

GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (January 2000)

By Rob Upson

1st January 1900 in Bendigo

Season's Greetings and a Happy New Year to you all. Welcome to the year 2000 and the beginning of a new Century and a new Millennium. Or is it? When does a new century or millennium really commence? Commercialism is telling us that it began on the 1st January 2000 so that we all went out and celebrated. Some of us might have spent a lot of money doing so. At the end of this year we will be told that the new century and millennium will begin in the year 2001, so we can go out and celebrate all over again. This time it will cost you more with the added bonus of a GST.

Believe it or not, but the good folk of Bendigo were wrestling with this very same dilemma one hundred years ago. An editorial in the Bendigo Advertiser of Monday 1st January 1900, in part, put forward the following.

'Many people believe that to-day is the first day of the new century, but the great majority regard the 1st of January, 1901, as the first day of the 20th century, and to our view they have the best of the argument. One hundred complete years are needed to make up a century, and nineteen hundred complete years are needed to make up nineteen centuries, therefore the nineteenth century will not be completed till midnight on the 31st December, 1900. Those who maintain that to-day is the first day of the twentieth century must believe that the first year of the Christian era was known as the year 0, but nobody has ever heard of anything having happened in the year 0, or that there was such a year.....'

..... Of course those who celebrate the advent of the twentieth century to-day are welcome to do so, but we shall wait till the 1st January, 1901.'

New Year's Day, 1900 in Bendigo was fine and *exceedingly hot*. The maximum temperature in the shade was 103 degrees F (nearly 40 degrees C), in fact it was well over the century mark in many parts of the State. It was not reported how Bendigonians celebrated New Year's Eve but various sports gatherings were held on New Year's Day.

One, in particular, was reported by the Addy thus. *'Notwithstanding the great heat, the Bendigo Athletic Club's Cycling Carnival in the Show Grounds was well patronised, the gate receipts being 150, which may be taken to represent 3500 persons.'* Cycling and wood chopping appeared to be the main activities.

Another reported highlight was the St. Paul's Sunday School annual excursion and picnic. This year they went to the Kyneton Gardens, *affording those who attended a pleasant change from the usual picnic spots about Bendigo..... Two long trains filled to their utmost capacity were needed to accommodate the excursionists.*

Unfortunately, the New Year celebrations were marred with the news of a *TERRIBLE RAILWAY ACCIDENT*, which dominated the headlines in the Addy of the 2nd January. *'New Year's Day of 1900 will long be remembered by reason of the lamentable accident which happened on the Axedale line shortly before 10 o'clock in the morning. A cab containing a picnic party, joyfully anticipating the pleasures of the day, was crossing the railway line where it intersects the McIvor road when a railway train with excursionists to another picnic suddenly ran into it. In less time than it takes to tell the sad story, the cab was smashed, the horses killed, two young men had sustained injuries from which they subsequently died, a young lady was so dangerously injured that her condition is critical and several others sustained contusions more or less severe.....'*

Apparently, this particular crossing, about 3 miles out of Bendigo, used to have gates and a gatekeeper, as the McIvor road was (and still is) a very busy thoroughfare. However the Railway department in a cost cutting exercise, several years previously, retrenched the gatekeeper and removed the gates. The economic rationalists were alive and well, even in those days.

At the end of 1899, the Boer War in South Africa had been in progress about 12 weeks. What should have been a reasonably swift campaign, with the British greatly outnumbering the Boers, was turning into a prolonged struggle. The British forces were under siege in the towns of Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking. In an editorial of 3rd January, 1900, the Bendigo Advertiser was very critical of the British War Office for its lack of proper planning and inadequate provision of supplies.

To conclude on a less sombre note, 1899 was a good year for Bendigo's gold mines with production at 228,959 ounces and dividends of 227,306. *'The Garden Gully line has again justified its great reputation by contributing handsomely to the gold output and dividend list, and the permanency and proverbial richness of this famous line is amply demonstrated by the number of dividend paying mines which are situated along its course for a distance of fully six miles.'*

TRY KENNEDY'S FAMOUS KOLA NUT AND COCA TONIC

So highly is Coca esteemed in Peru, where it grows, they consume 30 million pounds annually, as a remedy for indigestion, dyspepsia, alcoholism and reviving the liver and brain restoring vigor.

This was part of an advertisement that appeared in the Addy on the 2nd January 1900. Just what we needed after a heavy night of New Year celebrations. Mate de Coca (coca leaf tea) is still widely used in South America. Cocaine is derived from the leaves of the coca shrub and the original recipe for Coca-Cola was supposed to have contained this drug. This beverage still has addictive qualities. Cheers !!

Reference: The Bendigo Advertiser 1st and 2nd January 1900