

Early Travel across Wodonga Flats

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Before and for some time after the opening Albury's first Union Bridge in 1861, most travel from Albury to Wodonga was completed independently.

During the 1867 flood, the third highest ever recorded in Albury, the *Border Post* reported "that the whole of the culverts and bridges between Albury and Wodonga are carried away, the one over the Wodonga creek being the last one to go." The roads had not long been repaired before the 1870 flood was even higher. In times of flood, all intercolonial travel had to be by boat.

George Filmer advertised in the *Albury Banner* of December 1870: "An Express Coach to Wodonga will leave the Exchange Hotel [Albury] every day at half-past 9 and half-past 11am, and at 4 and 6 o'clock pm, and from Mackay's Hotel Wodonga to Albury at 8 and 10am, and 3 and 5 o'clock pm."

With rail on its way to Wodonga from Melbourne, Filmer soon had competition. The *Banner* reported in May 1873 that "In anticipation of the traffic likely on completion of the railway line, another omnibus proprietor has entered the field. With three omnibuses plying on the road, we certainly cannot complain that facilities for intercourse between the two townships are wanting."



A typical omnibus awaits passengers outside Albury Railway Station during celebrations for the official opening of the Sydney to Albury rail in early 1881.

The noun *omnibus* referring to long, horse-drawn vehicles to transport people originated in the 1820s in France. In Latin, *omnibus* means 'for all.' What we commonly refer to as a *bus* is a shortened form of the word *omnibus*.

When the north-east rail line terminated at Wodonga in November 1873, it was another 10 years before rail linked Wodonga and Albury. In 1875, Crawford Coaches "purchased from the Victorian Railway department the exclusive right of driving omnibuses into the reserve at the Wodonga railway terminus."

Crawford's did well from the arrangement, charging one shilling for travel between Wodonga and Albury until a temporary bridge across the Murray completed the rail link between Sydney and Melbourne in 1883.

A freak accident landed George Filmer in Albury Court in 1878. Filmer's coach driver was travelling east on Dean street and crossed to the right hand side of the road and stopped to let a passenger off at the Albury Hotel. A Crawford's coach heading west ran into Filmer's coach and a protruding pole on the stationary coach speared and killed one of Crawford's horses. The judge ruled that Filmer's driver should have completed a U-turn and pulled up facing west – he awarded damages of £15 plus costs.