

Mate's Store Window

Geoff Romero

Her hands were already on the window and then she pressed her nose to the glass. She was trying to get a closer look at the small figure of Santa Claus playing an organ in the window of Mates department store, Dean Street Albury.

"Come along Lesley, we have shopping to do" called her mother. Santa's hands moved along the small keyboard and his body swayed to the music. Lesley, a five-year-old girl, was transfixed.

As life sometimes goes, Lesley would later marry the grandson of the man who made the elaborate organ and the clever mechanical equipment which made it work. There were in excess of 100 working parts. The inventor was Stan Heppner. He was an electrical inspector with the Albury Municipal Council. He spent many hours in his workshop fabricating the metal parts he needed to assemble the elaborate mechanism which brought the small figures to life.



Left: Mate's Store window, corner of Dean & Kiewa Streets, Santa meets his maker, Stan Heppner

Right: Santa "tickling the ivories" in the store window display, Christmas 1968

Mates first Christmas window was displayed in 1956. Throughout the following two decades various themes were featured to thrill the young and young at heart. Alice in Wonderland, The Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella were all featured. The displays continued under Mates ownership until 1973 when Mates store was sold to Waltons.

At the request of Albury Council, Stan designed and built a floral clock with a 16 feet diameter to celebrate Albury being declared a city in 1947. Stan made the various parts in his workshop and assembled them in Dean Square. Stan was a man ahead of his time. He

also invented an electrical system to power his Council van. As he read the electricity meters for Council during the 1940s, he drove an electric vehicle. The rest of the world is now catching up!

He used his electrical prowess to fix kettles, irons and electric jugs for his friends and neighbours at little cost to them. If a war widow could not afford the parts Stan would pay for them out of his own pocket.

Stan Heppner also played drums and piano in a band with "Doc" Hogan and others at St Patrick's Hall and The Ritz Ballroom.

Communities like ours need people like Stan Heppner who bring colour to our city. He is an unsung hero who sought no public acclaim. He died in 1985 but the things he did are remembered by many.

At the December meeting of the Albury & District Historical Society members shared stories of the various ways in which Christmas had been celebrated in Albury over the years.