

Carlton Community History Group

Carlton Chronicles

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When Carlton was a slum

Carlton's desirability as a place to live has varied dramatically over the years, from highly desirable, to slum, and back to desirable. But for most of the twentieth century it was regarded as a slum. When it was first developed in the mid-nineteenth century, Carlton was regarded as a pleasant place to live, away from the hustle and bustle of the town but still convenient to it, and on higher ground than neighbouring Fitzroy and Collingwood. It attracted mainly middle-class artisans and well-off merchants. This was the period, in the 1870s and 1880s, when the great Victorian houses that we see today were constructed, built on the money from gold. Even the more modest terrace houses provided good quality accommodation for a largely middle-class population.

But in the 1890s Victoria experienced a severe economic depression, and this affected Carlton quite badly. Merchants and land speculators went bankrupt, and artisans and others found themselves out of work. Many of the grand homes were converted into boarding houses. Overcrowding became a problem and housing conditions and the health situation deteriorated badly. Carlton acquired an image of an area of unacceptable poverty, hardship and depravity. In 1890 the Melbourne City Council's Health Officer reported that south Carlton had become one of the most densely populated part of the city and a refuge for the poorest of the poor. 'It is now, in a special sense, the district of narrow lanes and crowded courts, and of old dilapidated houses, occupied by persons having little regard for cleanliness'. Half a century later, the situation had changed little. In 1937 a report of the Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board described North Carlton in similar terms:



(Photo: F. Oswald Barnett Collection, State Library of Victoria)

Hidden behind wide spacious streets there are slum pockets which are hot-beds of depravity and disease. In many houses, dilapidation of structure is such that bugs and other vermin cannot be eradicated. These houses are infected to such an extent as to be unfit for human habitation.

In the late 1930s a series of photographs of Carlton's slums was taken by social reformer Frederick Oswald Barnett as part of his campaign to raise awareness of inner-city poverty. His fight for improved housing conditions eventually led to the formation of the Housing Commission of Victoria, of which he was Vice-Chairman for many years. The photo on the previous page is one of his. It shows the back-yard of a house in Palmerston Street in the late 1930s. The only source of water available to this housewife is the tap over the gully trap, and her only washing facility the hand basin on the box. The house is heated with firewood and a piece of canvas has been erected to try and keep the wood pile dry.

This particular house escaped the large-scale demolition of slum areas by the Housing Commission in the 1960s, and in more recent years it has been rebuilt. Its street façade has been retained, but behind it is now a modern architect designed house. This is emblematic of what has happened to Carlton as a suburb in recent decades. From a slum, it has once again become a highly desirable inner-suburban place to live.

Historical Walks in Carlton in April and May

These walks are run by the Princes Hill Community Centre in conjunction with the Carlton Community History Group. To register, contact Princes Hill Community Centre: www.princeshill.org.au Email: enquiries@princeshill.org.au Phone: 9387 7740.

Saturday 22 April 2023, 10am till 12 noon – Princes Hill

This tour takes you around an interesting and historic part of Carlton to hear its history and the history of iconic places such as Princes Park and the Carlton Football Ground.

Saturday 29 April 2023, 10am till 12 noon – Melbourne General Cemetery (Southern Part)

Melbourne General Cemetery is the oldest and most historic of our existing cemeteries. On this tour you will learn about its history, and about some of the interesting or notorious characters who are buried there.

Saturday 6 May 2023, 10am till 12 noon – Jewish and Italian Carlton

This tour takes you through the streets of Carlton to learn something of the two communities that, in the early and mid-twentieth century, made it one of Australia's first truly multi-cultural suburbs. You will visit the sites of synagogues, churches and iconic businesses, and hear stories of crimes and disputes, of those who prospered and those who struggled.

Friday 12 May 2023, 3.00 till 5.00pm – Tour of Trades Hall

Walk in the footsteps of John Curtin, Zeldia D'Aprano, Bob Hawke and other giants of labour history, and hear the stories of significant historic events that occurred in this building.

Books on Jewish Carlton

A number of excellent books have been written about Jewish Carlton, but among the best are those by Julie Meadows. In 2011 she published *A Stetl in Ek Velt* (A Village at the End of the Earth) that contained the stories of 54 Jewish migrants who settled in Carlton between 1925 and 1945. In 2014, she published a companion volume, *Fun Himlen Blayene tsu Bloye Teg* (From Leaden Skies to Blue Days) that featured the stories of migrants who came in the second wave, from 1945 to 1975, and settled in Carlton. These books were written with some personal knowledge as Julie had grown up in Carlton. She was two when her Polish family settled there in 1937 and a teenager when they left in 1948. (The second book was published by, and is available from, the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisations at Monash University).

Remembering Zaida: A story of love and loss

By Rose Raymen

My parents were born in the town of Kalisz, Poland/Russia and married in Danzig (now Gdansk) where my sister Jetka (Judy) was born. In December 1938, they fled Danzig and sought refuge in Shanghai, China, where my two brothers and I were born. Later we moved to Israel. Judy was the first in the family to migrate from Israel, in 1955, followed by the rest of the family in 1956. We lived in Lygon Street, Carlton, later relocating to a rented house at 48 Pigdon Street, North Carlton. In the early 1960s, my parents purchased their first home here, at 77 Pigdon Street, and my brother Danny and I attended Princes Hill Primary School.

Sara Pacanowski, lived at 577 Canning Street, which crossed Pigdon Street, and we met shortly after moving to the suburb. I was nine at the time and Sara was seven. I was also introduced to her parents, Gabriel and Fela, her younger sister Gita, and *Zaida* her paternal grandfather.

The post-war years saw enormous changes to Melbourne. The arrival of a million immigrants over a twenty-year period, beginning with displaced persons from war-ravaged Europe. Carlton was often where they settled, being close to the business hub of the town and the inner-city Queen Victoria Market. Many immigrants embraced the opportunity to run a small business: greengrocers, delicatessens and milk bars or corner stores. In the 1950s and 60s, Carlton's Jewish community was declining and moving out to the leafy suburbs of St Kilda, Elwood, Brighton and Caulfield. By the mid-1970s few Jews were left in Carlton.

Sara's *Zaida* was a small slender man with a long white beard and would spend his days in his room sitting in front of a bay window watching the world go by. It was common for children passing the house to yell out 'Look there's Father Christmas'. Sara, Gita and I often played hopscotch on the footpath outside the home, and *Zaida* would keep an eye on us. I never knew my grandparents so considered this gentle sweet man to be my 'adopted' grandfather and he always treated me

as one of the family. There was a milk bar on the corner of Pigdon and Canning Streets, and we would occasionally ask *Zaida* if he could spare some change for Wagon Wheels or icy poles.

On the morning of Friday 21 December 1962, Fela told me that *Zaida* had passed away. As a 15-year-old female, I was discouraged from attending any services, and *Zaida*'s death was never mentioned again. When I next saw Sara, she told me that her parents were selling the house and relocating to Caulfield. I wanted to let her know how much I loved her grandfather and that my heart was breaking, but I never got the chance. I would later discover that Sara's grandfather's given name was Alter and that he was 71 at the time of his death. Alter Pacanowski is buried at the Adass Israel Cemetery in Springvale.



Sara (left) and Rose at 48 Pigdon Street
(Photo: Rose Raymen)

The opera star from Carlton

When Florence Fawaz was a student at Carlton North (Lee Street) Primary School, her teachers and classmates had no inkling that she would become the world famous opera singer Florence Austral, who was renowned for performing in demanding Wagnerian roles.

She was born Florence Mary Wilson in 1892. But when she was still quite young her father died, and in 1903 her mother married John Michael Fawaz, a business man of Syrian descent and a devout Methodist. Florence adopted her stepfather's surname Fawaz, and later changed her performing name to 'Florence Austral'. Her remarkable vocal ability was noticed when she was still a child performing as Santa Claus in a Carlton Methodist Sunday school concert. She went on to win singing competitions and studied for several years in Melbourne. To further her studies and develop her performance skills, Florence left Australia in 1919 for New York and London.

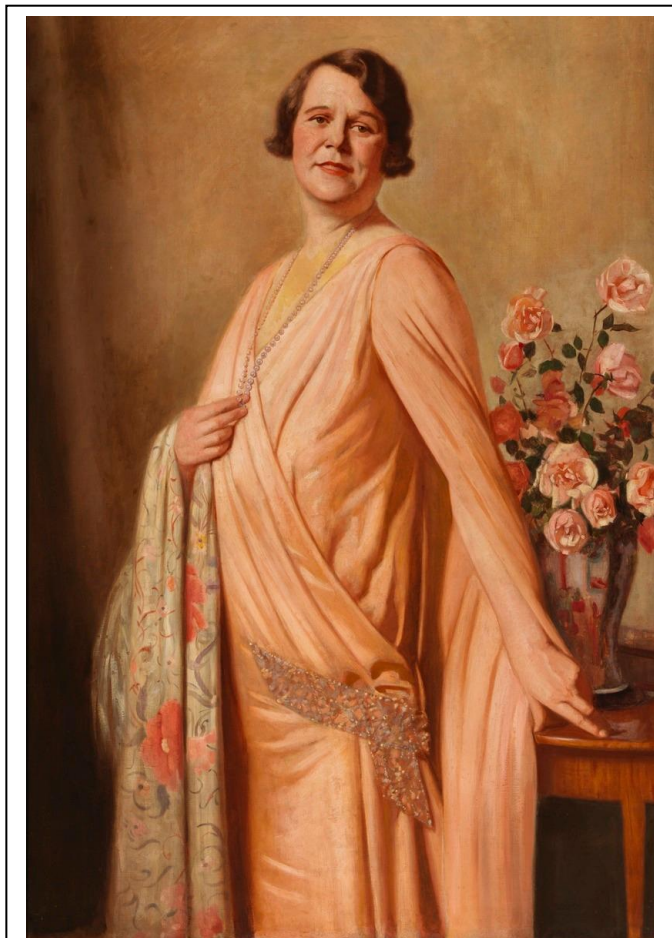
Despite a few setbacks and disappointments, she soon rose to prominence as an opera singer in London. Her triumph at Covent Garden in 1923 launched her on an international career. In a letter that year to her parents back home in Drummond Street, North Carlton, she told of her successes in London and her recognition by some notable figures:

Dame Nellie Melba also is very charming to me. She came to hear me at Covent Garden on Boxing night. She had a box, and Dame Clara Butt also had a box. At the interval Melba came to the back of the stage and asked me all about myself, and congratulated me on my success. She advised me to go to Paris.

In February 1923 The Age newspaper published excerpts from this letter, and the staff of her former school in Lee Street responded by writing to congratulate her on her achievement.

Around this time Florence became involved with John Amadio, a New Zealand-born flautist with whom she had performed in Australia. Amadio was a married man who had also left Australia in 1919, leaving behind his wife Leonora and two daughters. In 1924 Leonora filed for divorce, alleging that her husband had behaved improperly with Florence and that they were living together 'as man and wife'. The following year the case was heard in the Supreme Court of Victoria and divorce was granted, with Leonora retaining custody of the two children. Florence Austral and John Amadio wasted no time in formalising their relationship. A few months later they married in a private ceremony at the Hampstead Registry Office in London in December 1925.

Florence Austral's stellar career continued into the 1930s. But by now she was beginning to show early signs of illness that was later diagnosed as multiple sclerosis. By the 1940s, she and her husband John Amadio had gone their separate ways. Florence returned to Australia in 1946 and took up teaching positions in Melbourne and Newcastle (NSW). She died in Newcastle in 1968, aged 76 years.



A portrait of Florence Austral by Howard Barron, circa 1930 (Source: National Portrait Gallery, Canberra)

Bear escapes from the Zoo?

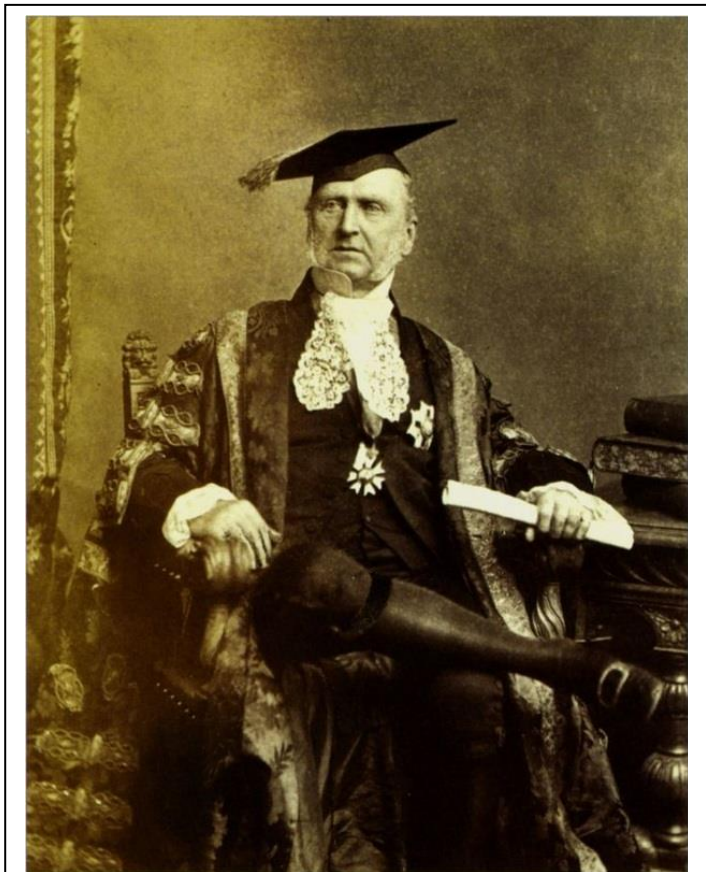
In March 1923, the overseer of the Zoological Gardens in Royal Park received phone calls in the middle of the night from people telling him that a large brown bear had escaped and was now threatening people in the backyard of a private house near the Zoo. He was advised by one of the callers that the animal was quite fierce and that he should come armed. However the zoo-keeper quickly realised that it was unlikely that a bear could escape from the Zoo, and that the culprit was more likely to be a wondering wombat named Charley. A check of Charley's cage showed that this was in fact the case – Charley was missing. A few minutes later two of the keepers, armed with a large sack, went off looking for him. He was found entrenched in a corner of the washhouse of a nearby house. Being large and very heavy, it took some effort to dislodge him from his stronghold, but eventually the keepers got him into the sack and took him back to the Zoo. The excited onlookers who from the security of their upstairs windows thought that they had been witnessing the capture of a wild bear, retired once more to their slumbers

Carlton Personality – Sir Redmond Barry

Sir Redmond Barry was a prominent judge in colonial Victoria who lived in a palatial house in Rathdowne Street, Carlton.

Born in Ireland in 1813 into a well-to-do Anglo-Irish family, Barry was admitted to the Irish Bar as a lawyer in 1838. The following year he migrated to Melbourne, the principal town in the District of Port Phillip. As a well-qualified and educated man in a town that lacked such people, he found himself appointed to important public offices. When the District of Port Phillip became the Colony of Victoria in 1851, Barry was appointed to be its first Solicitor-General. In 1852, he became a judge of the bench of the new Supreme Court of Victoria. Later he served as acting Chief Justice and Administrator of the government.

Barry devoted great energy to developing Melbourne's institutions. Among his most significant achievements were the founding of the University of Melbourne and the State Library of Victoria, two institutions that he hoped would encourage the cultural advancement of the general population. He was the inaugural Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, serving from 1853 until his death in 1880, and President of the Trustees of the State Library.



Sir Redmond Barry as Chancellor of the University of Melbourne. (Photo: Thomas Chuck, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria).

In 1856 he had a house built in Carlton, on the corner of Rathdowne and Pelham Streets. This was a palatial building with fourteen rooms plus stables and coach-house set in spacious grounds. He lived there for the next twenty years.

Barry never married, but had four children by his mistress Louisa Bridget Barrow whom, judging by their correspondence, he obviously loved dearly. She was quite a fiery character and they used to have terrible rows. She never lived with him in the big house on Rathdowne Street. Initially she lived

in Flinders Street, and after 1860 in a house that Barry bought for her in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. When they first met, she was a married woman with a daughter. But then the affair with Barry started and she eventually had four children by him, all of whom Barry acknowledged and supported. Even after Louisa became a widow in 1859, Barry did not marry her. This may have been because, although they were both Irish, she was working class and Catholic while he was upper class and Protestant.

As a judge, Barry presided over some of Australia's well-known early trials, including that of the Eureka Stockade rebels in 1855 and Ned Kelly in 1880. When he sentenced Kelly to death by hanging, Barry uttered the customary words 'May God have mercy on your soul'. According to the transcripts, Kelly replied 'I will go a little further than that, and say

I will see you there when I go'. On 23 November 1880, only twelve days after Kelly's execution, Sir Redmond Barry died, from what the doctors described as 'congestion of the lungs and a carbuncle in the neck'. His grave is in the Melbourne General Cemetery, and buried with him are his mistress Louisa Barrow and several of their children.



Sir Redmond Barry's house in the 1880s. (Photo: Royal Children's Hospital Archives)

Some time before his death, Barry had sold the house in Rathdowne Street and moved elsewhere. When he died in 1880 he was living in East Melbourne. In 1876 the property in Rathdowne Street became the Hospital for Sick Children, and his former house became 'the old surgical ward' of the hospital. New buildings were erected around it and eventually it was demolished in 1912.

Stationmaster who wrote on Aboriginal culture

Anthony Gladstone Bolam, former stationmaster on the Trans-Australian Railway who towards the end of his life lived in Barkly Street, Carlton, was the author of a book on the Aboriginal culture of the Nullarbor Plain. Born in Bendigo in 1893 he worked initially on the Victorian Railways before transferring to the Commonwealth Railways in 1915. Posted to Ooldea Siding, a small settlement on the eastern edge of the Nullarbor Plain, in 1918, he worked initially as a porter but in 1920 was promoted to station master. During his time at Ooldea he met anthropologist Daisy Bates and developed an interest in Aboriginal culture and natural history. Bolam was a keen photographer and collector of local plant and animal specimens. In 1923 he published a book *The Trans-Australian Wonderland*, which documented the Aboriginal culture, fauna, flora and geology of the Nullarbor Plain. Anthony Bolam retired from the Commonwealth Railways in 1942 and took up residence at his mother Isabella Snowden's house at 58 Barkly Street, Carlton. Isabella died in 1945 and ownership of the house passed to her son. He died in April 1966, aged 72 years.

Membership fee for 2023 are now due

Help finance the preservation of Carlton's history by becoming a financial member of the Carlton Community History Group. The membership fee is \$20 for a calendar year.

It can be paid by bank transfer into the CCHG's Commonwealth Bank account.

BSB: 06 3014 Account number: 10198637

Name of account: Carlton Community History Group