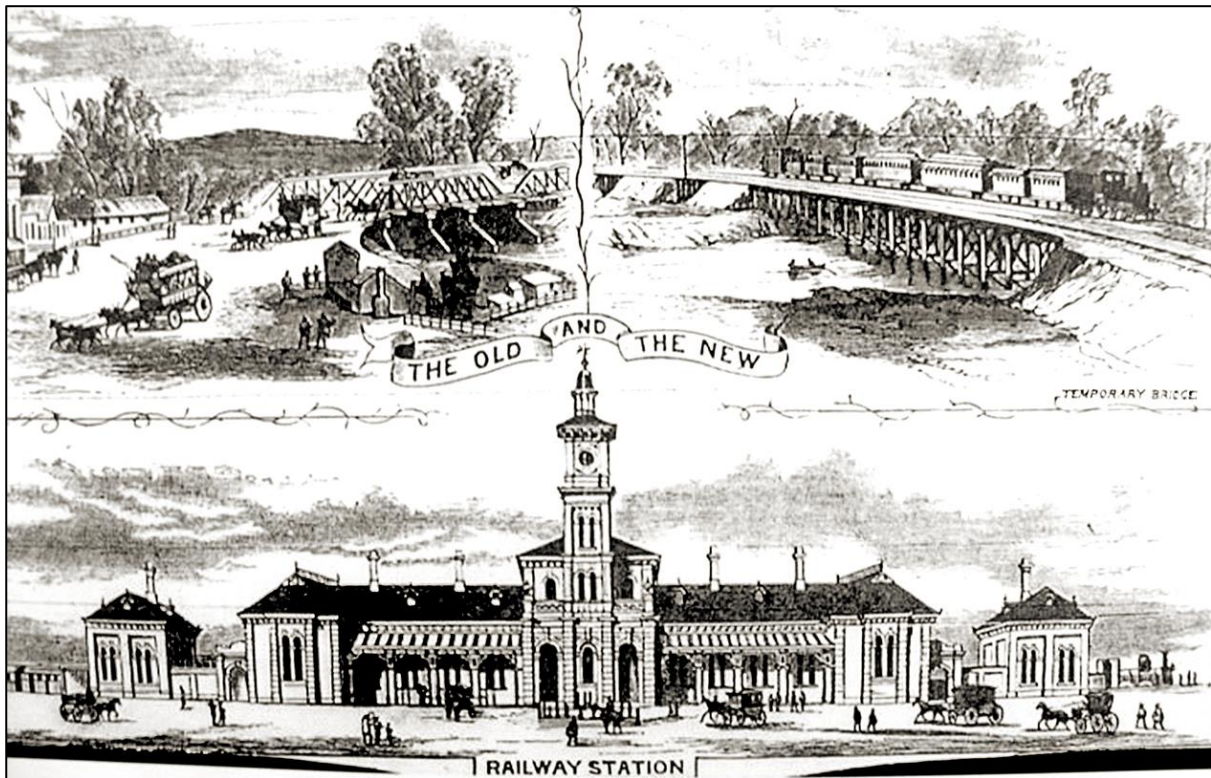


Connecting NSW and Vic Railways

Bruce Pennay

In 1883 a Sydney sketch artist pictured the new temporary railway bridge that linked Melbourne and Sydney and admired the magnificent Albury Railway Station in the *Australian Town and Country Journal*.



The 1883 sketch from the *Australian Town and Country Journal*.

In 1883, 140 years ago, there were lavish celebrations in Albury to mark the connection of the two railway systems.

Never before had such a fuss been made about such a small track of railway line as that from Wodonga to Albury across the Murray River, across the two-colony divide.

The connection of railways stretching over 600km from Sydney and 300km from Melbourne was hailed as a railway engineering achievement that would foster cross-border trade and facilitate inter-capital passenger travel.

A temporary grandstand was erected at the railway station for the celebrations. From it, residents could view the arrival of special trains from the capital cities carrying two sets of Governors, Premiers, ministers, politicians, bishops and other distinguished guests.

A choir of local school children sang 'God Save the Queen'. There were torch light parades of bands through the streets of Albury.

Just over 1,000 invited men attended a celebratory banquet in the rough goods shed specially illuminated with Edison electric lights and transformed with artistic wall drapes for

the occasion. A band from Sydney played dreamy waltzes and operatic airs while the invited guests enjoyed a rich menu.

All the speakers hailed the event as a prelude to federation. Melbourne's *Age* reported federation pervaded the air almost as thickly as the spicy aromas and the coriander. Guests thought federation, talked federation and drank federation.

The new Albury Railway station, the grandest of all the country town stations buildings, was intended to show how NSW was reclaiming the border district trade it had lost to Victoria with the railway to Wodonga ten years earlier.

But in 1883 the building was hailed as the public face of the connection of the two railway systems.

In 2023, 140 years on, the building has become an iconic place identifier. The introduction of cheap fares and better trains has ensured that Albury, as well as Wodonga, look to Melbourne for capital city services.

At the break of gauge connection point, there has emerged a sense of a distinctive border community with blurred state loyalties.

To commemorate the 140th anniversary of the connection, Albury & District Historical Society, with the help of a grant from Transport Heritage NSW, is producing a short documentary film.