



J. G. Arnold & Son Fruit & Vegetables
– a Family Business

Arnold Fuit and Veg

Early customer patronage was encouraging, for within about one year of opening, the partnership business of J. G. Arnold & Son was established with a capital of twenty pounds. Fifteen pounds was applied to the purchase of a horse and cart - a considerable step-up on the barrow - and the balance of five pounds went into buying a stock of potatoes, onions and pumpkins.

By the time William Frederick, a younger brother of John Ernest left school, the business had grown sufficiently to admit him as a third partner and so the name was changed to J.G. Arnold & Sons.

The business continued to prosper and presently a shop with dwelling attached was rented in Wilson Street Albury for the princely sum of twelve shillings and sixpence per week. The "stand" was not a good one, for Albury's business centre was in Dean and Olive Streets. However, the business was carried on in Wilson Street for three years. Then the premises were sold by the owner and, perforce, a new location had to be found.

Fortunately it proved possible to purchase premises in Olive Street near Dean Street where the business was to remain and expand over the next 84 years.

In addition to his two sons John Ernest and William Frederick, Johann Gottfield^{red} had daughters almost all of whom worked in the business until marriage took them into new fields.

RETAIL OPERATIONS

By 1920 most of the daughters had married, and the business had developed into one of wholesale distribution. At this time a young man Harry Arnold (a nephew of J. G.) whose family lived near Yackandandah, was offered and accepted the position of controlling the retail side of the Albury business. This came to operate under the style of Harry Arnold & Co.

In 1938 Harry left the business and went to Sydney. Ernest Noel (Noel) the eldest son of John Ernest, took over from Harry and that part of the business operation was renamed N. Arnold & Co.

Confectionery and groceries appeared on the shelves of the store and Arnolds became the agents for Murray Breweries cordials.

Noel remained in the business until he retired in 1966 when N. Arnold & Co was absorbed into the original J. G. Arnold & Sons and the retail department was dropped.

WHOLESALE OPERATIONS

At the turn of the century Arnolds ventured into the wholesaling of fruit and vegetables, supplying other shops in Albury, Wodonga & district with their produce. This move, like the earlier retailing, also began in a small way. Potatoes and onions were bought direct from the producers in the Colac and Warrnambool districts of Victoria.

At that time there were 13 market gardens in Albury, including those earlier mentioned which were run by Chinese. Over all they were producing more vegetables than the owner operators could sell from their carts travelling around the streets of the town.

Arnold's wholesale business found ready markets for this surplus produce - small though it was compared with what it later became - in centres throughout the Riverina. The gardeners brought their vegetables to the Albury railway goods yards each morning for despatch by the firm to various destinations enjoying rail connection.

This was the real foundation of Arnolds' wholesale business which in later years was to handle fruit and vegetables from every State of the Commonwealth. ?

About the same time as the firm began trading as a wholesaler, it also entered into the transshipping business at the Albury railway station where, side by side as it were, were the different gauge lines of the New South Wales and Victorian Government Railways. In this department of their business, Arnolds acted as agents for firms at other centres whose goods had to pass through the Albury goods yards. They supervised the safe consignment of goods from one State's railway trucks to the other's.

J. E. Arnold liked to recall that the firm "drifted" into the transshipping business in a big way during the drought of 1902. Huge quantities of hay and fodder were consigned through Arnolds from Victorian locations to drought-stricken areas in the Riverina.

In the days before federation, Arnolds, as well as being transshipping agents, acted as customs agents for Riverina stores. In those times duty had to be paid on goods coming into N.S.W. from Victoria.

Through the years Arnolds prospered and their business expanded. There came, too, changes in the marketing of fruit and vegetables, brought about by faster transport - road, rail and air - and, very importantly refrigeration.

Arnolds opened branches at Queanbeyan, Cootamundra and Wagga Wagga.

There was a time when vegetables and fruit were only sold "in season". To give one example, when the business was first started, peas were available only from September to December. Refrigeration and speed of transport changed all that, so that by the thirties, peas, from all parts of Australia were never out of the greengrocer's shop.

In 1953 strawberries, which had been thought of as a summer delicacy, were sold in Albury during winter for the first time. They had been flown down from Queensland, landed at Corowa airport and brought by truck to Albury where Arnolds distributed them to shops in the area.

For many years now, bananas from Queensland have been ripened in the firm's special ripening rooms. Arnolds were the first firm in Albury to introduce this facility. With similar treatment tomatoes, for which there is always a heavy demand, have been and still are being brought from all parts of Australia.

Modern equipment was obtained in order to increase product range and extend the life of product. One of the most significant pieces of equipment to be installed was the Filacell unit which enables highly perishable vegetables to be maintained in harvest condition for long periods of time.

Another innovation was the Ag-pac machine which automatically weighs and bags fruit and vegetables. The Ag-pac machine can be connected to the potato washing machine, for automatic packaging after washing and grading of the potatoes. Ag-pac machines were installed at the firm's Queanbeyan and Albury stores in 1978, and also used to pack oranges and onions. Fresh potato chips were also produced with another semi-automatic machine.

With the passage of time John William (Jack) and Earle George (Earle) (John Ernest's two younger sons) and later Paul William (William Frederick's only son) joined the firm. So it came about that the foresight and energies of Johann Gottfried produced a lifetime of work not only for his own two sons John Ernest and William Frederick but also for all of their sons, Ernest Noel, John William, Earle George and Paul William.

Nor does the story end there. At the time when this history is going to print, Roger son of Paul William is fully engaged in the firm's Wodonga establishment.

While, as we have already noted, the purchase of potatoes and onions and the trucking and transshipping of produce were controlled by William Frederick Arnold, customer contact and general business administration were largely in the hands of John Ernest Arnold. His personality and skills well fitted him for these tasks.

As the years passed William Frederick's son Paul learned his father's "tricks of the trade" and progressively stepped into his father shoes. Likewise John Ernest was succeeded by his three sons. Noel, Jack and Earle.

That progression of father to son was to continue still further but not to the same degree. When the opportunity came, Paul's son Roger decided to follow in his father's footsteps; Earle's son Barrie did likewise for a time, but ambition to do things for himself led him to join the McDonald's family restaurant chain. Two Albury restaurants are now under his management. No son of either Noel or Jack was attracted to becoming a produce merchant.

Jack retired for reasons of failing health in 1970..... Noel died in 1978..... Earle and Barrie both retired towards the end of 1979. It was at this time that Roger entered the business.

Towards the end of the seventies the firm became persuaded that a new home for the business must be found. The central business district of a rapidly growing provincial city was not the right location for an expanding wholesale business of produce merchandising. Lack of floor space and acute traffic congestion in the loading area were major problems. Additional land, if available at all, would only have been at a cost which the business could not justify.

Major commercial developments in both Olive and David Streets Albury by a local property developer Thomas Ernest Pearsall and the Myer retail chain gave impetus to J. G. Arnold & Sons moving into pastures new. Those pastures drew them from Albury to Wodonga.

In 1980 the firm crossed the river to new premises at the corner of Osburn and Wigg Streets Wodonga. The new warehouse provided 20,000 sq ft of floor space. One fifth of this area was fitted up as coolrooms and banana ripening rooms.

At this time Paul Arnold, grandson of the founder Johann Gottfried took over sole ownership of J. G. Arnold & Sons.

In 1983 the firm merged with Country Fruit Distributors a division of national operator All States Foods Limited and the name changed to Arnold's CFD Pty Ltd. However sole ownership reverted to "Arnolds" in 1990.

Roger is now the General Manager of the business. The company employs around 35 people and handles between 120 and 150 tonnes of fruit and vegetables weekly.

LIFE AT THE "OFFICE"

Elizabeth (Betty) Richardson, the elder daughter of William Frederick Arnold recalls the life of the Arnolds in Albury from the mid 1920's.

"Some of my earliest memories" she says "were the whistles of the early morning trains as they pulled into the Albury railway station. While we snuggled in bed on frosty mornings, Dad had already departed on his motor bike to check the consignments and organise the transshipping of freight between New South Wales and Victoria".

"Father's important responsibilities within J. G. Arnold & Sons were the transshipping agency and the potato and onion merchandising. The first radio he bought in about 1929 had to be able to pick up Burnie in Tasmania so that each morning he could check the market prices of potatoes."

"With his work at the railway completed, it was his habit to return home for a substantial breakfast - porridge with milk or cream and sugar, eggs (sometimes dried up in the oven when he was detained), toast, home made jam and tea. After breakfast he walked to his "office" via the back gate of our David Street home, through the family tennis courts, laid for those players who could not be accommodated on Saturdays at St Matthews, and then across vacant land later filled by the bulk store and Edwin (Ted) Arnold's box factory."

"The "office" was immediately behind the retail business which fronted Olive Street. Behind both the retail business and the office were the produce store and reception dock for local and interstate fruit and vegetables. By 8.00am this area was a hive of activity. The Chinese market gardeners brought horse drawn loads of fresh cabbage and other seasonal vegetables to the loading dock. The store was large and smelt of earthy potatoes, pungent onions,

sweet smelling fruits as well, at times, of decaying vegetables. The "office" was entered from the Olive Street retail section via a narrow passage lined with Arnotts biscuit tins. In it were grandfather's large desk and, then, in order of rank, the desks of Uncle Jack (J. E. Arnold) and my father (W. F. Arnold)."

"This arrangement all changed after grandfather died and the "new office" took shape. Now everyone had space, partitions, typewriters, desk telephones and even names on the swinging doors ! It was quite an event - when Auntie Rose (Rosina Jane Arnold) got her own office with private entrance."

"As children, on Sunday mornings we frequently visited the office with Dad where we were instructed in the intricacies of a telephone switchboard - all those numbers (probably six) and the up and down switches. It was, of course, a manual board and often, when asking the local exchange for a number, Eda Arnold (daughter of Johann Wilhelm Arnold) would be the operator so we could have a chat with her too. Dad had great patience, even magic with children. He taught us to operate telephones, to work typewriters, to steer cars (sitting on his lap), to sell, shop and measure. He tested us regularly in "sums" and "numbers"."

"The shop and office grew as the business developed. The "shop" was Harry Arnold & Co and I recall the pride Harry had in the quite large built-in wooden bins (probably oak) which contained flour, sugar, rolled oats and the smaller drawers for spices, each with meticulously hand printed labels. There was a whole area, "the orange shop", where oranges from 100 a shilling to 10 a shilling were sold. Dad used to bring cases of juicy navels home, which we children devoured as many as four at a time."

"There were other delights for the customers of the shop:- sweets galore, licorice allsorts, boiled lollies, chocolates, toffees, to be weighed out from discreet glass compartments under the counter. There was the soda fountain where strawberry, pineapple and other flavoured "spiders" were mixed in tall glasses from ice cream and soda water, generously doused with the selected flavouring . These "spiders" were sipped decorously through straws, while seated at cane glass topped tables."

"Mid-September was the time of the Annual Spring Show. We were all involved, both as exhibitors and workers. Prizes for floral exhibits, needlework and cakes frequently bore the family name. At the age of nine, after months of practice, I won second prize for a sponge cake and first prize for handwriting. It was a case of following family tradition. Grandmother had usually won the jam prizes - especially strawberry, It was commonly

thought that this was because "Mrs Arnold had the choice of the fruit". The family knew she used the fruit which could not be sold!"

"Hard work and firm, yet kind discipline, with a measure of fun and games along the way, were great character builders."

"Harry reminded me of the family reputation when he came to Albury for my wedding in 1947. He said that when establishing his business in Sydney, the fact that he had been connected with J. G. Arnold & Sons of Albury at once established his credibility. The reputation of the firm as hard working and honest traders had spread far and wide."

LOOKING BACK

And so, from a humble wheel barrow beginning, there has grown through the industry and enterprise of four generations a prosperous business of which every person, past and present, who has had an ownership stake in it, has been or is now justly proud.

With 100 years passed since Johann Gottfried Arnold first commenced selling fruit and vegetables, the firm has unfailingly supplied storekeepers, hotels, restaurants and clubs with the best available quality fresh fruit and vegetables and in so doing has drawn its supplies from all parts of Australia.

Over the years the fortunes of the business have fluctuated; many financial losses have been suffered; in difficult times, particularly in the years of the great depression, traders who were honest at heart but poor in pocket, were given credit so that they could continue to help their customers. Never did the firm find it necessary to ration the services of any full-time employee - a record that few businesses could equal. Always there was a firm determination to give faithful community service.

The Arnolds of today like to think of it all as a family tradition.

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