

Carlton Community History Group

NEWSLETTER

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Dairies and milk distribution in Carlton

In the early twentieth century, long before the days of household refrigerators and glass milk bottles, there were dairies all over Melbourne. Carried in large cans by horse-drawn carts, milk was delivered to the customer's door and ladled into tin billies. Alternatively, many consumers walked the short distance to their nearest dairy, a task often given to children. Dairy produce was sold in specialist shops, usually situated in shopping strips on main roads like Rathdowne, Lygon and Nicholson Streets. By 1930, not long before legislative restrictions were introduced, Sands & McDougall's directory records seven dairies in North Carlton and two more in Princes Hill. In Carlton, by comparison, further from parkland suitable for grazing dairy cows, there were only three. Several of the North Carlton dairies, notably Condons' at the southern end of Amess Street and the Pahoffs' in Macpherson Street, occupied big buildings, the nature of their business obvious to any passer-by. In most of the others, milk was sold from the back doors or back gates of ordinary houses, perhaps with a discreet sign on the corner of a lane saying 'To the Dairy'.



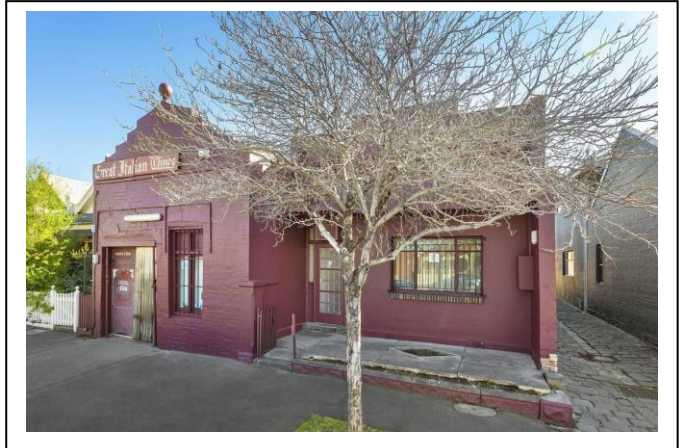
Buildings that used to be a dairy at 183 MacPherson Street, North Carlton. There was a dairy established here in 1901. In 1926 it was taken over by the Pahoff family who ran it until it ceased trading in 1967. The dairy buildings and the Victorian house attached to them have in recent years been renovated. (Photo: Carlton Community History Group)

While some of the milk sold in Carlton's dairies came from dairy farms in the country, brought down to Melbourne by wagon or train in large cans, some of it was produced locally. We know for example that there were dairy cows in Princes Park right up until the early 20th century. In 1881 a letter to the editor of *The Argus* newspaper complained about the state of Princes Park saying that: 'It is perfectly impassable from the constant travelling of the milch cows into and from the park'. In 1895 an article in *The Argus* described Princes Park as 'a barren waste occupied only by a few cows' and as 'merely a cow feeding establishment'.



A typical Carlton dairy

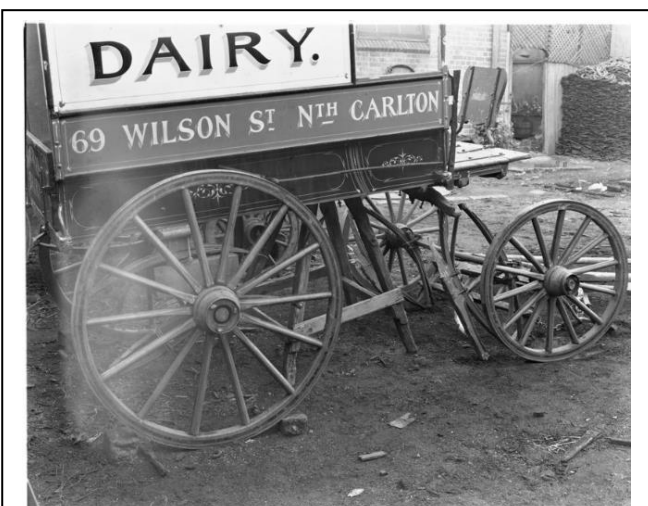
Amess Street, North Carlton, has always been almost totally residential, but the double-fronted building at numbers 21 to 23 is an exception (photo below). As early as 1897 it appears in Sands & McDougall's business directory as Condon's woodyard, conveniently situated with lanes beside and behind it. Within a few years it had become Condon's dairy, and remained so for almost fifty years. It frequently features in memoirs. Jack Ward, who as a child in the 1940s lived just round the corner in Fenwick Street, helped out at Condon's after school by rolling the milk cans up the bluestone lane. He was paid in milk. After 1947 the dairy changed its name several times. For a while it was called the Princes Park Dairy, named after the park where local cows were sent to graze, returning down Amess Street and entering number 21 through its big front doors. They were milked at the back of the building where, when the building was sold in 2019, traces of the dairy could still be seen. The two last rooms had concrete floors and a slope to facilitate washing down.



Many a slip twixt the cow and the lip

The practice of watering down milk or adding other substances to boost the taste or volume has been around for as long as there have been dairies. Quality control of milk sold or delivered in Carlton rested with the local authority, the Melbourne City Council. In March 1875 the Council's Health Officer tested 50 samples of milk as supplied to the public and bought in the city. He reported to the Council's Health Committee that only 19 of the 50 samples were pure milk, 7 were of poor quality being deficient in cream, and the remaining 24 were adulterated. The adulterated samples contained between 10 and 35 percent added water. Salt was found in several, animal fat (most likely mutton fat) in two, and a good deal of dirty sediment in five. The *Medical Record*, as reported by *The Age* of 8 May 1875, was of the opinion that: 'It is not the water added that makes the milk injurious, but the state of fermentation it is in from constantly mixing the unsold milk with the new'. The issue of introducing contaminants with the added water was apparently not considered at the time.

Who was responsible for the adulterated milk – the dairy owner or the man who delivered milk to the door? Ultimately, the dairy owner was responsible, but the milk deliverer could also be prosecuted. The milkmen came up with all sorts of excuses. A common one was that he ran out of milk before completing his rounds and had to buy some from another milkman, which must have been adulterated. A method of milk adulteration that escaped prosecution was the addition of ice to extend the shelf life. In 1890, J. Booth of Lygon Street, Carlton, and one of his employees were charged with selling milk adulterated with five percent water. Booth successfully argued that the ice was added at the request of his customers who wanted cold milk. The case was dismissed by the magistrate,



An old milk delivery cart. We know that there was a dairy operating at 69 Wilson Street, Princes Hill, in 1900. In 1940 it was known as the Somerlea Dairy. However by 1960 it was out of business. (Photo: State Library of Vic)

Mr. Rappiport, who concluded that: 'It was far better that people should be able to obtain a glass of iced milk than that they should be compelled to drink beer or brandy.'

When Frank Davidson appeared in court in February 1899 to answer a charge of adulteration of milk, he denied adding water and claimed to be acting under the instructions of his employer, Frederick Morgan of Carlton, in supplying inferior quality 'cold milk' to the poorer customers. Morgan, whose dairy was at 43 Faraday Street, Carlton, put the blame back onto his employee, who he believed was stealing milk and making up the volume with water. Morgan was found guilty of a technical breach of the Health Act and fined.

Local History News

New exhibition at the RHSV – 'The Swamp Vanishes'

Before European settlers arrived in the Port Phillip district, a large wetland that lay between the Yarra River and the Moonee Ponds Creek sustained the indigenous people and the cultural traditions of the Kulin nation. It was known by the new settlers as Batman's Swamp, later West Melbourne Swamp. In less than 20 years, that important wetland had been despoiled by European settlers, who turned into a receptacle for sewerage and rubbish, and shot large numbers of birds. While the wetland had initially been described in terms of beauty, within a few short years the swamp was noisome and reviled, and talk began of draining and reclamation. By the end of the century significant engineering works had changed the very shape of the land. A feature of the land which had sustained aboriginal people for millennia became a refuge for the down-and-out during the 1930s depression. 'Reclamation' works continued, and the wetland is now represented by the Dynon Road Tidal Canal and a small Wildlife Reserve. A new exhibition at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, 239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne, traces how this significant wetland vanished from sight.

RHSV plans History Writers Group and History Book Club

In 2020, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV) is planning to run a History Writers' Group, which will meet monthly at the RHSV premises in A'Beckett Street. Those with writing projects in mind will meet to peer-edit and share feedback with other writers of history. Writing projects can be short or long, academic history, family history, memoir, community history, or even historical fiction. There will be occasional guest speakers who will cover subjects like research, use of images, publishing possibilities and professional editing. The first meeting will be on Tuesday 25 February, from 11.30am till 1.00pm, and the group will then meet on every fourth Thursday of the month.

The RHSV also plans to form a History Book Club for members in 2020. The time and days on which it meets will be shaped by the responses of those interested. It will focus on Victorian history but there may be little deviations. The club will be moderated at first, but it is planned that it will become self-sufficient. And, like the History Writers Group, there will also be occasional author visits. The group size will be capped.

If you would like to be involved in either of these initiatives, please email Rosemary Cameron at rosemary.cameron@historyvictoria.org.au

**Interested in local history?
Researching your family history?
Or the history of your house?**

Then join others with similar interests in the Carlton Community History Group.

Our aim is to help preserve our past for the future.

Email: cchg@y7mail.com Website: www.cchg.asn.au

Bushfires and preservation

In the recent bushfire crisis in Victoria, many historical societies lost important local history records and resources. For example, the Mallacoota and District Historical Society lost their Genoa Schoolhouse Museum. Some in the fire affected areas were faced with not only trying to save their own homes and communities but also trying to save vital local history. In a recent edition of the newsletter of the Federation of Australian Historical Societies its President, Don Garden, reminded us of the need for historical societies to protect the important historical resources that they have in their charge against such eventualities:

One of the principal roles of historical societies has been, and is, the collection and preservation of items that together tell the stories of our history and heritage. As the FAHS recent flyer says, 'Societies have collected and preserved millions of items which form a significant part of Australia's cultural heritage and the Distributed National Collection. Increasingly their images, documents and artefacts are being digitised and made available online, often through the Commonwealth-funded National Library of Australia Trove platform.' The drive to digitise appears even more urgent as we face the uncertainties of climate change, fires, floods and other potential disasters that threaten the physical security of our collections. I am sure that most of us are aware of examples of societies whose collections have been lost or damaged in the last decade. Digitising collections so that there is a second and more widely accessible format, is the future. It also reduces wear and tear on fragile physical materials which can then be stored securely and handled infrequently. Of course, digitisation has its traps, too. The risks involved in rapidly changing formats of digital media mean that digital collections need careful curation to ensure that their format is not superseded and that they remain accessible.

The clip-clop of hooves in the night

Noted author Arnold Zable, who grew up in Carlton, remembers what it was like when milk in bottles was delivered to the house in the middle of the night, by a milkman with a horse-drawn cart. The following is an excerpt from his book 'Scraps of Heaven':

Late at night, weaving in and out of my dreams, would come the neighing of a horse, the metallic clip clop of hooves, the rattling and tinkling of bottles, the quick rhythmic steps of a man on the run, interrupted by the creaking of the front gate flung wide open; and from my half-sleep I could hear him, the milkman, depositing the half-dozen or so bottles by the front door. It was a comforting sound, a familiar sound. It had about it a sense of orderliness and regularity. It emanated goodwill and seemed to whisper: 'All is well in the world. While you sleep, little children, you are being looked after'. I never once saw the face of the milkman. He always remained a creature of the



(Photo: Newcastle Herald)

night, of the pre-dawn hours. All I knew of him was the sound of his deliveries, the footsteps, the final swing of the gate shut as he retreated, on the run, back to the milk cart. Then, like phantoms, the horses moved on, the neighing subsided, the jingling vanished into the distance. And in the early morning sun, as if to prove it was not merely a dream, there stood the bottles, gleaming white, neatly arranged by the doormat, twinkling with dew.

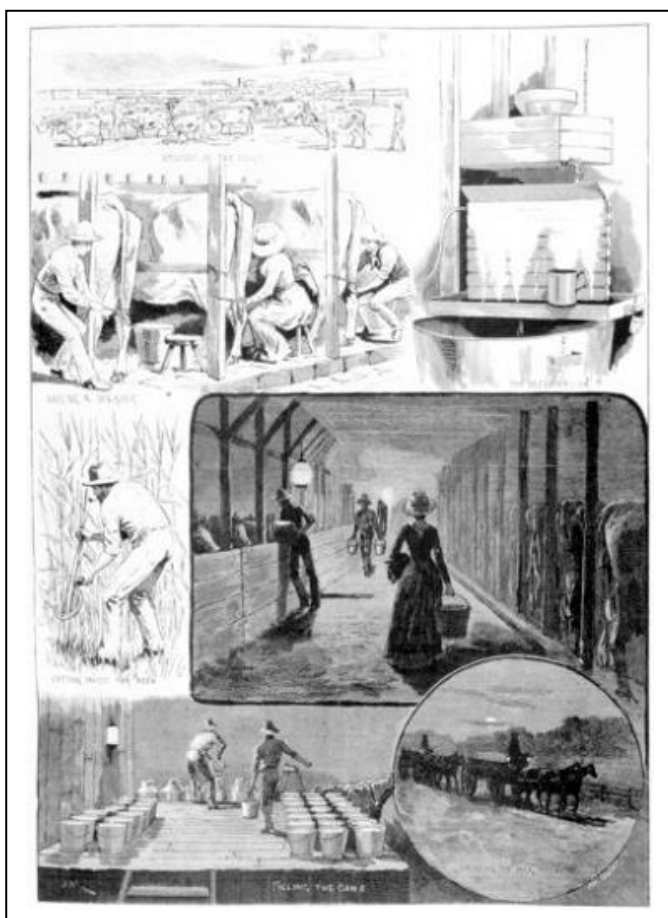
One of the largest dairy businesses in Victoria

For nearly fifty years, from the 1870s until the 1920s, the building that still stands on the northern corner of Elgin and Swanston (formerly Madeleine) Streets was the home of Wyndham Baker, who ran a dairy from his back yard. Public access to the dairy was from a laneway at the back called Elgin Place. Wyndham Baker was part of a family that for many years were among the biggest milk producers and distributors in Melbourne.

Initially the milk he sold in Carlton came from his brother's dairy farms at Somerton, 20 kilometres north of Melbourne, and Strathallen near Preston. This family dairy farming business had begun in 1863 with just four cows, but by 1882 they were milking a total of 540 cows each day on the two farms, making it 'the largest milk producing business in the metropolitan area' (*Australasian*, 10 June 1882). The milk produced on these farms went to two family outlets in Melbourne, one in Albert Park and Wyndham's dairy in Carlton. In 1882 the Carlton dairy had 15 delivery carts distributing milk in Carlton, Richmond and Brunswick.

Wyndham Baker was on several occasions charged with supplying milk that had been adulterated with water. He thought that one of his employees, Melville Farnie, was the culprit, and in March 1892, with the help of Sergeant Paterson of the North Carlton police station, he laid a trap for Farnie and caught him in the act of adding water from a tap on the corner of Nicholson and Lee Streets. Farnie was fined £3, in default one month's imprisonment.

In the early 1890s Wyndham Baker acquired his own dairy farm, at Donnybrook, just north of the other family farm at Somerton. This 2,300 acre dairy farm was described in a newspaper report as 'probably the largest of its kind in Victoria' (*Weekly Times*, 25 March 1911). Wyndham ran the farm at the same time as his outlet in Carlton. Other members of the Baker family ran dairies at various times in Station Street and Drummond Street in Carlton, and Delbridge Street in North Fitzroy.



Wyndham Baker died in August 1928 at his home on the corner of Swanston and Elgin Streets. He was described in the death notices as a retired dairyman of Carlton and Donnybrook. Both the dairy farm and the Carlton property were sold by the family soon after his death. The site of the dairy farm at Donnybrook is now on the Victorian Heritage Register as a site that contains 'remnants of a dairy that illustrates rural life in the Donnybrook locality from the early 1890s to the 1910s'.

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Trades Hall restored

One of the most historic buildings in Carlton, Trades Hall on the corner of Lygon and Victoria Streets, has been extensively restored and refurbished over the last eighteen months. The building is the oldest and the largest trades hall in Australia, and is a prominent Carlton landmark that serves as a hub for union organisation. Designed by noted Melbourne architects Joseph Reed and Frederick Barnes in the 1870s, its construction was begun in 1874 and not completed until the 1920s.

Work on the recent restoration commenced in April 2018, led by architect and heritage consultant Lovell Chen, and funded by the State Government of Victoria under the Living Heritage Grants Program. The project

focused on conservation works and refurbishing of the main public spaces inside the 3,800 square metre heritage-listed building. This included the specialist restoration of several of the main interior rooms, including the Old Council Chamber and the New and Old Ballrooms.



The Old Council Chamber (photo above) was opened in 1884, and its original 1880s decorative scheme included significant portraits and elaborate wall treatments by prominent decorators of the period, C.S. Paterson Brothers.

The New Council Chamber, which had been extensively modified in the 1960s, has had its ugly 1960s wood panelling removed, and some of the original 19th century murals and honour boards, which had been hidden for decades behind the wood panelling, restored as far as possible to their original state. The Chamber has also been returned to its original orientation, resulting in the creation

of a brand new 300 seat auditorium. The photo at right, taken at the official opening ceremony in December 2019, shows the New Council Chamber in its restored form. At the top of the end wall can be seen some of the restored 19th century murals and honour boards. The new first floor gallery that runs around three sides of the Chamber houses a series of showcases that make up a new mini museum dedicated to the history of the labour movement in Victoria.



As well as continuing its previous roles, the restored and refurbished Trades Hall building will become the new base for Melbourne's Fringe Festival, housing its staff offices and providing a year-round licensed venue dedicated to supporting Melbourne's independent arts sector.