

## ADELAIDE DEMOCRATIC CLUB

21 Market Street

The Adelaide Democratic Club was established in 1887. It appears that the majority of those who encouraged the formation of such a club had been members of the National Reform League which had ceased to function at some time before 1883. The aims and objectives of that League were similar to those of the proposed Club, and it appears they generally shared the same members. The first suggestion to form a new club was made in 1883, but it was not until July 1887 that the Adelaide Democratic Club was officially created. The impetus for the formation of the ADC can be traced to the Club's first President, James Zimri Sellar.

The aims and objectives of the Club in the early years was to obtain better conditions for wage earners and the under-privileged, particularly it was said, the miners who worked in the copper mines. Under Sellar's guidance the Club developed strong political views and was closely tied to the United Labour Party. According to the Club's history, Sellar was one of the first leaders of the United Labor Party and the Honorary Secretary of the Party's official organ, *the Daily Herald*. (However, this information is not recorded in Sellar's obituary and the history does not seem to be a particularly reliable one.)

Sellar was a fascinating man. He was born in 1830 in London, the son of a bootmaker. He was a deeply religious man, a non-conformist Congregationalist. After his arrival in South Australia in 1849 he worked as a mechanic in the Burra Burra Mines. In his youth, Sellar flirted with the notion of becoming a journalist and in South Australia contributed to the *Register*. While at Burra he was elected the spokesman of the mechanics who advocated the change from a ten hour to an eight hour working day, a burning political issue at the time. In the 1850s he journeyed to the Victorian Goldfields, to Bendigo, and must have been moderately successful as he was able to establish a business as a tea merchant upon his return to South Australia, in February 1853. However, in 1866 he was declared insolvent and was gaoled for 12 months. Nevertheless his obituary records that his business continued for 44 years.

Sellar was keenly interested in the working man and his rights. He was the founder of the National Reform Association. He was an Adelaide City Councillor for Young Ward for seven years. Sellar stood for election as a member of the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council, twelve times before finally being elected to represent the District of Adelaide in May 1905. He died in December 1906.

His obituary, published in the *Observer*, reported that Mr Sellar had been ailing for some time and mentioned that one Adelaide paper had reported his death before it had happened. Sellar died at the age of 76, and the Albert bells of the Town Hall were rung to mark his death.

After Sellar's death in 1906, the activities and focus of the club began to drift away from political issues to general educational and social activities. The Club had organised a series of lectures (conducted usually on Sundays in the Central Market), held debates, social evenings and dances. The lecture topics in the early years included 'The Progress of Medicine and Dietetics for the last 25 Years', and 'Heredity, its Bearing on the Social Problems of the

## Heritage of the City of Adelaide

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Days'. Incredibly, someone spoke on a topic entitled 'Ireland's Wrongs and England's Grievances'. In 1903, one of the speakers included William Morris Hughes, later Australia's Prime Minister whose topic was 'Socialism - Is it opposed to Religion?'

The Club never had many members. At the close of its first year there were 102 members. After a few years there were 300 members and in 1962, there were 450 members. Members of the Club included Mr Paris Nesbitt, QC and Sir Charles Cameron Kingston, QC.

While initially the Club was vitally interested in the political issues of the time, as time progressed and Sellar's influence diminished, the Club's members seemed to have lost their impetus and settled into the comfortable role of belonging to a simple social club. The Club's history at this time mentions concerns such as the price of a dozen cigars and then

paradoxically, warned a brewery that unless it paid its employees award wages, it would get no more custom from the Club. An excellent indication of the Club's general decline into conservatism was the decision taken in 1910. The Club's history states, "In 1910, the rules which had until then permitted women to be members were altered so as to exclude them except on special occasions."



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In 1946, the Club severed its close affiliation with the Australian Labour Party, a seemingly vital shift in emphasis that receives only a passing comment in the history. The more apolitical the Club became, the more it seemed to have concerned itself with billiards and snooker tournaments, picnics and dances. In the late 1950s, the Club members agreed to allow bookmakers to use the upstairs hall for the settling of bets.

In relation to a building in which to house themselves, the Club initially rented space while it worked towards obtaining

premises. In 1887 they leased rooms in the City Arcade in Grenfell Street. In 1889 and again in 1890, the club moved to different rooms in the same premises. In 1891 some space was leased in a building in Waymouth street and later in 1893, the Club moved to Molton's Assembly Rooms in Flinders Street, near Victoria Square.

## Heritage of the City of Adelaide

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By 1910 the Club was looking for a site on which to build its own premises. They acquired the land in Market Street in 1911 for approximately £442 and built the clubrooms in 1915 for a cost of £6000 (including the furniture).

The significance of the Club lies in its association with Sellar and in its reflection of the rise of the Labor movement in South Australia. The 1870s and 1880s throughout Australia were marked by the growth and development of unionism and the rise of a political party to represent the Unions' concerns. In fact, the *Cyclopedia of South Australia*, published in 1909 comments, "In the political history of South Australia, scarcely anything more forcibly arrests observation than the growth and consolidation of the influence wielded by the United Labor Party." Many clubs and societies with a similar set of objectives to the Labour Party (such as the Adelaide Democratic Club), were established during this period in South Australia. The Adelaide Democratic Club represents this trend. However, by the time the building was constructed the founding father of the Club had died, and it was beginning to shift its emphasis from politics to a men's social club.

It is not known whether the Adelaide Democratic Club still exists, there is no listing in the Telephone Book for the Club. The premises in Market Street are now occupied and owned by a firm of solicitors.

The club was housed in a three storeyed, load bearing face red brick building with a glazed brick plinth. A foundation stone set in the building records that it was opened on 3 April 1915 by Senator William H. Story. At the roofline the building has a rendered parapet with brackets and pediments. It is a clear example of brick construction of the Edwardian period. Much development occurred around the Central Market area in the early years of the twentieth century, responding to the consolidation and development of Market buildings.

A series of alterations were made to the building in the 1960s. Generally the changes involved the uses of rooms, but the documentation reveals that the Club at that stage had a dining room, a billiard room, a bar, showers for members and "a powder room for females who on special occasions may be admitted as guests of the members."

The building contributes to a notable cultural environment. It is close to the Market and accords, in terms of the architectural style of the building, with the many other buildings constructed in this area in this architectural style. Those buildings include the Gouger and Grote Street facades of the Market Buildings, the Hampshire Hotel, the former Seventh Day Adventist Church (later LTU Hall) and the dance hall at 122 Gouger Street.

*Observer*, 22 December 1906, p. 38; *The Cyclopedia of South Australia*, p. 166-7; Howard Coxan, John Playford and Robert Reid, *Biographical Register of South Australian Parliamentarians, 1857-1957*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1985, p. 202; Faulkner, J.K. *The Adelaide Democratic Club - The History*, Adelaide Democratic Club, Adelaide, 1962; Moss, Jim *Sound of Trumpets*, p. 106 and p. 111.

## Heritage of the City of Adelaide

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