



# THE STORY OF GEELONG

BY NORMAN HOUGHTON

The first known sighting of the Geelong region by Europeans occurred in December 1800 when Lt. James Grant sailed through Bass Strait from the west in the coastal exploration brig *Lady Nelson*. Next came the discovery and exploration of Port Phillip Bay, from January to March 1802, when the *Lady Nelson* under Lt John Murray R.N entered it from Sydney.

It is of interest to note that the first newly discovered place in the British Dominions where the Union Jack was hoisted was Port Phillip. Lt. Murray had with him one of the new flags, and he took possession on 8 March 1802. He was the first white man to enter the Port Phillips Heads, and he found what he described as 'a most notable sheet of water'. On 21 February 1802, Lt. Murray, while exploring the larger Port Phillip Bay, discovered and explored in a launch, Corio Bay, on which Geelong was destined to stand.

On 27 April 1802, Commander Matthew Flinders R.N., entered Port Phillip Bay in charge of the *Investigator*. This celebrated navigator not only duplicated the work of Lt. Murray, but climbed Station Peak (now called Flinders' Peak) at the You Yangs, the picturesque heights to the north of Geelong.

In October 1803, Lt. Colonel David Collins established a short-lived settlement near Point Nepean. Before Collins left, to found Hobart, a convict (William Buckley) escaped and lived among the Aborigines for 32 years. Buckley can therefore claim to be Victoria's first permanent European settler.

It was on 24 December 1824, that explorers Hume and Hovell, after passing through many perils and privations, arrived at a rise close to the present Duck Ponds bridge on the Melbourne-Geelong Road at Corio, about 15 kilometres from the Geelong Post Office. Noticing the fine harbor and situation of the surrounding country, they concluded that it is in every respect admirably adapted for settlement. The Aborigines in the locality were approached, and on being asked the name of the area, informed the explorers that the bay was called 'Jillong' and the land 'Corio', or at least this is how Hume and Hovell construed the conversation.

The Aborigines had but another ten years to enjoy full sovereignty of the land they had occupied for at least twenty thousand years.

## 1830 – 1840

The Hume and Hovell expedition, and restrictions on pastoral extension in Tasmania resulted in the formation of the Port Phillip Association in Tasmania, John Batman's arrival off Indented Head in May 1835 representing the Association and his establishment of a holding station there. In July 1835, Buckley revealed himself to Batman's men at Indented Head.


After this, more squatters began to arrive, landing their stock at what became Williamstown or at Indented Head, but from 1836 increasingly at Point Henry.

John Cowie and David Stead, the first to settle, occupied Bell Post Hill and the Moorabool Valley beyond it. Dr. Alexander Thomson founded 'Kardinia' on the south bank of the Barwon. George Russell, for the 'Clyde' Company, went further up the Moorabool than Cowie and Stead's first station and pushed across to the Leigh. By mid 1837 Armytage and others had stations as far as Austin's Ford, now Winchelsea. By late 1837 Hugh Murray and his friends were settling around Lake Colac. Early in 1838 Cowie, Stead and the von Stieglitz brothers left their runs on the lower Moorabool River and moved up as far as the Werribee River to found Ballan.

David Fisher, managing for the Derwent Company, ran his three flocks over the site of Geelong, and by March 1837, when Governor Bourke arrived on a tour of inspection, had built 'the first house worthy of the name' on land by the Barwon River – now occupied by Fagg's Hardware business.

Captain Foster Fyans arrived as Police Magistrate in 1837, thus giving informal settlement an official basis. Geelong was surveyed in 1838 and gazetted as a town on 10 October (its birthday) and the first land sale held the following year.

Some had built before this and had to remove their buildings after the survey. The first wool store was erected as early as 1836, and the first general store and hotel in 1838. At this time there were 82 houses in Geelong and a population of 545. The local Aborigines had been dispossessed, and existed on the fringes. Geelong was well on the way to becoming the wool capital, service centre and port outlet for the Western District.



## 1840 – 1850

From small beginnings the Town developed in fits and starts in response to trends in the general economy and the fortunes of the wool trade.

Corio Street became the main business centre for several years until more land was sold further up the hill and activity drifted to the Market Square area.

A severe depression inflicted a great setback to pastoralists when wool prices fell, and the only value of sheep was as boiled-down tallow.

The higher things in life away from business and earning pounds, shillings and pence were created by the establishment of churches, church schools and a Mechanics Institute. The oldest building in Geelong is probably the core of the former St. Andrews Presbyterian Church (now St. John's Lutheran Church) Yarra Street, which dates from 1841. A theatre, horse-racing and regatta events were also initiated during this period.

Communications with Melbourne were improved by a steamer service, the *Aphrasia*, introduced in 1841.

Geelong's original newspaper, the *Geelong Advertiser* was first issued in November 1840 and remains in publication today as Victorian's oldest morning newspaper.

By the end of the decade Geelong's population was around 8000 souls, and steps were taken to establish some form of local government and amenities, such as the Botanical Gardens.

## 1850 – 1860

The new decade opened with momentous events. The Geelong Town Council began work, Separation from New South Wales was achieved and gold was discovered.

The *Geelong Advertiser* scooped the announcement of James Esmond's find of gold at Clunes. Geelong was the sea port for the gold districts around Ballarat and was strategically placed to tap the boom time's traffic and commerce. In the meantime most of the male population of Geelong deserted to Ballarat to try their luck.

Local population declined at first but soon recovered and then trebled by 1861. In the mid 1850's, Geelong had more than 23,000 people and was about the fourth largest town in Australia. Jealously from Melbourne saw underhand schemes to thwart Geelong, such as the issuing of a false map to new arrivals purporting to show the quickest road to the goldfields as being via Melbourne.

After the Eureka rebellion the wounded Peter Lalor was spirited to Geelong and hidden in his fiance's house in McKillop Street.

The wealth accruing to Geelong from its pivotal position was expressed in architecture and reinvestment in infrastructure. Many fine commercial buildings and dwelling houses were now erected and services such as water supply and gas initiated by private enterprise. The Geelong and Melbourne Railway Company was formed and succeeded in laying a railway, country Victoria's first, between the two points.


Geelong citizens maintained a keen interest in politics and when responsible government was initiated in Victoria in 1856, local farmer and Ceres landowner, William Haines was made what in effect was Victoria's first Premier.

Municipal separation and the fragmentation of unified local government began in this period after dissatisfaction by outlying burghers that their interests were not being adequately met.

Geelong Advertiser and editor and inventor, James Harrison, devised the world's first successful ice making and refrigeration machinery in Geelong in 1856 and thereby laid the foundation of our modern way of life.

Various civic minded residents, clergy and their congregations began moves to establish organised institutional care for homeless children and the sick and the result was a hospital (known as the benevolent asylum) in 1850 and two fine orphanages a little later. The survivors of the local Aboriginal tribe were supported by local charity and occasionally brought into the limelight to add colour to grand events such as the opening of the railway.

Alas, the boom did not last. Impediments in shipping access to waterfront wharves due to a sandbar and the drain of trade away from Geelong made possible by the railway to Melbourne dissipated the gold era momentum. The landing of four hares and twenty wild rabbits from the *Lightning* on 25 December 1858 consigned to Thomas Austin at Winchelsea passed unnoticed.



## 1860 – 1870

The growth had stopped, and Geelong was overtaken by upstart Ballarat and Bendigo. Melbourne critics dubbed Geelong 'Sleepy Hollow'.

The Town did not go backwards at least, and steady progress was pursued in all avenues of local life. Basic services were improved or initiated on a proper basis, and works commenced on reticulated water supply, a replacement Railway (Cunningham) Pier, a deeper channel for shipping, public gardens, street beautification, public street lighting and more. A Common School system was introduced, and, for neglected children, Industrial School were provided. One of the latter schools was housed in an unused wing of the Geelong Jail!

More churches were built in what was an evangelical time, and the general cultural tone of the community maintained by amateur theatricals, music recitals and penny readings.

The loss of goldfields prosperity spurred local initiative to find other sources of wealth, this time industrial, closer to home. The beginnings of a factory system had occurred in the 1850's with Donaghy's Rope Works and Brearly's Tannery, but these remained isolated from a wider manufacturing base for more than a decade.

In response to a Victorian Government offer of a prize for the production of woollen goods, Geelong investors launched the Victorian Woollen and Cloth Manufacturing Company. In 1868 this Company, and Victoria's first woollen mill, produced from its new premises at South Geelong (now part of Hirst's) several thousand metres of colonial tweeds and other lines. The prize was theirs, and the foundation laid for Geelong's future strength as a woollen and worsted producer.

The sensation of the decade was the burning of the famous clipper ship *Lightning* in 1869 at Yarra Street pier, its being cast off to drift in the Bay and the firing of artillery salvos at the vessel in order to sink it.

## 1870 – 1880

Improvements in transport via the railway further strengthened Geelong's role as the capital of the Western District. Extension of lines to Queenscliff and Colac occurred at this time and made possible the speedier and more convenient access to Geelong of wool and agricultural produce.

Geelong's industrial base was strengthened by several new industries such as papermaking, bootmaking and meat preserving. Technical innovation by talented locals, like W. Thomas who undertook Geelong's first telephone experiment in 1877, helped to maintain the Town's image. It was just as well, since the district's prosperous vine industry was afflicted by a fatal dose of phylloxera vastatrix and wiped out by government decrees on plant hygiene.

Industrial achievement was paraded before the rest of Victoria by the holding of an Industrial and Juvenile Exhibition in 1879. The Exhibition Building in Market Square was rushed to completion, ahead of a similar project in Melbourne, and the exposition opened on 18 December 1879, again one step in front of Melbourne.

A Free Library was established in the former Chamber of Commerce building during 1876, and yet more new church buildings were begun, this time St. Mary's and the Aberdeen Street Baptists. Football, cricket and rowing remained popular evergreen sports, and service plus social clubs were initiated by the YMCA and friendly societies.

The introduction of an omnibus service in 1872 betokened not only a threat to the then cab services, but also a suburban need for some form of public transport.

Geelong was beginning to slough off the lethargy of the previous twenty years.


## 1880 – 1890

A boom in the Victorian economy was reflected in Geelong and many new projects got underway, but not without some setbacks.

In 1880 the highest flood yet seen by Europeans swept down the Barwon, causing immense damage and dislocation.

New sporting crazes mirrored the good times and activities like roller skating and bicycle racing became common leisure events for the young. Education took a step forward with the opening of the Gordon Technical College in 1887.

Welfare for the poor and needy was sided by the benefactions of the Ladies' Benevolent Association, a long established group, and a welcome gesture by Elizabeth Austin in funding a terrace of cottages for homeless women at South Geelong.



When the land boom gripped public imagination there was a rash of speculation, mostly unwise, and a tremendous bout of building and renovating. Between 1886 and 1889 the central business district's major banks, insurance companies and lodges erected new premises in a solid and ornate character and many of these buildings are still extant. In the suburbs new dwellings rose and an organised horse omnibus service was popularised to transport the outer fringe residents.

Proposals for an electricity supply were floated.

Community tensions were exposed in the strong moves to limit public houses and the consumption of alcohol and Geelong's most famous hotel, Mack's, was purchased by prohibitionists and converted to a coffee palace.

Two of Geelong's more enduring businesses were established, namely Cheetham's Salt Works, and the Fyansford Cement Manufactory, thus broadening the city's industrial base. Population remained at about the same level as thirty years before and the region was primarily regarded as a wool growing, selling and processing area that also dispensed transport, education and other services.

### **1890 – 1900**

As the Aboriginals passed on, so too did many of Geelong's original European pioneers, leaving the town's affairs to the progeny of the great immigration wave of the 1850's. Geelong's first native born Mayor, H. Richardson, was sworn in during 1894.

A new post office, built in the grand manner, opened in 1891 and was the last of the boom time architecture owing to a severe economic depression following the recklessness of the previous period. There was much distress and as a local welfare agency put it 'the poor have been poorer and many who were hitherto living in comfort have been obliged to seek relief'.

In this gloomy period, though, the foundations for a great lift in the city's fortunes were laid, principally through the completion of the ship channel through the bar. This deepwater channel opened in December 1893 and initiatives such as the export of frozen meat were tried.

Local municipalities like to regard themselves as progressive and when the Shire of Corio and Bannockburn in 1899 commissioned an engineer named John Monash to erect a concrete bridge over the Moorabool River at Fyansford they were regarded as being very far sighted and courageous, if not a little foolish, in leaping into a new and almost untried technology.

Popular culture saw the rise of young men and women's literary, debating and self-improvement societies and most church groups had one of these societies attached. A full size locally printed journal was regularly published on the activities. In 1896 the first cinema exhibition was held in the town.

The bonds of Empire were very strong and Geelong engaged in a welter of celebrations for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. An avenue of trees was planted in the Botanical Gardens to commemorate the event.

The size of Geelong now began to grow, a little at first, but steadily upward as the twentieth century came along.


### **1900 – 1910**

The patriotic fervour of the South African war saw numerous local recruits join the expeditionary force. There were several casualties, but all bar one succumbed to battle wounds; the others to disease.

A strong move to either improve, or equip Geelong with the latest urban services saw many advances. Electricity, sewerage, street tramways and port autonomy were achieved or initiated during this period. After decades of representation to Parliament Geelong finally was granted its own port authority, the Geelong Harbor Trust, and this heralded the arrival of Geelong as an industrial giant. The Harbor Trust was vested with large land holdings, and it immediately sought to fill this land with industry. The Trust built and operated a meat works, ran several farms and rarely missed an opportunity to entice new industry to Geelong.

This vigorous promotion of Geelong was facilitated first by Mayor Thomas Bostock (1906-1908) and then by Mayor Howard Hitchcock (1917-1922), the latter being almost a once man permanent deputation whenever Parliamentarians and Melbourne businessmen were encountered.

The formation of the Geelong Waterworks and Sewerage Trust also belongs to this time, and it is certainly true to state that without this substrate of essential services the City could not have undertaken the expansion of later years.



The ailing Gordon Technical College was revitalised by the appointment of George King as Principal, and made a force in local education. The city fathers had plans in mind for the central business district, and in 1910 secured ratepayer approval to develop Market Square for retailing purposes.

In the same year, Geelong was proclaimed a City and confirmed as the leading Municipality of the region.

### **1910 – 1920**

Geelong's role as an education centre was assured by the many fine schools established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and none was so famous as the Geelong Grammar School. Overcrowding at its McKillop Street site and urban encroachment finally decided the issue, and in 1914 the Grammar left Geelong for Corio.

Street trams began running in 1912, and with the opening of Solomon's Building in the old Market Square, Geelong now had what was then regarded as a very up-to-date business aspect. In the cultural field, the Art Gallery was opened.

Because of its size and character, Geelong has been a suitable testing area for the application of new devices and products, and one experiment in this period during 1912 was the installation and commissioning of the first automatic telephone exchange in Australia.

The outbreak of war in 1914 diverted local energies into the conflict and, led by proud and energetic civic representatives, Geelong sought to out perform all others.

Geelong raised approximately \$1,500,000 (around 35 million in today's terms) during the Great War for war funds and loans and the Belgian Relief, the Red Cross, the Australian Soldiers' Comforts Fund, the YMCA and a general fund from which grants were made by the local War Funds' Board. In addition to cash donations, several substantial donations were made by local residents, including two fully equipped motor transports and a large YMCA hut for use in France.

Over 3,000 men from Geelong served overseas. On two occasions during the War the Government promoted friendly rivalry between the large provincial cities and towns in the State in the matter of raising money for War loans. Places of corresponding sizes were matched against each other, and Geelong was particularly interested in a triangular contest between the large provincial cities of the State. This contest was between Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo. On each occasion Geelong raised more money than its opponents put together. No other city of its size in Australia showed figures approaching those of Geelong during the War years.

On the darker side, German descendants at what was then Germantown (now Grovedale) were discriminated against, and the name of the locality changed.

Additional industry came to Geelong (such as the Federal Woollen Mill) and by now Geelong was almost equal in size to its rivals and only a short step away from becoming the second city of Victoria.

### **1920-1930**

With the dislocation of the war now left behind, Geelong resumed its normal activities and exerted greater energies towards expansion.


More industries were enticed here – woollen mills, a fertilizer works, distillery and, most importantly, motor vehicle manufacture. The Ford Motor Company opened its works in 1925 and not only offered the prospects of large-scale employment but also encouraged a massive bout of optimism and land speculation. Whole new suburbs were surveyed in North Geelong, Bell Park, Corio, Norlane and North Shore and touted as residential areas for industrial workers. Alas, they were not filled for another thirty years.

On the other side of town, a similar boom hit Belmont with the opening of the new Barwon Bridge in 1926 and extension of the tramway along High Street. These subdivisions also sold slowly. The City had not yet filled out enough to need these fringe areas, and basically the entity of Geelong then comprised the three inner municipalities with a population of around 40,000.

Local pride swelled in 1924 when a Geelong footballer, 'Cargie' Greaves won the very first Brownlow Medal. Next year the Geelong Football Club won its first VFL Premiership.

Civic spirit remained strong, and after a long campaign of fund raising and lobbying, and new hospital building was commissioned for use in 1924.

'Morongo' Ladies college opened at Bell Post Hill during 1927 and helped to enhance Geelong's reputation as an education centre.



Popular culture, in the form of ballroom dancing and other light entertainment was now accommodated at the 'Palais' in Moorabool Street. This building was formerly the 'Joy Ark' at Eastern Beach and had been re-sited in 1926.

The motley collection of baths and pavilions at Eastern Beach was soon to be eliminated when in 1927 the Geelong City Council announced an ambitious redevelopment plan that was subsequently carried out in stages and completed by 1939. This complex of gardens, picnic sites, playgrounds and an enormous shark proof swimming enclosure was breathtaking in its execution and unique in Victoria. It was designed to make Geelong the ideal summer holiday destination.

Geelong West had advanced to the stage where it too could claim city status and achieved this distinction in 1929.

Popular imagination was stirred by the feats of aviation heroes and 10,000 packed the Belmont Common in March 1928 to welcome Bert Hinkler following his sixteen day flight from England to Australia.

### **1930 – 1940**

The prosperity of the 1920's dissipated in the Great Depression, and Geelong was afflicted as much as anywhere else. Local Government provided relief works and much road building, tree planting, wall and ditch construction was undertaken. The Geelong Council operated a 'Mother Hubbard Account' to assist the needy, and private welfare was dispensed by other bodies.

Geelong's first radio station 3GL – commenced transmission in 1930, and opened a wide vista of entertainment and new to local listeners. The provision of youth entertainment and sport still remained largely with Church groups, but this influence was beginning to wane. The Geelong Repertory Society was formed in 1932, and another young and forward looking service group, the Apex Club, was first founded in Geelong during 1933.

The completion of the Great Ocean Road scheme firmly tied coastal tourism to Geelong and made Geelong the gateway to summer pleasures. Complaints by some about lewd costumes on Geelong beaches were firmly rejected by civic leaders in 1934 – 'there is no indecency in Geelong'.

Another landmark, the T & G Building, was completed in 1934, and from its tower emerged two figures, Farmer and Son, to toll the time each hour. Economic misery slowed the building trade, but adversity spurred on some visionaries, and further architectural and industrial expansion was secured. St Mary's Church was completed at this time, and its lofty spire can be seen for kilometres around. New Public Offices were built in Gheringhap Street.

Out at North Geelong, Pilkington's Glass Works and the International Harvester plant were erected and, in a move that secured Geelong as Victoria's premier grain exporter, bulk handling and loading facilities were installed by the Grain Elevators' Board.

The fostering of local youngsters of promise was vindicated in 1939 when Marjorie Lawrence, the lass from Deans Marsh, returned in triumph to Geelong after establishing an international reputation.

The outbreak of war once again in 1939 saw Geelong despatch its young men overseas and the home front organise behind them in support roles.

### **1940 – 1950**

As in the 1914-1918 War, Geelong rallied to fund raising and from 1941-1946 collected a total of \$280,000 for the War Funds Board.


Air raid shelters were built in Johnstone Park as models for householders. A system of air raid precautions and black out measures were introduced. Khaki and blue uniforms filled the streets when training camps were set up in the country side and in requisitioned buildings.

The entry of Japan into the War brought the danger closer to home, and a new sense of urgency filled the air. Geelong factories switched to war work, and out of these busy places poured weapons, vehicles, aircraft, barges, tugs, machinery, textiles, foodstuffs and all the paraphernalia of modern, mechanised warfare.

Those not directly involved in the Armed Forces could help in other ways through the Land Army, staffing the Soldier's Lounge, Fighting Forces' Hostel, Baxter House Leave House and the Yarra Street Service Hut and collecting for the Comforts Fund and the Red Cross. Collections of waste products were organised for sale.

In the midst of this upheaval was a growing awareness that action should be taken to improve the lot of the less fortunate and the elderly. In 1941 a survey was carried out on sub-standard housing in Geelong at the behest of the Victorian Government Housing Commission, and it revealed that there were many such dwellings in the City. The need for an Old Folks' home was also sorely felt, and the first moves were made to secure what is now the Grace McKellar complex during 1944. The desirability





of orderly town planning to better manage the modern City gained acceptance, and in 1945 this was initiated for Geelong. The Plan was adopted in 1947 and was a first for Victoria.

The end of hostilities enabled thousands of servicemen and women to resume their normal occupations and begin the task of reconstruction. This task was aided by the arrival of migrants from war ravaged Europe, and hostels were set up for these people.

Geelong's role as Australia's premier textile centre was strengthened in 1946 when the Gordon Textile College was opened and the CSIRO Textile Branch facility established at Belmont.

The central area of Geelong was almost fully developed, and this was signified by the creation of the Newton municipality as a City in 1949.

### **1950 – 1960**

Despite shortages of labour, materials and power the city forged on with its expansion plans. This was not helped by the record Barwon flood of 1952.

The Housing Commission created new suburbs first at East Geelong, and then at Norlane and Corio for the growing workforce. The Rural Shire of Corio suddenly leapt to the fore as Greater Geelong's leading municipality in 1954 following its increase in population and revenue after the opening of the Shell Refinery, Birmid Auto Castings and other industries.

By 1956 Geelong's population was 88,000 and growing at a rate of 5,000 per year. The migrant intake was high and constituted ten per cent of the city's people. Naturalisation ceremonies now became annual events each Australia Day.

Back-to-back premierships in the VFL were won by Geelong in 1951 and 1952 due to the team's fast flow-on type of game. The homecoming celebrations were something to behold as city streets filled with revellers.

A Royal Visit by Queen Elizabeth in 1954 was a highlight of the times.

The ailing street tramway system was scrapped in 1956 and all urban public transport provided by diesel buses, yet another first for Victoria.

Local sports identities John Landy and Russell Mockridge were at their peak and won international recognition for their performances in regular and Olympic competition.

Cultural life and outlook was now guided by the Geelong Association of Music and Art comprising sections of repertory choir, orchestra, and art. A new Regional Library, opened in 1959, covered the City and Corio Shire areas with a full reference and lending service. Attempts were first made in 1957 to secure a university for Geelong and this was achieved twenty years later.

Trade through the port increased to the point where Geelong became the fourth busiest shipping outlet in the country. Expansion of wharf facilities at Corio and a decline in traffic at the city wharves signalled the gradual shift of trade from the traditional inner areas to the newer and more modern facilities at the northern side of Corio Bay.

### **1960 – 1970**


The amazing growth of Geelong continued throughout the decade mostly in the outer areas of Lara, Lovely Banks, Corio, Highton, Belmont, Leopold and Newcomb, and at such a pitch that in February 1967 for example, Geelong accounted for twenty one per cent of private home development in non-metropolitan Victoria.

This in turn brought traffic problems to the central business district and arterial roads. Parking meters were introduced in 1961 by the City Council. At the same time, the State Government overrode municipal objections and permitted the widespread installation of service stations, thus permitting prime corner sites to be given over to the motor car.

Other changes to the face of the City were wrought by new architectural styles making free use of glass, aluminum and steel. The traditional grocer shop was consigned to oblivion in 1965 when Coles opened Geelong's first supermarket in the City. The long time retailers, Solomons, sold out and ended decades of services to Geelong customers.

Industries came afresh and some giant developments came about – Alcoa's smelter, the Waurn Ponds cement works, and carpet and felt-makers. But these were to be the last of the phenomenal growth spurt.

The provision of educational facilities moved at the same frantic pace as the City, and this period saw the establishment of the Marcus Oldham Agricultural College and the affiliation of the Gordon Institute with the Victorian Institute of Colleges. By now



Geelong had two of Victoria's great public schools – Grammar and College – two of the larger public girls' schools – 'Morongo' and the 'Hermitage' – plus other church and private schools and a network of State primary, secondary and technical schools.

Administration of the City required more sophisticated tools with each passing year, and in 1969 Geelong West became the first local municipality to use computer services. The largest municipality, Corio followed suite in 1971.

### **1970 – 1980**

The continued material progress of Geelong seemed assured in 1971 when the State Government announced plans to restrict the growth of Melbourne and accelerate Geelong to a size of 250,000 persons. But political and economic factors caused the eventual shelving of the plan. A movement to environmental and heritage awareness was also making itself felt, questioning growth for its own sake, seeking to improve the quality of life and imposing restrictions on previously unfettered development.

A downturn in the economy, Federal Government policy changes on tariff protection and new trends in global manufacture and service industries exposed structural weaknesses in Geelong industry. The woollen mills, so long a feature of the city, disappeared one by one from 1974 and unemployment, particularly for young school leavers began to rise. Social problems relating to alcohol and drug abuse became evident amongst teenagers.

Changes in wool selling and handling methods rendered obsolete the hectares of warehouse space in the central city area. It took years to find alternative uses for the abandoned woolstores or the spaces formerly occupied by them.

Manufacturing was in relative decline, although in absolute terms it continued to be the major employment sector at around thirty per cent of the workforce. Tertiary industries came into their own, and this period saw the establishment of Deakin University, the Australian National Animal Health Laboratory complex, Performing Arts Centre, new Public Office, 'Target' national headquarters, Institute of Educational Administration and expansion in the finance and financial services sector, particularly Building Societies such as Capital and the Farrow Group, and creation of information age technology outlets and services.

A partial solution to the problem of local government fragmentation in Geelong was the establishment of the Geelong Regional Commission in 1977 to oversee unified planning and development of policies.

Their inner municipalities were static and losing trade and population to the other areas. Large retailing outlets were built at Corio, Belmont and Newcomb to cater for these locations.

South Barwon became a city in 1974 and healthy growth continued in the Bellarine and Corio Shires. The coup-de-grace to the inner areas was almost delivered by the Road Construction Authority when it announced plans to build a multi-lane freeway along Latrobe Terrace in 1973 and lay waste scores of dwellings to achieve this. Citizen's opposition proved too strong and the proposal was modified.

Global and national trends towards concentration of regional resources were expressed locally in a wave of church and private school rationalisations from 1977 as well as a move by the State Government to regionalise administration in transport, banking, education and other services.

One of the big issues to emerge in 1978-79 was the setting of the retail focus for the city and the debate on whether to rebuild or move out was epitomised by the dispute over the siting of a 'Target' store in North Geelong. The Planners won the argument on retaining a retail focus in the Central Business District but much soul searching was to eventuate in the mid 1980's about where the focus should be within the CBD when large scale developments wrenched the centre of gravity to the north. Many empty shops were left behind in the southern part of the CBD and the preference for suburban shopping left the centre of Geelong with a down at heel look.

### **1980 – 1990**


The 1980's were characterised by many structural and organisational changes as well as a building and redevelopment boom, the likes of which the city had not seen in decades.

After several set backs the Market Square Scheme got under way in 1984, and this was soon followed by the redevelopment of the wool store areas into the Bay City Plaza and other retailing outlets.

Tourism initiatives sought to capture the spending power of holiday makers passing through Geelong to the Bellarine Peninsula and Bass Strait resorts with developments such as the National Wool Museum and the City by the Bay Waterfront Scheme.

The outer suburban areas too felt the need for renewal and extensive rebuilding programmes at established shopping centres in Corio, Newtown, Geelong West, South Barwon and Drysdale were under way from 1986. The eastern and south eastern urban





fringes of Geelong continued to be the main areas of dwelling and recreational facility construction. The focus of residential expansion, and therefore population growth, moved to the Bellarine Peninsula and the municipalities of Bellarine and South Barwon began overtaking the Corio Shire, formerly the yardstick of regional development. The municipality of Bellarine became a rural city in 1989. By the mid 1980's the inner municipalities had halted their population slide and a slow return to inner city living was begun.

Moves to rationalise the fragmented state of municipal administration (where eight councils had a say in running Geelong) were initiated in 1985 but were soon defeated by the fierce resistance of the smaller municipalities in the region. Many municipalities restructured their operations and conducted strategic planning reviews in order to chart new directions in response to community wants and the imposition of greater responsibilities by State and Federal Governments. Rationalisation of government secondary schools generated a new round of community debate and some anguish as long standing schools either changed their names or lost their identities. In the field of government services there was erected a new main wing for the Geelong Hospital, the railway station was refurbished, a new law court and police station was built and the James Harrison bridge over the Barwon River was opened.

The persistent failure of the Geelong Football Club to do well in the Australia Football League competition was a continuing source of exasperation to the community. A restructure of the club administration and methods in 1987 was seen as the foundation for a better future and in 1989 the club reached the Grand Final, but failed by one kick to grab the Premiership Flag. The bicentenary year of 1988 saw a stream of very important visitors to the city, first the State Governor, Dr Davis McCaughey, then Queen Elizabeth 11 to open a Wool Week Display in the almost complete National Wool Centre and finally the Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, and senior ministers for a Cabinet Meeting at Geelong City Hall. Mayor Jim Fidge was heard in quip that all Geelong needed was a visit from the Pope and his mayoral term would be well and truly complete.

Battles over heritage buildings were waged by conservationists, mostly to no avail, as structures continued to come down for redevelopment, including several listed on the statutory Historic Register. But the demolition of the unique Dennys Lascelles Bow Truss Wool Store in mid 1989 amid national controversy signalled the end of the boom. In June 1989 the local economy and self esteem received a shattering blow with the collapse of the giant financier Farrow Corporation with hundreds of millions of dollars of debt. Thousands of Geelong savers, investors and businesses had used Farrow accounts and, overnight, these accounts were frozen. Millions of dollars were suddenly shut off from local circulation with disastrous economic consequences.

Geelong manufacturers and their suppliers began massive retrenchments in the face of declining sales. Federal Government tariff on cars, footwear, clothing and textiles caused much anxiety in Geelong factories producing these goods. The economic and social upheaval in Geelong as well as a revolt by local parliamentary representatives brought the State Labor Government to the verge of collapse and in August 1990 the Premier John Cain was dumped in favour of Joan Kirner.

The Geelong Regional Commission continued its efforts to get the City by the Bay scheme made into a reality but the political and economic climate was against it. The municipal amalgamation debate was turned on again in 1990 in the interests of economic rationalisation and all the acrimony of the 1985 campaign returned.


The Geelong Football Club, so triumphant in 1989, slumped badly in 1990 and one of the region's drawcards, its magnificent surf beaches, received damning publicity for sewage pollution from Geelong's ocean outfall pipe. Clearly the city was in crisis with failures of leadership in many spheres. The boom was over and a different set of community attitudes came into play. The local Red Cross opened a soup kitchen to cater for the poor and the unemployed and welfare agencies were swamped by demand.

The City's economic base was broad enough to absorb a number of blows without crippling the entire region and while there were very few positives for Geelong in 1989 and 1990 there was a feeling within a couple of years that the worst was over and the city could rebuild its pride and achievements.

### **1990 - 2000**

An amalgamated municipal administration was proclaimed on 18 May 1993 by the State Government and out of this came the City of Great Geelong. The City assumed all of the responsibilities, staff, assets and liabilities of the Geelong Regional Commission and the former municipalities of Geelong, Geelong West, Newtown, Corio, Bellarine and South Barwon.

The new City's first task was to arrange its affairs under State Government guidelines and legislation. This involved a complete staff restructure to achieve a new administration, implementation of redundancies, management of an altered financial year calendar, implementation of new accounting standards, a 20% rate cut and a rate freeze and introduction of compulsory



competitive tendering. The transition to a new City was a huge undertaking and not without teething problems but the shift to a unified local government presented many new opportunities and potentialities.

The new City made the Waterfront project a priority and being clear of any local political wrangling was able to achieve a successful outcome. Work commenced in 1994 to a new plan that superseded the previous work of the Geelong Harbor Trust and Geelong Regional Commission and the project was completed in 1999. One of the major advances in this area was the provision of additional restaurant capacity and high quality accommodation for the tourist market.

The marketing of Geelong and its hinterland, particularly the Great Ocean Road, was stepped up through the new City and funds were readily available for this. The main thoroughfare into Geelong along the Melbourne Road was completely refurbished from Corio to the city centre through centre plantings and flag standards. The first staging of an international air show at Avalon airfield in 1991 and every two years afterwards proved to be a great boost to the local economy. This gain was offset by failure to keep the Barwon River rowing course up to modern competitive conditions and several key regatta events moved elsewhere when a plan to build a two kilometre Olympic course fell through in 1999.

The Geelong Football Club did well in the first half of the 1990's and reached the grand final play off in 1992, 1994 and 1995 but failed to achieve the ultimate prize of a premiership. The Club's home ground at Kardinia Park was refurbished over several years from 1993 with the addition of new stands and a seated outer in order to offer patrons a facility of national standard.

The waves of administrative rationalisation continued to roll in and a mega health network was created in 1998 through a merger of the Geelong Hospital, Grace McKellar Home and other health providers under the banner of Barwon Health. The district water supply authorities were similarly merged and a super network from Geelong to Colac formed.

Education experienced a decade of change. Several state primary and secondary schools closed or merged to form multi campus networks. Morongo Girls College suffered financial problems and was sold as a vacant possession in 1996 to re-emerge later as Kardinia International College. Chanel College closed as a catholic school and reopened as a Baptist college. The Gordon Technical College finally recovered from its post Deakin University formation slump and offered a wide range of courses in its redeveloped courses at East Geelong and the City.

The greatest initiative in education occurred through Deakin University when in 1996 a brand new campus opened on the Geelong waterfront in the former Dalgety woolstore. This monumental development was one of the major catalysts in reviving the northern part of the central business district.


Privatisation of the Port of Geelong Authority in 1996 provided new opportunities for Waterfront services. The redundant Cunningham Pier was sold to a restaurant chain and indirectly turned over to the people as part of the Waterfront Redevelopment scheme. The grain elevators loading facility at Corio Quay was also sold and the new owner invested heavily in an up to date handling facility. Woodchip exporters were encouraged to use the Geelong port and major wood industries were established at Corio Quay North and South and Lascelles Wharf North.

The city's manufacturing sectors in textiles, clothing, footwear, automobiles, automotive parts, aluminium, oil refining, food processing, ropemaking and cement manufacture were subject to severe cost squeeze pressures from surplus global industrial capacity and the Federal Government's free trade policies. Many jobs were lost as companies repositioned themselves or closed their Geelong operations. Casualties here were springmaking and rope and cement manufacture. However, on the whole, local manufacturers weathered the storm and this sector continued to be the major source of Geelong employment, occupying the largest share of the local economy and well ahead of business and technical services.

The continued decline of the retail sector in the southern central business district and general appearance of the streetscape was a real cause for concern to planners and the community and, while the problem was much talked about, very little was done. One successful turnaround was the provision of apartments and student accommodation in the abandoned upper floors of commercial buildings. However, generally speaking, the continued malfunctioning of, for example, the T & G tower clock and its Farmer and Son icon was symptomatic of the community's inability to deal with the city centre problem.

## **GEELONG TODAY**

The problem of inner city decline was vigorously tackled by the City of Greater Geelong and the Victorian Government through a number of initiatives. The main city thoroughfares of Mercer Street and Ryrie Street were redesigned and rebuilt in the period 2000 to 2002. A Central Activities Area management body was established to initiate and coordinate renewal efforts and property owners encouraged to refurbish their frontages. The owners of the T & G building responded and the clock and Farmer and Son feature were reconditioned and recommissioned in 2002. The State Government devised a planning strategy to



transform the Western Wedge of the CAA, an area of disused wool industry sites and stagnant activities, into a vibrant residential, educational, cultural, transport and commercial precinct and committed funds towards this.

A snapshot of Geelong at the time of writing reveals a community that is talented and committed to making their home and work place an ideal place to be. The local economy is predominantly industrial, with the major employers being Ford, Shell, Godfrey Hirst, Alcoa, Steggles, Rip Curl, Herd and Pilkington. The major players in the growing services sector are Target, Coles, Gorell, Transwest, Swift, McColls. Myer and Bender. Education and Research remains an important segment of the local economy and over 6,000 are employed in teaching and industrial, fisheries and agricultural research. The Public Sector has several thousands employed in health care and various federal, state and local government services.

The local demographic shows an even age spread but with a significant bulge in the 25 to 55 years bracket, thus indicating a community having a very active workforce of experienced and trained people. This demographic is driving community activity and creativity.

Geelong in 2003 has many positive attributes. The amalgamated city has a population of 180,000 and sufficient presence as a major regional force in Australia. Geelong's economy is diverse and its citizens sufficiently talented and vocal to ensure that Geelong gains and retains its share of national wealth and prosperity.