

NAME CAROL PLOOY

SUBJECT AUSTRALIAN HISTORY
OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE 1988
TUESDAY 1pm - 3pm

LECTURER MARGARET HENRY

TOPIC REGIONAL TOPIC ASSIGNMENT
STOCKTON - TRANSPORT
AS AN ISSUE FOR RESIDENT ACTION

SYNOPSIS

Stockton, by virtue of its locality has evolved since the days of Newcastle's first settlement as a suburb where community spirit ranks high on its list of attributes. Being a peninsula bounded by the Pacific Ocean, Newcastle Harbour and the Hunter River accessibility has been a key issue for unity of residents for over 100years. Today there is a bridge linking Newcastle, Stockton and Port Stephens for vehicular traffic and also a government controlled passenger ferry service across the harbour. From 1883 until 1983, a period of 100years, Stockton residents along with with residents north of the harbour felt the insecurities of being overlooked often disadvantaged by want of what other suburbs achieved as a natural progression in their development, that is, the provision by the government of adequate and reliable public transport.

When looking at the development of Stockton and its transport system it must firstly be established that the two modes of access, that is, vehicular and pedestrian, have always been separate entities. Today both are controlled by the government but under the auspices of individual government bodies, namely Department of Main Roads and Urban Transit Authority respectively.

In 1883 residents of Stockton and members of council held public meetings to discuss the need for a "Steam Ferry To Stockton." 1 As can be seen from reports of that meeting held on July 12th, 1883

The first step has been taken towards meeting one of the greatest wants of the present day, in connection with the prosperity of this port, namely, the means of horse and carriage traffic across the harbour²

By the late 1800's Stockton had a number of thriving industries and a population of almost 1,000. Goods required by householders and industry alike were transported by punts or barges necessitating double handling and incurring extra costs as a result. In lobbying for a government ferry the following example was used to highlight the additional costs incurred by the government as well as residents

For instance, a small room, 14x14, lately added to the parochial school - the carriage of material from Newcastle made an addition of £ 4 to the contract, and so on. 3

Residents and council continued their lobbying the government for a steam ferry expounding on the disadvantages, especially the plight of "the large and increasing agricultural population along the shores of Fullerton Cove" who were forced to take their produce to Maitland and Morpeth to alleviate "the present excessive cost of bringing goods and produce from Fullerton Cove...to the Newcastle market"⁴

The pleas from residents fell on deaf ears for the government denied the request repeatedly. In 1889 Mr Peter Callen began a vehicular punt service out of an obvious need and "mostly as a favour to farmers and the people of Stockton"⁵ Although the service received many criticisms and was unprofitable "he did it out of the goodness of his heart"⁶ The punt required towing by a tug which was often called away to assist sailing ships into the harbour. The service was unreliable but nevertheless a service provided by private enterprise in the face of government apathy to the plight of the residents. Peter Callen's punt service ceased in the early 1900's. Once again Stockton residents were without vehicular transport.

- 1 NEWCASTLE MORNING HERALD 12thJuly,1883
- 2 NEWCASTLE MORNING HERALD 28thJuly,1883
- 3 IBID
- 4 Taped interview with Terry Callen 17thAugust,1988
- 5 IBID
- 6 IBID

With the opening of the Steel Works in 1915 Newcastle began a period of rapid expansion. In 1916 the Dept. of Public Works commenced the first government ferry service which continued until the opening of the Stockton Bridge in 1971.¹ There was a period in 1955 when the service was disrupted due to harbour dredging problems. In that period Stockton residents again felt the isolation and difficulties previously experienced. Many people were affected by the necessity to travel a 60 mile return trip to Newcastle via Tomago and Hexham. Tradespeople were inconvenienced and again the residents were disadvantaged with an increase in the price of goods to cover "the cost in petrol, tyres and time. ...On the family side, the lack of transport lack of a road, has had its effect of funerals, hospital cases, babies, homes."²

In 1971 the opening of Stockton Bridge marked the end of an era in maritime history for Newcastle - the vehicular service ceased for the first time in 55 years. Newcastle, Stockton and Port Stephens were linked permanently by road allowing the development of areas north of the harbour and providing permanent access for residents of Stockton to Newcastle. There began a period of rapid growth for areas such as Fullerton Cove, Salt Ash Medowie. In 1883 residents of these areas had been referred to as "very patient and long suffering" and "who were greatly neglected by the government".³

For several years after the opening of the Stockton Bridge both vehicular and pedestrian traffic were well catered for. The passenger ferry had been inaugurated by Mr Hugh Boyce in the 1860's. In 1869 the first steam ferry SS "Lady Belmore" commenced service costing "6D each way and 1/- after dark". With the exception of timetable changes and fare increases the passenger service was uninterrupted remaining in private enterprise until 1982. On July 7th, 1982 the service was withdrawn by the operator on the grounds of unprofitability.⁴ This again prompted residents of Stockton to unite on the vital issue of accessibility. Many residents again were disadvantaged, especially the elderly, housewives and children. Private buses began an interim service while the Resident Action Group lobbied the government for the reintroduction of the ferry service. The timetable and cost factor of private buses were restrictive. Children travelled to High Schools in Newcastle on overcrowded buses causing much concern for Stockton parents and illuminating the disastrous effect the termination of the ferry had caused.

Newcastle's Central Business District bustled but a few hundred yards from Stockton with "so near but yet so far" the catchphrase. The residents united again on the issue causing the government (Labor) Minister for Transport, Mr Cox to promise "the people of Stockton would not be disadvantaged"⁵

- 1 "Newcastle-Stockton Vehicular Ferry Service",
MAIN ROADS, VOL 38, NO1 September, 1972 Pp27-31
- 2 N. M. HERALD 4th June, 1955
- 3 N. M. HERALD 18th July, 1883
- 4 NEWCASTLE POST 7th July, 1982
- 5 IBID

The people of Stockton did feel isolated and disadvantaged as in the past. While government procrastinated over the issue of profitability the residents gained momentum in their cause just as in 1883 they argued why should not the government contribute a proportionate share of the expense of such an undertaking... the only way to make Stockton progressive was by bringing about every facility for full communication with Newcastle"¹

In February 1983, seven months after the service was suspended the government reintroduced the service under control of the U.T.A - the first time in Newcastle's history. It was coincidentally 100 years since resident action began for government provision of adequate transport to Stockton. Much of the credit for the resumption of service went to North of the Harbour Residents Action Group.

A quote by Dr Morgan at the first meeting in 1883 may again be called upon by residents of Stockton as the newspaper articles of today threaten "Stockton ferry on list of proposed sell-offs"². With the Liberal Government of today receiving recommendations to privatise the ferry service therefore putting at risk the stability of the service. Stockton residents may again unite on the issue to remind the government that as Newcastle's oldest suburb Stockton has already passed that rubicon what is proverbially known as the day of small things, and must be no longer despised.³

- 1 NEWCASTLE MORNING HERALD 7th July, 1883
- 2 N.M. HERALD 12th July, 1988
- 3 N.M. HERALD 12th July, 1883

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