



LACROSSE

Celebrating 125 Years

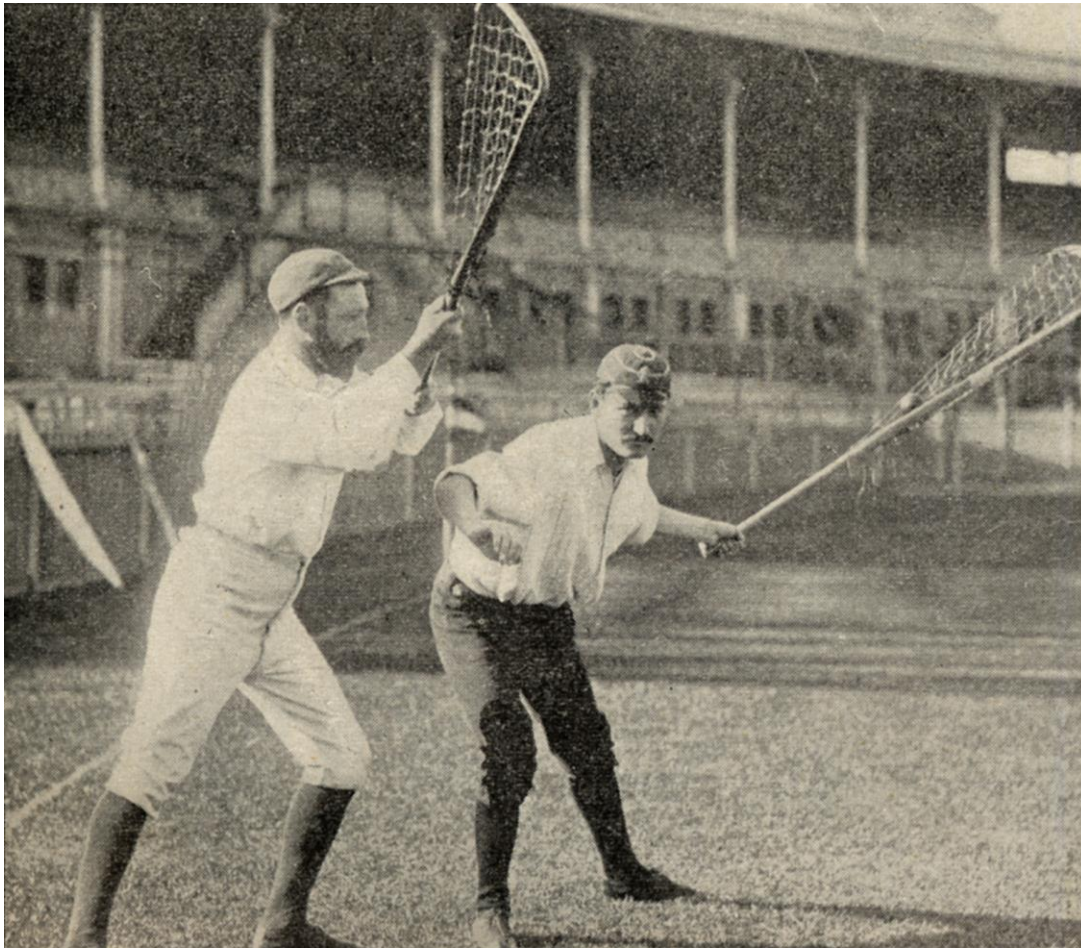
MCC Members' Dining Room

March 18, 2022



Lacrosse in Melbourne 125 Years Ago

Lacrosse was introduced to Melbourne by Lambton Le Breton Mount in 1876. He imported lacrosse sticks and rule books, and on April 19 the Melbourne Lacrosse Club played its first game in Albert Park. In 1879 it and three new clubs established the Victorian Lacrosse Association (VLA). At the close of the first VLA season on October 4, a combined South Melbourne/Carlton team defeated a combined Melbourne/Fitzroy team three goals to two in the first lacrosse game at the MCG. While the winter sport had enthusiasts in the 1880s and 1890s, it did not have the mass appeal of football. In 1895 the VLA was an eight team competition, played by about 100 Melburnians each weekend. University won the pennant that year, while,



Theo Handfield (right), regarded as one of the founders of MCC Lacrosse, posed for this photo wearing MCC uniform before the MCG Grandstand in May 1897.
[*Australasian*, May 22, 1897.]

the runner-up, Essendon, won the VLA annual tournament in July. This was held at the MCG, but lacrosse was rarely played at the ground prior to 1896, and the establishment of MCC Lacrosse.

MCC Lacrosse: Celebrating 125 Years, was created by Trevor Ruddell of the Melbourne Cricket Club Library, for a MCC Lacrosse Sporting Section function at the MCC Members' Dining Room, MCG, on March 18, 2022. The views expressed are those of the editor/author and are not necessarily those of the Melbourne Cricket Club.

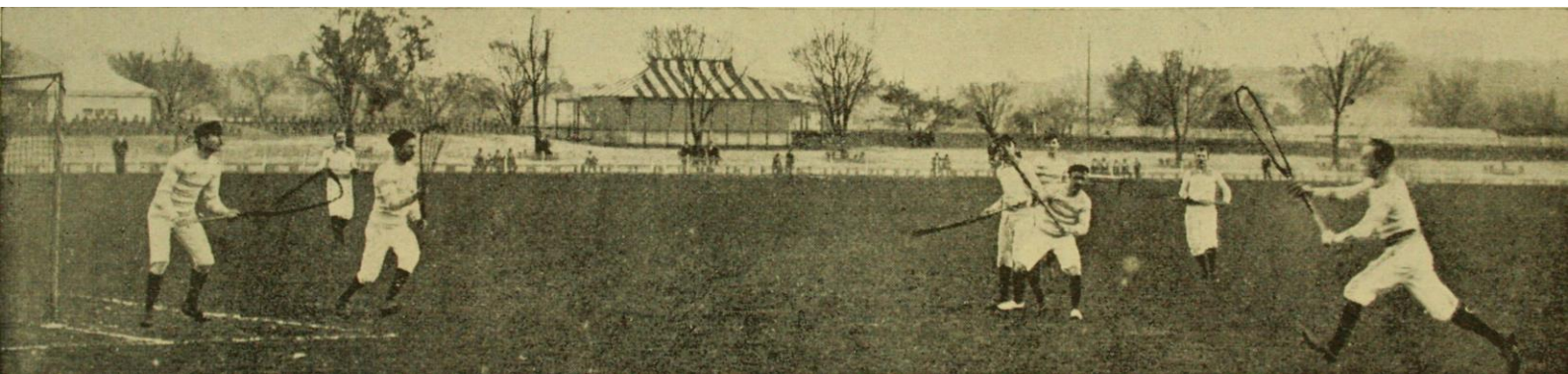
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MCC Lacrosse ~ The Foundation Years

MCC Lacrosse was established in 1896 by “two or three of the more enthusiastic” members of the Melbourne Cricket Club. Dan White, the club’s inaugural secretary and the MCC’s captain from 1897 to 1904, wrote that he, Cis Murray and Theo. Handfield were the “backbone of the new club”, all three having, “played prominent parts for other teams prior to undertaking the establishment of the game amongst the young cricketers.” Only five of the 1896 MCC lacrosse team were regular players in 1895 and, with the exception of another one or two, the rest were novices.

Under the captaincy of Cis Murray, the MCC finished its first season runners-up to Essendon. The club was soon blessed with an oversupply of lacrosseurs, and in 1897 it established a B Division team that played primarily at the Warehouseman’s Cricket Ground (renamed the Albert Ground in 1908) adjoining Albert Park. The talented Murray brothers, Basil, Hugh and Noel, also reunited with their brother Cis at the MCC that year, their old club, Caulfield, having disbanded after the 1896 season. The MCC were runners-up to University in 1897, and won their first VLA A Division pennant in 1898 (this team is shown on the cover). It also won premierships in 1901 and 1902, the latter decided by a play-off against University at the MCG.

The new club also opened Melbourne’s famous arena, the MCG, to lacrosseurs on a regular basis. The MCC played six VLA matches at the MCG in 1896. Four of them were football curtain-raisers, but from 1897 to 1910 lacrosse matches were generally played at the MCG on Saturdays when the ground was not being used for football.



Above: MCC player Stuart Simson throws one of his six goals for Victoria against New South Wales at the MCG on July 22, 1899. Simson was one of the “young cricketers” introduced to lacrosse through the MCC team in 1896. [Australasian, July 29, 1899.]

The First Match

Herald, Friday May 1, 1896, p.3.

LACROSSE by "TORONTO"

The start for what promises to be a very successful lacrosse season will take place to-morrow. Eleven clubs have entered for the competition, out of which seven, at least, claim a strong chance of annexing the President's gold medals. University, last year's premiers are weakened by the loss of Wingrove, Tisdall and Harlin, who have left the colony, and Holmes, who has transferred his attentions to the newly-formed M.C.C. lacrosse Club. Essendon, who were actually only a drawn game behind the University for pride of position, have the whole of last season's players to choose from, and, on paper, appear, to be the most likely winners for 1896. South Melbourne, who was a good third last season, are losing the service of White, who is also throwing in his lot with the M.C.C. They have secured the services of Arnold, from Hawthorn, and two South Australians, Ebbs and O'Halloran. Caulfield are suffering the greatest

losses of any team. Hawthorn will be very strong this season. Collingwood, with all last season's team, and a few improving juniors, expect to be well up, whilst Flemington will not be found such easy prey for the older clubs, as they were last year. Of the newly-formed clubs, the M.C.C. will prove the strongest. To-morrow University should defeat Collingwood after a good game. Essendon will about secure a win (nothing to spare) against M.C.C., whilst Caulfield, South Melbourne, and Hawthorn should have no difficulty in defeating Brighton, Auburn, and Flemington respectively.

TO-MORROW'S MATCHES.

M.C.C. play Essendon on the M.C.C. ground, at 1p.m. M.C.C. team — Graham, Murray, White, Handfield, Holmes, Eccles, Mayne, Jacobs, Phillips, Willmott, Thomas and Simson.

Sportsman, Tuesday May 5, 1896, p.5.

LACROSSE by "CENTRE"

Essendon and Melbourne met on the M.C.C. ground prior to the football match, and, contrary to expectations, resulted in a draw, each side scoring one goal, F. McCall and C. Murray being the respective goal-throwers placed their strength back, which had the effect of preventing the Essendon

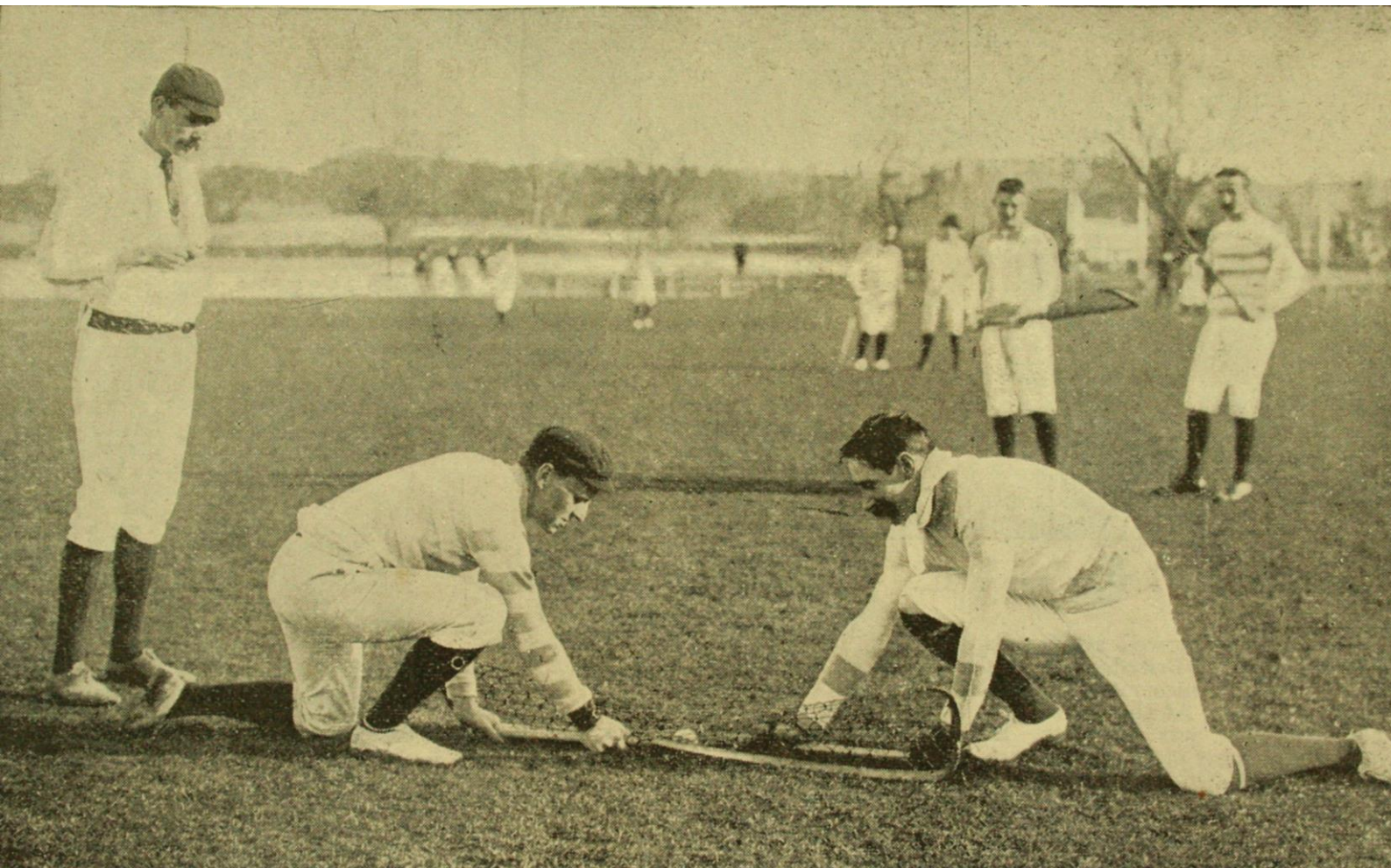
attack scoring, whilst C. Murray, the Melbourne goal-thrower, who appeared in better form than ever, made repeated assaults on the Essendon goal, and was at length rewarded with a brilliant shot, which equalised the scores. White, Handfield, Graham, and Holmes also played well.

MCC Lacrosse ~ Celebrating 125 Years

The Age, Monday May 4, 1896, p.3.
LACROSSE.

Essendon v. M.C.C. — Essendon visited, the newly formed M.C.C. team on Saturday afternoon, and a fast game resulted in a draw, both sides securing 1 goal each. From the start it was evident that the M.C.C. team were not such easy prey as their opponents expected, and had undoubtedly the best of the play during the first half, their back men, Graham, Handfield, White and Holmes, overpowering the Essendon forwards completely. The Essendon

backs, however, also played a fine game, with the result that Murray; who was practically the only old player forward, found a difficulty in getting any direct shots. In the second half the Essendon played better together, and F. McCall scored first goal. M.C.C. rallied, and in half a minute Murray equalised the score. The game was hard fought to the end without the scores being increased.

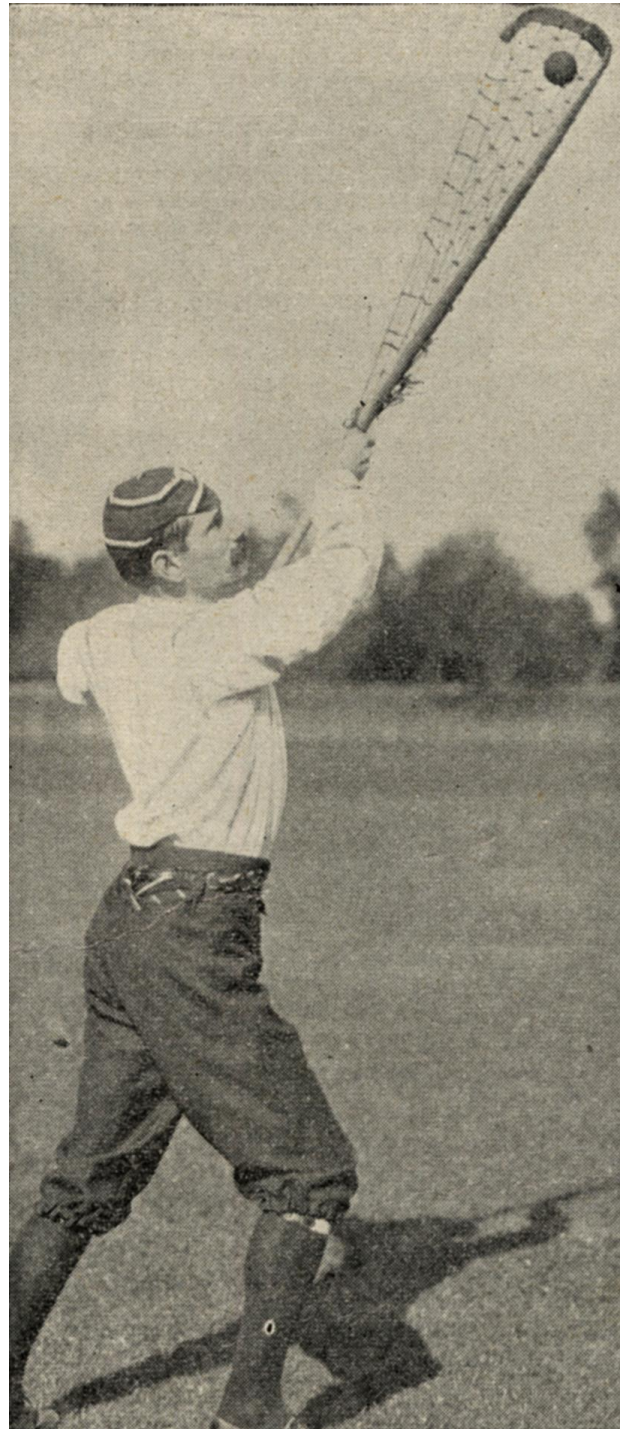


Dan White (right) faces off for Victoria against New South Wales at the MCG on July 22, 1899.

[Australasian, July 29, 1899.]

Dan White

Daniel White first played lacrosse as a favour for a friend, when he helped to make up the numbers for the short-lived Doric club late in the 1892 season. White became one of the sport's leading players and advocates within months of picking up a crosse. White was a co-founder of the Civil Service club in 1893 (renamed South Melbourne in 1895) and was the secretary of the VLA from 1895 until 1902. He even designed the nets that were placed on the goals for all VLA matches from 1896. White was instrumental to the establishment of the MCC Lacrosse Club in 1896, a team he captained from 1897 to 1904. The *MCC Annual Report* for 1903/04 noted that, until White's work commitments forced him to leave Melbourne for the country, he had "played in every match with the Senior Team since the formation of the Club." White was a tireless lacrosse promoter and on May 5, 1904 *Table Talk* noted that he, "worked hard and long, and much credit is due to him for the progress made by the game here during the period of his occupation of the position [as secretary], mainly owing to the zeal and energy displayed by him. On the field he has had few rivals as an exponent of the game, and fewer still as a director of the men in his charge." White died in early 1907 aged 35. On January 30, 1907, the *Sydney Referee* remembered him, "It might almost be said that he lived too far ahead of the game as it was played here. He saw points and possibilities that few players in this country have noticed."



Dan White, in MCC uniform, takes a high catch.

[*Australasian*, May 22, 1897.]

Cis Murray

Cecil Arthur Lathrop “Cis” Murray was arguably the greatest lacrosseur of federation era Melbourne. Born in 1871 Cis was introduced to lacrosse as a boy in 1883 by the University club. Besides University, he also played for St Kilda in 1887, represented Victoria from its first intercolonial match in 1888, and was a prominent player for Caulfield in the first half of the 1890s. In the early 1890s he also reputedly threw a ball over 162 yards (an Australian record). Cis had a dramatic impact on the game off the field too. In the late 1880s the VLA’s membership dropped from a peak of 10

clubs fielding 13 teams in 1886 to just five teams in 1890. That year Cis Murray returned from his travels through England and North America and, according to the May 9, 1899 *Sportsman*, he was “instrumental in working up a revival in the game, which was at that time at a very low ebb.” In 1891 the VLA reformed. Its rules were altered to make it more like the Canadian game, with each match starting with a “face off” rather than a “throw up”, while teams were reduced from 13 to 12 players. A pennant for the premier club was also

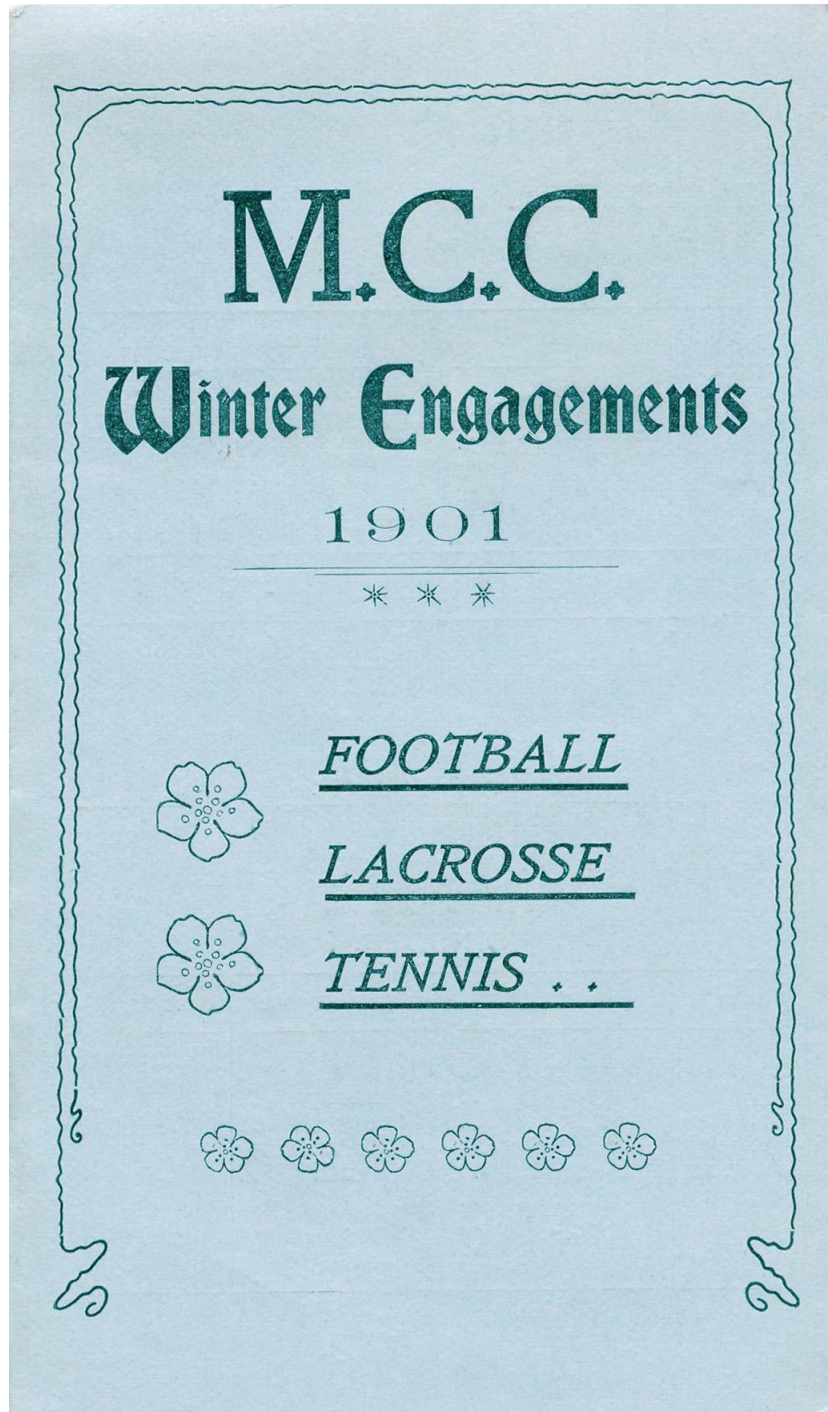
provided by Cis Murray, the

VLA’s new honorary secretary. A prolific goal thrower, within the decade Murray would be vital to the formation and immediate success of MCC Lacrosse. The following year his brothers Basil, Hugh and Noel, joined him at the MCC. Cis played for the Club until illness forced his retirement from the game in 1900.



Cis Murray posed for this photo in 1897 at the MCG. He is portrayed dodging Collingwood’s G. Bachelor.

[Australasian, May 22, 1897.]



Above: 1901 fixture published by the MCC for three of the Club's winter sports. [MCC Library collection]

Cover: The MCC's 1898 VLA A Division premiers team. [MCC Museum collection M10]