

20th February, 1969.

'HISTORY OF THE BRISBANE TRAMWAYS'

On 10th August, 1885, the Metropolitan Tramway and Investment Company officially opened their horse-drawn tram system in Brisbane, the first car carrying official guests from Victoria Bridge to the Exhibition. The entire system, from Woolloongabba to Breakfast Creek Bridge, with branches to the Exhibition and New Farm, embraced a total of six and one half (6½) miles of track separated into two areas by the river; tracks were not laid across Victoria Bridge until 1886. Eighteen (18) tramcars were used for the service, and one hundred (100) horses were employed, two horses being used for each car.

The tramcars were of American origin, nine being built in New York, and nine by the Brill Company in Philadelphia. A description of the cars in the Brisbane Courier of that time includes the following:- "The cars are constructed of cedar and mahogany, highly polished, and are fitted with all the latest improvements. They are mounted on steel springs, making the motion almost imperceptible."

In 1895, the Brisbane Tramways Company Limited was formed to take over the assets of the Metropolitan Tramways and Investment Co., with the primary object of electrifying the tramway system of Brisbane. The official opening of the first electric tramway took place on June 21st, 1897, the service operating from Logan Rd. to the southern end of Victoria Bridge. The first car, driven by Mr. J.S. Badger, General Manager of the Company, stopped at the South Brisbane Council Chambers to collect members of the Council. Others accepted a general invitation to board the car, including the band of the Queensland Volunteer Rifles, which played for a number of trips. The electric service commenced in Queen Street on 3rd July, 1897, about a year before electric trams were used in Glasgow.

At that time, there were twenty (20) cars operating over 15 miles of track, and the Company embarked on a steady programme of expansion over the following twenty (20) years. Some of the new lines, and extensions constructed during this period were:-

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| 1897 | Logan Rd., Ithaca, George St., Red Hill, and part of the Paddington lines. |
| 1899 | Ipswich Rd., Paddington extension, Ascot. |
| 1901 | Gladstone Rd., Kelvin Grove, Clayfield. |
| 1902 | Wharf St., Edward St. |
| 1903 | Lower Edward St., East Brisbane (to Norman Bridge) |
| 1904 | Toowong, Rosalie. |
| 1905 | Enoggera Terrace. |
| 1908 | Dutton Park |
| 1914 | Greenslopes, Windsor, Kedron Park, Merthyr Rd. |
| 1915 | Coorparoo, Cracknell Rd. |
| 1917 | Grey St. (single track in place of inbound track in Stanley Street) Adelaide Street. Ann Street (to Brunswick St.) |

The Company ceased operations on 31st December, 1922, handing over to the Brisbane Tramways Trust on that date. The Trust took over 181 cars providing services on 42½ miles of tram routes. The system left by the Company formed the nucleus of Brisbane's tramway system.

Despite the quite considerable increase in the rolling stock, and the extensions carried out, during the life of the Company, the system taken over by the Tramways Trust was in a state where large sums of money were required to be invested. For example, little new track was laid during the closing years of the Company's existence, and only eight new cars (representing less than 5% of the fleet) were added in the last five years of operation.

None-the-less, the Brisbane Tramways Company gave excellent service to the citizens of Brisbane for many years, and until the last few years of its life, expanded and kept pace with the growth of population; the shareholders also did well from the venture. The system had the advantage of being well designed at its commencement, as each of the principal routes served both sides of the river, instead of terminating in the City.

The Brisbane Tramways Trust was brought into being by Act of Parliament which received Royal Assent on 14th October, 1922. The amount of compensation payable by the Trust to the Brisbane Tramways Company was the subject of very extensive negotiation, culminating in a settlement being reached just prior to a hearing set down for the Privy Council in London. It is interesting to note that among the legal representatives for the Trust during the negotiations were two future Chief Justices of Queensland, Messrs. Hugh Macrossan and William Webb. The amount agreed upon was £1,400,000, which sum was raised by floating a public loan of £1,500,000 in London. Further sums were required to carry out very necessary development works, and an additional £500,000 was raised in London.

When the Trust took possession of the Undertaking, it vigorously set about the most urgent works, e.g. track relaying, and it adopted the British Standard Specification for tram rail. Very considerable attention was focused at this time on the design of new type tramcars; the drop centre car was a product of these deliberations.

The drop centre car was provided with considerably more power than its predecessors, had greater seating and carrying capacity, and more entrances and exits to speed up passenger flow. During 1924, the Trust accepted tenders for the first 30 drop-centre cars, and simultaneously, owing to the urgency of the situation, placed orders for the construction of twenty-one (21) trams of the earlier dreadnought or centre-aisle type. Drop-centres were to prove very popular and robust cars and later examples of them, with modifications in design, remained in service almost up to the abandonment

of the tramway system, in favour of a diesel bus system, in March, 1969. The centre aisle cars ceased to be in service after some years, although the more recent models were pressed into regular service following the disastrous Paddington fire of September, 1962.

When the Trust gave way to the Brisbane City Council on 1st December, 1925, there were 225 tramcars in service, an increase of 44 cars. Nineteen (19) cars were in course of construction, and it was proposed to invite tenders for 20 more. Some of the Trust's difficulties had been the poor condition of many of the older cars, particularly in respect to inefficient motors, inadequate insulation of electric cables, and leaking roofs.

During the tenure of the Trust, the first venture in running a combined tram and bus system was undertaken, and during 1925, eleven (11) motor bus chassis were purchased, and bodies supplied by local contractors. A garage was built at North Quay to service both the buses and the Trust's fleet of motor vehicles. Contracts were let to construct car sheds and depot offices at Ipswich Road, and elevated signal cabins were installed at Petrie Bight.

It is of interest to note that the Trust in those days had realised the limitations of a tramways system, particularly in its inability to provide economic services to areas of low population density, or where grades and curves were unsuited to the use of trams. It is a matter of regret that the decision to move in such a direction was premature - the buses available at that time were inefficient and unreliable in service as compared with the electrically operated tramways, and they were costly; road surfaces were poor, and petrol and tyres were very expensive. Late in 1927, that is, following the acquisition of the system by the Brisbane City Council, bus operation was abandoned after heavy losses had been incurred. (The Council resumed bus operation in 1940, on a minor scale, no large growth in the

services taking place until the post war years. In 1947, the Administration acquired a large number of privately operated bus services, as it was considered that the main system of street passenger transport should be co-ordinated under one central authority. Further, it was intended to combine certain routes by direct runs through the city with the object of reducing City terminals and minimising congestion in the main thoroughfares.)

From the date of acquisition by the Brisbane City Council, up to the commencement of World War 2, very substantial progress was made; some idea of the vigour with which the task was pursued is conveyed by the following list of new lines, or extensions:--

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| 1926 | New Farm Park, Holland Park, Kelvin Grove, Newmarket. |
| 1927 | Barry Parade, Albion Park Racecourse loop, Davies Park Loop. |
| 1928 | Grange. |
| 1929 | Kalinga. |
| 1930 | Rainworth. |
| 1931 | Gregory Terrace Loop. |
| 1932 | Brisbane Cricket Ground Loop. |
| 1935 | Ashgrove school, Exhibition siding extension, Balmoral extension. |
| 1937 | Bardon, Moorooka, Doomben extension. |
| 1939 | Dutton Park extension. |
| 1940 | Stafford, Salisbury. |

At the date of take-over in 1925, the annual mileage run by the vehicles was 5,915,844, and by 1940, there was a total of 62 route miles of track, operating 8,389,993 miles annually.

Addendum.

Tram route extensions

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| Chernside | 1947 |
| Belmont | 1943 |
| Enoggera | 1949 |
| Mt. Gravatt | 1951 |

Electric Trolley buses introduced

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| 12.8.51 | Gardens and Gregory Tce. Service followed later by Prospect Terrace Stanley Bridge Service. |
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The Council, through its Department of Tramways and Power Houses, was charged with the responsibility of providing a Power House, not only for the purpose of supplying the Tramways, but also to meet the needs of the domestic consumer, and of industry. Accordingly, the design and construction of the New Farm Power House was undertaken. (During the term of office of the Trust, a decision had been taken that if its tenure were to exceed three (3) years, it would have to construct a modern power plant. The Trust was drawing power from its own obsolete and expensive plant, supplemented by energy supplied by the City Electric Light Co.) The new station commenced on 27th June, 1928, and the venture has proved an outstanding success. Over later years, the Council relinquished its role as a power generating authority.

In 1929, the present tramway offices in Coronation Drive were erected almost wholly from materials salvaged from the demolition of the old offices, power house and workshop at Countess Street.

The provision of additional cars proceeded steadily and for a number of years, building was carried out in the tramway workshops, the underframes, trucks, wheels, motors and controllers being supplied by outside contractors. In 1938, an entirely new type of all-steel car was designed, and construction undertaken in the tramway workshops. The car had eight equal wheels, and four motors, instead of unequal wheels and two motors as formerly, giving more power, quicker acceleration and deceleration, wider entrances, and more room for passengers. Known as the "400" or "Streamlined" type, the four-motor tram was a pronounced success, maintenance costs being very minor. A continuing programme was introduced to fit air-brakes to all new cars, and to large numbers of the older drop-centre type. With some interruption through World War 2, the construction

of the "400" car continued, until 1960, at which time 147 were in service.

The continuing increase in the number of cars called for more accommodation, and a new depot was erected at Light Street in 1931, whilst the depots erected by the Trust at Ipswich Road and Paddington were considerably enlarged in 1936 and 1938 respectively.

In 1939, Australia found herself involved in World War 2. The demands of a total war effort necessarily imposed a tremendous strain upon industry, communications, transport and the rest, and the Tramways Department was no exception. Early in the War, Allied troops in large numbers were stationed in Brisbane, and the tram system performed yeoman service in coping with the great demands placed upon it. As in many other industries, the employment of female labour was dictated by the recruitment of male employees into the Armed Services, and Conductresses became a familiar sight on Brisbane's trams.

The post war years saw consolidation in many areas of operation; much new relay work was carried out, and refinements effected in the popular F.M. class tramcar. The Department emerged as a major operator of bus services, and even at this stage, there was perhaps a foreshadowing of the Department's eventual role as an operator of diesel services only. In September, 1962, disaster struck.....the Paddington Depot was destroyed by fire with the loss of one-fifth of the tram fleet. The situation was indeed critical; a passenger-carrying capacity of some 6,500 people per trip had been lost, and the lack of adequate accommodation for the remaining trams presented a serious additional problem. The steps taken to overcome the difficulties facing the Department are a story in themselves, but the major reorganisation following the fire was the substitution of buses for trams on the Rainworth,

Kalinga and Toowong-Bulimba Ferry routes. (So far as the Bulimba route was concerned, a recommendation for conversion to bus operation had been prepared by the Department prior to the Paddington fire. The state of the track and the steadily declining patronage on this route were the reasons for the Department's recommendation.) Other measures preparatory to the conversion of these routes were the withdrawal of thirty (30) trams from the evening peak service, and the introduction into service of fifteen (15) buses hired from the Department of Government Transport, Sydney.

The years immediately following the fire presented problems of very real complexity to the Department. The climate had become disposed to a conversion to diesel buses, but yet, such a decision could not be entered upon lightly. Informed opinion was that conversion, if decided upon, would be a step-by-step process. In view of the uncertainty of these matters, and because of the age and obsolescence of many of the tramcars in use, the Department decided to construct eight (8) new tramcars in the Coronation Drive Workshops.

Quite apart from these reasons the decision to resume tram car construction was reinforced by the fact that motors were already held in stock, following the cessation of the tram-building programme some years earlier. In addition, sufficient trucks and wheels had been salvaged from the Paddington fire, and certain other materials were obtained from Adelaide at most reasonable prices, following the abandonment of trams in that city.

The eight (8) new cars, numbered 547-554 were commenced in January, 1964; the most modern of the F.M. class, they bore the title "Phoenix". The name chosen was a most happy inspiration, bearing witness to the mythical bird rising from the ashes of its own funeral pyre, and to the usage of the materials recovered from the embers of the Paddington inferno. Certainly, there would be few public service vehicles bearing such an appropriate appellation.

Also in 1964, earthworks were commenced at the site of the new Toowong Bus Depot. The Depot, completed in 1967, houses 150 buses, and is the focal point of the western suburbs services. Due for completion in March, 1969, is a sister depot at Carina. The new Carina Depot is required to be in operation on 31st March, 1969, to coincide with the second and final stage of conversion to an all bus system from that date. Following a policy decision in the matter, Stage 1 of "Operation Conversion" was carried out on 2nd December, 1968, when the Adelaide Street tram services were converted to diesel bus operation.

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ADDENDUM

The second and final stage of conversion referred to on page 9 as being scheduled for 31st March, 1969, was in fact deferred to April 14th, 1969. The decision was taken after publication of this short history. The last day of Brisbane Tram Operation was thus Sunday, April 13th, 1969.