

JOHN PAUL SENNITT (1851-1922)

Ice cream manufacturer

Famously remembered for its polar bear licking an ice cream logo, Sennitt's had its origins in the 1870s in a South African ice works where John Paul Sennitt began a long and productive career in ice manufacturing. From the mid-1890s, well before household fridges existed, Sennitt used a newly invented refrigeration system to make and sell ice, and later ice cream, to thousands of Melbournians.

Sennitt was born in Stretham, Cambridgeshire, England in 1851. As a young man he left for South Africa where he established the first Transvaal ice works. He married Harriet Coulbeck in 1875 in South Africa.

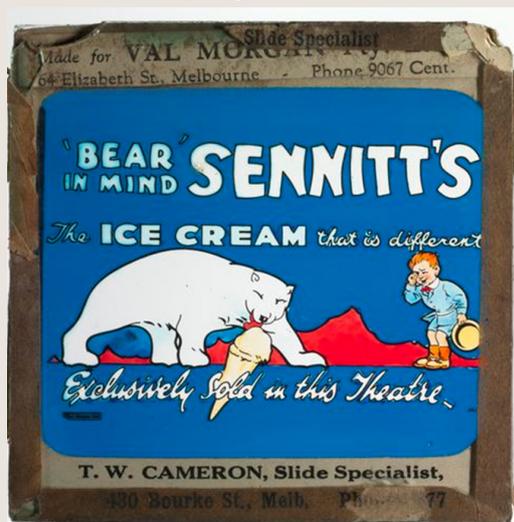
After two of their children died in infancy, Sennitt and his wife and their five children then migrated to Melbourne in 1888 where two more children were born.

Sennitt started work at the Melbourne Cold Accumulator Company and soon took over the business. From 1898, when his son William joined the firm, Sennitt's was promoted as clean and healthy, building the Sennitt reputation as 'benefactors of humanity'.

By 1899, the South Melbourne plant and machinery expanded to occupy half an acre as ice was distributed around Melbourne by 20 drivers, horses and carts. They manufactured ice cream from 1904 and the J.P. Sennitt and Sons Ice and Refrigerating Company was formed in 1906.

Sennitt was a Master Freemason at the Admiral Collingwood Lodge. In May 1902 he was elected unopposed to Fawcner Ward in the South Melbourne Council, retiring in 1909. He was a Justice of the Peace and a council member of the Honorary Justices' Association. At one time he sat on the local Court of Petty Sessions. His youngest son, Alfred, was killed in action in France on 1 September 1918.

Sennitt died in 1922 and is buried in Coburg Cemetery. Sennitt's Ice-cream continued for another 40 years under son William's management until its sale in 1961 to the Streets Company.



Source: Museums Victoria

Find out more

Australian Dictionary of Biography

500 Victorians (1934)

Cozzolino M & and Rutherford, G.F. *Symbols of Australia* (1987)



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Jan is a professional historian who has worked across the fields of heritage, education and tourism. She has taught at several universities, including Monash University where she delivered the master of public history course. She is also a former Chair of the Heritage Council of Victoria. Jan was appointed to The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust in 2010.



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