Chapter 2

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Set in the footpath of Flinders Street outside the Customs House is the inscription:—"John Batman landed near this spot, June, 1835. This will be the place for a village"—a silent reminder of the origin of this great city.

Batman was born at Parramatta on the outskirts of Sydney. As a young man he went to Tasmania and for 15 years fought an uphill battle to raise sheep in the wild country which had been allotted to him. In fulfilment of a long-held desire to seek more suitable pastoral country on the mainland, he sailed from the River Tamar on May 10th, 1835, and crossed Bass Strait. After inspecting the land inside the entrance of Port Phillip Bay, he sailed around its northern shores and arrived near the mouth of the river later to be known as the Yarra.

It was not, however, until June 8th, when his contemplated return to Tasmania was interrupted by adverse weather, that he took a boat's crew and pulled up the river in search of water. At the ridge of rocks which then stood at the present site of Queen's Bridge he found good water, and here he landed. His journal for that day reads: "The boat went up the large river I have spoken of, which comes from the east, and I am glad to state, about six miles up found the river all good water and very deep. This will be the place for a village. Natives on shore."

Surely, at that time no one could ever have imagined that from this humble beginning there would arise on the banks of the river a city which in little more than a century would contain more people than then existed in any but a few cities in the world. Yet this is so, and today Melbourne is one of the world's notable cities. But despite the stature which it has now attained, its brief career has not been unchequered, and changing social, economic and political conditions have left their influence on the city, and with it a heritage for subsequent generations which has not always been for the best.

Its fluctuating fortunes can be illustrated by the variations in the annual increase in population shown graphically in diagram 1. As might be expected, periods of rapid growth have been followed by periods in which the city has grown much more slowly, and in two periods it has even declined in population. For all these variations there have been reasons, and it may lead to a better understanding of the problems of the city if these are briefly traced.

The Early Days

Two years after Batman had established his village Governor Bourke visited the new settlement, which at that time formed part of New South Wales. He saw that a number of huts had been built at Gellibrand's Point opposite the mouth of the Yarra. To him this site appeared to offer better possibilities than that selected by Batman, and he therefore called it Williamstown after the reigning British monarch. Batman's village was named Melbourne after the Prime Minister of the day.

Time has proved Bourke's judgment faulty, for Melbourne has grown into a large city while Williamstown has remained one of its outer suburbs. Looking back it is not difficult to see why this has happened. The country behind Williamstown was, and still is, a windswept, somewhat inhospitable plain with a poor natural water supply. Melbourne, on the other hand, offered abundant water and was close to the more fertile and attractive eastern areas which are still in demand as residential districts. Even today in Williamstown there lingers an atmosphere faintly reminiscent of its separate origin, such as is not found elsewhere in the metropolis.

With Governor Bourke came Robert Hoddle, who had been appointed Surveyor-General to the new district. His first act was to have a survey made of the two sites. Following the usual practice of the time, he had the town laid out on a rectangular grid with scant recognition of the topography. However, he made generous provisions for parklands immediately surrounding the town and for this foresight, later generations have cause to thank him.

The width of the roads was fixed at 99 feet, but the Governor insisted on having lanes 33 feet wide running east and west through the centre of the blocks to give access to the rear of the allotments it was proposed to sell. The area thus originally planned today comprises the business and the commercial heart of the metropolis. Its wide streets lend dignity and convenience to its functions but its erstwhile lanes, now avenues of trade and commerce, detract from this and present an almost insuperable problem.

The settlement, chosen primarily as a place to run sheep, soon developed into a thriving business centre, and by the early 1840's could boast a population of some 10,000 people. The quickly-growing community was unable to

supply itself with building materials and a large number of its inhabitants had to be content with tents and humpies. Those who could afford it brought out complete prefabricated homes from England. It is interesting to record that a five-room house could then be landed in Melbourne for less than £ 200.

Whereas most sea-board cities have begun facing the sea and have gradually extended back to the hinterland, the nucleus around which Melbourne has been built is situated some six miles up the river. Besides determining the centre of gravity of the city, this has resulted in the dispersion of the dock areas between three localities — Williamstown, the original anchorage, Port Melbourne at the mouth of the Yarra, and the Victoria Dock area and river berths below Spencer Street Bridge.

In 1842 the colonists were given the power to spend as they deemed best portion of the revenue collected, and despite a serious set-back by drought the Port Phillip district continued to prosper during this decade. In 1843 there existed a bush track from St. Kilda to Melbourne and two years later a bridge was built across the river just above the present Princes Bridge. This bridge, giving easy access across the Yarra, marked the beginning of St. Kilda as a popular beach resort. In 1847 Melbourne was proclaimed a city, and by mid-century the colony had about 77,000 people of whom one-third lived in Melbourne. Then occurred two events, each in its own way epoch-making, and each of which was to leave an indelible mark on the colony.

Separation and Gold Discovery

For some years there had been a movement for separation from the penal colony of New South Wales, and in 1850 Queen Victoria gave the Royal Assent to an Act by which the district became a separate colony, to be known as Victoria after the young Queen. In November, 1851, the first State Parliament was opened by Superintendent, afterwards Governor, La Trobe in St. Patrick's Hall, Bourke Street.

At this time about one-half of the population of the State was associated with pastoral interests which had developed rapidly. Then in 1851 came the discovery of gold, which ushered in a decade of remarkable expansion, unprecedented difficulties, and great prosperity. As the news of the discovery spread abroad, people flocked to the new land from the four corners of the earth. In this decade 70% of the people who migrated to Australia settled in Victoria.

The surging influx of migrants created extraordinary problems for the infant colony, as yet quite unprepared for such an invasion. When one considers the difficulty experienced today in assimilating 100,000 new citizens a year into Australia's population of over 8,000,000, some idea may be formed of what it meant to Victoria to have 250,000 migrants in five years. Practically all of them passed through Melbourne. A period of social and political disorder resulted. Crimes of violence and riotous debauchery sprang

into existence before police could be recruited and organised to repress them.

The story of those days has been told many times, but some incidents should be given which had their effect on Melbourne and its early life and character.

During 1852 one-third of the adult population, throwing family responsibilities to the wind, dropping tools of trade, leaving businesses and professions, set off for the gold fields. Shops were closed and hundreds of houses vacated, to be temporarily filled by new arrivals. Lucky prospectors returned to the city with almost unbelievable wealth. In one year the gold yield was valued at £ 12,000,000 and bank deposits rose from £ 800,000 to £ 4,500,000.

But all miners were not successful. Each winter saw a stream of disappointed men and women trampling back to the city looking for work. Fortunately for a time at least, this was plentiful and remunerative with builders and artisans receiving up to £ 2 per day. But the flow of new migrants at the rate of about 3,000 a week overstrained the available accommodation, and those who possessed houses had no difficulty in letting rooms at exorbitant prices.

The Government demanded a share of the gold being won by issuing licenses which cost thirty shillings a month and without which miners were not allowed to dig. This action was bitterly resented, and eventually resulted in a clash between the military forces and the "rebel" miners led by Peter Lalor. About thirty men were killed in the skirmish at the Eureka Stockade. Lalor escaped and though a reward was offered for his capture it was never claimed. He lived to become a public servant, later a Member of Parliament and finally the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. Popular sympathy was with the miners and at their subsequent trial no jury would convict them and the charges were withdrawn. This period is generally hailed as the beginning of the democratic era in Australia. Merchants who were able to continue trading during these difficult times were amply rewarded by enormous profits, and in this period the foundations of many fortunes were laid.

As the interior of Victoria was opened up, it was natural that the roads from the city should follow the easiest routes along the ridges between the valleys. It was natural also that as the city grew, development should spread outwards from these roads. The result is that today along the valleys are to be found open spaces and areas of comparatively sparse development, which offer great opportunities for the location of those roads, parks and playing fields which the city now so badly needs.

Consolidation

In 1854 the first railway was constructed from the waterfront at Sandridge, now Port Melbourne, to the city. This was operated by a company whose capital was raised locally. Owing to the delay in obtaining a locomotive from England, one was made in Melbourne. Elated by the success of this venture, many other railway companies were formed to run