

Fitzroy History Society Newsletter

www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au

February 2013

Imagining -Smith Street Retail Shopping Precinct – 1890's – 1940's

A Walk along Smith Street (West side)

Sunday February 24

11.00 am-12.00 noon

Meet beside 'Woolworths' in Hodgson St, near corner of Smith St. (as per the photograph below) The walk will outline the retail history of the buildings together with their architectural significance to the precinct.



1905 H. Ackman and Company,
Monster Furnishing Arcade, 243-247 Smith Street,
Fitzroy, now Woolworths.

Committee Members 2013

President: Meg Lee

Vice President: Trudy Fraser

Treasurer: Chris Friday

Committee Members:

Mike Moore

Graeme Pritchard

Kym Ortenburg

All members can be contacted via our website.

UP COMING EVENTS MARCH

Researching the History of your House

Many houses in Fitzroy are at least 150 years old in 2013. Is yours?

Researching Your House - using the library resources and the Internet.

Tuesday March 26

Fitzroy Library, Moor St

7pm sharp

APRIL

National Trust Heritage Festival week Gertrude Street -Lost and Found

During the Festival the Fitzroy History Society will be conducting walks along Gertrude Street, on:

- Sunday 21 April. There will be several themes with highlights along the way.
- Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 April there are planned walks led by Miles Lewis.
- Sunday 28 April we are offering several walks.

Further details and booking arrangements will be advertised on our website;

www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au from

1 March and at National Trust website;

www.nationaltrust.org.au/vic/heritage-festival-2013 from 1 April

Numbers are limited; pre-booking is essential and the starting location and times will be advertised when your booking is accepted.

FITZROY HISTORY SOCIETY MEMBERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO BOOK BEFORE 1 APRIL.

With increasing costs of printing and postage for the Newsletter we prefer to send you a copy by email. By receiving it by email you help to keep the membership subscription to a minimum – and help the environment.

Please email fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au with your email address to receive the newsletter electronically

DID YOU KNOW?

Fitzroy's Roller Coaster 1885-6

27 years before St Kilda's Luna Park a roller coaster was in use on the Corner of Nicholson and Gertrude Streets.

THE GRAVITY RAILROAD COMPANY

Curiosity has been excited the last few days by the erection of a circular tramway in the grounds at the corner of Nicholson and Gertrude streets. This curiosity has been engendered by the fact that the higher section of the structure is 26ft above the roadway, and towers over the bill-board wall so that it is visible from the road. The gravity tramway is a curiosity, not only as displaying the scientific properties of self-propulsion, but in America has attracted many thousands of passengers from the novelty of this mode of transit. By the force of its own momentum ten passengers are carried in a car similar to a gradient chair round the whole circuit of the line in 17 seconds, and the sensation is so novel and exhilarating - possessing the apparent element of danger without the possibility of such, for which makers so much craven that it has become a fixed institution in all American centres. Messrs. Kilbourn and Ciphers have patented the apparatus in all the colonies and have gone to great expense in perfecting the fixture. They propose having a private exhibition tomorrow, when we shall be able to give fuller details.

(The Herald, February 25, 1885)



Image of the Fitzroy roller coaster in *Story of Australian Roller Coasters*, by Edwin Dickinson.. (copy now being acquired by the State Library of Victoria)

Newspaper Reports of the time

March, 1885

CHEAP EXCITEMENT

The latest novelty from America, in the form of an aerial railroad, is now in full swing at the junction of Nicholson and Gertrude-streets. We have personally experienced the peculiar sensation of riding in the cars, and can confidently recommend the pastime to any other readers who find the mild form of insanity displayed by the Army insufficient for their daily wants. Most of our readers are no doubt aware of the system on which the cars work by gravity, but to thoroughly understand the principle of Newton's discovery a ride on the American Gravity Railroad Company's cars is a necessity. The distance travelled is considerable, the speed tremendous, and the excitement intense. The proprietors, Messrs Kilbourn and Ciphers inform us that there are eight similar establishments in New York city, and the business done is immense. The price of is 3d including a ride on the cars, and considering all things, we cannot help thinking that it is decidedly the cheapest form of excitement hitherto introduced.

(Fitzroy City Press,
Saturday 14 March 1885, page 3)

January, 1886 CLOSURE
American Gravity Railway, Remember the last nights. Admission 3d

(The Argus, 27 Jan 1886)

August 1887 REPLACED BY THE CABLE TRAM

The tramway from Spencer-street to Clifton-hill via Bourke-street was opened yesterday for traffic without further hindrances. Cars ran regularly on the line all day, and conveyed large numbers of passengers. The police exercised special vigilance at the crossings of Swanston and Elizabeth streets to regulate the traffic. Near the engine house expert inspectors took the dummies across the space at which the grips pass from one cable to the other, and flagmen kept watch at the crossing of the Brunswick-street line and at the sharp curve at the intersection of Smith and Gertrude streets.

(The Argus, 11Aug 1887, page 7)

October 1939 **EARLY MEMORIES**

Sir,- Now that the last of the cable cars are doomed and the power-house at the corner of Gertrude and Nicholson streets will be abolished, a memory comes to me of the first "chute" in Melbourne that was erected on that site over 50 years ago. It was built somewhat after the style of the scenic railway at Luna Park; but, if I remember rightly, passengers had to walk up steps to the highest point, where there was a long seat like a garden seat with a backrest. At a given signal off went .garden seat and passengers at a high speed, sideways, not facing forward, down the slope, then by the impetus up again round the circle until the starting point was leached. I do not know how it was worked; we school children were not allowed to have a "thrill" on it. It was considered a "great joke" by the mistakenly humorous-minded young men to take nervous womenfolk for a climb to the top to see the "lovely view" and then suggest a seat after their exertions. As there was nothing to hold on to in front the "joke," in nine cases out of ten, did not come off; there were many shrieks and fainting cases. I do not think it was running very long. Do any of your readers remember this. I wonder?

Yours, N.S. Melbourne

(The Argus, 7 Oct 1939, page 7)

Any Suggestions and Contributions are most welcome?

We invite you to become a part of our society in any way you feel that you can make a contribution. We welcome receiving your local knowledge, any research you have about the area, articles of interest etc.

Your suggestions regarding activities, speakers or walks are most welcome.

www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au

E-MAIL: Fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au

PO Box 180 Fitzroy 3065

Become a Member

Membership costs just \$10 per person per year.

To make renewal easy, all memberships fall for renewal on 1 August each year (around the date of our AGM).

If you would like to join or renew your membership, please complete the form found on our website www.fitzroyhistorysociety.com.au and send it with the membership fee to PO Box 180, Fitzroy, 3065.

If you have any queries email us at fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au or write to us at PO Box 180, Fitzroy, 3065.

We look forward to having you as a member.