

THE EVOLUTION OF LAMBTON MOUNT LACROSSE CLUB

In early 2015 I caught up with former team mate (Chadstone) and house mate, Bill (Junior) Gray for a lunch and we went down memory lane, recounting the days, and nights, of our youth, and noting the older we got the better we were! We then drifted on to the state of lacrosse in Australia, lamenting that, despite being the greatest game ever played by mankind, it wasn't making any progress in terms of numbers in Australia, and most players when they retired, sadly walked away from the game.

We got onto the history of the game and Junior told me that his father, Bill Gray senior, Horrie Webber (Who never played lacrosse) and maybe a few others had produced a hand written history of the game and he had started having it typed but the secretarial resource dried up, thus it remained unfinished. I was retired and told Junior that I could touch type so happy to help. He reluctantly agreed to send me the typed document thus far (About 150 pages typed) and gave me 10 pages at a time to type, which turned into another 230 pages, and hey presto we had a type written version of the history of lacrosse in Australia from 1876 to the 1980s. It took quite a lot longer before all of the typos and missing names and places were correctly identified, but that document still resides on our website.

When I started reading our history I was fascinated with what Lambton Mount had done to get the game started in Australia, how popular lacrosse became in such a short time, how it was sponsored by High Court judges, university professors, leading dignitaries and high profile business people, and it was expanding throughout the land, with a tour by a Canadian team in 1907 arousing so much interest that 2 of the 4 tests against Australia being played at the MCG, with crowds of 17,000 and 11,000 respectively, with AFL giving way to the great game. Those were the days!

We were approached by the Victorian Lacrosse Past Players & Supporters Association (VLPPSA) late in 2015 as the club was struggling, the leadership was ageing, Rob Pettit had passed away, the membership was in decline and they needed help. Junior and I were not interested in taking on the leadership roles unless the Club had a purpose, was open to men and women, and was nationally focused rather than Victorian. At that time the Club did not have a constitution, it never formally met, but they had legends like former champions Allan Gandy and Denis Trainor, along with stalwarts of the ilk of Rob Pettit and Doug Imlach, and needed help to get their ambition back on track.

With their unanimous agreement and support a new club was formed, a constitution adopted, with formal meetings to be held and a bank account established! At that time the Club did not have a bank account of its own despite having quite an amount of money raised over many years!

While the club was incorporated in September 2015 as the VLPPSA, the committee was of the view that in order to attract a national membership of former female and male lacrosseurs the name of the club had to assume a national reference. Bill Gray and I have been on the committee since inception in 2015, Luke Oswald joined shortly thereafter and hopefully we have many more years to come, and have been joined by two champions of the game, John "Keka" Butkiewicz and Peter Cann, both who are actively helping develop and grow the club.

The name Lambton Mount, while not a modern or catchy name, was in fact the name of the founder of our great game in Australia in 1876, and he was a statesman of his time not only in athletics and lacrosse but also as a businessman and entrepreneur.

Thus we asked our members to adopt this relatively obscure name for our club on the basis that with some marketing and publicity we could explain why that name was so important and relevant.

In February 2016 we called a meeting to change the name of the club, had already secured a broad cross-section of skilled people from men and women's lacrosse, and tried to ensure that the committee was represented by as many lacrosse playing states as possible. The meeting unanimously resolved to change the name to the Lambton Mount Lacrosse Club Inc. and shortly thereafter we affiliated with what is now Lacrosse Australia.

We knew that to grow we had to have a value proposition to offer prospective members, and we wanted people like us to reconnect with our great game, we wanted to be able to help the game grow where we could and wanted to develop our history and inform our members and the broader lacrosse community of our proud and long history in Australia.

I bumped into Bill Stahmer at the Boxing Day test at the MCG in 2015, he was then living in Phuket, and told him what we were doing. He put his hand in his wallet and gave me \$100, and said he would do his best to help us grow. He was our first international member, our first financial member since inception, and helped get many on board through his numerous contacts.

We issued our first newsletter "Lambton's Shot on Goal" in March 2016, we had a logo developed reflecting our national interest for men and women, we didn't have a website at that stage but it didn't take long before we had a very basic website and our database was an Excel spreadsheet and emails were issued from my personal computer. When we started we had about 50 financial members (Although fees had not been collected for a few years), mostly former members of the VLPPSA, and we set about promoting the club through word of mouth and through our newsletters.

We also wanted to help the game so we started donating cash to the senior Australian men's and women's teams. The problem we had was that we were still perceived as a Victorian club, hardly known in Adelaide, unheard of in W.A.!

Pretty soon we had a website and a logo, which subtly says it all - we are all about Australian lacrosse, we are not state centric, and we are a club for men and women! We didn't have a database, email account or a custom made website but that was about to change.

Walking down the 13th fairway at Commonwealth one day circa 2019 with Bill Matthews, I realized that amongst other things Bill built websites, and knowing that our website was very basic and generic I asked how much would it cost to build a website for Lambton Mount.

Without hesitation he said he would do it for nothing, and here we are 6 years later with what is clearly the best lacrosse website in the world and arguably the best sporting website in the world.

How generous is this man? - He has no connection with lacrosse, others were asking for big bucks and were connected with lacrosse, yet he was altruistic enough to build it, maintain it, host it, and support it for nothing, which he is still doing to this day.

As well as the website functionality Bill has included an email account and continually expanded and enhanced the scope and functionality of the website to include a photo gallery (Over 2,500 photos), video gallery, virtual museum, all of the editions of "Lambton's shot on Goal" since 2016 and we are about to add a bit more functionality relating to the Australian Lacrosse Hall of Fame. But as they used to say at Nike, "There is no finish line", and we continue to build and enhance this great website, with improved functionality, and thanks to Keka, who had an epiphany a few months ago (Who would have thought?), and now with almost all of our records on our Google drive we now have fantastic access speed and we are continually increasing our storage capacity.

Keka has done an amazing job in not only loading the thousands of photos and images he has accessed over many years, but he is always looking to improve the functionality and content, and as noted above he came up with the "Epiphany", which was a game changer for us in terms of speed of access and storage!

Over the last 5 years or so we have also established awards and competitions sections covering best and fairest and life memberships, loading national and state details for men and women. This has been a painstaking task, as has in many cases finding the names of the people in the photos, whether they be a very old state team or a local club.

Given how long the game has been going and the number of photos or records, we have broken galleries down for example into periods, 1876 to 1962, and 1963 onwards, as well as galleries by state and, where there are sufficient photos, separate galleries for clubs.

We have developed histories of clubs and found information that even the clubs were not aware of.

Membership increased from just over 100 financial members in 2016 to 301 financial members in 2025, and sadly we have lost a lot of those inaugural stalwarts from 2015.

While we have steadily grown our numbers from 2016, age catching up with all of us so we need a shot in the arm with growth, particularly in terms of female members and W.A.

Given our ageing demographic we have established a value for money membership for those under 35, so do what you can as members to ensure the next generation not only enjoys what we do, but may help in sustaining and growing our great club, which is arguably the highest financial membership of any lacrosse club in the world.

Given our strong financial position as at the end of 2024 your committee determined that it should not be seeking further subscriptions from existing members until such time as we have started to utilise a significant amount of our funds to projects that will benefit the game, which is what we did this year by donating just under \$7,000 to the inaugural ALHOF to fund 2 inductees travelling from the U.S. and \$2,233 on books on the history of lacrosse.

Other than the inaugural committee meeting in 2016, our committee has never met as a group due to the logistics of where we all are but we came close during the inaugural ALHOF induction dinner where we had all but one there on the big night so

with a bit of technology we have been able to “Skilfully” add the missing member – can you pick who it is?



If you look carefully you will see that Keka is having a good time or another epiphany, and Peter Cann is not far behind him! Both had been inducted into the ALHOF that evening and thoroughly enjoying themselves!



Above are the Victorian members of the LMLC committee, along with Bill Matthews, website developer and host extraordinaire, enjoying a lunch to celebrate 10 year anniversary of our great club and to thank Bill Matthews for what he has done for us over the last 6 years or so, and focusing on where we take the club in the next 10 years.

Rest assured members we are quite different to our politicians and not one dollar of your funds was used to fund this lunch and importantly we had a great time! As you can see that old campaigner Keka was ticking over nicely and never spilled a drop!