching ballroom dancing.

He first offered his services in Rathdowne Street between Church (now Fenwick) and Freeman (now Curtain) Streets, where, he advertised, 'buses pass the door'. In October 1887 he was offering long nights on Cup Eve and the Prince of Wales' Birthday. Once he had acquired his own premises, *Louisville*, business boomed. He and his wife Ellen taught 'the tango, maxixe and all the latest dances'. During the 1890s annual balls were held at *Louisville* with up to a hundred people attending, but by 1907 this event was so popular it had moved to a larger venue in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. Remarkably, teaching sessions at the Soumprou school in North Carlton continued until 1931 when very reasonably (at the age of 67) he hung up his dancing shoes.

Louisville was now put to a very different use. At that time there was a very substantial Jewish population in North Carlton and the Hascola Talmud Torah moved in with up to two hundred children a day attending after-school Hebrew classes. By the late 1930s the sale of the building forced the school to move and the hall was then owned for many decades by the Returned Sailors Soldiers and Airmen Imperial League of Australia (later the Returned Services League of Australia). At different times tenants included a local branch of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes and, in the 1950s, Avonleigh House Receptions. Today *Louisville* houses two private dwellings and Louis' grand title on the facade is being gradually obscured by a creeper.



Mr and Mrs Soumprou demonstrating the 'Maxixe Brasilienne' (Photo: State Library Victoria).

A new name and format

In our previous edition it was announced that the format of this publication was changing. In future there would be less news and more articles on Carlton's history. Hence the name 'Newsletter' was no longer appropriate and we asked for suggestions for a new one. Several suggestions were received, but the one that appealed most, and which we have now adopted, was 'Carlton Chronicles'.

We sincerely thank the reader who sent us this suggestion

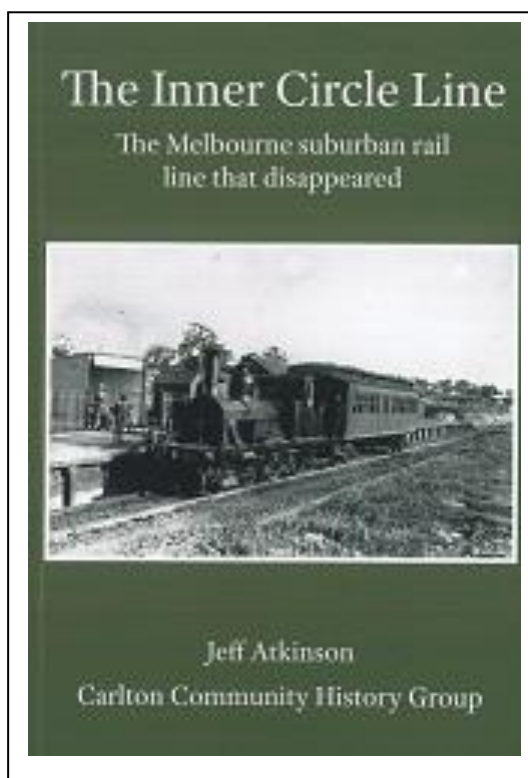
A new book from the CCHG

This book recently published by the CCHG tells the story of an ill-conceived suburban rail line that ran through the inner northern suburbs from 1888 until its final closure in the 1970s. It also tells how, after it closed, a local residents' group struggled to have the unused railway land and station building converted into facilities for community use.

Cost: \$15 (plus postage if applicable) by mail order from CCHG, or from the following retail outlets:

- Railfan Shop, 4 Churchill Street, Mont Albert.
- Train Shop, 290 Bay Street, Brighton.
- Carlton Library, 667 Rathdowne Street, North Carlton.
- Kylie's Slow Dough, 649 Rathdowne Street, North Carlton.
- Railway House, 20 Solly Avenue, Princes Hill.
- Royal Historical Society of Victoria Bookshop, 239 a'Beckett Street, City.

Note: Prices from these outlets may be higher than the \$15 stated above.



Illustrated Talks on Carlton History by Zoom Tuesday 21 June, 7.30pm

- Felice Rocca will talk on the history of Faraday Street in Carlton.
- Margaret Rich will tell the story of the distinctive Streamline Moderne flats in Jewish North Carlton.

To register for this presentation, email jeffann@bigpond.net.au and a zoom link will be sent to you.

This publication, Carlton Chronicles, is produced and distributed four times a year. If you would like to be put on the mailing list, email the Carlton Community History Group at cchg@y7mail.com or visit our website www.cchg.asn.au

Pose's Pickles

In the heyday of Jewish Carlton there were many businesses catering to the needs of newcomers. Little trace of them remains, and the sale of 512 Rathdowne Street in March 2022 breaks one of the very last links with that period of Carlton's history. The shop was the home of a deli that was known far and wide as Pose's Pickles. Like most of its neighbours the shop had had a variety of occupants, but in the mid-1930s it was taken over by Russian immigrants Nahum (Nathan) and Doba Pose, who were expanding from a rented stall at the Victoria Market. Unlike many of their customers, they were not new arrivals having arrived in 1912.



The logo that appeared on Pose's Pickles.

Nathan and Doba Pose's grandson Harry, interviewed for *The Australian Jewish News* in 1990, told a story about their early days in Australia when Nathan was working in the tyre-making industry. Left without work in the Depression, and in Harry's words 'leftish in his politics', Nathan wanted to return to Russia, but could not gain entry. He was advised to wait in London while a brother still in Russia exerted some influence. But the advice he received from Russia was quite unambiguous. Don't come back!

After Nathan died in 1939, his son Sol ran the business with his mother. They had the space to produce their delicacies and, as the number of Jews in the area increased in the 1940s and 1950s, business boomed. In 1948 the Poses bought the shop. They diversified: pickled herrings, whole *wurst* hanging over doorways, candles imported from Israel and a huge array of biscuits. In an interview with author Julie Meadows, Harry gave a vivid description of life behind the counter of the deli, and especially the frantic preparations for Pesach (Passover) each year. Deliveries were made in a T Model Ford home-converted to a wagon, or even by bicycle. Of course, most of what was sold was destined for the family dinner table, but local children often called in for a snack of *wurst* and a cucumber. After their comparatively long stay in Australia, the Poses were also known to be a valuable source of advice and support to newcomers.



Rae Pose behind the counter in the shop in Rathdowne St.
(Photo: Jewish Museum of Australia).

By the 1970s the Jewish population of Carlton had declined to the point where a retail grocery was no longer viable, but Sol and his wife Rae continued to commute from Caulfield to produce vinegar and pickles for the wholesale market. Behind the shop, extensive outbuildings remind us that in the past many local businesses housed factory and retail outlet under one roof.

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In the 1990 interview, Harry, 'third generation pickle maker', who had just joined the business after a career in a very different field, outlined his plans for expansion interstate. But by the end of that decade the business had been sold. Today the shop and almost ninety years of stories and memories is no longer Pose's. But the sign above the veranda.

A Notable Carlton Personality – Nino Borsari

Borsari's Corner at the intersection of Lygon and Grattan Streets, with its distinctive neon sign of a man on a racing cycle, is a well-known landmark in Carlton. But who was Borsari?

Nino Borsari was a lad from a poor background in Italy, who at age 21 became a gold medal winning cyclist for Italy at the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles, winning a gold medal in the 4,000-metre team pursuit race. Two years later, in 1934, he was invited to Australia to compete in a 1000 mile cycle road race that was part of the celebrations marking the centenary of the founding of Melbourne. Nino delighted the Australian crowds with his happy disposition and won the alpine stage of the race from Mt Buffalo to Omeo.

In March 1940 he was back in Australia racing. But when Mussolini's Italy entered the war in June that year he found himself unable to return home. As an Italian citizen he was officially an 'enemy alien' and was lucky not to be interned. When interviewed by security officers they reported that he had 'no political leanings' and 'appears to take no interest in anything but sport'. Although he was not interned, he was forbidden from racing. Instead he opened a bicycle store on the corner of Lygon and Grattan Streets. Later that year he married Fanny Cester at the Sacred Heart Church in Carlton. She was an Italian-born opera student who had migrated to Melbourne in 1939.

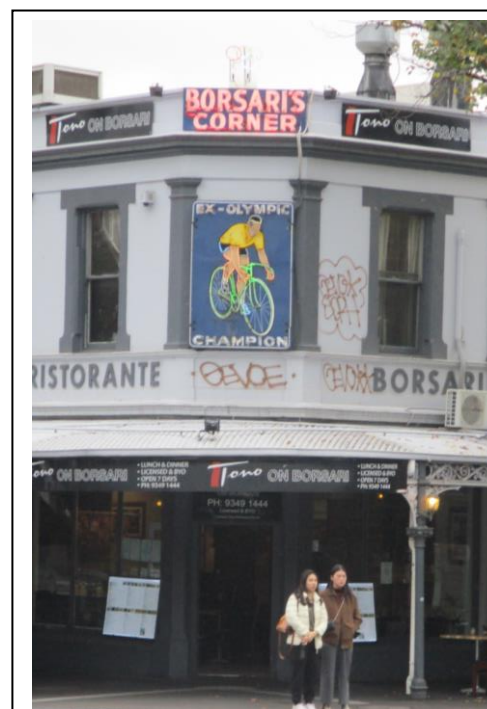
When the war ended, he and Fanny had grown so used to life in Australia that they did not go home to Italy. Instead in 1946 they both became naturalized Australian citizens. Sometime in the late 1940s the prominent neon sign featuring Nino on a racing bike was placed on the bicycle shop, and the location became known as Borsari's Corner.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the business expanded to become Borsari's Emporium selling a variety of goods to the newly arrived Italian migrants who were then coming to Carlton in large numbers. These included household items, giftware, jewellery, and Italian magazines and newspapers. By 1961 the business had expanded sufficiently for them to establish a separate bicycle and sports store in the building next door.

Nino Borsari was a prominent businessman and citizen in Melbourne. In 1962 he received an Italian knighthood for his support of new immigrants in Melbourne. He was a founding member of Juventus soccer club and president of the Australian Boxing Federation. In 1988 his wife Fanny died, and eight years later he himself passed away. But his name lives on in Carlton, on the landmark corner with its distinctive neon sign.



Nino Borsari as a young racing cyclist. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons).



Borsari's Corner today. (Photo: J. Atkinson).

Did you know

Madeline Street

The northern section of Swanston Street, from Victoria Street to Melbourne University, was originally known as Madeline Street. It was renamed as an extension of Swanston Street in the city in 1925. But like any change, it took a while to implement. Properties along the full length of the street had to be re-numbered and street signs changed. Businesses or residences that used personalised stationery headed off to the printers, while the postman and delivery drivers had to navigate a new system of street numbers running into the 800s. The old name 'Madeline Street' was still in use nine years later, in 1934. In that year, an abandoned baby girl was found outside the Women's Hospital in Carlton. She was named 'Madeline Carlton', after the location where she was found, and was committed by the Children's Court to the care of Berry Street Foundling Home until her future was decided. A few months later *The Herald* newspaper reported that 'Madeline' had been adopted out. In this case, it was quite appropriate to use the old street name, as 'Swanston' was hardly the choice for a baby girl.

Three imposing houses

On the southern side of Pigdon Street in Princes Hill there are three houses that were constructed in the Federation era (1899-1900) but in the style of an earlier era, the boom era of the 1870s and 1880s. They were built by Joseph Hince. Originally from London, he had come out to Melbourne as a young man of 22 in 1858. Despite many setbacks, including the early death of his first wife and five of his ten children dying in childhood, he finally achieved prosperity. He had owned all the land on the south side of Pigdon Street between Arnold Street and what is now called Bagung Lane for some five years before completing three double-storey houses at 305, 307 and 309 in 1890. Number 305 became the family home and remained so for some 70 years. But the depression of the 1890s

hit builders hard and the eastern section of the land remained vacant until 1900 when he chose to build three unusually wide single-storey houses on a site which would normally have accommodated five. The photo right shows one of these. These three imposing houses carried the names of Orient Line ships that regularly brought migrants to Melbourne, *Ormuz*, *Orotava* and *Oruba*. Joseph Hince died in 1918 aged 82 but more than a century on these three houses,



Orotava, 301 Pigdon Street, Princes Hill. (Photo: J. Atkinson)

originally identical and even today varying only in minor detail, are listed on the Victorian Heritage database and are a well-known local landmark.

First Chinese Australian admitted to the bar

William Ah Ket, the first Chinese Australian admitted to practise as a barrister and solicitor at the Supreme Court of Victoria, once lived in Carlton. William was born in country Victoria in 1876 and educated at Wangaratta High School. He was also home-schooled by a Chinese tutor and, with his language proficiency in both English and Chinese, he was engaged as a court interpreter while he was still in his teens. He studied law at Melbourne University and was awarded the Supreme Court prize of £40 in 1902. In 1903 William advertised his intention to apply for admission to practise as a barrister and solicitor at the Supreme Court of Victoria. His address at the time was 16 Grattan Street,

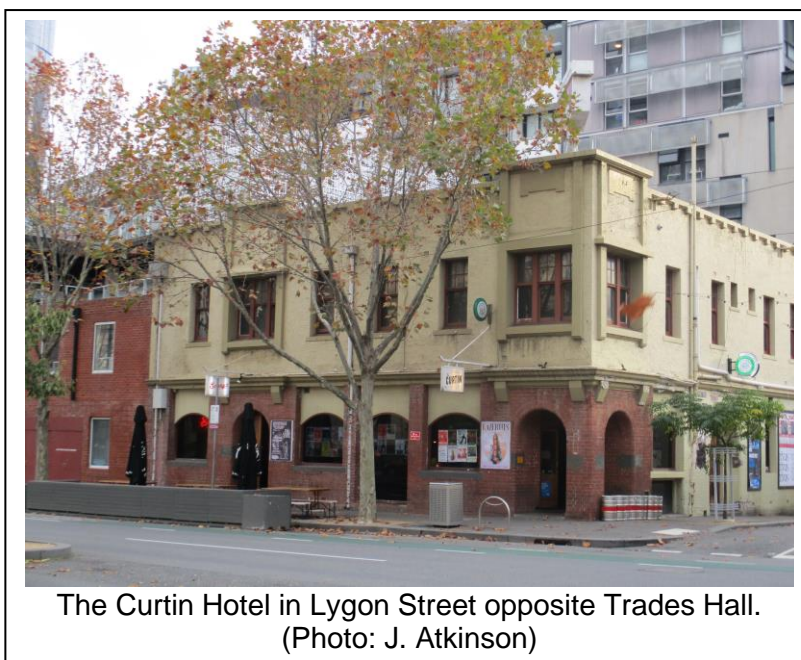
part of Bayview Terrace, and electoral rolls also record him living in Drummond Street, Carlton. He later lived in Brunswick, Caulfield and Malvern. William married Gertrude Bullock at Kew Methodist Church in 1912 and they had four children. William Ah Ket died in 1936, aged 60 years. He was the grandfather of renowned classical guitarist John Williams. William Ah Ket was well respected in legal circles and the general community. He opposed discriminatory laws against the Chinese in Australia and worked for the alleviation of all unreasonable conditions imposed under the umbrella of the White Australia Policy.

Heritage and the Community – the Curtin Hotel

This is an edited version of an article by Jeremy Hill that first appeared in CRA Newsflash, the newsletter of the Carlton Residents Association in March 2022.

Known earlier as the Lygon Hotel and then the John Curtin Hotel, it is now the Curtin Hotel (the Curtin) but may soon be a pile of rubble following the entitled decision by its owner to sell. Yet another multistorey building is a probable future.

The Curtin is hardly an architectural gem but its heritage should be its saving. Until now it is unlikely to have been considered as having importance as a place or object. Lying in the shadow of the Trades Hall, its ordinary appearance belies the conversations, tears and laughter of some of the greats of national politics, the labour movement and the Labor Party. Named after



Australia's outstanding war-time leader, John Curtin who was described by Gough Whitlam in glowing terms:

If ever a man was born to lead this nation into a time of peace and in the paths of peace it was John Curtin. If ever a man was born to apply his vision of what Australia at peace could be, his vision of what Australia at peace should become in his time, he was John Curtin.

On a wall of the pub is a photograph of three Victorian leaders (Bracks, Shorten and Andrews) having a beer in the Curtin, around a photograph of one-time habitué Bob Hawke, who gave away drink for Prime Ministership. This association of leading politicians endows the Curtin with characteristics of heritage which determine the importance of the place to the history and development of Carlton, Victoria and Australia.

Heritage is what the past has conceded to us, what we value in the present and what we choose to preserve for future generations. It adds character and distinctiveness to an area and enhances a community's sense of place. Heritage is a valuable property in the empowerment of local communities and encourages social and cultural life. New business and community development is motivated by an historical environment and links to the past. The Curtin is not just a pub. Its heritage is a light on the past and a beacon to the future. Carlton should encourage regeneration while identifying with colourful accounts of its local history. The argument is not just about heritage but the public benefit it affords to place, community and people.