

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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FROM HORSECAR TO ELECTRIC RAILWAYS

Hazel M. Hyde

When a beige envelope with a train pictured as chugging toward me arrived in the mail, my interest was stirred mightily. There is a fine railroad and train museum at Union, Illinois. Mr. John Reed of Rockford is one of several train buffs. Memories of train trips stirred.

But horse drawn street railroads! Did Rockford truly have these? E. L. Tomberlin of Oakland, California, had done a bit of preliminary research. He wrote, "I know of two horsecar lines that ran in Rockford, before the local street railways were electrified. These two were the City Railway Company, started in 1882, and the West End Street Railway Company, circa 1891. However I just want to know if the Church and Spruce Street Railway did operate in Rockford 1880's (and if yes, approximately which year).

Conversation with Mrs. Leo H. Nelson (Lois), whose father operated a horse drawn street railroad in Chicago, did not yield the information needed. Mrs. Nelson gives talks in schools for Source and at first she thought she had a picture of a horse-drawn street car.

From Rockfordiana at the Rockford Public Library Local History and Genealogy Room, the sequence began to emerge. Mrs. Ruth Lunde soon had the 1902 City Directory, the first to list street names, Church's History of Rockford and Winnebago County, and maps spread out for me to use. Two ideas formed, first Spruce Street could easily have been Bruce Street, which was served by a horse drawn street railway, and second, horsecar lines are so fascinating that NUGGETS readers might enjoy knowing more about them.

Have you ever had a ride in a horse drawn buggy or carriage? Then you can imagine a horse car railway ride. It was in the 1880's that ladies and gentlemen stepped into the carriage-like cars of Rockford's early public transportation.

As Mr. Tomberlin pointed out in his letter, "Most horse-cars in smaller cities ran just a few blocks, usually from a railroad station, towards a local hotel and business section of town." What streets and parts of town were served by the local horsecar street railway?

Charles Church tells the story of the Rockford Street Railway Company, the earliest of three railways:

The Rockford Street Railway Company was organized in the latter part of 1880, with a capital of \$20,000. January 21, 1881, the secretary of state authorized Anthony Haines, Charles O. Upton, and James Ferguson as commissioners to open books for subscriptions to stock. The original stockholders were Anthony Haines, H. H. Robinson, James Ferguson, C.O. Upton, C.M. Brazee, R. F. Crawford, Levi Rhoades, N.E. Lyman, George H. Trufant, J.S. Ticknor, A.D. Forbes, E.L. Woodruff, John Barnes and John Lake. The first directorate, chosen February 9, 1881, at the office of Holland, Ferguson & Company consisted of Messers: Brazee, Forbes, Rhoades, Upton, Crawford, Haines,

and Barnes. The directors elected A. Haines, president; Levi Rhoades, vice president; H. H. Robinson, secretary; G.H. Trufant, treasurer. The company was organized under the general corporation act of April 18, 1872, and a charter was obtained for ninety-nine years.

June 27, 1881, a franchise was granted by the city council. There was no difficulty in obtaining a right of way.

The company proceeded to build a street railway from the corner of Montague and South Main Streets in South Rockford to where South Fourth Street crosses the Chicago and Northwestern Railway in East Rockford. The original track beginning at Fourth Avenue, run to Kishwaukee Street, then to State Street, on to South Main to the intersection, with Montague.

When the capital of the company was increased, December 27, 1883, to \$80,000, the track was extended to the north gate of the Fair Grounds. The east line was extended to Seventh Street and on to the Northwestern Railroad Crossing. There was a double track on State Street.

Sinnissippi Saga has some details about Rockford's early transportation. In the latter part of 1880 the Rockford Street Railway Company was organized. When the first line was nearing completion, debate arose as to whether horses or mules should be used to draw the cars. The vote ended in a tie. President Anthony Haines cast his vote to break the tie, voting in favor of horses.

The Republic of October 20, 1921, stated that in 1891, the West End Street Railway Company operated an opposition line to the Rockford City Railway Company. In 1893 the company was taken over by a receiver and the parent company bought the West End Company. The system was remodeled but for a year the pale yellow box cars of the West End Company were on the city lines. Then they were withdrawn to be replaced by newer, finer, cars.

Rockford's old baseball park in the west end was a favorite gathering place. Business was booming for the West End lines for a considerable time, but this did not last.

Mr. Church pointed out that the Rockford Street Railway Company made money during the first six years. It began to fail to pay when the lines were extended to the outlying areas with fewer residences.

In 1889 H.H. Price, a director, negotiated the sale of the property of the old company into the hands of a syndicate at sixty cents on the dollar. R. N. Baylies became president and the corporation became known as the Rockford City Railway Company. It was soon to discard the faithful horses and the plodding but dependable mules.

The West End Street Railway was considered a rival of the first street railway system. The extension of the city into what was known as the West End became a concern of a number of men, during the winter of 1890. To increase the demand for lots and to eventually build up a prosperous suburb, they proposed to construct a street railway. The leader of this movement, James S. Ticknor, became



secretary and superintendent.

According to Church's history, the West End Railway Company was organized in 1890, with a capital of \$50,000, which sum was later increased. A franchise was obtained without opposition. The girder type rail was used.

The first line of the West Side Loop started from the intersection of Elm and South Main Streets, on Elm to Cleveland; north on Cleveland Avenue to School Street, west on School to Johnson Avenue, south on Johnson to Anderson, east on Anderson and Preston Streets to South Avon, and north on South Avon.

The South Rockford Line began on Elm Street running west to Church, south on Church to Cedar, west on Cedar to Winnebago, south on Winnebago to Montague.

The third line began at the intersection of Chestnut and Wyman Streets, running north on Wyman to Mulberry, west on Mulberry to Horsman, on Horsman to Locust, west on Locust to Kilburn Avenue, north on Kilburn to School Street. Later the line was extended on Mulberry to Avon, north on Avon to School, east on School to connect with the first terminus.

The East Side Line was built in 1892. It began at the intersection of Church and Chestnut Streets, east on Chestnut and Walnut Streets to Third, north on Third to Market, east on Market to North Fourth, north on North Fourth to Benton, east on Benton to Longwood, north on Longwood to Rural Street. The East Side was subsequently extended on Market to the intersection of Charles and East State, and on Charles to Eleventh Street.

When the lines were completed, the West End had a greater mileage than the City Railway. The lines were supplied



PANORAMA—FOURTEENTH AVENUE

with electricity throughout.

Rockford's Star, February 20, 1927 printed an article showing Gus Ring, a veteran employee of the Rockford Street Car System who began as a driver of horse and mule drawn cars when he was fifteen years old. Rockford had been using horse cars for two years when Gus joined up as a driver. There were two cars on the line where he worked. His run was between Seventh and Kishwaukee Street and Montague and Main Streets. It was the line serving the eastern and southwestern areas of the city.

Two cars were used on the Rockton Avenue run. This line operated between Porter's Corner at State and Main and the corner of Rockton Avenue and Bruce Street. Good service was maintained with the use of two cars.

A third line served the North Main Street District. Two cars ran between the corner of Salem and Church Streets and Porter Corner. This made two lines serving North Main and Harlem Avenue routes. The July 15, 1928, Star gave an account of Mr. Ring's forty-six years of service in piloting cars.

People of our time think the horse car railroad was slow and monotonous. Gus Ring recalled after his many years of service on local lines, that it did not seem particularly slow in those years. He stood behind a fine pair of spirited horses in daylight and mules at night. Gus said mules were more sure-footed than horses. With few street lights and some unlighted streets, it was safer to have animals that knew where they were going.

He was quoted by the Star in 1927 as saying, "When I started driving a horse car as a mere lad there were no paved streets anywhere in the city. A course rubble of gravel and rock was dumped between the rails as a foundation for a finer rock on top of which the horses or mules trotted." He pointed out that when a car jumped the track and landed alongside, the deep mud of spring months form-



WEST STATE STREET—LOOKING WEST

ed a bottomless quagmire. Gus said that in dry times he had applied his own broad shoulders and muscle power to move the car back on the track. The cars were comparatively light.

The schedule on the first city line allowed only half an hour from Sixth Avenue and Seventh Street to Montague Street in South Rockford. The horses and mules had to step lively to complete the round trip in an hour and he frequently had to use the whip.

Every Sunday morning the hay, which was used to keep the patrons' feet warm, was changed. By stuffing the feet into a pile of hay when the temperatures hovered around zero, you could keep a person from freezing his feet. The ride was breezy at best.

Nearly everyone in Rockford knew Gus Ring. Most of them felt Gus was their friend. This veteran trainman had a real gift for making people feel at ease.

Other trainmen, beside Gus Ring, who drove the horses and mules included Gus Messerknecht who started work on the local street railroad in 1882; William B. Easton, who started in 1883; John (Jack) Dougherty, who also began work for the company in 1883; Dusty Rhoades, in 1885, and William (Bill) Poole, in 1890. These men say many of the so called gay boys of the 1880's who rode on the mule cars to show off their bell-bottom pants, congress shoes, and tile hats.

The company did not employ conductors. Each passenger was supposed to drop his nickle or ticket into a coin box. Sometimes a few washers and buttons were found at the end of the day.

During the first six years the project was a financial success. Lines were extended to sparsely settled parts of the city with the aim of serving more people. This

did not prove to be a money-making plan and the property had to be sold.

The census figure for Rockford in 1880 was 13,129. By 1890 the population was 23,534 and the day of the horse-drawn car was at an end.

The horse cars ran on narrow rails fastened to pieces of wood which were laid on the ground. The ride was a bumpy one. The speed was from three to four miles an hour and the usual fare was five cents.

The cost of a horse and a car was about \$1,200. The driver was paid from seventy-five cents to a dollar and seventy five cents a day in the early 1880's.

A good map of Rockford in 1883 is to be found in the Rockford Public Library. Here Bruce Street, which was on the railway line can be found; but not Spruce Street. Since this line ran from Porter's Drug Store Corner on State and Main out to the corner of Rockton and Bruce Street, there is a possibility that an oral tradition could have called it the Church and Bruce Line.

According to the Workers Writers Program, Illinois Guide Series, Rockford, in 1890 Rockford had one hundred thirty miles of sidewalks and more than one hundred miles of streets. Except for a strip of 1,730 feet of wood blocks laid in 1889 on East State Street, there had been no paving. In 1890 there was laid 1,775 feet on West State Street and 3,770 feet of South Main Street with cedar block pavement.

Miss Judith Dalin, whom I interviewed, September 11, 1945, came to Rockford with her parents, directly from Sweden, when she was two years of age. She was born May 20, 1878, in Blidsby, Westergotland, Sweden, and was the daughter of John and Clara Dalin. The year was 1880. She remembered the street railway on Seventh Street. Judith would have been twelve years old by the time the horses and mules were no longer in use. She remembered the mules especially. She recalled the long ears of the mules and the braying voice. It was said the mules were more sure-footed than horses and the streets were not paved. They were very strong and the drivers treated them well. She remembered the first electric cars that replaced the horse and mule drawn street cars.

There was a paved area on East State Street as early as about 1889, but the paving was wood blocks. About the year the electric railway or street car came to Rockford, she recalled, some wood blocks were used to pave a part of West State Street and South Main Street.

The Rockford City Traction Company and the Rockford and Interurban Company, an auxiliary, provided the workers with club rooms over the Kishwaukee Street barns. The Trainmen's Club had quarters with steel lockers, pool table, reading room with periodicals supplied by the company, card tables, and showers. The furnishings were described as pleasant and comfortable. A dance and entertainment were given there once a month. Members of the club provided the

orchestra. There was also a trainmen's chorus.

The company originated an annual picnic for its workers at Harlem Park. The day-long outing also featured a program and athletic events.

The Employees' Mutual Benefit Association founded July 1, 1914, provided for trainmen benefits for sickness, accident and bereavement. One dollar a day was given the employee who was sick or injured. In case of death the widow received \$100. If the wife or a child under fifteen years of age, died then \$50. was paid to the family.

There was a flurry of articles about horse cars as the age of electrical cars and interurbans came along to replace them. Cartoons sprang up all over the country. John Held, Jr., who became famous for his classic cartoons in The New Yorker Magazine had a fine one in a 1932 issue entitled "The Olde Horse Car Encounters The New Automobile".

The street railway company controlled two Rock River excursion boats, the "May Lee" and the "Illinois". (NUGGETS OF HISTORY, Jan-Feb 1971 p 2)

My first knowledge of the electrical street railway system of Rockford came at the time of World War II. Since I lived on Kishwaukee Street where pavement covered the old tracks, there was excitement in the possibility of digging up the street car tracks to recover the metal. After much discussion, it was decided that effort would not yield enough useful material and little if any track was uncovered from the Rockford streets. The bus system had firmly replaced the street cars.

The year was 1895 when the West End Railway Company passed into the hands of a receiver. John Farson represented the owners.

The Rockford Railway and Power Company was organized in the consolidation of the Rockford City Rail Company and the Rockford Traction Company. It was the age of electricity. Other companies were formed.

Oldsters remember the Rockford and Belvidere Electric Company organized in 1900 and completed the next year. Recollections of the Freeport Electric Railway Company and the Rockford, Beloit, and Janesville Interurban line are fairly common. These systems were consolidated and in 1909 were sold to Commonwealth Railway and Light Syndicate, an eastern concern. Then there was the Rockford City Traction Company, organized to operate city lines. (NUGGETS OF HISTORY, Vol XIII, Mar-April 1975, pp 6-7 for picture Interurban tracks along Woodruff Avenue and a concrete support for the Interurban along Wesleyan Avenue east of Twentieth Street).

Olive Ballard, who taught English at Lincoln Junior High School from 1927-1959 could remember riding on the trolley cars. Her home had been in Wayne and she had taken the electrified third rail to Elgin. There she transferred to Rockford by Interurban. She recalls the interurban came into Rockford on Broadway, which was

called Fourteenth Avenue in those days. From there it went down Seventh Street. There was a depot on East State. She took a stree-car to London Avenue where she roomed. This retired teacher, now in her eighties, made the trip on the interurban to Elgin every week as long as her parents lived.

Dorrin E. Branstetter, who was 97 years of age when I interviewed him, April 20, 1977, spoke of riding the interurban to Freeport. McNair's Crossing was one of the stops.

There are many others who recall the electric street cars and the interurbans. The Republican, October 20, 1921, stated that the first electric street cars in Rockford were in 1889. At that time six miles of trackage were electrified. The men who were pioneers in the first electric cars were Levi Rhoades, H.H. Robinson, John Barnes, and E. L. Woodruff. The Star tells of the last trips in 1930 of the cars from Freeport with R.C. Burton at the controls and the final car from Beloit with motorman Frank Gilchrist. Other long time employees that piloted electric cars that last day included Gus Messerknecht and Bill Gebritz.

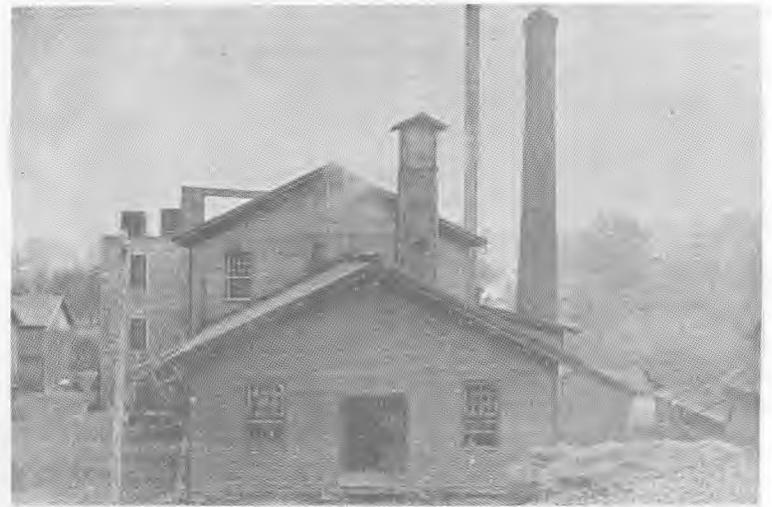
Bill Berkheimer, writing in NUGGETS OF HISTORY (Vol IV, No 5, July-August 1967), gave some memories of his grandfather, Everett W. Russ. "There were horsedrawn streetcars in 1888 and on for some years. You could ride from one end of Rockford to the other for five cents. A turntable on South Main at Montague enabled the streetcars to turn around on the west side of the river. The turntable on the east side was at State and Shaw Streets.

The Register Republic, August 22, 1935, wrote of the repaving of East and West State Streets and the doom of the electric street car. The age of automobiles and busses had arrived. An era was ended.

ISAAC UTTER, WATER POWER INDUSTRIALIST by Clem Burns

On September 30, 1979, Mrs. Henry B. Utter (Hazel), her sister Mrs. Tillstrom, and Mrs. Chrisy Landen all of the Chicago area, were entertained at a luncheon at Henrici's Restaurant. Representing the Rockford Historical Society, Rockford Museum Center, Friends of the Museum, and the Swedish Historical Scoety were Mrs. Gertrude Mead, Mr. and Mrs. William Ralston, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Hyde, Clem and Barbara Burns, and Mrs. Vi Burden. Mrs. Utter is the widow of Henry B. Utter, an electrical engineer associated with Commonwealth Edison in the Chicago area during his professional life.

Mrs. Utter has given a great amount to Rockford Historical Society and Rockford Museum Center, both in family artifacts and a money grant. Among the family items is an oil painting of Isaac Utter, who came to our Forest City in



RHOADES-UTTER PAPER MILL.

1852 from Warsaw, N.Y. In Warsaw he had operated a wool processing and weaving firm.

In Rockford, Mr. Utter became associated with Orlando Clark, who had a machine shop and foundry in the Water Power, having moved there upon the failure of the earlier dam farther upstream. The firm of Clark & Utter later became known as the Utter Manufacturing Company, and is noted for the production of Manny reapers before the Manny firm had its own plant. They also produced Gorham seeders, the first of its time to assist farmers in their labors, and a prototype of modern-day grain drills and cultivators. Several of these farm implements were the inventions of Marquis L. Gorham, a native of Vermont who arrived in Winnebago County in 1857 and lived here during his inventive years. It seemed that Gorham was not interested in the manufacture of his inventions. In addition to Clark and N. C. Thompson and Cyrus McCormick also put some Gorham inventions into production.

Isaac Utter is credited with promotion or founding of fourteen firms, including those previously mentioned. The Utter Manufacturing Company operated almost to the turn of the century, and he was associated with Levi Rhoades in the Rockford Paper Company for over twenty years. This latter firm brought straw from the Great Plains for their use in paper production. Mr. Utter was also active in the development of the Rockford Tack Company, the Rockford Watch Company, the Rockford Well Drill Company (which did not drill wells, but made the machinery and tools for that purpose), and operated a foundry as well as investing in three banks. Some old settlers may recall the Utter house on South Winnebago, which later was donated to Rockford Hospital for a nurses' home. Utter died on May 7, 1888.

CHANGES ON CHARLES STREET
Several Homes Razed



More landmarks in Rockford are coming down. One of the most recent was the office of the late Dr. Thomas A. Johnson, 1303 Charles Street. The Johnson Clinic, run by Dr. Johnson's father, the late Dr. T. Arthur Johnson, had been in the same building. The 1902 Rockford City Directory lists it as the home of George W. Pfanstiel and his wife, Agnes. Mr. Pfanstiel was a barber shop was located at 119 West State Street.



At the left is the apartment building at 1232 Charles Street as it appeared in 1966. In 1902 it was the home of J. P. Johnson and Gust Swanstrom. In 1920 it was the home of E. Matthew Rundquist and Gust Olson.



1229 Charles Street, as it appeared in 1966. In 1902 it was the home of Charles and Cora Marsh. Mr. Marsh was a collector for the U. S. Department of Internal Revenue. In the 1930s 1940s and 1950s it was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Herman Magnuson, grandparents of Jayne Borden.

Pictured at the right is 1239 Charles Street in 1964 for many years the home of John P. Risberg and family. The Risberg daughter, Olga, continued to live there until her death, and the home was razed soon afterward.



Pictured at the left is the home which was located at 1228 Charles Street as it appeared in 1966. The address in 1902 was 1226 Charles St., the home of C. W. Shirley. In 1920 it was the home of Arthur E. Sorenson and Swen Lundberg.

MORE COOKIE RECIPES

Date Icebox Cookies

<u>Batter</u>	<u>Filling</u>
1 cup butter ($\frac{1}{2}$ butter, $\frac{1}{2}$ oleo) (I use oleo)	1 pound of dates
1 cup brown sugar	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar
1 cup white sugar	$\frac{2}{3}$ cup water
$\frac{1}{4}$ cups flour	Cook until thick; let cool
1 teaspoon soda	
1 teaspoon vanilla	
$\frac{1}{4}$ eggs	
pinch of salt	

Cream butter and sugar, then add eggs well beaten, add flour, soda, salt (already mixed). Roll dough about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick. Spread filling and roll, put in icebox overnight. Following day cut in slices of desired thickness and bake 12 to 15 minutes at 350° or until light brown.

Pearl E. Goeller -- 1979

Old-Fashioned Sour Cream Cookies

$1\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar) $\frac{1}{2}$ cup shortening) mix thoroughly	Drop by rounded teaspoonful 2 inches apart on ungreased baking sheet and bake until delicately brown or just until you touch lightly with your finger leaving no imprint.
2 eggs	
1 cup thick sour cream	
1 teaspoon vanilla	Temperature 400°
2 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups sifted flour	Bake 8 to 10 minutes
$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon soda	Makes about 5 dozen
$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon	
$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt	Butter icing, if desired
Chill at least one hour	

Pearl E. Goeller -- 1979

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