

For the Junior Members

Roads and Road Transport before the Motor Car

GRAND-DAD.

In previous numbers of *Provincial Pride* I have tried to picture the conditions in which people in Otago lived during its earlier years of settlement, and to compare these with conditions today. Older boys and girls today know more than did their great grandfathers when they were old men. None of them ever saw or dreamed of a motor car or an aeroplane. They would have thought it quite impossible to travel round the world in a space capsule in a little over an hour, to land a rocket on the moon, or to send pictures from one country to another by wire in less than a minute. None of them ever saw a motor-bike or a T.V. set, and none ever listened to the radio or saw a 'movie'. You are most fortunate to be living in the most marvellous period the world has ever known. Yet your great grandparents were as a rule quite happy. For amusements they had their concerts, their vaudeville shows, their magic lantern lectures, their libraries, their picnics, their games of draughts or chess, and their musical evenings in one another's homes.

On this occasion I propose to tell you something about the horse drawn vehicles, many of which are preserved in the Early Settlers' Museum, but first just a word about the horses. Farm implements were drawn by oxen or by horses, sturdy animals known as draught horses, mainly of the Clydesdale breed, and it was a grand sight to see a team of well-groomed horses, four or six in number pulling a double-furrowed plough. Carts and drays, used for transporting goods, were drawn by sturdy, but somewhat smaller horses as a rule, and passenger vehicles by still lighter animals capable of trotting along at 8 to 10 miles an hour while pulling a buggy or other conveyance. Riding ponies were also extremely common and even racehorses were not rare.

There were many different kinds of passenger vehicles, commonest of all being the four-wheeled buggy. This usually had two seats both facing forwards. The phaeton was a low-set sort of buggy with one seat facing forwards and the other backwards, so that the passengers sat facing one another. The gig was a light sort of buggy with two wheels and a single seat. The jaunting car was not so common but here the seats were on the sides and the passengers sat back to back facing outwards. One of these was for many years used as a taxi taking passengers from the Mosgiel railway station to the township. The wagonette had a front seat facing forwards and two side seats facing inwards and could convey eight or nine passengers as a rule.

Covered-in vehicles were not numerous. First there was the hansom-cab, a light two-wheeled vehicle much used in Dunedin as a sort of taxi. This had a closed-in body with doors on either side partly of glass to admit light. The driver sat behind the cab overlooking it and on an open seat. The brougham was usually four wheeled with a closed-in body in which the passengers sat, and a seat in front for the driver. The hansom-cab and the brougham were the only city vehicles that protected the passengers from wind or rain. For picnic parties the drag was the favourite vehicle. It was really just an oversize wagonette capable of seating up to sixteen passengers or even more. Sometimes this was provided with a movable covered frame for use in wet weather. For long journeys there were several coaches. One, for some years, travelled daily between Dunedin and Portobello conveying both passengers and goods. Some passengers travelled in the cab and others on outside seats. It was drawn by a team of four horses. A large coach is preserved in the Early Settlers' Museum. All vehicles travelling at night had two lamps with a lighted candle in each.

Goods were transported usually in carts or drays or in wagons and cabs. Wagons were used to convey heavy loads on the longer routes such as from Dunedin to the Maniototo or to Central Otago and required teams of horses or bullocks, often as many as a dozen being harnessed to one wagon. For local use on the farm, drays were used to cart loads of coal, or of turnips, or of lime, or manure. These were just really large boxes provided with two wheels and drawn by either one or two horses. No seats were provided. In the city covered-in cabs were used in the same way as motor trucks are used today for

transporting produce from the shops to people's homes. Hay-carts were used by many farmers for carrying loads of hay or sheaves of oats or wheat from the field to where they were built into stacks till such time as the hay was required for winter feed, or the threshing mill arrived to thresh the grain. Today stacks of grain are rarely seen because the header removes the grain in the field. The hay-cart had four wheels as a rule but no back or sides save close to the wheels and boys and girls loved to jump on the back of the cart when it was empty and enjoy a free ride.

The only vehicles not drawn by horses (or bullocks) were the threshing mills that were drawn from one farm to another by means of a traction -engine. Once the mill arrived at the stacks of grain, the engine was used to drive the mill machinery by means of an endless belt.

All horse-drawn vehicles had wooden wheels with iron rims and it was the task of the wheelwright to make these wheels. The wooden spokes had to be fitted into the hub at one end; into a wooden rim at the other. The wheel was then laid in a flat iron rim. This was made to fit so tightly that it had to be made to expand by heating in a fire in order to get it in position. As it cooled it grew smaller and bound the wheel so securely that it could not be removed. It was the task of the blacksmith to fit all working horses with a set of iron shoes, which he had to make in the first place. The iron bar was placed in the forge fire and by means of a huge bellows, the fire was made intensely hot. When the iron bar was red hot it was removed by a pair of tongs and beaten into shape on a large iron anvil by the use of heavy hammers. Then holes had to be punched for the nails, and the shoes were then nailed to the horses' hooves. This was done while the blacksmith held the horse's hoof between his knees. The horse felt no pain of course because there are no nerves in the hoof.

Lastly, just a word about the roads. At first the roads were of clay but those most in use were soon given a coat of road metal bound together with clay. In some cases river gravel was used, but generally the rocks had to be broken up by hammer as there were no stone-crushers such as we have today. It was quite a common sight to see a man armed with a long-handled heavy hammer beside a load of rock on the roadside, breaking it up into a suitable size for mending the large potholes that frequently formed. These would be filled with road metal and a shovel of clay for binding. In dry weather the roads were very dusty but the roads could at least be used in all weathers. Today the metal is broken up much smaller and tar or bitumen is used to bind the metal. As a result the roads are stronger and better and there is no dust nuisance. The country roads were just clay roads for many years and they were measured by length, breadth, and depth (of mud).