

CAMPBELLTOWN CITY COUNCIL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Our Fruitful Record: A history of Market Gardening in Campbelltown

Oral history interview with Dennis Lorenz
recorded by Di Booker on 18th January 2018
at Athelstone, South Australia

Interview 1130/10

Also present is Dennis' wife, Jill Lorenz

Participants:

OH: Interviewer

DL: Dennis Lorenz

JL: Jill Lorenz

OH: This is an interview with Dennis Lorenz, recorded by Di Booker on the 18th January at Athelstone. Also present is his wife, Jill Lorenz. It is part of the Campbelltown City Council oral history project, Our Fruitful Record, A History of Market Gardens in Campbelltown. Thank you, Dennis for agreeing to be part of this project and I'm sure that it, it will be really interesting to hear about your aspect of the market garden history of Campbelltown.

DL: Hope so.

OH: Sure. So we'll start with just some questions about you and the family. So what's your full name?

DL: Dennis Cleland Lorenz.

OH: And is Cleland a family name?

DL: It was my father's second name and that's as far back as that goes.

OH: So as a personal question, what's your date of birth?

DL: 5/11/43 born on Guy Fawkes Day, but they don't have that any more so.

OH: No. So where were you born?

DL: Down at St Peter's which is just out of Adelaide.

OH: And what's the full name of your father?

DL: Jack Cleland Lorenz.

OH: And where was he born?

DL: He was born in the old house at 11 Manresa Court.

OH: And when was he born?

DL: 1st February, 1912.

OH: And was he always a market gardener?

DL: Yeah his father bought the land, he worked in some of the land that he finished up buying and then Dad went straight from school into the garden because his father died when Dad was 28. So he had to go straight into the garden, I think he was 14 or 15 when he went straight into the garden, which happened back in those days.

OH: And was it the same with you, did you go straight-?

DL: I was 15 when I started in the garden and it was a good life, hard but.

OH: Especially on days like today?

DL: Well you get the hotter the weather the more watering you had to do and that stuff but-

OH: Well we'll talk about the water shortly. So what was the full name of your mother?

DL: Well she was Clarice May Tregeagle, she come from Tea Tree Gully and they got married in 1938.

OH: And do know when she was born?

DL: 9th May, 1915.

OH: And do you have any siblings?

DL: I've got three boys.

OH: No your brothers and sisters.

DL: Oh brother, I've got two sisters, one 18 months older than me, and one 10 years younger. Maureen is the oldest one and Cheryl's the youngest one.

OH: And were they involved in the gardening at all?

DL: No they was never worked in the garden.

OH: No so it was mainly the boys?

DL: Well yeah.

OH: And so we've got Jill here with us today. So when did you get married?

DL: Married on the 27th of, 21st of March, 1970, no what was it? 20th March, 1973.

JL: 1971

DL: 1971.

OH: '71 it's important.

DL: Hard to remember.

OH: It is. And so what are the names of your children?

DL: The oldest, I've got three boys Darren who's the oldest he's, was born in '73, he manages a cattle station 100ks east of Birdsville, one of which was Kidman Stations, now been bought by Gina Rinehart. And Jamie lives over at Ingle Farm he's a landscaper and Troy's the youngest one he was born in '78 and he's a salesman for Redox.

OH: So the land is in the some of the blood of the descendants then?

DL: They're all on the land in a different way not, not market gardening but half tied up with the land I suppose or partly tied up with the land.

OH: So what are your earliest memories of Campbelltown and Athelstone, of this area?

DL: Oh probably going to the primary school up here which is, is it still a library?

OH: No it's not at the moment.

DL: No the library, well it was a library up here and that's, there was nothing but, much between where we lived and the school. We used to walk up there and it was just like a country town Athelstone back in those days and no fear of anything and just ride your bikes around anywhere and.

OH: So you mentioned that you started in, in the gardens when you were about 15, but were you in, involved in the gardens before then when you-?

DL: Yeah when you was a kid you're always out there doing something helping and getting in the way and.

OH: So you grew up in this area. So who lived in your home when you were, were a child was it just your parents and your brothers and sisters, your sisters rather-?

DL: We all lived in the, in the house mum and Dad built a new house when they first got married on the Gorge Road and we lived there. When we first got married there's an old house at the, what they call it Manresa Cottage now, we lived there for eight years and then built a new house on Manresa Court, or what is now Manresa Court, used to be Addison Avenue years ago and then it got changed to Manresa Court. So I've only ever moved about 100 metres from where I was brought up.

OH: Makes moving easy doesn't it?

DL: Still on, part of the original land what was part of the garden after it got sold.

OH: You're probably one of the few people who do still live on the land and on the same land?

DL: I don't think there's too many others live on there, where they was gardening?

OH: No. So what was the neighbourhood like though, was it mostly gardens all around here?

DL: It was all gardens when we, when I was young back in the '50s, I can remember, well partly back in the '50s and it was just all gardens. I think the first one that got sold was up where the primary school is now, that was another Lorenz family and that was Dad's cousin. I think that got sold around about 1960 because they had no, well the sons didn't want to take it over and they'd got a bit old to continue gardening and I think that's one of the first ones that was sold.

OH: So who were your nearest neighbours then?

DL: Well that one what I've just said was Dad's cousin, that was four brothers and their place joined ours and then on, over where St Ignatius school is now that was, someone was gardening there at one stage but it wasn't very good land there. So there wasn't, and then it joined onto the cemetery and just a couple of little other places on either side.

OH: So the, the land was obviously a bit uneven in quality then in, in all around?

DL: Most of ours was sandy soil, we had one section which was red Bay of Biscay but most of it was pretty sandy stuff. Good to work in the winter when it was wet but not so good in the summer when it needed a lot of water.

OH: So how much land then did your family work?

DL: It was 18 acres all told, 13 on the northern side of Gorge Road and five acres on the southern side of Gorge Road where Dad built his house. And then the northern side got sold for subdivision when Dad got too old to work in 1973, then it was subdivided but we kept the, $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre was sold in the mid '60s, Ampol was going to put a service station on a triangle corner, right opposite the cemetery, but that never eventuated and we kept the other $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres which is where we live now.

OH: So I guess when your father gardened you used horses did you?

DL: It was horses, tractors was just coming into it in the '50s but we still had the one horse when I started and they said tractors could never do what they call row work, in-between rows of caulies and cabbage and stuff that a tractor could do, but that was soon proved wrong.

OH: Depends on the driver.

DL: Well they, early days in early '50s they never had the machinery, the stuff to fit on the tractor to do the rows. But so you walked up and down all the rows, single row with a horse, but then they got machinery fit on the back on the tractor, whereas a tractor could go all the day, the horse couldn't go all day. So but we would have used a horse into the early '60s, the last horse we had.

OH: Oh as late as that, I didn't realise.

DL: Well I started in '59 we were still using the horse for a few things then. So that would have been a few years into the '60s when we stopped using the horse.

OH: So in, in your father's time did you employ other people to work in the garden?

DL: Dad had, there was two other houses on the property one either side of the road and he would employ, well they were Australian men originally local chaps from around the area. And then the later years just before I started, he seemed to get the people that come out from Holland and Dutch men they seemed to like to work in the garden, they would come here for a few years when they first come out from Holland and then once they got settled they'd usually go somewhere else and he'd get someone else. But he was lucky that there was two houses that he could put the workman in so.

OH: And you mentioned before about the Italians who used to come out on the Saturday morning.

DL: They all used to ride out Saturday mornings 6:30 am, 7:00 am and ride up the road and sing out, "Job boss, job boss." All looking for work because there's a lot of them worked in the factories which didn't work on weekends and they'd just come up and get a few extra dollars for working over the weekend, but that, that was early in the piece, that wouldn't have gone too long into the '60s.

OH: No, no.

DL: Mainly in the '50s is when that would have happened.

OH: So when you took over it was a smaller plot of land. So did you mostly work it on your own?

DL: Oh I was working with Dad, I was.

OH: When your father retired?

DL: Oh well that's when it was sold, when the 13 acres on the north side of Gorge Road that was sold in '73 and that's when Dad retired. He had to have a hip operation so he couldn't continue and by then it was starting to get subdivided all around here and getting houses close and people that come into the houses didn't like the smell of the sprays and fertilisers and stuff and so eventually all the land went.

OH: So what sort of crops did you grow?

DL: Variety of crops, mainly caulis and cabbage in the winter, potatoes, sweet corn. Dad used to grow beans early in the piece before I started but we never grew beans when I was started gardening. Tomatoes for sauce for down at Rosella when they was down at Kent Town, used to grow sauce tomatoes during the summer and a variety of crops.

OH: So were there any other contracts that you had apart from the tomatoes?

DL: One year we had a contract for beetroot for one of the factories and just as the beetroot was ready, the factory got burnt down by fire.

OH: Oh dear.

DL: So the beetroot was left in the ground, eventually they rebuilt the factory and the beetroot was sold to them but it wasn't in real good condition when it was sold, but they still took it so.

OH: Oh I guess that's something that you can't predict those sorts of things, can you?

DL: No it was just, I think that was a one off year the beetroot that I remember, but.

OH: So what hours did you work on the gardens then? How long, how long was the day?

DL: Well mainly from nearly not long after daylight and depends on weather conditions in the summer you could be working from daylight till dark. Winter because the days were shorter, but the summer was, well everyone knows what watering is like trying to keep stuff wet and keep it survive. So no the days was pretty long.

OH: When you, so you planted seeds?

DL: Well caulis and cabbage you use the seed and you plant it in a seedbed, just in a small area and then after about six weeks they, when they grow then you transplant them out.

OH: So what time of the year did you do plant the seeds and then transplant the little-?

DL: Probably November, December, January, February depends on what crop it was. Sweet corn was planted by seed, well I suppose potatoes were too but you had to get the potatoes and cut them into pieces and plant them, they was, later years they was planted with a machine but the early years they was planted by hand. You'd plough a, a furrow with a tractor and walk along with them in a tin bucket and just poke them in, about the 6 or 8 inches deep in the side of the bank, then plough another furrow and just put them in but the, then machines come in and made that a lot easier.

OH: I can imagine that machinery made a lot of difference to a lot of the processes.

DL: It made a big difference; you could grow more stuff and need the bigger areas and just made things a lot easier.

OH: So what was really the busiest time of the year or was it pretty much the same all year round?

DL: Probably busy most of the year, you had different crops and you had to come in different times of the year, caulis and cabbage during the winter and potatoes during the summer. So you'd always find something to do.

OH: Well how did you water the gardens?

DL: Well when I started it used to be what they call drill watering, you'd make a gutter, like a gutter and run the water down the drill and then once machinery come into it, well you'd just use a machine a plant it, put it on the back of a tractor and transplant your, all your seedlings you've grown just off the back of a tractor with a machine.

OH: So with the water, did you use sprinklers or did you use other means?

DL: Well sprinklers come in after the drills was used, they gradually come in, they were start coming in the '50s probably and you could-

OH: So where did you get the water from?

DL: Well Fifth creek run through our place and while there was water in there we'd use out of the, the creek, had a big cement tank which was built in the early 1940s, 50,000 gallons and they'd pump the water into there and there was also a dam, they'd run the water into the dam. But then the creek doesn't run all year round, there was a bore on the place, but the bore water wasn't real good. And they would mix the bore water with the mains water and use that when the creek stopped running. You couldn't use the bore water on most vegetable because there was too much salt in it, but it was alright if you mixed it and made a shandy of it.

OH: So if you had to use mains water it would have been quite expensive then?

DL: Well not like it is today.

OH: No, no but still-

DL: No but back then you could, oh probably grow your vegetables on mains water because it was that cheap, but as it's got dearer and dearer you wouldn't want to be doing it now it's just, but back then it wasn't too bad.

OH: So what sort of buildings did you, did you have on the land apart from the houses did you have lots of-?

DL: Only sheds.

OH: Sheds.

DL: Sheds for the truck and-

OH: Package.

DL: Tractors and that to finish up.

OH: A packing shed or something like ...?

DL: We never used to pack anything here, they used to be taken straight on the truck to market mainly cut it, caulis and cabbage first thing in the morning and take them straight to the market which was down in Rundle Street on the Rundle and, corner of Rundle Street and Grenfell Street, East Terrace there.

OH: I've seen photographs of the, some of the other families who grew cabbages and caulis and they were piled high on the trucks.

DL: There was a bit of art in stacking them on the truck, but you had to put them in, put the corner ones, and then put the others on top to hold them in and they'd drive into town and I don't think there was ever too many lost off the truck.

OH: So did you go to market or did you?

DL: We didn't go to the early market, we went into the merchants probably 9:30am, 10:00 am into the packing merchants and not to early market where the, all the greengrocers and stuff went, they used to go in 4:00 am, 4:30 am and sell it there, but we never went to that.

OH: And when you, you grew tomatoes?

DL: Only for sauce, sauce tomatoes for Rosella factory.

OH: But did you, did you have glasshouses or?

DL: No.

OH: No.

DL: They was just grown out on open, open paddock.

OH: And who, who tied them up?

DL: They didn't tie up, they was just a bush that grew on the ground.

OH: Oh really?

DL: They didn't need staking up, they just a, just sat on the ground and.

OH: Now there, all around you were neighbours, even if they were a little way away, so who, who were the nearest gardeners to you?

DL: Well Dad's cousin, that was Henry, George, Clyde and Stirling Lorenz they joined our place on the northern side. And there was a, Rotollo's on the east side and then it was divided by Schulze Road on the west side and there was virtually no one on the southern side.

OH: And you were on the border then for then?

DL: Well it was the Addison Avenue what went up, which is now Manresa Court and then, there was a garden where St Ignatius is, but that didn't last that long, not in what I remember.

OH: I heard a story about some of the early people who lived on that bit of land just this week and I'll tell you about later.

DL: Where St Ignatius is?

OH: Yes. But so did you have a lot of contact with all of the other gardeners in the area though?

DL: Oh a certain amount of contact, used to help each other a little bit, certain ones, not everyone but probably two or three other gardeners if you was busy they'd help you, and if you was not quite so busy, you'd go and help them, to a certain extent but you couldn't do it all the time because you had your own work to do.

OH: So what did this area look like when you were in, in the garden? There were just, there's the house next door where you lived and the house across the road and-?

DL: Well there was the service station just up the road, which was owned by Ed Coventry and then between there, there was the Institute and then only about one other house before up the school. So there was virtually nothing on this side, down towards the reservoir which is all houses now, that was a lot of time it was just scotch thistles, no one even worked the land as garden land, it was sort of, well not scrub but just scotch thistles and but there was a few gardens between Schulze Road and the reservoir.

OH: And was, was Jill involved in the garden at all?

DL: No she come in, well we got married two years before it was sold. So she was never tied up, she helped a bit in later years when we used a couple of other places as, because I kept market gardening after it was sold, after Dad sold it and retired, I still kept gardening. And she helped a bit then we went up along the river leased some land from the Government what was now the Linear Park and we grew celery up there and she used to come and help wash that and-

OH: So whereabouts was that in, perhaps in relation to, was it near the golf course the Campbelltown Golf Course was-?

DL: No it was up the top of Athelstone-

OH: Up a further-?

DL: Down near Gorge Road goes or Coulls Road it was in, the ones that had it was Dean Packer and his brother Bruce and then they sold to the Government or the Government relieved them of it. And another one Eric De Ionno and they bought that for the Linear Park and we leased that up there for eight years. Went up there with a lad, young lad who was Bradley Walker and just before that we'd, I'd use land just north of the Athelstone oval, worked there for five years till that got subdivided.

OH: And did you grow the same sort of crops on it-?

DL: Grew celery there-

OH: Celery.

DL: Because it was probably heavier ground which suited the celery more than the sandy soil.

OH: So well and we haven't talked about the soil, you mentioned it was mostly sandy soil that you were working. So what is the difference for people who don't understand soil types? What are the different strategies that you would be using for growing crops in sandy or bad soil?

DL: Well the sandy soil is easier to work when it's wet, doesn't stick like the Bay of Biscay soil, probably needs fertiliser, not as much but more often because it leeches through the ground, whereas the Bay of Biscay soil is heavier, especially down along the river the black soil. It's good to grow stuff in, holds more water content, you don't have to put the amount of

water on but in the winter when it gets wet it's like glue, sticky and sticks to you and they've both got their good attributes.

OH: And you grow the same crops in both types of soil?

DL: We couldn't really grow the celery here where we are now, we in the sandy soil, it was just too, celery likes ground that held the moisture, didn't dry out as quick, but later years they've breed different sorts that they grow in sandier soils. So but back in those days there was only certain varieties of stuff and that's the ones you went by.

OH: Campbelltown seems to have a bit of reputation for celery doesn't it?

DL: Well at one stage a few years ago now and I remember when there was 102 celery growers in South Australia. And later years I went out to Virginia for 10 years and there was four of us, four celery growers because all along the river got subdivided for houses and that and but back those days you couldn't grow the areas, because they had no sprays for the weeds and stuff and a lot of it was done with hoeing the weeds. And then later years they brought the sprays in to kill the weeds and you could just spray them instead of hoeing and that made things easier and you could grow bigger areas but.

OH: The library had a photograph of a, a child hold, standing against a, a stick of celery that was, a bunch of celery that was as tall as she was, I don't know if you have seen that photo but-

DL: I've seen that, it was down at Packers I think.

OH: Oh was it, amazing how tall they grow.

DL: Well years ago they used to celery grew taller and they used to put boards on it, either side of the row about a fortnight before they cut it to make it go white, bleach it. And the celery then grew taller and then in later years they brought in what they called American celery was shorter and was supposed to be stringless and you didn't have to put the boards on that so much, it bleached itself. And then finish up, they virtually stopped bleaching it altogether and people just eat green celery. So the varieties changed and the American celery was probably about half the height of what the old celery used to be.

OH: So when you weren't gardening after hours, what, what were the activities that you and, and your neighbours got up to?

DL: We was well behaved, oh we used to, well later years when you was old enough we used to go fishing, go out crabbing out the Port Gawler and Thompsons Beach, late in the afternoon rake in crabs. Played sport, played tennis and football, and-

OH: So was it a fairly close community?

DL: Years ago it was, you knew who everyone in the area, but then once they brought in subdivision people would come in and well in Athelstone now there's, I wouldn't know 1% of the people because most of the-

OH: It's different.

DL: My generation have moved away from the area or passed on, but well it's back then it was, wasn't many houses here. So you knew everyone.

OH: And so you played football at the Athelstone Football Club?

DL: I played there when I was a junior and then I played out at Norwood for a few years and then come back and when I was in mid-20's I played the last year at Athelstone and I busted my knee and that was the end of that so.

OH: It's often the way with sport isn't it?

DL: Yeah.

OH: So after you finished gardening in this area you, where did you go after that, where, what work did you do after here and then you, you had the land further up on the river but?

DL: Well, well after I think in '79 for five years was down on the river just below the football oval, where it is now and then eight years up where Packers and De Ionno's were up along the river. And then in 1993 went out to Virginia for 10 years with Paul and Cyril Emery we bought some land out there and the 3 of us went out there for 10 years.

OH: And was that celery there?

DL: It was all celery and, mainly celery and a few cabbage out there, that's all we grew out there. Used to still live home here but go out there each day and back which is, it was 30 odd kilometres out there. So it was a bit of drag going out and back but it, it was alright for 10 years.

OH: So when did the land, when did the market gardens start to be sold, you mentioned something about the '60s?

DL: About 1960 the, Dad's cousins who was next to us on the northern side they was about the first one, would have been around 1960 I think they sold where the Athelstone Primary

School is now, they sold and that's about the first one I can remember. There wasn't probably much happened for a few years after that and then when Dad sold in 1973 there was a few, fair few gardens went around the same time then, it was when the subdivision really started to get in Athelstone and then it went pretty quick from then on.

OH: Well when you think about its relatively close to town isn't it, so it was an attractive area for housing.

DL: Well suburbs just expanded out from town and this was the area that it gobbled up because Athelstone goes to the foothill so they can't go much past here.

OH: No, no.

DL: So it's just virtually as the base of the foothills.

OH: So what changes have you noticed then when you're driving around Athelstone about how the land's being used these days?

DL: Well it's nothing like it used to be, it's just like being in a nearly in the middle of Adelaide now, whereas before you could just drive around and occasionally our horse used to get out and he'd just wander up the road into the cousin's place because they had a horse too. And they'd just go up there and we used to run a few cows down along the creek, milk the cows and tie them out on the edge of the road; it was not much traffic going up and down the road. And during the day we'd take them out and let them feed along the edge of the road; just tie them up with a chain. And then at night you'd let them go, just let them go and they'd walk back to the shed where they used to be milked, they'd just knew to go back there. And but they wouldn't want to do it today they'd get run over, but those days there was hardly a car on the road.

OH: No, no so what other animals did you have in the, in the, on the property, did chickens?

DL: Mum always had fowls.

OH: Fowls.

DL: Fowls for egg and.

OH: Eating.

DL: And that's about all.

OH: Largely, well self-sufficient to a certain extent.

DL: Yeah every now and again they'd kill a chook and eat it and.

OH: What, when you mentioned, we were talking about the people in the neighbourhood you mentioned I think at our early discussion that your father worked for the Fry's for a while.

DL: No Dad's father, my grandfather.

OH: Oh your grandfather worked for the Fry's.

DL: My grandfather.

OH: It seems as though nearly everybody worked for the Fry's at some stage.

DL: William Fry he had a big garden and my grandfather he come out from Germany in 1876 I think when he was about five months old, he was bought out by his father. And then the father who brought them out he got killed down at the reservoir when he was 44 years old. He wouldn't pay for his drink down there one day and they had a bit of an argument and he got knocked off the balcony and lobbed on his head and killed him. So my grandfather had to start in the garden when he was about 12 or 13, take over.

OH: Oh gosh.

DL: So because there was no one to take it over and then he'd, he worked for William Fry who had, he had a lot of gardens around. And then eventually they, he bought his own land and what we had when it was sold.

OH: I've run out of questions but I'm wondering if you've got any other stories that you'd like to record for the, for the project and that you?

DL: Other stories.

OH: Or just anecdotes that, that you have to tell.

DL: Probably can't think of much, we've covered a fair bit of it.

OH: No.

DL: So just that it was good times back then, free and as I said before just like a little country town, where nothing seemed to go wrong and you'd just roam around and go and visit someone, walk up the edge of the road with your toy truck or something and no worries about anything happening but.

OH: I just had a thought, so did most of the gardeners grow similar crops or were, were there, were, did you have an arrangement that you grew different things?

DL: No there was no arrangement.

OH: No.

DL: You just, one thing I forgot to mention though we grew carrots and parsnips, a fair few carrots and parsnips, they grew well in the sandy soil. But no you just grew whatever you thought was going to bring in the most money to survive on. So someone who was short one year everyone would seem to plant the next year and then there'd be plenty the next year and the thing that grew the year before well that was short because everyone had changed over but no mostly you grew virtually the same things year after year but there was no rule on what you could grow.

OH: No, no.

DL: Just everyone for themselves.

OH: I just and I know there was a, a Market Gardeners Association at one stage and Campbelltown had, seemed to have had a section and of that, a branch of the Market Gardeners Association.

DL: Well I can't remember anything about that.

OH: No, no it-

DL: Because Campbelltown was a little bit separate from Athelstone, there was a lot of Italians come out into the Campbelltown area when they come out in the '40s and '50s but we mainly located on, you, you knew some of them down there, but you didn't associate garden wise with them.

OH: No.

DL: Not as though you was in opposition or anything but.

OH: Well I think we've probably covered everything then and so I'd like to say thank you to you both to-

DL: That's okay.

OH: For giving up your time this morning and having to think about the, all the things that you probably had forgotten about some of them.

DL: Well you can still remember certain things but then you've got to think about dates and other things which has passed quickly by, by and they're, they're going quicker every year you get older. And so you've always got the memories.

OH: Anyway thank you very much Dennis and thank you, Jill.

DL: That's okay, thank you.

(Recorder switched off)