

J I M   W A L K E R   K E Y N O T E   A D D R E S S

INTRODUCTION

I thank COTMA for inviting me to this conference and I thank you also for the hospitality extended. The opportunity to visit most of your member museums has been marvellous. Seeing each site, speaking with members and observing the operation of museums has been very instructive.

I see many parallels with museums in the U.S.A. and Canada - you might say the same "cast of characters" but with different names. We are all after the same goals, have much the same problems, and speak (well nearly) the same language.

I have experienced good fellowship, good beer, Vegemite, warm and polite people, beautiful scenery and so many other things in both your nations. Thanks again.

Particular thanks to my hosts for providing quarters. I have enjoyed the opportunity to meet their families: Tim and Ingrid Atherton in Brisbane, David and Glynne Rawlings in Sydney, John and Barbara Radcliffe in Adelaide, Bob Prentice in Melbourne, David and Dorothy Hinman in Christchurch, Kevin Hawke in Wellington and COTMA in Auckland. Thanks also to all of you who welcomed me to your museums.

My association with the movement began in 1956 when I was one of the 14 founders of the Orange Empire Trolley Museum, which became the Orange Empire Railway Museum in 1975 upon merger with a smaller railway oriented group. I served as Secretary from the beginning until 1969 and have been its President since 1972. My activities have been varied, particularly in the areas of track and overhead construction, erection of buildings, public relations and administration.

Since 1975 I have been co-owner of a small book publishing firm specializing in electric railways, now broadening to what we term main-line or "steam" railroad topics. This is a labour of love and my associate and I enjoy combining our vocation with our avocation.

I did not prepare the final draft of this presentation until after I visited your museums because I would have written it from ignorance. It is presented from my viewpoint not as a "renown expert" but as a fellow member of the museum fraternity.

N O R T H   A M E R I C A N   S C E N E

The history of the trolley museum movement in North America and Canada has been related before in print. The latest is a book entitled "Trolley to the Past" by Andrew D. Young, which was published last year by our firm. I was pleased to be able to combine his text and roster data with photographs to present a review of the "industry" to many readers. I will therefore not get into great detail. I do recommend his book, not only for an overall look at the North American museums, but for some thoughts that might be useful to your own groups.

It began in 1939 when a small group saved an open-benched (you call them toastracks, I believe) trolley car in the state of Maine. This is now the Seashore Trolley Museum. A few more cars were acquired, but World War II put a stop to the effort (and it also forestalled massive abandonments of street railway and inter-urban rail systems).

At war's end there was a population explosion of private automobiles and buses, dooming great segments of rail systems within a few years. Meanwhile, by the end of the 1940's, a few other museum groups had formed to rescue fast-vanishing examples of vehicles. By 1955 half a dozen museums were open to the public. Twenty years after the first car was rescued, in 1959, a survey found a dozen of today's 20+ operating museums in existence, and nearly 300 cars were saved.

Mr Young's 1983 survey found over 20 operating museums with over 600 pieces of electric railway passenger, works and locomotive rolling stock. I would estimate that other static museums plus a few holdings of transport undertakings possess another 150 or more units. That very quickly brings us to the present.

There has been no national policy toward saving rail transport vehicles, nor had any local governmental bodies expressed any concern that trolleys and inter-urban cars be preserved as buses took their place. Today's movement is fiercely independent volunteer groups.

As the museums came to exist their neighbours and communities either ignored them or, often, expressed hostility at the noise and early unsightliness introduced by the "nuts". Today most museums are socially acceptable and have strong ties with their communities, which now recognize the potential of tourism even if they still don't share the museums' zeal for their historic role.

Except for a few targeted examples of still-operating fleets, most museums are past the collecting stage. Housing has been a long-term accomplishment. 98% of the Branford Museum's collection is housed, 84% of Seashore's 115+ cars are indoors, the Toronto area museum houses 95%, and 33% of Orange Empire's large collection (140+ counting freight cars) will be indoors when a 70-foot by 275-foot barn is completed this year.

A few of the museums have woodworking and metal shops capable of major restoration and more are constructing such facilities. It is realized by most that small parts and major components will have to be created from "scratch".

Operating demonstration railways have generally expanded quite a bit in both length and quality. A few reached their maximum lengths years ago due to siting or plan, some are building to as much as five miles long, although between one and two miles seems the optimum length for visitors. Except for a few stretches, cars do not run beyond series in almost every location. Aside from safety, the operators find this speed makes the ride last long enough. At nearly every location I have seen, operators wear uniforms and perform in an authentic manner. Some museums have been operating over 20 years so should have been able to develop professional methods.

Even some museums on site for 10 or 15 years still present a rustic "front end" and even more rustic plumbing for restrooms. The rural locations selected by many groups brought about the latter condition as they were without water or sewer service. The oldest group, Seashore, only recently built decent toilets by sinking two railway tank cars in the ground to provide water and sanitary disposal.

The original intentions of most museums were quite conservative compared to what happened over the years. Three New England groups which began to more or less collect a few local open-bench cars all have exhibits from vast distances. Two museums have kept the lid on expansion simply because of odd track gauge (Toronto's 4'10-7/8" and Baltimore's 5'4 1/4").

Another phenomenon is the mass acquisition of cars from systems that lasted in the 1960s by museums at long distance (cars from New Orleans and the North Shore inter-urban are prime examples). Museums that had no open-bench cars sought them in Brazil, and many museums purchased cars from Portugal, Germany and Sweden (as well as components to put bodies back together as operating exhibits). Acquiring cars that had no relation to history in the region of the museums seemed to be for the purpose of having "more", or giving the tourist something to ride until local cars in bad conditions could be restored.

Today, due to a lack of plan or an apparent policy to get everything money can buy, some of the museums have collections that would take decades to ever fix. The burden of housing these had been significant, and those which must sit outdoors may not last until their day comes. Most of the museums have a row of "chicken coops" (our general term for bodies) called "chicken coop gulch". It was a hard choice to not get them in the first place, since they usually were car types gone before the museums began, and a few heartening examples of resurrection give eternal hope that the rest can eventually be whole again.

None of the museums has an over-abundance of cars from its collection available for demonstration service. Even those with large collections suffer from equipment shortages. As you know, keeping a fleet of once-junked, aged, obsolete rolling stock in operable condition is one of the most formidable tasks for the museum.

T O D A Y ' S I S S U E S

Since our movement is basically voluntary and democratic, there are always issues at hand. Putting more mildly what one of the members of my museum says, "Every member has a bum and an opinion". If every matter were put to debate or a vote, however, we would get nowhere or at least go very slowly. So most of the museums have developed management and staff specializing in different functions. In the small museums everyone is involved in nearly everything, and in the large ones more departmentalization has taken place. I often wish our museum was smaller for this reason, since the "them and us" syndrome has developed between the different areas, ah, human nature at work!

Whether the ride or the collection is our reason to exist. Some of the founders at the museums felt this was their personal fantasy come to life and resent strangers tramping through. Well, today these institutions are too costly to be locked up unless the individuals want to stand all the costs.

Tax considerations and the public trust aspects of the preservation movement opt for a reasonable balance wherein operation of the collection is done without damage. John White of the U.S. Smithsonian Institution cried out in 1970 that none of the collections should be operated, much less restored in the way we have done to make them roadworthy. He urged museums to construct replicas of steam locos and trolleys to operate because he was concerned about 100 or 200 years from now. He has some valid points, but the "live" aspect of our museums is what I feel keeps them in existence.

I would say that our museums feel they are not amusement parks and that authenticity in preservation and operation are essential. We are urged to get busy on archival, documentation and interpretive functions - items which have been the cornerstones of the indoor art, cultural and science museums that pre-date us. Only a few trolley museums have given major emphasis to these jobs. Accreditation of the museums, a prerequisite for much public and private funding, has given a new impetus to getting off our rear ends in this important but heretofore ignored sector (You know, "working" members don't have time for messing about with "paper shuffling").

The idea that a collection of trolleys can be a "museum" is radical and recent. I am sure that more than once a visitor has said to you, "Where is the museum?" The answer, "You are in it." is still incomprehensible to many. Our railroads gave hundreds of steam locos to cities along their routes when the diesels came. They were vandalized and became eyesores. They do not represent "museum", just a mistake. A mistake, by the way, which is being rectified in a few instances as city park locos are rescued by museums.

There are more displays coming in the form of restored city areas. Lowell, Massachusetts, just opened a trolley line with two newly-built (at a cost of about 3/4th of a million dollars) open-bench cars. San Jose, California, is building a light rail system which will open with restored vintage cars in operation, and other cities are working toward vintage operation as part of renewal of older areas. What affect these will have upon the volunteer efforts in those areas is yet to be seen.

A few of our museums use paid personnel, usually members, for daily operations in regions where that takes place. Many have resident caretakers, but with few exceptions none has a full-time paid staff. Friction between paid persons in a managerial capacity and volunteer workers has occurred. I do not forecast any shift to paid staff as the basis for our museums is still volunteerism.

Before turning to discussion of the future, I should mention our counterpart to COITMA, the Association of Railway Museums. It is composed of over 30 museums, mostly trolley oriented. Its primary function is an annual conference, although over the years it has brought about some joint efforts of great worth. It began in 1961 and its meetings have witnessed an occasional "beef" between groups. This year's conference is in Toronto, Canada, the third weekend of September.

### I S S U E S   O F   T H E   F U T U R E

A U.S. group, the Association of American Museums, studies the future. It set up a 24-member group known as the Commission on Museums for a New Century which is still working on a comprehensive report. Although almost all of the members of the AAM are what might be called the more "normal" museums with paid staff, some of the following comments would apply to us.

They noted that most surveys dwell on museum's needs, particularly financial and staffing, whereas the commission began on the premise that not enough has been discussed about what the museums have to offer. They hope to learn about the changes in society in general that will affect museums. They heard comments about sensible limits of growth and anxiety about competing with the entertainment industry for visitors leisure time.

An early goal of the commission was to enhance the public image and increase the visibility of museums. Although museums are popular, they are not always viewed as institutions essential to their communities. (I would comment that "community" does not always mean the next town or city of residence, it may be a geographically widespread area.)

Public funding of museums is an increasingly important source of large sums. A California legislator made the interesting observation that in a debate, a fellow legislator remarked, "We don't have enough money for the living and known, so we shouldn't spend it on the past and dead." Increased work to make the museum's mission understood seems to be a mandatory task.

The AAM commission notes, "The most special and valued qualities of museums are their traditional responsibilities. Acquisition, conservation, research, interpretation and exhibitions are the foundations of a museum's existence and will remain so in the future." It added, "Museums are our collective memory, our chronicle of human creativity, our window on the natural world".

Rebutting the legislator's remark about funding priorities, the Commission's staff director, noting that "Museums, in a sense, really have very little to do with the past. They save the evidence of human life, creativity and the natural world so we can all understand the present and look to the future with confidence and vision.

Railway and trolley museums are institutions which did not exist only a few decades ago, and these are now being accepted as true museums along with other technical displays - a different picture from not so long ago when only a collection of Chinese vases, rare paintings, or dinosaur bones and dioramas were considered to be "museums".

John White, of our Smithsonian Institution, spoke to the 1970 Association of Railway Museums convention in Baltimore, Maryland, and raised quite a few eyebrows with some of his comments. In the railway field, he noted that setting aside examples began in the mid 1800s by a few railroads. He bemoaned the lack of such preservations by all the major roads and noted that a lack of collection policy on more recent efforts resulted in more unusual, even freakish, types being saved by amateur groups. Railroads, in the meantime, took little or no interest in preservation, except to present examples of what was left at the end of steam to city parks for children and vandals to destroy over the years.

He noted that truly important locomotives were scattered around the country and that no national institution had been set up to put them in one place. In a nation as big as America, where could a central place be designated for locomotives or electric cars? Since the existing effort is almost entirely by volunteers, who would make the decision for a central location. A proposal by an individual that each trolley museum donate items for such a place brought forth howls of protest from those who had put in years of their lives for their collection. Not a surprising reaction.

I feel that museums in the future will have to develop more along the lines of heritage parks, that is a total environment such as I have seen in two places in New Zealand, to survive in the long run. The word "interpretation" began in our area as an approved term in applications for government funding. It has grown in acceptance in the volunteer circles as it is more understood as simply explaining what the collection is about - why it ran (not just that it ran on rails and was propelled by such-and-such horsepower motors).

The typical railfan views of the rolling stock is devoid of people and is so tightly cropped that WHERE the car was located is not possible to decipher. We will not be able to have tightly-cropped outlooks, enterpreting the whole idea of the electric railway systems, technology and sociology and politics, will be a must. In line with interpreting, the subject of archives, documentation are most important. Professional museums guidelines require cataloging of associated archives, documentation of the complete history of the collection, including all the things that have happened to it after acquisition by the museum. If it was restored, what pieces are original, are new technologies used (new type wiring, laminated woods, plastics and other new technologies not in existence when the vehicles were built)? Museums should be publishing historical and technical facts as part of their functions.

### WHICH MUSEUMS WILL SURVIVE?

We do have a sort of "death watch" on a few that were set up in locations of apparent lack of numbers of interested members, or for one reason or another have continued only to exist and not grow and develop. Sometimes the personalities involved, or the existence of other such museums not too far distant have been negative factors. I would not be surprised if a few collections are not snapped up by other museums when in all likelihood these museum organizations give up. As discussed earlier, the lack of a reason to found a museum beyond wanting "your own" can be fatal.

By the turn of the century, few will be active in any of our museums who rode the trolleys and tramcars. But, even in 1984, most persons under 35 never had the personal experience in all but a few cities (Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Toronto for instance). Perhaps the answer for the future is the same as today, somehow young people are fascinated by a living railway museum display. It is essential that this interest be kept alive if there is to be a future to the fan-type, volunteer museum concept with which we are familiar. The electric passenger-carrying railway transit concept is not dead in North America as was thought in the 1960s due to re-evaluation of energy resources, so it seems likely that the new "light rail vehicle" lines (the tramcar in disguise) will continue to produce first-hand "fans" in more and more sections. It should always be kept in mind that at least some of the museums have dedicated members who might be termed "museum fans" rather than "rail fans" because they were first turned on to the lore of the trolley at a museum.

I see many parallels between the tramway museums in Australia and New Zealand and the trolley museums in the U.S. and Canada. For the future, my comments could apply generally to the groups on both sides of the equator.

The museums cannot continue to exist as amateurish productions. I feel strongly that the spirit of volunteerism is a key to the future. Volunteers, however, need not be forever "amateurs" in the sense that we have and continue to develop highly skilled restorers, operators and managers of railways, administrators and those in a particularly valuable field - publicity/funding.

This latter category has been nearly ignored at too many museums and will deserve as much attention as bodywork, controller repair and erection of buildings and construction of track and overhead wires, since all require MONEY. Most of the museums have now been around long enough that all excuses for a poor production (bad track, cars with "chicken pox" paint, lack of public amenities that other "entertainments" provide) are no longer valid, some sort of orientation or interpretation of the collection beyond just an amusement ride, an education of the membership that it is no longer a personal toy (these collections are now an important public trust). The commensurate amount of effort to present a professional "front end" will have to be given just as it must be to house and restore the collections.

If properly presented as living museums and not just another variety of amusement parks, the museums will outlive such things as fads for nostalgia and the good old days. In all the decades since trolleys disappeared from the streets they have consistently been of interest, not only to those who personally remember them, but younger generations. They are, after all, a link between yesterday's wagons and horse-drawn streetcars, today's buses and computer-run rapid transit systems, and tomorrow's public transport.

Although national and local governments now recognize the value of our institutions, one party or another may be in or out of power. So, in the future, the supply of funding and moral support is like the tides, sometimes low and sometimes high, not certainly on a dependable cycle like mother nature provides. The museums will make the most of the periods of "high tide" and the combination of dedication by volunteers and the basic worth of the projects should carry them through those lean, "low tide" times.

If survival is the theme for the future of the trolley and tramway museums, these factors should be considered:-

#### LOCATION

How accessible by road and public transport? The future prospects for revenue from visitors will be made on this basis. Picking up and moving a museum is physically and psychologically a traumatic experience, so everything will have to be scaled with its prospects in mind. I would not be surprised to see one or two smaller collections brought to themed nostalgic locations, as has been partially done in Philadelphia. This is the latest chapter in the saga of a collection that might be termed a "wandering tribe". Called in past times by Delaware Valley Railway Assn and Trolley Valhalla, the present Buckingham Valley organisation has had a tenuous relationship with the location at a tourist steam railway. A new "Waterfront Trolley" located on a renewing tourist-oriented location in Philadelphia presents an operating site, and perhaps a long-lasting home for this group. All of our museums are sited, perhaps not always at ideal locations in retrospect.

#### HOW DEVELOPED

Has the acquisition stage been followed by preservation in terms of housing? What percentage of the collection is inside buildings? Is there an attractive visitor entrance and other amenities (bathrooms in particular)? Is parking adequate, convenient and well-designed for all weather? Is the operating line well maintained and interesting? Are facilities for interpretation included.

#### SIZE OF COLLECTION

With or without a past policy, can the support from the membership and outside financial sources hope to preserve what is already on hand? Will a number of derelicts and redundant exhibits be a millstone forever holding back or threatening the future success of the museum? I am not suggesting that so-called "excess" be cut up as that would be the tragedy the volunteers hoped to avoid when the equipment was rescued years ago, but some thought has to be given to a solution. How much more can you support?

#### DOCUMENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

Have the histories of all the exhibits been searched and recorded? Documentation also means tracing all that has been done with the stock since construction - both in service and since arrival at the museum. If some main frames are practically new, and some bodies now operate on truck and motors from other sources, a professional accounting includes these facts.

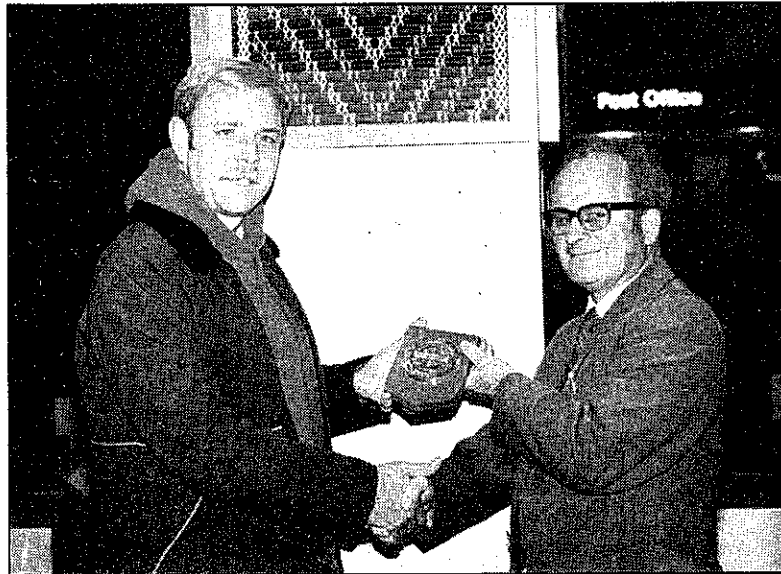


DOCUMENTATION AND INTERPRETATION continued

Indoor technology museums interpret "why" the displays existed, and the trolley cars should also be accorded this treatment. The components of the cars are displayable as are the track and overhead fittings. Rail-borne transport is a complete technology beyond the rolling stock. Those museums which document and interpret will receive much more favourable attention from their communities as well as sources of funding and other support.

MARKETING

Our museums are up against a burgeoning entertainment industry. Disneyland, various "sea worlds" at the coast lines, video archades, television and other recreational locations built with millions of dollars are direct competitors for the tourist dollar. The area of marketing the museums is one which must have a professional touch. By all means use volunteers who are professionals in this field - but a scruffy looking brochure or other advertising will not be very appealing to potential visitors. The museums which hope to survive will be those which maximize their public appeal.



On his departure from New Zealand, Jim Walker (left) receives a farewell plaque from Ian Stewart (WST Manager, MOTAT) in recognition of his valuable contribution to this conference.