

# Shakin' the World Over: The Greek-Australian Milk Bar\*

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In Sydney, late in 1932, Joachim Tavlaridis — known as Mick Adams — opened Australia's first modern "American-style" milk bar: the Black & White 4d. Milk Bar. Indeed, Adams' milk bar was the world's first. Within five years, there were some four thousand milk bars operating in Australia. Most were Greek-run. By the mid-1930s, Greeks had taken the concept to New Zealand. At the same time, Great Britain also quickly imported the idea, and attempts were made to introduce it to the United States; although influenced by food-catering enterprises in America, "milk bars" did not exist there. Milk bars even appear to have reached Fiji not long after their initial success in Australia. Adams' refreshment revolution became both an Australian and international food-catering icon. This paper provides an insight into the milk bar's international cross-cultural origins, its development within Australia, its subsequent distribution overseas, and its role as a vehicle for Americanisation.

This presentation builds upon material from two earlier research articles published by the authors that touched upon the Greek-Australian milk bar (Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2003/2004:177–197; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:36–57).

Early in November 1932,<sup>1</sup> Joachim Tavlaridis, an enterprising Greek migrant-settler<sup>2</sup> who adopted the name Mick Adams, introduced Australians to a new, essentially American influenced, food-catering idea: the "milk bar". Adams opened Australia's first modern "American-style" milk bar, the Black & White 4d. Milk Bar, at 24 Martin Place in Sydney. The name Black & White was a sarcastic reference to a brand of

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<sup>1</sup> Newspaper and trade journal reports have noted 4 November 1932 as the day the milk bar opened. However, Adams' youngest daughter, Lilian Keldoulis, possesses a photograph of the milk bar with a window sign that indicates 5 November. Although Adams intended the milk bar's name as a reference to Black & White blended Scotch whisky, the enterprise's graphic logo became a black and white dairy cow.

<sup>2</sup> Adams' marriage certificate records that he was born in Thrace, which was then under Turkish rule. His family migrated to Australia from the village of Sakis in Turkey (Keldoulis, private papers; Gilchrist, 1992:218).



Black & White 4d. Milk Bar exterior — Martin Place, Sydney, NSW, 1934: Mick Adams (Joachim Tavlaridis) is standing at the centre of the group in the back row

Photo courtesy of L. Keldoulis, from the “In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians”, National Project Archives, Macquarie University

whisky — Adams is said to have been personally opposed to what he considered to be an over-consumption of alcohol by the Australian population; a view that reflected temperance attitudes of the period. The 4d. in the title was designed to emphasise the very affordable low price — fourpence — set by Adams for the purchase of a milkshake, per glass (Keldoulis, 2001; *Sunday Telegraph*, 19 April 1964:51; *Australasian Confectioner*, 1932:np).

Adams' status as the creator of the first “milk bar” in Australia is firmly supported in the November 1932 issue of the *Australasian Confectioner* and the April–June 1935 issue of *The Milk Messenger* (*Australasian Confectioner*, 1932:np; *The Milk Messenger*, 1935:30; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:40–41). Yet, there have been claims that have attempted to challenge Adams' pre-eminent position. George Sklavos is said to have opened the “American Milk Bar” in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, as early as 1912. However, original sources identify the business as a pastry, confectionery and ice cream parlour. Moreover, its business name was advertised as “Sklavos & Co, American Bar, Ice Cream Parlour”. The term “American Bar” was utilised by a notable number of Greek-run food catering establishments in Australia at the time (particularly in

eastern states) to declare that their business operated a front-service soda fountain; a refreshment-beverage technology imported from the United States. Like soda drinks, American-style ice cream and confectionery were also proving commercially popular in Australia by the 1910s and Sklavos, like other Greek food caterers, seems to have clearly capitalised on the circumstance. Significantly, the means of mass producing milkshakes — the electric milkshake maker — was not in broad commercial use as yet: an invention of the Hamilton Beach Company in the United States, application to patent the device had only been undertaken in 1911 (Conomos, 2002:119; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:37, 39–40; Comino, Andronikos, K., Andronikos, E. D., Kentavros, 1916:184; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 1991:65; Cominos, 1987; Kriz, 2009). Furthermore, a 1936 Confectioner’s Union publication in England, *Service for Soda Fountains, Ice-cream Parlours and Milk Bars*, states that “the milk bar, so named, started in Sydney, N.S.W., and from that city spread rapidly to all parts of the Australian Commonwealth” (Feltham, 1936:29) — Sklavos’ business was located in Queensland’s capital.

It has also often been accepted that Clarence and Norman Burt were operating a milk bar in Pitt Street, Sydney, two years before Adams. However, according to a mid-1930s issue of *Glass* (the Australian Glass Manufacturer’s [AGM] journal), Burt’s



Black & White 4d. Milk Bar interior — Martin Place, Sydney, NSW, 1934

Photo courtesy of L. Keldoulis, from the “In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians”, National Project Archives, Macquarie University

Milk Bar did not open until 1934, following an extensive refurbishment — which utilised much glass and stainless steel construction — of the existing Burt's refreshment business. In physical layout and service emphasis, it appears to have mimicked Adams' Black & White (*Glass*, 1934:18–22; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:40–41).

Adams had previously been running a confectionery and soda fountain business on George Street in Sydney's Haymarket, and while on a trip to the United States, "he ... got the idea about the milk bar" (Keldoulis, 2001; *Australasian Confectioner*, 1932:np; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 1995:22). Although it has been declared that "at that time milk bars existed ... in America" (*Sunday Telegraph*, 19 April 1964:51), this claim is contentious. Research has been unable to uncover any evidence of businesses known as "milk bars" in the United States before 1940 and it has been pointed out that Americans have tended to associate the word "bar" with alcoholic beverages, not light liquid refreshments (Phillis, 2003; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:41). The "milk bar" appears to have been initially created by Adams based essentially upon his observations of early 1930s American drugstore soda "parlors".<sup>3</sup> In Australia, the Greek-run oyster saloon and soda/sundae parlour had placed prime importance on sit-down trade for meals, drinks and desserts. American drugstore soda "parlors" seem to have emphasised quick stand-up and bar-stool bar trade (soda drinks, milkshakes and sundaes) over sit-down meal trade. Adams firmly took up the American soda "parlor" catering emphasis and highlighted the milkshake (Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:41–42; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2003/2004:182). As Adams' youngest daughter, Lilian Keldoulis (nee Adams), points out in regard to her father's trip to the United States: "Yes, there were milkshakes ... there were restaurants with milk bars. But he wanted to build his own milk bar where he only sold milkshakes" (Keldoulis, 2001). The *galactopoleion* — a traditional Greek shop specialising in the sale of milk products with which Adams would have been familiar — may have also played a part in his thinking towards the milk bar's genesis.

A rapid stand-up trade in milkshakes became the successful commercial foundation of Adams' original Black & White 4d. Milk Bar. Seating capacity in the premises was restricted to just six small two-seater cubicles along one wall, the main feature being a long hotel-style bar with soda fountain pumps and numerous milkshake makers (manufactured by the Hamilton Beach Company, in Racine, Wisconsin, USA). No cooked meals were provided, only flavoured milkshakes, pure fruit juices and soda drinks; tea and coffee were introduced later (Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:42–43; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2003/2004:183).

The milkshake is purported to have appeared in Australia well before Adams' milk bar and Greek involvement is again evidenced.<sup>4</sup> Dimitris Lalas, who is said to have

<sup>3</sup> As in Australia, Greeks were heavily involved in America's food-catering industry at the time, including soda fountain businesses (Georgakis, 2003; Lindberg, 1997:203–208; *The Greeks in California*, 1917–18). Greeks involved in such businesses may have therefore directly informed Adams during his visit to the United States.

<sup>4</sup> The term "milk shake" was first recorded in the United States in 1889 in *Harper's Bazaar* [*Bazaar*] (Ayto, 1999:220–221; Mathews, 1951:1055).

had an open-air bench stall in Sydney's Market Street just before 1910, was selling a liquid refreshment under the title of "milk shake". The drink consisted of cold milk diluted with water and flavoured with vanilla powder. The ingredients were vigorously shaken in a sealed tin before being presented to the customer for consumption (Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:45; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2003/2004:185–186). An earlier claim is that an Italian, Guiseppe Portovino, was offering in his emporium located on King Street, Newtown (an inner western suburb of Sydney), "one pint milkshakes that were a popular rival to the threepenny shandy gaffs offered by pubs shortly after the turn of the century" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May 1985, Doug Anderson, Metro section). During the very early 1930s milkshakes were selling for ninepence per glass, which Adams solidly undercut by fivepence. Just how long before the establishment of Adams' business the milkshake had been introduced to Australia, is open to conjecture, but his "American-style" milk bar succeeded in leading the way to dramatically popularising the refreshment. Surprisingly, given its contemporary association with the milkshake as a key ingredient, ice cream was not part of the drink's original make-up, even during Adams' time. It was a component which was later acquired — the milkshake in the form with which we are familiar today, is really a drink of the 1950s (Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:45; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2003/2004:186; Ayto, 1999:220–221). However, milkshakes did include a variety of ingredients other than milk and basic flavoured essences depending on the strength of taste and texture required: "varieties of fruit (mostly fresh, some dried), cream, butter, eggs, chocolate, honey, caramel, malt, and yeast" (Keldoulis, private papers). Of the flavoured milkshakes that were on offer, two became quite popular: the banana milk cocktail, and "bootlegger punch", the latter of which contained a dash of rum essence (Keldoulis, private papers; *Australasian Confectioner*, 1932:np).

On the first day of opening five thousand customers are reported to have crowded into Adams' milk bar, and as many as twenty-seven thousand per week then began to patronise the establishment (Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:43; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2003/2004:183). With this number of customers, Adams was "obliged to secure a two-hour delivery of milk" and to quickly extend the bar to 50ft (15.24m) in length — the refurbishment was undertaken without too much disruption to business (*Australasian Confectioner*, 1932:np). Adams soon succeeded in establishing other Black & White milk bars in Brisbane (1933), Melbourne (1933), Adelaide (1934) and Wollongong (1937). Both Sydney and Adelaide later acquired second Black & White milk bars (Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:43; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2003/2004:184; Morris, 2006).

Under Adams' guidance, the official launch of each milk bar became a highly theatrical affair — an entertainment element of overblown pomp and ceremony (designed to draw maximum attention to his new commercial enterprises) that he may have also picked up from his time in the United States. At the opening of the first Black & White for example, the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Alderman S. Walder, assisted by MLA Brigadier-General Loyd, and A. E. Dalwood of the Dalwood Children's Health Home,

presided over the occasion. Acting as serving staff (referred to as “soda jerks” — another American adoption) were well-known celebrities of radio and stage of the day, including Cyril Ritchard and Madge Elliot. It was reported that displayed in the front window of the business was “a large black and white mechanical cow, complete with milkmaid ... who is inducing a continuous flow of milk from the cow to an apparently bottomless pail”<sup>5</sup> (*Australasian Confectioner*, 1932:np). The ceremony and the window attraction halted traffic in a then non-pedestrian Martin Place — police were called in repeatedly throughout the day in an effort to get traffic and onlookers to “move on” (*Australasian Confectioner*, 1932:np). From then on, Adams never missed an opportunity to secure publicity. Not long after the milk bar’s opening, public celebrations for “Boys’ Week” were getting underway and he quickly took advantage of an opportune moment:

Adams noticed the band of the Young Australia League performing outside his shop. He immediately issued an invitation to the captain, and the boys marched into “Mick’s” bar, followed by a large crowd — so large that a policeman was placed on duty outside the door. It was a fine advertisement at the cost of a few drinks (*Australasian Confectioner*, 1932:np).

At each of his milk bars around the country, opening anniversaries were celebrated every year without fail, a day’s takings was often donated to charitable/philanthropic organisations (such as the Dalwood Children’s Health Home, the Returned Sailors and Soldiers Imperial League of Australia, Australian Imperial Force Widows and Children’s Holiday Fund, and the Boy Scouts), and well-designed, highly colourful and decorative floats were created to advertise the milk bars along city streets and during celebratory parades (Keldoulis, private papers; Keldoulis, 2001; Gill, 2000:116).

Given Adams’ impressive flair for publicity, the inexpensive fourpenny cost to the customer of purchasing a milkshake, and the heavy promotion of milk as a health food by both the New South Wales Board of Health and the state’s Milk Board, other food caterers quickly adopted the idea (*The Milk Messenger*, 1935:12–16, 22–23, 28, 30; Keldoulis, 2001). Not surprisingly, given their numerical strength in food-catering occupations within Australia at the time, many of these other food caterers were of Greek background. Adams believed “that the Depression gave a fillip” to milk bars “as the public very quickly realised the value of milk as a tonic food ... and the price ... considerably eased the financial position” (*The Milk Messenger*, 1935:30).

Within five years of the opening of Adams’ original Black & White Milk Bar in 1932, some four thousand milk bars were operating in Australia (*Sunday Telegraph*, 19 April 1964:51). While the first milk bars in Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide were all established by Adams through extended family and/or friends, Perth’s first “American-style” milk bar was opened by two Greek brothers, Stavros and John Coufos, originally from the island of Kastellorizo. It was called, The Golden Star. The enterprise was

<sup>5</sup> The almost life-size mechanical cow may have been a promotional idea that Adams acquired from the United States. Memories of the cow, together with its calf and milkmaid, recently re-emerged (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 16–21, 23 May 2005, Column 8).



The Golden Star Milk Bar — Hay Street, Perth, WA, mid-1930s

Photo courtesy of M. Coufos, from the “In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians”,  
National Project Archives, Macquarie University

located at what is now Gladden Arcade on the corner of Hay and William streets in Perth's central business district. It operated for approximately eighteen months in 1935–36. The concept had been brought over by the Coufos' from the eastern states, the interior layout reflecting that of the original Black & White Milk Bar in Sydney (Coufos, M., 2006; Coufos, C., 2006; Fermanis, 2006). Later, Greek-run fruit shops in Western Australia incorporated milk bars as part of their food retailing service, rather than milk bars being “stand alone”, commercial entities (Stratos, 2006; Antonas, N. A., 2006; Antonas, E., 2006).

In 1936, George Haros opened what has been claimed to be the first milk bar in Tasmania — the Green Gate Milk Bar in Hobart. Haros, who later served as Honorary Vice-Consul for Greece in Tasmania's capital, stated that he had seen milk bars while on a visit to Sydney in 1935. Initially, he employed a “Mr Comino” to manage the new business. In 1939 George was able to devote more of his own time in running the enterprise, together with developing what was to become an Australian milk bar and café icon — the Haros Boiler; used in the production of hot beverages such as tea and coffee. George retired from the Green Gate in 1968, leaving the business to one of his sons (Haros, 1994; Alexakis and Janiszewski, 1995:32–33).

Milk bars are said to have developed in the Northern Territory just before World War II. Darwin's Greek-run milk bars, such as the Star Milk Bar, the Rendezvous Milk Bar, and the Continental Milk Bar, all attempted to express a sophisticated style in their design, furnishings, staff uniforms and customer service that copied milk bars in Australia's major urban centres — they tried to offer “a bit of Hollywood glamour” in what was then a frontier town. But despite appearances, Darwin's early milk bars could not provide their customers with the milkshake's key ingredient: fresh milk. Powdered milk was used, and its supply was solely reliant upon shipments from interstate (Papadonakis and Liveris, 2006; Manolis, 2006; Pantazis, P. and I., 2006; Paspalis, 1987; Forrest, 2008:15–24, 35–46).

During the 1930s, it was observed that most milk bar patrons in Australia — between 70% and 95% — were men (Feltham, 1936:29; Keldoulis, private papers; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:43). No doubt attracted, in part, by the bootlegger punch and its very affordable cost — the latter being particularly important during the Depression years. Indeed, not long after the opening of Adams' Black & White Milk Bar in Sydney, the *Australasian Confectioner* declared that “there is probably some truth in the rumor that nearby hotels are losing their beer trade to milk!” (*Australasian Confectioner*, 1932:np). However, only more research could show if the traditional male-oriented Australian pub was affected by the milk bar's incursion into its client numbers (Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:43).



Star Milk Bar — Smith Street, Darwin, NT, 1948

Photo courtesy of Papadonakis family, from the “In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians”, National Project Archives, Macquarie University



The emergence of milk bars in Britain followed their development in Australia (Feltham, 1936:29; Van Straten, 2004:255–256). There is even a local suggestion that Adams directly influenced the establishment of milk bars in England: “Mick gave a friend the idea [the milk bar], the recipes, the advice, and the friend went to London and opened the first milk bar in England” (*Sunday Telegraph*, 19 April 1964:51). Britain’s first milk bar opened in London’s Fleet Street in August 1935. Like Adams’ original, it was called the Black & White 4d. Milk Bar. An expatriate Australian businessman, Hugh Donald McIntosh — nicknamed “Huge Deal” — one of Australia’s most audacious early entrepreneurs, had been responsible for its establishment. McIntosh had left Sydney for England in the early 1930s, following bankruptcy proceedings (Van Straten, 2004:229–257; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:43). He had seen Adams’ original Black & White in Sydney and had declared, “I’m going back to England to start one of those” (Van Straten, 2004:254). Within a year of the launch of McIntosh’s Fleet Street milk bar, there were 420 milk bars throughout Britain and by 1937 the number had climbed to one thousand. Moreover, the British Milk Board had quickly thrown its support behind milk bars and with such immediate burgeoning success, McIntosh himself, again like Adams, attempted to develop a chain of Black & White milk bars. Regrettably, his eventual chain of 20 milk bars wilted against the fierce competition generated by the escalating number of rival milk bars. Macintosh had “dreamed of milk bars proliferating through England and even on the Continent” (*Daily Telegraph*, 2 November 1937:np; Van Straten, 2004:229–268; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:43). Adams’ direct personal involvement with McIntosh cannot currently be clearly validated.

In 1934, while on a return trip from Greece, two Greek brothers who had been living in New Zealand, Anastasios and Dimitrios Pagonis, visited Melbourne for the city’s centenary celebrations. They then went on to Sydney, where “they visited a friend who ran a milk bar business in Martin Place”. The brothers “saw great potential for the same business in New Zealand” (Blades, private papers). On 19 December 1935 the brothers applied to Wellington City Council for a permit to refit 64 Willis Street in the city to establish a milk bar. In mid-June 1936 New Zealand’s first milk bar opened. The Mayor of Wellington presided at the official launch with the Wellington City Council Band providing musical entertainment. The milk bar was called the Black & White. The business boomed and the Pagonis’ soon opened a second Black & White Milk Bar on Cuba Street in Wellington. They ran both simultaneously. As had occurred in Australia and Britain, milk bars in New Zealand proved exceptionally popular and rapidly increased in number — particularly those with a “cafeteria” section that offered meals. Again, as in Australia, Greek food caterers readily embraced the milk bar. Peter Bares was one of those Greeks. In the late 1930s he opened the Golden Gate and Popular milk bars in Wellington’s central business district and later, the Arizona Milk Bar in Kilbirnie, one of the New Zealand capital’s suburbs (Blades, private papers; Blades, 2005:31–36, 56–95; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:43–45).

New Zealand’s milk bars, together with those in Great Britain, were part of a knock-on effect of Americanisation from Australia — Mick Adams’ “American-style” milk bar

had selectively embraced elements of American drugstore soda “parlors”, particularly in regard to emphasising rapid bar trade and product focus. In the mid-1930s social commentator, W. Robert Moore, had recognised that “American institutions ... milk bars” had become popular and that their origins were reflected in names such as “The California”, and “The Monterey”. New Zealand also followed this practice with milk bar names: Astoria, Golden Gate, Arizona, Manhattan, Florida, American and Montana (Moore, 1935:671; Blades, private papers; Blades, 2005:31–36; 56–95; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:37–38, 43–45).

Great Britain and New Zealand were not the only countries in which milk bars emerged along the lines of Mick Adams’ original “American-style” Black & White Milk Bar. Milk bars in Fiji — providing milkshakes, fruit juices and ice cream — emerged in the 1950s; some locals claim an earlier starting date. The concept is said to have been brought over by Australians and/or New Zealanders (Fong, 2007; Roylel, 2007). Further research is required to see how far the idea reached into the South Pacific. Interestingly, as mentioned earlier, the term “milk bar” began to appear in limited use in the United States after 1940 — the entrenchment in the United States of both the drugstore soda “parlor”, and the fixed association of the term “bar” with the sale of alcoholic beverages, restricted the appeal of the “milk bar” to Americans (Phillis, 2003; Janiszewski and Alexakis, 2008:41).

Given the contentiousness of the claim that businesses known as “milk bars” had existed in the United States before the early 1930s — these were very likely to have actually been American drugstore soda “parlors” — and the establishment of milk bars in both Britain and New Zealand a few years after the opening of Adams’ original milk bar in Sydney, the Black & White 4d. Milk Bar in Martin Place, was indeed, based upon current evidence, the world’s first. The concept’s attempt to enter the United States in the 1940s, and its later further extension into the South Pacific, reinforce this position. This paper is just a start at investigating the origins and international appeal of the Greek-Australian milk bar concept. As milkshakes are still shakin’ the world over, additional research may well reveal a truly global Greek-Australian export.

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