

FIFTY YEARS OF CABLE TRAMS

Monday's
Anniversary

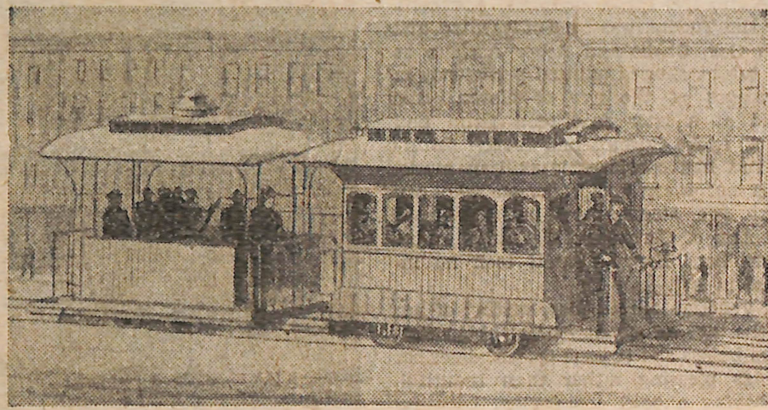
ON Monday, the 50th anniversary will be celebrated of the opening of Melbourne's first cable tramway, and although no festivities have been arranged the occasion is of considerable historic interest. Sixty odd years ago Melbourne was not so much a city as a number of scattered settlements not too closely linked together. Hotham (as North Melbourne was then called), Brunswick, Jika Jika (which we now call Northcote), Richmond, Hawthorn, Prahran, St. Kilda, Brighton—all had definite, separate identities, and were little self-contained worlds of their own. Hotham could look over Port Phillip Bay without seeing an intervening smoke pall; Jika Jika shimmered in the heat in the summer and got a full share of the cold north wind in winter, blowing from the Dividing Range; Hawthorn was as calm as the river which wound slowly past it, and Brighton was the retreat of wealthy men, and the journey from the city took the best part of two hours, and was a splendid adventure for the younger members of the family. Into most of these peaceful places, and connecting

ment way at £63,509, and nine others were let within the next few months, one being for 7,000,000 red gum paving blocks. The construction of the line (to Richmond) was let in three sections, and from the outset difficulty was experienced in the alterations to the gas and water pipes and the drains. The additional expense fell wholly on the trust.

First Line Opened.

While extraordinary interest was taken in the building of that first line, it was nothing compared with the desire to experience the new mode of travel when car No. 1 set out on its initial journey on 11th November, 1885. All day long the cars carried full loads, and parents from the outer suburbs brought their children to the city for the special treat of a ride. Incidentally it is obvious that the original builders believed in sound materials and construction, for car No. 1, with something like 1,250,000 miles to its credit, is still in service.

At the end of 1891 there were 41 miles of cable lines in operation, the total



TRAM CAR IN 1885.

them with the city, came horse buses, and at once the pulse of life quickened.

Mechanical transport was proposed, but 13 long years passed before the proposal to construct tramways received the sanction of Parliament in the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company's Act of 1883. With the passing of the Melbourne Tramways Trust Act in 1884, the way was finally cleared for another progressive move in the development of the metropolis. The act authorised the building of tramways in Melbourne, Fitzroy, Jika Jika, Collingwood, Richmond, Kew, Hawthorn, Brunswick, Hotham, South Melbourne, Sandridge (Port Melbourne), Prahran and St. Kilda, and it also provided that the municipalities, if they desired, could form a tramways trust and build tramways themselves. Twelve municipalities took advantage of this provision, and the first trust met in the Town Hall on 7th March, 1884, the chairman being Alderman O'Grady, of Melbourne. The meeting considered what motive power should be adopted, and, steam locomotives having been ruled out by Parliament, the choice lay between the electric or underground cable systems. Electric traction by means of overhead wires was then in its infancy, and so the trust resolved to adopt the underground cable system, being influenced by the known success of similar systems in the United States and New Zealand.

Designer Appointed.

With the desire to get the best designer possible, the trust unanimously resolved to secure the services of the late Mr. George S. Duncan, who had been associated with the New Zealand and other cable systems. The proof of the soundness of the design Mr. Duncan evolved is shown by the fact that the original tracks, engine houses, cars and depots are still in use on those portions of the cable system which remain unconverted. Most of the engine houses operated three ropes, the length of which varied from 16,000 to 33,000 feet. Although the designed speed was nine miles per hour it was found possible in practice to run the cables at a greater speed. Even during the last few years, although the equipment has been in continuous service, the average speed, including stops, has never fallen more than a fraction below 10 m.p.h. Each route had its own set of cars, distinguished by a colored dome on the dummy and colored lights on the trailer.

The trust at first thought that it would be impossible to run a cable tramway around the curves on the South, Port, West and North Melbourne routes,

length of the ropes being about 95 miles. After Richmond, the lines were opened to traffic in the following order:—Fitzroy (Collins-street), 2nd October, 1886; Victoria-street, 22nd November, 1886; Collingwood and Clifton Hill, 10th August, 1887; Bourke and Nicholson streets, 26th August, 1887; Brunswick, 1st October, 1887; Carlton, 21st December, 1887; St. Kilda and Brighton-road, 11th October, 1888; Prahran, 26th October, 1888; North Melbourne, 3rd March, 1890; West Melbourne, 11th April, 1890; South Melbourne, 17th June, 1890; Port Melbourne, 17th June, 1890; and St. Kilda Esplanade, 27th October, 1891. In addition, the Kew horse line was opened as far as Victoria-street-bridge in December, 1887, and the Hawthorn horse line in January, 1890. On completion of Victoria-bridge in February, 1890, the horse line to Kew was completed and opened to traffic.

In the construction of the Collins-street line it was found necessary to remove the statue of Burke and Wills, which then stood at the intersection of Russell-street. Another episode was more expensive, costing the trust £1200. Collins-street appears to be straight, but actually it deviates in places considerably from a straight line. With the idea of avoiding curves the trust proposed to divert the lines about 2 feet out of the centre. Owners in the vicinity alleged that this deviation—in a street 99 feet wide—would endanger their properties and eventually the trust had to correct the alignment.

When the last line, that to St. Kilda Esplanade, was built the construction programme of the trust was completed. Up to 31st July, 1892, its total expenditure had been £1,671,966, and the chairman (Mr. H. Jennings) congratulated the trust and the municipalities "on the completion of this noble system of street locomotion." He predicted that at the termination of the lease in 1916 the municipalities would "enter into possession of a splendid remunerative property entirely unencumbered by debt."

An Unfulfilled Prophecy.

Eventually, however, the councils which had pledged their rates as security for the capital expenditure lost their property, receiving only the cancellation of the debentures. When the future of the tramways was discussed there were, in addition to the trust, five other tramways trusts in the suburbs, as well as the North Melbourne Tramways and Lighting Co. Various conferences were held, and the first proposal was that the municipalities should be divided into groups, which should elect eleven members to form the trust. No agreement was reached, and the Government then



THE FIRST ENGINE HOUSE, VICTORIA-PARADE.

and decided that these and the Kew and Hawthorn lines should be worked by horses. Later it was seen that Mr. Duncan's design was admirable for curves and the other cable lines were built.

Under its act the trust had power to raise all money for tramway construction, and for the expenses of the trust by borrowing on debentures secured on the lines themselves, and on the revenues of the various municipalities interested, the liability of each council being in proportion to the length and cost of the lines within their respective boundaries. It was provided also that the trust should give a 32 years' lease of the lines to the company, which had to pay interest on debentures, and a yearly percentage to be set aside as a sinking fund to extinguish the loan by the end of the lease. In return the company agreed to find the capital for the rolling stock and equipment of the lines and engine houses, and undertook, on the expiry of the lease in 1914, to hand over the tramways in good working order to the trust. Later the lease was extended to 1916.

Negotiations with financial agents disclosed that the London Stock Exchange would not view favorably flotation of a loan on the terms indicated. To overcome the objections an act was passed in July, 1884, making £1,200,000 the limit of the trust's borrowing powers. At first the sale of debentures yielded only £97 6/6 to the trust, but their value was soon realised, and in April, 1888, the first issue of £500,000 was quoted at £111 15/. Messrs. Briscoe and Co. got the first contract on 27th January, 1885, for 9000 tons of perma-

proposed a nominee board which would take over the various municipal tramway trusts and the tramway interests of the North Melbourne company. In 1918 the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Bill was passed, providing that the total amount of each municipality's contribution to the municipal loans redemption fund should be determined, and that the cable surplus should be deemed to be £827,000. The municipalities responsible for the cable tramways had hoped to receive this surplus, but it was appropriated by the Government to assist in redeeming a loan then due in London. Following protests the Government agreed in return to write off a corresponding amount of the debentures which were due for payment by the municipalities this year. The Government also provided that tramway revenue should be saddled with payments to the fire brigade, the Infectious Diseases Hospital and the licensing fund, and municipal opposition was stifled by the threat that if the tramways did not make the payments they would come from municipal receipts.

Before the expiry of the cable tramway lease in 1916 a temporary board was created, with Mr. Colin Templeton a member of the present board, as chairman. In 1919 the present board was constituted, with Mr. A. Cameron as chairman, and its planning of a metropolitan scheme, its gradual programme of tramway conversions, and its steady reduction of capital indebtedness on the system have made Melbourne's tramways one of the most efficient and profitable undertakings in the world. The day of the cable tram is drawing rapidly to a close, and they will soon be remembered only by dummies forming the nucleus of a mountain shack or a shelter at a bayside resort. Kindly laughter will centre round these old relics, mute reminders of a system of transport which for many a year served Melbourne well.