History of Trade in South Australia

Trade has been happening in South Australia for thousands of years. There have been many changes to the way we trade and exchange goods, and the types of goods that are traded. Advances in technology and the needs of people have driven these changes.

The Aboriginal people traded goods amongst themselves and indigenous groups long before European people arrived, and it was vital to their existence. Food was not traded over large distances, but other highly valued and scarce resources were traded. Stones, ochres, tools, ceremonial items and other resources that were not normally available within one area could be obtained through trade from another area. Trade was also seen as a form of social control and law, as it required people from different areas and different groups to respect each other's rights, boundaries and cultural differences. It helped strengthen relationships between neighbouring Aboriginal groups by providing an opportunity to settle disputes, meet to discuss laws and for sharing gifts of respect.

In 1836, nine ships arrived in South Australia bringing 546 European people to this state. The European people lived very different lifestyles to the Aboriginal people, their needs and wants were very different, and changed the ways and types of products that were brought into our state. In the early days of European settlement, ships would come in to the harbour and unload cargo the best that they could. At this time, all goods were imported, with no exports. The harbour was rough and very disorganised and anyone could load / unload cargo along the beaches.

In 1839, David McLaren (Manager of the SA Company) got the company to build a wharf and causeway at Port Adelaide. Port Adelaide was officially opened by Governor Hindmarsh on November 14th, 1840. There were 2 wharfs, the government owned Queens Wharf and the SA Company owned McLaren's wharf

The ketch trade started in the very early days in Port Adelaide. Ketches are small cargo vessels, peaking in the 1880s and 1890s, with more than 70 ketches and schooners trading out of Port Adelaide. Ketches were known as the 'semi-trailers of the sea.' Ketches travelled all around South Australian waters and were called the Mosquito Fleet because when you looked out at the horizon from the beach, they looked like a swarm of mosquitos. They carried wheat, wool, live animals, gypsum, salt, firewood and many other cargo around South Australia's ports. They were also used to carry cargo to larger vessels for the overseas trade. Ropes and pulleys were used to load and unload the cargo. It was hard work lifting the heavy sacks and loads. The cargo was lifted and placed into the hull of the ketch.

Life was hard on the ketches and the pay was not very good. The crew was made up of a skipper and 1 or 2 ketch deck hands. The deck hands were usually 14 year old boys who worked hard on the ketch to get sea time. They would have to do lots of jobs, cooking, loading and unloading cargo, cleaning and hoisting and lowering the sails. This would then the boys an opportunity to get sea time and eventually qualify as crew on overseas ships.

During the 20th century the fleet witnessed constant change and reinvention in a struggle to remain viable. By the 1920s, competition from steamers and improved road transport saw most ketches fitted with auxiliary engines. They numbered 30 in the 1950s and three decades later, the last two working ketches, *Nelcebee* and *Falie*, were retired from service.

When the *Harbours Act of 1913* was gazetted in March 1914, the state government was empowered to compulsory take ownership all the privately owned wharves, docks and waterfront facilities in the state. In 1917, the South Australian Harbours Board started purchasing all the docks and waterside facilities. Another job was to deepen and widen the shipping channel (Port River). It took 16 years to deepen the channel so that it was no less than 8 meters deep at low water and nowhere less than 110 meters wide. Once this had been done, larger vessels drawing 10 meters could enter the channel.

In 1966, the SAHB was extinguished and the Department of Marine and Harbours was established to oversee the workings at Port Adelaide. This new act and organisation provided full time management staff and was under greater government control. Their job was to control navigation within all SA waterways, pilotage and

all government controlled harbour facilities, the provision and maintenance of all navigation aids, the construction and maintenance of all wharves, docks, jetties, cargo sheds and bulk handling plants, the cleansing and dredging of harbours and channels.

By 1960s it was apparent that SA was missing out on a rapidly growing, new form of cargo transport that used standardised shipping containers. The states delay in building a container port was costing it dearly. It was hoped that Port Adelaide would act as a feeder port to Melbourne, but it was soon apparent that expanding the sea-borne container transport trade was bypassing the port. It was the railways that were reaping the benefits and South Australian's were left waiting for their goods to be imported or exported via Melbourne or Sydney. Even when containers were used in the Port, the process was initially rather primitive. Goods were transported in loose form, to and from the dock, and the containers were filled or emptied manually on the wharves.

Finally in 1972, the cutter-suction dredge deepened the berth & turning basin at Outer Harbour for the construction of SA's first container terminal. Most of the steel work for this wharf was produced at the South Australian Railway Workshops at Islington. A container crane, with a lifting capacity of 60 tonnes 'on the hook' and 45 tonnes 'on the spreader' was purchased from a Melbourne company. The total cost of development was $8.7 million dollars.

Further information:
http://www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=622
http://www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=698#e1598