



## Chapter IV

### SEVERANCE FROM SHIRE OF LILLYDALE

By 1952 I had a client, Herbert Jeeves of Mt. Dandenong, bus proprietor and doyen of the Shire of Lillydale.

In the next couple of years, as well as preparing his tax returns, we had time to discuss the future of Croydon, and it was our opinion that Croydon, at some stage, would sever from the Shire, either on its own or an amalgamation with another municipality.

Gradually, not from Cr. Jeeves, I acquired various items of facts and figures and, by March, 1956, I had enough information to prove that it was a feasible proposition.

I placed the proposition before the Chamber and, after considering this, the Croydon Chamber of Commerce decided to sponsor a Severance Committee within the Chamber, in November, 1956.

This followed on from a meeting in March, 1956, attended by Crs. Frank Batten, Mal Spencer and Fred Geale, our West Riding Councillors, where, although the figures were not complete, they showed the costs of a separate municipality could not be held down.

We had already come to the conclusion that the Shire was not looking after Croydon and this was emphasised when they warned us that independence was not important, but drainage was. "Any day an epidemic could smack us right in the face." It will be realized that the Shire could not cope with the aspirations of Croydon when the vast majority of Councillors were primary producers or orchardists.

At the meeting, in November, I opened the debate by stating this was the time to go ahead, pointing out that, in the West Riding, three hundred and sixty-one houses were under construction and the future had to be grasped now.

It was not for the Chamber to go it alone, but we have to initiate the move as a community venture by calling a public meeting, forming a separate organization and letting the ratepayers take over. When the question of Shire accommodation was raised I pointed out this was not insurmountable as temporary offices could be constructed by installing partitions in the Croydon Hall.

Len Pawsey said, "It would be to the Chamber's great credit if they saw the breakaway through to its conclusion. Croydon needed leadership and, in the absence of any other organization, the Chamber would be doing a very great service to the people of Croydon if they accepted the full burden in expediting the breakaway."

He added, "If the Chamber called a public meeting, we should be prepared to offer our services to the ratepayers so that the breakaway would not be bogged down through lack of proper administration.

Ray Johnson (Croydon Mail) supported the scheme and resulting from vital and encouraging information, it was decided to form a committee to call a public meeting. Gordon Allen, as President of the Chamber, was elected Chairman and I was appointed Secretary/Organizer.

The first move for the breakaway of Croydon from Lillydale had been in the middle of 1953 with a suggestion of joining up with Ringwood.

This did not meet with much support. I am not sure who started the move, but the idea was that it would be preferable for Croydon to get away from a country shire and attach to a future suburban council. It was felt that it was not the action to take, as Croydon would be treated as a satellite of Ringwood.

Ringwood Council stated they were not interested so that settled the matter.

Having accepted the position of Secretary/organizer, it was my responsibility to prepare a scheme and figures. I found there was no way I could cope, it was so involved and time consuming. Then came my "white knight". Living at Croydon, with his daughter, was Rolf Jansen, who had retired from being Secretary of the Country Roads Board. He heard of my problems and, as he believe in the breakaway, he offered to accept the responsibility for preparing a scheme for consideration, leaving me to handle the publicity to the public. With his knowledge of the Public Service, and his contacts within the Service, he was the ideal man for the job.

To broaden the base of the movement it was decided that Gordon Allen resign as Chairman, as he was an office-holder of the Chamber, and Fred Geale, who had left the Lillydale Council, took over as Chairman in August, 1957, with me remaining Secretary/Organizer.

At a meeting in August, 1957, Mr. Jansen "put the case for breakaway in a methodical manner".

That severance was not only desirable but also possible as a proposition that could pay its way, was a fact from Rolf Jansen's survey. He gave facts, figures and comparisons with similar breakaways, and he was appointed special delegate.

After conferences, we had established the proposition that, as well as the nine square miles around Croydon, which was the highest rating revenue area, and included the area to "five-ways" Mooroolbark, we should accept the liability of Wonga Park and Kilsyth, at least to Liverpool Road. These were, because of the sparsity of development, areas that did not have the rate revenue to cover the expense of administration and services to the areas.

The Croydon Mail of 26th September, 1957, reported that the question of the severance was the most talked about question, the fulfillment of dreams of many far-thinking citizens, that the time was ripe. It was reported the progress in the Borough of Ringwood was proof positive of what will be achieved, that there would be an overflowing attendance at the proposed public meeting which would be held in time for a referendum in August, 1958.

In November, 1957, a report by Rolf Jansen was presented which started with a consideration as a Borough which, with other requirements, should not exceed nine square miles, defined by roads, streams or Crown allotments. Another consideration had to be that community interest should not be split. The proposed area of nine square miles was flawed as Croydon North would be split, approximately two square miles would be isolated, Warranwood remaining with Lillydale. The east was hard to define due to number of subdivisions. Another pocket, between Lincoln Road and the railway line, would remain within Lillydale as would happen with Golf Links estate, etc.

To obtain an homogeneous mass the municipality had to be a Shire, that is greater than nine square miles.

Three schemes were considered and the final area decided to proceed with was twenty-nine square miles which took in the area out to Clifford Park and Yarra River, Crown allotments to Black Springs Road, Manchester Road, Liverpool Road, Dandenong Creek, Ringwood and Doncaster and Templestowe boundaries. (See map opposite.)

The area chosen had no affinity with Lillydale and Croydon would be the natural centre for business, shopping, community activities, etc.

Finances were considered and the West Riding of the Shire of Lillydale had recently been revalued one hundred percent and this represented forty-five percent of the whole of the Shire of Lillydale. This would be increased with the additions of part of the South Riding (Mooroolbark, Liverpool and Colchester Roads, etc.).

The revaluations of the South, North and East Ridings were being conducted and these were to be in the order of fifty percent. The rateable value of the area would be £451,000 to £470,000.

Rate revenue for the new municipality would approximate £69,000 to £84,000 but it was realized that the rate revenue would increase as further development took place with houses etc. being built, revenue increased under NAV rating.

However, it was pointed out that no ratepayer would be satisfied with the lack of action in the past, and a new municipality would have to raise extra revenue to overcome the backlog and it should be recognized that this could mean an increase in rates.

An increase in rates would only be caused by demands of ratepayers and, in fact, with the last six new municipalities, through severance, three had lower rates, two the same and only one had increased rates.

To proceed, ten percent of persons on the municipal role should request the Governor in Council for severance, the Shire of Lillydale conduct a poll at the time of the next election and a simple majority would carry the poll. Then an enquiry would be held by the Local Government Advisory Board. the Board could advise the Governor in Council to allow the request, that the request be approved with some alterations, or the request be refused. It was anticipated, if everything went smoothly, the new municipality could be functioning early in 1959.

Estimates were that the figures would be :

	Rate Revenue		£69,000
Cost	Administration	£15,000	
	Works & Services	50,000	
	Sundries	4,000	

This £50,000 was considered adequate as the Shire of Lillydale 1955/56 spent £73,000 over one hundred and sixty-three square miles.

It was further recommended that there be no Ridings for the new municipality as we wanted to develop the new Shire as a whole, where the need was greater from time to time, and this would mean the Councillors would work together instead of "fighting" amongst themselves over finances.

I regret that I cannot remember the complete Severance Committee, but I do remember Fred Geale, Gordon Allen, Rolf Jansen, Ken Leversha (who carried the banner into Kilsyth), Alan Waldron, John Benson, Glenn Frost (as a Lillydale Councillor he was only an observer) and myself.

At the public meeting questions were raised, in particular, would there be a differential rating for primary producers and would "there be a push" to industrialize the area, as per Dandenong? This latter question was raised by Mrs. Frost.

Naturally, it was pointed out these would be the decisions of the new Council. A Mr. Gordon raised a laugh when he asked whether the proposed new Council would be formed from the Chamber of Commerce or from the community? Of course it was explained that the Chamber was there to see the project to fruition and then would retire. This proved that we were right to include the local community on the Severance Committee.

Another question was, how many of the Chamber were ratepayers? The answer was ninety percent, and therefore, the movement was not initiated by "birds of paradise".

By February, 1958, we had over the necessary ten percent of ratepayers sign the petition for a poll for the severance. I had a table in Main Street and had a queue waiting to sign. There was no objection from the Shire of Lillydale over this action (see the action from the Shire of Croydon when similar action was taken in 1971 over City status).

The only organized opposition to the move to sever was from Wonga Park where Alex de Podolinsky called a meeting at the Wonga Park Hall, and it was decided there that the area would oppose any move to include Wonga Park in the proposed new Shire.

There was some trepidation, from some individuals, about the effect it would have on them personally, but most people were in favour of the creation of the new Shire.

Concern was expressed that the new Shire would have a big expense, starting out from scratch, but this was answered that, in actual fact, the new Shire would receive, from Lillydale, adjustment of all the assets according to the rateable value of the new Shire and the balance of the Shire of Lillydale, with temporary finance available until the adjustment could be made.

Again, the matter of staffing was raised but it was pointed out that, as work had not been carried out over the whole of the Shire of Lillydale, it would be necessary for Lillydale to increase staff and also to add onto the Shire offices to catch up on the backlog and the increase in development in Croydon increased that need.

April, 1958, was the month that the petition to hold a poll for the establishment of the Shire of Croydon had to be submitted and the Severance Committee presented it to the Shire of Lillydale.

In the campaigning between April, 1958 and the poll in August, quite a lot of correspondence was conducted in the local papers. Most of it was by individual ratepayers, but organized negative publicity was from Alex de Podolinsky, on behalf of Wonga Park. He and I conducted a spirited argument through the papers. It never got abusive, but was heated. (a few years later, Alex found out I was a good accountant, became a client, and remains so, and a valued friend to this day, after thirty years as his accountant.)

Naturally, the Shire of Lillydale prepared a report in order to stop a favourable vote for severance. In it, the Shire quoted several cases where the Governor in Council refused a new municipality. It was "clutching at straws" as not one case was in any way similar to the Croydon proposal. Another case quoted was Shire of Altona, which was refused, in 1953, originally because of poor finances but, with industrial development and improved finances, it was proclaimed in May, 1957. The Shire of Lillydale stated we had proceeded with consultation with it. Our procedure was as per the Local Government Act.

The rest of the Shire of Lillydale had been revalued and Rolf Jansen took out fresh valuation figures and these showed -

West Riding	£350,578
South Riding	303,222
North Riding	132,913
East Riding	166,505

and with proposed severance of areas -

	Lillydale	Croydon
West Riding	-	£350,578
South Riding	£173,461	129,761
North Riding	132,913	-
East Riding	166,505	-
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	£472,879	£480,339
	49.6%	50.4%

The Shire decided to employ a barrister for the hearing before the Local Government Advisory Board, showing how hard they were going to fight. Some of our rate money was to finance the opposition but we didn't have any money to employ a barrister.

Non-compulsory voting was in force then and, prior to the poll, a final effort was made to ensure people voted and were not apathetic. The poll was conducted on Saturday, 31st August, 1958, with the Movement manning all booths and the turnout of ratepayers was phenomenal. People stood in a queue for up to, and over, an hour because of the lack of voting tables. Some people left for other activities and returned later to ensure they had a say.

The poll result was extraordinarily successful. Votes cast were four thousand eight hundred and sixty-two with four thousand one hundred and ninety-one in favour of the breakaway. Even in Wonga Park there was success. To show how widespread the "yes" vote was, the booths were -

	In Favour	Against
Croydon	3280	248
Kilsyth	358	81
Croydon North	540	87
Bayswater North	187	61
Warranwood	159	33
Wonga Park	129	68
Mooroolbark	133	45
Postal	40	12

A majority for "yes" of three thousand five hundred and fifty-six.

With the advent of the hearing by the Local Government Advisory Board on 2nd December, 1958, ratepayers were warned that just because of the overwhelming vote at the poll, it was not certain that our wishes would be granted. In other words, we couldn't impose our will on the Government.

The hearing was held on 2nd December, at 10.30 a.m., the Shire of Lillydale, engaging Mr. Gifford, and because of his complete comprehension of case, figures, etc., Rolf Jansen represented the Severance Movement before a packed audience in the Croydon Hall.

The Board consisted of Mr. Stringer, Inspector Municipal Accounts, Mr. Cook, Chairman of Town and Country Planning Board and Cr. Lines, former Chairman of Municipal Association and a Heidelberg Shire Councillor.

Mr. Gifford was the Town and Country Planning Advisor (later he was made a Q.C.). Evidence, on behalf of the Severance Committee, was given by ratepayers Don Fraser, Secretary of Croydon Co-operative Housing Society, Mrs. P. Frost, Messrs. L. Kerr and H. Malcolm. These were supported by Fred Geale.

The cases were put with interjections, but without hostility.

One "dirty trick" was disclosed when Mr. Jansen, in the early afternoon, answering the case put forward by Mr. Gifford, stated that, "the Council never came near us and we had no idea what their views would be until the typewritten copy of Mr. Gifford's statement was handed over this morning", and that he was disappointed over the way the Council had dealt with this matter.

He pointed out sometimes he disagreed with the Severance Committee, had, when the Shire was criticized over the long period, even written to the press disagreeing with the criticism. He pointed out his report had been published twelve months ago, and there had been no comment by the Council until the last minute. He further stated that, although Council committee meetings were necessary, it was wrong for the Shire not to take the public into their confidence. In fact, the Council's view should have been publicized before the poll. The Shire had not treated the ratepayers with due respect.

Rolf also referred to the remark of Cr. White of Lillydale, at the Statutory Meeting after the Croydon poll, that, when the matter of the severance was first mooted, the Council adopted the attitude of "letting them tell us what to do and the Croydon ratepayers had so in such convincing manner, that he could not see anything but a successful outcome to a new municipality in the Croydon area". I am prepared to accept that as the Council's attitude.

Mr. Gifford, in the case for the Shire of Lillydale, told the enquiry the Shire was not in favour of severance, but if there was a severance, the whole Shire could be examined on a regional basis, that the new Shire should be a Borough (nine square miles) that, if severance was granted, the boundaries should be ascertained as to what is best for both municipalities. Also a small municipality could not be in the interests of the ratepayers of Croydon.

Further, that the area applied for included land that was rural and likely to remain rural (Wonga Park and east of Dorset Road and we know what is the position today) and this was espoused by an expert - the Town and Country Planning advisor, Mr. Gifford.

Rolf, on our behalf, put the case that the greatest development in the Shire was in the Croydon area. This development, both residential and industrial, needed the "on hands" concentration of a local Council. The rest of

the Shire was rural and needed a different approach. Local Councillors were best equipped to deal with local problems and whilst some areas were now rural, their community of interest was with Croydon not Lillydale. Wonga Park (part of West Riding) was included as it was not considered desirable to eliminate an area from which comparatively little revenue would be obtained, instead of leaving the liability with the Shire.

Also, at present, the Shire did not have the staff or facilities to cope with its problems (one of the causes of the neglect of Croydon).

Those are the main points, the fact that Croydon looked towards Melbourne and that many cultural, social, philanthropic and sporting bodies were in Croydon.

In February, 1959, we received the bad news that the municipality of Croydon had not been granted, that, in a few years' time, a Borough may be warranted. There was no appeal possible. Rolf Jansen was seriously ill in Royal Melbourne Hospital and the town was devastated.

No doubt the Shire of Lillydale was overjoyed, thinking this was the last they would hear of severance for some years. They did not count on my perseverance (or doggedness) because I immediately announced, "that the idea of a Borough was to be scoffed at, that it would be an anachronism in the Croydon of the future". It would be just a temporary measure, inadequate to cope with the needs of the Croydon in the next decade, as the development of the last ten years would be dwarfed by what would happen in the foreseeable future. From now on, Parliamentary representatives would be urged, in no uncertain manner, to lend a helping hand.

Len Pawsey said he was amazed at the decision, as did Mr. Pinches and Cr. G. Frost. The President of the Shire, Cr. E. Rechsteiner, didn't have much to say, mainly, "The Council would not have minded a Borough because it would have taken only one third of the built up area".

An editorial at the time stressed that it was the democratic principle that, irrespective of what the people wanted with an overwhelming majority, the Government had decided what was best for us - what a load of "tripe".

It further pointed out the sincerity of the Councillors of the area concerned in that five of the six had not supported the movement.

Rolf Jansen was still ill and, because I was too close to the action and could be considered to have "cooked" the figures, we asked Don Fraser to use the figures of Rolf Jansen and adjust them for the fourteen square miles, that was our next choice.

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By July, 1959, again we were acting for another poll for the Shire of Croydon, not a Borough.

We prepared four schemes.

- The first was ten point four square miles, covering Dorset, Colchester, Lincoln and Yarra Road and Maroondah Highway.
- The second was ten point five square miles had the same boundaries but went east of Colchester Road.
- The third included part of North Croydon and Wonga Park, covering approximately fourteen square miles.
- Scheme four covered the area of the third proposal with the addition of Canterbury Road and covered eighteen square miles.

We placed the four schemes before the Council and they had asked for time to consider the schemes and Cr. Rechsteiner, Shire President, said the Council had come to the conclusion that thirteen square miles, including the whole of the Trawalla Road tip and sanitary depot, was a suitable area. The boundaries would be largely what was finally decided, and this was to be the basis of negotiation. The attitude of the Council, this time, was so different from the previous scheme and was greatly appreciated. Possibly, it was recognition of the inevitable result (of a separate Shire) or it was that Emil was the Shire President and he realized what the locals wanted, he was a local Councillor.

A great disappointment was the death of Rolf Jansen, in November, '59, and it is a great regret that he was not able to see the Shire of Croydon come to fruition. All members of the Movement accepted the increased "load of work" with his death.

In February, 1960, we received a "bomb-shell"!

Just as the Shire did not have the courtesy to act with its ratepayers on the first poll, on 10th February a deputation by Crs. Hubert Jeeves, Frank Batten, A. Chandler, Glenn Frost, Alec Gordon and Emil Rechsteiner, Shire President, saw the Minister of Local Government (Mr. Murray Porter) and informed him the Council was emphatically against the severance. However, a week later, we were informed that the Local Government Advisory Board would not oppose a fourteen square mile area for Croydon, if it was applied for.

The Shire decided to ask Parliamentary representatives to place the Council's case before the Minister, who would be asked to receive another deputation. The vote was six for, three against, the three being Crs. Spencer, Frost and Mould.

Cr. Rechsteiner had stated the Council's objection was that severance would take away, from the Shire, a state of stability and economic progress.

To add further ammunition that the Shire couldn't afford the loss of revenue, the Shire had started spending £60,000 on new offices without waiting for the results of a severance poll.

The Shire also stated the new Shire would lose benefits of the plant hire system (Croydon installed the same system) that present office administration cost £38,528 and this would be £30,000 for each Shire. The new Shire would need premises and the interest on this would be £3,000 per year. Cr. Hill stated that the Shire of Lillydale had been tolerant over the issue, it had already cost Lillydale considerable money and had not presented the ratepayers with its own side of the matter. (This was our complaint over the actions of the Shire to the first poll.) "If facts and figures were put before the ratepayers, by the Shire, it was felt their support for severance would disappear."

In March, the Shire of Lillydale issued a statement of the revenue that was very confusing to the ratepayers.

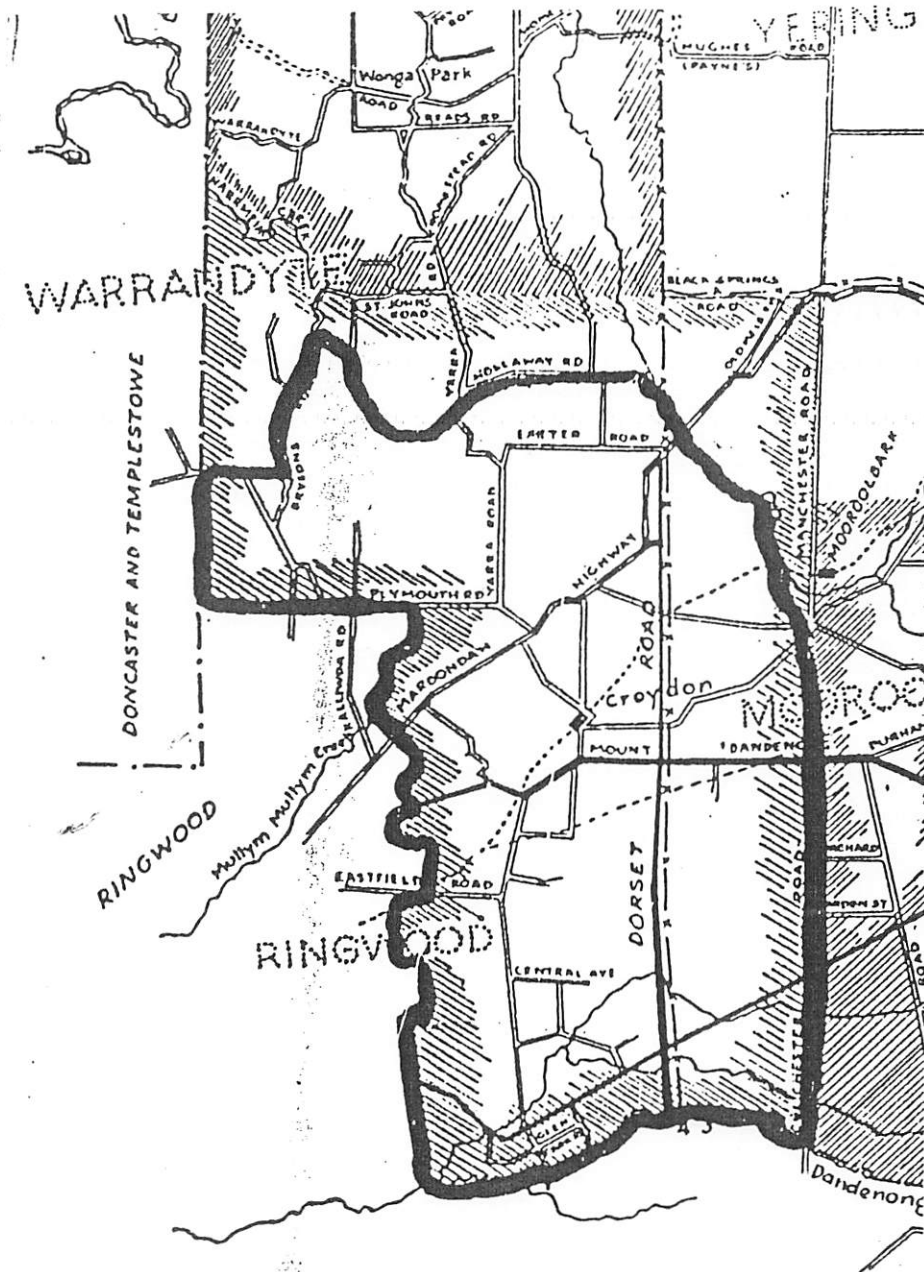
As At	North	East	South	West
31.12.59	£103,167	£201,768	£283,570	£464,416
			Value	Revenue
Borough Croydon (without Wonga Park)			£429,544	£64,929
13 sq. miles inc. Trawalla Road			472,611	71,567
14 sq. miles inc. Colchester Road			508,173	77,346

This did not allow for future valuations and rate revenue as with the Net Annual Value rating and supplementary valuations, this would increase both the valuations and revenue would increase between this date and any date that the new Shire could commence.

Another petition was prepared and the poll was held in August, 1960, at the Council elections. Again, crowds queued up to cast their votes, and to show that not everyone could cast their votes (couldn't wait any longer) I took photographs of the queues and entered the polling booths and, standing on a chair, took photographs of the shambles in the booth. A few weeks later the presiding officer at the Croydon Hall, Roy Pitman, took me to task for acting like this in his booth, but I wanted it, if necessary, to show the members of the Advisory Board.

The Ringwood Croydon Mail came in strong for a "yes" vote, using the fact that Croydon was no longer a rural area and the example of "where Ringwood was now" and would that have been the result if it had not severed in 1923?





Area of 2nd Poll and start of Shire of Croydon

The vote in favour of the severance was again overwhelming with "yes" four thousand, nine hundred and forty, "no" nine hundred and seventy-three, "informal" thirty, which was a majority of three thousand, nine hundred and sixty-seven votes.

The enquiry was held in December and, in view of previous advices and knowing that there was no point in it, the Shire of Lillydale only made a gesture of objecting to the breakaway; not even employing Mr. Gifford. We were successful.

Croydon was granted its request for thirteen square miles and this was the start of great co-operation from the Shire of Lillydale. They couldn't do enough to ensure the success of the Shire of Croydon. It was stated, twelve months later, that it was the most co-operative severance in the history of Victoria.

In August, 1960, knowing the result of the poll, the councilors of the Shire of Lillydale had elected Glenn Frost as Shire President with the knowledge that it would be the last period he would be a Councillor of the Shire of Lillydale.

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The old Army hospital/Egg Board/Co-operative supermarket/swimming pool/fund raising building was up for sale and, as the new Council of Shire of Croydon, had no contractual authority, the Shire of Lillydale approached a meeting of the newly elected Councillors in May, 1961, about the proposition that this building be purchased to become the nucleus off the new Shire of Croydon. We agreed to this and the Shire of Lillydale used part of their loan moneys to purchase the building on our behalf.

The Croydon Chamber of Commerce and Croydon Severance Committee called for a public meeting on 17th March to organize celebrations for the proclamation of the Shire of Croydon, with invitations sent to various organizations and the general public. Although the proclamation was a serious matter, it was felt, in many quarters, there should be a gala trend after the success of the recent Lillydale centenary celebrations. From this meeting, as well as the official dinner provided by the Shire of Lillydale at Kimberley (now Colonial Court), it was decided to have a concert in the Croydon Hall where the new Councillors would leave the dinner, be introduced to the public on the stage, and return to the dinner. We attempted to get a big name band for the variety night but the price was too high for the admission charge proposed, but the concert was a resounding success.

Another item was a carnival, from Wednesday to Saturday, on the Park but, on Saturday afternoon, Main Street was closed and the whole carnival was shifted to down each side of Main Street with bands and dancing, and spectators down the centre. It was a wild night and with the "black boy and table tennis ball" stall I had and the recognizing of friends, I lost my voice, but it was beautiful.

This was after a procession on the Saturday afternoon, down Main Street, organized by Bob Fallon. Sunday, Wittingslow cleared Main Street. My main effort was organizing the Croydon Industries Fair in Croydon Hall.

In April, the Apex Club had organized a seminar, the subject being the development off Croydon Shire and the ways in which Apex could help in its growth. As one person put it, "There'll be plenty of time for tears, blood and sweat, when the new Councillors settle down on their mammoth job". Speakers at the seminar were Ross Starkey, Apex District Governor and myself, as President of the Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Starkey stated that, although State authorities had deprived local government of many of its responsibilities, new needs for local action arose daily. Because of this the need for vigorous community participation by well-informed citizens was greater than ever and Apex had the means to make a real contribution.

I added that there was a role for organizations such as Apex, there were sixty-eight fundraising organizations all working to better the community. There was a great need for club rooms and other facilities for a better social life for the elderly and the youth of the district. Also, Apex could help with development of local industry to minimize Croydon becoming a dormitory suburb. Apex could help with vigorous and well-informed public support for the Council still to be elected.

The Apex Club decided to make a close study of the needs of the district and form a long-range plan of community activity by the Club, that co-operating with other organizations, an effective program of community growth.

Candidates for the first Council were -

Gordon Allen  
Geoffrey Chenowith  
Claude Cooper  
Brian Dowling  
Robert Fallon  
Donald Fraser  
Glenn Frost

Fred Geale  
Irwin Hunter  
Neil McIntosh  
Francis Nugent  
George Pile  
Emil Rechsteiner  
Richard Silcock

Lewis Spencer

When announcing results of the poll, Ken Cowling, Secretary, Shire of Lillydale, as Returning Officer, told the people present that the voting had taken five hundred hours, eight men working well into the early hours of each morning, with eight thousand, four hundred and eleven valid, five hundred and fifty-three informal, by a team from the Commonwealth Electoral Office. With fifteen candidates and nine positions, the counting had to be similar to a Senate election and it needed their expertise.

After preferences, the candidates elected were -

Frost  
Allen  
Geale

Rechsteiner  
Chenowith  
Pile

Silcock  
Fallon  
Spencer



Crowning Miss Croydon 1961, part of the proclamation celebrations