

## Early History of the NMA\*

FROM THE MID 1960S TO THE EARLY 1970S.

by Ruth Crow

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*"The residents's associations of the 1960s and 1970s marked a new phase in planning ideas in Melbourne" (Renate Howe).*

In 1964 when we (Maurie Crow and I) came to live in North Melbourne (footnote 1) there was a very weak North Melbourne Progress Association and a quite well functioning Kensington/Flemington Progress Association. (footnote 2)

The residents in the newly constructed O-Y-O flats met each month and thus knew each other fairly well (footnote 3). Some of these people began to meet to discuss wider town planning matters. The initiation of these study groups was assisted by Rev Barry Martin (St Mary's Church of England) and were attended by about 20 people some of whom were members of various churches but some without church connections. (footnote 4).

In 1966 (or thereabouts) two members of this group, Anthea and David Eyres circulated a questionnaire amongst the residents in the O-Y-O flats (footnote 5) which included a question on how could the new residents contribute to the community. (footnote 6)

Shortly after this a public meeting was called to form the "North Melbourne Community Development Association." (footnote 7).

This organisation formed several work groups... planning, cultural activities and history. Conveners of the work groups and the elected officer bearers formed the Committee of the North Melbourne Community Development Association. Most of its members lived in the O-Y-O flats.

Soon after the formation of the NMCDA the Carlton Association and then the Fitzroy Residents' Association were formed. The main aim of both organisations was to save the building stock. The new type newspaper "The Melbourne Times" popularised the campaigns "to stop the bull dozers" (block demolition by the Housing Commission).

In North Melbourne, late in the 1960s there was concern over the planned demolition of the shopping centre in Abbotsford Street which was then known as "Happy Valley". The NMCDA took some action on this, for example through writing letters, but did not publicly support the demonstrations which were organised to save the shops (footnote 8).

In late 1971 or early 1972 it was announced that the Melbourne City Council would be preparing a Strategy Plan and that there would be opportunities for the public to participate (footnote 9). Towards the end of that year a public meeting with the planners (footnote 10) was held. It was very well attended and members of the NMCDA played a prominent part in the exchange of ideas.

Early in 1973 the AGM for the NMCDA did not have a quorum and there were no nominations for office bearers. The organisation

was, in effect, disbanded. Shortly after this an informal group of former members of the town planning group of the NMCDA met and decided to try to revive the Association in order to enable the public to participate in the preparation of the Melbourne City Council Strategy Plan.

A very well attended public meeting was held in mid May 1972. It was resolved that for the next six months all efforts of the Association should be around participating in the preparation of Strategy Plan. A time line was adopted, a number of sub groups were formed, a new organisational structure was adopted (for example all committee meetings to be open to all members). It was decided to give special attention to issues affecting West Melbourne, and also that the organisation was for people who lived and/or worked or were being educated in North or West Melbourne. (footnote 10).

In December 1973 the "Citizens' Action Plan for North and West Melbourne" ("CAN") was launched. (less than than 7 months after the meeting to revive the organisation was held).(footnote 11)

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The Crow Collection at the Victoria University of Technology has documents about the North Melbourne Association in the 1970s and 1980s and as indicated in the footnotes some useful documents of the earlier years.

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**Further Information :-** The "Northern Advertiser" was published from the end of the 1930s to the beginning of the 1970s. For most of these 40 years it was written, published and delivered by Tom O'Meara who lived in Kensington and who had very effective links with community organisations. He sold the publication to the "Age" in the early 1970 and the Age ceased publishing it a few years later. The files of the "Advertiser" are probably in one of the Melbourne City Council Libraries. (footnote 12)

The files of "Melbourne Times" and the "North Melbourne News" are most probably available through the MCC Library.

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EARLY HISTORY OF THE NMA  
END NOTES

\* NMA is the acronym of the North Melbourne Association. As will be seen from this document it was originally called the North Melbourne Community Development Association (NMCD). I am not sure when the name change was made but for the purposes of this document I have used NMCD to describe the organisation before it was decided to participate in the Strategy Plan (ie 1973) but I think the name change was earlier than that.

**Footnote 1.** When we shifted to North Melbourne I had some knowledge of the area through teaching for some years at Flemington Girls High School. Maurie was involved in the Town and Country Planning Association and I was involved in educational organisations.

**Footnote 2.** In the North Melbourne Progress Association a man named Gilmore or Gilmour was one of the main people, other members were Reihman Basch and Irving Plotkin. The last issue they seem to have been concerned about was saving the North Melbourne Town Hall... see "Advertiser" article in early 1960s and also Lands Dept records on the threat to the Town Hall in those years. The Flemington Kensington Progress Association held regular monthly meetings well into the 1960s. The last issue they seem to have been concerned about was the removal of the industrial buildings on Debney's Park. The Council of Progress Associations formed the Clean Air Council of Victoria in 1966 and some of the members of the inner urban Progress Associations used to attend meetings of this group. I was the Treasurer of the Clean Air Council and was made a life member in 1969 or thereabouts. (It was superseded by the Environment Council).

**Footnote 3.** The O'Shanassy Street flats were completed about 1959. These flats were built on land cleared by the HCV and then sold to private developers. In the Crow Collection there is information about the cost of reclamation and the sale price etc. of these flats.

**Footnote 4.** The changes in the churches after Vatican 2 resulted in considerable encouragement for church people to become involved in urban issues. For example the Coventry Conference (England) in 1967 (papers from this in Crow Collection) and the Chicago School of Sociology were much discussed during these years.

**Footnote 5.** The answers to the questionnaire showed that there was a very high proportion of women living on their own, most were in the 45 to 60 age group and had only recently come to live in North Melbourne. (A Copy of the results of the questionnaire may be in the Crow Collection)

**Footnote 5.** Privately. Maurie and I regarded the question on what O-Y-O flat dwellers could do for the community as being rather patronising but we supported the desire of the promoters to be involved in the community.

**Footnote 7.** From memory the first office bearers were Dr Robert Southby (Chair), Anthea Eyres (Secretary), Nan Taylor

(Treasurer). As stated at the beginning of the endnotes I am not sure when the change in name was made. At least for the first couple of years the organisation was called the North Melbourne Community Development Association.

Footnote 8. The first demonstration was organised by a group of women calling themselves "The Four Housewives".. They were Sandra Fayers-Jessop, Dora McLennan, Dorothy Welsh and Ruth Crow. This was a very successful demonstration as can be seen from the scrap book on Happy Valley in the Crow Collection.

Footnote 9. The idea of public participation in planning was popularised in 1969 by the publication in the United Kingdom of the "Skeffington Report" (copy in Crow Collection). This was a whole new concept in planning.

Footnote 10. Peter McIntyre and the Interplan Consortium who were appointed planners for the Melbourne City Council Strategy Plan enthusiastically promoted participation

Footnote 11. There are documents in the Crow Collection about this meeting including the poster used to propose work groups. Also some of the working group reports and drafts of "CAN" are in the Collection.

Footnote 12. From 1965 I contributed articles to the Northern Advertiser using the pen names "Una Voce" and "Ruth Writes" and Dr Blanchard contributed history articles. Some selected articles from the "Advertiser" are in the Crow Collection. During the critical months while "CAN" was being prepared I usually had 3 or more articles in the Advertiser and frequently contributed the front page. This, and the Melbourne Times, greatly assisted to inform people about the opportunities for participation etc.

### GROWING PAINS Party Politics and the NMA

The founders of the North Melbourne Community Development Association were very altruistic and had no party political ambitions. However with the changes that were taking place in the social composition of North Melbourne there were bids by some young people who aspired to build careers as elected politician through building a base for themselves .

There were two examples of this, both engineered by candidates who were endorsed by the Liberal Party. Neither was successful. Information on these bids could be obtained by interviews with some people I know, also, in the Crow Collection there may be a leaflet which Maurie wrote and distributed to stem such amateurish opportunism.

6/10/95

Dear Lesley,

Sheila suggested I send this information to you as background to the work you are doing on community organisations in Flemington/Kensington area. I prepared it for the NMA people involved in a North Melbourne history project. There is a myth that Maurie and I were the founders of the NMA. We did go to the initial meeting and attended work groups but we did not make much of a commitment to the Association until 1973.

I have referred to the early Progress Associations that existed in Flemington/Kensington and in North Melbourne until the mid 1960s. I think the Kensington/Flemington Progress Association was formed in the mid 1940s when Doris McRae was principal of the Flemington Girls School (and when Post War Reconstruction brought so much hope to community groups). Bill Deveney's grandmother will give you some information about this. I think as well as the Progress Association there was a Youth Group supported by the same group of people. Mrs Deveney may need prompting and if you like I can suggest questions which may bring out some information. In the late 1960s I prepared some material on the history of Flemington Girls School and interviewed Doris McRae about these local organisations as well as about her life as a school teacher etc. I doubt if that material is available as I think the school did not continue with its history.

There was an elderly Flemington woman (elderly in the late 1960s) who had a very comprehensive scrap book about these local organisations. I wrote an article about her (and the scrap book) for the Northern Advertiser in about 1967 and it will give her name. Perhaps you may be able to locate the document through her family. It was very comprehensive.

There was no follow-through in membership of the Progress Association and the Flemington/Kensington Social Action Group of the late 1960s.

I used to attend the Progress meetings when I was teaching at Flemington Girls and I also attended the Social Action Group meetings right from the start. As I was writing for the Northern Advertiser at that time some of the meetings are reported in that paper. I do not have documents about this but I have some very sharp memories which may be helpful to you.

The Friends of the VUT Libraries are having a gathering from 6 pm to 7.30 pm on Tuesday, October 24. It is being held in the Footscray Campus Library and the main topic will be on special collections. The Crow Collection will be on view and I will be one of the speakers. This is a useful opportunity to invite community activists to the University. I have put your name on the mail-out list and hope you can pass on the invitation to others..