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OUR FIRST TRAMWAY WAS A RIOT. "THE HERALD"; 29-12-58.

At 8 p.m. on June 27, 1891, a stuffed figure representing a successful business man dangled from the overhead wires at the Doncaster terminus of the electric tramway from Box Hill.

A crowd of 800 watched while the figure which had been hanging for a week, was solemnly cut down. Then it was tossed into a roaring fire of pitch.

After a mock service, the "mourners" gave three hearty groans to show their loathing of the man responsible for the temporary stoppage of the tram service.

This was one of many bizarre incidents in the stormy history of Australia's first electric tramway in the outer suburbs of Melbourne.

Massed assaults on construction gangs and the wrecking of the permanent way forced the tram company to seek police protection before the line was built.

Even when the trams started running, sabotage, line blockages and legal actions caused many stoppages. Then the economic collapse of the 1890's dealt a final blow to the struggling enterprise.

The world's first electric tram ran at Sighperfelde, Germany, in 1881.

A two-car test electric railway, carrying passengers, was shown at the International Exhibition in Melbourne in 1888.

It ran for 58 days but the new-fangled transport did not appeal to the horse-and-buggy conscious public.

After the Exhibition, one car was bought as a lighting plant for Melbourne's main cable powerhouse. No buyer wanted the second car.

Box Hill was a quiet rural village when the steam railway reached it in 1882. But the orchard district of Doncaster,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles out, was already becoming popular as a picnic resort.

Because Doncaster was one of the highest points within 20 miles of Melbourne, a local publican built a wooden tower as a lookout to draw the holiday trade.

It was burnt down. He rebuilt it but a strong wind flattened it.

But the towers had proved so popular with trippers that the licensee of the Tower Hotel built a third in 1880.

Claimed to be a model of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, it was 285ft. high with 597 steps up to the look-out.

From the top a magnificent panoramic view covering about 50 miles round Melbourne rewarded the climber.

The tower was a notable landmark visible from most suburbs until it was demolished in 1914.

Despite the popular tower, the Doncaster district remained a quiet, pretty haven. Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton and other noted landscape artists frequented a permanent painters' camp there.

Then the land boom shattered the peace of the area. In a hectic race to find allotments for a public gripped by the land-buying mania, subdividers paid fantastic prices for the orchards and market gardens.

The tramway company which was formed to cash in on the hundreds of land buyers and week-end trippers bought the second electric car from the exhibition train.



By June, 1889, The Box Hill and Doncaster Electric Tramway Company had spent nearly £5000 on the permanent way, including concessions and rights from owners of land adjoining the track.

The new enterprise did not get the whole-hearted support of the locals. Many opposed it as being the death-knell to any hope of getting the promised Government railway to Doncaster.

Others did not want the privacy of their quiet rural retreat destroyed. They did not like trippers with their drunken parties and vandalism.

At the time, the pushes were coming into their own. Larrikins raided the orchards, breaking fences, tearing branches from trees and spoiling more than they stole.

They did not hesitate to beat-up an owner who protested.

The owners retaliated with man-traps, spring-guns and vigilante patrols. These men were bitterly against the new push-carrying tramway.

Verbal protests by the anti-tram factions were ridiculed as reactionary. The line pushed inexorably from Box Hill towards Doncaster.

Words and threats having failed, the orchardists resorted to direct action. They swooped on the construction gangs.

Fighting grimly, they drove the men from the job, ripped up rails, chopped up sleepers, then retreated to their farms.

This happened so frequently that the company had to seek police protection. With a strong guard of constables continually on patrol, the line was eventually completed.

On October 14, 1889, the one-car tramway was officially opened in the presence of many prominent citizens.

The single car, an open 6-bencher, was designed to carry 40 passengers--when its 12 h.p. motor was in good running order.

Because of difficulties in getting straight right-of-way, the line had to be built with some very sharp curves and steep grades. The steepest, up to the Tower Hotel, was 1 in 16.

Despite this, the packed car did the trip in 20 minutes without much trouble.

The line proved so popular that a second car--a closed vehicle with double seating space and a much more powerful engine--was ordered.

Then a former Member of Parliament who had opposed the line claimed free transport on the strength of his railway gold pass. He was told the tram carried paying passengers only.

The angry ex-member promptly started a cab service from Doncaster to the Kew railway station.

After nine days, he abandoned the scheme; he had been his only passenger.

The tram proved its popularity on Easter Monday, 1890, when it carried 1500 passengers to the Tower.

Having shown a small profit on the first half year's operations, the company looked to an era of prosperity. Then it suffered a serious blow.

The line ran through property owned by a land syndicate named the South Doncaster Land Company.

This company suddenly disputed the tram's right-of-way. It served a notice that the tram must stop running by June, 20, 1891--or else.



Faced with the threat of force as well as legal action, the tramway company stopped its service on the evening of June 19.

Next day, the land syndicate rebuilt fences across the line at both boundaries of its land. That night, the fence posts were ripped out and the timber and wire stolen.

The land syndicate retaliated by chopping down the poles carrying the power line over its land. It left the poles and a tangle of copper cable strewn over the tram rails.

On June 22, a meeting of wildly indignant residents was held at the Doncaster council chambers.

Delegates wanted to negotiate for a settlement between the parties but the meeting was told no settlement was possible.

Next morning, an effigy of the secretary of the land syndicate was dangling at a rope's end from the overhead wires at the Doncaster terminus.

Abig placard announced that the effigy would be publicly burned on the following Saturday night and all were "cordially invited to attend".

It was duly burned, and 800 cheerful mourners attended the funeral on the syndicate's land, singing "Old ----- body lies asmouldering in the grave".

But local indignation and protests were unavailing. Further legal actions compelled the tramway company to go into liquidation early in 1892.

But three weeks later a new company under the management of H.J. Hilton was formed to run the trams along a slightly varried route, dodging the contested right-of-way. The tram ran again in March.

But foul play and several suspected cases of outright sabotage of equipment continued to hinder the company's activities.

Fighting doggedly to keep the line open, Hilton put the new box car in the shed, took one of its motors, and ran the old open car with a saving of 25 per cent in running costs.

But his efforts were in vain.

The new company was hit badly when its bank - the E. S. & A. Chartered Bank at Box Hill--closed its doors in the bank crash of 1893.

Nevertheless, the tram ran intermittently until April 14, 1894, when the company decided to give up the fight.

Then Hilton offered to take over and run the line himself. He leased the tramway as a going concern at 1/- a week.

The company accepted the offer and an agreement was signed giving Hilton the right to terminate the contract on a month's notice.

Hilton set to energetically. Stoppages became fewer. He was his own stoker, engine-driver, dynamo attendant and armature winder. He was general manager, chief engineer and car cleaner.

Several times he was nearly beaten by sabotage. Once the motor wiring was interfered with causing a dangerous run down the hill from Doncaster.

Soon after this incident a church picnic party engaged the tram. They wanted to return to Box Hill at 10 p.m.

With 45 passengers, Hilton started to coast down the hill. When he applied the brakes nothing happened.



The little tram gathered speed. It lurched and rocked but held the line rounding a sharp curve on to a bridge. Then a run up-hill stopped it.

His passengers had no idea that they had been in grave danger of making tragic tramway history.

But Hilton's efforts to keep the line operating were hopeless. With the bursting of the boom, depression hit Melbourne.

There was no money for picnics and the orchardists around Doncaster were struggling to make ends meet.

Despite his keen interest in the line and the long hours of labour he had put into it, he realised at last he was finished.

Just before Christmas, 1895, Hilton gave the company notice that he was surrendering his lease. The last tram on Australia's first tram line ran on January 6, 1896.

*Hilton*