

Carlton Community History Group

# Carlton Chronicles

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## The Inner Circle Rail Line

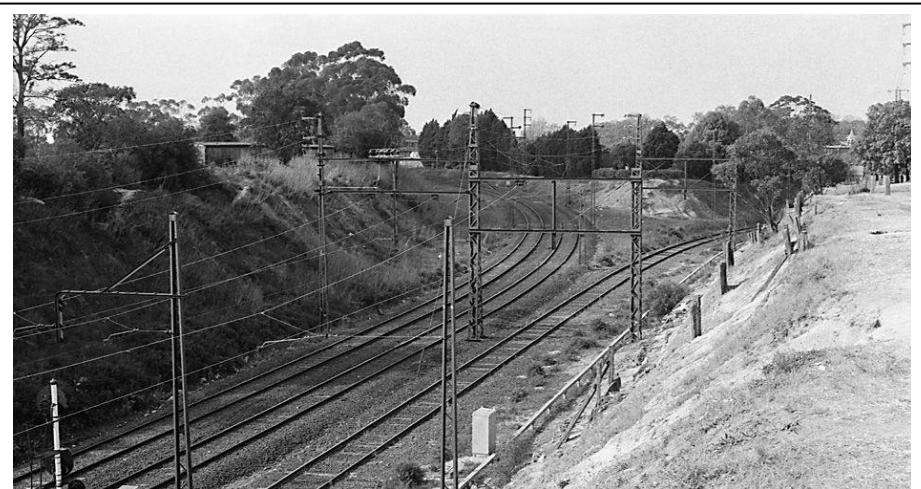
The suburban steam train in the photo below has just left Royal Park station next to the Zoo and is heading north away from the city. But instead of heading for Jewell station, as a modern train would

(line on the right), it is branching off onto a line running to the left. This is the Inner Circle Line that ran across the northern edge of North Carlton and North Fitzroy. The train is heading for a cutting that will take it under The Avenue and Royal Parade, then up a slope to a crossing at Bowen Crescent in Princes Hill and on to the North Carlton station (which is now the North Carlton Railway Neighbourhood House). The Inner Circle Line has long since disappeared, and the entrance to cutting has been blocked off.



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The second photo shows the same junction where trains branched off onto the Inner Circle Line, but this time looking from the direction of Royal Park station towards Jewell. The line can be seen branching off in the top right of the photo. In the early 1920s, the steam suburban trains were replaced by electric



(Photo: John Thompson)

trains as the suburban rail system was electrified. Gantries can be seen in this photo that carried the overhead wires from which the electric trains obtained their power. The gantries are still there, even though the rails of the branch line have long since been removed.

The Inner Circle Line operated for some eighty years, although patronage was poor due to, amongst other things, competition from the trams that ran more directly to the city down Royal Parade. The line eventually ceased operating as a passenger service in 1948, although it did continue to take freight trains up until the late 1970s. The rail tracks were then taken up and the route that the train used to follow became a linear park with a walking and cycling track.

## **Aquarium in Exhibition Building destroyed by fire**

The Exhibition Building in Carlton (now the Royal Exhibition Building) used to be much more extensive than it currently is. When originally built, there were two large wings attached to the northwest and northeast corners of the main building. From 1930 until 1953, the northeast wing housed what was then Melbourne's only public aquarium. That was until January 1953 when it was destroyed by a massive fire that almost consumed the historic Royal Exhibition Building as well.

At about 6pm on the evening of 28 January 1953, an alarm was raised by two children who saw flames at the rear of the building and ran to the night watchman calling out, 'There's a fire. The place is burning'. Firemen and members of the staff said afterwards that if the boys had not acted so quickly the whole of the historic building might have been destroyed. Fire trucks soon arrived and a large crowd began to gather. Thousands of people who were heading home after a day's work gathered to watch and to help the firemen try to control the blaze and stop it spreading to the adjacent main building. Dozens of members of the public joined in the efforts to fight the inferno, including children who scurried up ladders to deliver extinguishers to firemen on the walls of the aquarium.



(Photo: Museums Victoria).

Thousands of fish perished as red-hot sheets of corrugated galvanised iron from the roof crashed into the fish tanks. Rare tropical fish, brought to the aquarium only a few months before, were lost. The seals, which had been a big attraction at the aquarium, escaped as volunteers from the crowd coaxed the blackened creatures from the water. The terrified seals were still circling the pool long after the fire was out. All the birds including two peacocks were rescued. Firemen and volunteers dashed through choking fumes to release the terrified birds and carry them to other cages out of the danger area. One peacock escaped and was still wandering around the blackened ruins at dusk. Perhaps the most famous of the aquarium's exhibits, Ned Kelly's armour, was fortunately saved. The fire caused damage in the millions of dollars in today's terms, and the aquarium was never reopened.

## Anti-Fascist Italians and the Italian Navy

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, many in Carlton's Italian community were people who had fled Mussolini's fascist regime in Italy. There were in Melbourne at the time organizations dedicated to fighting fascism, including one known as *Casa d'Italia* that was headquartered in a building in Palmerston Street, Carlton. It functioned as a club where political meetings were held as well as cultural and social events. There were also pro-fascist and pro-Mussolini groups in Melbourne, and a consulate in South Melbourne that officially represented the Mussolini government.

In February 1938, an Italian naval vessel, the *Raimondo Montecuccoli*, made an official visit to Melbourne. During the visit, members of its crew came ashore to sightsee in the city. One evening, some of them visited the *Casa d'Italia* club in Carlton and were outraged to find people distributing anti-Mussolini, anti-fascist literature. A newspaper account at the time said: 'It is alleged that the sailors made several assaults on the Club, led by a non-commissioned officer, but the men returned to their ship without serious mischief occurring' (Record, 26 February 1938). In the days that followed the ship, which was berthed in Port Melbourne, was opened for the public to come on board. Among the visitors was an Italian taxi-driver from Carlton. The same newspaper report said: 'When he went aboard the cruiser, allegedly as a visitor, he was, he said, severely beaten, on the grounds that he had been at the Club at Carlton, and had distributed anti-Fascist literature. Both these allegations were denied, and witnesses supported the denial'.

So outraged was the local Italian community at the way this man had been violently treated by the sailors that a group of several thousand descended on the pier in Port Melbourne intent on demonstrating against the ship and its crew. However they were stopped from entering the pier by a large group of mounted and foot police. The demonstrators were restricted to burning an effigy of Mussolini at some distance from the ship, and delivering speeches denouncing fascism in general and the crew of the warship in particular. Although a complaint was lodged by the injured man, the police refused to board the ship as they regarded it as officially Italian territory.

Once Italy entered the war on the German side in June 1940, Italians in Australia, both pro- and anti-fascist, became enemy aliens. They had to register, and many were interned for the duration of the war. In September 1940 the *Casa d'Italia* club was closed by the Australian authorities.

## Did you know

### Early Italian community in Carlton

One of the earliest groups of Italians to settle in Victoria were itinerant musicians from the town of Viggiano in the province of Basilicata in southern Italy. They came to the Victorian goldfields where they entertained the miners. Some remained and settled in Melbourne with their families. By the first decade of the 20th century, the Viggiano musicians had formed a close-knit village-like community in Carlton, in a small area around Argyle Square and Cardigan Street.

### Post-war migration

By the end of the Second World War, Italy's fascist government had been defeated and Mussolini was dead. But the country had been devastated by the fighting and its economic future looked bleak. As a result, many sought emigration as a way of improving their



prospects. Between 1945 and 1981, some 400,000 Italians migrated to Australia, 40 percent of them to Victoria, and a significant proportion of those to the Carlton area. It has been estimated that by 1960, there were some 7,000 persons of Italian origin living in Carlton, making up about 25 percent of the area's population.

### **Sacred Heart Church**

The Sacred Heart church, on the corner of Rathdowne and Pelham Streets in Carlton, became a major cultural centre for the Italian migrant community, and a favoured venue for Italian weddings, funerals, baptisms and confirmations. The church hall was regularly used for community dances, concerts and fundraising events. The church had a long Italian connection going right back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when in 1899 the ceiling frescos inside the church were painted by an Italian artist named A.F.D. Cavallaro. In 1938, one of the first Italian priests to arrive in Melbourne, Father Ugo Modotti, was assigned to Sacred Heart church where he would say Mass and preach in Italian.

### **Royal Blue Terrace**

About a block north of the Sacred Heart church in Rathdowne Street, Carlton, there is a group of three two-storey Victorian terrace houses known as 'Royal Blue Terrace'. Together with their neighbour 'Loch-Shin House' these are now the only surviving 1870s buildings in the block between Pelham and Grattan Streets. Royal Blue Terrace was built in 1874 for a colourful character named Walter Renny who had once been Lord Mayor of Sydney, and who seemed to have a predilection for the colour blue.

Walter Renny was a master painter and decorator, who was born in England and migrated to Sydney in 1853. He established a business in Pitt Street, Sydney, and advertised his calling by decorating his premises with blocks of blue and white. The building became known as the 'Royal Blue House' and earned its master the nickname of 'Royal Blue Renny'. Renny was



Royal Blue Terrace, Rathdowne Street, Carlton.

also active in local government and served as an alderman for the City of Sydney in the 1860s. He was elected Lord Mayor of Sydney in 1869-70. In 1874 he moved to Melbourne, and purchased land in Rathdowne Street in a prime location opposite the Carlton Gardens. The land was originally part of a government grant to the Erskine Church, on the corner of Rathdowne and Grattan Streets, and was subdivided for sale under the provisions of the State Aid to Religion Abolition Act (391/1871). On his land Renny built the three adjoining houses, and in keeping with his colour theme, named them 'Royal Blue Terrace'. Renny and his family lived in the southernmost house in the terrace and rented out the other two.

Walter Renny died in June 1878 while on an overseas trip in Europe. In the subsequent years, the ownership of Royal Blue Terrace changed several times. The terrace was eventually subdivided, and the three houses sold separately in the late 1940s. Walter Renny's legacy of Royal Blue Terrace is now well into its second century.

## Carlton Personality – Rabbi Joseph Gurewicz

One of the more colourful characters in Carlton's past was Rabbi Joseph Gurewicz, who was a prominent but controversial figure in Melbourne's Jewish community in the mid-twentieth century. Born in Vilna (in modern day Lithuania) in 1885, Rabbi Gurewicz arrived in Australia in 1932, and quickly became the spiritual head of the United Hebrew Congregations of Carlton. He was an authority on *halachic* matters (Jewish religious law), a dynamic leader and a skilled orator in Yiddish, which was the language in Jewish Carlton. He was much involved in the supervision and distribution of kosher foods (meat, wine, cheeses, biscuits, butter, sausage casings) and in settling disputes. Many of Carlton's Jewish residents at that time were stall holders at the nearby Victoria Market, and disputes often arose amongst them over small amounts of money, on which Rabbi Gurewicz would arbitrate. He lived in a house in Rathdowne Street, North Carlton, in what is now Rathdowne Village.

In 1937, Rabbi Gurewicz caused a great rift in the Jewish community in Melbourne. The Carlton-based kosher butchers Smorgon & Co, had began exporting kosher meat to the Jewish community in Palestine, then a British Mandate created by the League of Nations. Rabbi Gurewicz questioned the status of kosher supervision of the meat in a letter to the Chief Rabbinate of Tel Aviv in Palestine. The meat had been certified by Rabbi Jacob Danglow who had been appointed *Av Beth Din* (presiding Rabbi of the rabbinical court) by the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation. However Rabbi Gurewicz, who had a very different approach to *halachic* matters than Danglow, and a much deeper knowledge of them, publicly questioned his methods in the letter to Tel Aviv. As a result of Gurewicz's letter, the Chief Rabbinate in Tel Aviv issued a ban on the Australian meat and posted notices around the city quoting from Gurewicz's letter. The Melbourne *Beth Din* (rabbinical court) was understandably very offended that their authority had been questioned in this very public way.

**בעקאנטמאכונג**

מיר גיבען צו וויסן דעם פובליק אן  
 דינסטאג אין דער פרייה דעם 9 דעצעמבער 1930  
**האט זיך גיעפונט די נארט-קארלטאנער**  
**כשרה בוטשער שאפ**  
 אין 797 רעטהדאון סטריט נארט קארלטאן וועלכע איז  
 אונטער דער השגחה פון דעם בית-דין אויף מעלבארן.  
 מיר שלמה זילבערמאן שוחט ובורק אַנערקענט פון פאלעסטינער טשיף ראבינאט אונט  
 אויך פון מקלבורנער רבנים שקכט פאר אונז.  
 מיר אַראַנזשירן אויך אַ פּעקטאָרי פון גוטע סאַרטן וואַרשט גערייכערטע פלייש וכדומה.  
 פרישע פלייש טעגליך, בעסטע קוואַליטע, מעסיגע פרייוון, אַרדערס ווערן צוגישטעלט.  
 מיט אכטונג מאיר און יעקב פאלאנסקי  
 797 רעטהדאון סטריט נארט קארלטאן (2טע שאַפּ פון קינג און גאָדפריי)  
 טעלעפאן 8393 F

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**ANNOUNCEMENT**

We beg to notify the Jewish Public, that The North Carlton  
**KOSHER BUTCHER SHOP**  
 HAS BEEN OPENED  
 On Tuesday, December the 9th, 1930  
 The Shop is situated at  
**797 Rathdown St., Corner McPherson St., North Carlton.**  
 and is under the supervision of the Beth Din of Melbourne.  
 Mr. S. SILVERMAN qualified from the Chief Rabbi of Palestine and the Beth  
 Din of Melbourne is engaged as Shochet.  
 We are also arranging a Small Goods Factory. Complete Satisfaction to Custo-  
 mers is assured.

**BEST QUALITY FRESH MEAT DAILY. REASONABLE PRICES.**  
 ORDERS CALLED FOR AND DELIVERED.  
 Soliciting Your Patronage, Yours Faithfully.  
**POLONSKY BROS.,**  
 797 Rathdown Street, Corner McPherson Street (2 Doors from King and Godfree) North Carlton, N.A., Phone F 8393  
DAVID ALPERIN, Printer, 248 Devonport St., Carlton, N.E.

A few blocks further north on Rathdowne Street from Rabbi Gurewicz house was Polonsky Brothers' kosher butcher shop. This handbill announced its opening in December 1930.

The Smorgon family on the other hand were not going to let a communal dispute get in the way of a good business opportunity. In July 1937 they wrote to Rabbi Gurewicz, requesting him 'to supervise the killing and treating of all kosher meat which we are and will be exporting to Palestine and other countries of the world'.

In his later years Rabbi Gurewicz was nearly blind, and used to walk to synagogue on a Saturday on the arm of one of his sons. One observer described him as a straight-backed figure in a long black garment in the Eastern European Jewish style and a wide-brimmed black hat. He had a long grey beard that framed a face that always beamed with kindness. Rabbi Gurewicz died in 1956.

## The story of Curtain Square

Curtain Square in North Carlton was originally a quarry worked by convicts from the nearby Collingwood Stockade, from 1853 to 1866. The convicts spent their days hewing blocks of bluestone with hand tools, and in the evening, they were marched back to the stockade (now the site of North Carlton Primary School in Lee Street) to be locked up overnight. The square has had several makeovers during its lifetime. In 1876, ten years after the Stockade was closed, the land was permanently reserved, and a year later *The Argus* newspaper reported that the old quarry holes had been filled in and the planting of trees and shrubs had commenced.

The square is named in honour of John Curtain who was instrumental in having the land reserved. Curtain Street, on the northern boundary of the square, is also named after him. Born in Ireland, he arrived in Melbourne as a young man in 1854,



Curtain Square in about 1907. (Photo: City of Melbourne Art and Heritage Collection).

and by dint of hard work and a lot of charm, managed to rise through the ranks of society. He became a publican, an owner and developer of many properties in Carlton, a Melbourne City Councillor for 16 years, a member of Parliament, a director of several companies, chairman of the Licensed Victuallers Brewing Company, and co-proprietor of the Melbourne Herald newspaper. One of his major investments was a large vineyard, cellars and distillery at Dookie in northern Victoria. However the economic depression of the 1890 brought this enterprise to ruin and he lost all his capital. John Curtain died in poverty in 1905.

There is currently a display on the life of John Curtain at the Carlton Library, 667 Rathdowne Street, North Carlton (opposite Curtain Square)

**This publication, Carlton Chronicles, is produced and distributed four times a year.**

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