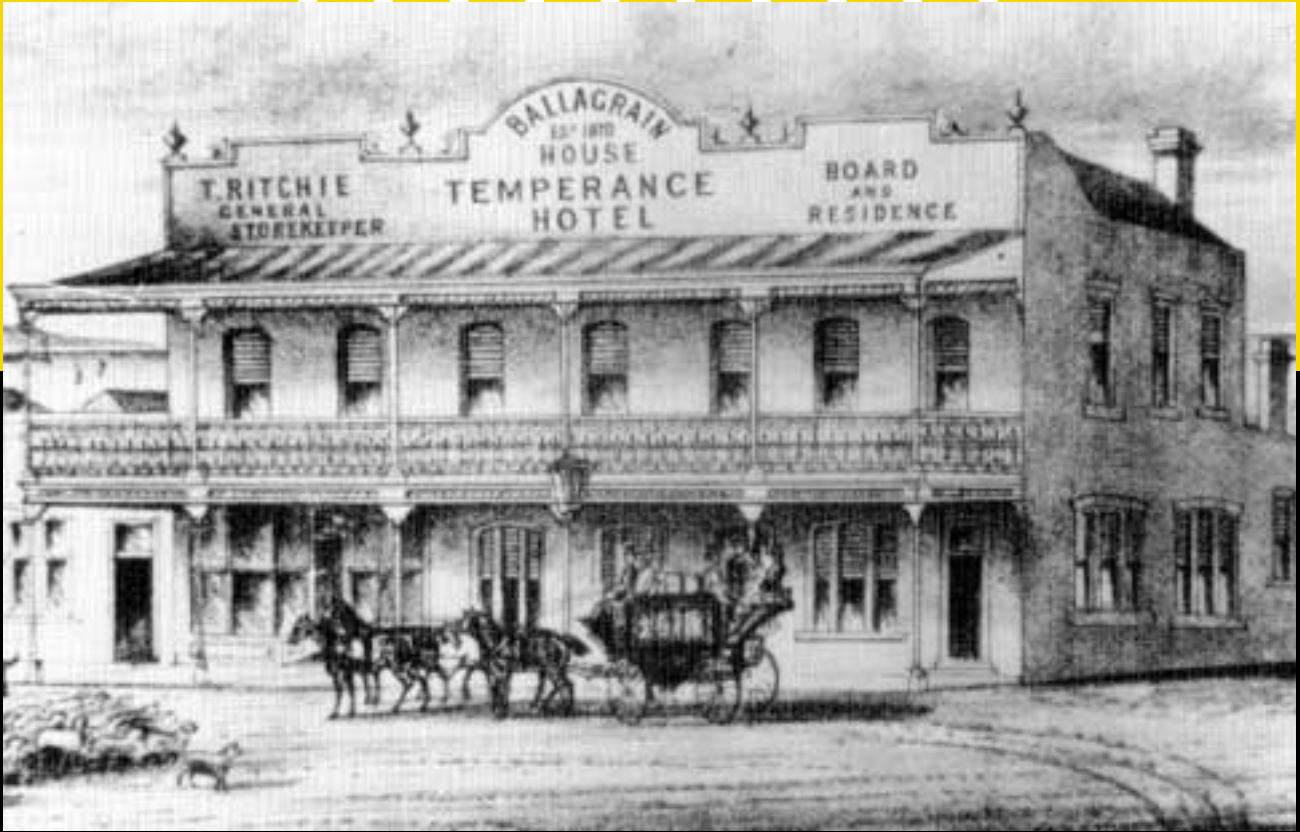


# THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COUNTER



**THE HISTORY OF RITCHIES STORES**  
By D.M. Carnegie

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I thank the many people who have given me their time and assistance to write this book.

Mrs Elisabeth Cameron and her family. Mr. Alan Collard of the Frankston Cemetery Trust. The Frankston Civic Centre. The Frankston Library. Mrs. Molly Graham of the Ballam Park Frankston Historical Society. Mrs. Helen Kennan, grand-daughter of Thomas and Margaret Ritchie. The LaTrobe State Library of Victoria. Mr. Nelson Morris and Mrs. P.J. Serle.

# CHAPTER 1

In 1851-The news that gold had been discovered in Australia, historically one of the richest finds ever made, spread over the world like a raging bushfire fanned by a hot wind, and taking into consideration the lack of our modern communication it is astounding that by 1852 it was common knowledge that sixteen million pounds worth of the precious metal had been discovered in this new colony. To convert sixteen million pounds to the present day dollar, plus the increase in the value of gold between 1851 and today is beyond my capability. One would need to be a retiring politician to visualise such a sum. Small wonder then that so many men all over the world who could, or hoped they could wield a pick and shovel, dreaming of the sudden wealth to be wrought from this new “El Dorado” were scrambling for a passage to this old, but newly discovered far continent, Australia. Amongst them no doubt, there were many whose only contact with a spade was in a pack of cards, and with their legerdemain were confident of relieving many a miner of his hard won nuggets or pay dirt!

In Australian harbours many ships lay idle at their anchorage unable to sail for their home ports as most of the crew had jumped ship and were heading for the “Pot of Gold” in the new diggings, where they had heard that nuggets of gold could be gathered as easily as acorns under an oak tree! They were to find this rumour far from true! Some may have been fortunate but most eventually filtered back to the ports, having found that the hard rough life of a seaman was vastly superior to the starvation and privations of an inexperienced gold fossicker in these sparsely populated new colonies in the depth of an inhospitable, unfamiliar terrain. Fortunately for Australia, amongst the “Get Rich Quick” passengers on most vessels setting sail to cross the world were honest farmers, tradesmen and artisans who wished to settle and help develop the new colonies; these were to become the foundation stones in the building of a vast and thriving country.

Early in 1852 a small sailing ship the “Isabella Watson” of 430 tons departed from the Port of London for Melbourne, Australia. On her crowded passenger list was the name of an eighteen year old youth, Thomas Ritchie.

Born in the town of Ballacrain on the Isle of Man in 1832, Thomas was the youngest son of Captain Colin

Ritchie, an officer of the 10th West India Regiment in the reign of George III. He had been badly wounded in action and had retired on half pay and returned to his homeland where his family were long established well-to-do shipbuilders. Thomas Ritchie and his brother, or possibly brothers, were educated in Scotland, but both he and an older brother James were itching to leave the restricted confines of the island. Possibly James had more difficulties in breaking the family ties, for he arrived in Australia twelve months after the spectacular debut of the irrepressible Thomas. With the history of his father and family behind him it is understandable that Thomas was longing to prove himself equal to their exploits both on sea and land. However, this handsome, well built young Manxman had more than hair under his wee Scottish Bonnet, for he realised that there were other ways of founding a fortune in the goldfields of Australia than slogging in the mud, searching for an elusive mineral at the bottom of a mineshaft; not that he was averse to hard work as his history proves, but mixed with the derring-do in his ancestry was that of a canny Scottish businessman, so when the “Isabella Watson” hoisted her anchor, in the hold lay a consignment of boots and shoes which he intended to sell at the goldfields, where such a commodity was virtually unobtainable.

On March 21 st, 1852 the Captain, crew and passengers aboard the little vessel were jubilant, for in spite of a squally, inclement day the excitement was mounting as the long voyage was all but over. Forgotten were the months of close confinement, cooped up with less space and privacy than an unfortunate hen in a battery, the dreary discomforts and boredom, the half rotten food and the inevitable bickering quarrels, for now they were not months, weeks or days away from their destination, but only a matter of hours. Bags packed, ready for disembarkation as they neared Port Phillip Heads, the passengers were in unanimous agreement that once ashore, surely whatever fate awaited them could not be worse than this voyage across the world. What was to follow is best described from an extract from “Shipwrecks at Port Phillip Head, 1840 to 1963”, written by the late Mr. P.T. Serle and Mr. P.J. Williams, both of whom were employed by the Maritime Services and had access to Official Returns and Board of Inquiry Reports:

## ‘ISABELLA WATSON SAILING SHIP’

Totally wrecked Cosair Rock, Point Nepean,  
21st March 1852.

The tragic wreck of this vessel followed very soon after her arrival off Port Phillip Heads on the 21st March, 1852. She was struck by a violent squall, and before coming into control was swept backwards onto an isolated rock at Point Nepean, presumed to be the now famous Corsair Rock.

Part of her starboard side was stove in, stern and stern post were carried away, and her back broken; the Captain’s gig with two men and six women got away from the wreck and at first were thought lost, but were later found on the beach.

Another boat was put into the water and eleven people were in it when the mizzen mast fell across and overturned it. Only two survived beside the Captain, who had been helping load it, and who had been pitched into the sea several times.

Pilot Tobin swam out to the wreck with a line, and the remainder, about sixty passengers and crew in all, were landed without loss of life. Most of the passengers’ luggage was saved, as well as the mails, and owing to a continuation of good weather a considerable amount of cargo was got ashore before she shifted and broke up a week later.

The Isabella Watson was a ship of 434 tons, belonging to London owners, and bound from that port to Melbourne with a general cargo.”

Also from the same book comes a further extract:

“It was not until the 7th November 1853 that the Port and Harbour Office, Williamstown, Victoria, issued this “Notice to Mariners”. “A Dangerous Rock, with only eleven feet of water over it at low tide has recently been discovered nearly three quarters of a mile west of Point Nepean. This is not laid down in any charts of this port. Commanders of vessels navigating “The Heads” are requested to observe the following marks in order to avoid the said rock which will hereafter be known as the “Corsair Rock”, and are recommended to lay down its position on their charts, as given underneath.”

Here follows explicit instructions for mariners, but far too late for the Captain of the “Isabella Watson”.

In spite of this warning many ships were still to be lost on this killer rock. One of them was a small colonial vessel named the “Isabella”, which outward bound from Melbourne for Western Port Bay was also caught in a sudden squall after passing through the Heads of Port Phillip Bay. Fortunately no lives were lost, but the little ship became a total loss, and no cargo could be salvaged. I have written of this wreck as I am sure that historians have confused this craft with the “Isabella Watson”.

There can be no doubt that Thomas Ritchie was a survivor of the “Isabella Watson’s” second boat launched, for all stories of his life agree that he was washed ashore, clinging to a spar. I am convinced that it is more than a possibility that some, if not all of his trading goods were salvaged, for he continued with his plans, and with some success. He spent nearly twelve months on the Bendigo goldfields before returning to “Melbourne Town” to meet his brother James. It was on the goldfields he came to share the fascination of all involved in this “Poker Machine” existence, for later he became a wealthy investor in the industry, but was to lose a great deal of his fortune made from this, and his many other business ventures in 1890, when a severe economic recession known as “The Land Boom”, was to see many gentlemen of his era stripped of their savings.

I believe that the two brothers James and Thomas opened the first grocery store at Gardners Creek, now known as Malvern, and it was here Thomas met Margaret Kennedy, who shortly afterwards became his wife. According to all stories written of his life, the then twenty year old founder of Ritchies Stores returned to Frankston in 1854. There is no record of his original stay in this then small community which consisted of approximately thirty inhabitants, mostly dwelling in huts and tents in the lee of Olivers Hill—perhaps after the wreck of the “Isabella Watson” he was befriended by the small group of inhabitants, and not only became enchanted with this beautiful coastal area but had the foresight to see the potential it offered, for he was to have more to do with the development of this now large city than any other of our early pioneers in the district. As from the moment of his return he set to work with enthusiasm with his many projects, the

success of which were not only to his own advantage, but were also to benefit his fellow townsmen.

Our Thomas was a man of great enterprise with matching energy. He contracted with the Mt. Eliza District Roads Board for the making and maintenance of roads, mainly nearby Frankston. He started a business for cutting and supplying wood, and became the main shareholder (date unstated) in the Frankston Brick Co. Thomas Ritchie started Frankston's first bakery, but later sold it to John Box. He also started a cartage business to bring fish from Hastings to Frankston, and reverting to his forebears on the Isle of Man, he became a builder of some note. Perhaps because of his experience on the "Isabella Watson" he had a preference for something more stable than the ships built by his family. As a result he was responsible for several of the lovely old colonial buildings which once graced the streets of Frankston, amongst them Frankston House and the Frankston Coffee Palace, a guest house with a row of shops on street level. An advertisement in the Mornington Standard 1889 states that "it had the longest and broadest balconies in the Colony". Sadly all have been demolished to make way for modern progress.

Strangely his first building was the last to go, for Frankston House was still standing until early 1980.

It has been wrongly stated that it was because of his building interests that Thomas Ritchie was absent from his home which he had built for his wife and young family on Olivers Hill when the greatest tragedy in the lives of Margaret and Thomas occurred. Mrs. Helen Kennor, their granddaughter, tells me that her grandfather had left his home early one morning towards the end of July 1863 to go fishing. Margaret, who had undoubtedly risen to cook his breakfast and see him on his way on this dark winter morning, found to her dismay that the family cow had strayed. It must be remembered that in those days there were no milkmen clanking bottles on the doorstep in the early hours of the morning, and more than likely the poor woman had to milk this valuable possession which rewarded the family with milk, cream and butter. To her horror, on her return as she neared the Ritchie property, what she thought to be a neighbour burning off was her

own home in flames! Poor Thomas could see from his boat the smoke of the fire but could not return in time to be of any help and on his frantic arrival found the house totally demolished. Not only three of their children died in the inferno, but also Margaret's young nephew, William Kennedy, who had been paying a visit. The only survivor was the baby, Rose, who was found wrapped in a smouldering blanket under a bush. Poor little Rose was to wear the scars of burns for the rest of her life. One historian wrote that "Colin, the eldest son survived, but was psychologically affected and died while still in his thirties". This is not true, as over the grave in the Mornington Cemetery stands a tablet inscribed with the names of Colin, Thomas, Janet Ritchie and William Kennedy-3rd August, 1863. Lower down – Ritchie – 1871, and, Janet Ritchie – 1874. Thomas and Margaret were to later have seven more children and to suffer the loss of these later two, Ritchie and Janet. The only surviving son was named Thomas, either after his father, or the small brother who perished in the fire.

In spite of this appalling tragedy Thomas Ritchie's good fortune in commerce was phenomenal, for it was literally true that all fish which came into his net were not only good, but marketable, as in 1867 with John Box, Harry Prosser, Phillip Renouf and James Croskell he founded the Frankston Fish Company. They not only founded the company but forged a strong and lasting friendship which was to remain for the rest of their lives. John Dixon Box was born in New South Wales in 1840 and he was later to become a Justice of the Peace. James Croskell was an American who found his way to Frankston in 1859. Harry Prosser was a Victorian, born in 1844 and Phillip Renouf, a Frenchman, a sailor who left, or jumped his ship at Port Adelaide in 1863.

In a photograph reproduced in this book you will see Thomas Ritchie and these other handsomely be whiskered young men gathered around a large fishcrate. Somehow this old photograph seems to portray the very essence of our early colonists. The only thing they had in their favour was youth, a cheerful readiness to receive and overcome the rigours and discomforts in their new land, and an iron determination to succeed in establishing a good home and life for their wives and children.

I have read in one of many books re the early days of Frankston that the Frankston Fish Company used no less than forty horses in the staging of carting the fish to the Melbourne market. It could be possible that they used the same stations as Cobb & Co. who then operated on the Mornington Peninsula.

Thomas Ritchie, James Crosskell and Phillip Renouf were later to form another business venture in Real Estate and Auctioneering and from the first issue of the Mornington Standard, 5th October, 1889, (from which I have obtained a great deal of information) they seemed prepared to auction anything from a bullock to a buttonhook!

By this time Thomas Ritchie was a well established licensed grocer, as in 1870 he had purchased a block of land on the corner of Playne and Bay Streets, the latter now Nepean Highway. The land extended from Bay Street to Kananook Creek, then a beautiful unpolluted stream, the mouth of which flows into Port Phillip Bay a short distance away. On this land he erected a building which he first named "Ballacrain House Temperance Hotel". Above a row of shops at street level there was a boarding house with accommodation for the ever increasing summer visitors who were finding Frankston an ideal holiday resort, as indeed it was with its long stretch of sandy beach and wide tree shaded quiet streets. It was one of these shops which became the birthplace of today's flourishing Ritchies Stores, for it was here Thomas opened Ritchie's first grocery, and it is from this small store that Ritchies has become a familiar name all over the Mornington Peninsula. Shortly after opening the store Thomas applied for a licence to sell wines and spirits, etc. This was granted in 1873. It must have been then that he changed the name of this building to Frankston House - no doubt he realised it would have been rather ludicrous to have a sign "Ritchies Licensed Grocery" underneath "Ballacrain House Temperance Hotel", both being owned by the same gentleman. Before long Thomas Ritchie found the confined space in his Frankston House store too restricting for his thriving business, so he bought a block of land on the opposite corner of Playne Street and the then Bay Street where he built his second store, and either then or perhaps before, he established nearby his "Grain & Chaff Store"



*The Frankston Fish Company established 1867 to supply Melbourne with fresh fish. Back Row: John Dixonbone, H. Prosser & Philip Renouf. Front Row: James Crosskell & Thomas Ritchie.*

Few people of today can remember the old general stores which served the small towns and outlying properties in Australia many years ago, such as the one built, owned and operated by Thomas Ritchie. Yet they are still to be found in the far outback, and, like the leopard, have never changed their spots. Invariably they were built on a corner intersecting the main roads leading into and out of the small settlements. Although the Grain & Chaff Merchant has taken a back seat to the Town Garage, the horse trough has been replaced by petrol pumps, the essential character still remains, for with the local Pub they are the hub, well greased by gossip in these communities. Many of these old stores once housed the local Post Office and Telephone Exchange (no Telecom then!), both too often in the charge of a soured widow or spinster "who knew so little, and knew it fluently".

Wisely, when Thomas designed his new store he made generous provisions for chattering idlers. Outside the building the long low windows facing Bay and Playne Streets had wide sills, with ample room for the townsmen to sit in the sun and discuss many a moot point relating to the district. This was also a meeting



place for the farmers on market day where they sat exchanging news and opinions of crops, sheep and cattle, and the always unpredictable weather whilst they waited in nervous trepidation for their wives. These hardworking ladies inside the store were trading their eggs and butter and no doubt squandering their savings on a new bonnet, having forgotten the long list of necessities needed to support their rugged existence—bags of sugar and flour, the chest of tea, candle moulds, the two pounds of nails, etc., amongst other items, all carefully compiled by candlelight or lamp on the back of an envelope at the kitchen table when the endless daily chores were finished, and the evergrowing, clammering family abed. Who could blame them if they had. For in their restricted, hardworking lives it was rarely they could accompany their husbands on a shopping expedition and were determined to make the most of it! As the door of this new shop was pushed open a bell tinkled, and suddenly before them was a veritable “Aladdin’s Cave”.

One side of the store was given over to groceries, and behind a long polished counter stood a large jovial Genie, wearing over his garments a long white apron, and under his well groomed beard could be glimpsed a stiff white collar adorned with a smart bow tie. Behind him the well stocked shelves reaching to the ceiling held no pre-packaged goods as we know today—only a few paper bags of flour, sugar, tea, rice, etc., which held a sufficient quantity to meet the immediate needs of the townsfolk. The bags and sacks of these vital commodities, indispensable for the outlying farms

were stacked in “Ritchies Grain & Chaff Store” which stood in a nearby lane. On the wall directly behind the counter a wide shelf supported a marble slab on which lay a huge mound of home made butter, coyly screened by a muslin curtain. Beside it stood a large jar of water in which soaked a pair of wooden butter pats. With these, with amazing dexterity, the requested amount almost to a fraction of the desired quantity was dug out, slapped on the shining weights and measure scales—a shaving off, or a small dab added and then shaped into a creamy golden brick, and with the edge of the wooden paddles a lattice work design engraved on the top and sides. Not far away from the butter, also behind its muslin purdah, lay a large wheel of cheese, and nearby a portion of a side of bacon, which was usually bought in a large lump piece and carved at home. No doubt many a platter of bacon and eggs was placed on the breakfast table by a bandaged hand.

On a high shelf, well out of the reach of small children was a packed row of Patent Medicines, mostly consisting of sugar and water, flavoured with aniseed, liquorice or vanilla beans, all strongly laced with laudanum. Certainly an analgesic for pain, but unfortunately not a cure. Standing between these and bottles of eucalyptus oil, packets of pills, cornplasters and other remedies, glinting evilly through the blue glass of the bottle (now a bottle collectors unobtainable dream), CASTOR OIL, which in those days and for many years to follow was administered to a naughty child as it was lavishly spooned out to a sick one! To neutralise this horrible



*'Frankston House' – the site of Thomas Ritchie's first grocery store.*

sight, on the counter in easy reach of the grocer but inaccessible to small grubby fingers stood a row of large glass jars filled with peppermints, twists of barleysugar, bullseyes and brightly coloured “boiled lollies”. It was rarely that an order was packed and delivered without a twisted paper cornucopia containing some of these was not included as a gift from the proprietor. Another shelf held large tins of biscuits, each containing approximately five pounds (today roughly two and a half kilos). The end tin always held a mass of broken biscuits, remnants from the fast emptying containers. These were much prized by the children, for a large bag of broken biscuits could be purchased for a penny (or one cent). Overhead from large hooks in the ceiling hung clusters of hurricane lamps, iron kettles, frying pans, hanks of rope, various bits of harness, candlesticks, and in a corner discreetly hidden from female view, chamberpots. Amongst these rather odd chandeliers, taking pride of place strung by their were handles would be a bunch of Billy-Cans, now made famous by Australia's favourite song “Waltzing Matilda”. Few people today know that “Matilda” was the rolled blanket slung on the back of an itinerant tramp, to Australians known as a “Swagman”, and “Waltzing Matilda” was when he had rolled up his swag and was walking the road in search of work, and rather hoping not to find it, for at every country property they could rely on a handout of ration tea (an inferior tea handed out to boundary riders, stockmen,

etc., who came to the homestead for their weekly rations), sugar and flour, and more often than not a lump of mutton. Today's “Matilda” has been replaced by a sleeping bag and the “waltzing” mostly done in a beaten up old truck. The jumbuck was, as most people know, a young sheep.

On the far side of the store the shelves were well stocked with bolts of gingham, muslin, flannel and various materials. Cards of lace, elastic and a veritable rainbow of ribbons, boxes of buttons, spools of thread, needles, pins, hairpins, etc., and most of the requirements needed for the townswomen and farmers' wives. On large sturdy tables lay piles of boots, shoes and slippers, hats and bonnets, flannel and linen shirts and moleskin trousers. The latter made from a sort of cotton fustian, a thick twilled short napped cotton, usually dyed a dark colour. A hard wearing material which many years later was replaced by dungaree, a coarse Indian calico, and today by denim. But in the case of Ritchie's Store there were shepherds smocks, handmade by Margaret Ritchie. Over the whole store there was an indefinable elusive aroma, a mixture of spices, leather, tarred rope, coffee, new cloth and a lingering smell of kerosene and beeswax polish. Perhaps a slight suggestion adding interest to the mixture would be wine or spirits from a dropped or leaking bottle migrating from behind the counter of the liquor department, usually situated adjacent to the groceries.

This is the way I visualise Thomas Ritchie's second store – but without the Post Office with its attendant dragon. It appears that his first store was still existing, as an advertisement in the first Mornington Standard was printed as follows:



*'Ritchies General Store' on the corner of Playne and Bay Streets (Nepean Highway)*

## “WINTER GOODS”

Ritchies Stores • Frankston • Established 1870

ALWAYS ON HAND

A Good Stock Of

WINES and SPIRITS • GROCERIES

• BOOTS • DRAPERY ... Etc. Etc.

Just now we are showing a splendid stock of

DRESS MATERIALS • HOUSE LINENS •

RIBBONS

• LACE ... Etc. Etc.

New Goods and SPLENDID VALUE

Patterns on Application

Amongst other valuable old papers, etc. pertaining to Ritchies Stores, Mr. Nelson Morris has lent me an old note book, once the property of Thomas Ritchie, in which he has written in his copperplate handwriting the grocery orders of a Mrs. John Petrie – from 31st January to 22nd February, 1876. Reading her near daily order is fascinating, as are the prices for the goods which I have converted to dollars and cents, as in those days it was pounds, shillings and pence, a pound weight was a little less than half a kilogram.

Poor Mrs. Petrie seems to have been a somewhat scatterbrained lady as frequently bread, sugar, etc., are not included in the first order, but later added, plus one cent for “lollies” ... so obviously some unwilling child had been sent to complete the household requirements. Butter at this time cost twelve cents per pound. Bread

approximately seven cents. Sugar, three cents per pound and eggs eighteen cents per dozen. I am sure that early in February Mrs. Petrie was planning some sort of party, for she orders extra candles (ten cents), and kerosene (seven cents), eggs, nutmeg (one cent), one pound of currants (six cents), a quarter of a pound of candy peel (six cents), a packet of spice (two cents), and more sugar-so it seems a fruit cake is contemplated.

On February 12th, writing paper and envelopes are ordered – each costing three cents and, “one linen collar” (four cents). Panic stations on February 14th! Extra bread and more butter. Tea (sixteen cent's per pound), a pound of biscuits (seven cents) plus one cents worth of lollies. I surmise the guests were regaled with sandwiches, fruit cake, biscuits and tea. Possibly the feast was too much for the family, as on February 16th “Epsom Salts” (two cents) are purchased! As Mrs. Petrie has only ordered one bar of soap (ten cents) for the month for what appears by the bread consumption a fairly large family, it seems ominous that there is an order on the same day for one toothcomb (lice)?! (ten cents)! Life seems to be back to normal by February 24th, and Mr. Petrie back to less expensive garb for we have an entry, “one collar” (one cent-obviously not linen, possibly celluloid).

Thomas Ritchie was a very long sighted businessman for he refunded one shilling for every pound spent in his stores, (today five cents in each dollar), which made shopping at Ritchie's very popular. At the back of the notebook Thomas has recorded itemised accounts for supplying cut wood to various customers, yet another of his lucrative business ventures. A Mr. W.E. Chattering seems to have been the most constant customer, for he bought many tons of cut wattle each week at ninety cents per ton. Perhaps he was involved with the

Frankston Brick Co. and needed the wood to fire the kilns.

I am sure that had Thomas concerned himself with all his later ventures in business, and had not been infected with “Gold Fever” he would have died a millionaire, for it was only his stores and his involvement with the Frankston Fish Co. which saved him from penury in 1890 when, with the collapse of the land boom, Thomas became bankrupt. He was later cleared by the Court with an Honourable Discharge. Thomas was heavily involved with goldmining in Victoria, where he owned the Buninyong Gold Mine and also in Western Australia where for another mining venture he had ordered hundreds of pounds worth of mining machinery from England which Mrs. Helen Kennor said may still be seen lying covered in rust and sand. As her husband’s other business interests involved more and more of his time, Margaret Ritchie took over the management of his licenced grocery stores. Not sharing his optimistic dreams of sudden wealth, she, unknown to her husband, who at this time appears not to have shown much interest in her work, opened a savings bank account in her own name, into which she deposited a portion of each week’s profits from the stores.

When, with the collapse of the market Thomas came to her, fell into a chair and with his head in his hands said, “Maggie, we have lost everything!” – Margaret quietly left the room and returned with her bank book which she put in his hands and said, “No Thomas, we have not!”. To the astonishment and relief of Thomas Ritchie he found his wife had saved sufficient capital to maintain the continuance of Ritchies Stores. Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain a photograph of this magnificent woman, but I am gratified that the vital part she played in the history of Ritchie’s Stores has at least been recorded.

Although the founder of Ritchie’s Stores was keenly interested in his adopted home town, Frankston, and a generous benefactor, he was never involved with politics, or the Shire Council. “In 1860 Frankston belonged to the district proclaimed as the Mt. Eliza Road Board, this in 1871 was incorporated in the Shire of Mornington, and the Shire of Frankston and Hastings

was created.” This is an extract from the first issue of the Mornington Standard, October 5th 1889. The Thomas Ritchie who first entered Council in 1897 to 1901, with a second term from 1909 to 1915, and became Shire President from 1911 to 1912, was the son of Thomas Ritchie Senior, perhaps named after his brother who perished with Thomas and Margaret’s earlier family in the disastrous fire. There have been many inaccurate stories written regarding Thomas Ritchie Senior’s involvement with the Frankston Council, but as he died in 1907, this cannot be correct.

In his late years Thomas became keenly interested in his garden and took great pride in growing and exhibiting prizewinning flowers and vegetables. It seems almost ironical that a man who had survived a shipwreck, a train derailment and a nearly fatal accident with his horse and buggy should lose his life at the age of seventy-three years because of this new hobby, for working in his garden early in September in 1907 he caught a chill and never recovered, for no doubt it turned to pneumonia, which in those days was nearly always fatal. I find it very touching, reading from the Mornington Standard, September 17th 1907 that his old friends John Box, James Croskell and Phillip Renouf were among his pall bearers.

Thomas Ritchie was survived by his wife and five of their children: Mr. Thomas Ritchie, Mrs. W. Deane, Mrs. Powell, Mrs. Ward and Mrs. Mirroque. Thomas Ritchie was a notable man, so much so that no successive owner of his historic stores have changed the name “RITCHIES STORES”.

## CHAPTER 2

After the death of Thomas Ritchie, the management of the stores was taken over by his eldest daughter, Mrs. Rose Deane, the baby who was the only survivor of the tragic fire in 1873. By this time Rose was in her mid thirties and must have had training and experience in her father's business as Thomas had semi retired. Rose had not only inherited her father's keen business ability but also his warm and friendly personality for she was fondly called and remembered by all who knew her as "Auntie Rosy". It could be possible that Auntie Rosy was assisted in the family business by a younger sister, Mrs. Janet Powell, who later was to run an Estate Agency and General Store at the "Mile Bridge" spanning Kananook Creek, approximately a mile from Frankston on Point Nepean Highway after Seaford.

Mrs. Powell was remembered by residents and weekend visitors for her vibrant personality and her Pekinese dogs, one of which chose for its midday snooze the scoop (or tray) of her measuring scales, and like her sister, Rose, such was her popularity that no one lodged a complaint. "After all", said her philosophical customers, mostly weekenders and day trippers, "A hair or two in the sandwiches is no worse than ants and sand", and to the few permanent residents in the then sparsely populated neighbourhood the bonus canine gift was well compensated by the convenience of saving a long walk to the Frankston shops for "Run-out-ofs"-and where else could they catch up with the local gossip! In 1928 Auntie Rosy decided that "enough is enough" and sold the business to Melville Tomasetti.

Melville Tomasetti's name was, and still is an honoured one in Frankston, not only for his business acumen, but more for his integrity and generosity. He "practised what he preached" and "his word was his bond". Wisely, because of its famous founder he retained the name of the stores, and continued to trade in the old colonial store on the north west corner of Nepean Highway – I think then still named Bay Street-and Playne Street. In the 1930s he moved the grocery and liquor section to a new site on the other side of the road, now 457 Nepean Highway. Here he owned a building with a row of shops, two of which he utilised for Ritchies-one for the liquor store and the other for groceries. Under the

shops there is a large commodious cellar-like basement where groceries were stored and orders packed for delivery, another section was used for extra stocks of liquor, and bulk wine was bottled. Above the shops were two large dwelling areas, reached from the inside by a narrow curving staircase, and outside by a wooden stairway descending to a service lane. Melville Tomasetti and his family lived in one for some years. This area is now Ritchies' head office.

Although Melville's ideas seemed somewhat avant-garde to residents of Frankston, they were well thought out for he was determined to modernise his stores. He imported wine and spirits from all over the world for his liquor store, and from the old "Theatre Royal" in Melbourne, which had been damaged by fire, he purchased a large glass showcase that had pride of place in the foyer. This he installed in Ritchies Grocery Store and filled with imported gourmet foods. Amongst these were tins of fishballs – perhaps the forerunner of Fish Fingers-froglegs, snails, etc., and believe it or not, chocolate covered ants! I very much doubt if there was a ready sale for these, as to the unsophisticated palate of the Frankstonians "only the brave deserved the fare", however it created great interest, which was Melville's aim.

In an old newspaper, printed on February 15th, 1930 there is an advertisement for Ritchies Stores under "Public Notices", below a long list of wines, spirits, etc., which at today's prices seem ludicrously small until one remembers that the basic wage at this time was only about five dollars. There is listed amongst the groceries "Fish Balls" priced at one shilling and sixpence (fifteen cents), so they really were quite expensive as lamb chops around that time were two cents each. The most pertinent section of the advertisement is at the bottom. "ORDERS DELIVERED WITH PLEASURE, AND SERVICE WITH A SMILE".

Well over fifty years later Ritchies Stores still honour that statement and are unique in their growing chain of flourishing stores, as they still give free delivery of groceries.

Melville Tomasetti decided that with the expansion of Frankston and the surrounding area the deliveries of goods to his customers must also be modernised.

The horse and cart was replaced by a motor van painted yellow, proudly displaying on its sides "Ritchies Stores" as it chugged up Olivers Hill and around the town and district. I do not know if the old store on the corner of Playne Street and Nepean Highway was still operating, nor do I know in which year the old landmark was demolished. For many years Melville and his wife ran Ritchies Stores with increasing success, then with the pressure of his many other business commitments and his involvement with his work as a Town Councillor he decided to lease them. The lessee was Mr. Alan Marshall, a licensed grocer who owned several stores in the southern suburbs. I cannot ascertain if Alan Marshall took up the lease before the outbreak of World War II, or during the ensuing years, but if the latter it seems strange that he should wish to expand his business activities at this time. Perhaps he took up the lease before Japan entered the conflict and when rationing was introduced in Australia, for as well as catering for our own Armed Forces and later for those of the U.S.A. stationed in Australian bases, we were exporting as much food, wool and many other vital commodities to the United Kingdom as possible. Sadly much of it was lost on the voyages together with the many heroic men manning the ships.

Rationing in Australia was lavish in comparison to the restrictions in the United Kingdom, for there was always a bountiful supply of vegetables, fruit and fish, but it did pose a few problems to storekeepers. Clothing, household linen, tea, sugar, butter and meat were on the list, as was petrol. Mustard and other spices, plus rice were wistful memories to the housewife – though strangely there seemed no shortage of curry powder, for though meat was rationed, sausages were not, so while the starving English housewives stood in queues for hours to buy their meagre supply of food, the Australians ate sausages! We ate them fried, we ate them grilled, covered in egg and breadcrumbs, and always, when invited to a dinner party, curried!

Eggs, though not rationed were in short supply, as were cigarettes, wine, spirits and beer, and to deprive the Aussie of his beer was unthinkable! They decided to brew their own. Actually this was not illegal if only



*Melville Tomasetti*

used for home consumption and not marketed, but few home brewers were aware of this. In retrospect the whole operation was as hilarious as it was naive. First there was a visit to the pharmacy to purchase hops to stuff a pillow for an asthmatic grandparent (then thought to be of help to these sufferers!). Next, if they were fortunate to live in the vicinity of a brewery, a plea to buy some brewers' yeast to administer to little Willie to cure his boils; if brewers' yeast was not available they went to the local bakery with the same woeful story, asking the baker for "Bakers' Yeast". Next there was a raid on Mum's treasured sugar, and her preserving pan appropriated, within which the hops and the necessary quantity of water were boiled. The atmosphere in the neighbourhood was redolent with the stench, but any complaining residents were assured that "We are making gingerbeer for the children". As by this time ginger was unobtainable, the answer was somewhat ambiguous!

The next step was to commandeer the stoneware bread crock into which the liquid was strained, the other dubious ingredients added and placed in the pantry for quite a few days, during which the contents began to seethe, forming a growing foam on the surface which

began to look like an ominous grey creature from outer space. (I was once followed into the pantry by my old cat who took one look, fluffed himself to twice his size, spat at the intruder and vanished for two days). Eventually the nauseous brew was strained and bottled, frequently too soon, and the resulting explosions of bottles left the neighbourhood in a state of trepidation, thinking that the Japanese had commenced an invasion! The remaining brew, though seldom very palatable was certainly potent, but fortunately not lethal.

Possibly Alan Marshall may have taken up the lease of Ritchies Stores with the idea of expanding his business activities in a popular holiday resort with returns from summer residents and weekenders, as well as a steady income from the permanent dwellers in the town and nearby district. For where could be found a better location than Frankston, situated by the superb beaches of Port Phillip Bay on the now well populated Mornington Peninsula, with easy access by road and rail to Melbourne?

Unfortunately for Alan Marshall, during the war years, few families were taking vacations due to so many of our men and women serving in the Navy, Army, Airforce and, bravest of all, the Merchant Navy. Ritchies Stores did not have a monopoly in this field of business, for in 1927 there were four grocery stores in Frankston. It appears that Marshall did not find this latest extension to his business as profitable as he had anticipated, for when the lease terminated in 1945 it was not renewed. However his brief tenure has little to contribute to "The History of Ritchies Stores".

The lease became available at a fortuitous moment for Mr. Nelson Morris.

Nelson, the only son of Mr. and Mrs. C.W. Morris, was well versed in the grocery business as his father had operated in this field all his life, having owned and sometimes leased stores in several country towns in Victoria, one of which was Camperdown, where Nelson was born. Nelson, his five sisters and their parents had always spent their vacations in Frankston and eventually made it their home. In 1927 the lease of a grocery store in Frankston became available. Nelson's father became the new leaseholder. At this time Nelson was employed by the S.E.C., but cheerfully gave up his job to join his father in the new store where in every aspect he gained invaluable experience which was to stand him in good stead for his future success. A success won by hard work, an intelligent approach to any problem, and his absolute integrity.

Nelson has many amusing reminiscences of his early days in his father's store, and later in his own. Of the former he recalls how Bert Shannon, an employee of his father and he, plus assistants from the other three

grocery stores (amongst whom there was a friendly rivalry) used to gather at Mile Bridge each Friday, order books in hand, awaiting the arrival of "weekenders". Nelson peddled furiously on his bike back and forth between the store and the bridge whilst Bert, not trusting to two wheels, galloped the horsedrawn cart to and fro with the orders. Bert was to remain with Nelson for many years. Nelson also recollects the confusion of an unsophisticated young girl working in the store when a typewriter was installed in the office, for when hearing the ping of the bell as the operator reached the end of the line, thinking it was the sound of the doorbell, she rushed to the counter to serve a non-existent customer!

After the death of his father Nelson ran the business with the ability he had learned so painstakingly until 1945 when the lease of the shop expired and was not renewable as the original owner had sold the premises some years before and at this time Mr. Morris Senior was not in a position to buy the property as all of his finance was tied up in the business. The new proprietor eventually decided to set up his own drapery business in the building, so when the lease of Ritchies Stores became available at this time it was for Nelson Morris a golden opportunity and for Ritchies Stores a miracle of good fortune for Nelson was the round peg to fit the round hole to perfection.

Nelson Morris and Melville Tomasetti had been firm friends for many years. The two men were of the same calibre, different yet curiously alike, both keen, astute businessmen, but never ruthless, and endowed with wisdom and gentleness. They understood and respected each other. Melville and his wife had long wished for Nelson to take up the lease of Ritchies Stores but until this moment it had not been possible for him to do so. The business association between these two gentlemen proved most beneficial for them, and for Ritchies Stores. Nelson, alike to Melville Tomasetti, always kept a jump ahead of his competitors for he installed refrigerated counters for deep frozen food, and though at this time there was not as lavish a variety as today, it was a welcome innovation for housewives, weekenders and campers. He was the first to introduce sliced bread in Frankston and amongst other ingenious ideas to attract customers he not only had a cookery book printed, but established a lending library of various recipe books. Naturally the cook would buy the ingredients from Ritchies.

Though Ritchies Stores continued to prosper there were odd moments when I am sure Nelson wished they had met the fate of the "Isabella Watson" on Corsair Rock. Such a moment was when late one afternoon a torrential cloud burst drenched Frankston and a drain in the



*Nepean Highway, Frankston. Ritchies Grocery Store on the right, present Ritchies site on the left.*



*Present day (1988) – Frankston, Nepean highway – looking south.*

service lane behind the store became blocked. The resultant overflow poured under a door, cascaded down the stairs and into the cellars. When Nelson and some of the staff managed to divert the flood and slosh down the stairs they discovered an unexpected wading pool of filthy water foaming with soapflakes where sodden packets had disintegrated. Swollen rice, flour, biscuits

and other items from orders packed for delivery were joined by lableless bottles gently bobbing in the unsavoury bubble bath.

On another occasion there was a fire in the Grain & Chaff Store where extra goods were stored. The damage was not serious, but all the labels had been burnt off the tinned goods, although the contents were



*An era gone by – Frankston, Nepean highway , Frankston of old, looking north.*



*Present day (1988) – Frankston intersection of Davey Street and Nepean highway, looking north.*

not affected. There was no way to tell what the similar shaped tins contained, and were naturally unsaleable. These were given to a charity for distribution. The needy recipients could only guess if they were opening a tin of peaches, pears or apricots; were they to have marmalade or what type of jam, sardines or smoked

oysters, asparagus or baked beans – fortunately tinned dog food was not yet on the market! It must have been quite an exciting “Bran-Dip”, one can visualise some rather unexpected dishes on the menu.

Amongst other innovations Nelson introduced a “Staff Training Manual”, an instruction book listing

the general rules for the efficient operation of the stores, with stress on the “Staff Customer Relationship”.

In 1947 he commissioned the “Ashby Research Service” to do a survey of the Frankston grocery stores. At this time there were eight major stores in the area, and quite a few small shops apart from Ritchies Stores. There were “Pratts”, “Cameron”, not to be confused with B.W. Cameron who was later to follow Nelson Morris, “Moran & Cato”, at that time a well known name, “Crookes”, “Crofts”, “Farris” and “Browns”. The survey was carried out with a lengthy, most comprehensive questionnaire filled in by some hundreds of housewives. It covered every aspect of the customers’ experiences and views of all the various stores. Ritchies Stores sailed home with an easy win! Here are two extracts from the “Ashby Research Service Survey of Grocery Stores, Frankston”:

“With respect to ‘Service Rendered’, the ‘Range of Goods’; the ‘Arrangement of Counter Goods’, ‘Deliveries’ and the ‘Quality of Goods’, Ritchies Stores have the best reputation. For ‘Methods of Collecting Orders’, Ritchies also are favoured.

In another section of the questionnaire the housewives were asked ‘Do you remember how you came to deal from your present supplier?’ Answers to this question show that Ritchies have secured most new customers because they ‘liked the look of the store’.”

By this time Ritchies Stores had expanded as in 1953 a chemist who had leased one of the shops from Tomasetti moved out, and the lease was promptly taken up by Nelson Morris and his store enlarged. Furthermore when on a visit to the U.S.A. in 1954 Nelson became pertinently aware of the growing necessity of parking space for shoppers’ cars. On his return to Australia Nelson approached his good friend, Melville Tomasetti, who had just erected a large building in Thompson Street opposite what is now Central carpark, but had not definitely decided for which of his profitable schemes it would be utilised. Nelson discussed the growing parking problem with Melville and the latter agreed to lease the premises to the “Morris Family Partnership” which Nelson, his mother and four sisters Mrs Irma Amor, Mrs Vera Jane, Myra and Roma Morris,



*Nelson Morris*

had formed when first taking up the lease of Ritchies Stores.

In 1959, “R.T.S.” (Ritchies Thompson Street) store opened. This was Ritchies first supermarket. It seems strange today to think of members of Ritchies staff during their lunch break playing cricket where now there is a crowded carpark, but it proves the foresight of the indomitable Nelson Morris.

By 1971, Nelson Morris was giving thoughts to a well earned retirement, but reluctant to let his beloved stores pass into the hands of one of the giant chainstores. Losing its name and history was abhorrent, not to mention the long established family atmosphere. Fortunately Nelson Morris was to find his right successor in Barry William Cameron, a wise decision for Ritchies Stores.

## CHAPTER 3

**B**orn and educated in New South Wales, Barry Cameron, shortly after leaving school was employed by “Woolworths”. His advancement was spectacular, for he had an instinct for this type of business, for staff management, customer relationship, organisation and as a trouble shooter. At the age of twenty-one he was promoted to be the manager of a Woolworths store in Queanbeyan, a fast growing town on the border of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Here he quickly transformed a somewhat static country branch into a prosperous investment.

After his success in Queanbeyan, Barry was recalled to Sydney where he was appointed manager of a large Woolworths store in Burwood, a large semi-industrial suburb on the southern side of the vast, sprawling city. Shortly afterwards the management of Woolworths decided to test the legality of the sale of fresh meat in their food stores. Barry was chosen as a willing guinea-pig for the challenge. A large refrigerated counter was installed in the Burwood store and stocked with various cuts of packaged meat. The Burwood housewives were delighted and naturally the local butchers incensed! Their dingo howls were silenced by a Court declaration where the sale of fresh meat in supermarkets was proclaimed legal. Naturally all other big chainstores were quick to follow suit.

From then on Barry’s progressive achievements were outstanding. He was next moved to the management of a drab little store in Double Bay, which he transformed almost overnight into “The In-Thing” for the social matrons of this rather exclusive bayside suburb to shop, meet their friends and sip coffee at tables amidst the greenery of a charming horticultural section of the store. With the Double Bay store now flourishing, Barry was moved to St. Ives, a suburb on Sydney’s North Shore which is socially the counterpart of Double Bay. Here in St. Ives, Woolworths had built a large new very modern store. From then on, though still in charge of St. Ives, Barry was always requested to assist with the opening of new stores owned by this huge commercial octopus which, with its rivals, stretched out grasping tentacles to any developing suburban area and expanding country towns. Barry remained as manager of the St.

Ives store for several years and it was here he met and formed a lasting friendship with Arthur Parsonage O.B.E. who was later to become involved with Ritchies.

Barry’s next promotion was to Newcastle, New South Wales, where he was supervisor of the Woolworths stores in that area as well as all Woolworths stores from Newcastle to the north eastern border of New South Wales and Queensland, west as far as Tamworth and south to Gosford.

Though Barry had had offers of more remunerative employment and being anything but a wealthy man, he was determined that someday, somehow he would own his own business and must accumulate every aspect of the one he knew so well, for he had no intention of spending his working years as a replaceable cog in a colossal machine.

“All men can dream, but how few of them turn them into reality”-One was Barry William Cameron, for in a few short years he wished to move to Melbourne. Coincidentally “Myer Australia” was searching for a man of his calibre and experience. Barry applied for, and obtained the position of supervisor of all the Myer Food Halls in Australia. His resignation from Woolworths was received with disgruntled reluctance and Barry, his wife and three children moved to Melbourne where he took up his new position with his exceptional capability and enthusiasm.

Barry did extremely well in his new appointment and was well thought of by the management of Myer Australia, but nevertheless his determination to strike out on his own was a motivating force. Approximately two and a half years later this was to be achieved for he heard that Nelson Morris, owner of Ritchies Stores in Frankston was contemplating taking a partner in view of eventually selling out and retiring, but only to someone who would share his dedication to Ritchie’s.

It says a lot for Nelson Morris that he could have sold out very lucratively to any of the big chainstores, but to Nelson “Ritchies” still trading under the founder’s name after nearly a century, represented far more than a profitable business which by his own efforts he had revitalised. It meant more to him that he had retained the link with an important part of the early history of Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula. To think of

his beloved stores losing their identity was not only abhorrent it was unthinkable. Barry William Cameron was to share his views.

In 1971, with the financial support of his good friend, Arthur Parsonage, Barry entered into a partnership with Nelson Morris. The termination of his employment with "Myer Australia" was regretted by the management, but he was wished every success.

Nelson Morris and Barry Cameron proved to be a strong combination and the two were soon to share a warm relationship. Nelson realised at once that Barry did not consider "Ritchies" as just a business venture to be developed, expanded and sold at a profit but that he shared his own dedication to this old historic store; his concern for the staff, customers and the continuity of this totally Australian-owned link with Frankston's early history. Barry's respect, admiration and genuine affection for his astute kindly partner was unbounded and Nelson Morris, on his retirement in 1974, requested that 'He wished to put on record his appreciation for the manner in which the partnership between himself and Mr. Barry Cameron had been conducted during the past three years and thanked Mr. Cameron for his understanding and consideration during these years.'

Barry's first move as partner was, with the sanction of Nelson Morris, to reorganise the Ritchies Thompson Street store. Here he installed a refrigerated counter for packaged cuts of meat which was well received by the customers. Some months later the floor space was increased by the removal of a wall between a storage area and loading bay which had once been several small shops facing onto a service lane. Here he installed tentatively a self service fruit and vegetable section which proved so successful that it was remodelled as a permanent department and where shortly afterwards an extremely tempting delicatessen was included. For some years now "R.T.S." or "Ritchies Thompson Street" has become a "Food Barn".

The small self service grocery store beside the liquor store on – Nepean Highway remained until May 1974 when it was closed, and the dividing wall opened up to enlarge the liquor store most effectively. An antique oak "Tun" barrel was sawn in half and the base encased in the wall facing the street. The inside protruding into the store was filled with shelves containing bottles of wine. More well stocked shelves lined the walls, and warm red carpet covered the floor upon which large, laden wine racks were placed. Overhead light filtered down from flickering candle type chandeliers – a veritable

"Aladdin's Cave" for the wine buffor spirit connoisseur (and no shadow of doubt, a den of iniquity to a rabid Rechabite!). This liquor store of Ritchies is frequently sought by vintners to hold a "Wine Tasting" and to exhibit their wares.

From his years with Woolworths and later Myer, Barry realised that to compete in this "Eat or be Eaten" commercial world it was imperative for Ritchies Stores to expand. He kept a close watch on the areas where the fast growing population of Frankston was spreading and where new housing estates were mushrooming.

In 1972 Barry discovered that "Retail Developers Pty. Ltd." had purchased land at Tower Hill where in nearby Golf Links Road a large housing project was underway. Here "Retail Developers" were constructing a row of shops with more than ample parking space and abundant room for an eventual shopping village. Not without some misgivings, Nelson Morris, the senior partner, was persuaded by Barry to consent to Ritchies leasing two of the shops. Any doubts he may have had were proved unfounded for, from the opening of "Ritchies Tower Hill" on 1st July 1972, the small store, the nucleus of Ritchies expansion over the Mornington Peninsula, was an instantaneous success. Gradually like a cuckoo fledgling usurping the nest, Ritchies Tower Hill has spread over the whole building, bar one shop. In 1974 Ritchies acquired part ownership of the land at Tower Hill from Dr. Robert and Pam Taranto. This area is now a flourishing shopping centre in a well populated area. Ritchies Tower Hill was enlarged yet again in 1986 and completely modernised and is now a contemporary, attractive, roomy and popular supermarket.

Though justly gratified by the outcome of the Tower Hill project Barry had no intention of resting on his laurels and leased a licensed supermarket in Mount Eliza from Mr. G. Demaine in 1973. This proved a very sound investment and though it is by no means one of Ritchies largest stores it is perhaps the one which has most retained the cheerful family store atmosphere, though possibly not always the best shopping choice for frantically rushed purchasers as the aisles are frequently blocked by gossiping customers (which must be rather frustrating to the busy friendly staff). Recently by clever manipulation of the refrigerated counters and the shop fittings the liquor store has become quite spacious. This building is now owned by Ritchies.

The next extension of Ritchies was at Rosebud. Here in 1974 a licensed grocery near the corner of Nepean Highway and Boneo Road was bought together with

two adjoining houses to enlarge the small parking area. A drive-in liquor service was installed. However the store was cramped and out moded so plans were drawn up for rebuilding. Shortly before negotiations for the reconstruction were finalized in 1978 a very substantial offer to purchase the business was received from "Safeways". By this time Ritchies Stores had been incorporated and was known as "Ritchies Stores Proprietary Limited" with Barry appointed as Chairman of the Board, and Managing Director. It was decided by the Board that the offer for the Rosebud store be accepted as the financial gain could be better employed elsewhere for by this time Ritchies were heating many more irons in the fire. The Rosebud store was sold on 2nd February, 1978.

In the meantime "Bayside" a newly constructed shopping complex in Beach Street, Frankston, had opened and was growing in popularity with the public. Here in 1975 Ritchies opened a large air conditioned supermarket which shortly afterwards obtained a liquor licence.

Ritchies next move was to establish its historic name in Main Street, Mornington. This store, though small in comparison with the others, has ample space behind the customer's section, which has been invaluable for cutting and packaging meat for some of the company's other stores. This is now also done at the Tower Hill store. The Mornington store was later to become Ritchies first "Food Barn". The food barns are completely self service, offering goods at a reduced price but with no free home delivery.

By 1977 the small town of Hastings on Westernport Bay had mushroomed almost overnight, and here the late Sir Morris Nathan had invested in a large block of land in the shopping area. He was building a supermarket and sundry other shops and approached Barry Cameron with an insistent offer for Ritchies to lease the premises. After some debate Ritchies opened in November of that year and promptly applied for a liquor licence. The Hastings store is large, modern and popular, with space for the customers to park their cars at the back of the building.

Well satisfied with the result of the Hastings venture Sir Morris purchased an old licensed grocery store on the corner of Grant and Eramosa Roads in Somerville.



*Barry Cameron*

Adjacent to a large block of land it was an ideal place for a supermarket with plenty of space for parking. Here he intended to build another store which would be leased by Ritchies. The first intention of Sir Morris was to demolish the old building until it was discovered that it had been constructed with handmade bricks. There is no doubt that the bricks had been made in Thomas Ritchie's brick yards. The old building was reprieved, the interior stripped and remodelled to become the liquor store of the large new supermarket which opened in May 1980. Recently this store has doubled in size and had a "facelift" similar to the Tower Hill store with colourful murals in each section denoting "Dairy Foods", "Meat", "Vegetables and Fruit", etc.

In September 1982 Ritchies entered into a lease at the Footscray Market. Here a large Foodbarn was outfitted and was a completely different type of Store with no fruit and vegetables or meat, selling purely grocery items to a mainly ethnic population. As the Footscray Store was geographically distant from Headquarters and could by no means come under the Ritchies slogan "Serving the Peninsula" it was deemed wiser by the Board of Directors to sell. The Footscray branch was

sold in April 1986. In 1984 Ritchies purchased the old Balnarring Licensed Grocery Store. Here they operated under great difficulty whilst a new modern supermarket was being constructed around them. This building was completed in 1985 which complemented the newly built colonial styled shopping area opposite.

The Hastings store was granted a liquor licence in 1984 but tragically Barry William Cameron was not to live to see the opening of this section, for in his fifty-first year, on the crest of his career his sudden death from a heart attack left his family, friends, staff and many citizens of Frankston stunned. Barry's consideration for his staff will not be forgotten, neither will his unobtrusive support to sporting clubs, community groups and charitable organisations in his beloved adopted city. In this he resembled Thomas Ritchie, Melville Tomasetti and Nelson Morris.

Following the death of Barry Cameron, Robert Parsonage, son of the late Arthur Parsonage OBE, became Chairman of the Board and Barry's protege and good friend Peter Carson was appointed Managing Director of Ritchies. Peter had been with the firm for twelve years and had risen to the position of General Manager. Peter took up his new responsibilities with great aptitude. He thoroughly understood Barry's policies for the business and was well aware of the importance of expansion. The influence of the Cameron family is still seen at Ritchies. Elisabeth, his widow, is part owner, a director and actively involved with the stores. Malcolm, his eldest son, is the company's accountant and James is now liquor supervisor.

Under Peter Carson's competent management and with Fred Harrison now General Manager, Ritchies continued to prosper and expand. In early 1987 a brand new store, boasting Ritchies first computer scanning technology, was opened at Langwarrin. Here in a newly completed shopping centre Ritchies have their most modern well designed licensed supermarket. The aisles between the well stocked shelves are wide and spacious with ample room to coax a recalcitrant shopping trolley around others on the way to the fast working computerised checkouts. Langwarrin has now become an increasingly popular area on the outskirts of Frankston. Also in the same year, Ritchies took over the supermarket and liquor store in Webb Street, Narre Warren.

Again in 1987 Ritchies expanded, for in November of this year a licensed supermarket in Wonthaggi was displaying a new name "Ritchies Stores Pty. Ltd." Exciting plans are underway for "Ritchies Mount Eliza Store", but are not yet finalized. All stores, with the exception of the "Food Barns" offer free home delivery-quite unique for supermarkets today. No longer as in the era of Thomas Ritchie over a century ago, does the owner, notebook in hand, knock on his customers' door to write down their orders for later delivery. Today Ritchies customers receive the equivalent service, for in an emergency an order may be phoned to the nearest Ritchies Store where it is packed and delivered within a few hours. I doubt if Ritchies fully realise the boon they offer to their customers, especially to the elderly or disabled and mothers of young children, and the relief they feel when a cheery voice from outside the door calls "Ritchies" and a moment later the heavy cartons of goods are effortlessly deposited in the kitchen. Given time, I have no doubt these busy young men would stay and unpack the contents, but one day in February 1983, when the holocaust of bushfires raged in the Dandenongs and other areas surrounding Melbourne, many of Ritchies customers waited impatiently for their orders to arrive, with their tempers matching the temperature, their annoyance turned to admiration when the weary, but still cheery van drivers turned up late in the evening and explained that the delay in the delivery was because Barry Cameron had had the vans packed with food and other necessities for the unfortunate bushfire victims and sent to the disaster areas. An act which Thomas Ritchie would have executed, and one which has never been made public.

Ritchies Stores not only care for the welfare of their customers but also for their staff and those willing to pull their weight are offered every chance of advancement. There are members of staff still with the company who joined the firm in the days of Nelson Morris's ownership. Foremost is Dawn Borley who commenced her work with Ritchies over thirty-seven years ago, a young inexperienced girl in fear and trepidation of an austere Miss Wishart then on the staff. Her first job was assembling orders for delivery but she soon progressed to serving customers, taking telephone orders, handling cash and finally working in the office

on accounts. Dawn says the only job she has not done is to deliver the groceries or bone bacon, possibly the reason she still possesses two thumbs and all her fingers.

Dawn retired recently, but has returned part-time as has Bill Indian. Ray Cullen joined Ritchies staff in 1964 and his wife, Margie, a year later. Margie is no longer working with Ritchies, but Ray still remains and at the moment is manager of the Hastings store. Last but not least the irreplaceable Bill Pitts has been up to date, seventeen years on “The Other Side of the Counter”. Ritchies staff have quite a family atmosphere as Bill’s wife, Daphne, who has recently retired, was with the company for many years, joining shortly after Bill. Daphne may still be seen occasionally back in her old job for she is willing to fill in an emergency.

Ritchies staff seems to comprise quite a number of husband and wife teams for Cathy Carson, the wife of Peter joined the firm before Peter and is still a valued employee.

Recently Peter Carson said to me “Ritchies are making history faster than you can write it,” and indeed he is right, but had it not been for Margaret Ritchie, the wife of the founder, there would be no “Ritchies Stores” to write about.