

“Dee-Jays” and “Foodland” at Riverstone

Alan Strachan

In the late 1950s, the shops along Riverstone Parade opposite the Riverstone Railway Station comprised a dry cleaner, fruit shop, butcher shop, Aussie Café, Conway’s Newsagency, a Chemist and the Commonwealth Bank on the Corner of Garfield Road. The Riverstone Meat Company owned three of the buildings, two of which being the Fruit Shop and the “Imperial” Butcher Shop.

During 1959 Mr Don Chandler of Windsor, secured a lease with the Meatworks for the vacant building between the Riverstone Dry Cleaner’s and the Fruit and Vegetable Shop. With the assistance and finance of Mrs Joyce Howe, who was also from Windsor and was a silent partner, the self-serve grocery shop was established, and opened for business the same year and traded as “Dee-Jays”. This name had been formed from the first initials of both Don and Joyce – “D - J”, hence the name “Dee-Jays”. It is not known as to why Mr Don Chandler went into the grocery store business, as his brother was the funeral Director at Windsor – J. W. Chandler.

At first Carol Dwyer of Riverstone worked for and with Don Chandler, filling the shelves and on the check-out, or in those days better known as the “till” or “cash-register”. Eric Wells was the delivery man who only worked part-time for Don at the store. He delivered the groceries “free of charge” to the customers throughout the Riverstone district, Marsden Park and Schofields in the blue 1959 Holden panel van which had side view windows. Eric was a foreman in the Mutton Section at the Riverstone Meatworks, and delivered the groceries after he finished his day shift.

When Carol Dwyer left the store, Jan Bennett took her place, and in late 1961, Margaret Britton of Riverstone commenced working at the shop for Don Chandler. In 1966 Mrs Joyce Howe took over the store from Mr Chandler and then traded under the “Boomerang” as Riverstone “Foodland”. The “Boomerang” was yellow and the words “Foodland” were in red. Margaret Britton was kept on and remained as the cashier on the check-out and filling the shelves with grocery stock. Eric Wells was only kept on for a short time, as Mrs Howe required a full-time man to fill the position. She offered Eric the full-time job at the shop delivering the groceries and picking up grocery stock etc. Owing to the fact that he was fully employed as a foreman at the Meatworks, Eric had to decline the offer. Mrs Howe considered this service vital as business had built up under the “Foodland” banner, also in retaining the regular customers who now wanted their groceries delivered throughout the day and not just in the late afternoon. The free delivery service also attracted new customers to the store.

Len Strachan was a butcher/slaughterman, working in the Beef House at Riverstone Meatworks. At that point in time during 1966, the Meatworks were slack with a limited kill and he was only working three days a week, and he could not survive on such a low wage per week. Len found out about the vacancy at the “Foodland” Store through his sister-in-law, Margaret Britton. Following inquiries with Mrs Howe, he was offered the full-time position at the shop which he accepted. Len recalls that for a short period he used the 1959 Holden Panel Van, but Mrs Howe then bought a 1963 white Holden Panel Van with side canopy windows for making grocery deliveries in.

About the same time Len Strachan started at the shop, young Miss Teena Duce of Windsor was employed to work on the “till” and to stack the shelves. Under the “Boomerang”, business had certainly picked up at the shop. It is not exactly known as to how Teena got the job at Riverstone, but one theory is that her mother, Mrs Duce may have known or been friends with Mrs Howe. Teena and her mother Mrs Duce lived along side the Richmond Railway Line in a Railway House on the

northern side in Cox Street. Teena travelled on the train to work at Riverstone, with Noel Smith who worked at Arnold's Clothing Shop.

Len Strachan recalls that there were several shops in Riverstone Parade at the time he worked at "Foodland". There was the "Riverstone Dry-Cleaners", then "Foodland", Mr Tim Lee (who was Chinese), had the small "Fruit Shop", "Imperial" Butcher Shop, then Mr Frank Culina had the large "Fruit & Vegie" Shop. His shop was back off the footpath between the Butcher's and the "Aussie" Café. Then there was Conway's Newspaper Shop, Mr Bill Kull had the Chemist and the Commonwealth bank was on the corner.

At the shop, Lenny Strachan was also required to make up and check the grocery orders before delivery, but mostly they were selected off the shelves by the customers and put through the cash-register and pre-paid. The groceries were packed into empty cardboard cartons that the stock items came in from the food companies. The "Foodland" delivery truck arrived on Tuesdays in the back lane-way near the R. S. L. Club, and Len, along with the driver had the job of unloading it.

Besides making the deliveries in the van around Riverstone, Len also went to Marsden Park, Vineyard, Schofields and as far away as the Box Hill area. He was called upon by Mrs Howe to drive to Campbell's at Penrith to obtain stores for the shop when they ran short or out of stock. Mr Joe Wilson also obtained stores from "Foodland" for his small grocery shop on the Windsor Road at Vineyard. Len Strachan would pick up the stores required such as a pack of sugar etc. Mr Wilson would attend Riverstone and collect the stores from Mrs Howe and at the same time, pay for them.

Len recalls that when Mr Joseph "Joe" Wilson passed away in 1967, that his shop at Vineyard was closed. Through Len Strachan's Aunty – Violet Johnson who had worked for Joe and May Wilson at the Vineyard Shop and Post Office for almost twenty-years, arrangements were made through Mrs Joyce Howe to purchase all the stock on the shelves at the Vineyard General Store. Len went to Vineyard and picked all the stores up.

In early 1968, Maurice "Maurie" and Evelyn Hawkins who operated a guest-house at Bowral in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, took over the store from Mrs Joyce Howe. Evelyn worked on the "till" at the check-out, and shortly after Margaret Britton left after working at the shop for nine years. Margaret then went to work for Mr Frank Culina at the large fruit shop next to the "Aussie" Cafe. This then left Evelyn and "Maurie" Hawkins, Len Strachan and Miss Teena Duce at the store. The Hawkins' discovered that they could not afford to keep everyone employed at the store, and shortly after, Teena left "Foodland" and went to work for Mr Neil Murray at his MFC [Major Food Centre] Store in Garfield Road next to the picture theatre.

Later, Vicki White from Riverstone worked on the "till" and filling shelves. When Vicki left the store, Miss Kay Alcorn of Vineyard, took her place. Len Strachan left "Foodland" in 1973 after working at the shop for seven years, and went to work at David's in Bessemer Road at Blacktown. David's were a supplier of "Foodland". Miss Kay Alcorn stayed on at the store with the Hawkins' until the end of the late 1970s. At the end, Mrs Hawkins worked on the "till" and packed shelves, along with Kay Alcorn, and "Maurie" did the grocery deliveries in the van. The building had operated as a self-serve grocery store for just on eighteen years, with eleven of these years under the "Foodland" banner.



1974 photo by Neville Biddle.

Up until the time the Riverstone Meat Company sold out to the developers, who were building the new shopping complex at Riverstone, the premises were still leased. Len Strachan recalls that Mr John Muddle, the Clerk from the Meatworks would come to the shop each week and collect the rent and issue a receipt to the occupiers of the shop – Mrs Howe and the Hawkins'. Mr John Muddle also collected the mail at the Post Office for the Meatworks.

With the closure of the "Riverstone Dry-Cleaner's", "Foodland", "Fruit and Vegetable Shop", and the "Butcher Shop" [Manager Mr Barry Rosa], they were all demolished in 1977, and during 1978, the new Riverstone Market Town opened for business. Here, Mr Maurice Hawkins and his wife, Evelyn, went into business in a small jewellery shop.



1970s ANZAC service Foodland in the background.

Photo Riverstone & District Historical Society Inc.