



Home Away From Home



Home Away From Home

Celebrating
125 Years of The Victoria Hotel

Contents

First published in 2007 by CL Creations Pty Ltd
On behalf of Dr Jerry Schwartz
The Victoria Hotel Melbourne
215 Little Collins Street Melbourne Victoria 3000 Australia



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PO Box 1136 Lane Cove NSW 1595 Australia



Authors: Katherine Sheedy with Sarah Rood
Design: Green Poles Design Pty Ltd
Printer: Toppan Printing Co (Australia) Pty Ltd

Printed in China

ISBN 978-0-9580670-6-5 HB
ISBN 978-0-9580670-5-8 PB

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Foreword

*I dedicate this book to
the past, present and future of The Vic.
A true family hotel.*

DR JERRY SCHWARTZ
On behalf of Schwartz Family Company,
Proprietors of The Victoria Hotel Melbourne

IT IS WITH GREAT PLEASURE I offer congratulations to The Victoria Hotel, one of our city's longest serving providers of friendly hospitality.

Adjacent to Melbourne Town Hall, The Victoria has enjoyed a special connection with Melbourne City Council. As early as 1880 it was frequented by those visiting the city's early political masters and provided sumptuous fare at Town Hall functions right up to the swinging sixties.

Fifty years on, it is worth noting that The Victoria Hotel was a temporary home for International Olympic Committee members when Melbourne hosted the 1956 Olympic Games.

The Victoria has always offered a quiet respite for people coming to the hectic city centre. The grand old building has expanded and adapted with Melbourne society, adding many more beds and modern facilities.

One of the city's oldest remaining hotels and loved by generations of Victorians, especially those from regional centres, The Victoria Hotel has proudly served our community for 125 years. I am delighted a written record has been produced of this enduring and well loved city establishment.

On behalf of the City of Melbourne, I wish the staff and owners of The Victoria Hotel the very best on this auspicious anniversary. I hope we enjoy another 125 years of Victoria hospitality.



JOHN SO
Lord Mayor of Melbourne





CHAPTER ONE

Grand Beginnings

The Victoria Coffee Palace



THE MORNING PAPERS in Melbourne on 1 November 1880 ran an ornate notice on their front page announcing the opening of a new establishment in Melbourne's illustrious Collins Street. That initial notice to herald The Victoria Coffee Palace stated that a magnificent café, restaurant and hotel would be opened that same day. Offering 'the finest dining hall in the Colonies' and a 'first class bill of fare' at 'moderate charges', the new establishment boasted smoking, reading and billiard rooms.¹

Marvellous Melbourne

The opening of The Victoria Coffee Palace coincided with the era of 'Marvellous Melbourne'. The city at that time had been through a period of enormous growth, largely due to the discovery of gold in Victoria in the early 1850s. Some 90% of the gold mined in Australia in the 1850s came from Victoria's prosperous goldfields and this had a remarkable effect on the growth of Melbourne. In 1854, the population of Melbourne was nearly 80,000 but by 1861 had increased to 140,000.²

The surge of wealth and people that resulted from the gold rush cemented Melbourne's future as a major city. Gold sparked the development of public buildings, schools, churches and fine homes. Central Melbourne as we know it today began to take shape. By 1860 the city had reached its final form, most of the land had been sold and many sections of the town had attracted particular types of occupancies which still characterise the city. The eastern end of Collins Street had attracted members of the medical profession while insurance companies, banks and building societies established themselves in the central and western section. Bourke Street had its theatres and music halls, while the western section of Little Collins Street was largely occupied by the legal profession.³

Previous: View of Collins Street showing the Town Hall and The Victoria Coffee Palace.
Inset: Announcing the opening of The Victoria Coffee Palace, The Age, 1 November 1880.
Inset top: Notice of registered office for The Victoria Coffee Palace Company Limited.
Above: Early Collins Street view with The Victoria Coffee Palace on the right, c. 1880.



CHAPTER TWO

An Eye For Business

Running a successful enterprise



Company Admitted by Share.

MEMORANDUM OF ASSOCIATION OF THE

Victoria Coffee Palace Company LIMITED.

1st. The name of the Company is **THE VICTORIA COFFEE PALACE COMPANY LIMITED.**

2nd. The registered Office of the Company shall be situated in Melbourne.

3rd. The objects for which the Company is established are To establish houses, stalls, and other places of a like nature in Melbourne, and to carry on the business of Refreshment and Restaurant and to keep, in which houses no wine, or intoxicating liquors shall be sold, build houses for such purposes, and on lease, or from year to year, or on other premises, and to fit up and fit out and either conduct the same under control of the Company, or to let, let out the same for any purpose whatever all such other things as are incidental to the attainment of these objects, or any

4th. The liability of the members shall be the sum of One pound per Share.

SINCE ITS ESTABLISHMENT 125 years ago, what is now known as The Victoria Hotel has had a number of names and various owners. The company behind the enterprise has also had several different names. Originally known as The Victoria Coffee Palace Company Limited upon the hotel's founding in 1880, in 1924 it moved away from the term used to denote temperance hotels in the 19th century and removed the word 'Coffee' from the name, becoming The Victoria Palace Limited. Then in 1952 the word 'Palace' was dropped and the company became The Victoria Limited.

Correspondingly, the name of the hotel itself has also changed over the years, as such:

- The Victoria Coffee Palace (1880 – 1924)
- The Victoria Palace (1924 – 1952)
- The Victoria Hotel (1952 – 1990)
- The Victoria Vista Hotel (1990 – 1998)
- The Victoria Hotel (1998 – 2006)
- The Victoria – an All Seasons Hotel (current)

In time the hotel also came to be known by the abbreviated names, The Victoria and more colloquially, The Vic.

Previous: The Victoria Hotel on Little Collins Street in 1977.

Opposite: The original Articles of Association for The Victoria Coffee Palace Company, dated 1 November 1880, state that the objectives for which the company is formed are, 'to establish houses, rooms, street stalls, and other places of like nature in and around Melbourne, and to carry out the business of General Refreshment.... House-keepers, in which houses no wine, ale or spirituous or intoxicating liquors shall be sold.'

Following: This plan of The Victoria Hotel's second floor in 1984 shows the complex nature of the hotel's layout.

Following inset: The Victoria Coffee Palace Company's half yearly statement, 1881.



MANY ASPECTS OF THE VICTORIA have changed over the years, but perhaps none more dramatically so than the physical form of the hotel. Over the years facilities have been continually upgraded and extended to keep pace with changing consumer demand. The many different buildings that make up the hotel today were acquired, rebuilt and upgraded at various times as the development of the hotel kept pace with that of Melbourne.¹

The original location of The Victoria Coffee Palace was 196 Collins Street. The leased premises adjoined the Melbourne Town Hall, just fifty metres from the corner of Swanston Street in Melbourne's central business district. The four-story building featured a beautiful Victorian façade with stunning intricate iron lace-work.

The hotel was opened to the public on 1 November 1880 with accommodation of 61 beds after the building had been renovated and refurnished. The accommodation was considered particularly grand in its day and newspapers spoke of the great entrance lounge and the handsome staircase.² Apart from these few references, little is known about the original building as few records of this time have survived. The building itself no longer exists.

Almost immediately after its opening in 1880, the directors of The Victoria Coffee Palace set about making the first of what would become constant upgrades to the building. In 1883 electric lights were placed in public rooms to replace gas. This was much cooler for guests, particularly in summer. In 1885 the hotel kitchen was ventilated 'with the object of discharging all unpleasant odours to the open air'.

Previous: View of Collins Street showing the Town Hall and The Victoria Coffee Palace with its decorative lace-work verandah, c. 1880.

Opposite: Postcard of The Victoria Coffee Palace's original building at 196 Collins Street showing the Town Hall at left and the Melbourne Athenaeum at right.

116 bedrooms, two dining rooms and a kitchen in the basement. Significant rebuilding was carried out, including the addition of two extra stories, but construction was initially delayed by shortages of materials and strikes resulting from unsatisfactory conditions in the labour market. Interior renovation of the rest of the company's freehold property was undertaken during 1922-24. By the mid-1920s, the freehold block of buildings facing Little Collins Street was a compact unit and the hotel's capacity had increased to 550 guests. Good results in 1927 were considered to have justified the refurbishment costs.⁸

In 1925 the lease of the Collins Street premises expired and the original building was vacated, 45 years after the grand opening of The Victoria Coffee Palace in 1880. In July the main entrance to the hotel was established in Little Collins Street. At the beginning of 1927 the directors were pleased to note in the annual report that the change from Collins Street to Little Collins Street had not prejudiced the success of the company in any way.⁹

1928: a new era, a new building

Despite numerous additions during the 1920s, by the end of the decade the demand for accommodation continued to exceed the number of beds at The Victoria Palace. In 1927 the directors negotiated a deal with the nearby Baptist Church to lease a parcel of land adjoining the hotel. The annual report of that year announced:

A building lease for a period of 65 years has been secured of the adjoining freehold, having a frontage to Little Collins Street of 66 feet by a depth of 138 feet. Upon this land your Directors intend to erect a building of nine stories, the ground and first floors of which will be occupied by the Baptist Church, and the seven floors above by the Victoria Palace.¹⁰

In the following year, at a cost of £108,000, the nine-floor East Wing was erected at the rear of the Collins Street Baptist Church, fronting Little Collins Street. The new wing had hot and cold running water and was joined by bridges to the existing structure. It provided accommodation for 250 guests and increased the hotel's capacity to 800. This more than covered the accommodation lost when the lease on the Collins Street property expired in 1925.



Cigarettes were displayed in the Little Collins Street window that sold newspapers and tobacco from the hotel's foyer bookstall to pedestrians in the 1930s and 1940s.

The Victoria Palace architect, Alex Eggleston, who had designed and supervised alterations and improvements throughout the hotel during the previous six years, was responsible for the new building. The façade was faced with decorative terracotta tiling that needed only a shower of rain to bring it back to original brightness. An extensive view of the city and suburbs could be enjoyed from the roof.

A feature in *Hotel & Guest House* magazine in April 1929 gave detailed descriptions of the new building.¹¹ The entrance lobby on the ground floor was fitted out with showcases used by city retail stores for display. There was a bookstall in one corner with newspapers, magazines, tobacco and stamps for purchase. From a window the passing public in Little Collins Street could be served with tobacco. Public telephones were located in the foyer and in cabinets on each floor. A copper letter chute that ran beside the lifts from the top floor into a polished copper receiving box in the lobby made sending mail easy for guests.



Stay in the heart of MELBOURNE

The New VICTORIA PALACE

301-329 LINDA STREET (Near Town Hall).

AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST, MOST MODERN, HOTEL.

POPULAR ROOMS ONLY TAKEN

Single Rooms, 10/- to 12/- per day.
Double Rooms, 15/- to 18/- per day.
Unfurnished Dining Room and
Cafeteria. Bar. Larder.
Write to Dept. 12 for FREE
Illustrated Brochure.

Above: The hotel's Centre Block was rebuilt in time for Melbourne's Centenary in 1934. The new eight-story building boosted accommodation to 850, making The Victoria Palace the largest hotel in the Commonwealth.
Below: The hotel's guest lounge provided a quiet space for guests to read, write and entertain visitors in the 1940s.



BRICKS AND MORTAR

The foyer also contained a booking office and cloakroom, a telephone switchboard linked to 182 new bedrooms and a microphone to page people. At a cost of £5,000 the hotel's lifts were modernised and capacity increased, bringing the total to five for guest use and one service lift. Australian timbers were used for all internal fittings while white marble was imported from the famous quarries of Sicily.¹²

The new Victoria Palace building had passages totalling more than one mile – equivalent to the distance from Spring Street to Spencer Street. Passages varied in width from five to twenty feet and were decorated in a variety of materials.

Rooms were numbered according to the floors on which they were situated, for example, all rooms commencing with 'one hundred' being on the first floor, rooms commencing with 'two hundred' on the second floor, and so on. Lounge accommodation was provided on the second floor of the East Wing and on the mezzanine of the main building.¹³

The new Centre Block brought the accommodation up to 850, making The Victoria Palace the largest hotel in the Commonwealth, if not in the Southern Hemisphere.¹⁴ By September 1934 advertisements for the 'new' Victoria Palace boasted it as 'Australia's largest unlicensed hotel', 'the most centrally situated residential hotel in Melbourne' and 'the most up-to-the-minute hotel accommodation in Australia'. While the hotel was located in the heart of the city, because of its protected position, it was said to be quiet and restful.¹⁵

In October 1934 an advertisement was placed in the *Argus* thanking patrons for their loyal support during the period of rebuilding and advising that the alterations were complete.¹⁶ By the end of the financial year to 30 June 1936, the first complete year of occupation of the new premises, guest numbers had increased by 30,000 to more than 220,000 per year. Directors felt the money was well spent in bringing the establishment up to date.¹⁷

1940s and 1950s: wartime deconstruction and post war construction

After the addition of the new Centre Block in 1934, not a lot of changes were made to the hotel during the subsequent war years. One major modification was the removal of the impressive skylight dome in the foyer, which was dismantled as part of the blackout requirements during World War II.



CHAPTER FOUR

*Worth their Weight
in Gold*

Staff of The Vic



To Miss Miley
 & John of Our Estate
 22/5/36
 Melbourne Victoria Australia

WHEN ASKED THE REASONS why they return to The Victoria Hotel again and again, regular guests invariably reply that the staff have a lot to do with their repeat visits. There is a proud tradition of providing superior service to guests at The Victoria. The hotel is made up of not only the physical buildings but, just as importantly, the service provided by the people working behind the scenes to ensure that each guest's stay is pleasurable. A history of The Victoria Hotel would not be complete without covering the vital role of the staff.

Providing superior service

An article in *Hotel & Guest House* magazine in 1929, which featured a large spread on the newly renovated Victoria Palace, made special note of the role of the staff at the hotel. It reported that 'special care is taken in the selection of staff, and an attitude of courtesy toward guests is demanded at all times'.¹ It is clear that, even at this early stage, great importance was placed on highly skilled, personable employees to represent the establishment.

The Victoria Palace at this time had around 250 employees who punched a time clock in the timekeeper's office to note their arrival and departure. At the front of house was a head porter who was in charge of a large squad of bellboys. Looking after the hotel's dining facilities was a cafeteria manageress who had three superintendents under her: two looking after the brown dining room and one in charge of the blue dining room. There were 30 kitchen staff working under the direction of the hotel's chef.

Previous: The staff of The Victoria Hotel in 2006.

Opposite: The staff of The Victoria Palace in 1936. This photograph, taken on the roof of the hotel, was presented to Miss B. Miley on her retirement after 21 years as dining room manageress. She is seated in the second row to the left of the chef.



CHAPTER FIVE

Feeding the Masses

Dining at The Vic

The two cafeterias were situated on the ground floor of the Centre Block, entered directly from Collins Street. The cafeterias operated on a self service *a la carte* basis, with prices ranging from 4 pence for pea soup, to 9 pence for sausages and mashed potatoes, and 1/- for a small plate of oysters. The Victoria had been among the first to introduce this type of meal service to the Melbourne public two years earlier when the cafeterias opened in 1927. They were largely patronised by Melbourne business people. The cafeterias offered cakes, scones, pastry, bread rolls, butter, salads, cold meats, cold sweets and fruit, all of which was displayed on shelves and clearly priced. There were also two soda fountains installed for the service of cold drinks.

At the end of the 1920s, The Victoria Palace served over 3,000 meals per day. Fish was the most popular choice. The hotel kitchen occupied a large area in the basement of two sections of the building. It had an eight-foot square coal fired range. By 1934, the hotel was serving 100,000 meals each month in its cafeterias and dining rooms, which covered more than 9,000 square feet. Long lines of customers often extended 80 yards up the street as they waited for a place. The quantity of food consumed was often enormous. For example, to cater for hungry diners during the period covering the Royal Melbourne Show and the racing carnival in 1934, 1,000 turkeys and 1,500 chickens were ordered from local poultry farmers.²

1930s: a multitude of choice

In 1935 the hotel offered three large cafeterias for fast dining and a well-appointed dining room where guests could dine at leisure in the old fashioned way. Both the 'luxurious dining room and modern noiseless cafeterias' of The Victoria were said to serve 'excellent food at moderate price'.³ A café serving morning and afternoon tea was a haven for morning shoppers and tired businessmen. On the second floor there was also a Tudor style lounge where people met for late suppers to chat together in a homelike atmosphere of wood fires and armchairs.⁴

Patricia Forrest, who first stayed at The Victoria as a child in 1925, recalls dining at the hotel with her parents during the 1920s and 1930s:

A selection of souvenir menus from events held at The Victoria Palace during the 1930s.





Queen Elizabeth II was the guest of honour at a State Reception held at the Melbourne Town Hall and adjoining Victoria Hotel on 23 February 1963. To cater for 1,700 guests, covered walkways between the buildings were created and the hotel's function rooms were converted into banquet rooms.

suckling pig, ox tongue and ham on the bone; poultry including roast turkey, capons and duckling; various salads; and a selection of sweets like French gateaux, pavlova and fruits.¹⁸

A humorous newspaper article from the late 1960s discussing the various merits of long lunches in Melbourne during this era demonstrates The Victoria's position as a sought after place to dine. Author and well-known food critic Keith Dunstan wrote:

*The Victoria has its large Banquet Hall, and to get in there you have to book months ahead...travel agents, advertising men, PR men, accountants, insurance men, engineers, are there daily, always with their guest speakers. Part of the Lunchmanship there is that everybody always gets labelled. Your name in large letters is pinned on your lapel as soon as you arrive. Then it is indicative of the quality of the lunch if you forget to remove your name tag before you return to the office. And you think, how nice so many people recognise your name as you walk down the street.*¹⁹

For a long period during the 1960s, '70s and '80s there was a coffee shop on the mezzanine known as The Mezzanine Coffee Shop. It was open seven days a week from mid-morning until mid-afternoon. The coffee shop operated on a self-selection basis where patrons could place items like cakes, doughnuts and sandwiches on a tray and have the total calculated at the end. Tables were positioned around the mezzanine and the aroma of freshly brewed coffee filled the area. Regular guests loved watching the world pass by through the foyer from the prime position. The coffee shop was profitable, often taking \$600 a day and it was run by Beverley Beard, one of the hotel's longest serving employees, for almost three decades.

1980s: Munro's Restaurant, a popular place to eat

During the 1980s the hotel's dining room was renamed Munro's Restaurant. While this was an appropriate epithet to the hotel's founder, James Munro, 100 years after its formation, the hotel that now assumed his name bore little resemblance to the coffee palace he established in 1880. At Munro's Restaurant breakfast was served from 7am every day except Sundays when the chef was given a sleep-in and breakfast started half an hour later. Munro's served lunch each weekday from 12pm to 3pm and was open for dinner

every night. On Sundays the restaurant offered a smorgasbord from 12pm to 3pm. But the biggest difference between Munro's in the 1980s and the original Victoria Coffee Palace of 1880 was that the new restaurant was licensed and guests could enjoy a selection of wine and ales with their meal.²⁰

A review of Munro's Restaurant at The Victoria in *The Age* in February 1985 described the atmosphere as falling 'somewhere between country pub and chain-store cafeteria'. The restaurant seated 160 people and had a wide selection of Victorian wines. A meal for two people cost approximately \$34 plus drinks.²¹

Munro's was a popular place for a meal during the latter part of the eighties for guest and members of the general public alike. Munro's had high-backed button upholstered plush leather booths that gave an impression of privacy even when the restaurant was full. The restaurant had an Italian Maitre d' who knew all of the regulars by name. He was known to wander around the tables during each meal, seeing that everything was to the guests' satisfaction. If a guest was not happy the meal was sent back to the kitchen without argument.

Long-term guest Des Bennett recalls that the restaurant served meals that provided value for money. Like many diners, Des felt that people were always served a good meal and never went away hungry. He can remember dining at the hotel prior to it gaining a liquor licence in 1967, when no alcoholic drinks were available. And while he never considered it one of Melbourne's top restaurants, Des feels that Munro's concentrated on looking after country people's needs and wants, which quite likely contributed to its success.²²

Lyn and Bob Thomson first stayed at The Vic in 1989 when the restaurant was Munro's. At that time lunch was served on the mezzanine and dinner at night in the restaurant itself. For a short period during a restaurant renovation a few years later both lunch and dinner were served on the mezzanine.

In 1992 Munro's Restaurant and the Victoria Hotel kitchen were closed for a total refurbishment. The restaurant was completely revamped, marble tables were added and it was given a new image. When the restaurant was relaunched in September it was called Vista Café.

A spectacular display of cuisine at The Victoria Hotel in the 1980s.





CHAPTER SIX

Gracing the Halls

People and events of The Vic



TWO OF THE ELEMENTS that have shaped The Vic over the years are the guests who have graced its halls and the events going on in Melbourne that played a pivotal part in bringing people to the hotel. The Vic has hosted thousands of functions and events in its long history and many hundreds of thousands of guests have passed through its doors. Snapshots of different periods in the hotel's history reveal how events and people at The Vic have changed, and sometimes stayed the same, and how they have brought life to the hotel.¹

1930s: guests from far and wide

Melbourne newspapers of the 1930s show that it was a common practice to note who stayed at which local hotels. This was not limited to notable individuals, as papers would often report on 'ordinary' people. As noted in the *Herald*, *Sun* and *Star* newspapers, guests at The Victoria Palace in 1934 included the Secretary of the Girl Guides' Association, teachers on exchange from England, members of the Australian, NSW and Queensland women's cricket teams and a couple from Hobart on their golden wedding anniversary. It is an indication of the general type of guest The Victoria Coffee Palace attracted that some of the professional titles represented were captain, senator, reverend, lady mayoress, doctor, mayor and professor.

Previous: Melbourne's major events have long attracted crowds to The Victoria Hotel. In preparation for the city's Centenary in 1934, the hotel erected a new eight-story building to cater for the anticipated influx of visitors to Melbourne. Large crowds can be seen in this image of the Electricity Commission float in the Centenary parade.
Opposite: Ladies in their racing finery at the Spring Racing Carnival at Flemington, 1902. Demand was always high at The Victoria during Melbourne Cup Week and guests often had to be turned away.

Newspaper also noted where guests travelled from. Visitors to The Victoria Palace in 1934 lived as far afield as Adelaide, Bairnsdale, Ballarat, Benambra, Bendigo, Brisbane, Burnie, Cairns, Camperdown, Canberra, Creswick, Geelong, Gippsland, Hamilton, Healesville, Hobart, Horsham, Kerang, Kyabram, Launceston, Maffra, Maryborough, Mortlake, Mt. Buffalo, Mt Gambier, Perth, Queenscliff, Sale, Shepparton, Rockhampton, Sorrento, Stawell, Sydney, Traralgon, Wagga, Warracknabeal, Wonthaggi and Yea.

International guests arrived from Wellington, Christchurch, Nauru Island, Singapore, South India and London (via New Zealand on a world trip). Many visitors stayed before leaving on overseas travel. The following years show similar trends. Guests included a Tasmanian senator, Country Women's Association members and girls' hockey teams from around Australia who were in Melbourne for the International Women's Hockey Tournament.

During the 1930s The Victoria Palace frequently accommodated visitors from Britain, America, India, China, Japan and South Africa. Interestingly, the proportion of overseas visitors at The Victoria Palace increased from 15 per 1,000 during 1934 to over 45 per 1,000 the following year. The main increases were guests from Ceylon, India, the Federated Malay States and New Zealand.

One of the largest single hotel reservations made at a Melbourne hotel was for a booking at The Victoria Palace in 1935 when 93 members of the Bendigo Agricultural and Horticultural Society, who were on a six day tour of Victoria, stayed at the hotel during their time in Melbourne. During that year The Victoria Palace housed on average 600 people per night and 800 during the holidays. Those numbers were significant for a hotel in Melbourne at that time and the hotel's large clientele was considered 'a striking tribute to the constant good management of the House over the 55 years of its existence.'²

Posters advertising events that drew crowds to the hotel in the 1940s and '50s. Clockwise from top left: Melbourne's Centenary, The Victoria Palace's own advertisement, Olympic Games, The Royal Show.



While much has changed for the hotel, certain themes continue. For instance, some events, seventy years later, are still popular in Melbourne and still attract large numbers to The Vic. As was the case in the 1930s, Cup Week is one of the hotel's peak periods today, with occupancy hovering around 95%. Other major attractions in the first decade of the 21st century are the Australian Open Tennis in January, the International Comedy Festival each April and the AFL Grand Final week combined with the Royal Melbourne Show in late September. The Formula One Grand Prix in March and the Boxing Day Test Cricket are also events that attract large crowds to the hotel.

Cup Week is still one of the most exciting times of the year at The Victoria Hotel. Every year the hotel overflows with interstate and international visitors, in Melbourne for the first week in November. Now, as in the 1930s, guests dress in the finest fashion and glorious millinery. Early morning is the perfect time to sit in the lobby as lifts open to reveal beautifully attired ladies, heading to Flemington for champagne and chicken breakfasts.



Cup Week is still one of the most exciting times of the year at The Victoria Hotel. This 1936 image shows race-goers in fine fashion and millinery at Flemington Racecourse. Opposite: This advertisement appeared in a programme for a performance by famed soprano Florence Austral at the Melbourne Town Hall in 1935.

Bringing
First-class Hotel Accommodation
Within the Reach of All

The New
VICTORIA PALACE
NEXT TOWN HALL LITTLE COLLINS STREET
MELBOURNE

The largest Unfurnished Hotel
in the Commonwealth

Situated right in the heart of Melbourne within a
minute's stroll of the Shops, Theatres and Main
Quarantine House.

THE NEWEST AND MOST MODERN HOTEL IN AUSTRALIA

A CORNER OF THE
NEW DINING ROOM

THE DINING ROOMS ARE UNDER THE PERSONAL
SUPERVISION OF A CHIEF WAITER, AND IN
CLUDE TABLE D'HOEN, A
LA CARTE AND BUFFET

TARIFF (Room only)
Single Room 2/- to 3/-
Double Room 3/- to 4/-

Private Bachelors
by arrangement
Catering Tariff
on application

THE VICTORIA PALACE LTD.
LITTLE COLLINS STREET
MELBOURNE



CHAPTER SEVEN

Bottoms Up

Enjoying a drink at The Vic



THE VICTORIA HOTEL has a complex association with liquor – firstly its denunciation of alcohol in the hotel's early days as a temperance bar, then the introduction of liquor after more than eighty years. The Victoria was the last of the great coffee palaces, remaining a 'dry' hotel until it obtained a liquor licence in 1967, well over eight decades after it began trading.

The 1880s was a rich temperance era in Melbourne when the government of the day was described as 'the greatest moral show on earth'. The Victoria was the first of the great coffee palaces, ahead of the Grand Coffee Palace, St Anne's Coffee Palace, Melbourne Coffee Palace and the Federal Coffee Palace. The Victoria was founded by 'rapacious land-boomer' James Munro, who was leader of the Temperance Party, president of the Total Abstinence Society and the Victorian Alliance for the Suppression of Liquor Traffic and a committeeman of the Independent Order of Rechabites.

It was '[w]ith much blowing of Presbyterian and Temperance trumpets [that] the Victoria was opened in 1880'.¹ Immediately it started paying good dividends, as were the other coffee palaces, which indicates there was a market for places to socialise free from the 'demon drink'. The strong temperance influence remained for many years. Even when the temperance and church influence began to wane post World War II, a large teetotal clientele kept the attitude to liquor the same and the dry covenant signed into the Articles of Association prevented any change.

Previous: After 87 years without a liquor licence, in the 1980s the hotel's cocktail bar was a place for guests to enjoy a drink.

Opposite: The ornate foyer at The Victoria Hotel dates back to the 1934 rebuilding of the Centre Block and includes a grand central staircase with decorative balustrade. The hotel's bar has always been located at the top of the stairs on the mezzanine.



CHAPTER EIGHT

One of a Kind

The Vic's unique atmosphere



THE NUMBER OF RETURN GUESTS at The Victoria Hotel is between 40% and 50%. This extraordinary rate represents a percentage of return customers that many businesses would love to claim. This has been an attribute of The Victoria for almost as long as the hotel has existed. In 1935 it was reported, 'An unusual feature about the business is that more than 90% of the clientele are regular patrons whose names recur with unfailing regularity year after year.'¹

When the hotel's reservation record keeping system was changed in 2004 the extent of the hotel's loyal customer base became apparent. Front of house manager John Psaila decided to record some of the data from the old system before the changeover. He requested a report that identified guests who had stayed at the hotel ten times or more in the previous four years. John expected 50-60 names to appear and was astonished to find more than 1,000 on the list. So he altered the criterion to patrons with twenty or more visits and even this still revealed over 600 guests.²

As for why people keep coming back to The Victoria Hotel, John believes there are three main features the hotel has to offer. In no specific order, these are: most definitely the location: 'You couldn't wish for a better location in Melbourne. Guests can walk two or three minutes to wherever they want to go and whatever they want to do in Melbourne.' Secondly, the staff-guest relationship at the hotel is different to other hotels: 'A lot of guests will say they regard the hotel as home. They're coming to their second home when they come here.' The third point is that the hotel's pricing has always been fair.

Previous: Allan and Betty Angus celebrated their marriage on 5 October 1944 with a wedding breakfast at The Victoria Palace and have become lifelong guests of the hotel. Opposite: Functions have always been a feature of the hotel, when care is taken to create a special atmosphere.



CHAPTER NINE

Looking Ahead

The future for The Vic



Looking back: 125 years of History

IN NOVEMBER 2005 The Victoria Hotel celebrated the 125th anniversary of The Victoria Coffee Palace's opening in 1880. To commemorate this milestone, a function was held on the hotel's mezzanine area on the morning of Tuesday 8 November.

The scene was set by a four-piece string quartet and waiters dressed in period costume. Owner Dr Jerry Schwartz looked the part in Victorian style dress that included top hat, tails, waistcoat and cravat. The guest list comprised current and former staff and many long-standing guests, who say they were honoured to have been invited to such an occasion. Engraved plaques were presented to attendees and the hotel took the opportunity to launch a booklet outlining the hotel's fascinating history.

A highlight of the occasion was the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the hotel's 125 years. This is now proudly displayed in the hotel foyer. A range of carefully selected archives on display included early maps and floor plans of the buildings, photos of staff and hotel facilities over the years, newspaper clippings and even placemats once used in the dining room. Prizes were awarded for the top entries in a competition inviting guests to record their memories of the hotel.

Previous: The hotel's foyer has been updated over the years but retains its grand staircase. Opposite: The hotel's 125th anniversary was celebrated in style with a mezzanine function. Hotel owner Jerry Schwartz (top right) and staff dressed in period costume.