

## THE MOST PROGRESSIVE STORE IN KANDOS

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This article by Colleen O’Sullivan appeared in the *Mudgee Guardian* on 19 January 2015.

A photograph was taken in 1933 of the Kandos Co-operative Store. That photo is now proudly reproduced on the shop-front of the present IGA store – an appropriate reminder of our shopping heritage.

In the photo the staff and management of Kandos Co-op are carefully arranged: twelve staff, three managers and two of the five directors for that year. The assets too are displayed: a 1930 Ford V8 truck, two horse-drawn vehicles and a substantial brick shop and awning (extended in 1926 to include a bakery). The composition highlights a professional, loyal and well-trained company, ready for business.

And yet, according to the half-yearly report presented at a meeting in April 1933 and reported in the *Mudgee Guardian*, Kandos Co-op was experiencing “very difficult times”, and a loss in trade. The Depression was having an adverse effect. In their defence the directors and manager pointed to price cutting, unemployment of share holders and a lower return on government relief. Members at that meeting suggested ways to improve income including: lowering the dividend from six to five per cent, using horse vehicles instead of motor vehicles, and retrenchment; one member argued strongly for increased publicity. Hence, I assume, the proud photo.

At that same meeting the manager reminded members that the society remained loyal to union principles. They did not employ boy/girl labour, they adhered to the Early Closing Act and paid union wages. It is not surprising that Kandos Co-op sat comfortably in an industrial, Labor-voting town for sixty years (30 September 1919 to 29 September 1979).

How did it begin? In February 1919 Kandos citizens were called to a public meeting in the Angus Memorial Hall where the President of Lithgow Co-operative Society outlined the aims and operation of a co-operative society. Within a month, interest was high enough in Kandos for another “large and enthusiastic meeting”. A management committee was elected consisting of Messrs Shannon, Agnew, Hall, Noonan, Brooks, Carter, Connors, Griffiths, and Hargrave.

A co-op took some time to organise. First they had to open a bank account, recruit members and collect members’ subscriptions. On 30 September 1919 the Department of the Treasury gave approval for registration of the Kandos Co-operative Society Limited as a NSW company. In mid-December the store opened its doors for trading in a building owned by Mr Meany, Public School Principal (it was on the site of the Bank of NSW beside the Kandos Community Hall).

The terms of membership of Kandos Co-op were one shilling entrance fee and the holding of six one pound shares, to be fully paid up in six months. Members paid for their shares by purchasing goods from the co-op. When they fully owned their shares they received cash bonuses at the end of each financial year. Non-members also received some benefits for shopping at the co-op.

Shareholders who had twelve pounds capital in the society were entitled to become directors. While directors were not paid, the secretary usually received a ten pounds honorarium. General meetings were held twice a year and directors were elected annually.

Not everyone approved of co-operative stores, particularly business owners in competition. As with many public issues there were at least two points of view, evidenced in letters to the editor of the Mudgee Guardian in 1921. "Caution" argued that a co-op store charged higher prices and was an unsafe investment.

George Oram argued that co-ops were not out to make profits; they helped to lower the cost of living. He reminded readers of the strength of co-operation and the advantages of being part owners in their own business.

There is no doubt consumers' co-operatives had high ideals – with a socialist flavour. One slogan was "production for use and not for profit"; another one: "each for all and all for each". They aimed to reduce the cost of living by cutting out the profits of middlemen, provide employment for workers in their own societies and insure against accidents, sickness and old age.

Producers' co-operatives in contrast, such as the Co-operative Dairy Company formed in Rylstone in 1921, aimed to protect and increase the profits of farmers and business owners.

In 1944 Kandos Co-op celebrated the centenary of the co-op movement with a ball in the Soldiers' Hall. The President J Sneddon explained that the movement had its beginnings in Rochdale, England in 1844 when eight men and two women each contributed one pound as capital to lease premises and purchase stock. Their first day's takings were twenty pounds.

In England one hundred years later there were 1058 shops and nine million members. The movement provided manufactured goods from 300 factories, offered insurance and banking, published a weekly newspaper and worked four coal mines. "The co-op movement of ours is like a mighty ocean – never still. Its achievements are world-wide," Sneddon declared. Building Societies and community banks are modern co-operatives.

Over the years Kandos Co-operative Society organised numerous events as a way of rewarding its loyal membership, building allegiance and promoting the store. The "annual" picnic was probably the most memorable. In 1929 a crowd of 400 assembled in Mudgee at Lawson Park. While the managing and organising committees and invited guests enjoyed a "tempting" dinner and numerous speeches at Blackburns' supper rooms, the members had a picnic in the park.

There were free ice creams, drinks and lollies for the children; and sports and games to keep everyone amused. Races for all categories included "single ladies" and "old buffers". Boating, swimming, diving and stepping competitions were held and something called "breaking the jar". The Kandos Boys' Band "proved a great aid in enlivening the proceedings" under the baton of Mr Julian.

The Kandos store expanded over its sixty years. Eighteen months after it opened for trading, Kandos Co-op moved to long-term premises on the present site of IGA. The society purchased, in June 1921, the business and premises of John Cecil Strong (said to have been the first shop-keeper in Kandos).

In the early years the main business of the co-op was drapery, clothing, boots, shoes and grocery items. In January 1926 the society built a new bakery business at the rear of the shop and then gave a concert and dance in the Angus Hall to celebrate the opening. They welcomed Frank Akehurst as baker and Frank Duffie as his apprentice. When it opened, the bakery caused a reduction of half-pence per loaf in the local price of bread.

Soon after, the co-op opened a greengrocery business. In 1935 they opened a cake and pastry premises and after the war introduced a catering service.

“Cash and carry” was becoming popular at this time. It was in an era when most customers were given credit and paid bills monthly; and most stores delivered to customers’ homes. Cash and carry was a cheaper option for customers and saved retailers on staff, petrol, paperwork and chasing debts.

Kandos Co-op made two attempts at cash and carry. In 1932 they opened a branch in premises in Angus Avenue beside the Kandos Hotel. Alex Collison was the manager. Then in 1937 they made another attempt at a furniture branch in J B Simpkins’ premises (Crystal Palais). Neither endeavour appeared to be very successful.

In 1957 the co-op built a new addition to the main store, in brick, and then rented it to Ken Mearns. Twenty-two years later, in 1979, Kandos Co-op closed its doors and sold its premises to Ken Mearns.

It was the end of an era.

Photo with information was kindly provided by Denise Jamieson and Bill Day per Rose Evans.



Back Row on truck: Norm Drury, Frank Duffie, Bill Day, Arthur Cox, Harold Northey.  
Front Row: Wal Gaudry (Grocery horse and cart), Mrs Evans, Mr Cox (directors), Carmel Gilchrist, Dot Callow, Marion Palmer, Ethel Francis, Alex Collison (branch manager), Dot Wilson, Jack Fletcher (manager), Bill Haywood (in truck), Vic Selig and “Nigger” and baker’s cart.

Mrs Cox and Mrs Jackson in background. Bob Day standing at gate next door.