

The First



Railway

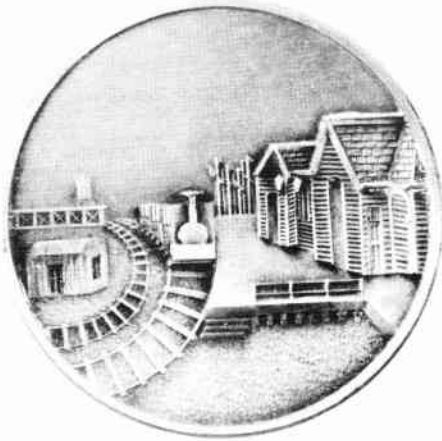


B y B E T T Y T U R V E Y

N. A. V. N o. 6 0 9

In the spring of 1854 it was "All aboard for the beach!" as Sandridge was called. (Now known as Port Melbourne.) Thanks to the Melbourne and Hobson's Bay Railway Company, a train service ran from Flinders Street at 15 miles an hour to Sandridge over two and a quarter miles of sand wastes and bulrush swamps.

In 1839 the surveyor Robert Hoddle proposed that Sandridge be the first beach village, while the surveyor for Melbourne, James Blackburn, was the planner for the railway. The engines were ordered from Robert Stephenson's works at Birmingham but there were delivery delays, also for rolling stock, machinery, rails, etc., and costs greatly exceeded estimates. (Things haven't changed much, have they?) So a locally built engine made at Langland's port Phillip foundry was used until the English ones arrived three months later. They were named "Melbourne", "Sandridge", "Victoria" and "Yarra", and served one day each in rotation.



"The N.A.V. First Steam Railway Medallion."

The official opening of the line provided a gala occasion for Melbourne. Thousands assembled along the track to watch not only Victoria's but AUSTRALIA's first public steam railway!

The Company's guests were resplendent in their best attire: frock coats, brocaded waistcoats, stovepipe hats, and carefully trimmed whiskers; the ladies displaying gay dresses, their bonnets tied with veils against the sea breeze, and parasols; a great contrast to the casual dress of modern Melbournians at the piers recently to see the Tall Ships.

The Lieut.-Governor (Captain Sir Charles Hotham, R.N.) and Lady Hotham were ceremoniously received at Flinders Street and presented with copies of the railway timetable and the by-laws printed on silk. Her Majesty's warships "Electra" and "Fantome" fired a salute, whilst a spectator fleet of about 100 bedecked with flags added to the welcome at the terminus!

The train consisted of an engine, one second-class and two first-class carriages for the guests. In an open wagon next to the engine, the band of the 40th Regiment played appropriate music. Then, amid cheers from the jubilant crowd and cinders from the engine, the train trip began, arriving at what is now Port Melbourne in ten minutes. Two extra journeys were needed for the rest of the guests, who enjoyed a sumptuous banquet in the engine shed at the pier, where lengthy speeches of adulation (stimulated by the customary champagne) promised a rosy future for the Company, which paid a dividend of 8% for that year.

The timetable showed trains running at half hourly intervals from 8.30 a.m. at Sandhurst, an hour and a half being allowed for lunch, and the last to leave Flinders Street at 6.45 p.m., with fewer journeys on Sundays.

The fares were: 1/6d. first class single, 1/- second class single; half fare for children up to ten years, free under three years. Not only has the fare risen in the last 134 years but the concessions for children have changed, too.

The numismatic connection? Well, at the time of the centenary of the opening of this first Australian railway, the Numismatic Association of Victoria commemorated the event by issuing a medallion. Only sixty bronze and forty silver were struck (by Stokes), and they rarely appear at auctions. The design was adapted from the medal struck the same year for Alfred Chitty, a Melbourne numismatist who designed his version by adapting the S. T. Gill print, which was published in the National Bank calendar in 1972.

The N.A.V. medallion used the inner portion of Chitty's design, which was similar to the illustration but included a legend around the rim: "Melbourne & Hobsons Bay Railway Station Flinders Street". Chitty's reverse bore the legend: "To/commemorate the/opening of the first steam/railway in Australia/Melbourne to Sandridge 12th Septr. 1854/and the construction of the first/locomotive used in/Australia/also/early Victorian railways/Melbourne to Geelong 1857/Melbourne to St.Kilda 1857/Melbourne to Williamstown/1859/Melbourne to Essendon/1860.

The sizes of the medallions are: 51 mm (Chitty); 38 mm. (N.A.V.) The Chitty version was in bronze.

Acknowledgements to:

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