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"FEUDIN' AND FIGHTIN' OVER THE TRAM,

by
Geoff. Palmer.

A "QUIET" tram is likely to sidle up to you in Bourke Street any time next year.

But if you fancy feuds, clattering hooves, holdups and showers of sparks for your 4d. you've "missed the tram"--by anything up to 65 years.

Feudin' and fitin' raged in the rolling hills not a dozen miles from Melbourne back in 1891--two years^{or} after our first electric tram rocketed at 15 m.p.h. (on the down-grades) between White Horse Road, Box Hill and the Tower Hotel, Doncaster.

The land boom laid these metals across what was then undeveloped, dun-colored, sun-baked, clay country, for the promoters of the Box Hill and Doncaster Tramway Company Limited, saw possibilities in the quaint car which had been run as an "attraction" at the Centennial International Exhibition in Melbourne in 1888.

When the Exhibition closed, no one quite knew what to do with the "new electrical tramway". The land syndicate bought it.

The Box Hill-Doncaster service connected with every train from Princes Bridge Station to Box Hill--and kept out of the red, too--until, as J.K. Moir tells in his history of the line, a dispute arose with a shareholder who had ceded a strip of land to the company in consideration of shares.

Then, under the darkness of a June 1891 night, rails were pulled up and posts carrying the overhead wire chopped down.

Other land owners became embroiled and Doncaster rubbed the sleep from its eyes one morning to see a bell-topped effigy--placarded and ripe for burning--suspended on the cross wire at the terminus.

In the midst of bitterness--but without blood-shed--the company failed.

The Bank Smash of 1893 crippled a new-formed company's efforts to convey passengers over a route altered to overcome the land difficulty--and a further valiant, but futile, effort to keep the wheels turning was made by this company's engineer, Mr. H.J. Hilton, to whom the directors leased tramway, machinery and sheds at a weekly rent of one shil.

For nearly two years, Hilton labored day and night to maintain the service; but traffic dwindled, local orchardists struck bad times, and Australia's first electric tram came to the end of the penny section on January 6, 1896.

Other lines were thriving on one live horse power!

A horse car line--hastily laid to promote land sales--was opened in December, 1884, between Clifton Hill and Fairfield. Hooves clattered between steel ribbons along Sydney Road, Coburg, and from Glenhuntly to Elsternwick.

You can still be on the right side of 40 and remember the horse-tram service from Sydney Road to the Zoological Gardens.

And--if you found tram travel dull--there was always the Hawthorn horse-car. Four armed and masked bandits held up its driver and passengers just before midnight on August 18, 1901. A chilling and costly ride for nine Sunday tram trippers, who handed over £25 in money and valuables.

Bendigo added a noisy and novel chapter to Victoria's tramway history.

The golden city's first electric trams drew power from storage batteries on each car.

theoretically, the energy consumed on inclines was restored by the declines. In practice, passengers pushed!

Steam "dummies", each hauling a long car, gave steady, if smoky, service, in succession to electric traction. Showers of sparks from the funnel marked their progress, and lengths of angle iron, carried as standard equipment, were plied frequently and good-humoredly by passengers when the old contraption forsook its rails.

It'll be quiet down here--with no grinding, wrenching, bumping, thumping, or squealing of anguished metal--but not half as much fun as when Grandpa rode the trams!

FOOTNOTE:

Memorandum to gripmen and conductors from the Melbourne Tramways Trust (1895):--
"You are required to regard all persons coming at all in the way of car or dummy as infants, or deaf, or blind, and when you know they are neither infants, nor deaf, nor blind, you must act on your part towards them as though they were, and it will be no excuse that you THOUGHT something. What we DEMAND is--that you Stop and take no chances".

Caption to photograph.

Tram arriving at Doncaster on the opening day--October, 14, 1889.