

The history of the Grace Building, Sydney



John W. Ross

Cover photograph:

The Grace Building (Peter Sheridan, *Sydney Art Deco*, 2019)

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Foreword

Before the twentieth century, shopping was very different from what we experience today. Apart from everyday food and groceries, which were purchased at open markets or from street vendors, most people made their own clothes, soap, candles, bread, butter and other basic items. For other needs, there were usually two types of small specialist shops: draperies and ironmongers (hardware shops). Draperies typically carried dress materials, millinery, haberdashery, as well as men's and women's clothing, and catered for well-off families. Ironmongeries sold all the tools, cutlery and other implements used in the house.

Gradually, the small stores grew to larger stores and then into department stores. Some eventually became huge enterprises employing many hundreds of staff and constructing impressive multi-storied buildings that were masterpieces of architectural excellence rivalling cathedrals in size. Le Bon Marche in Paris originated the monumental department store style, designed by Gustav Eiffel and completed in 1905.

Department stores became so big that they sold virtually everything for the home, and in addition provided services such as cafeterias, post offices and travel services. Mark Foy's claimed in 1901 that they could supply the front door mat, the back door mat and everything in between. By the 1920s, the new loose flowing clothes for women and baggy suits for men were ideal for mass production and sale as ready-made items in these stores. Shows were regularly held in store auditoriums to promote the new interest in fashion.

The two Grace brothers, Joseph and Albert, began as drapers when they bought an existing drapery shop in George Street West in the 1880s. They constructed a large emporium by 1905 and added to it until it contained 250 departments by 1923. But the construction of Central Railway Station in 1905 and in the 1920s the underground City Circle railway moved the retail centre of Sydney northwards to the Market Street area. The brothers decided to erect a large new store on York Street, encouraged by the predicted high traffic volume off the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the construction of Wynyard Station nearby.

The site chosen for the new department store contained the first Sydney Opera House, which had opened in 1879. Comic operas and musical comedies were performed for some years, but falling attendances led to its closure, and it was converted into a warehouse in 1900. In 1927, the building was demolished and a twelve-storey Inter-War Gothic skyscraper known as the Grace Building was constructed with strong Art Deco features, modelled on the Tribune Tower in Chicago.

However, York Street did not become the retail precinct the brothers expected, and after opening in 1930, the store was not a success. Other large stores like David Jones, Mark Foy's and Farmer's were much better located near the new underground railway stations that brought shoppers into town from the suburbs. Grace Bros' response was to plan a network of suburban stores from the 1930s onwards. This was a successful strategy that allowed them to survive longer than Mark Foy's and Anthony Hordern, who maintained stores in central Sydney only.

World War II saw a dramatic change to the Grace Building's usage when the Federal Government requisitioned the whole building in 1942 for wartime use. The American army and American and

British navies took over the building for the duration of the war. After the war, the Federal Government compulsorily acquired the building, to the dismay of Grace Bros and all the soft goods merchants who were expecting to return to the building and resume their businesses.

The Government eventually compensated Grace Bros for the loss of their building (after a High Court battle), but continued to house various departments until selling cheaply it to the construction company Shimizu Australia Pty Ltd in 1990, during a depressed property market. After extensive restoration of many of the original features, the building was sold in 1994 at an even greater reduction to the Low Yat Group, who converted the building into the luxury Grace Hotel.

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The rise of the department stores

Nineteenth century shopping

Until the nineteenth century, retailing evolved very little and slowly. People mostly bought what they needed from open markets and fairs, door-to-door pedlars, street vendors and a few small specialist shops. Most stores sold products that were made by hand in small batches. The products were not standardised, labelled or necessarily of good quality.

It was also very difficult to shop around, as a lack of public or private transport restricted shoppers to their own neighbourhood stores. Newspapers advertisements were rudimentary and literacy rates were fairly low. Goods were typically kept behind the counter, very few could be handled before purchase, and haggling over prices was normal.

Until the late nineteenth century, there was a sharp distinction between everyday food or grocery shopping, which was a chore for working class women, and non-food shopping, which was more of a leisure activity for the well-off. Women were not normally seen walking on the streets of downtown Sydney in the nineteenth century, and the few with their own horse-drawn transport were driven to the door of the shop and taken home afterwards.

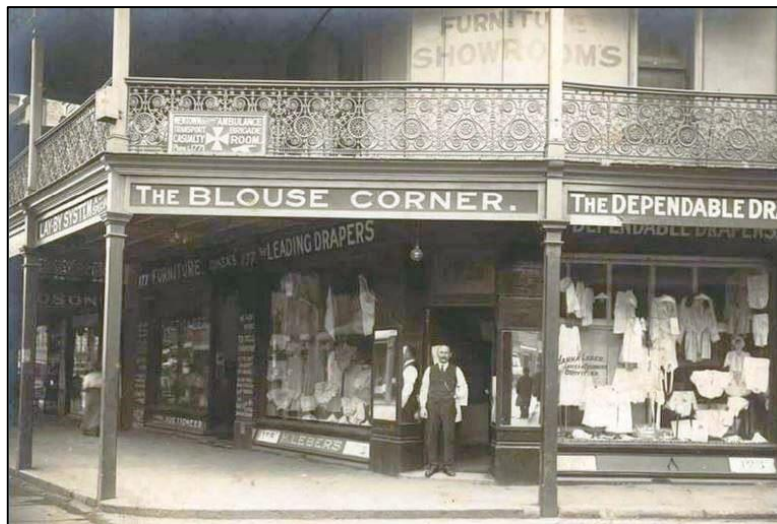


Figure 1 Leber's Drapery Newtown, 1926 (National Library of Australia)

Drapery stores offered a safe haven for women in a city dominated by male enclaves such as offices, warehouses and pubs. Because of the difficulty in shopping, most people were loyal to their chosen providers, who further cemented the bond by supplying credit to consumers. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, shopping in town was becoming more sophisticated as the emerging larger retailers were broadening into more universal providers, or emporiums.

These grew mainly from two types of specialist shops: drapery shops and hardware stores (then called ironmongeries), which were essential providers when almost everything else was hand-made. Many households in Australia made their own soap, candles, clothes, medicines, jam, bread and butter in their own kitchen¹. Drapery stores typically carried dress materials, haberdashery, millinery, Manchester, men's and women's clothing and later soft furnishings, largely targeting high-

class women. Street stalls and markets like Sydney's Paddy's Market catered for the clothing and drapery needs of the poorer majority².

Department stores

The evolution of retail stores was a gradual process, from small stores to general stores and eventually to department stores. Compared with the dark one-storey shops of the nineteenth century, department stores were "cathedrals of consumption"³ which architectural textbooks today regard as ranking among the masterpieces of commercial building at the time.

The colossal retail buildings from that time which have survived can be ranked among the finest buildings in most Western cities. Mark Foy's Piazza Store on Hyde Park and the Grace Bros buildings in York Street and Broadway were imitation palaces, deliberately analogous to theatres and museums. The first department store, Le Bon Marche in Paris, which originated the monumental style of department store architecture, was designed by Gustav Eiffel and completed in 1905⁴.



Figure 2 Le Bon Marche, Paris (L'Art Nouveau website)

A key characteristic of department stores was the wide range of merchandise, giving shoppers the opportunity to buy virtually everything under one roof. Harrods of London even offered funeral services from the store's undertaking department. Department stores continued to add departments to their mix of merchandise between 1900 and 1930 as the number of new consumer products mushroomed, including the bicycle, box brownie camera, phonograph, wireless, washing machine and refrigerator. The spread of merchandise was reflected in the 250 separate departments operated by Grace Bros by 1923, including the newly-created self-service cafeteria.

One of the most profitable new departments in Australian department stores was women's fashion. The loose flowing styles of the 1920s flapper era and the baggy suits worn by men were ideally suited to mass production, replacing the hand-tailored clothes of the Edwardian era. Department stores played an important role in promoting the new interest in fashion and the implied need to constantly replace outfits. For consumers, ready-made clothing was much cheaper than hand-made apparel from a dressmaker or tailor.

Fashion shows staged in the department stores became very popular, and the big stores came to dominate the retail trade so much in the 1920s and 1930s that few fashion trends could catch on without the active involvement of the big stores. Department stores also increasingly provided many free services, such as a public library, post office and travel service. David Jones also had an in-store restaurant.

Other services were being provided by the 1920s. For example, Grace Bros "Miss Service" could book theatre tickets, make travel arrangements, and purchase, pack and despatch any article requested. In Sydney, Christmas pageants and other seasonal festivities were also part of a regular parade of entertainments staged by department stores. They were so successful that by 1930 theatre owners were complaining to the Chief Secretary that Christmas pantomimes in stores were detrimental to the rest of the theatrical industry.

By the 1920s, a conventional arrangement of store departments had arisen. Basements sold bargain goods and groceries. Street floors offered cosmetics, gloves, hosiery and other small wares. Middle floors featured clothing, shoes, millinery and lingerie. Upper floors displayed furniture, appliances, carpeting and housewares. The organisation of departments was somewhat gender-based, with men's clothing and tobacco departments occupying less display area and positioned just inside the entrance. This allowed men, generally considered to be reluctant and self-conscious shoppers, to make a quick entrance, snap up what they wanted, and make an even quicker exit from the store.

Sydney's CBD was upgraded in the 1920s, and getting into the city and travelling around the city centre was greatly simplified after the city circle railway loop opened in December 1926. Retailers took advantage of this and moved closer to the train stations on the City Circle.

The Grace Brothers Broadway store

Joseph Neale Grace (1859-1931) was born at Winslow, Buckinghamshire, the son of a schoolmaster. After being indentured to a small drapery retail firm at Notting Hill in London, he migrated to Australia in about 1880 and became a retail assistant with Farmer & Co. In about 1883, he bought a horse and cart and took out a hawker's licence to sell drapery and other stock. Keen bargaining in the inner industrial suburbs made him a first-class trader.

In 1885, he borrowed £500 and with his brother Albert Edward, who had arrived from Boston that year, bought the premises, fittings and stock of the draper John Kingsbury at 5-7 George Street West (later Broadway)⁵. Philip Geeves, in his 1981 book on historic Sydney, recounts the family tradition that Albert walked into the shop one day to buy a new collar. He found the place dingy and untidy, and had to climb a ladder to get his collar. The owner told him she wanted to retire, so Albert and Joseph offered to buy the shop⁶.

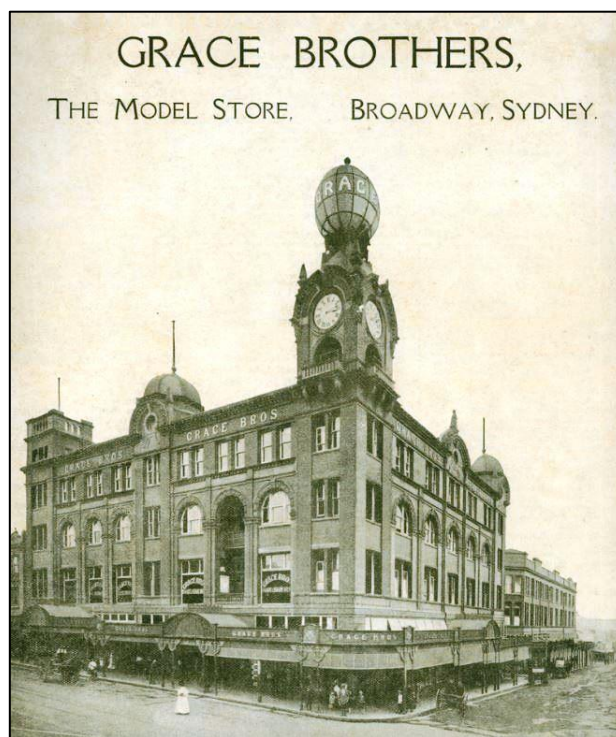


Figure 3 Grace Bros 1913 catalogue (Museums of History NSW)

Business prospered, and in 1891-92 the brothers took over three adjacent shops and four years later erected a four-storey building at the rear of Grose Street. Further extensions were built in 1904, and the Broadway frontage was rebuilt in 1906⁷. The building on the western side of Bay Street and Broadway was topped with a glass and steel dome inscribed with the company name that became a symbol of the company. A second matching globe on the eastern side of Bay Street was erected in 1926.

Grace Bros imported most of its stock up to World War I, and even established a London buying office in 1908 to buy directly from English manufacturers. The company's removal service, established in 1911, became an important and highly visible part of the business. The 1923 furniture catalogue stated that the company specialised in interstate removals by road, rail or sea. By that time, the company boasted 3,000 employees and included a pharmacy, hairdresser and portrait

photography services. The huge range meant that Grace Bros could appeal to a wide range of incomes and tastes. Their bedroom suites in the 1920s ranged from the lowest prices to some of the most expensive⁸.

The Broadway building was known as the Model Store, and many products were given the Model prefix: the Model boot, Model piano, and Model tyre among others. The Grace family kept a tight rein over the business, and when Grace Bros became a limited company in 1917, shares were issued only to Grace family members.

The success of the firm relied on a large and diverse staff. The Shop Assistants Case in the 1907 New South Wales Arbitration Court revealed the poor pay rates and working conditions experienced by staff in the large retailers. Grace Bros was singled out for not providing paid leave to most staff, working staff long hours, fining staff for minor offences and over-employing young women because they received lower rates than more experienced staff. Over 60% of Grace Bros employees were women, and over 40% were under 23 years of age.

On the other hand, many workers considered large employers like Grace Bros a much better alternative to other occupations. In addition, a large array of cultural pursuits, sporting clubs and other facilities were offered to staff⁹. The Auditorium held dances, fashion parades, children's events, displays and pantomimes. But the centre of Sydney shopping gradually moved from Broadway into the current Central Business District around Market and Pitt Streets. Grace Bros finally vacated the Broadway store in 1992, and the building was resurrected as a retail and cinema complex in 1998.

The Roaring Twenties retail boom

Post-war economic boom

Much of the world was hit by an economic recession in the immediate aftermath of World War I and the Spanish Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919. Many nations had experienced economic growth during the war as countries stimulated their economies by mobilising to fight the war. But when the war ended, global economies began to decline through to 1920-21.

The rest of the 1920s was a period of economic growth and widespread prosperity, driven by the recovery from wartime devastation and deferred spending, a construction boom, and the rapid growth of consumer goods such as automobiles and electrical goods in North America, Europe and a few other developed countries such as Australia.

The spirit of the decade was marked by a general feeling of novelty associated with modernity and a break with tradition. Modern technology such as automobiles, moving pictures and radio brought modern things to much of the population. Jazz and dancing rose in popularity in reaction to the sombre mood of World War I. Global economies quickly recovered from the post-war slump as returning troops re-entered the workforce and munitions factories retooled to produce consumer goods. Mass production made technology affordable for the middle class.

Technology played an important role in delivering the economic and cultural good times during the 1920s. Canned food, ready-made clothing and household appliances liberated women from much household drudgery. Henry Ford's methods of mass production and efficiency enabled other industries to produce a huge variety of consumer appliances¹⁰. By the middle of the 1920s, prosperity was widespread.

Art Deco architecture

Art Deco was the style of design and architecture that flourished in the United States and Europe during the 1920s and early 1930s. Through the interior and exterior styling and design of a great variety of things from large structures to small objects, Art Deco influenced bridges, buildings (from skyscrapers to cinemas), motor vehicles, furniture, and everyday objects such as radios and vacuum cleaners.

Art Deco was named after the exposition on decorative arts held in Paris in 1925 (Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs). It had its origins in bold geometric forms such as Cubism, and was influenced by the bright colours of Fauvism and exotic styles from Asia, Egypt and ancient Maya. In its heyday, Art Deco represented luxury, glamour, exuberance and faith in progress. It introduced new materials such as chrome, stainless steel and plastic. The Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building in New York are monuments to the style.

But Art Deco gradually became more subdued during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Its dominance ended with the outbreak of World War II and the rise of more functional and unadorned style of modern architecture that followed.



Figure 4 Minerva/Metro Theatre, 1939 (Sam Hood, SLNSW)

Many Sydney buildings have been strongly influenced by the Art Deco style. Some notable examples are:

Minerva/Metro Theatre, Kings Cross (1939).

State Theatre, Market Street (1929).

ANZAC War Memorial, Hyde Park (1934).

AWA building, York Street (1939).

Hayden Orpheum, Military Road, Cremorne (1935).

The Great Depression of the 1930s

The end of the Roaring Twenties

The Roaring Twenties roared loudest and longest on the New York Stock Exchange. Share prices rose six-fold from August 1921 to September 1929, reaching unprecedented heights. The epic boom ended in a cataclysmic bust: on Black Monday, October 28th, the Dow Jones Index dropped nearly 13%, then the following day it dropped nearly 12%. By mid-November, the Dow Jones Index had lost almost half its value. The slide continued through the summer of 1932, and did not return to its pre-crash heights until 1954.

The financial boom occurred during an era of optimism. Families prospered, automobiles, telephones and other new technologies proliferated. Ordinary people invested growing sums of money in stocks and bonds. A new industry of brokerage houses, investment trusts and margin accounts allowed most people to buy company equities on borrowed funds.

Purchasers typically put down 10%, borrowed the rest, and the stocks they bought served as collateral for the loan. Borrowed money poured into equity markets and stock prices soared. Despite this optimism, the governors of the US Federal Reserve were sceptical, and believed stock speculation diverted resources from productive uses such as commerce and industry.

The Federal Reserve considered ways to curb the intense financial speculation. The Board decided to ask banks to deny credit from member banks that loaned funds to stock speculators, and warned the public of the danger of speculation. The Board also agreed to raise the rates paid by all borrowers. But the Federal Reserve's actions had unintended consequences. The Fed's actions forced foreign banks to raise their own interest rates, and tightened money policies tipped global economies into recession. However, while the international economy slowed, the financial boom continued. While the Federal Reserve watched anxiously, in September 1929 stock prices began to experience sudden declines and rapid recoveries.

But the Federal Reserve's actions had unintended consequences. Foreign banks were forced to raise their own interest rates, and tightened money policies tipped global economies into recession. However, while the international economy slowed, the financial boom continued. While the Federal Reserve watched anxiously, in September 1929 stock prices began to experience sudden declines and rapid recoveries. Investors began selling madly and share prices plummeted. Funds realised from the sale of shares flowed into banks, who were then beset with depositor requests for cash withdrawals, severely straining their reserves¹¹.

Other important economic barometers were also slowing by mid-1929, such as car sales, house sales and steel production, causing increasing instability in the stock market, with steep down days followed by a few up days in October 1929. The falls in share prices in the US were almost instantaneous in all financial markets except Japan.

After a brief recovery on 30th October when it regained 12%, the market continued to fall for a month, but recovered for several months. But from April 1930 to July 1932 the Dow embarked on a much longer steady slide, closing at its lowest level of the twentieth century, concluding with an 89% loss in value in less than three years. Beginning in March 1933, the Dow began to slowly regain its lost ground, continuing through the rest of the 1930s.

There is much ongoing debate among economists about the connection between the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression of the 1930s, but what is certain is that the 1929 crash brought the Roaring Twenties to a halt.



Figure 5 Great Depression in Australia, 1930 (National Museum of Australia)

The Great Depression in Australia

The Australian economy suffered from falling wheat and wool prices in the second half of the 1920s, as well as competition from other commodity-producing countries. The country was also borrowing vast sums of money, which dried up as the economy slowed. Following the Wall Street crash of 1929, the Australian economy collapsed and unemployment reached a peak of 32% in 1932. It took almost a decade to recover from the Depression.

Australia experienced high inflation from 1919 to 1920 then a severe recession until 1923. As the economy was based on agricultural production, Australians identified prosperity with the land. However, just as the rural economy began to recover in the mid-1920s, so did European economies affected by war. The United States, Canada and Argentina began to produce agricultural surpluses for overseas markets, creating an oversupply in Australia's main exports: wheat and wool.

After the Wall Street crash in October 1929, the Labor Government was thrown into disarray from Australian arguments about how to handle the crisis, splitting into three factions. Despite the Government's attempts to manage the financial situation, it was the recovery of our major trading partners, especially after Britain began rearming in earnest from 1936, and public works funded by State and local governments that brought about a slow recovery. By the start of World War II, unemployment was down to 11%.

In 1932, the official unemployment level reached 32%. Hundreds of thousands of Australians were out of work. More than 40,000 men moved around the country looking for work. By 1932, more than 60,000 men, women and children were dependent on a State-based sustenance system that enabled families to buy the bare minimum of food.

For families still recovering from the pain of World War I, the Great Depression was a cruel blow that scarred people for decades to come. Memories of the Great Depression played a major role in Labor government policy in the 1940s. In 1942, income tax became a Federal rather than a State responsibility, giving the Federal Government more control over revenues¹².

Underground railway and Sydney Harbour Bridge

The City Circle loop opens up the CBD

The original concept for the City Railway was part of a report in 1915 submitted to the New South Wales Government by the chief railway engineer, Dr. John Bradfield. His concepts were largely based on the New York subway system, which he observed during his time there. Bradfield's original city railway proposal, on which the City Circle loop is now based, saw St James as a busy junction and changeover point. In addition to the lines now in use, a double-track railway was to be built from Gladesville to the western arc of the City Circle, and leaving it on its eastern side for Watson's Bay and the south-eastern suburbs.

The first section of the city railway loop was above ground from Cleveland Street (now Redfern) to Central Station. The two kilometre section from Central to St. James via Museum opened in December 1926. The 2.6 kilometre western arm of the underground railway from Central to Wynyard via Town Hall was opened in February 1932, along with the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.



Figure 6 Tunnelling under Hyde Park, 1923 (Powerhouse Museum)

The City Circle is a complicated system, with one tunnel running on top of another for half a kilometre, and tunnels crossing each other at various places. To minimise disruption to the city during construction, most lines were planned to pass under public parks or roadways. The greatest difficulties were where the tunnel had to pass under building foundations between Central and Wynyard.

St. James and Wynyard were busy terminals until 1956 when the two stations were connected by a line through Circular Quay, allowing trains to run into the City and out again without having to stop and reverse direction. St. James was intended to be the junction station of the city loop, and was built by the cut-and-cover method. Two inner platforms were for trains travelling to and from the Watsons Bay/Randwick area, but these have never been used by trains¹³.

The Sydney Harbour Bridge

Under the direction of Dr. John Bradfield of the New South Wales Department of Public Works, the bridge across Sydney Harbour was designed and built by the British firm Dorman Long of Middlesbrough and opened in 1932. The bridge was inspired by the 1917 Hell Gate Bridge that Bradfield had seen in New York City, and included some of Dorman Long's design from its own Tyne Bridge in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in Northumberland. The bridge originally had four lanes (wider than today) for road traffic, two lanes for trains on the western side and two lanes for trams on the eastern side. After trams were discontinued in 1958, the two eastern lanes have been used for road traffic.

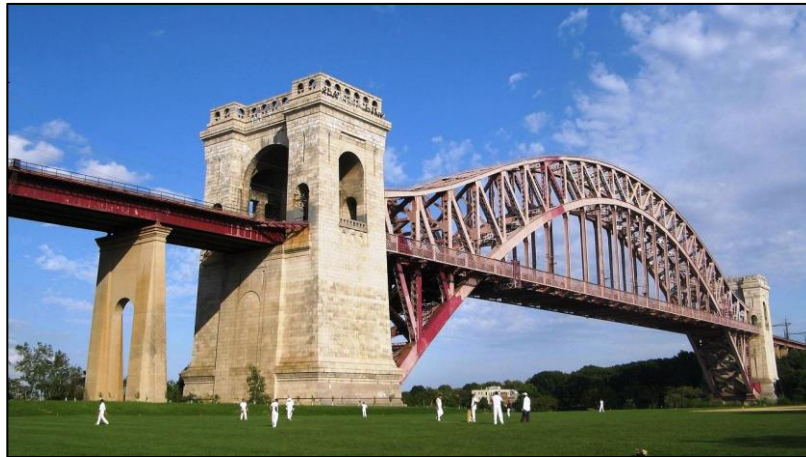


Figure 7 Hell Gate Bridge, New York (Wikimedia)

The four granite pylons at the ends of the arch were originally added for their aesthetic value, but have since been variously put to use as a museum, tourist centre and CCTV cameras (the southern pylons) and venting chimneys for fumes from the Sydney Harbour Tunnel (the northern pylons). In 1942, the pylons were fitted with parapets and anti-aircraft guns to assist in Sydney's defence.

A bridge spanning Sydney Harbour had been proposed as early as 1814 when the convict architect Francis Greenway reputedly proposed to Governor Lachlan Macquarie that a bridge be built across the harbour¹⁴. Nothing came of Greenway's suggestion, but the idea remained alive and many further suggestions were made during the nineteenth century.

In 1914, Dr. John Bradfield was appointed Chief Engineer of Sydney Harbour Bridge and Metropolitan Railway Construction, and his work on the project over many years earned him the legacy as the father of the bridge¹⁵. After World War I, plans to build the bridge regained momentum, and by 1922 Bradfield decided that an arch design was the most suitable. He and Public Works officers prepared a design based on New York's Hell Gate Bridge.

Construction began in 1924 and the bridge was completed and opened in March 1932. The building of the bridge coincided with the construction of the underground railway system beneath Sydney's CBD, known as the City Circle, and the bridge was designed with this in mind. Originally, trains were intended to use both the western and eastern pair of lanes. The eastern lanes were for a planned rail link to the northern beaches that was never built, so trams to the north shore used the lanes until tram services were discontinued in about 1958.

The roadway across the bridge and its approaches was named the Bradfield Highway in honour of Bradfield's contribution to the bridge. The original four traffic lanes were narrowed to form six lanes as the traffic volume grew. The eastern side tram lanes became two extra road lanes in 1958. It is a little-known fact that the Bradfield Highway is designated as a Travelling Stock Route¹⁶, which means it is quite legal to herd livestock across the bridge, but only between midnight and dawn and after giving advance notice. The last time the bridge sounded to the clatter of cloven hooves was for an event staged as part of the Gelbvieh Cattle World Congress during the 1999 Royal Easter Show¹⁷.

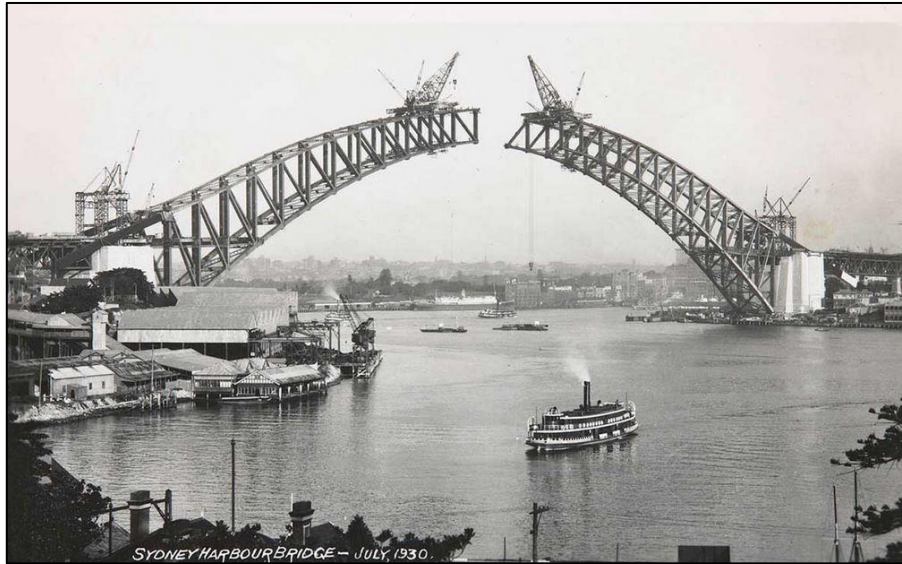


Figure 8 Sydney Harbour Bridge, 1930 (National Museum of Australia)

Impact on CBD public transport

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sydney's public transport system consisted of a suburban railway and an inner-city tram network, both operated by New South Wales Government Railways. They were complemented by a number of privately-operated ferry services on Sydney Harbour and a few horse-drawn bus services.

After World War I, the city's bus fleet expanded to more than 600 by 1929. It was a private bus industry dominated by owner-operators and small family businesses¹⁸. In 1930, Premier Jack Lang sought to protect the tram system from competition when he introduced the *Transport Act 1930*, which empowered a new Metropolitan Transport Trust to shut down private bus routes that competed with trams and trains. The tram system was then restructured with the opening of the Harbour Bridge in 1932, when vehicles could travel across the Harbour for the first time.

Until 1932, passengers from the North Shore who wished to travel to the CBD caught a tram to either Milsons Point or McMahon's Point, and then took a ferry across the harbour to the city. In March 1932, when the Sydney Harbour Bridge with its associated railway and tramway tracks was opened, all the services to and from Milsons Point and McMahon's Point were diverted to travel across the bridge to and from Wynyard. The Milsons Point and McMahon's Point lines were then closed. Several lines to other north shore destinations were opened.

A c1920 map in the National Library of Australia shows a tram line running along King Street with stops at York and Clarence Streets to the ferry wharf at the end of Erskine Street (which then took

passengers to the Balmain peninsula)¹⁹. But a 1958 map shows that no trams ran along King Street by then. The trams from the North Shore terminated at Wynyard (more than two blocks north of the Grace Building) and the only other nearby tramline ran along George Street²⁰.

So the tram that would have run past the door of the proposed Grace Building in the 1920s was discontinued at some time during the reconstruction of the exit road from the Harbour Bridge (principally York Street). And as the 1925 bus timetables show that the only buses in the CBD ran from Central Railway Station out to the eastern and southern suburbs²¹, there were few trams and no buses at all for the convenience of shoppers to the Grace Bros in York Street. In addition, the long-awaited exit from Wynyard Station in York Street did not open until the economic downturn was well underway in 1932. Grace Bros therefore found itself at a severe disadvantage compared to rivals like Mark Foy's and David Jones, which were only a few steps from Museum Station and St. James Station, respectively.

The retail trade moves northwards

At the time Joseph and Albert Grace began their retail empire at the western end of the Broadway in 1885, Sydney's main railway terminus was located in the area west of modern-day Prince Alfred Park. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the New South Wales Government decided to construct a new railway terminus closer to the centre of the city. Central Railway Station was opened in 1906, and resulted in the focus of Sydney retail moving closer to where rivals Marcus Clark & Co already had a store on the corner of George and Harris Streets. The new station prompted Marcus Clark to open a nine-storey building at George and Pitt Streets in 1909. In addition, Anthony Hordern & Sons were only a short tram ride from the station with their New Palace Emporium at Brickfield Hill.

The focus of the retail trade then moved even further from the Grace Bros Broadway store when the underground City Circle railway loop began to open in 1926, where the main rivals of Grace Bros were already operating, or were soon to exploit the new access to customers by opening stores in the area.

The evolution of skyscrapers

Reaching for the sky

The term skyscraper referred to tall multi-storied buildings in its earliest iterations of 10-20 storeys, but by the end of the twentieth century referred to high-rise buildings greater than 40-50 storeys and more than 150 metres high. The world's first skyscraper was the Home Insurance Building in Chicago built in 1884 with 10 floors and 42 metres high.

The sixteen-storey Manhattan Building built in Chicago in 1890 is the oldest surviving skyscraper in the world to use a purely skeletal supporting structure. In 2019, Hong Kong had the most skyscrapers with 355 followed by Shenzhen in China with 289 and New York with 284.

Sydney was one of the first cities in Australia to welcome tall commercial and residential buildings, starting in 1912 with the Culwulla Chambers on the corner of King and Castlereagh Streets, built to 50 metres. The building was 14 floors and created a great deal of controversy due to a fear of a New York skyline and concern as a fire hazard, given that existing fire ladders could not reach the upper floors. This forced an amendment to Sydney's building regulations, limiting buildings to 45 metres. This remained in force until the 26-storey AMP building was constructed overlooking Circular Quay, opening in 1962²². At this time, the Art Deco AWA building with its mini-Eiffel Tower on top lost its 23-year title as Sydney's tallest building.

The impact of the height limit is evident today as the remaining buildings from the first half of the twentieth century are dwarfed by modern high-rise buildings. As well, commercial development economics have seen many earlier buildings demolished for more modern high-rise buildings. These may have less architectural significance but maximise the site in terms of height and number of floors.

While some of the late 1920s buildings have some Art Deco features, two buildings clearly reflect the new modern style and vie for the title of Sydney's first Art Deco skyscraper: the Grace Building in York Street and the British Medical Association Building (generally called BMA House, and now called AMA House) in Macquarie Street. These are 12 storey buildings within the 150 feet limit, but designed in 1928 and completed in 1930.

Compared with the Empire State Building, completed in 1931 with 102 storeys, these are hardly in the same category of skyscrapers, but they are important landmarks in Sydney's built environment as well as important Art Deco icons.

1930 was a momentous year, as the effects of the Great Depression following the 1929 New York stock market crash were having a global impact. With the exception of Kyle House, major building activities came to a sudden halt in Sydney for some five years²³.

The Tribune Building

In 1922, Robert R. McCormick, the owner of the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper, held an international interior and exterior design competition for its new headquarters to mark its 75th anniversary. \$100,000 in prize money was offered, including \$50,000 first prize for the "most beautiful and distinctive office building in the world". The resulting 260 or more entries still reveal a unique turning point in American architectural history.

The winning entry by New York architects John Mead Howells and Raymond Hood was a neo-Gothic design with buttresses near the top. Other entries were from internationally-known architects such as Walter Gropius and Walter Burley Griffin. By 1922, neo-Gothic skyscrapers were an established design style, also called the “American Perpendicular Style”, with the first important example being the Woolworth Building in 1913. Construction of the Tribune Tower was complete in 1925 and reached a height of 141 metres above ground with 36 floors. The ornate buttresses surrounding the peak of the tower are especially visible when the tower is lit up at night.



Figure 9 Tribune Tower, Chicago (Wikimedia)

The architects are commemorated near the main entrance with carved images of Robin Hood (Hood) and a howling dog (Howells), made by American artist Rene Paul Chambellan. One of Chambellan’s gargoyles is a frog, a joking nod to his own French background. The top of the tower is modelled on the “butter tower” of Rouen Cathedral, which is typical of the Late-Gothic style with a crown-shaped top instead of a spire.

The Tribune Tower is cited as influencing the design of the Grace Building in Sydney and the Manchester Unity Building in Melbourne. The *Chicago Tribune* newspaper moved out in June 2018 prior to the building’s conversion to condominiums.

The construction of the Grace Building

The first Sydney Opera House

The American entertainers Edwin Kelly and Francis Leon brought their minstrel troupe to Australia in January 1878²⁴. Kelly was a singer and comedian and Leon a female impersonator who began their partnership in Chicago in 1863. After bringing Kelly and Leon's Minstrels and Burlesque Opera Troupe to Australia, they were heavily involved in the local variety industry during their time here²⁵.

The troupe travelled throughout regional towns and interstate, often performing on the small stages of Schools of Arts and Mechanics Institute. By 1879 they were putting on substantial productions such as Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*, and became so popular they decided to erect a music hall in Sydney especially devoted to their brand of comic opera and variety²⁶.

A site was selected on King Street between Clarence and York Streets that was occupied by several old buildings owned by Mr I. J. Josephson²⁷. The land was cleared and a two-storey building constructed, known as Kelly and Leon's Opera House. The entrance to the stalls and pit (which held 800 to 900 patrons) was in King Street and the entrance to the dress circle (which held another 300, including a Vice Regal box) was in York Street. It opened on the night of Boxing Day 1879²⁸ with a season of the musical comedy *The Doctor of Alcantara*²⁹.



Figure 10 Opera House (on right of warehouse), c1892 (National Library of Australia)

After Kelly and Leon's lease ended in 1880, the venue was renamed the Sydney Opera House, and reopened in September with performances by Kelly and Leon's Mastodon Minstrels³⁰. The building was in use on and off for a number of years, but had been inactive for some time when the new lessee and director George Forbes reopened it in June 1892 as the Imperial Opera House with a season of variety performances³¹.

In January 1900, a 20-round boxing contest for the Australian Featherweight Championship of Australasia was advertised in the opera house, which was renamed the Imperial Athletic Club for the occasion³². Musical performances continued with the comic opera *Rip Van Winkle* the following month³³. The last scheduled musical work at the opera house was the comic opera *Fayette* in February 1900. But the expected performances did not go ahead due to the severe disposition of Howard Vernon, the principal performer³⁴.

This seemed to be the last straw for the landowner J. Percy Josephson, because just a few days later he closed the theatre and advertised the sale of the scenery and internal fittings³⁵. It was reported in the press in March 1900 that the owner held architectural plans for modifications to the opera house to incorporate it into the adjacent warehouse of W. and A. McArthur, which had been operating in York Street. The York Hotel on the York Street corner and the shops on the Clarence Street corner would remain³⁶.

A newspaper article published in 1927 when the building was being demolished claimed that the Opera House closed down because the orchestra went on strike for arrears of wages³⁷, but there was no mention of this in newspapers at the time. The likely cause of the closure was the dwindling income from the increasingly underused venue, as reported by the *Sydney Morning Herald* at the time of closure³⁸. Another two floors were added to the building, as shown in a 1927 Demolition Book photo in the City of Sydney Archives³⁹.

The Grace Building – the jewel in the crown?

By the 1920s, York Street in the Sydney CBD was the heart of the New South Wales soft goods trade, where buyers patronised the great warehouses that dominated the street. When Joseph and Albert Grace decided to resurrect their declining retail business by establishing a new department store in the heart of the CBD, the site they chose had frontages to York, King and Clarence Streets. It was seen as a strategically important location in the 1920s because the traffic plan for the future Sydney Harbour Bridge designated York Street as the main vehicular exit from the Bridge, and also the site of one entrance to the future Wynyard Station⁴⁰.

Grace Bros bought the former Sydney Opera House in 1926, demolished it in 1927 and proceeded to erect a twelve storey Inter-War Gothic Skyscraper with strong Art Deco elements. The general design and in particular the spectacular corner tower were modelled on the Chicago Tribune Tower, built in 1922⁴¹. The building opened in 1930 with a department store on the first two floors, and offices in the floors above.

The intention was that many of the soft goods merchants in the area would move into the new building to give them easy access to the Grace Bros trade. But the early 1930s were difficult for the firm, partly because of the Great Depression, but also because the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the diversion of city trams affected passing trade⁴². The construction of the Grace Building in York Street was a failed attempt to counter changed traffic flows.

Prior to his death in 1938, Albert Grace planned the suburban expansion of the business, a move that is credited as the reason Grace Bros survived when many of their contemporaries did not, such as Anthony Hordern & Sons and Mark Foy's. Although Grace Bros was not the first department store to establish suburban outlets (Marcus Clark & Co had opened several suburban and country stores

by 1915), it was the first to strategically plan and develop an extensive network of branches in Sydney's suburbs⁴³.

The branch network began with Parramatta in 1933 and Bondi Junction in 1934. A five-storey furniture repository was opened in Chatswood in 1938 and more suburban branches opened after World War II. The company's stated goal was to put a Grace Bros store within a ten minute drive of every Sydney home. The company also acquired the country stores of J. B. Young and rebadged them as Grace Bros stores⁴⁴.

Radio broadcasting from the Grace Building

In February 1932, the New South Wales Council of Churches acquired a licence for the radio station 2CH. Programs were broadcast from a studio in the Grace Building on the AM frequency 1210 kHz, before changing to 1170 kHz in 1935. The station was essentially a response to the formation of the Catholic Broadcasting Co Ltd, which had obtained a licence for station 2SM in 1931⁴⁵.



Figure 11 2CH advert, 1936 (Broadcasting Business Year Book 1936)

The Council of Churches, made up of representatives from most of the Protestant denominations, aims to advance a Christian perspective on public issues, to promote unity and united action among evangelical churches in New South Wales, and to apply biblical and theological principles to contemporary issues⁴⁶.

In 1936, the Council of Churches sublet the licence to AWA to provide content six days a week, leaving the Council of Churches with responsibility for programming on Sundays. In December 1938, AWA moved into a new building with a radio transmitting tower on the roof at 47 York Street (The Grace Building was located at 77 York Street). A number of broadcasting studios were being constructed in the building⁴⁷.

In August 1940, the 2CH studios moved into the eleventh and twelfth floors of the AWA building, which included an auditorium for audience participation programmes⁴⁸. In 1994, the station joined

the Macquarie Radio Network when the licence was sold to John Singleton. In August 2020, after the station was sold to the Pacific Star Network⁴⁹, it switched to broadcasting on digital radio only after relinquishing its AM frequency allocation. It was heard on DAB+ radio until closing down in June 2022.

The 1170 kHz frequency was taken over by the station 1170 SEN (the Sports Entertainment Network), carrying a dedicated sports format. The legendary radio announcer Bob Rogers worked at 2CH from 1995 until he retired in October 2020 at the age of 93.

Wartime and Post-war occupation of the building

World War II requisitioning

At the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, the Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced on every national and commercial radio station that Australia was also at war in support of its ally in Great Britain⁵⁰. Anticipating Australia's active involvement in the war in Europe (but not yet in the Pacific), the Australian Government established the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and set about the task of rebuilding the army from its small permanent cadre at the start of the war. A number of infantry divisions were raised and sent to the Middle East in early 1940 for training and eventually deployment in North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

By the second year of the war, many voluntary women's groups had been formed for a variety of specialist defence training. This was in addition to the existing Australian Red Cross Society, Comforts Funds and Canteens. It was acknowledged that there was a need for better training and co-ordination of these diverse groups, so the Women's Australian National Services (WANS) was formed in June 1940. At the inaugural meeting at the Sydney Town Hall, Lady Wakehurst, the wife of the New South Wales Governor, outlined the aims of the WANS: to be a training scheme and not an employment bureau, to better organise the existing groups, and to form a Women's Land Army for essential farming work⁵¹.



Figure 12 WANS in War Loans march (Australian War Memorial)

By this time, some of the office space in the Grace Building was being used for war support purposes. In June 1940, the Australian Gas Light Company made its showrooms in the Grace Building available for canteen cooking classes in connection with the WANS⁵². In August, the women of the Sydney Hospital Auxiliary began to meet on each working day in the Grace Building to make garments from materials supplied by the Lord Mayor's Fund, beginning with mosquito-proof leggings for AIF nurses⁵³. The same month, the 21st Field Regiment Comforts Fund established its headquarters on the eleventh floor of the Grace Building, where friends and relatives were requested to go there and work on the Christmas gift parcels. The Fund was sponsored by the Gallipoli Legion of Anzacs⁵⁴.

The December 1941 bombing of the American naval base at Pearl Harbour by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service suddenly brought World War II a lot closer to Australia, and dramatically raised the level of preparedness. The fall of Singapore to Japanese troops in February 1942 was a disaster for the Australian Army when more than 15,000 Australian troops were captured.

United States General Douglas MacArthur was in charge of the defence of the Philippines following massive air raids on Manila and nearby Dark Field in early 1942. By March, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered him to escape to Australia. MacArthur travelled by boat and plane to Darwin, then by train to Melbourne, arriving on 21 March 1942. MacArthur and his senior officers were provided with accommodation at the Menzies Hotel and he soon established his headquarters in an insurance building at 401 Collins Street⁵⁵.



Figure 13 Douglas MacArthur, Canberra, 1942 (Sydney Morning Herald, 18 March 1942)

As the Japanese forces were gradually pushed northwards, MacArthur moved his headquarters from Melbourne to Brisbane in July 1942, to Hollandia (on the north coast of Dutch New Guinea) in August 1944, and then to the Philippines in October 1944. The New South Wales State Heritage Inventory entry points out that MacArthur's Australian headquarters were never in Sydney, as is commonly reported in various websites⁵⁶.

After the wake-up call in Singapore, the many offices in the Grace Building were taken up by an increasing number of war support organisations. The possibility of air raids was at the forefront of thinking on the home front, and in April 1942 it was announced that the building's basement would be used as a central depot for ARP (Air Raid Preparedness) rescue squads⁵⁷. In the same month, New South Wales Premier William McKell appealed for financial support for the Civilian War Emergency Clothing Committee, located on the ground floor of the Grace Building, to create a reserve of clothing for people who might lose their possessions in an air raid⁵⁸.

The offices of the Milk Board were located in the Grace Building at this time, and in May 1942 it was reported that the staff missed out on their morning milk delivery due to a sudden switch in the zones covered by different milk companies. Normally 700,000 gallons are successfully distributed around Sydney each week. But on this occasion a stressed-out spokesperson from the Fresh Food

and Ice Pty Ltd complained that milk delivery to the building trade was suddenly thrust upon them and they did not have enough facilities to deal with all required deliveries at such short notice. Fortunately, the lactose-tolerant employees of the Milk Board were able to obtain milk for their morning tea from a nearby kiosk⁵⁹.

In August 1942, the Australian Army requisitioned the whole building under the *National Security Act*, and the 162 commercial tenants were given seven days to vacate the building and find new premises⁶⁰. The United States Army Services of Supply took up occupation in the building from September 1942 to September 1943, followed by the Royal Navy from 1945 to 1946 to service the British Pacific Fleet⁶¹.

The United States Navy also used the building⁶², and the Sydney headquarters of the American Red Cross was in the Grace Building from December 1943⁶³ until at least 1945⁶⁴.

Post-war Government acquisition

In June 1945, Grace Bros decided to sue the Minister for the Army for failure to pay compensation after taking over the building in August 1942. The Commonwealth had agreed to pay £45,000 as rental plus £13,000 for lifts, cleaning and other expenses, but had delayed making these payments, and the company was entitled to interest on outstanding amounts. The company pointed out that prior to being taken over in 1942, the building had been leased to a great number of tenants who had to pay their rents promptly⁶⁵.

In November 1945, the *Daily Telegraph* reported that the Federal Government had compulsorily acquired the Grace Building for the Repatriation Department under the authority of the *Lands Acquisition Act 1915*. This was a nasty surprise, as Grace Bros always understood that after the war the Commonwealth would hand the building back to them, and the former tenants had already been given an undertaking that they would have first priority when that happened.

An official from the Department of the Interior had approached the building owners in September and informed them the Government wanted to purchase the building. But they refused to sell under any circumstances, and declined to put a price on the building. Subsequently, the Department informed the owners that a notice had been published in the *Commonwealth Gazette*, acquiring the building "for the purposes of the Commonwealth at Sydney".

The original requisition in 1942 deprived the owners of the use of the building for the duration of the war and for six months afterwards, but the recent action takes the property away for all time. The owners have 120 days to lodge a claim of compensation, and it can be taken to the High Court in the event of a dispute. The Governing Director of Charles Parsons & Co Pty Ltd (Mr Charles Parsons), a former tenant, said yesterday that the Commonwealth's action was a serious blow to the soft goods trade⁶⁶. The Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Joseph Carrodus, was then reported as saying that the acquisition of the Grace Building would enable the Repatriation Commission to centralise all departmental activities⁶⁷.

Within a couple of days, a meeting of more than a hundred representatives of former tenant companies in the Grace Building carried a motion protesting the acquisition of the building. A committee planned to meet the Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, to convey their protest. The disgruntled chairman, Charles Parsons, claimed that actions such as the seizure of the building came from heads

of departments who looked out a window and said “that building over there would do”. He was present (during the war) when a US Army officer had received a cable asking him to acquire millions of feet of office space in the centre of Sydney. Parsons said the officer simply looked out of his window and picked out twenty buildings which he then took over⁶⁸.

Allied military forces were still occupying the Grace Building in February 1946. By that time, the Repatriation Department was using four floors, and the Royal Navy, US Navy and the US Army occupied the rest⁶⁹.

Meanwhile, Grace Bros were not taking the loss of their building without a fight, and the following month they appealed the Government’s acquisition in the High Court⁷⁰. By that time, the United States armed forces were getting ready to vacate the building, and the British forces were also packing up⁷¹. In April, the acquisition of the Grace Building by the Commonwealth was upheld in the High Court⁷². In June, the Minister for the Interior announced that six Government departments would occupy the Grace Building: the Post Master General, Immigration, Labour and National Service, War Service Homes Commission, Post-War Reconstruction and the Repatriation Department. The basement would be used for car parking⁷³.

In July 1946, a new telephone exchange was erected on the ground floor of the Grace Building, allowing about 10,000 new telephone subscribers to be connected in two or three months. As applications for telephones had reached 60,000 to 70,000 for the whole of Australia, this was a matter of some urgency⁷⁴. In November 1946, it was reported that the Australian Base Command of the United States Army in the Grace Building would officially close at the end of the month⁷⁵.

In May 1947, a bureaucratic tug-of-war broke out between the Repatriation Department and the Taxation Department for possession of the remaining two floors of the building. The British Navy was still in occupation, but was expected to move out soon. The Federal Government decided to allow the Tax Department’s Sales Branch to occupy the top two floors, despite an earlier undertaking that a repatriation outpatients’ clinic would be set up there. The RSL was quick to criticise the Government’s decision⁷⁶.

By the end of 1947, it appeared that a compromise had been reached. Both the Taxation Department⁷⁷, and (after some lobbying by the RSL) the Repatriation specialists’ rooms and outpatients’ clinic had been established⁷⁸. By January 1950, the outpatients’ clinic was operating in both the tenth and eleventh floors⁷⁹.

The issue of compensation to Grace Bros for the compulsory resumption of the building had still not been resolved by January 1952, when the High Court heard the company’s claim for £1,368,456 in compensation, plus 3% interest from November 1945. It was reported that the company originally issued the writ for this claim in 1948, but delays were caused by an unsuccessful challenge in the High Court, followed by an unsuccessful appeal to the Privy Council related to the validity of the *Lands Acquisition Act of 1915*⁸⁰.

In February 1953, the High Court finally awarded Grace Bros compensation of £935,800 plus 3% interest from November 1945 (which was expected to exceed £200,000). The Commonwealth’s best offer had been £650,000, but the judge said that the amount awarded was the fair price at which the land and building could have been sold to a hypothetical purchaser in 1945⁸¹.

Government Departments continued to use the Grace Building through the 1980s. In 1966, medical examinations for National Service army conscripts were being conducted before a Medical Board⁸², and similarly in the Sydney Employment Office of the building in March 1971⁸³.

The Grace Hotel

The Federal Government continued to use the Grace Building for various departments until January 1990, when it was sold to the giant Japanese construction company Shimizu Australia Pty Ltd for \$38 million⁸⁴. Having acquired the building at well under the expected market price, Shimizu then spent a further \$40 million on a complete refurbishment. The existing structure was retained, but the façade was restored with new windows and a turret was added at the corner of York and King Streets. The entrance lobby and original main staircase were also restored⁸⁵.



Figure 14 Grace Hotel lobby (Booking.com website)

After completing the restoration, Shimizu decided to put the building up for sale in 1993, although it was expected the company wouldn't recover even its refurbishment costs in a still-depressed property market⁸⁶. In January 1994, the Malaysian Low Yat Group purchased the renovated building for \$16 million⁸⁷. The new owners received development approval in 1995 for a \$28 million conversion to a luxury hotel, initially planned to contain 320 rooms and a shopping arcade, which was expected to be completed by mid-1997⁸⁸. The hotel reportedly contains 382 rooms in its present form⁸⁹.

The fate of the Grace Building may be seen as a cautionary tale for businesses trying to predict the future of their trade. But it is easy to feel sympathy for Joseph and Albert Grace, who were persuaded during the optimism of the Roaring Twenties that the York Street location would be the new retail area, and who could not have predicted the massive economic Depression that was just around the corner at the end of the decade when the building opened.

Other Sydney department stores

Grace Bros had a great deal of competition for department store customers from its early days. It is useful to look at how the different retail empires developed in Sydney, and their eventual fates at the hands of changing demographics and market trends. The one thing they had in common is that they all began as drapery businesses. As mentioned earlier, draperies and hardware shops were the two nineteenth century retailing areas that grew into large enterprises.

Anthony Hordern & Sons

Anthony Hordern & Sons was possibly Australia's largest retailer from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Few companies in Sydney could match its size: the scale of its stores, the variety of its stock and services, the diversity of its manufacturing enterprises and the number of employees.

The firm originated in the drapery business of Ann and Anthony Hordern, which was established in King Street Sydney in 1823. The couple eventually moved to Melbourne in 1838, but their sons Anthony II and Lebbeus returned five years later to set up their own drapery store in George Street. By the time Anthony II's sons, Anthony III (1842-1886) and Samuel (1849-1909) joined the business in 1869, the firm was called Anthony Hordern & Sons.

During the 1870s, the company purchased several surrounding buildings and then reconstructed them into the large 1879 Palace Emporium with a staff of over 300. By the 1880s, more sites had been added, and the company sold a huge range of goods, organised into distinct departments. A major fire in 1901 gutted the building, which influenced Samuel Hordern to construct a brand new building which he called the New Palace Emporium at Brickfield Hill, where all the stock from their various sites could be housed under the one roof. The six-storey building stretched across half a city block, fronting George, Goulburn and Pitt Streets. Many of the materials used in the building's construction were made or finished in Hordern's many factories and workshops.

The company's red-bound general catalogues were produced between about 1894 and 1924, with its 1914 catalogue extending to over 1,500 pages. An amazing array of services were eventually installed in the building after renovations in the 1920s and 1930s, including a library, surgery, dining room, classroom, post and parcel office, public phone booths, a Commonwealth Bank branch and a Thomas Cook travel agency.

In 1970, rival Sydney retailer Waltons Ltd eventually took over Anthony Hordern & Son and closed the city store in 1973. The large building was then occupied by a number of small businesses until it was controversially demolished in 1987. The failure and demolition of the once grand building was a symbol of the passing of large scale retailing from the southern end of the CBD to the area around the underground railway stations. Unlike Grace Bros, Hordern's did not expand into the suburbs, where most of their customers were. The site continued to be problematic due to planning disputes and was not built upon until the World Square development opened the first stage of a new shopping centre in 1999⁹⁰.

David Jones

David Jones has long been associated with the retailing of fine merchandise and is one of the few Sydney department stores to survive into the twenty-first century. The company began in 1838 when Welsh immigrant, David Jones (1793-1873) established a drapery business in George and Barrack Streets. After a bankruptcy scare in the 1850s, the family-run company prospered with David Jones' son Edward Lloyd Jones and three grandsons.

Charles Lloyd Jones (1879-1958) was Chairman of the company from 1920 to his death in 1958. A new four-storey building was constructed on the George Street site in 1887, with two extra floors added in 1906. The new building allowed David Jones to expand its range of stock with furniture and home furnishings.

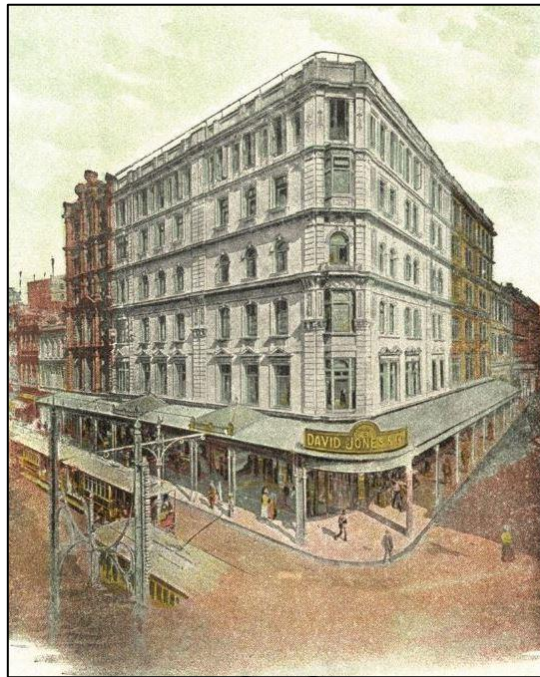


Figure 15 David Jones, George Street, c1910 (Caroline Simpson Collection)

A new eight-storey factory was constructed in Surry Hills in 1914 and extended in 1935, principally to produce clothing and leather goods. David Jones positioned itself as a quality retailer, as expressed through its catalogues, advertisements in home journals and its store displays. In 1927, a new nine-storey building was constructed on the corner of Elizabeth and Market Streets, on a site previously occupied by the Sydney Boys and Girls High Schools until they moved to the site of the former zoo in Moore Park.

The plain building concealed an interior of marble staircases, beauty salons, a palatial restaurant and its own art gallery (which opened in 1944). A building constructed on the corner of Market and Castlereagh Streets in 1938 housed the menswear store, which was moved from the old George Street store. From about 1920, David Jones stopped selling furniture and floor coverings, but continued selling homewares such as dinnerware, glassware, household linen and soft furnishings.

By 1960, David Jones had opened stores in Sydney's suburbs, regional areas and other State capitals. In 2007, the company operated 35 stores and it remains one of the few sellers of home furnishings in central Sydney⁹¹.

Marcus Clark & Co

In 1896, Marcus Clark opened a store close to the city on the corner of George and Harris Streets. It was more of a budget store than the others and was named Bon Marche, after the French department store (and meaning “cheap” in French). The success of this store led to a larger building being constructed on the site in 1909, and influenced Marcus Clark to build other stores around the new and adjacent Central Railway Station, including the nine-storey Central Square building on the corner of George and Pitt Streets, the tallest in Sydney at the time.



Figure 16 Marcus Clark & Co advert, c1928 (Museums of History NSW)

The company’s range of stock expanded at around this time to Manchester, ironmongery, musical instruments and stationery. Marcus Clark opened stores in suburbs and regional towns at an unprecedented rate, and by 1915 had outlets in twelve New South Wales towns. Many of the country stores were modest-sized sample rooms rather than large stores, but they provided a personalised service, unlike Anthony Hordern and others who relied on the lucrative but impersonal mail-order trade.

Country customers could order goods from the local store and have them shipped from the city stores, located close to the parcels post office at Central Railway Station. Marcus Clark, like other department stores, operated its own factories, including timber and cane furniture, quilts and bedding.

On the death of Henry Marcus Clark in 1913, his son Reginald Marcus Clark (1883-1953) (later Sir Reginald) took over the business until the family-run business was taken over by rival Waltons in 1966. The Bon Marche store had already closed in 1961 and moved to the suburb of Liverpool, and the Railway Square store closed in 1965⁹².

Mark Foy's

Mark Foy's first retail outlet was in Oxford Street, a short stroll from Hyde Park. It was established in 1885 by Francis (c1856-1918) and Mark Foy (1865-1950) and named in honour of their father, who ran a drapery store in Bendigo and Melbourne. The innovative and flamboyant Francis ran the company in its first decades when it expanded from a drapery to a department store.

As well as clothing, fashion accessories and jewellery, Mark Foy's supplied all kinds of home furnishings. A Furniture catalogue in about 1901 claimed that the store could supply the front door mat, the back door mat and everything in between.



Figure 17 Mark Foy's, c1930 (Museums of History NSW)

Mark Foy's massive new store, taking up almost a city block between Liverpool, Elizabeth and Castlereagh Streets, opened in 1908 and was known as The Piazza. The three storey store (two stories plus basement) had a turreted roof and was modelled partly on the grand Bon Marche department store in Paris. Business was so brisk that further stores were opened nearby to sell furniture and carpets, ironmongery and hardware, and a knitting factory and bulk store.

The main store was considerably extended in 1927-30 to create a six-storey building. Mark Foy's had the advantage of being situated next to the Museum underground railway station, constructed in 1926, and provision was even made in the 1908 building design for a subway entrance directly to the store.

However, Mark Foy's fortunes began suffer after 1960, as did many large city retailers due to changing demographics and shopping patterns. In 1968, McDowell's Ltd took over the company, and it was in turn taken over by Waltons in 1972. The store continued to trade as Mark Foy's until taken over by Grace Bros in 1980. Then in 1983, Grace Bros closed its doors and retailing ceased in the Piazza building. Today the building is known as the Downing Centre and serves as Local and District Courts⁹³.

Farmer's

Joseph and Caroline Farmer established a drapery business in Pitt Street Sydney in 1840⁹⁴. Farmer retired from business in 1847, leasing the shop to the firm Price and Favenc, which in 1849 became Farmer, Williams and Giles when a nephew William Farmer joined the business⁹⁵.

In 1869, the company eventually became Farmer and Company, commonly known as Farmer's. John Pope (1827-1912) was the driving force of the company for many years, and was succeeded by his sons Parke and Norman. The building underwent a major rebuild and expansion in 1907⁹⁶.

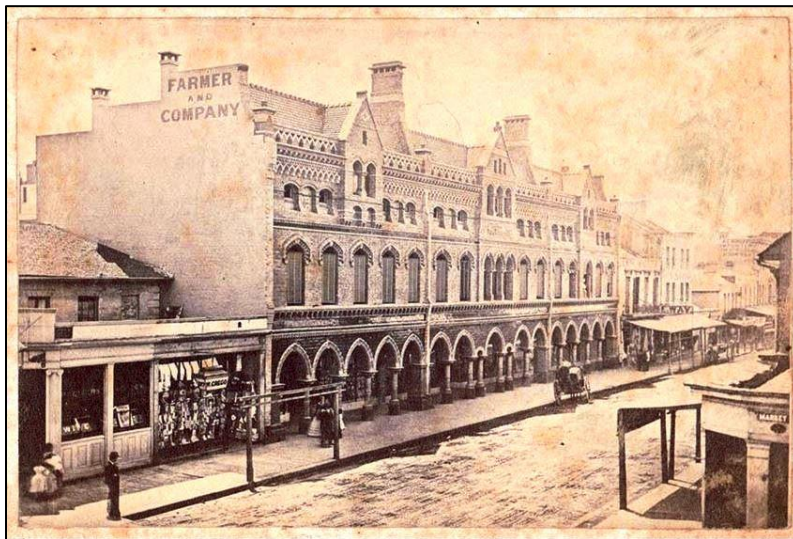


Figure 18 Farmer & Co, Pitt St, c1875 (State Library of NSW)

In 1923, Farmer and Co Ltd established a radio broadcasting station, known as 2FC after the company name⁹⁷. It operated from a studio in Pitt Street with a transmitter at Willoughby. Receivers tuned to its frequency only went on sale shortly after (under the “sealed set” scheme)⁹⁸, but with the repeal of the “sealed set” legislation, 2FC increased its power and changed its frequency from long-wave to the medium-wave band. The station was acquired by the Australian Broadcasting Company Ltd in 1929⁹⁹, and in 1932 was nationalised and became part of the current Australian Broadcasting Commission (the ABC).

By 1960, the retail sector was undergoing consolidation, and that year Farmer's acquired the regional retailer Western Stores¹⁰⁰. In early 1961, Farmer's was in turn acquired by Myer Emporium Ltd¹⁰¹. The New South Wales stores continued to trade as Farmer's through the 1960s, but following the final buy-out of Farmer & Co shares in 1969¹⁰², all their stores were rebranded as Myer stores in about 1974.

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- ²⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 January 1878.
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- ²⁷ City of Sydney Rate Assessment Books, 1877.
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- ²⁹ *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 March 1900.
- ³⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 September 1880.
- ³¹ *The Sydney Mail*, 4 June 1892.
- ³² *Truth*, 21 January 1900.
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