

PRETORIA FIFTY YEARS AGO

II

In a previous article Mr. Beanes described Pretoria during the period just after the signing of the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging. The rapidly growing Johannesburg had become the industrial and economic centre of the Transvaal, with the result that the British authorities tentatively made the startling suggestion that Johannesburg should become the Administrative Capital. According to Mr. Beanes it was as a result of the Progressive Party's agitation that this suggestion was ultimately dropped. Pretoria was not yet a town to be proud of and especially the camp of white squatters beyond Hove's Drift was a blot on the town. Fortunately they were moved off by the Government at about the time of Union. Now read on:

Public transport was non-existent for a few years. Tram lines ran from the railway station along Market, Church, du Toit and Esselen Streets to the terminus at the east end of de Kock Street. The company ceased to function at the outbreak of war and it was not until about 1904 that the Municipality purchased the concession and restarted the service. The sheds and stables were at the corner of Spuy and Bourke Streets. The trams were roofed but were open at the sides and the passengers sat on planks stretching across the vehicle. Each plank seated five passengers who got on and off at the side of the tram. The seats had no backs, so they were not the most comfortable of trams! They were of three horse power—the animals being abreast of each other. Normally Natives were not carried, but on Sunday afternoons a brightly painted car was run specially for them and they appeared to enjoy the experience of a tram ride.

A private bus drawn by two horses and holding about 12 people ran from the corner of Hill and Pretorius Streets to town. There was no other public transport until November, 1910, when the electric trams were started. How did people get about? Well, many kept themselves in good health by walking, but the majority of men, women and children had bicycles. The more well-to-do citizens kept a light trap or Cape cart drawn by one or two horses while others maintained a carriage and pair. Hitching posts all over town and swarms of picannins on the look out to "hold a horse's head" testified to the many saddle horses in use. Traffic pulled up on either side of the street and those who used horse-drawn vehicles did not park or stable them in the street while they were at work, but had Native drivers to take the vehicle home and return with it at the appropriate time to take the master home. I never heard it suggested that the Municipality should provide parking or stable accommodation for them. Such a number of horses and carts called for farriers, wheelwrights, wagon-builders, saddle and harness makers. There were shops that dealt only with horse trappings but

most of the general stores stocked saddles and bridles. Needless to say horse shoes were to be found in plenty in the main streets (Some cyclists found them far too often), while in some gardens they formed the border to the flower bed.

Ox wagons were a common sight as it was the wagon and not the railway lorry that delivered produce to the market. The oxen were out-spanned on Market Square—which was not paved until about 1917—and the produce, if not sold direct from the wagon, would be placed on the ground amidst all the muck caused by the trek oxen and the cattle and horses for sale. The first shed was put up by the Municipality after Union and that led to a legal battle between the Pretoria Market and Estate Company and the Town Council which was finally decided by Lord de Villiers at Bloemfontein. That decision gave the Council control over three-quarters of the Market Square. The market and Estate Company retains control of the Market Hall and buildings on the North-West corner of the square for about another forty years.

The building of further sheds and the paving of the Market Square were the result of Lord de Villiers' decision.

In addition to the many horses in town a number of householders kept one or two cows to provide themselves and their neighbours with milk, generally delivered in whisky bottles. Cows and horses were usually stabled in wood and iron buildings that were not only rat infested but provided suitable breeding places for flies. The cows were no doubt stable fed but many were turned out to graze on the footpaths and I have seen cows grazing in Market Street near the Pretoria Club. The keeping of animals in backyards was certainly a problem for the M.O.H.

One of the most urgent problems tackled by the first elected Town Council which took office on the 1st January, 1904, was the sanitary system. A contractor arranged with each householder how often the sanitary bucket should be emptied. That arrangement was bad enough but the method of clearance was worse. A tank on a cart passed through the streets during the evenings and the "bucket" (which was usually a leaky four-gallon paraffin tin) was taken to the tank and the contents—or most of it—tipped out. The unsavoury and unwashed bucket was then returned to the latrine. Windows were shut when the "night carts" were due to arrive. Is it any wonder that during the summer months few houses escaped the scourge of enteric fever? The new Council cabled to Europe for suitable buckets, purchased the sanitary concession, and passed a by-law that every lavatory must have a stone or concrete floor. Earth floors were prohibited. The Council by its wise action saved the citizens much suffering and medical expenses, and it reduced the incidence of enteric fever so that Pretoria could compare favourably with the well conducted cities of Europe. Water borne sewerage came after Union.

When the Town Council took office in January 1904 there was no storm water drainage or kerbing and very little in the way of made roads. In 1903

in Church Street between the post office and Bosman Street, I saw a gang of convicts filling up holes in the roadway and removing grass. Further west a paved footpath crossed Church Street from Kruger's house to the Church opposite. Evidently the President objected to sinking up to his knees in mud or dust when going to church.

Outside most of the shops the footpaths were paved, but owing to the absence of kerbing the pavements were at different levels, so that going along Church Street one frequently encountered a ramp between adjoining shops.

Without stormwater drainage it was useless to make roads as the first thunderstorm would wash all the stones loose. As soon as the stormwater-drainage was completed in the centre of the town, kerbing and roads followed. It was some years, however, before the Council wisely decided that it was a waste of money to macadamise a road without tarring it. To-day it is difficult to imagine the amount of dust we had in the days of earth roads. Except immediately after rain, a walk of a block would be sufficient for one's boots and trousers to be covered with dust up to the knee. Hanging near the front door, many houses kept a feather duster to remove some of the dust before one entered the house.

Prior to 1909 there was no road for vehicular traffic along Schoeman-Park Streets between the bridge of the Aapies River near the Baths and Park Street at the Hamilton-Troye Streets intersection. Previously traffic for the eastern suburbs could travel only along Church and Beatrix Streets, then cross Meintjies Square by the Road that still exists between the tennis courts and the garden part of the Square. Incidentally, the houses in Park Street opposite Meintjes Square were usually unoccupied because there was no road in front of them. Consequently, furniture, coal and other goods had to be off-loaded on the roadside near the tennis courts and carried to the houses down the steep boulder-strewn veld.

Ox wagons going east of Pretoria used Church Street only as far as Beatrix Street and then crossed Meintjies Square into Park Street. As the Eastern Sports Grounds, Girls' High School and Pretoria University were not there to bar the way, the wagons kept straight on the Park Street southern line until they reached Albert Road, now Roper Street, at a point between Burnett and Prospect Streets where there is an angle, marked in those days by a substantial beacon because it was the meeting place of four farms: Sunnyside, Arcadia, Koedoespoort (Hatfield) and Uitval (now Hillcrest and Brooklyn). The town plan of Pretoria shows that a line drawn along the south side of Park Street to the beacon mentioned is the dividing line between Sunnyside and Arcadia, and it is as well to remember that the University, Boys' High School, Fuel Research Institute, and Meteorological Offices and the greater portion of the Eastern Sports Grounds are on the Sunnyside commonage and not in Brooklyn as so many people believe. Pretoria's first golf course was, I believe, on the ground now known as

Princess Park which came into existence as a park about 1904 when the Golf Club moved to the Sunnyside commonage. A few years later it again had to move. Without being certain of the matter I think that at that stage the Pretoria Golf Course was established for the west and the Country Club golf course for the east.

Dust, flies and enteric fever have been mentioned as trials of the early days, but there was yet another pest, and that was the mosquito. It was said at the time that Pretoria was free from mosquitoes until the railway was built from Lourenco Marques. Be that as it may, there were plenty of them at the beginning of the century and I imagine that very few people slept without a mosquito net. Are they still sold to Pretorians to-day?

There was great approbation when the roads were tarred to lessen the dust, the stables cleaned to reduce the flies, sanitary conditions improved with the result that there were fewer cases of enteric, but when the newly appointed M.O.H. tried to eliminate mosquitoes he met with great opposition. Leaflets and notices in the Press having no success, a few men were engaged as temporary sanitary officers. These inspectors went round inspecting back-yards and gardens, especially in wet weather. Old tins, boots, broken crockery and glasses found lying about and holding water meant a summons for the householder who, on appearing in the Magistrate's Court, had to pay a fine of 2s. 6d. The indignation that this action caused! Why should the Council interfere because a citizen threw a milk tin into the garden? No use telling him that he should place it in the rubbish bin because he would reply that he had no rubbish bin and was not going to pay to have his rubbish removed when he could dispose of it himself and the quicker the Town Council was abolished the better! One land owner refused to fill in a trench, was fined 2s. 6d. by the Magistrate and gave notice of appeal. He would show the Town Council that it could not do as it liked—it was up against the wrong man. However, when he got to the Palace of Justice he found that it was he was up against the wrong man, for the learned judge told him that he could not do as he liked to the detriment of the health of the town. It cost him much more than 2s. 6d. and he still had to fill in the trench.

The appoinment of an M.O.H. was an unqualified success in spite of the opposition put up by Ansell Clark when the appointment was first suggested. "Why do we need an M.O.H." asked that kindly giant with the winking eye. "I do well enough." He did—and in the end Pretorians all needed his good offices, for he was the undertaker!

Notwithstanding dust, enteric fever, flies and mosquitoes, Pretoria was a happy place. There were neither political parties nor bioscopes. There were a few gramophones but no radio sets, and we were not bothered by ennui—not by any means. Visits from travelling theatre and opera companies were frequent and the shows were usually well patronised. Picnics to Hennops River, Fountains, Skinners Court, Silverton, Wonderboom and

the Thorns were very popular, while in the evenings there were always house parties. One could not walk along a street for many blocks without finding a house well lit up, doors and windows open and the inmates enjoying themselves with music and song and dance. Such conditions produced a lot of local talent in singing and playing various instruments, and social life of that kind enabled one to have a large circle of friends, and who will deny that self arranged entertainment is better and provides a happier life than that obtained with to-day's canned amusements? One effect of the social life obtaining then and the talent produced was to be seen in the music shops which were stocked with nothing but music and musical instruments. To-day the music shops are stocked with wireless sets, gramophones and refrigerators, toasters, washing machines, egg beaters and similar electrical goods. The musical requirements of the town would not pay the rental of a music shop to-day.

Another form of an evening's entertainment, still practised to-day in some of the smaller towns, was to go to the railway station to see the weekly mail train off. It was not necessary to know anybody going away because among the crowd you were sure to meet somebody you knew.

Diversion for one evening a week was provided by the post office. Prior to November 1902, there was no delivery by postmen in Pretoria, correspondence being delivered into P.O. Boxes or to callers at the Poste Restante. At the commencement and for a few years afterwards, eight postmen met the requirements of the town. To-day there are about 250. Fifty years ago newcomers from Europe were many and, like most newcomers, wrote and received a number of letters by the weekly mail. The arrival of the European mail was, therefore, important for the many people who wished to receive their letters as soon as the mail arrived. The mail reached Pretoria about 6.30 p.m., too late for delivery by postmen who were, however, on duty to get their deliveries in order. About 8 p.m. the postmen would go to the counter, sit in order, one to eight, with their particular number hanging on the public side of the grill, and then the public would be admitted. If anybody did not know his particular postman an official was there to help him. It was usually ten or later before the counter was cleared, but by that time as a rule more than half the mail had been disposed of.

(To be Continued)

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Zoeloe-kryger