

OLDEST LACROSSE CLUBS IN THE WORLD

When asking the question about the oldest clubs in the world we need to ask, is it the oldest as in original formation or oldest continuously running clubs. As members should note in Australia there are only about 40 clubs in existence but since 1876 there have probably been at least 5-10 times that many that no longer exist.

Looking at the earliest formed clubs the award goes to Montreal Lacrosse Club, which was formed in 1856, by Dr W. G. Beers, who also in 1860, codified the game, shortening the length of each game and reducing the number of players to 12 per team. The first game played under Beers' rules was at Upper Canada College in 1867; they lost to the Toronto Cricket Club by a score of 3–1. It is probable that Lambton Mount either played or saw lacrosse around Montreal before coming to Australia, to the goldfields of Ballarat, with his family.



"Montreal Lacrosse Club," 1867-68
"Club de crosse de Montréal", 1867-68

Outside of Canada the next oldest clubs formed were the Melbourne Lacrosse Club and Stockport Lacrosse Club. While Stockport is still a strong club based in Manchester, England, we do not know whether or not it has run continuously since 1876, and like many clubs during WW1 and WW2, may have been forced for one reason or another to go into recession due to a lack of numbers due to the war effort as well as a shortage of equipment and other resources. Hopefully someone from Stockport can tell us more on this great club's history.

Other early clubs outside of Canada include the Mohawk Lacrosse Club (Troy, New York – 1868), Frontier Lacrosse Club (Waikato, NZ – 1877), Cheadle Lacrosse Club (England – 1879), Princeton and Yale Universities (1882), Durban Lacrosse Club (South Africa – 1897).

Melbourne Lacrosse Club, which was formed by the namesake of our club, Lambton Mount who, after watching a game of AFL football with one of the founders of AFL football (Harrison), and lamenting what a superior game lacrosse was to football, decided to introduce lacrosse to Melbourne. Both Harrison and Mount were both members of the M.C.C. and were highly regarded "Pedestrians" (Read middle distance

athletes!). In June 1876 Lambton Mount formed the Melbourne La Crosse Club, which played intra club matches for the next three years until the South Melbourne Lacrosse Club was formed, followed by Carlton and Fitzroy, along with the formation of the Victorian Lacrosse Association.

The Melbourne La Crosse Club had been the instrument for establishing the game in Victoria, and for many years its members were among the leading exponents; but in encouraging its members to establish other clubs, its membership had become much diminished. Probably demographic shifts also exerted an influence, and the decay of the city of Melbourne as a residential area with the subsequent development of more outlying "dormitory" suburbs made it hard for the administration of the club to attract the new players they needed. As most of the members of the Melbourne Lacrosse Club were also members of the Melbourne Cricket Club an approach was made in 1896 to the committee of the Melbourne Cricket Club to take over the Melbourne Lacrosse Club. After consideration, the committee of the Cricket Club accepted the proposition, and the Melbourne Lacrosse Club became the Lacrosse Section of the Melbourne Cricket Club. While this would indicate continuity given the Melbourne club effectively became the M.C.C. Lacrosse Section, it does not appear to be deemed continuous, hard to fathom why, thus its beginning is deemed as 1896.



On Thursday 25 June 1885 a meeting was called by W.J Paterson at Prince Alfred Hotel (King William Street, Adelaide) to form the Adelaide Lacrosse Club (Photo above, 1886) and proceeded to practise in the park lands. J.S. Wainwright attended from Noarlunga and formed the Noarlunga team soon afterwards.

The first match played in South Australia was played on Saturday 1 August 1885 between Adelaide and Noarlunga, played at Noarlunga Recreation Ground (one goal all).

A meeting was convened at the United Services Hotel (St George's Terrace, Perth) on 26 July 1896 at the instigation of the local sports store owner, Mr C. Atkins, for the purposes of forming a lacrosse club, with 2 former players from Victoria attending along with a dozen interested persons. Thus the Perth Lacrosse Club was formed and within a few months the Fremantle Lacrosse Club was born, followed by the formation of Cottesloe and Mercantile in 1897, with the WALA being formed in 1898.

Lacrosse appears to have been developing in Sydney by 1883 (Sydney Lacrosse Club) and in Queensland (Brisbane Lacrosse Club) by 1887 with associations

formed and matches played. Lacrosse was being played in Tasmania (Hobart Lacrosse Club) by 1895. The game was spreading in all directions and by the early 1900s was being played in country and regional towns across the nation eg. Rockhampton, Ballarat, Jamestown (photo below, 1912), Kalgoorlie, Broken Hill and Launceston.



As far as longest continuously running clubs in Australia the winner appears to be Melbourne University Lacrosse Club, which was formed in 1883 and has been continuously operating since that time. In SA it would be North Adelaide which formed in 1887, which was founded by Nobel Prize winner (Physics) Sir William Bragg. As far as WA is concerned the oldest continuously operated club is East Fremantle, which was formed in 1899.

Perhaps the oldest continuously running club in the world may be Stockport Lacrosse Club, in Manchester, England, but we are awaiting information from Stockport as to this claim and would appreciate any information on this matter as well as a history of the club.

If you want an appreciation of how many clubs have come and gone by state go to our website and have a look at “Lacrosse Clubs by State”, which no doubt is not exhaustive, as we find new clubs almost weekly, but it does demonstrate that most lacrosse clubs don’t last too long, anywhere in the world, and to have a club with a history of nearly 150 years is a wonderful achievement.

This covers men’s lacrosse clubs, next edition we will provide some information on the history of women’s lacrosse clubs in Australia, and perhaps we can find something on overseas women’s lacrosse clubs as well.