THE MELBOURNE BOOK

They came from the south, across 150 miles of shallow sea. They were escaping from the north of Tasmania; not from the law but from hard, cold, mountainous authority and country. They were attracted by the tales of warmer, flatter, softer land around the big bay on the south of the mainland. Drawn by greed and idealism they sailed their fragile boats around the silent bay and found a passable river between the low hills at its head. It was 1835, two years before Queen Victoria came to the throne.

There were two leaders, heading rival teams: little John Pascoe Fawkner and big John Batman. Both were by-products of the convict system, both the sons of convicts. Neither of them had any love for the arrogant legal and social establishment, but they loved the only land they knew and they had the faith in it which it badly needed at the time. Six miles up the river later called the Yarra Yarra they made their huts, selecting rising land on the north bank. John Batman, who had the unorthodox notion that aborigines were people, exchanged with four native chiefs a number of blankets and civilized trinkets for a great area of land. John Pascoe Fawkner, who preferred the urban life, opened a hotel though he had no liquor and started a newspaper though he had no printing machine, but pasted a manuscript on the window. Some of the Fawkner party pressed inland into rolling, open, yellow country, avoiding the wooded land to the east. Samuel Jackson helped his brother William build

A baked mud hut. George Evans built one of stone. Of all the early houses, Evans is the only one still in existance. It is called Holly Green and stands by Jackson's Creek, beyond Sunbury.

Very soon Governor Sir Rixhard Bourke in Sydney heard of these ungoverned private enterprising ruffians and he sent Captain William Lonsdale to be a resident Police Magistrate and, as surveyor, a free settler newly arrived from England by the name of Robert Russell. Russell was the last person one would have expected to meet here in the primeval bush. In London he had been apprenticed to the distinguished architect John Nash. He painted romantic little oils and water-colours, very capably and sensitively in the Turner manner. He once wrote a novel, and he lived here on the south side of the river, rather remote, occupying his evenings carving cameos in shell. He was Melbourne's first professional man. By day Russell traversed the hills each side of the river and set it all down on a map, houses and buildings already built included, and had this ready when Governor Bourke arrived from Sydney in 1837. Bourke brought with him Robert Hoddle, the man to be later the first Surveyor-General. They met in a tent and bent over Robert Russell's map, and out of the conference came a simple rectangular grid of roads, eight blocks by three, which Russell later drew carefully on his original drawing. That was the basis of Melbourne. It was the plan of what is now known as the Golden Mile, for its length measures just over a mile on the ground.

It is the central city, 'downtown' to an American, just 'town' to most Melburnians who live up to ten or more miles away from it in the great uneven ring of suburbs.

The plan was neat and logical. The rectangle had one side practically on the north bank of the river and roughly parallel to it, which gave the main streets an orientation about east-northeast. Each big block was made just ten chains square and each of the streets between them measured one chain and a half in width. A creek ran from the north into the river, and this was the centre of the grid with four blocks on either side. It became, in due course, Elizabeth Street.

It was a bold plan, not approaching in imagination or foresight Colonel Light's plan for Adelaide of the same year, but at least done with good scale and a determination not to let this new colonial centre fall into bent shapes like Sydney, which had refused to accept the rigid discipline of various gridiron plans which successive early governors had tried to impose.

The primitive gridiron marked out on Russell's map was soon embellished. Hoddle planned good escapes from it: potentially magnificent boulevards three chains wide. To break up the ten chain blocks into more manageable size intermediate lanes only half a chain wide were cut through the middle of them, running longitudinally, or roughly east-west. These were intended to be service lanes, by which

the farms and buildings fronting the main streets could have their produce and refuse removed. Before long, however, when the village began to grow at a pace no-one had forseen, the rear lanes became front roads, and they were painfully restricted for such use. Nevertheless the gridiron rectangle served well, and it has remained the plan of central Melbourne, unaltered except for the addition of a few lateral lanes and one short street: Market Street. Its square horizontal character is so strong that it almost nullifies the natural hilliness in the creation of an urban image.

The streets of the gridiron were duly named - and the nameplates erected in 1850 - from Spring Street on the east to Spencer Street on the west, from Flinders by the river on the south to Lonsdale on the north. Now it felt like a real city, and this was still a year before the gold rush. After 1851 it never looked back to the village. It grew compulsively, internally, by filling the blocks of the gridiron with buildings. Robert Hoddle, when he went on to plan the inner suburbs, was generous in providing public squares, but in the hastily conceived centre all the space between the streets was made available for building. And thus it is still today, while the problem of cutting a green square into the mass of concrete and masonry is ever discussed and ever unsolved.

The gridiron has remained the heart, but it is not of course all there is to Melbourne. It is but a small urban island, hardly noticable to a bird's eye, in an ocean of industry, greenery and suburbs. But it is the heart, and some aspect of it is the subject of every drawing in the Melbourne section of this book.

A work about the drawings. The older set, the Troedel prints, were first published in 1863 and 1864, as part of a set of twenty-four lithographs known as The Melbourne Album. This was published by Charles Troedel, who had arrived in the colony from Norway (though he was a native of Denmark) as recently as 1860, aged no more than twenty-five. He was a fine craftsman and he found in F. Cogne a sensitive observer and capable artist to draw the likeness of Melbourne on his lithographic stones. Of Cogne nothing else is known, but Troedel's activities are well documented and the printing firm he founded is still very much alive. In fact it honoured the centenary of his pioneering work with an exhibition of his prints. The Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, Mr. Eric Westbrook, opened that exhibition, and in passing remarked on the changes in the city during the century. He suggested that it would be good to see someone repeat now what Troedel and Cogne did a hundred years ago. His suggestion impressed at least one member of the audience, Harold Freedman, who took up the challenge and a sharp pencil.

During 1964 and 1965 Freedman drew scenes of Melbourne's central area from the same vantage points as Cogne chose, or as close as possible to them. He found and recorded great change, as was only to be expected, but he also found some old landmarks still extant. And he had a problem. He was working in a period of intense building activity, and making a portrait of a city from life. It was by no means still life. It continued to develop even as he drew, and during this time of writing and printing further impressive changes have happened.

The changes of the century are mostly architectural, and mainly vertical, but there were other alterations in the streets. Top hats and bustles and horses and cobblestones went. Trees and trams appeared, and overhead wires, and advertisements, and cars, and nearly two million more people.

When Cogne drew Melbourne it had about 165,000 people most of whome had come some ten years earlier seeking gold, and now successful or unsuccessful, stayed on for other reasons. Even then in 1864 the Golden Mile was largely a centre for commerce and entertainment. More than two-thirds of the population retired to sleep in the outer suburbs of Collingwood, Fitzroy, Richmond, Prahran - even out as far as St. Kilda. Yet Melbourne was already immensely proud, claiming to be the 'Metropolis of the Southern Hemisphere', complete with a university, a fine public library, a National Gallery, and a night life

that would make a modern vice-squad sergeant' hair stand on end. Not only more theatres than in 1965, but strange dance entertainments and waxworks and skittle alleys. Wine cafes were open all night, hotels till midnight. Prostitution and crime flourished and was punished with calculated brutality. Only five years earlier convicts had been herded and tortured in revolting hulks anchored off shore in the bay, which more recently had been exhibited as chambers of horrors at a shilling a look. A gold rush residue of 80,000 unsuccessful miners still slept in huts or tents or under the stars.

Yet Melbourne also had good schools. Scotch College was already 14 years old, and Melbourne Grammar and Wesley were dispensing a classical education. The Royal Society headquarters on the edge of the Golden Mile focused the city's intellectual and professional respectability, while Melbourne Punch, A magazine of high sophistication represented the more boisterous culture of the literary groups and the art clubs.

Democratic government was in spirited infancy. It was only ten years after the incident at the Eureka stockade and five years after the first election held under manhood suffrage. The colony of Victoria, of which Melbourne was capital, had its own separate Parliament, Government, and its own flag. It had a separate

naval and military establishment, and a hardly less formal social one. When they left their towered mansions in the suburbs and came to town the Quality seldom ventured beyond Collins Street. The Melbourne Club and a colony of doctors had gathered at the top end in the protective shadow of the Treasury. Down the eastern hill from there pretty ladies and elegant beaux could walk and shop and gossip in safety, and in a quiet broken only by the sharp clatter on bluestone cobbles of the hoofs and wheels of handsome equipages: barouches and mail-phaetons, pony carriages and American buggies.

Now we have Holdens and Volkswagens, Minis and Falcons, yet the striking contrast of the two scenes at the extreme ends of the century's span does not tell much more than half the story of the years between. Substantial buildings were erected and demolished within the period and leave no evidence at either end. One that is typical of these was on the south-east corner of Collins and Queen Streets. It was one of the skyscrapers of the 1880s, when Melbourne built four or five office blocks, each with some ten high storeys of massive brick walls dripping with plaster ornament, as tall as almost any offices in their world - including most of those in Chicago, the home of the skyscraper. This building on the corner served two generations of office workers. Then it was modernised. Much of the old ornament was stripped off but it was

decorated with an enormous tower which bacame one of the dominant verticals on the city skyline. Its tip was marked with the new owner= company's initials: A. P. A. Thus it served another generation. Then it changed hands again, and the letters on the tower were altered to L & G. More faithful officex service followed, but it was tiring visibly. At this stage Harold Freedman caught it; its walls of arched windows are to be seen on the extreme right of his Collins Street view. But even as Freedman drew the lower facade Whelan the Wreckers were nibbling away at the top, and by the time this book is published that building will be nothing but a confused memory and its site will be bared ready for a new, much bigger office block of twenty storeys.

Freedman's scenes of the present day miss another major element of Melbourne's historical character that came in the boom years of the 1880s and went finally in grim years half a century later. This was the cable tram, now quite vanished, and yet leaving in the minds of those who ever rode on it a residue that is part of the Melbourne character. Its curved and ornamental iron and shiny brown and yellow wood was part of a mobile architecture that complimented perfectly the static building of the only period when Melbourne made a style for herself. This Melbourne style of last century has not altogether disappeared. It can be seen scattered all through the early Troedel prints and is not entirely hidden by later buildings in

Freedman's drawings.

The Melbourne style consists of a contrast of strength and delicacy. The strength came at first from thick walls of the local basalt, a hard dark, blue-brown stone, and the delicacy came at first from elegantly proportioned windows and doorways and touches of timber or stone carvings. Later the stone gave way to brick and the carvings gave way to castings of iron, but still the contrast was there. In the 1880s it produced one of the very few distinctive urban styles in the world of the nineteenth century.

Five unmomentous events in the years between the two sets of drawings played major parts in shaping Melbourne's character. One has been mentioned already; it was the initial decision of 1837 to shape the city as a gridiron of straight, wide roads. This set the pattern of orderly horizontal perspectives.

The second was the building height limit of two chains (132 feet) which was set by the Melbourne City Council in 1886 after one of the early skyscrapers - the Australia Building in Elizabeth Street - had shocked with its unexpected height. This arbitrary height limit tied Melbourne down through the first half of the twentieth century, and the restriction went against the will of many of the more eager building promoters and their architects. They broke through the legal barrier whenever they were able with the permissable device

of an unoccupied architectural feature. Thus the A. P. A., Howey Court, the Manchester Unity, the T. & G., and many others of the 1930s projected tall, thin towers above their topmost floors. These towers joined the earlier churchs' steeples and the public buildings' fatter domes to make a spikey skyline above the businesslike blocks of offices and shops.

The next main character-forming event took place on Empire Day, the 24th of May, 1875. The first tree was ceremoniously planted on the edge of the slate footpath at the top end of Collins Street near the Treasury Building. Through the years trees were gradually extended.down Collins Street, and branch lines grew up William Street and up the centres of Queen and King Streets. Later there was a pause in tree planting and then in recent years they started to multiply again, though now in cement tubs, rather than in holes in the pavement, which gives them a rather more transient look. Since few if any of the trees planted so far have been Australian, the leafy show is seasonal. In winter the young trees and the potted ones all but disappear, and the old ones at the top of Collins Street are only ink lines scribbled over the faces of the buildings. But for at least three seasons of the year the leaves throw a flattering veil over the architecture and a spotted carpet of shade over the footpaths, and they transform the streets which are blessed with them.

The fourth main characteristic of modern Melbourne arrived in 1927. It was painted green and cream, in the fashion of its day, and it rumbled down Flinders Street, tethered to an overhead wire: the first electric tram in the Golden Mile. Today the tram cars are in most streets and are a little straighter and heavier than the first ones, but they are still painted in the same colours. They are handsome enough vehicles as public transport goes, and no one would deny that they have an aesthetic presence with the scream and clatter of their steel wheels and the network of wires which hold aloft their power cable in the otherwise wireless city streets.

The fifth event that made modern Melbourne was the lifting of the building height limit, which happened gradually after 1956 when ICI House on Eastern Hill showed a reasonable way around the regulations. Since then loftier buildings, of twenty storeys or so, have appeared at the rate of about one per year. Few are taller than the thin decorative towers of the first half of the century, but their square silhouettes are gradually adding bulk and authority to the skyline.

Trees, trams and towers are general characteristics of Melbourne. The details are filled in by architecture, and nowhere in the world can a greater variety be found, representing both pride and carelessness in the adaptation of every imaginable historical style

and modern fashion. The long persepctives of the Golden Mile are kaleidascopic in colour and fragmentation and without a kaleidascope's geometrical unity. Yet a few representative buildings may be selected (arbitrarily and personally) for mention here.

The Treasury building of 1858, in command at the top of Collins Street, stands for the highest pride of the gold days, the pomp of Italian Renaissance done with more style and competence than a colony so young had any right to expect. St. Patrick's Cathedral, built over a long period after 1858 when its architect, William Wardell, arrived, represents the best of Melbourne Gothic. It is good Gothic because Wardell was a master, and it is good Melbourne in the contrast of rough rock-faced bluestone walls and the delicate tracery of windows and carved ornaments. The big Princess Theatre of 1886 reflects well the boom years of plush and plaster. The Manchester Unity building of 1934, based on the design of the Chicago Tribune tower of 1922, raises a tall, delicate tower typical of all aspiring commercial building in the first half of the twentieth century. Buckley & Nunn's little addition of 1934 at 294 Bourke Street preserves in a tasteful version the jazzy modernistic style that preceded the search for an honest modern architecture. ICI House of 1956, by Bates, Smart and Mc Cutcheon, was not only the first but is also perhaps still the best of the new skyscrapers: reflective, antiseptic, beautifully placed in relation to the city as it stands astride Lonsdale Street on the

crest of the Eastern Hill.

Melbourne, unlike all the other Australian capitals, was not conceived as a capital city. Its site was not selected officially or deliberately. It grew up in cottages around the biggest creek which ran into a placid bay. And despite a rumbustious passage or two last century, for eighty years or so Melbourne has been in character with its site: quiet to the point of ennui in the eyes of some other Australian capital dwellers; calm and rather dignified in the eyes of those who love it. The rowdy early days have left no ghosts. Never seek here the visual or atmospheric excitements of cities built on deep harbours or wide rivers or on mountain sides; but look for gentler qualities. See Melbourne in autumn, her best season, when haze softens the spikey skyline. See here on a calm spring day from one of her nearer beaches, when the great grey expanse of the bay is almost as smooth and still as the sky, or in summer from the chequered shade beneath the trees on either hill of Collins Street. See her in winter at dusk from across the Yarra, when the sky turns magenta behind the spires and the neon jewels while the lights still blaze white in the office towers, showing that those who dwell in the huge ring of dormitory suburbs have not yet deserted their daytime town.

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