

EDHS_02160 - Hannah Lloyd's Railway General Store

ThrowbackThursday: Eltham Big Star Food Centre, Main Road, 1966



Eltham Big Star Food Centre on Main Road, c.1966 (Photo: poss. Ray Staff; EDHS_05019)

#ThrowbackThursday – In February 1965, Staffs Railway Store, the oldest business premises in the Eltham shopping district was demolished. Formerly a self-service grocery, restaurant and electrical repair shop, the building for many years housed Eltham's only 'family' grocer and feed store. Earlier it had appeared to have been the town's bakery. The building had been purchased in late March 1939 by Mr Eric N. Staff. At the time of E.N. Staff's purchase there were huge bakers' ovens located at the rear and the building also had a well and four toilets for employees.

When the 'pictures' came to Eltham with the opening of the Eltham Public Hall across the road in 1941, Mr E.N. Staff extended the business and opened a milk bar and sweet shop. Further extensions re-established the tea rooms of days gone by. Mr E.N. Staff conducted business for about 15 years before handing over the reins to his son, Ray Staff.

When his son Ray took over, the milk bar and tea rooms were closed for several years but the milk bar was later re-opened and subsequently became a greengrocers and later again, a restaurant. The tea rooms section was converted to an electrical repair shop about 1955.

Electoral Roll records for 1967 record Raymond Charles Staff at 929 Main Road, Eltham, grocer, and in 1968 at Lot 4, Hillcrest Avenue, Eltham, taxi truck operator. Staff's store appears to have occupied 929-933 Main Road and the Eltham Big Star Food Centre was centred around 931 Main Road. It would appear that Ray continued to run the business for approximately two years after the original store was demolished and a new supermarket was built.

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Today, 929 Main Road is the Nongkhai Thai Restaurant and is precisely where the original Staffs store stood. Even though the facade has been modified at eye level with new larger windows, the upper facade is identical to that of the new Eltham Big Star Food Centre of 1965/66.



929 Main Road Eltham ([Google Streetview August 2019](#))

But how did the original building, the oldest premises in the 1965 era shopping centre come about? Well let us tell you about a man named Jed . . . well, Luther actually, so let us travel back further in time to 1902; August 12th to be precise, to the Eltham Courthouse.

Appearing before T. Smallman, Esq., Police Magistrate, and Messrs. W. Duncan and W.J. Taylor, Justices of the Peace is Luther Haley, baker. Wilfred Henry Johnston, by his agent Stanley Ernest Elder has applied for a warrant of ejection under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1890 against Luther Haley from the bakery premises at the corner of Main Road and York Street.

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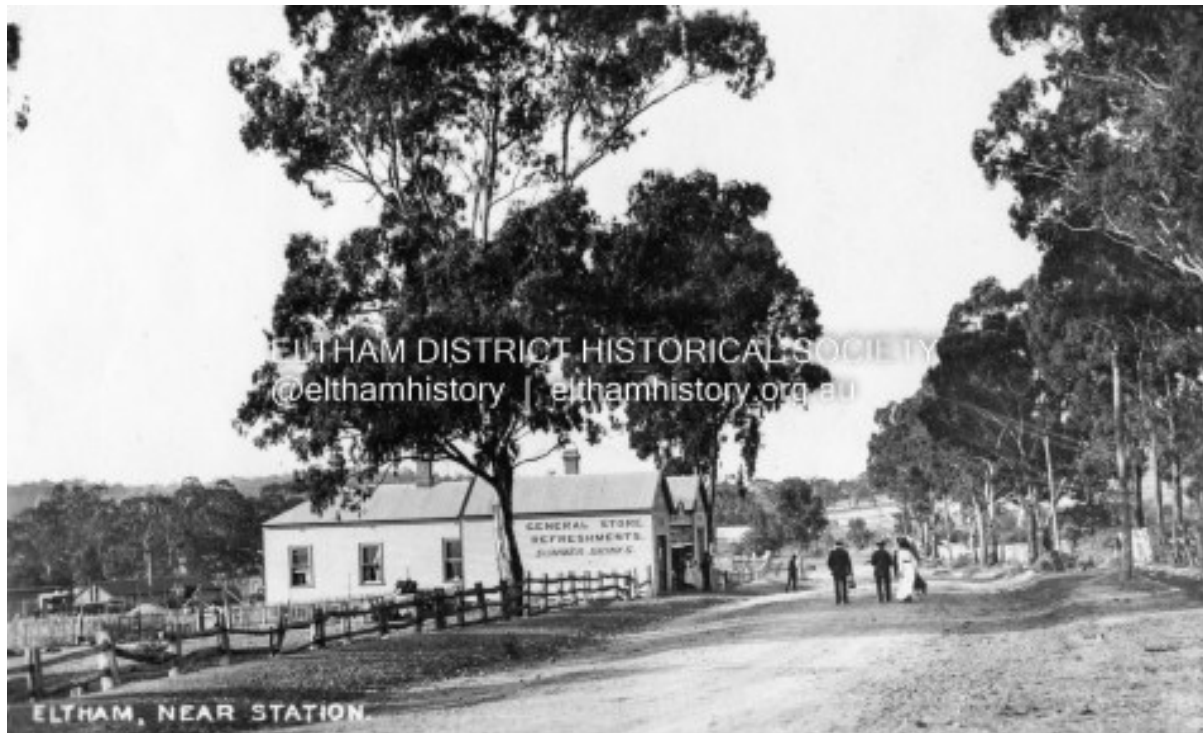
General Store and Bakery, cnr Main Road and York Street, c.1902. Pictured are most likely Mrs Burgoyne (given her age compared with Mrs Haley) and three of her children shortly after taking possession. Note the "Summer Drinks" sign on the side of the building, possibly a legacy of Luther Haley's time operating the business. (Photo: EDHS_00144)

From the evidence presented we hear that Mrs Burgoyne of Eltham had purchased the property some months earlier from Mr Johnston, which consists of a store and bakery establishment at Eltham occupied by Mr. Luther Haley, and whose lease expired some little time back, and up to the present time, Mr. Haley was not prepared to leave. He informs the court that he is unable to secure at Eltham a suitable house in which to carry on his business, but he is now building a place near the railway station which he expects to be done in about three weeks time, and he is then prepared to give up possession of the premises he now occupies.

Mr Smallman informs the defendant, Luther Haley, that he will have to quit the premises in three weeks from the present date, and that a warrant of ejectment would be issued. However he also informs Mr Haley that he would order the warrant to lie in the office for three weeks from that date.

The premises under construction referred to by Luther Haley in court were situated on the western side of Main Road, near the railway station slightly opposite present day Arthur Street. It was opened around September 1902 as a General Store, Bakery and Tea Rooms.

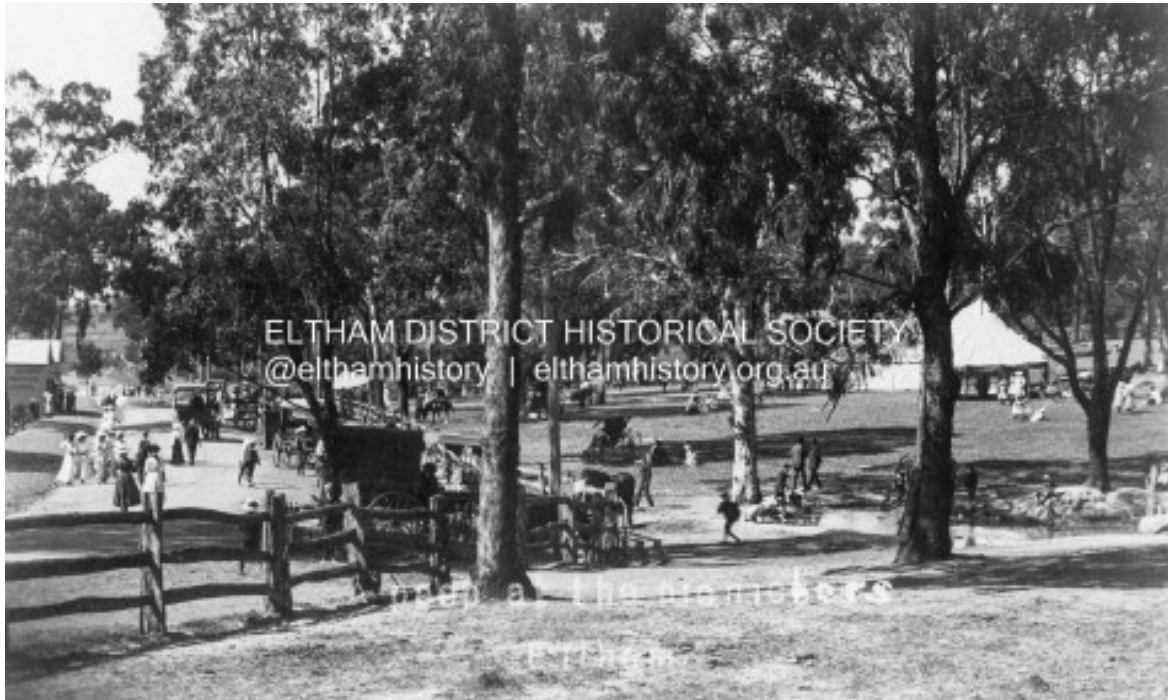
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Eltham, Main Road near station, c.1904. Looking north towards Research along Main Road near the intersection with Dudley Street. Haley's General Store on left promoting refreshments and summer drinks. With the opening of the railway to Eltham in 1902, Melbourne residents would regularly enjoy a Sunday excursion journey on the train to Eltham for a day's outing to the countryside. (Photo: poss. Tom Prior; SEPP_0610)

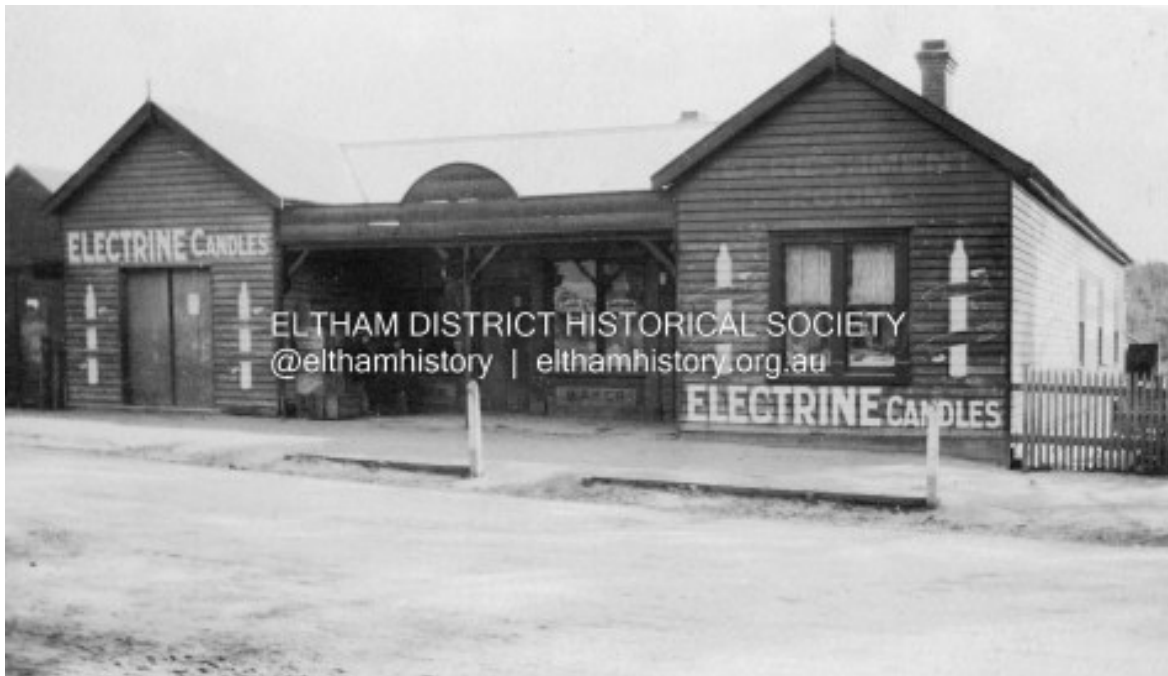
This was the original building in the present day shopping precinct. At the time the only thing nearby was the railway station. Luther Haley's business appeared to prosper and he would have catered to not only the locals but also day visitors by train on Sundays coming up from Melbourne, offering fresh baked produce, tea rooms and summer drinks. The fields across Main Road running between present day Arthur Street and Luck Street were known as Haley's Paddock and at times were used for community festivities and picnics. A newspaper report on the annual State schools picnic held at Haley's Paddock on March 11, 1904 described it as "quite close to the railway station, and is quite capable of holding comfortably 10,000 people. With its ample shade and hilly surroundings, it is an ideal place for any gathering." Unfortunately for Luther, just two months earlier his son, Leslie, aged 12 years had gone with a companion to bathe in the Diamond Creek and had accidentally drowned. But that's another story.

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Possibly the annual State schools picnic held by the Board of Advice at Haley's Paddock near Eltham railway station on 11 March, 1904. (Photo: Believed taken by Tom Prior, SEPP_0612)

Luther Haley successfully ran his general store, bakery and tea rooms until 1917 when he and his family departed the district and moved to Westgarth Street in Northcote where he changed careers and became a publisher.



Lloyd's Store, Main Road, Eltham, c.1917-c.Feb 1920 (Photo: EDHS_02160, edited; original, State Library of Victoria)

It was then taken over by Hannah Lloyd and became known as Lloyd's Railway General Store from 1917 to 1920. From then it had a succession of owners, one as short as two months until

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March 31, 1939 when the Grocery Business formerly carried on by Mr. T.K. White of Eltham for the previous eight years was purchased by Mr Eric N. Staff of Research and became known as E.N. Staff's Railway Store.

The ownership timeline for the store is as follows:

- Luther Haley Sep 1902-1917
- Hannah Lloyd 1917-circa July 1920
- Messrs J.R. & N.E. Lee 1920-Sep 1922
- A. & E. Copeland Sep 1922-Sep 1925
- Mr Price Sep 1925-Nov 1925
- Mr Warren Nov 1925?-Nov 1926
- A.W.J. Edwards Nov 1926-1931
- T.K. White 1931-Mar 1939
- Eric Staff Apr 1939-c.1954
- Ray Staff c.1954-Feb 1965 then demolished
- Ray Staff Eltham Big Star Food Centre c.1965-1967

If anyone has old photos of Staffs store or the shopping district, particularly in the 1930s through 1960s then we would love to hear from you. Perhaps you might consider donating them to the Eltham District Historical Society or if you prefer, we could borrow them and scan them at archival quality and then return them along with a digital copy.

References

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Author: P. Pidgeon, April 2020