

Lyle Rosenthal

Compiled by Clarrie Neal with information from Joan and Les Schilling, and Bob Cox.

The store on the corner of Garfield Road and Railway Terrace was owned and operated by Lyle Rosenthal and his wife Madge from 1923 to 1963. From this date his daughter Joan and her husband Les Schilling took over and they operated the store until it was sold in 1973. This meant the Rosenthal family store had served the community of Riverstone for a period of 50 years.

It was a two storey building with the shop occupying all the ground floor, and the family living on the top floor where Lyle and Madge raised their three daughters Leila, Joan and Lyle.

It was a general store in every sense of the word, at times selling groceries, clothing, shoes, gifts, newspapers, medicines, hardware, Victa mowers, and was also an agency for the payment of rates.

The following article was furnished by Lyle's daughter Joan and her husband Les Schilling, who now live in Cairns, Queensland.

After finishing his education at Newington College, and the Hawkesbury Agricultural College (now the University of Western Sydney), Lyle Elias Rosenthal decided to go farming in the Bega Valley to please his father who owned a prosperous General Store in Bega.

Lyle's main interest was in dairying, especially cheese making, to which end he employed a Swiss family named Jauncy to help him. In fact he was the first person in Australia to package cheese.

A couple of bad seasons sent him back to the Hawkesbury, where he remembered while at school, seeing lush pastures suitable for dairying. He found what he was looking for at Freemans Reach, and bought a farm there. Whilst at Freemans Reach, he was among a group of farmers who started the Windsor Milk Factory.

Unfortunately after a few good seasons the Hawkesbury flooded twice in as many years, and as Lyle was married with a wife Madge (nee Jewel) and two young daughters, he decided to look towards retailing.

At this stage of his career, he was offered the chance of a lifetime, to join with three other businessmen who were about to start Woolworths. He turned them down, and bought the general store at Riverstone in partnership with a Mr Stewart Filmer. They bought the store from a Mr Cohen, and started in business in 1923, the store was known as LYLE STEWARTS.

After a few years the partnership was dissolved. Rosenthalls took over the business, and bought out the Filmers who then moved to Goulburn. The business was known as LYLE ROSENTHALLS, and was carried on in the original two storied shop and dwelling owned by Mr Billy East, who also owned the Royal Hotel across the railway line.

The corner position, where the shop now stands, was the Produce Store, managed by Mr McKenna, and an assistant there was a Mr Edwards. Most of the farmers around the district were supplied from this part of the shop. Everything else was to be found in the main part of the shop, including papers etc., groceries, boots and shoes, plus mercery, drapery, and even patent medicines, there being no chemist, paper shop, or shoe shop in Riverstone at that time. There was no bank either, Windsor being the closest.

An assistant from the grocery department went around the district taking orders, and he covered Marsden Park, Schofields, Oakville and Kenthurst. When he returned to the store, the orders were made up.

Most grocery lines came to the store in bulk, and had to be weighed up in brown paper bags as required. This made selling of groceries much more labour intensive than today, where we have most lines packaged ready for immediate sale in the modern supermarkets.

In those days when the orders were made up ready for delivery, a small bag of boiled lollies was included in the order for the children. Not a lot of people had telephones, as can be judged by the number of the shop, which was number 4 Riverstone, much easier to remember than today's numbers.

In the late 1920s the business had outgrown the old premises and the present building was built by Mr East. Mr Ray Vaughan was the carpenter who built the new building. Later on the building was purchased by Rosenthalls.

A few years after the new building was completed, the original was burnt to the ground. It had been carrying on as a milk bar/restaurant, being run by Mr and Mrs Morgan. Fortunately no one was at home on the night of the fire. It was said that the new shop was only saved by having the railway water tank so handy. There was no laid-on water in Riverstone, everyone relied on tanks. The water came later, as did the electricity.

Lyle Rosenthal was an Alderman, first with Windsor Council and then later with Blacktown Council. He was credited with lobbying for both water and electricity, and there was much celebrating in Riverstone when both these essential items were installed. Among the fun days were 'Back to Riverstone Week', and Queen competitions, to name a couple.

Mr Rosenthal was always very active in town affairs, like the Progress Association, Masonic Lodge, and the Parents and Citizens of which he was president for 10 years. He was always willing to lend a hand to any fund raising charities.

In 1963 in consultation with the family, the Rosenthalls decided to hand over the running of the business to their daughter Joan and her husband Les Schilling. Madge had given up her active participation in 1954 owing to ill health. Madge and Lyle went to live permanently in their beach house at North Avalon.

Joan and Les carried on the business much as always, catering for the needs of the changing population, which included many migrants who had settled in the district. Bob Cox, Mrs Kate Pead, Mrs June Johnson, and Mrs Peggy Webster were some of the loyal staff who helped them greatly.

Sadly Lyle did not live long to enjoy his retirement: he passed away in October 1963 after a full and happy life. Madge continued to live at Avalon, visited often by her three daughters, sons-in-law, and eight grandchildren, until March 1973, when her death coincided with the sale of the business at Riverstone, the fiftieth anniversary of its beginning.

Bob Cox recalled his days working for Lyle Rosenthal, prior to becoming a foreman at the Meatworks. He commenced at the store in 1950, working in the grocery section and he replaced Ron Reilly as the delivery man, driving a cut down Buick sedan. The Buick was later replaced with a little dark green Ford Anglia van. The orders were delivered to the surrounding districts and he remembers on hot summer days it being necessary to place the perishables in the ice box (or refrigerator), even if there was nobody at home.

Others who worked in the shop at the time included Millie Crouch, Betty Davis (n.Strachan), Mary Skeers (n.Schofields), Denise Shields (n.Budden). Mrs Rosenthal's nephew, Jack Arnold also worked in the shop prior to opening his own drapery shop up near the Post Office.

Bob recalled most of the goods were delivered to the shop in bulk, biscuits arrived in 6lb, 8lb and 14lb tins, and then packed into paper bags as required by the customer. Cheese came in bulk and was cut to size by a wire strand used with a guillotine action.

White sugar, brown sugar, castor sugar, rice, barley, and split peas all arrived in 56lb hessian bags. The sugar was then packed into 1lb, 2lb, and 4lb brown paper bags and tied with string that hung down from a ball attached to the ceiling.

The empty hessian sugar bags were much sought after by the local residents who had a multitude of uses for them. Meatworkers would tie a piece of rope or a bike tube to the corners as a shoulder strap, and use the bag to carry their smoko and dinner to work.

Rosenthalls was the stockist for linoleum, a bitumen based material that was the common floor covering of the day. The lino was delivered in a large roll and it was Bobby's job to cut the lino. As there was no space to cut it inside the shop the cutting was done outside the side door on the footpath. The footpath had to be swept clean before the lino could be rolled out and cut to the required length.

The store was also the agency where residents paid their council rates, water rates and electricity bills, with each account having to be paid on a specified day. On that day two officers from the Council or the Board would arrive and set up their table in the centre of the shop and commence collecting. Often a long queue would form and Bob recalled the queue stretching outside the shop and sometimes up to the milkbar next door.

Lyle loved his fresh fruit and vegies and it was a tradition that every afternoon he would walk up to Dick Stacey's fruit shop with a little cardboard box under his arm to get his supplies, usually taking his pet blue cocker spaniel for the walk. In the shop as he sampled the grapes or a peach he would often ask for a half a pound of peas or beans, etc. - this prompted Mrs Stacey to refer to Lyle as 'Arfa' and it always led to much light hearted banter between the two as he made his purchases.

Bob was working in the store when in an agreement reached with Wally Wood, Rosenthalls took over that shop's mercery and drapery sections and Wally took over Lyle's grocery sections. Bob recalled cleaning out the grocery section and finding one drawer filled with unpaid accounts. Many of these accounts were from families who had struggled through the depression or the hard times with the slack seasons at the Meatworks.

When asked what he wanted done with the docketts, Lyle replied "Nothing". Bob, who always found Lyle to be a caring and compassionate man, believed this proved Lyle's innate generosity to the community of Riverstone.