

St Kilda Library's 35th Birthday

SKHS marks its opening to the public, May 1973

1973: Official Opening

The official opening of St Kilda's Free* Public Library, 14 May 1973, was a remarkable achievement. Especially for determined resident groups, who, despite decades of obstacles and derision, persisted with community campaigns for its establishment.

A group named the 'St Kilda Library Establishment Committee' and their supporters accomplished the feat when they propelled one of their members, Ivan Trayling onto St Kilda council in 1967, and over subsequent years, others.

The library was also an achievement for its architect, Dr Enrico Taglietti; builders, M. Notkin Constructions, and foundation librarian, Vida Horn and library staff.

*Free public libraries are financed by rate-payers and tax-payers.

1969: New Library

Tenders were called for the Design and Construction of the new library in 1969 and Dr Taglietti's proposal selected, April 1970. Council budgeted \$417,000 for Stage One built by M. Notkin (1971-1973) of Caulfield. Gardner & Naylor P/L were the Mechanical Contractors, E.H. Waldron P/L, the Electrical Contactors. Council appointed J. Twentymann Clerk of Works.

Brutalist Architecture

St Kilda Library remains the only example of Taglietti's work in Victoria. His confronting, brutalist 'ocean liner' plan referenced St Kilda's seaside environment and maritime-immigrant history.

He commented in *St Kilda Today* (Aug '71) that he designed the building "as a soothing refuge from the noise and confusion of modern life ... It will be a building that people will want to enter, and once inside, want to remain."

Taglietti made provisions in Stage Two (not built) of the design for a community theatre, gallery area, and coffee shop. Stage Three (not built) included a sculpture garden.

Local architect, Robert Sands, then a graduate student, assisted Dr Taglietti during construction.

1973: First Book

A day after the official opening by Victoria's Governor, Sir Rohan Delacombe, Commander Veale of the 1950s Library Promotion Committee was invited to borrow the first book, a biography of W. Kent-Hughes.

Pearl Donald, dedicated library-user and SKHS member, told St Kilda Times "Although foundation staff did not have to wear a uniform, they sometimes wore the St Kilda Football Club colours of red, white and black."



Vida Horn
and
Ivan Trayling
inspecting the library
foundation stone,
August 1972
Photo: *St Kilda Today*,
No 3, Aug 1972

St Kilda Library

Verses by Clive Johns (undated, probably 1974)
[due to space constraints, not all nine verses included]

*This is the tale of a building so grand
Quite close to St Kilda's rich golden sand
Set in surroundings so pleasing to all
Just across from St Kilda's gracious Town Hall.*

*As you approach this fine building
You're thrilled with delight
To see its name painted boldly
In red, black and white*

*There are books in their thousands on subjects diverse
On history and fiction, and volumes of verse,
With drama and action, and great lives that are told
Come in then dear reader, see these wonders unfold.*

*You can read about health, about jobs you can do,
About lawyers and tradesmen and discoveries new,
Of sporting achievements, of deeds that will thrill
Of explorers and hunters that are set for the kill.*

*I have yet barely touched on the books that are there
Such magnificent volumes with many so rare,
I appeal to each person to play the game fair
So treasure those volumes with fondness and care.*

*In conclusion, there's something to which I must
surely refer,
To this fine gracious library celebrating its first year.
You've done wonders for people and given them joy,
To the aged and young folk, aye to each girl and boy.*

Dr Enrico Taglietti,
image: generosity of
Vicky Wilkes
freelance photographer
www.vikkywilkes.com
image originally in
Architecture Australia
March/April 2007.



Library Charter

St Kilda library was an immediate success, and since then, successive staff have worked towards fulfilling the 'Library User's Charter' (available at front desk).

The Architect

Milan-born Dr Enrico Taglietti originally came to Sydney with an Italian Trade Exhibition in 1955.

At the time, the federal government was engaging architects to progress Canberra's growth. Taglietti was commissioned to design the Italian Consulate and this decided him to return and settle in what he once said was an 'invisible city'.

Dr Taglietti – now the elder statesman of Australia's architectural fraternity – was awarded the 2007 Gold Medal by RAI (Royal Aust. Institute of Architects). This medal is the professional body's highest honour with Robin Boyd and Joern Utzen among previous recipients.

The Librarians

From 1970 to 1987, Qld-born librarian, Vida Horn played a crucial role in the interior design of the facility, and the success of its operation. Under her experienced hands and firm guidance – St Kilda library became a vital community centre and a vibrant cultural hub.

Among the foundation staff were: Diane Nicholas, Deputy Librarian. Patricia O'Mear, first Reference and Youth Librarian. Helen Cook, Children's Librarian. Lois Barnett, Senior Clerical Assistant. Peter Stansfield, Senior Cataloguer. (Other early staff are listed in the 1970's section. Insert, p3)

Community Space

The Age in a recent* guide to Melbourne's 'stand-out libraries' reported that "libraries are reinventing themselves with music, art ... even good coffee ... Many are specialising in ... children's activities adult classes, public art collections and multi-media resources." While *The Age* did not give St Kilda Library 'an honourable mention', however, in many people's opinion, it fulfils much more than the roles mentioned above.

As Wayne Hope, co-producer of *The Librarians*** and St Kilda Library member pointed out in a 2007 interview "... public libraries are one of the few remaining free spaces in our communities" and added that *Children's Storytime* in St Kilda Library provides untold relief for himself and for "many anxious young parents."

*Stewart, R. L., *The Age*, Metro section p13, 12 Feb 2008.

** A 2007 ABC dark comedy.
+ ninemsn.com.au, 18 Oct 2007.

Brief History of St Kilda Library

MAIN SOURCES:

Cooper, J.B., *History of St Kilda 1840–1930* Vol 1, p 296 et seq., Vol 2 p47 et seq.

Longmire, A., *St Kilda: The Show Goes On*, Vol 3, 1930–1983, Hudson, Melb., 1989

Petersen, R., *A Place of Sensuous Resort*, SKHS, 2005

Unknown Author, *Influence of Community Interest Groups in the Success or Failure of a Library*. Research Paper, 1985/86.

Websites: SKHS; City of Port Phillip; Mechanics' Institutes.

1850s–1900s

1856: 'Torchbearers of Culture'

St Kilda's very first 'Library and Reading Room' opened in October 1856 above a furniture warehouse in the grounds of A. E. Wheatley, Acland Street-Esplanade, after a group of 137 wealthy St Kilda residents, which historian, J.B.Cooper (p298) described as "torchbearers of culture" formed the 'Athenaeum, St Kilda'. Charles Gavan Duffy and Thomas Loader hoped it would "provide moral exercise so the sensuality of youth might be changed for the better", while others thought it would amuse and edify the ladies, "those angels of life".

1857: 'Promiscuous Dancing'

The St Kilda Athenaeum officially opened with great fanfare with *une Soirée et une Dansante* on 16 January 1857. Dr Sewell was chairman and J. Hemming Webb read the opening address. Orion Horne gave a paper on 'Popular Institutions' before the band struck up and what the *Argus* reported as "promiscuous dancing" took place.

Cooper noted that other dances followed but over time: "... Euterpe wept on Minerva's classical bosom while Miss Terpsichore possessed the waxed floor of the Athenaeum." He concluded that the reports of "promiscuous dancing", which the *Argus* also described as little better than the dancing at Cremorne Gardens, must have led to its extinction.



Archibald Michie
ADB online

Mechanics' and Literary Institute

In 1859, just two years after St Kilda was proclaimed a municipality, Cr Spicer successfully moved that Council support the establishment of the more egalitarian Mechanics and Literary Institute, and School of Art.

1859: "Rational Inhabitants of St Kilda"

St Kilda Mechanics Institute and Circulating Library was temporarily housed in the first St Kilda Town Hall, attached to the Court House, cnr Barkly & Grey Sts.

Its inauguration took place on 19 Dec 1859 and coincided with the official opening of the Town Hall. The highlight of the occasion was an address delivered by local barrister, Archibald Michie "to three or four hundred of the elite of Melbourne" (Cooper, p284). A visitor, Clara Aspinall would later write that Mechanics' Institute lectures were attended by 'nearly all the rational inhabitants of St Kilda' (Cooper, p307).

1860: Circulating Library

A public meeting held September 1860 requested that St Kilda Council contribute £50 to purchase books for the Institute's library. In November, the Institute acknowledged Council's resolve to vote £500 for the purchase of land and erection of a building to house a Free Public Library & Mechanics' Institute providing a similar amount was raised by residents.

Seemingly, the 'rational inhabitants' were not as forthcoming with donations towards a separate building to house the Institute, as, in 1863, the MLI library was still in the Town Hall-Court House and reported as holding approx. 500 books.

1863: First Public Library

The Mechanics' Institute appear to have managed and operated what was called the 'St Kilda Public Library' from 1863.

Council contributed £75 to its upkeep and subscribers paid £1 a year. However, by 1875, the library was largely dependent on ratepayers for funding.

Early Librarians

Adam Daniel Butcher, Walter Wilson and Mr Batten are on record as early librarians.

1890: City Hall

Architect, William Pitt made provision for a free public library in the new St Kilda City Hall, built 1890 by Clark & Smith. However the space was not used as such because of staff expansion and the need for a [Masonic] lodge.

When State Government later sold off the first Town Hall to a commercial developer, Cooper* noted that Council received £2500 from the transaction. He added that it was spent on purchasing mantelpieces for the new city hall. (Cooper, Vol2, p152–3)

1910

Despite a number of requests, in 1904, 1905, and 1907, St Kilda's Public Library remained in its original setting.

In 1910, the Balaclava Mutual Improvement Society petitioned council to transfer the library's contents to City Hall and "stock it with suitable fiction and works of reference".

Council's response was to actually close down the library. Its contents were stored in bookcases with glass doors in the basement of City Hall awaiting the day when space would become available.

1940s

After WWII, more Melbourne municipalities began establishing libraries, but St Kilda was not among them.

Council reacted to a 1947 proposal by the Free Library Board of Vic – by asking Booksellers, Robertson & Mullens (R&M) to sort out the books stored in City Hall since 1910. R&M were also permitted to buy around 2000 to 2500 books. (Longmire, p133)

1950s

Library Promotion Committee

Council reputedly responded to requests made in 1953 and 1954 by the new 'St Kilda Library Promotion Committee'* by arguing that: "There is no demand for a library."

In addition: "Funds provided by property owners should not be used to provide mostly books of fiction which would come into active competition with a large number of Lending Libraries ..." (Longmire, p191)

*President:S.L.Veale
Secretary:E. Hogg

1955: Slur

The Promotion Committee responded with an open letter,* dated 15 April 1955.

In it they accuse Council of casting a 'slur' on the citizens of St Kilda: "... For there is no reason to suppose we are less intelligent or alert than citizens in other suburbs ...

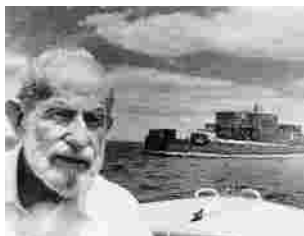
"Let us prove to Council that we refuse to be a backward, unprogressive city ..."

*copy of letter in SKHS Files.

Brief History of St Kilda Library (ctd)

Compiled: F. Bader

1950s continued



Commander R. S. Veale RANR
President of 1950s Library Promotion Committee
Photo: *The Age*, 24.1.1986
Reproduced from Herd, R.J., *Battle to Breakwater*,
Young, A., Appendix 3, Sandringham Historical
Series No.3, City of Sandringham, 1986.

Lending Libraries

Apparently the six or so local shops/outlets operating small fee-charging, independent 'Lending Libraries' were considered more than adequate for St Kildans.

Generally these were attached to bookshops, chemists, dry-cleaners, tobacconists, florists, and the like.

Sands & McDougall Directory lists around 400* such lending libraries in Melbourne's CBD and suburbs in 1940.

With the advent of TV in the 1950s, their numbers began dropping. By 1974, there were only about 80 'Lending Libraries' left, but they too gradually disappeared.

*Newsagents & Booksellers such as R & M lent out books & periodicals as well, so numbers may have been higher.

Reds under Cover

Fearful of an imminent communist takeover, several St Kilda municipal officers and councillors seem to have subscribed to the theory that public libraries were 'Continuation Schools for Socialists' and believed "... Only Communists read books." Allegedly, some councillors even maintained that public libraries were unnecessary because they only "encourage more reading of fiction" which could lead to "juvenile delinquency" and besides, "every one else watches television."

1960

Library Establishment Committee

The Promotion Committee lost momentum but concerned residents re-grouped to form the 'St Kilda Library Establishment Committee' in 1960.

This group was strongly supported by local volunteers, especially Nelson St Kindergarten parents, the Free Library Movement, and the Library Promotion Committee of Victoria which included Colin Watson.

1960s

No Action

The Library Establishment Committee (LEC) requested council to engage the Free Library Service Board of Victoria (FLSBV) to conduct a community survey on the need for a public library.

When it was presented to council they voted to take no action on its recommendations.

Their reasoning: a library was too expensive and unnecessary, plus "the population of St Kilda was itinerant and unlikely to return books."

LEC Members

LEC Members have included: Ivan Scown, Jeanette Love, Norma Gormley, K. O'Mara, Ruth Shnookal, Angela Pedecini, Ivan Trayling, Bernard Rechter, R. Bradley and others.



Angela Pedecini
scanned reproduction of pic in
St Kilda Today, March 1989

Free Library Movement (FLM)

FLM was formed after the U.S. Carnegie Foundation funded the 'Munn-Pitt Survey' of 1934-35. It presented a scathing report on most Aust. Libraries - Prahran was the exception in Victoria.

FLM consisted of librarians, educators, concerned individuals and parents groups.

No Submission

Spurred on by the opening of a new library in nearby and less populated Caulfield, LEC declared "we will not be trodden into submission." (*Southern Cross*, 1 Jul 1964)

Three years later, LEC supported by Brain Zouch,* editor of *Southern Cross*,⁺ propelled Ivan Trayling on to council in 1967 - with priorities of establishing a free public library, a crèche and other community facilities.

In Oct-Nov 1967, St Kilda council requested FLSBV to revise their earlier survey, and this time, accepted its recommendations.

*Zouch elected to council in 1968 election.

+Proprietor Peter Isaacson.

Fund-Raising

Council set aside \$50,000 of residents' funds in subsequent financial years and obtained two State subsidies of \$23,840 of taxpayer funds. This enabled the purchase of a used-car lot in Carlisle St, and properties in Duke St.

Sub-Committee

Mid-1969 saw Council form a library sub-committee. Among them Crs: Trayling, Manning, Hall-Kenny, and Clark, as well as community representatives: Jenny Love, Bernard Rechter, Bro. F. I. McCarthy and Bill Sisson, Deputy Town Clerk.

1970s

1973: Library Established

Everyone was impressed by the exterior of the new library building, the spaciousness of its interior, and visitors commented on the welcoming atmosphere.

When asked his opinion of the new library, Cr Zouch replied, "I do not consider the building completed ... Stage Two has not yet been undertaken." Zouch also made reference to Stage Three which involved purchasing other properties to provide additional book storage, and the establishment of a sculpture garden.

A disappointment to the Chief Librarian was that some of her specific requests concerning the functionality of what she described as a "handsome" and "landmark" building were not implemented in the construction of Stage One.

1971-73 Foundation Staff

Names of 1971-1973 staff were: Mrs R. Cameron, Deputy Librarian. Children's Librarian, Miss D. Titmus. Senior Librarian, (cataloguer) Mr. R. Hallon. Senior Technical Assistant, Mrs V. Zachariah. Senior Assistants: Misses Fergon and Blundy. Library Assistant, Mrs R. Nissen.

Turning the Tide

St Kilda's population c.1973 was around 61,000. Subsequent socially progressive and community-aware members of council considered the development of a Strategic Plan ... to control development for the next 15 years, and attract more permanent families. Others saw St Kilda as the "Gold Coast of the South". PR consultants, hired by the municipality tagged it "a happening place" for tourists as well as American soldiers on R & R, and suggested that a litter-maid be employed on the beach.

Concerned residents braced themselves once again. A number of interest groups mobilised to oppose a string of developments such as: a monorail, a six-lane carriage-way, the F2 & F12, a 2nd marina and a seaquarium, not to mention the SeaBaths, a split-level restaurant on Pt Ormond, and others too numerous to recount.

1980s

The Housebound-Library Service began in 1981 with Meals-on-Wheels volunteers delivering the books.

Council foreshadowed library staff and services cuts in Nov. 1982 which prompted a petition signed by over 700 people expressing their concern. This was presented by Cr Zouch and resulted in a reprieve. Crs McGregor and Jelbart also proposed that a new Library Advisory Committee (LAC) consisting of library staff, councillors, and registered library members be constituted - formed 1983.

The library went On-Line in 1984. Vida Horn retired in 1987 and Vera Boston, who replaced her, experienced the disastrous 'Flash Flood' of 7 February 1989.

Books to Bytes

1990s

1990: Milestones

A milestone took place early in 1990 when St Kilda became the first library in Melbourne to open seven days a week. Extended hours were introduced after the Library Advisory Committee (LAC) conducted a comprehensive survey of users and non-users during 1989/90.

LAC Members

Over the years LAC members have included staff: B. Ward, S. Penny, S. Edwards, H. Nicholson, V. Boston, M. Kindler. Among the volunteers were: Dr G. Anderson, I. & H. Blair, L. Brond, N. Newell, V. Colbert, B. Coe, G. Hearman, M. Micallef, and Cr N. Walker. Cr Elaine Miller supported LAC as did Mr & Mrs Throssel.

Changing Faces

After eight years as State Labor Premier, John Cain (Junior) resigned, Thursday 9 Aug 1990. Cain's resignation followed criticism over the collapse of the Pyramid group, and continuous faction-fighting within VIC Labor. Deputy Premier, Joan Kirner received the poisoned chalice and became the state's first female Premier.

When the Labor Party came to power in 1982, they were very keen on reducing the number of "moribund" municipalities and shires. Restructuring council services was high on their agenda – including those in the Labor heartlands of Port Melb., Sth Melb. and St Kilda – but they were thwarted by the Opposition.

1991: Integrated Library System

Alistair Baird, Technical Services Librarian advertised (*The Australian*, 29 January 1991) for an 'Integrated Library Computer System.' The advertisement stated the library operated from a single service point open seven days a week. Issues were in excess of 500,000 per year and there were some 25,000 registered members.

1991: Fire

The library housed council staff after an arsonist set St Kilda City Hall on fire, 7 April.

1991: Razor Gang

State Labor slashed funds to libraries in August 1991, and Chief Librarian, Barbara Ward worried that services might be cut.

1992-94 Library Extensions

Ashton Raggatt MacDougall (ARM) began their business relationship with St Kilda in 1992 when they were selected to design and construct an extension and upgrade of library facilities in tandem with the reconstruction of the fire-damaged City Hall.

ARM designed the open-page façade we are familiar with today.

**ARM involved in the proposed multi-million private-public development of community foreshore space – initiated by City of Port Phillip in 2002 – to finance a major refurbishment of the Palais Theatre.*

1992: Changing Places

On Friday, 14 Aug 1992, the 51st Victorian Parliament dissolved. Joan Kirner resigned after serving 790 days and an election held. Constituents voted in Jeffrey Gibb Kennett and the Liberal Party with a landslide in both houses.

1994–1996: Amalgamation

Ironically, it was the Liberals – previously against Labor's more modest council reforms – who radically slashed Victoria's municipal council numbers from 210 to 78 and set about cutting the cost of Local Government.

Regardless of the groundswell of residents' concern about the lack of community consultation over new boundaries (not necessarily, amalgamation) and the results of a plebiscite which returned a majority of 'no votes' – Liberals went ahead and created a new mega-council, the City of Port Phillip, by merging Port, South, & St Kilda.

Corporate Governance

In the process, and in, what many citizens regarded 'a travesty of democratic principles' on 22 June 1994 Liberals 'sacked' all locally elected councillors. Three government-appointed commissioners, some called them 'commissars', were imposed to oversee the 'transition period' of two years.

Economic Rationale

The government, not residents, appointed an acting chief executive of Port Phillip City and a corporate-style management. They were charged with identifying which municipal services could undergo 'compulsory competitive tendering' from the private sector – citing cost savings to CoPP and rate-cuts to residents, increased efficiency as well as greater responsiveness to 'customers' as their rationale.

CCT

Publicly-funded library services was identified as 'CCT-ready'. The volunteer-run Meals-on-Wheels was another.

Friends of Port Phillip Libraries

LAC and library members formed FoPPL in April 1995 to monitor the library CCT process.

The FoPPL committee was strongly supported by Marie Dowling and many in the community. Dr Hans Lofgren was spokesman and Colin Watson a prominent member.

1995: CCT* Unit

Assisted by the LAC (Library Advisory Committee) & FoPPL, Cathy Hunt and members of staff formed an in-house 'business unit' to submit a compulsory tender to co-ordinate CoPP's library services. Following assessment of the two bids received, CoPP opted to retain the in-house library unit as their preferred service providers for the city.

**CCT accountability measures replaced by 'Best Value Victoria' provisions in 1999.*

2008

Community Connector Global Gateway

Dissemination

- Local Gov Info
- Local Groups and Organizations
- Community Services

Global

- Worldwide web

Creative

- Poetry Idol Heats

- Ke Foundation*

Cultural

- Book Launches
- Book Clubs
- Photo Gallery

Innovative

- Wheelbarrow library

Fitness

- Pedometer use

Family

- Story-time
- Reading advice

Young people

- subcultured: urban art
- console games
- make-a zine
- various workshops

Community

The library is seen by residents as a centre for community interests as well as life-long learning and many use it as a regular meeting place.

Adult Learning

- Study facilities
- Knowledge sharing
- Books & Mags
- Large-print
- Foreign language
- Specialist journals
- Local History
- Audio-Visual
- DVDs

Workshops

- Range of

Environment

- Showerhead
- Light-bulbs exchange
- Hugo bags

Children's Services

Children's Services at Port Phillip City libraries are renowned among local children, parents and grand-parents – who are indeed grateful for the care and effort that staff put in.

Regular services include: reading lists and advice to parents and children, visits to schools and childcare centres, displays of works by local school children, a huge range of activities during school holidays and Children's Book Week as well as :-

Storytimes

Tiny Tots: Wed 11am; Fri 10 & 11am

Pre-schoolers: Tues. 11am

Bedtime stories: 1st Thurs ea mth