**HISTORY**

* **Ararat** is a city in south-west Victoria, Australia, about 2 hours (200km) west of Melbourne, at the southern end of the Wimmera and northern end of the Western District.
* **TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THE LAND**

The **Djab wurrung**, also **Tjapwurrung**, people are [Indigenous Australians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_Australians) who occupy the volcanic plains of central [Victoria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_%28Australia%29) from the [Mount William](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_William_%28Victoria%29) Range of [Gariwerd](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gariwerd%22%20%5Co%20%22Gariwerd) in the west to the [Pyrenees range](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyrenees_%28Victoria%29) in the east encompassing the [Wimmera River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wimmera_River) flowing north and the headwaters of the [Hopkins River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hopkins_River) flowing south. The towns of [Ararat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ararat%2C_Victoria), [Stawell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stawell%2C_Victoria) and [Hamilton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamilton%2C_Victoria) are within their territory. There were 41 Djab wurrung clans who formed an alliance with the neighboring [Jardwadjali](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jardwadjali%22%20%5Co%20%22Jardwadjali) people through intermarriage, shared culture, trade and moiety system.

Source – Wikipedia

* **EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT**
* **1836 Major Thomas Mitchell**, Surveyor-General of NSW, spent over a week exploring what was to become the shire of Ararat.
* **1840 Horatio Wills** explored the area he was later to settle (west of Ararat). The city’s name is derived from the nearby Mount Ararat (named by the early settler, Horatio Wills, who while exploring the area halted his party on high ground a few miles east of Mt William (Gariwerd/Grampians) to view the surrounding country. Turning eastward Wills pointed to the conical peak of the hills they had passed by. “We will call it Mount Ararat”, he said, “for like the ark we rested there.”)

Source – Wikipedia

* **Tom Wills** - one of Horatio’s 9 children, would later become famous for his exploits in cricket and being one of the founders of Australian Rules football.
* As a child, in Tom’s time at Lexington station (about 4km north east of Moyston and 14km west of Ararat), aboriginals may have played a traditional game called Marngrook where a stuffed possum skin was kicked and caught.
* At the age of 14 Tom went to England to attend Rugby School, where he became captain of its school cricket team and played an early version of rugby football.
* In 1858 he called for the formation of a "foot-ball club" with a "code of laws" to keep cricketers fit during winter. After founding the [Melbourne Football Club](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melbourne_Football_Club) in 1859, Wills co-wrote the first [laws of Australian rules football](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_of_Australian_rules_football). He and his cousin [H. C. A. Harrison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/H._C._A._Harrison) spearheaded the sport's development as captains, umpires and administrators.
* After a number of nearby short-lived gold rushes, a group of Chinese on their way to the area discovered the rich Canton lead which lead to the establishment of Ararat as a Mining District in 1857, Municipal District in 1858, a borough in 1863, a town in 1934 and a city in 1950.
* “Outdoor sport grew in popularity as the memory of pioneering days receded. Four or five times each season the town awoke to the call of the master’s horn and the music of the pack as the Hunt Club rode to meet at Mooney’s Gap, Cherry Tree Hill or Philip’s Flat.”

Source – “Green Pastures and Gold – A history of Ararat” by Lorna L Banfield

* 1871 – The Ararat Football was formed at a meeting at the Bull and Mouth Hotel on Friday 19th May
* *The Ararat and Pleasant Creek Advertiser - Friday 26/5/1871 – “*A football match was played on Wednesday afternoon on the cricket ground between two sides selected from all comers by Mr. Morres and Mr. Cook.

The first goal, after a spirited contest, was kicked by Morres. The second trial was contested even more vigorously than the first, and was not finished when the shades of evening put an end to the sport. Football is likely to become a popular game in Ararat during the ensuing winter.”

* Football took a little while to become fully established in the district. The Football club failed to form in 1872-3 apparently due to lack of interest, but formed in 1874 to play its first inter-town match against Stawell – a 15 aside game that yielded no goals.
* More than once there were letters to the editor bemoaning the lack of interest of the younger men in the town to form a club and play senior football. The Ararat Football Cub again failed to form in 1875,1881 and 1883-84, with Ararat Wanderers (a junior club) changing their name to Ararat Football club in 1882 but failed to form the following year. Again the club failed to form in 1892-94 with the Ararat Imperials (a junior club) changing their name to the Ararat Football club in 1895 and continued on from that point. Many of the players in the Wanderers and Imperials had previously played with the Ararat Football Club when it had formed.
* Between 1871 and 1901 football matches were organised as scratch matches (teams picked from the attending members), friendly matches (invitation matches with local or inter-town clubs, often on a return match basis) or competition matches (between one or a number of clubs where a trophy or money was offered as a prize). The club played 3 or 4 up to 11 games in a season. When other teams formed within Ararat, AFC was considered the senior club, playing the senior clubs from other towns. The other clubs were considered to be juniors or second twenty clubs.
* Opposition during 1874-1901 were: various Ballarat teams, Beaufort, Horsham, Hamilton, Lake Bolac, Middle Creek, Murtoa, Rupanyup, Skipton, Stawell, Streatham and various local teams.
* AFC first entered an organised Wimmera competition (Wimmera District Football Association) in 1902 with Horsham, Murtoa and Stawell. Ararat, Horsham and Stawell were the common teams in this competition with Murtoa, Minyip and Dimboola sometimes entering. AFC was very successful in this competition winning premierships in 1903, ‘04, ‘05, ‘08, ‘11, ‘12, ‘14 and 1920. There was mention of disharmony in the club in 1909. Wimmera competition in 1910 proved to be unsatisfactory. For a number of years clubs argued about a radius rule, where players were only allowed to be drawn from a certain area (for example 15 miles around the town). At a Horsham pre-season meeting the committee discussed possible competitions that didn’t include Ararat. In the end AFC pulled out of Wimmera competition and only played separate trophy matches against Willaura and Stawell. Horsham and Stawell played competition matches but ill-feeling developed when Stawell tried to play out of radius players. After the competition was drawn at 2 games each a flooded Horsham oval prevented the deciding game being played. The clubs were unable to organise a date for the decider and the game was never played.
* As well as playing the Wimmera competition AFC sometimes played a separate Pennant competition against Stawell and once against Hamilton during the season.
* As AFC played competition matches on Wednesday afternoons, better players would also play on Saturday for teams in Ballarat and sometimes the VFL.
* The captain was considered the coach. As other clubs began employing a coach there was some internal opposition to AFC employing a coach. AFC eventually employed their experienced incumbent captain, Bill Toole as coach in 1922. After Bill Toole, the club employed coaches out of Melbourne often from the VFL.
* To the upset of the other Wimmera clubs AFC played in the Ballarat Football League in 1924-28 seeking to play in a stronger competition. AFC finishing 5th, 4th, 5th, 4th and 3rd.
* AFC and Maryborough became increasingly discontented with the financial arrangements that suited the Ballarat clubs. After the BFL would not agree to the “country club’s” demands for a fairer deal AFC (which included more home games) decided to return to the Wimmera. Unfortunately for AFC there were Wimmera clubs still unhappy about AFC going to the BFL and AFC had to sit out of football for the 1929 season.
* In 1930 Rupanyup withdrew from Wimmera competition therefore AFC were accepted back into the Wimmera District Football League (Ararat, Dimboola, Horsham, Minyip, Murtoa, Nhill, Stawell and Warracknabeal). In 1932-33 the competing clubs were reduced to Ararat, Horsham, Stawell and Warracknabeal (the basis of our club song) as Dimboola, Minyip, Nhill and Murtoa withdrew due to disagreement about pooling gates. AFC was runners-up in 1931, ‘32 & ’33.
* As both the Ballarat Football League and Wimmera District Football League each only had 4 clubs they chose to amalgamate to become the Ballarat and Wimmera Football Leagues from 1934-36. AFC reluctantly agreed to the amalgamation.
* In 1937 the 2 leagues separated and the Wimmera Football League was established.
* AFC’s second successful era was premierships in 1949, ’51, ’55, ’56, ’57 and ’58 as well as runners-up in 1950. As AFC didn’t have a reserve team some local minor league players played in their own finals or premiership then backed up for a final or premiership with AFC.
* The 1960s only yielded a draw Grand Final in 1964 with Nhill then a loss in the replay.
* The 1970s proved a successful period with premierships in 1971 (AFC centenary year) and 1975 with runners-up in 1972 and 1974.
* In 1975 the Ballarat FL invited AFC to join. AFC decided not to because there was no netball competition, the heavy grounds and the BFL was rather professional – AFC would not be able to compete.
* The premiership in 1986 was very much a home-grown success with a number of players having progressed from the recently formed U/16 team. This was followed by the one that got away in 1989.
* The runners-up in 1993 was a prelude to the success at the end of the decade, although the club ended tens of thousands of dollars in the red after paying a larger than normal salary for a quality playing coach in 1997 and picking up the bill for a motorcycle raffle gone bad. An influx of former players and motivated people bolstered a new committee in 1998, which coincided with the cessation of the Ararat & District Football Association in 1999. AFC was the beneficiary of an influx of very good local players. The result being premiers in 1999 and 2001 and runners-up in 2000 and 2002 and 3rd in 2003. For the rest of the decade the club only had fair success with many of the premiership players moving on or retiring.
* **Committees** – as well as the general committee AFC had a very strong ladies’ committee. From the early 1900s annual meeting reports spoke in glowing terms of the assistance given by the ladies. Right up to their last year in 1996 the ladies were integral to the success of the AFC. As well as working for the football club their participation was their recreation and social outlet. Often, when their footballing partners had given football away, the ladies continued working for the club; many for decades at a time.
* After WW2 until the 1980s a number of male supporters formed additional committees to raise funds for the football club. The formation of the Social committee and Supporters’ Committee showed how much the football club was important to many people in Ararat.
* **Reserves** – The WFL Reserve competition began in 1951 *(went into recess 1957-64 and ’66-68).* AFC entered the WFL Reserves competition in 1969. Previously the AFC senior team was reliant on players from local minor leagues. The Reserves and Thirds became important breeding grounds for senior players and were premiers in 1973, ‘78’, ’81, ’87, ’93, ’94, ’99, ’02 and ’06.
* **Thirds** (U/16, U/17, U/17 half) – The WFL thirds competition began in 1966. In 1961 and 1962 a composite team from the Ararat and District Junior Football Association played as an AFC u/16 team being Premiers in 1961. In 1974 a narrow vote of WFL clubs excluded Ararat Stawell from having an U/16 team. AFC would have been embarrassed because of their close association with the ADJFA. The first official AFC U/16 team was in 1978 which has been a very successful team within the club. While the team had a very successful beginning it was in competition for players with the ADJFA and not every WFL club had an U/16 team. As a result, in 1984 the team folded after one game (as there would have been too many byes for the players to have meaningful competition) and didn’t re-form until 1994, when again it folded part way through the season due to lack of players. The ADJFA U/16 competition folded in 1996 meaning the availability of more players. AFC were premiers in 1978, ’79, ’82, ’96, ’98, 2000, ’06, ’09, ’10, ’11, ’12, ’15, ’17 and 2018
* **Fourths** – The WFL fourths competition began in 1998. In 2000 the U/14 team was formed meaning players out of the ADJFA U/13 competition had a pathway to U/16 football. Again numbers became an issue with a reliance on ADJFA U/13 players to play 2 games in a weekend. AFC preferred to have an U/15 competition so there would be 2 years in each team, but this was not supported by northern Wimmera clubs as they didn’t have local U/13 competitions. AFC were premiers in 2004, ’10, ’12, ’15, ’16 and 2018.
* **Netball** – Ararat Football Netball Club joined the Wimmera Netball Association in 1972 entering an A and B-Grade team and an U/16 team in 1977. A-Grade became a powerhouse along with Horsham. These 2 teams played off in 21 straight grand finals between 1974-94 with Ararat winning 13. All up from 1973-2013 A-grade played in 38 grand finals for 19 premierships. As other junior age group teams and C-grade formed many A-grade players also coached the lower grades on the same day. From its early days the netball club became a very successful and important part of the AFNC offering high level competition and coaching as well as being integral to the social side of the club as a whole.
* **Facilities** – In the early years, football was played on grounds such as the Market Square (land where the Town Hall is now situated), Race Course and Cricket Ground (maybe near Green Hill Lake). The Recreation Reserve (re-named Kokoda Park in 1947) was first mentioned by name in 1887, although previously games were listed as being played on the “Ararat ground”. *(The council of the Borough of Ararat to be trustees of the land reserved on the 4th March, 1861, for purposes of public recreation at Ararat).*
* A ladies’ stand was erected at the Recreation Reserve in 1885.
* A new grandstand was erected in 1902, which was dismantled and shifted in time for the opening of the new Alexandra Sports Ground in December 1920 *(construction of the oval was a scheme initiated to employ returned soldiers and completed with enormous community volunteer work).* The new sports ground became AFC’s home ground in 1921.
* In 1921 the Trotting club held its first meeting at Alexandra oval.
* Federal member Mr WG Gibson, MHR opened the dressing rooms at the 1921 Boxing Day Athletics carnival. The cost - £500, built by TA McArthur and Son. It is a large ornate structure. It is a handsome indispensable adjunct to the conveniences of the reserve.
* In 1926 it was resolved to carry out extensive improvements on the terrace at the foot of the J-Ward hill for the purpose of providing more accommodation for motor cars. Ararat is the only provincial town to permit cars in the reserve.
* In 1950 the Trotting club was the second club (after Mildura) to hold a night meeting outside Melbourne. The track is just under 3 furlongs long.
* In 1952 the Trotting club began making plans to reconstruct the track which would impact on the size and shape of the oval, the curator’s residence and adjoining camping ground. The council rejected these plans. Again in 1966 the Trotting club had plans to widen the track and increase it to 4 furlongs. Again the council rejected the plans. In 1967, after consultation with the council the Trotting club held their last meeting at Alexandra oval before moving to their new site in Blake street – Russell T White Raceway.
* The James Fiscalini pavilion was opened in December 1959.

Built by SL Phillips and Sons for £4800, it stands as a monument to James Fiscalini whose work as a curator of the grounds was always readily extended in the interests of all who used them, and who still lives to proudly see the pavilion in use.

Towards the cost the Football Club contributed £2000, of which over £400 was raised by special effort in conjunction with the Trotting Club, and by the sterling work of the ladies’ committee. *(The old changerooms were shifted to Centenary Park)*

* Late 1969 improvements to the dilapidated grandstand at Alexandra oval were undertaken due to an up-coming cricket match (touring New Zealand team v District eleven) in January 1970. A cream brick dining room and kitchen replaced an old dirt floored wooden lean-to. After the improvements were suggested in October and completed just in time for the match rain prevented the game being played.
* In 1970 a cream bricked toilet block was erected on the eastern side of the oval.
* In 1971 the front façade and stairs of the grandstand was replaced with concrete tiers. Later benches were bolted on the on the tiers increasing the seating capacity of the stand. These benches were replaced by red plastic seats during the early 1980s.
* In 1973 A second set of floodlights are erected on the eastern side of oval opposite an existing set of lights.It is a 60 foot pole with three 1500 watt quartz-iodine, the lights mounted at 50 feet. Cost $500.

The first set of lights was installed a few years ago.

* In 1973, after a reasonable contribution from the netball club *(council stipulation),* asphalt netball courts were laid on the south side of the grandstand.
* **UNSURE – late 1970s- 80s toilet block built behind the grandstand to replace old toilets in north-west corner of the site.**
* In 1982 the grandstand was named the Olver Stand in honour of the volunteer work of Bill ‘Buff’ Olver and his wife June.
* In 1985 a new scoreboard was erected replacing the decaying old one – which was shifted to Ararat Technical School.
* In 1991 AFC volunteer labour installed showers for the netballers in the toilet block behind the grandstand, Ararat Council supplied the materials.
* During 1992 St Marys Football Club (ADFA) were granted home ground use of Alexandra oval outside the activities of the Ararat Football Club.
* In 1993 the back portion of the Fiscalini Pavilion was demolished then new showers, toilets, gymnasium and football umpires’ room were added. Jim Pearce, builder and President of Ararat Highland Sports Society supervised the Ararat City Council $30,000 funded project. Completed in time for the Ararat Gift.

A toilet for the disabled was also added to the existing western toilet block behind the Olver Stand.

* In 1994 Ararat Football Club received a $2500 grant from Council to be matched by $2000 from user groups to erect one new light pole. The current poor lighting meant clubs tended to train on one side of the oval which would lead to deterioration of the ground. 3 new concrete light poles were erected in 1995
* In 1995 a new kiosk attached to the grandstand is nearing completion. It overcame the need to serve food from a caravan or rotunda. It was erected with the help of New Work Opportunities scheme and user groups.
* In 2001, due to safety concerns, netball was shifted to the tennis courts at the north side of the oval. The asphalt courts were green flexi-paved.
* **In 2004** (not absolutely sure of year) spectator shelter and storage was financed by the AFC netball club.
* In 2006 Ararat Eagles Football Netball Club and the Grampians Cricket Association went in partnership to build shared clubrooms with the help of volunteer labour. They were burnt down before they could be opened. Insurance paid for the rebuild of the rooms.
* In 2010 state of the art lighting was installed (4 towers, and later another 2, to deliver 100 lux).
* In 2014 new social and clubrooms at a cost of $3.8 million were opened.
* In 2017, after the completion of the new social rooms, the Eagles/GCA social rooms were removed to the hospital grounds for their use.
* In 2019 a new electronic scoreboard replaced the old dilapidated manual scoreboard, and new interchange boxes were installed.