

## LUNA PARK SITE HISTORY BEFORE 1935

Before the arrival of Europeans in N.S.W., the Aboriginal Cammeraygal, lived along the Milsons Point foreshores and surrounding bushland. From the beginning of Sydney's settlement the Milsons Point area was a place for picnics and entertainment. In 1789 Governor Phillip watched performances by aborigines who danced on this site in return for rum, trinkets and cloth.

The first permanent settlement was established by 1806 when James Milson farmed the area supplying vegetables, milk and spring water to Sydney. He also quarried sandstone and built a house near the site of the northeast pylon of the Harbour Bridge.

In the 1830's Billy Blue rowed passengers across the harbour. By 1837, the steep rocky slopes of the Luna Park site were inhabited by a few watermen (boat operators) who ferried paying passengers. In 1886 a cable tram service commenced operation between Milsons Point wharf and Ridge Street North Sydney. Soon after Milsons Point became the most popular point on the north side for a harbour crossing.

In 1890 the railway line was completed from Hornsby to St. Leonards and then further extended to Milsons Point in 1893. The rocky slopes were cut back extensively almost to water level as a 'platform' was created to make way for the railway line. The sandstone removed was used as fill to widen and straighten the shoreline.

A bridge across the harbour had been considered for many years before the Government announced a proposal for a high level bridge in 1911. In 1915 a new railway station was opened further back on the line in Lavender Bay, releasing the area now occupied by Luna Park for the construction workshop site for a bridge. However it was not until 1923 Dorman Long and Co Ltd of Middlesbrough, England made a successful tender to design and construct the Harbour Bridge. From 1924 – 1932 they occupied the Luna Park site plus all the waterfront land adjacent to the bridge. They excavated more of the cliff at Luna Park and used the fill to further widen and straighten the shoreline, creating a flat site large enough for two huge workshops. They also built a wharf with cranes suitable for overseas vessels to dock and unload materials. Extending from in front of Coney Island to the northern pylon of the Harbour Bridge, the workshops were reputed to be the largest in the southern hemisphere.

After the bridge was completed the government, as promised, ensured the demolition of all the buildings. The only structure to remain was the wharf. NSW Government and North Sydney Council agreed that the area should be developed as a recreational area as North Sydney lacked such facilities. Tenders were called for its use for public amusements. The tender was won by Hermann Phillips of Melbourne who formed Luna Park (NSW) Pty Ltd and commenced a twenty year lease on 11 May 1935.

## THE LUNA PARK STORY

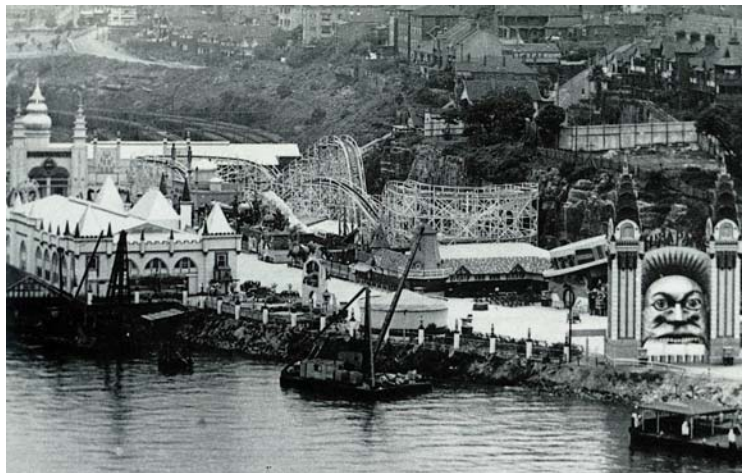
The origins of Luna Park go back to Coney Island, U.S.A., part of metropolitan New York, where in the late 1800's a number of competing amusement parks sprang up. Elmer Dundy and Frederick Thompson developed an amusement called A Trip to the Moon which was extremely successful. In 1903 they opened their own amusement park on Coney Island and called it Luna Park in acknowledgement of their successful ride.

Soon Luna Parks spread throughout the world. American showmen, brothers Herman, Leon and Harold Phillips with J.D. Williams, opened Australia's first Luna Park at St. Kilda in 1912. Showman David Atkins noticed its enormous success and convinced the Phillips to open a Luna Park in Glenelg, Adelaide in 1930. Ted Hopkins an electrical engineer joined the Park just prior to its opening to complete the electrical and mechanical installation. Despite several successful seasons, the Glenelg park was forced to close because of friction with the local residents and a local council that resisted any changes or expansion of the Park.

Herman Phillips and David Atkins commenced a search for a suitable place to relocate the South Australian Luna Park and found the vacant Harbour Bridge factory site at Milsons Point. Under the guidance of Ted Hopkins, Luna Park Glenelg was dismantled, packed up, transported by ship and unloaded onto the Dorman Long wharf and reassembled in Sydney.

Herman Phillips planned the layout of the park, Rupert Browne a scenic artist from Luna Park St Kilda gave the layout artistic imagination and Ted Hopkins made everything work – physically, mechanically and electrically. The whole Sydney site was constructed in just over 3 months and involved the employment of 800 structural workers, 70 electricians and 35 artists as well and many others.

When the doors opened at 8.00pm on 4 October, 1935 it cost 6d to enter (3d for children) and 6d for most rides. The Big Dipper and Coney Island cost 9d. The Park was an instant success. After the first year, the admission charge was removed and Luna Park proudly advertised "Admission Free"



Luna Park 1935

During the war years the lights of Luna Park were "browned out" and the Park became a magnet for servicemen. The Park was closed every winter and this gave an opportunity to move, overhaul and paint the rides and add new attractions. This continued until 1972. The amusement Park ran smoothly under the control of showmen from 1935 to 1970 when Ted Hopkins retired.

In 1969 the lease on the park was sold to World Trade Centre Pty Ltd headed by Leon Fink. An application was made to develop the site as a trade centre consisting of multi-storey buildings designed by eminent architect, Harry Seidler. The state government refused the application and the park continued. During the 1970's the park was altered from its original state, some older rides were demolished, and new portable rides introduced but they lacked the artistic facades that had been characteristic of the Park. The lease ran out in 1976 and operation continued on a weekly basis. The Park stopped closing for its regular winter maintenance schedules and in 1979 a tragic fire in the ghost train ride finally caused Luna Park to close down completely.



1960's view of park

Artists were involved in Luna Park from the earliest days. Rupert Browne was brought up from Luna Park Melbourne, designed the first entry face and did all the original artwork during the park's 1935 construction phase. After the park opened Arthur Barton became the resident artist until 1970. He designed murals, panels and cut outs as well as the fifth entry face. In the seventies Martin Sharp and Peter Kingston along with Richard Liney, and many others were commissioned to revitalise the Park.

The government called for tenders for use of the site in July 1979 with a second and third round called. Public agitation was growing. At this time Friends of Luna Park, headed by Martin Sharp and Peter Kingston, was established. They organised exhibitions, public meetings and a protest concert to draw attention to the park's condition.

The Luna Park operating contract was eventually won in 1980 by a company which became known as Harbourside Amusements Pty Ltd. This consortium was led by Sir Arthur George with Harold and Colman Goldstein.

In April 1981, after unsuccessful negotiations between the old and the new lessees over the name and key equipment, the Government forced the old lease owners to vacate the site. On 31 May and 1 June 1981, an auction was held within the park and many of the original amusements and artworks were sold. When the new operators entered the site, the Big Dipper, David Jones Locker and the River Caves were bulldozed and burnt.

New rides were installed and the park took on a distinctive American theme park flavour reopening in May 1982. In 1987 the lease was transferred to Prome Amusements and Luna Park “closed for renovations” in April 1988. The entry face was removed and the towers dismantled. There were two further changes to the name of the leaseholder and an application was made to redevelop the park as “an adult entertainment centre with high rise towers”.

While Luna Park remained dilapidated and empty, public pressure increased. In November 1989, the Government announced there would be no high rise development on the Luna Park site and the lease was withdrawn in June 1990 following the leaseholder’s failure to re-open the park as an amusement centre.



Early 1990's restoration work

After years of lobbying by the dedicated Friends of Luna Park assisted by North Sydney Council, the government passed the Luna Park Site Act in 1990. This act made the site Crown land dedicated for public recreation, amusement and entertainment. The Luna Park Reserve Trust was formed and took control of the park on 12 October 1990 and major restoration of all its buildings began in 1992

After the State Government spent a reported \$55m on revamping the Park it reopened in January 1995 under the management of Luna Park Amusements Pty Ltd – a joint venture company whose major shareholders were the Government through Luna Park Reserve Trust and Wittingslow Amusement Group of Melbourne. It was open for only just over a year, residents complaints about the new Big Dipper caused it to be closed in February 1996. Without the revenue from the Big Dipper, running the Park as an amusement park was not viable.

In 1997, the Government adopted The Luna Park Plan of Management after consultation with residents, the general public and potential operators. The precinct of Luna Park and its associated heritage items were classified and placed on the Register of the National Estate.

The operators of the Metro Theatre in George Street Sydney, Peter Hearne and Warwick Doughty, along with Michael Edgley formed Metro Edgley Pty. Ltd. (MEPL) to bring their vision for the closed park to fruition. The large Australian construction company Multiplex along with local businessmen joined MEPL and after a long and rigorous public tender process period, the NSW Government announced in July 1999 that Metro Edgley was the preferred proponent to lease and run the Park



2004 Redevelopment with new Big Top on the right

In July 2001 the Big Dipper rollercoaster was sold and moved to Dreamworld on Queensland's Gold Coast and renamed "the Cyclone". Final approvals for the redevelopment work were announced on 25 January 2003 and building work commenced soon after.

The redevelopment is based on keeping the site's unique identity and heritage features while providing a range of new entertainment, tourism and social facilities. A new 2,000 seat Big Top, onsite car park, restaurant/brasserie, refurbished Crystal Palace function centre now stand alongside the restored old favourites Coney Island, Wild Mouse, Rotor and other classic rides. At a cost in excess of \$80 million and at no cost to the taxpayer, the Park re-opened on 4 April 2004.

The tradition of popular art at Luna Park continues. Ashley Taylor who worked alongside artist Peter Kingston in the early 1990's is the current artist in residence, creating visual delights for the new millennium. Martin Sharp is working on a new ceramic tribute for the Ghost Train memorial.

### **REFERENCE BOOKS**

There has been a great deal of information written about Luna Park. North Sydney Council's Stanton Library holds an excellent collection of material on the subject as well as the site's history before 1935 in their Local Studies collection. You may access their library catalogue at [www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au](http://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au)

**Marshall, Sam** *Luna Park, Just for Fun*, Sydney, Chapter and verse, 1995

**Luna Park Sydney Pty Ltd** *Just for Fun - The Luna Park Story* Sydney, Luna Park Sydney Pty Ltd, 2004. Abridged from chapters 4-8 of *Luna Park - Just for Fun* by Sam Marshall with additions. Available for purchase from the Luna Park Sydney Shop

**Hopkins, E. A.** *A Few Brief Facts about the History of Luna Park from its Inception until 1940*. Unpublished paper, circa 1972

**Holleley, Douglas** *Image of a Funfair*. Sydney, Printed by Douglas Holleley, 1996

**Friends of Luna Park** *Report on Luna Park, Sydney, Australia*, NSW Dept of Public Works 1980

**Godden Mackay Pty Ltd.** *Luna Park/Lavender Bay Heritage Study*. Prepared for the NSW Dept of Planning in association with Sue Rosen and others. Vols 1 & 2. Sydney, Feb 1991

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**Clark, L. A.** *North of the Harbour, a brief history of transport to and on the North Shore*, Broadmeadow, N.S.W. Newey and Beath, 1976

**Jones, M** *North Sydney 1788-1988*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1988

**Mann, G.V.F** *Municipality of North Sydney. History and progress from earliest settlement 1788-1938*. North Sydney, Municipal Council of N.S., 1938

**Thorne, L.G.** *A History of North Shore Sydney from 1788 to Today* Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1979

### **VIDEO**

*Spirits of the Carnival* Produced by **Paperbark Films**, 1995. Available for purchase from the Luna Park Sydney Shop, \$24.95