

## **The Toronto Railway. Ed Tonks. Rail Transport. Lake Macquarie Heritage Study.**

This slightly more than four kilometre long railway was constructed as a tramway by a land investment company, to serve its development. The tramway previously catered for recreation and picnic travellers. It was later taken over by the NSW government and upgraded to a railway. Although the main traffic was passengers, goods were conveyed over the line and coal was transported a short distance, until the branch's junction with the main line at Fassifern.

During 1889 a letter was received from the Excelsior Land Investment & Building & Bank Co Ltd seeking consent of the Northumberland Coal Co to allow it to carry a tramway through their leasehold to junction with the Government railway near Fassifern Platform. The local directors desired clarification of a number of issues, such as who would retain mineral rights and whether the tramway would carry goods as well as passengers. Duly, the tramway was constructed between Fassifern and Toronto and operated by the Excelsior Company from March 1891 until March 1899 when leased to the Toronto Hotel and Tramway Co.<sup>1</sup>

Toronto Station opened as a private station on 7 March 1891, leased to the Toronto Hotel and Tramway Company 15 March 1899, closed 15 March 1909. Reopened when taken over by the government on 28 June 1910.<sup>2</sup>

Named "Toronto" by the Excelsior Land Investment & Building Co & Bank Ltd after a city in Canada to honour Edward Hanlan, then champion sculler who came from Toronto. He arrived in New South Wales at the time of the company's land was being subdivided.<sup>3</sup>

Another station was opened to serve the Toronto Tramway. It was opened as "Blackalls" on 7 March 1891. It was relocated to a new site a little more than two kilometres from Fassifern on 28 May 1911. The name changed to "Blackalls Park" from January 1956. The location is reportedly named after a Newcastle dentist who owned land at this location.<sup>4</sup>

Other set down points along the line have been recorded as "Fennells" and "Bowers".<sup>5</sup>

At least two Ralph Snowball photographs depict a horse-drawn trolley, complete with passengers over this standard gauge tramway. One carries the date, 8 October 1898 whilst the other is dated 29 October 1900. This photo shows the facing of a low profile station platform, possibly Toronto, to the right.

In spite of the lightness of the track and structures and numerous sharp curves, government engines and rolling stock were run on the branch to and from Newcastle on Sundays and public holidays. This service commenced on 2 August 1891.<sup>6</sup> The beginnings of this service reflect the level of demand from the recreational and picnic travellers.

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<sup>1</sup> Tonks E "Northumberland-Newstan 1887-1987 100 Years of Coal Mining" Elcom Collieries 1987.

<sup>2</sup> "How & Why of Station Names"

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Bicentennial Plaques Route LMCC 1988

<sup>6</sup> Singleton C C Ibid

Despite being reformed as the Toronto Hotel & Tramway Company no money was available for maintenance or renewals. As a consequence, the track and bridges deteriorated to such an extent that, early in 1908, government trains were withdrawn altogether and, finally on the 15 May 1909, the train ceased to function.<sup>7</sup>

At least two company-owned steam locomotives ran over the tramway when privately owned. Early in 1891, ex government owned No. 29, a small tank-type locomotive built by Manning Wardle in England and which had entered service during March 1864 was sold to the Excelsior Company.<sup>8</sup> This locomotive may well have been known as “Pygmy”. “Toronto, Lake Macquarie NSW. The Pictorial Story”, researched and published by Lake Macquarie & District Historical Society in 1979, shows “Pygmy” and a group of suitably attired passengers at Toronto Station. During January 1901 this locomotive was sold to the Public Works Department. After service at different locations A. Goninan scrapped it during May 1923.<sup>9</sup>

No. 1001, another government tank- type locomotive, which had previously worked Sandgate Cemetery trains, was hired to the Excelsior Company in 1893 and returned during March 1900.<sup>10</sup>

The second company- owned locomotive was a vertical boilered locomotive built in Sydney by Hudson Brothers. This locomotive became known as the famous “Coffee Pot” whose memories are kept alive in period photographs. It was sold in 1910 to Messrs Howley and Fernshaw for use along the coastal railway from Glenrock Colliery to The Junction. It was externally modified to fit through the two tunnels along the coastal railway. It continued in use until 1925.<sup>11</sup>

The closure of the tramway caused so much complaint locally that the government took over the tramway, made repairs to have it reopened temporarily and worked the line by a steam tram motor and cars of the type used in the Newcastle area at the time. The service commenced on 29 August 1910 and connected with the mainline at Fassifern.<sup>12</sup>

Norm Barney in his “From Mistake to Millennium. A pictorial history of Lake Macquarie over 200 years” features on page 77 tram motor number 61A, displaying the destination “Fassifern” department Toronto. Such a passage would be a little later than the “c 1891” in the accompanying caption.

Meanwhile, the NSW Railway Commission set about providing a standard railway, some of it on new locations.

The new Toronto branch railway was substituted for the tramway on 28 May 1911, using a new branch platform that turned sharply away from the main line. A new brick station building with footbridge was provided as well as a signal box at the Sydney end of the platform. These new facilities were opened on 12 January 1913.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Singleton C C Ibid

<sup>8</sup> PTC of NSW “Steam Locomotive Data” July 1974

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> NSW Department of Commerce “Volume 2 Historical Report Merewether Glenrock Coastal Railway” June 2004

<sup>12</sup> Singleton C C Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Singleton C C Ibid

Toronto was given a through service of trains from Newcastle coincidental with the opening of the relocated line. In 1933 a disastrous bush fire destroyed the large brick station buildings at Fassifern.<sup>14</sup>

The days of recreational and picnic traffic over the line come to life in period photographs. Norm Barney's Lake Macquarie bicentenary book on page 31 shows a trainload of picnickers disembarking from the train at Toronto Station on 10 October 1898. Page 33 shows BHP employees on a picnic "piling off" the train at Blackalls Station in 1934. An interesting social comment is provided by the uniformed bandmen amongst the crowd.

The Lake Macquarie and District Historical Society's "Toronto" book features on page 52 passengers and a "steam train at Railway Station -1912" whilst on page 54 colour photos depict the result of a set of passenger carriages "running away" at the end of the goods yard. These two photos are undated.

During June 1920 the Toronto branch line was utilised when HRH The Prince of Wales, later to become Edward VIII, overnighted at Toronto.

On the afternoon of Tuesday 5 September 1933, 198 school boy cricketers, accompanied by Australian cricket players, Don Bradman and Stan McCabe, departed Toronto by train for Newcastle. The group was on a "good will" tour of the North Coast". Earlier in the day they had travelled by train to Belmont by ferry across the lake to Wangi Wangi, where a demonstration cricket match was held. After the game the touring party was conveyed by ferry to Toronto Railway Station.<sup>15</sup>

On 10 April 1909, Mr James Donaldson, Junior, notified the Department of Mines that he and his brother were opening out a tunnel for the purpose of mining coal on their land situated about half a mile south-east of Fassifern Railway Station. The colliery was adjacent to the Toronto Branch and was developed to work the Great Northern Seam.<sup>16</sup> A series of loop sidings were constructed on the down side of the Toronto Branch and loading facilities built over the sidings. These sidings came into use on 11 January 1913. In the same year, the colliery was re-named Donaldson Colliery. Initially the Donaldson Brothers had planned to call their mine South Borehole Colliery.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of a change in ownership, the colliery changed its name in December 1919 to South Teralba Colliery.<sup>18</sup>

Another change in name occurred during March 1929 when the colliery became known as South Pacific Colliery.<sup>19</sup> The colliery closed during 1930 and was listed in 1931 and 1932 as being discontinued. The following year it was abandoned.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Singleton C C Ibid

<sup>15</sup> NMH 6 September 1933

<sup>16</sup> Andrews BR "Coal, Railways and Mines. The Collieries of the Newcastle District" 2009 Soon to be published.

<sup>17</sup> Andrews B R Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Andrews B R Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Andrews B R Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Andrews B R Ibid

On 17 November 1934 it was advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald that all the buildings, plant and equipment of South Pacific Colliery would be sold at the mine on 8 December 1934.<sup>21</sup>

The colliery changed ownership twice during 1935. In 1936 it was reopened and later discontinued in the same year. During its working life it was also known locally as Blackall's Colliery.<sup>22</sup>

On 7 September 1939, the South Pacific Colliery Siding was abolished and removed. The colliery surface facilities and loop sidings were subsequently removed.<sup>23</sup>

The last passenger trains ran to Toronto on 10 March 1990.<sup>24</sup> By then most of the services were not through services from Newcastle. Passengers had to alight from mainline trains and walk across to the platform at Fassifern Station serving the Toronto Branch.

- Bicentennial Plaque No. 6 – “Railway” Victory Pde Toronto
- Track “in situ” along the permanent way, most of which is now a “greenway”.
- Low profile bridge which carried the railway across Stony Creek.
- Railway station sites.
- Road subway with Toronto Branch across the top of the road to the east of Fassifern Railway Station.

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<sup>21</sup> Andrews, B R Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Andrews, B R Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Andrews, B R Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Tonks E Photographic files