

ABOUT PEOPLE

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It was Abraham Lincoln who, at Gettysburgh, Pennsylvania in 1863, promised a government "...of the people, by the people, for the people". I doubt whether the sixteenth President of the United States could have been a tramway fan or a transport museologist (Frank Julian Sprague pioneered the American "Trolley" two decades later), but I do know that his words are very apt and timely for us as operators of tramway museums to consider, applaud and apply this day to our own field of particular endeavour.

Let us look separately at those three "people" statements but please allow me to change the order.

"Of the people" - The purpose of a functional, operating street tramway has always been to carry people. To commute to work, to take people shopping, to transport people to the cinema, to bring people visiting. Tramcars do not grace the streets just to improve the aesthetic environment, they are there to carry people. Tramways are people. This is the way that it has been. This is the way that we must preserve it.

"For the people" - You are dependent on people, the people who will come and visit your display, the people who will ride on your tramcars. Surely you do not lovingly restore your trams just so that they can glisten at each other in the gloomy depths of a padlocked depot. No. You restore them so that people will look, admire and appreciate them. Surely you do not operate your tramway just so that you can play trams or pretend that you work on the real tramway. No. You operate so that people will ride, the oldies will get lost in nostalgia and the youngies will thrill to the ride.

"By the people" - You yourselves are people. Your workers are people. Your contacts are people. Your donors are people. You are in a people business.

This then is our task, to preserve the tramways of the people in museums for the people by volunteers from the people.

As you know, one of my many responsibilities in life (the one that I get paid to do) is that of teaching. Try to imagine just what it is like to return to your school or college, its corridors, its classrooms during term holidays. Your last lesson is still on the blackboard but the chairs are all upside down on the desks, the cobwebs have appeared and everything is still, quiet and ghostly. Only the smell of hydrogen sulphide from the chem. lab. lingers on. A week before the walls echoed with chatter, laughter, movement, noise. Not now, without people, the school is nothing.

Have you ever been the last one left in your tram depot at night? The place has been a hive of furious activity all day, service trams going in and out, derelict trams being restored, track being repaired. People activity and voices everywhere, sometimes panic. But now you are left alone in an eerie silence to lock up. The possum has not yet snuck in. Everything is still. Life has gone. The trams are there, yes, but without people it is all so unreal.

I remember a whimsical discussion of theological (or perhaps not so theological) matters once which emanated from the story of the well-to-do lady who, on departing this life, was led by an angel to a most beautiful and elaborate mansion on a hill. "It is yours" indicated the angel. "Oh how wonderful", exclaimed the jubilant recipient, "I never realised that Heaven was like this". There was silence for a minute before the angel explained quietly, "This is not Heaven, this is the other place. Your punishment is to live eternity alone, for no people can ever visit you here".

Our discussion group (I must admit that they were not tram fans) then thought up other possibilities for "the other place". A golf player, alone on an endless golf course, whose every shot is a hole-in-one. A cook alone in a kitchen, preparing endless delights for which there are no eaters. May we now add the tramway museologist in charge of the most beautifully restored collection of tramcars but which no one will ever come to see, or perhaps driving on that endless tram track in a world devoid of people.

Truly, without people we are nothing.

All this because I visited Branford last year.

The Branford Electric Railway and Trolley Museum, New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.A., operates from the suburb of East Haven along a former interurban type right-of-way to the neighbouring suburb of Short Beach on the Atlantic seashore. New Haven is the northern terminus of the e.m.u. railway interurban from New York, a Gosford from Sydney situation.

"The Flyin' Yankee", an early morning Amtrak train had rattled and bounced me southwards from Boston to New Haven (well, I did have to try a turboliner). As I tumbled out of the carriage in pursuit of my luggage which the porter had already placed on the platform, a rather large fellow with an even larger smile ambled up to me and asked, "Are you Bill Kingsley?" (Obviously Australians are easy to recognise). "I'm Bill Riccitelli, Welcome to the Branford Trolley Museum".

Think about that last sentence. I was not yet at Branford, I was on the platform at New Haven. But the sentence is correct. Bill was part of Branford because Branford is people.

I had already read the fine Branford book "Ride Down Memory Lane" before leaving Australia. In fact it was the magnetism of that publication which had made Branford a must in my itinerary. The book had told me all about the track, the bridges, the tramcars, yet I was not at all prepared for the real Branford, the people Branford.

Join me now in spirit and the present tense as Bill drives me to my first "trolley" museum.

From a large sealed car park we enter Sprague Building. This is an impressive museum of artifacts and historic photographs. There are also two counters. At the first counter straight ahead is the smiling face of Louis Iasillo who sells the tickets. Above Louis is a large and easily read timetable and an equally large clock. At the other counter to the right is another smiling face, for here are the souvenirs. Everyone wants to talk with me. They also want to talk with everyone else. It is quite amazing.

"Bill, I'm Garry Hartman. I'm the motorman for the next tour. Would you like to come with me?" Then, turning around and addressing himself to 360° of people, "Our next tour leaves in two minutes. Would those for the tour care to follow me now".

The car park door being the back door, we now exit by the front door. A beautifully restored and maintained tramcar stands in the street. We join those already on board. From the motorman's position but with his back to the track ahead Gary introduces himself to all on board. "I'm Gary Hartman. Welcome to the Branford Electric Railway. I am going to drive you for the full length of our route. Please do not lean out of the trolley. I hope that you enjoy the ride".

We do. Over bridges, past the car barns, through a forest, around an S-bend, across the plain. Meanwhile the conductor is checking tickets and talking to people. He is interested in them and wants them to be interested in Branford. He is establishing rapport between his passengers and the museum. They are people. They are important.

Gary alights at the terminus to change the poles, i.e. "turn the trolley". The conductor quickly takes the position that the motorman has just vacated and tells us about the vehicle, the track that we have just ridden over and the imminent extension of the per-way. Everyone is interested in what he is telling them because he is interested in telling them. He concludes with "When we return to the car barns, Gary, your motorman, would like to take you all on a guided tour".

So we return to the car barns. Gary alights before the first passengers, collects his flock together, and walks and talks us through the depot area. We see actual restoration being done. We take photos. We listen eagerly. At the conclusion, "It's been great to be your guide. You may now catch the next car back to Sprague or if you wish to stay here awhile you are very welcome. There are refreshments at the observation car and over there in the grove is a picnic area. Your ticket is an all-day ticket and you may ride as many cars as you wish for as long as you wish. Thanks for coming to Branford. We hope you'll come again".

But his work is not over. There are still questions. People want to chat, to photograph him with their grandmother, to ask him about his uniform.

I spent the next few hours walking the track, lunching and taking photographs.

About 2 in the afternoon (1400 hours) I was chatting at Sprague with Ray Crapo who was the O.I.C. for the day. Gary came in and apologised with "Ray, I just can't do any more today. I'm worn out. Something's wrong with me". Really I was not surprised. The mental effort that the staff put into making Branford a success would stop many of our Australian counterparts: stone dead.

As Ray concerned himself with Gary's condition I was to be introduced to the other side of Branford. Until now it had been "for the people". Now it was "by the people". I was seeing the real concern of management for its own staff, its own people.

How does Branford get its own people?

Press advertisements and person-to-person contact lure potential staff with the "come and drive a trolley" theme. Not only is this a proven magnet, but Branford believes that you can't understand a tramcar until you have driven it. (Australians maintain that you can't drive it until you understand it).

So the applicants are enrolled in the Level I Operators Training Programme. This is a most thoughtfully and thoroughly conceived and executed programme of four full-day sessions. The first session introduces the tramcar (for some enrollees may not even have seen one before) and gets everybody out driving to experience that undoubted thrill of electric traction.

The theoretical side of the first day's training includes topics such as the D.C. circuit, responsibilities of museum operators, how to efficiently and inoffensively deal with visitors and their many questions, rails and overhead, controllers.

Bill Kerrigan, a Level I trainee of 1976, reported in the Branford Journal that the instructors "... did much to relieve the apprehension of the newcomers. When I look back on all this, years from now, I'll recall that never for a moment did I feel like an outsider... and that's a good feeling to get after only a few hours in a place you've never seen before". To me that is real "by the people".

Bill continues "We were reminded that, as members, we were to consider ourselves not as potential operators of trolley cars but as potential operators of a museum, and, as such, many of our duties would be outside the ribbons of steel". Now it is "for the people".

Each student receives a manual. It is a loose leaf folder containing booklets to assist all phases of the programme. One booklet is called "The Environment of the Traction Era". It is aimed at giving the trainee a feel for the part which the "trolleys" played in the evolution of transport in the United States and in the development of the communities so served. This is the "of the people".

The booklet on "Tour Dynamics" brought home to me the full depth of the "people" thinking at Branford. This booklet recognises three types of people in each tour group:-

- a) the eager followers,
- b) those following those who follow,
- c) the disoriented at the rear.

It then describes in detail how the accomplished tour leader can successfully cater for his eager to not-so-eager group. It talks of establishing leadership, tour continuity, movement motivation. It strives towards the ultimate reward when a tour leader is spontaneously applauded at the end of the circuit.

Now, the alert reader will have noticed another practice opposite to ours in Australia. The new staff member is put into traffic before he is put into works. The Australian theory is to have the new member work (slave) in the background until he has "served his time". He has by then been sufficiently indoctrinated and brainwashed to develop a feeling for his museum and his co-workers and is then given the privilege of joining the traffic staff. The Branford theory is that the new member will get so enthused about the trolleys (by driving them) and the track (by driving over it) etc., that he will want to help in the works programme. They are encouraged but not coerced.

Attached to this Paper as an appendix is a notice from the Track Department to the new trainees. Read it, for it is a good example of how "old" people should communicate with "new" people.

Obviously, if there is a Level I Operators Training Programme, there must be further levels of training, and so there is, for Branford believes that in the fields of technical understanding, traffic techniques, administration and "people" relations only the best will do.

It was Begonia Festival 1977 and the old lady alighted from number 40 at the Gardens Loop on the Ballarat Tourist Tramway. There were real tears of joy in her eyes as she was moved to tell us. "The begonias are beautiful, the gardens are lovely, the procession was interesting, but it was your tram. The memories that it brought back to me. Oh, you have made me so happy".

Tramway museums are, indeed, people.

References

1. Branford Electric Railway Journal, Volume XXII, Number 1, January-February 1976, p.4.

BRANFORD ELECTRIC RAILWAYTrack DepartmentTO ALL PARTICIPANTS IN THE 1976 LEVEL I COURSE

Hi! We're glad to have you joining the operating staff here at Branford Electric Railway. You will learn the essential information that will make you a fine representative of the museum and its program of operating historical electric-railway equipment. Operation of cars is the life blood of the Association's financial being, and your efforts to provide a safe, pleasant, and educational visit to every one of our visitors will help ensure an even greater Branford in years to come.

Your work as a car-crew member and tour guide will expose you to all aspects of the museum. We in the Track Department would like to point out some notable items concerning the museum's track, and to ask your help in certain areas.

First and foremost, when guiding tours around, emphasize that people must step over rails, not on them -- this is a standard safety rule in the railroad and transit industries. Discourage as actively as possible the practice of walking along rails trying to balance on the railheads. If you are aware and stop people from doing these seemingly-harmless things, we might well be spared an injury and possible lawsuit. And follow these rules yourself!

Certain portions of the trackage are extra-greasy. These will be the sharp curves, curves with guardrails, and switches. The grease is a special compound developed for the high-pressure, high-abrasion application of railroad guardrails. It is also high in graphite content. This grease will stick readily to skin, or clothes, and is pretty difficult to wash out of clothes. We will try and keep deposits of excess grease to an absolute minimum; however, guardrails, switch frogs, and the cast points and mates of single-point switches such as those in Farm River Road yard will be greasy out of necessity. If you can steer your groups around such areas, dirty clothes and possible slips and falls will be avoided.

Occasionally, there may be ties or track hardware piled up in areas where you are escorting visitors. We will try and keep these piles neat, but children like to climb on ties -- try and discourage this, for obvious reasons. We'll try and keep the exposed hardware to a minimum. You can mention that there is or will be track work going on, and tell the people what the stuff is that they see -- ask us if you don't know. If we're working where you bring your groups, we'll try and say hello and give a short brief about what we're doing. Emphasize to visitors that we must follow standard practices: our track is normally 4'8½" gauge (same as railroads), parts of it do wear out even at a museum-type operation such as ours, and none of it is "special" because we're a museum instead of the Penn Central.

When you're operating cars, if you experience any rough-riding stretches of track, or get any bumps and hear loud clunks as you pass over a certain place in the track, tell us about it -- we can't be everywhere at once, and perhaps some part of the track is in need of attention and

has escaped our notice during periodic inspections. We'll try and clear up the problem -- and you're invited to come help us some day when you're not assigned to car operations!

We hope to get to know you better as you become more active in the affairs of the museum. Glad to see you here!

Bob RICE, Supt./Bill YOUNG, Asst. Supt.