

Australia's First Refrigerator.

In the 1960's Coldstream manufacture was made up of a number of manufacturing businesses, the oldest of these businesses was that of A.J. Eckersly & Sons Pty Limited of Melbourne. This business had commenced in 1902 and developed lines of soda fountain equipment, carbonators and bottling plants to help in the sale of lines developed by the company acting as manufacturing chemists. This led in the early thirties to the manufacture of "Zero Heat" compressor refrigerator machinery to complete the soda fountain equipment.

David Garvie had commenced business on the 1st March 1916. The original business was the manufacture of cinematograph machinery. The end of the first World War saw a quick return to German imports and the factory switched to other lines, such as gas meter parts, gas cocks, Ford pistons, piston rings, gudgeon pins and General Motor body hardware. When Ambrose Travers joined the staff on March 1st 1924 all these lines were quickly dropped after a cost study, except the motor body hardware and that business grew with the growth of Holdens and Richards.

Vaughan Pate started business in 1921 as a furniture manufacturer. His factory was close to the Garvie factory at Unley, South Australia and after Vaughan Pate's death the two businesses amalgamated in 1939. Vaughan Pate was killed in 1938 in the disastrous Kyeema aeroplane crash on Mount Dandenong, Victoria along with prominent members of the South Australian Wine Industry and Charles Hawker M.H.R. who was a member of Federal Cabinet.

The manufacture of refrigerators came at the end of 1926.

David Garvie had been overseas during most of 1926 and brought back several alternative ideas. A fortunate accident discounted the favourite proposal for the manufacture of vacuum cleaners and substituted refrigerators at the last minute. While he had been away the business had doubled and proved very profitable. On return Garvie brought himself a new cadillac car at the then huge cost of £1200 and committed over £3000 to the manufacture of refrigerators.

It was hard going without samples, drawings, or text books and without any facilities for sub-contracting in Australia when little more than agricultural machinery, furniture, pots and pans and stoves were being made.

ON THE 15TH DECEMBER 1926 A GROUP OF MEN WATCHED ICE FORMING ON COPPER TUBE ON AUSTRALIA'S FIRST LOW PRESSURE REFRIGERATOR SYSTEM.

IN JANUARY 1927 THE FIRST REFRIGERATOR, A 10 CU. FT DOMESTIC REFRIGERATOR WITH FOUR DOORS WAS MADE AND WAS READY TO SWITCH ON.

David Garvie was there, so were Roy Jewell, B.O. Siemer, Cliff Hodge, Fred Hibble, and Peter Kinnaid, Vaughan Pate and Alf Cornish from the neighboring cabinet factory were along side the wooden cabinet they had made using strips of hard rubber for door gaskets. Ambrose Travers was watching anxiously with little faith in his numerous amateur mathematical calculations. The brine tank slowly took on a white coat of frost and the first Australian made low pressure refrigerator was ready. They called it the ICE-O-LECTRIC.

It was not a very good refrigerator but it was the first Australian domestic or commercial refrigerator and from that day it took a place along side the large ice making and other industrial plants which were already being made in Australia.

That FIRST REFRIGERATOR was never sold, but after it was dismantled some of its components parts were used again. The brine tank disappeared after that first tense session and was replaced by an ice maker evaporator charged with sulphur dioxide and operated by a low side float.

A few months later in 1927 the first sale and delivery was made, it was not a domestic refrigerator. It was a 50 cu. ft eight door wooden cabinet and its twin cylinder belt driven compressor with a bore of 1½ inch run at 325 rpm. It was named model A but proved to be too small and was replaced by Model C with a bore of 1½ inch by a stroke of 1½ inch and again a speed of 325 rpm.

This refrigerator was delivered to a Mr. Wilson of Semaphore, South Australia and gave many years service. Years later it was installed at a beach kiosk in South Australia and disappeared into the sea when a big storm wrecked the Semaphore sea front.

The SECOND DELIVERY was to a butcher Ray Braybrook on Unley Road, Unley where a refrigeration unit fitted with a twin cylinder model D belt driven compressor with a bore of 3 inches by a stroke of 1½ inches at the speed of 325 rpm looked after a 300 cu. ft box (meat) previously cooled by ice. Ray Braybrook used it for over 30 years.

The THIRD DELIVERY followed soon after. It was the original 10 cu. ft 4 door domestic refrigerator with a model A compressor. This was a sad demotion for the model A after its brief reign on the 50 cu. ft cabinet at Semaphore.

This refrigerator was delivered to Dr Arnold of Church St, Mitcham South Australia and there it stayed as a proud possession of Mrs Arnold until her death some time after Dr Arnolds.

It was the third Australian made refrigerator delivered although the first Australian made low pressure refrigerator compressor made.

It is still in good running order (see illustration).

DURING THE EARLY PART OF 1930 AN IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT OCCURED. Australia had become painfully aware of the depression and the low price of wheat, wool and metals was not matched by similar drop in the price of imported goods. The balance of payments turned heavily against Australia with the deteriorating terms of trade and it became clear that drastic steps would have to taken to meet the situation.

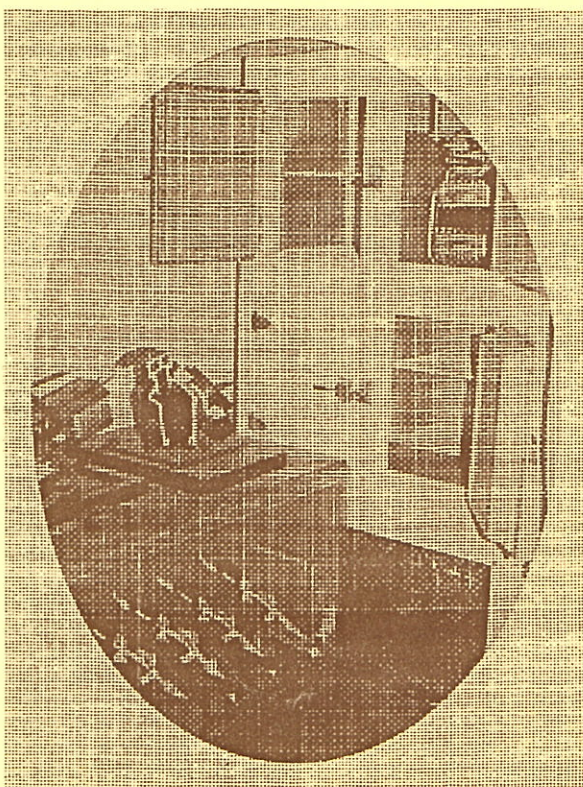
Bryden Brown was one of the most interesting characters among the many interesting men in the early history of the Trade and Emmco (Electrical Meter Manufacturing Company) was well served by him.

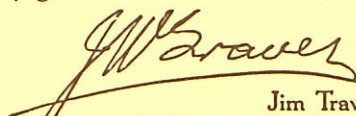
He came to Adelaide in 1930 armed with facts and as a result of a conference with Garvie and Travers left Adelaide with the formers written agreement that he should act for both parties in negotiation with Government on what became known as the Scullin Forde Tariffs.

The Government of the day accepted the undertaking that the retail price of refrigerators would be reduced generally if new Tariffs shut out imports. New duties were imposed, much higher than the old and the undertaking was kept. This was achieved in part by the keeping a close watch on factory prices and partly by the disappearance of the old mark ups extending as 100 to 150% on cost which had been common with imported refrigerators.

It was one of the most successful items in the whole tariff procedure and it certainly proved to be a turning point in the development of the refrigerator business in Australia.

These facts were written down over twenty years ago by Ambrose Travers, and I thought that they would be of interest now that sixty years have passed since the making of the first Australian Refrigerator.




Jim Travers
Coldstream Pty Limited