



Local History Factsheet:

A brief history of the suburb Woodville



From left: City of Woodville gardening staff 1963, Woodville town hall 1950, the Brocas c1912, Woodville Road 1976.

Woodville is commonly believed to have been settled as a result of it being located at the mid-way point between the Adelaide and the Port. The first building recorded in the locality was the 'Halfway House' an inn (near the Woodville Hotel and not be confused with the Halfway Hotel). This Inn opened in 1839.

Woodville was formally laid out in 1849. Woodville Road was originally called Main Street and the commercial centre was situated along Port Road. Until 1975 when the District Council of Woodville was proclaimed, Woodville was a part of the District Council of Hindmarsh.

The first part of the Brocas was built in c1852 believed to be by Henry Giles. Shipping agent John Newman bought the property in 1854 and, between 1869 and 1872, transformed the property with front and rear extensions including the 2-storey mansion style façade with central tower and balcony.

Another large Woodville homestead, 'St Clair' (demolished) was purchased by John Bristow Hughes (of Bundaleer Station fame) in 1854. Hughes was responsible for the construction of a number of iconic properties in Woodville including St Margaret's Church. Under his ownership, St Clair became one of the largest mansions in Adelaide at that time. An underground kitchen and a second storey were added and the entire ground floor was converted into a ballroom. In 1962, Woodville proudly opened the St Clair Recreation Centre, South Australia's first major youth centre and indoor sports stadium on the St Clair homestead site. Originally the headquarters of the South Australia Youth Club, the centre soon 'settled in to regular provision for youth sports and activities as basketball, squash, skating, judo and dancing'. The property is local heritage listed due of its significance as a combined youth/sports centre and its modernist architecture.

The Woodville Railway station opened in 1856. A spur line north to the Finsbury Munitions Factory was built in 1940 and the station was rebuilt during the War years as part of infrastructure upgrades.

The Woodville Institute building on Port Road opened in 1878 is still standing although greatly altered. In 1942, the building was compulsorily taken over by the Civil Defence Department as Air Raid Precaution Headquarters.

Woodville Primary School opened 1878 and Woodville High School in 1915.

In 1903, the Council offices relocated from Port Road to a new building on Woodville Road. This building now comprises part of the town hall complex. The Town Hall opened with great fanfare in 1927 as a suburban picture theatre under the Star Theatres chain. Woodville Star Pictures became a Greater Union cinema in 1947. The town hall closed as a main-stream picture theatre in 1974 but continued to show Greek films for a period of time.

'Mareeba' private hospital in Belmore Tce was built in 1912. Between 1914 and 1917 it operated as a Red Cross military hospital. In 1917 it was taken over by the Babies Hospital Association.

Holden's Motor Body Builders moved from the city to a 23 ½ acre site at Woodville in 1923. By 1926, the factory occupied a 40 acre site and employed 5,500 people. In the 1980s, operations were progressively moved to Holden's Elizabeth plant, resulting in the eventual closure of Holden at Woodville in 1986.

The Actil Factory was built in 1942 to supply material during the Second World War. The Commonwealth Government set the company the task of building the plant and producing yard cotton within eight weeks of commencement. Construction of a factory of this size would have normally taken six months, but within six weeks of cattle grazing on the site, the mill had been built and production started. Until 1944, all the employees were women. After the war, the factory became a major employer of residents at the nearby migrant hostel.

The Spastic Centres of South Australia (now SCOSA) was established in 1950. Funds raised through community supported enabled the purchase of 'Woodford' on Woodville Road.

Woodville's first citizenship ceremony was held in November 1953 at which fourteen men and women were granted citizenship.

The Queen Elizabeth Hospital was officially opened by Queen Mother in 1958.

Weinert's Shopping Centre, on the corner of Port and Woodville Roads, opened in 1959 . It boasted about being 'the very latest in shopping centres' with 11 shops under one roof.

The Ukrainian Catholic Church 'Saints Volodymyr and Olha Church', was constructed in 1963 by the local Ukrainian community

In 1996 a new Civic Centre and library adjoining the Woodville Town Hall was built. Hindmarsh-Woodville Council amalgamated with Henley & Grange Council to form the City of Charles Sturt in 1997. The Woodville Town Hall was returned to its former glory through major renovation work completed 2010.

Want more information?

The Historical Society of Woodville can be contacted on 8445 9670 or enquiries@thebrocasmuseum.com.au.

Sources

'A History of Woodville' by Susan Marsden, Corporation of the City of Woodville, 1977 & 'A History of Woodville – update' by Susan Marsden 1987 (not published).

'From Park Lands to Sea Coast' by Mary Geyer with Peter Donovan, published for the City of Hindmarsh and Woodville by Peacock Publications, 1996.

'The Brocas Conservation Plan - August 2005', prepared for the City of Charles Sturt by Swanbery Penglase Architects.