

A LOT IN STORE

Celebrating our shopping heritage

Joy McCann



NSW
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NSW Heritage Office and
NSW Ministry for the Arts
Movable Heritage Project

This publication is the first thematic study produced for the NSW Heritage Office and NSW Ministry for the Arts 1998–2001 Movable Heritage Project.

A Lot in Store tells the story of NSW shopping and retailing and investigates why our shopping heritage is vulnerable. It investigates how to identify, conserve and interpret historic shops and collections. It also explores opportunities to keep historic shops in business and to celebrate this living aspect of our communities.

It was researched and written by historian Joy McCann with advice from shopkeepers and owners, the Heritage Council of NSW's Movable Heritage Reference Group, heritage advisors, regional museum officers, NSW museums and other people interested in historic shops. John Petersen, Sarah Buckle and Lianne Hall from the NSW Heritage Office provided editorial assistance.

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Cover: Bill Morgan in the café his family have run since 1935

The Golden Gate Café in Hillston was built in 1929 and Bill started working there when he was twenty years old. This traditional corner shop and café now attracts locals and visitors as a rare surviving shop from an earlier era. *Photograph by Marinco Kojdanovski, reproduced courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.*

Inside covers: G.J. Coles Department Store, Canberra, c.1958

Photograph courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

Backcover: The metal change tray in Bill Morgan's Golden Gate Café in Hillston

This tray has been in daily use for about sixty years. Original fittings and objects are still used in the café which has been run by the same family since 1935. *Photograph by Marinco Kojdanovski, reproduced courtesy of the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.*

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Foreword

Shops from any era may be regarded as a significant part of our heritage – even shops established in recent years. However, the case studies from *A Lot in Store* focus on shops surviving from the late-nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries, since these are now increasingly rare. One aim of this study is to highlight these shops and to encourage others to recognise their significance, before these places succumb to changes that irreversibly alter or destroy their heritage significance.

This study aims to give practical suggestions to people who want to look after a particular aspect of our shopping heritage. It has a focus on interior fixtures and movable collections and explains how to record information about the shop and its contents. This will assist you in assessing the significance of the shop as a whole and not just as an empty building shell. The case studies demonstrate how the building, layout, movable items, written and oral histories, as well as people, contribute to cultural heritage significance and how this significance can be used to guide decisions about future use and management of our shopping heritage.

If you are concerned about the fate of a special shop, or appreciate that authenticity can add to customer appeal, there are case studies of special shops that are celebrated and lovingly cared for. Sadly, despite the best efforts of owners and communities, a number of shops featured in *A Lot in Store* have closed or changed since research was completed in 1999. Owners have retired or died and businesses have closed or been sold to new owners; shops are constantly changing hands and undergoing new leases and fit-outs. Our shopping heritage is vulnerable unless we can work together to slow the hands of time and keep this aspect of our heritage alive.



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Beverley Kingston's *Basket, Bag and Trolley; A History of Shopping in Australia* provided a valuable guide to the historical development of shopping in Australia.

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Above: Brennan and Geraghty's General Store Museum, Old

Photograph courtesy of National Trust of Queensland.

Introduction



Shops are central to the life of almost every village, town and city in Australia. Wherever people have settled, retailing has invariably followed, although the vast distances of Australia have stretched the resourcefulness and patience of its far flung communities. In turn, those selling goods and services have been endlessly enterprising. From hawkers touting their wares in caravans, to the ubiquitous general store, suburban corner shop and elegant department store, our retailing history is a proud and colourful one.

In NSW the evolution of shops and shopping is part and parcel of the story of European settlement. In the early days, 'going shopping' was still a relatively new concept, even in Britain. The new settlers brought their traditions with them, buying their goods from home producers, street-sellers or at the market-place. The first purpose-built shops began to appear in Britain from the early nineteenth century, and colonial societies at the outposts of Empire quickly followed suit.

Today, some shops survive that can still speak to us from another time. You may still be able to visit a favourite shop from childhood, or discover a store where customers have their orders filled whilst they wait. More often these days, you may only have the memory of smells and sounds of a corner shop long gone, with its vast array of boiled sweets or tins of biscuits. Or you might remember a trip to town, dressed in Sunday best to buy school clothes or search for basement bargains or marvel at the spectacles in shop windows and Christmas pageants.

In city and country older shops are becoming rare. These shops and, in many cases, the families still associated with them, are living links with the past. Inside, you may still catch a glimpse of the history of the shop and its locality in the shelves and counters, tools of trade, signs, and perhaps even the stock.

It is the more portable items that are the most vulnerable part of our shopping heritage. They are often removed from the shop in the final throes of selling or closing down. Their meaning and significance are quickly lost in the fall of an auctioneer's hammer.

Whilst objects such as signs and biscuit tins are highly prized and avidly collected, it is the shops retaining original contents and customs that are of special value in telling the history of a place. These shops have the power to show us our history and to inspire us with their stories.

This publication tells the story of shops of different types, from different eras, and from different regions across NSW. All are shared by communities still fortunate enough to have a significant shop in their midst.