

## MELBOURNE CRICKET CLUB – LACROSSE SECTION

The 1896 annual report of the Melbourne Cricket Club states: "This new adjunct to the sports has been fairly prosperous for a first season, having won, under the captaincy of Mr. C. Murray, eleven matches, lost three and drawn one. The M.C.C. lacrosse team is now third on the list out of 13 clubs; two matches have still to be played." The receipts and expenditure account for that year shows a debit of £12.4.0 against the lacrosse account. By the 1898 - 99 annual report the amount debited against the Lacrosse Section was £60.2.3. Under the control of the Melbourne Cricket Club, the lacrosse club showed itself to be worthy of its ancestry winning the Victorian Lacrosse Association premiership for 1901. Eight of the players in the M.C.C. team were selected for interstate matches. The section now fielded two teams. Thus the club established by the pioneers of the game was perpetuated. The benefits to the association soon became evident, when the committee of the Melbourne Cricket Club allowed the match between the tourists to play South Australia and the Rest to be played at the Warehousemen's Ground (Now known as the Albert Ground) where interstate matches and carnivals were played for many decades.

M.C.C. and other clubs like Williamstown were at that time keen to promote the game in Tasmania or within Victoria in regional towns. In 1906 a team from the M.C.C. had been invited to play against the Northern Tasmanian Association. The M.C.C. team defeated the Northern Tasmanian Association by 13 goals to 7. The game indicated a growing interest in lacrosse in Tasmania, and it seemed likely that the old friendly rivalries between Northern Tasmania and Melbourne might be carried into lacrosse, and perhaps another dimension added to interstate competitions.

Up until 1907 the game had grown slowly but surely, and it was wonderful that progress has been made considering the fact that Australians have never seen a Canadian team play. For years it has been the aim of lacrosse enthusiasts to try to arrange for the visit of a Canadian team, and at last the desired end is in view, which would play in every state in Australia as well as in regional towns and cities in various states.

To bring all this about it was necessary to guarantee the visitors a sum of £1500 towards their expenses, and this had been done by the following bodies and to the extent shown: - Melbourne Cricket Club £250, Victoria Lacrosse Association £300, South Australian Cricket Association £250; Western Australian Lacrosse Association £300; and Queensland Lacrosse Association £100. It was decided that the Melbourne Cricket Club and the South Australian Cricket Association should act as joint managers. As a result of the visit of the Canadian team, no inter-state matches will be played this year".

This speaks volumes to the power of the M.C.C. where a Victorian lacrosse club is contributing to the guarantee of the Canadian tour, the only club to contribute, and is guaranteeing what in those days would have been serious money!

An innovation of the 1923 season was that some senior pennant matches should be played in country centres to stimulate interest in the game. On 19 May M.C.C. and Malvern were to play their match in Bendigo. The fact that this was a competition match rather than a mere exhibition would give added interest. The experiment proved successful. A large attendance gathered at the Kensington oval, Bendigo and witnessed a good match.

The club has had two winners of the Vince Healy trophy for best and fairest senior player in Victoria – Joe Vazzoler (1984) and Ken Nichols (1987 and 1989).

The club proudly has had many players represent Australia, starting with Vic Steet and Allan Box, who were members of the 1907 Australian team to play the Canadian team

in two tests at the MCG, Don Riddington in 1967, followed by Ken Nichols, Tom Hardy (Originally from S.A.), Michael Brereton, Marty Hyde, Jake Egan, Sam Bullock, Eugene Desmond, Brett Barnard, Brendan Sheedy, and Bill Stahmer as coach (Formerly Caulfield and Australian player).



Vic Steet in the M.C.C. team circa 1906

We also cannot forget Dan White, who was captain of the Victorian team in 1896, 1898 and 1899 as well as the secretary of the V.A.L.A. in 1898. Dan White was a highly respected journalist/writer and was Captain of the M.C.C. Lacrosse Section for many years, including the inaugural year of 1896.



Above is the 1896 M.C.C. team, it appears to be taken at the M.C.G., with the inaugural captain Dan White sitting in the middle of the front row

Indeed M.C.C. was a powerful club on and off the field and won premierships in 1898, 1901 and 1903 and after the War in 1921 and 1928. The club did appear in senior competition grand finals in 1931-34 but has only once appeared in a state league grand final since, that being in 1986 where they were defeated by the all-conquering Williamstown.

From the late 1890's to the 1930's M.C.C. was a strong and powerful lacrosse club, which enabled lacrosse to be played at such world class venues as the M.C.G. and of

course the Albert Ground, with club and interstate matches being regularly played at the M.C.G. and of course in 1907 when the Canadian team played two test matches at the M.C.G. against Australia, to crowds of no less than 16,000 and 11,000, at a time when the population of Victoria was just over 1 million.