



WHO IS FANNY?

Fanny arrived at the Commercial Hotel on Fyfe Street as the sole passenger on a less-travelled Cobb & Co coach at precisely 9.52am sometime in early 1912.

The diminutive brunette, wearing French kid-leather gloves on her child-sized hands and a one-feathered jade hat on top of her precious curls, stepped from the 11-trunk heavy coach onto a pathway lined with wild rose petals ... or so the butcher said.



The baker, however, disagreed. Fanny arrived in Talbot during the 1870s gold-boom when the town was simply a sea of 15,000 miner-owned tents. Sitting side-saddle on the jittery leader of a posse of nuggety brumbies, Fanny tipped her tiny top hat to the town's many dusty miners as she made her way to the grand Commercial Hotel.

Although no local could agree on the manner of how Fanny arrived, or what she was wearing, all were unanimous that the two-storey Commercial Hotel was her destination and that she was the most elegant woman to set foot in the Talbot goldfields.

Fanny – songstress, chanteuse and butterfly brooch collector – arrived in the Victorian goldfields to promptly kick off the Commercial's gala nights and dance season in the downstairs ballroom. These grand evenings would begin with a few of Fanny's breathy torchlight numbers (later to become popular with blonde and bosomy 1950s siren) followed by dancing to the latest songs heard in smokey European salons.



Her dance card was always full. Fanny would be twirled by the town doctor, various mine owners and a somewhat leery visiting Irish architect. In fact, there were few eligible (and not-so-eligible) bachelors who did not desire the company of the well-accessorised Fanny.



Yes, she was breathy, brunette and bosomy – but it was her introduction of pre-supper promenades and the spirited promenade outfits that captivated the township. On the first promenade on Fyfe she wore a post-bustle bustle and her precious curls hung loose (hussy!) under her favourite one-feathered jade hat. Dusty miners were compelled to remove hats (if they had them) and bid the lady 'good evening'.

By the third week, joined by the butcher's wife and the baker's wife, Fanny dared to display some of her more daring ensembles. Arm-in-arm and in-between the butcher's and baker's wives, Fanny minced her steps in an inch-above-the-ankle (oh my!) black fish-tail skirt and a modified men's pinstripe jacket cinched at the waist. The locals watched in awe, unsure of whether to mock or go home and modify men's jackets themselves.



Naturally, Fanny was the hot topic of conversation in all talking circles. The Commercial's chefs giddily claimed her helpful presence in the hotel's toasty single-story kitchen, located in-between the hotel's two-storey servants quarters at the back. It was said that it was she who convinced the Commercial chefs to sprinkle little, coloured balls of sugar over the icing on sponge cakes.

But it was Fanny's flat that drew the greatest interest from locals and informed out-of-towners. Turning down the chance to stay in one of the hotel's 15 bright-and-light upstairs rooms, Fanny chose to spend her six-month (or was it 11 months?) stay in the moodily secluded downstairs room at the back of the servant's quarters, just near the stables and buggy houses.

A select few claimed the good fortune of an invite into Fanny's private world, speaking of the exotic half-and-half red and duck egg blue walls, the glass cabinet for her trinkets, and the pretty partition from behind of which she would change into items from the many racks of clothes. Shoes of all colours and shapes lined the mantelpiece, and the window-ledge. Charcoal drawings of sweetly naked female shapes (oh my!) hung from the walls.



On hot-hot-hot central Victorian summer days Fanny would sit on her dresser stool just beside the quarter's side entrance, undo the top two buttons of her blouse and fan her lily-white Irish neck (or was it her lily-white English neck?). On chillier winter nights, she would sit serenely by the flat's roaring fire and slowly flick her hair for those who dared a late-night peep through her window.

What Fanny did next caused even greater discussion and disagreement. Boasting authority-of-insight as fellow promenaders, the butcher's and baker's wives announced that Fanny had followed a Californian dandy to a sunny west-coast life full of beach-side promenading and night-time solo performances at the local hot-spot.



The old-timers who lived past 100 told their children, who told their children, the improbable tale that Fanny died in the Commercial's 1885 fire, binding her ghostly soul to her beloved flat forever. So, Talbot's current generation of dusty locals will merrily claim (just ask them) to sightings of a well-dressed Fanny happily polishing Fanny's Flat's saleable trinkets and straightening the many rows of oh-so-desirable clothes and colourful shoes.

A note: Any similarity between WHO IS FANNY? characters and real people from the past or present is purely coincidental and somewhat a pleasant surprise.



Fanny's Flat is a boutique (petite store!) of vintage and modern clothing, new accessories, occasionally revamped originals, gladrags and collectables on Fyfe Street in Talbot. Open Saturday 10am until 4pm & Sunday 10am until 3pm or by appointment.

You will find Talbot in in the Goldfields of central western Victoria, 15 minutes from Clunes or Maryborough, 30 minutes from Creswick or Avoca, 40 minutes from Ballarat or Daylesford and 60 minutes from Bendigo. If you're coming from Melbourne, allow 90 minutes from Westgate Bridge on the Western Highway.

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