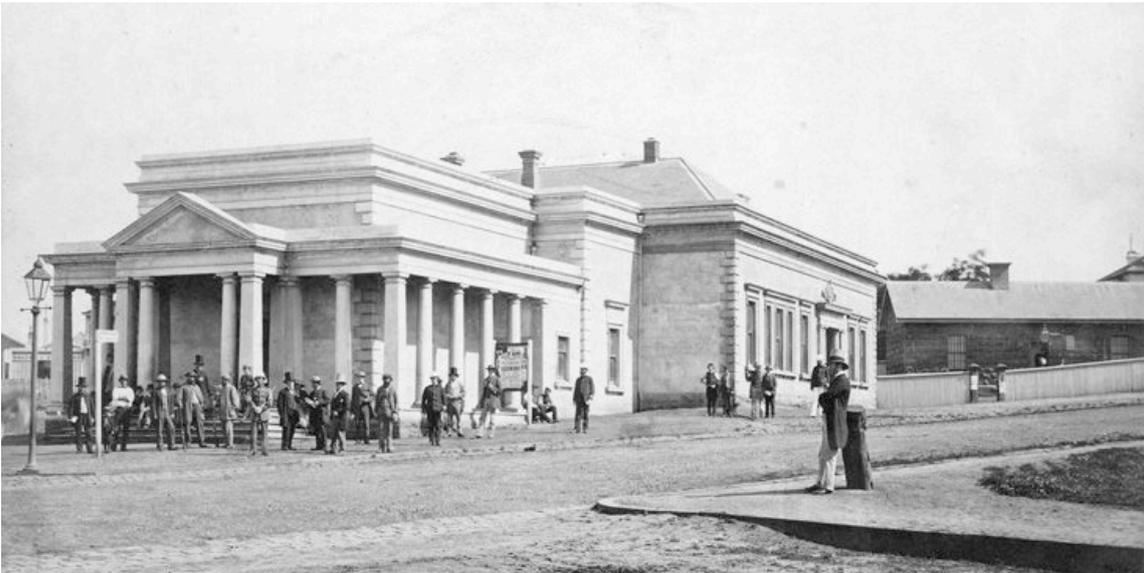


FIRST ST KILDA TOWN HALL



Courthouse and Town Hall, Barkly Street [ca. 1860], photographer unknown, Pictures Collection, State Library of Victoria

THE FIRST ST. KILDA TOWN HALL CORNER GREY AND BARKLY STREETS

Following the first sales of crown land in December 1842, St. Kilda rapidly became a fashionable suburb. It was under the jurisdiction of Melbourne Town Council until February 1857 when St. Kilda was proclaimed a separate municipal district. On Saturday, 7th March 1857, 250 residents attended a public meeting in a garden in Acland Street to nominate candidates for the new council. The election was held two days later at a polling booth at the Junction Hotel, and seven councillors were elected.

On 11th March 1857, the first council meeting was held in a public room at the Junction Hotel, at the corner of Barkly Street and High Street (now St. Kilda Road). For lack of other accommodation, most early meetings of municipal councils adjoining Melbourne were held at hotels of good repute. Two weeks later, St. Kilda council meetings were moved to the court house, which occupied a triangular piece of land bounded by Punt Road and St. Kilda Road, directly opposite the Junction Hotel. When a new court house was completed in April 1859 at the corner of Barkly and Grey Streets, council's weekly meetings were transferred there also.

Early in 1859, council bought properties so that Carlisle Street could be extended to meet Acland Street and the Esplanade. Some money remained from the amount allocated, so in May 1859 council directed the town surveyor to draw up plans and specifications for a town hall and municipal offices, modest in both size and design, on land next to the court house.

A description, presumably written by the Town Surveyor, tells us that the building was almost square, measuring 63 feet by 58 feet 6 inches. An 1862 engraving

FIRST ST KILDA TOWN HALL

shows that the façades were "in the Roman Doric style with Italian windows." Entrances from both Grey and Barkly Streets led to the council chamber, which extended the whole length of the building. There was a council committee room and rooms for the Town Clerk, the Town Surveyor and the contractors. The foundation stone was laid on 12th July 1859 by the Chairman of the Council, the Honourable Alexander Fraser, MLC. A handsome portico was added to the court house, "with pediment and flight of steps, facing the angle formed by the junction of Grey and Barkly Streets, and on either side of the portico is a colonnade of pillars in the Roman Doric style."

The impressive council chamber, with Roman Doric cornices and pilasters and a splendid ceiling rose, was designed so that it could also be used for public meetings, balls, etc. The first function, on 19th December 1859, was an inaugural lecture to the recently established St. Kilda Mechanics' Institute. St. Kilda council met in its handsome town hall for the first time on 4th January 1860. From 1860 to 1890, while the building was used by council, the shape of St. Kilda was set – streets were made, public transport routes established, churches, schools, shops and hotels erected, and the greater part of St. Kilda's housing built with the exception of Elwood, which was still a swamp.

Within a few years, it was obvious that the building was too small, but it was not until 1887 that the site of the present town hall was accepted and loan funds made available. A design by William Pitt was selected, which included a tower with a richly decorated pediment, a clock and a spire. On 23rd June 1890, St. Kilda council met for the first time in the new town hall, which had been completed minus clock and spire.

The old building in Grey Street was sold to the Victorian government on 29th September 1890. It was used as a court house and police station until 1930, when new police buildings were erected in Chapel Street. For a few months, the old building stood abandoned and derelict; it was then sold and replaced by the present block of flats.

Source:

Cooper, John Butler, The History of St. Kilda 1840 to 1930; Vol.I pp60-93; Vol.II pp39-64.