

VareseNews

Urban metamorphosis in Varese: a tram ride in old Varese

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*Every Monday, on a virtual walk, the column “Urban metamorphosis” talks about the transformations that **Varese** has undergone in the last one hundred years, that is, since it became the Capital of the Province. The column is written by **Fausto Bonoldi**, a historic figure in Varese journalism who has covered this topic for years in the Facebook group **La Varese Nascosta** (“The Hidden Varese”) and who has also written a book, published by Macchione, entitled “**Cara Varese come sei cambiata**” (“Dear Varese, how you’ve changed”).*

Urban metamorphosis, 56th episode: a tram ride in old Varese

On 24 August 1895, the first tram in Varese set off from the square between the *Mediterranea* (later State) railway station, which was inaugurated in 1865, and the *Nord* railway station (1885); this environmentally-friendly means of public transport was abandoned by the town a little more than half a century later (the last run took place on 31 August 1953), in order to make room for the polluting road transport.

The first line went from Varese to Robarello, which, at the time, was part of the independent municipality of Sant’Ambrogio Olona, but within two weeks, the tracks were extended to the First Chapel, in the square now named after Giuseppe Montanari, where the first tram arrived on 7 September 1895. Completing public works so quickly would be unthinkable today, when bureaucratic preliminaries alone sometimes take years.

The inaugural run, on 24 August 1895, was a great reason for celebration; the tram passed through an applauding crowd, with a few moments of apprehension when it had to tackle the climb between Viale Aguggiari and the centre of Sant’Ambrogio. In his book *Una stupenda gita in tram*, the transport historian, the late Professor Francesco Ogliari, wrote that “On the steep climb to Sant’Ambrogio, the crowd suddenly fell silent; the incline was 7% and the tram had to climb 30 m. Some doubted, others trembled [...] but the incredible electric monster made it and arrived victoriously at the Prealpi Restaurant.”

The first tram line was designed also to encourage the tourism and holiday industry, which had its greatest source of development on the slopes of Sacro Monte. It is true that even before the tram, our sacred mountain had attracted not only pilgrims but also crowds of illustrious visitors, such as Stendhal and Giovanni Verga; but there is no doubt that the tram increased the flow of tourists, thanks to the resulting cutting of journey times. Professor Ogliari himself calculated that, once the cable cars were operational, it would no longer take more than an hour and a half to travel by train, tram and cable car

from the Milan station in Piazzale Cadorna to Santa Maria del Monte.

By Fausto Bonoldi

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