

Collectors' Corner

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OLD DOCKET UNEARTH'S FASCINATING BENDIGO HISTORY

As I stated last week old documents are always a source of fascination and a ready reference that highlights times well past.

This week we shall investigate the pictured and very collectable docket that originated back in 1934 when

Stilwell's Ironmongers and Complete House Furnishers were located in Hargreaves Street, in the middle of what is now the Hargreaves Mall.

Stilwell's was an enormous store, which took in 281, 283 and 285 Hargreaves Street, as denoted on the pictured docket. Today this area is occupied by McArthur's Shoes and then Sanity Australia Music Store.

Research indicates that the Stilwell family has seen something like nine generations live and work in the Bendigo area, so they go back well into the gold mining boom of the mid 1800s.

In a document compiled by Neville Stilwell of Stilwell's Painters Pot fame, he states that Fred and Ernest Stilwell established a hardware business around 1907 - 08 at the above site in Hargreaves Street.

Around 1920, Fred sold out to Ernest and by this time the business had expanded into crockery and furniture and traded successfully to 1930 when Ernest became ill, and Neville's father Lewis then took over the business.

Stilwell's operated through the Great Depression of the 1930s and then into the War years of 1939 - 45, hard, difficult times for the best of businesses.

The late 1940s and into the 1950s were good years, however the introduction of chain-stores saw them starting to sell products that traditional hardware stores sold, so a change was made to Stilwell's product line to focus on building materials, tools and paint.

This is where Neville found his personal liking and eventually went on to establish Stilwell's Discount Paints.

Many will remember that Neville Stilwell was a dedicated Ham Radio enthusiast and wherever he lived he always had an enormous aerial constructed on his

property so as he could pursue his hobby. With the coming of the 1960s, the original business ceased operations and the property and buildings were sold in mid 1961.

Stilwell's Paint and Colour still operates at the corner of Mitchell Street and Mollison Streets and keeps up the fine quality of product and service that has been the catch cry of this business for many years. There is much more that I could add to this article regarding Stilwell's family businesses, but I am constrained by the borders of this segment. At this point I would like to thank Neville Willmott, the current proprietor of Stilwell's Paint and Colour for his assistance in putting this small article together.