



FOX RIVER LINES

m a g a z i n e



Issue 00-4, Fall 2000

Building the Fox River Line

Editor's Note:

This is part two of a three part-part article dealing with the "ROOTS" of the Fox River Trolley Museum's history. These articles along with those on the Batavia Power House help to reinforce an aspect of the Museum's Mission, preserving history. The first article appeared in Issue 00-2 of "Fox River Lines." Microfilms of many Fox River Valley newspapers provided the basis for this articles. Construction of the streetcar and interurban systems was BIG NEWS in Fox River Valley communities at the turn of the 20th Century! Media coverage was extensive and detailed. Local newspapers were the major media in this era that documented the history. Newspaper articles brought to light many interesting details about the development of the interurban trolley line our Fox River Trolley Museum calls "Home." Andy Roth deserves a huge round of applause and appreciation for persevering in this significant endeavor.

- Ed.

(Part 2) - Elgin to Geneva



No 204 headed south on Third Street in Geneva, having just turned south

from State Street, now Illinois Route 64.

The local newspapers in the Fox River Valley Communities covered the construction of the interurban line from Elgin to Geneva in detail about whether or not the railway was to be built in their town. The trolley's construction was very interesting and had a number of investors nervous with anticipation and anxiety with the tension of a financial deadline looming over the project.

Directors of the Elgin City Railway, who were also the Directors of the Carpentersville, Elgin and Aurora, (CE&A) wasted no time in implementing their plan to expand their company through the Fox River Valley. While Mr. Lane was directly overseeing the construction of the Carpentersville portion of the CE&A in the Spring of 1895, his fellow directors were at work putting plans together to build south from Elgin to Aurora. The directors initially had plans to complete construction of their trolley system to Aurora in 1895, thus fulfilling the destinations in their railway's name.



The tracks (now in the AE&C, Fox River Division era) turn east off of Third Street, Geneva to a private right of way headed toward First Street (Illinois Route 31) and the bridge under the C&NW. The building on the left still stands and now houses a Pizza Hut carry out facility. The old Geneva car barn is to the right in the picture.

In early April 1895, Directors A. Church, E. Waldron and W. Grote, who was also Elgin's mayor at the time, traveled to New York City to present their proposal to the backers of the Aurora Street Railway. The First National Bank of New York was a heavy stockholder in the Aurora Street Railway. Successful negotiations were announced in the April 8th Elgin Daily Courier. "Mayor Grote, A. Church and E. Waldorn completed arrangements, with the exception of minor details, last week for the consolidation of the Elgin and Aurora street railway systems into one company and the construction of a line from Carpentersville to Aurora in connection with these. The company will be known as the Carpentersville, Elgin and Aurora Railway Company; capital stock \$1,200,000. This will be held by Elgin, Aurora and New York capitalists and the management of the entire system will probably develop upon the

managers of the present Elgin City Railway. It will be an interurban as well as a local line and will be completed this season. The commencement will be the construction of the line from Carpentersville to Elgin, which will be begun at once. The completion of the enterprise is one that has been long cherished by Mayor Grote and it will be of great value to the Fox River Valley."



A southbound AE&FRE car near the top of the hill headed for Aurora. Note the C&NW "wig-wag" signal protecting the crossing.

The work of negotiating the consolidation proceeded beyond the upper management negotiating stage a few weeks later. Street railway managers from Elgin and Aurora toured and inspected each others railway system during the latter part of April.

While the consolidation arrangements were being made, another company was already at work purchasing property and negotiating franchises to build an electric line between Aurora and Carpentersville. This competing company was represented by a Mr. Holden of the Evaporated Cream Company; they were proposing to build an electric-powered interurban using an underground wire. However, by May 14th, it was announced that Mr. Holden and his backers had abandoned their efforts and signed over their property and franchise rights to the CE&A under Mayor Grote's negotiations. Mr. Holden became an employee of the CE&A.

After the competition was gone, work again focused on the interurban extensions. By early July 1895, streetcars were running to Carpentersville and the railway's consolidation details were nearly completed. The Elgin system would build south to the north side of Batavia and the Aurora system would build north through Batavia to meet the Elgin extension. The consolidation would take place after the interurban segments were connected. However, a problem would surface that would plague the interurban for six years. The problem started when the Aurora Street Railway encountered difficulty in securing a franchise to build on public streets through Batavia.

While the Aurora system was busy with their Batavia problem, the Elgin system was working to secure a route between Elgin and Geneva. By mid-

August 1895, the CE&A had negotiated and accepted a franchise from St. Charles based on a route coming south on the east side of the river. This route was via Dunham Road, then on Main Street across the river, and finally via First and Second Streets on the west side of the river to reach Geneva. However, by November, the managers were having second thoughts about the project's cost. The original route would require eight railroad crossings at grade, each of which the interurban would have to pay to have interlocking switches installed. The managers realized that if they approached Kane County highway commission to extend their permission to build along the west river road from South Elgin to St. Charles, they would only have one railroad to cross at grade. The CE&A already had permission from the highway commissioners to build along the west river road from Elgin to South Elgin. The railway's request was denied by the highway commission, only giving consideration to build along the highway to the Illinois Central at Coleman, which was just south of South Elgin. Instead of this option, the CE&A managers decided to purchase a private right-of-way between Coleman and the point where the east river road entered St. Charles. The last remaining element of the route from the St. Charles Main Street bridge to Geneva was completed by December 20th. "It is intended to run the interurban west on Main Street to the old Carlson corner, 3rd Street, and then south, along the line of churches and Mallory House, down Anderson Boulevard to Geneva. This route will certainly accommodate St. Charles as fully as it can be accommodated by a single railway line." wrote the Valley Chronicle.



A familiar sight on State Street in Elgin (Illinois Route 31) is the steep hill south bound which the trolleys traversed climbing out of the Fox River Valley. Note the C&NW steam engine at the crossing with the interurban.

The CE&A completed its franchises with Elgin on March 2nd and Geneva on April 14th, 1896. The railway wasted no time in starting construction to meet the deadline of June 30, 1896 to run a car in town as required in the St. Charles franchise. All of the construction and equipment supply contracts were executed by March 27th. All of the contracts contained time clauses to allow the CE&A to meet the deadline. To avoid potential problems, the railway hired Mr. H. Niles of Indianapolis, who had charge of the electrical work for the Elgin City Railway's construction six years earlier, to supervise the new line's overhead construction. The Yawger Construction Company, of Bucyrus, Ohio, was awarded the construction contract for the earthwork and trackage. Officials anticipated that the first trolley would be running by June 1st. However, as fate would have it, this date was to change.

The first track built for the Geneva extension was a wye track on the Illinois Central at Coleman and the interchange track down to the location of the interurban. The Yawger Construction Company leased at least two Illinois Central steam locomotives for use during construction. Yawger's construction camp was initially established at Coleman. Work and material delivery moved at a feverish pace. By early May, a number of carloads of rails and ties had been unloaded at Geneva and St. Charles, with the work of spreading the material along the boulevards progressing well.

The CE&A directors encountered and resolved many difficulties in organizing and building the extension to Geneva. The Elgin Courier summarized some of the organizational difficulties on March 27th, "In building to Geneva, the gentlemen composing the Carpentersville, Elgin & Aurora company have secured little cooperation, but in the main, the undertaking is their own venture. They some time ago concluded to forego any further delay and go ahead on their own responsibility. The prospect for business is good and that it will be a great convenience for the people of the north half of the county is undoubted". There problems did not end when construction started. A farm owner who sold some land to the railway just south of the Five Islands bridge felt that he was deceived and took the railway to court. The railway won the argument in court and the case was dismissed.



Another of the many obstacles to be surmounted were the tracks of the Chicago Great Western on the north side of St. Charles seen here with a bridge owned by the AE&FRE. The bridge carried auto and pedestrian traffic long after the AE&FRE ceased operations in March 1935.

Some Geneva people who had fought the construction of the railway considered filing an injunction to stop construction in early June. To avoid this, the CE&A managers had the contractor start construction in Geneva with a vary large second work force and kept the work start date quiet to surprise the naysayers. Over 200 men with picks and shovels, a steam plow, 30 horses and numerous other scrapers and plows converged on Geneva early Monday morning June 8th. By the end of the day, the railroad grade was leveled from the Chicago & NorthWestern's depot

north past the County Court House and the track was laid from the C&NW depot to the south end of the Court House. The plan worked and no injunction was filed. By the evening of June 10th, the track had been laid north to State Street, as well as on west State Street, and on its way to St. Charles.

Yawger's first work force, working south from Elgin, was approaching St. Charles when the second crew started in Geneva. The railway also had difficulty purchasing the land where it wanted to build the Geneva depot and carbarn. Mr. James Lane was finally able to purchase a 60-foot by 150-foot lot next to the C&NW freight house for their depot and carbarn on June 8th. These difficulties and construction delays were pushing the start-up date closer to the June 30th deadline in the St. Charles franchise and the management was getting concerned.

Fortunately, good news was just around the bend. On June 10th, the first trolley car operated between the Elgin Asylum and Coleman. Mr. James Lane, now president of the C E&A, personally supervised the first run to Coleman. He hosted many prominent Elgin citizens on this trip. The Elgin Daily News reported "Nobody minded that the initial trip was delayed five to ten minutes to finish connecting the existing trolley wires to the new ones. The trip began at 2:40 o'clock in the afternoon. The run was made from the asylum to Coleman at a 'slow pace' in only 14 minutes. After their return to the asylum, three of the railway's's directors greeted the guests. The directors had arrived too late and had missed the first trip. Another trip was thereupon made to Coleman to introduce these gentlemen to the beautiful scenery and delightful ride. Many who took the first ride went again to repeat the pleasure. The car ran comparatively slowly, but yet again made it in 14 minutes. This speaks well for fast time to Geneva".



An AE&FRE car on the "Five Islands Bridge" near the present end of the Museum's line.

Regular trolley operations began between Elgin and Coleman on Sunday June 20th. "Hundreds of people enjoyed river scenery and a delightfully

cool hour in the heat of the hottest day by taking the electric cars to Coleman. Two cars were assigned to this run for a frequency of a car every 30 minutes. The grove at Coleman is now full of picnickers and sight-seers. A dozen or so enthusiasts attracted quite some attention while they waded in the river there and fished. Some nice strings of black bass were captured during the day", wrote the Elgin Courier.

The first day of service to Coleman ended with two construction trains colliding at Coleman. As the grade on the interchange track is very steep, the conductor told the engineer not to attempt to bring down over two cars at a time, but the engineer coupled onto all five loaded flat cars. The engineer intended to stop before reaching the steep grade, however, and take but two cars down at once. The little train reached the steep part before either the engineer or the fireman realized it, and as there were no air brakes on the flat cars, they started to 'scorch' down the steep hill. The engineer reversed the engine, and he and the fireman alighted as gracefully as circumstanced would permit. Their train collided with the other construction train down in Coleman yard. The collision scattered one flat car to the four winds and did damage to both engines. Luckily, nobody was hurt and the locomotives were repaired in short order.

Construction work continued at a feverish pace to complete the remainder of the trolley line within the last days of June. Explosives had to be used to excavate holes along west Main Street in St. Charles to install trolley poles. One of the blasts nearly paralyzed the neighborhood! The contractor had to pay to replace a number of broken windows and other repairs. The first construction train rolled over the completed tracks in St. Charles on June 24th. The Valley Chronicle reported, "Big Illinois Central locomotives are a common sight now on East 4th Street. Staging was built on a flat car for installing the overhead wire. The linemen are busily engaged in stringing trolley wires".



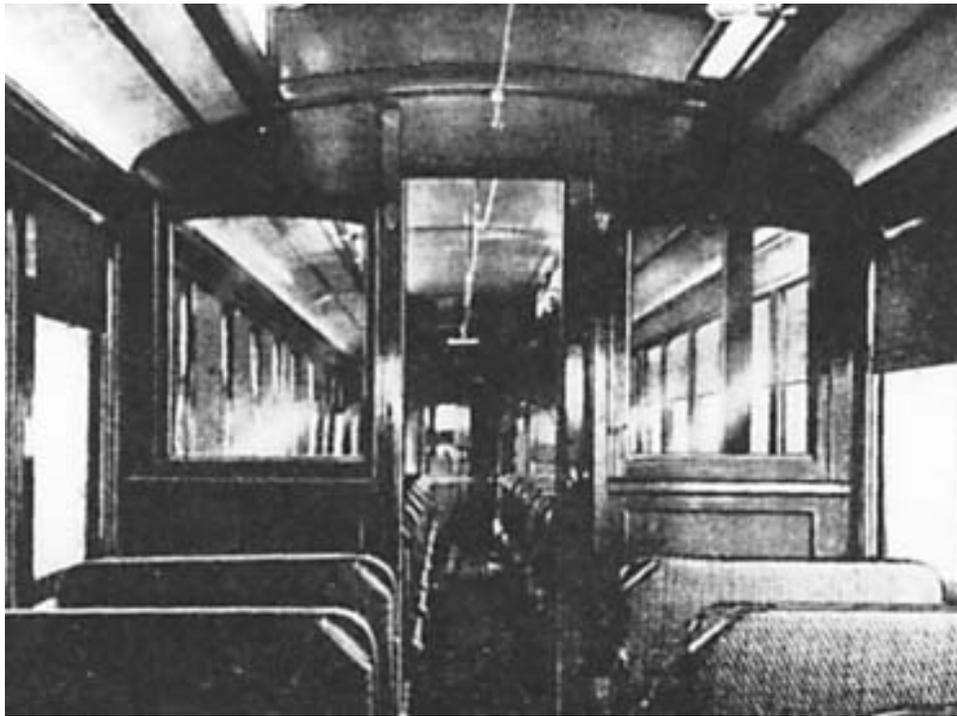
There were many obstacles encountered in building the line, among them crossing steam railroads. Seen here are the CE&A tracks going under the C&NW in Geneva. The road is now Illinois Route 31.

"New equipment to generate additional electricity for the Geneva extension trolleys has arrived in Elgin", reported the Elgin Daily News on June 23rd. "The vertical, compound condensing engine weighs 56,000 pound, stands 40 feet high and generates 350 horse power. The dynamo

that comes with it weighs 24,000 pounds and the new tubular boiler is rated at 300 horse power. The new equipment was planned to be in operation by June 27th.

As the sun rose on Tuesday, June 30th, the management of the CE&A were very anxious. The franchise with the City of St. Charles would lapse at 12:01 a.m. July 1st, and a required \$1,000 fee paid to that city, if a trolley car had not operated over the city's streets by this appointed time. Construction work was still in progress. The ballasting of the track was not complete, 3.5 miles of overhead trolley wire still did not have power feed wire attached, and the new engine and dynamo in the power house were not yet operational. Without the feed wire, the only power would have to be supplied by the trolley wire. Management decided that they had to make the test run to Geneva that day or forfeit the money and the St. Charles franchise. The first run would be as severe a test as one could be, because it was a circus day. Every Elgin car would be running and the heavy watch factory trips would be operated in town while the test run was being made.

Carpentersville, Elgin & Aurora officials, lead by President Lane, Mayor W. Grote and guests departed Fountain Square in Elgin at 4 o'clock in the afternoon for Geneva. An Elgin Courier reporter recorded the trip. "The trip went smoothly until they reached Coleman. They were met at Coleman by loaded construction flat cars and stray box cars on the tracks. The construction steam locomotive needed to move the freight cars, was nowhere in sight. It was dumping its train of ballast somewhere on the mainline near St. Charles. Everyone took a leisure tour of the attractions at Coleman while waiting for the work train to return. Fifty minutes passed before the work train arrived and was able to push the freight cars out of the trolley's path. The trip was resumed, the river crossed, the hill climbed and Little Woods invaded by electricity for the first time in the history of the world. A few stops were necessary to remove obstructions from the track. St. Charles was surprised, but made up for any apparent lack of hospitality by blowing the fire whistle when the car returned. As it left the place, young girls threw flowers at the car, and hit it too. Miss Stewart, of St. Charles, was the first lady to ride from St. Charles to Geneva. It was an afterthought for her, but the way she whipped up her horse and chased the car was sufficient evidence of pluck to induce the conductor to stop for her and her escort. Geneva was warned from St. Charles, and her streets were lined with people. The end of the line at the Chicago & NorthWestern depot was reached with great eclat at six o'clock, beating the deadline by only six hours!" Considerable enthusiasm was evinced by the people of St. Charles and Geneva, who gave the first car run quite an ovation. On the homebound run, another delay was necessary while a gravel train unloaded and the switching process at Coleman had to be repeated.



This interior view of car 256 shows the smoking compartment with low-back rattan, reversible seats and a bell cord in the foreground, separated from the main compartment by a sliding door. Most interurbans had toilets and drinking water.

The CE&A ordered eight new interurban cars, with six of them matching the cars operated between Elgin and Carpentersville. These six cars had single enclosed vestibules at one end of the cars for boarding and alighting. They had seven rows of rattan covered seats with a center aisle, seating 28 people. The other two cars were open-sided cars. Four of the new cars arrived in Elgin from the St. Louis Car Company on July 1st. It took about three weeks to prepare these cars for regular service.

Regular trolley service did not begin right away after the inaugural run on June 30th because there was a lot of finishing and clean-up work to complete. Yawger completed ballasting the track, and the overhead feed wire was completed in about two weeks. During this time, the installation of the equipment in the powerhouse was also completed. A single Elgin streetcar was sent down the second week of July to ply the tracks between Geneva and St. Charles, making a round trip every hour. Only one round trip was operated between Elgin and Geneva, in the evenings to comply with the franchises and still allow the contractors track time to complete their work. The CE&A utilized this single round trip to give various dignitaries a tour of the new line.

Regular trolley service began on Thursday, July 16th without the new cars. There were apparently a few bugs or adjustments being made to the cars. The initial service had only two stops, Coleman and Dunham, between South Elgin and St. Charles. Coleman was the junction with the Illinois Central railroad and Dunham was near the Oak Lawn farm owned by Mr. Mark Dunham. The CE&A advertised its new schedule for all streetcar lines operating in Elgin and interurban lines running out of Elgin in the July 16th Elgin Daily News:

"Trolley Lines Schedule - Information that the Traveling Public Will Like.

The Carpentersville, Elgin & Aurora Railway company has its whole system in active operation. The timetable and fare to various points are as follows, which will be of general interest:

Dundee Avenue..... car every 15 minutes
Highland Avenue..... car every 30 minutes
Douglas Avenue..... car every 20 minutes
Chicago Avenue..... car every 20 minutes
Grove Avenue..... car every 20 minutes
South State Street..... car every 20 minutes
To Dundee and Carpentersville.....car every hour over Douglas Avenue
Line
To Coleman, Dunham, St. Charles & Geneva.... car every hour; on
holidays, pleasant Sundays or picnic days....car every 20 minutes.

One ticket (six for 25 cents) will carry passengers anywhere inside the Elgin city limits. Outside the city limits the tickets are not good, and cash must be paid. The fare from Elgin to Carpentersville is 10 cents; from Elgin to Coleman in 10 cents, to Dunham 15 cents, to St. Charles 20 cents, to Geneva 25 cents. The cars on all lines are at Fountain Square on the hour.

The first southbound car from Elgin to Geneva departs at 6:00 a.m. and the last southbound car departs Elgin at 9:00 p.m."

The Geneva Republican newspaper stated that after all of the ballasting was done, the running time from Elgin to Geneva can be easily made in 45 minutes. The trolley line fare was significantly cheaper than the Chicago & NorthWestern's fare between Elgin and Geneva. A round trip ticket on the direct CE&A was 50 cents. Geneva passengers riding the C&NW had to first go to West Chicago and then transfer to the Elgin line train. The C&NW round trip fare was \$1.10. Needless to say, the CE&A quickly captured a large portion of the passenger traffic between these two towns.

The new interurban line was well received. The Sycamore Republican reported on July 31st, " The trolley makes good connections with the C&NW at Geneva and the Chicago Great Western at St. Charles. A ride on the new trolley to Geneva or Elgin is some of the new added attractions offered those who go to St. Charles to picnic. The line runs just east of the picnic grounds and cars pass every half hour whether going up or down the valley. The line runs through some of the most picturesque Fox River Valley, and the trip is one well worth taking".

Numerous trolley charters were operated for trolley parties in addition to regular service. Also, extended service hours were offered when large events were held at one of the towns along the line. For example, two extra cars were dispatched to Geneva to handle the additional people who wanted to attend the large outdoor play "The Last Days of Pompeii" in Elgin. Over 30,000 people attended celebrations of Scotland's Day in Elgin. Many people from St. Charles and Geneva attended these events.

The interurban trolley line was a big success for the people in the valley. The CE&A also sold electricity to town, business and people in addition to

providing transportation. The CE&A sale of electricity was the first time many people had access to this new source of power, a technology we take for granted today.

The Elgin Courier commented on the new interurban line, "It will add materially to the trade of Elgin merchants, being sure to bring about the most important accession in that line which had been secured for years. People who have business at the county seat can transact it expeditiously and return home when they are through with it, without vexatious waits at Geneva and Turner (Turner is now West Chicago)". Judge Willis commented to the Geneva newspaper about the new trolley line, "Talk about your rapid transit. I left home this morning, held court in Wheaton one hour, came over to Geneva on the 10 o'clock train and attended to my work here, and will take the electric for Elgin, arriving home in time for dinner".

- Andy Roth

Photos from *Aurora-Elgin Area Streetcars & Interurbans* © 1993 by Hopkins Stolp Peppers, used by permission.

Development Report

Much has happened in the Museum's Development Department in the past few months. Following the initial grading, pole installation and track switch construction that occurred last Spring the available funds for the Blackhawk Extension were expended. While the track material was on hand the resources to install the track was not available.

Through the efforts of friends and members of the Museum a grant application was made to the Kane County Board for a grant from the County's "River Boat Fund". After several meetings with County Staff and Officials the County Board approved a grant for \$270,000 to help in the completion of the Extension. At the same time our State Senator Doris Karpel arranged for an Illinois First Grant for \$100,000 to complete the Extension. These Grants will allow the Museum to complete the extension.

Using the money from the Kane County Riverboat Fund construction of the track into the Blackhawk Forest Preserve was started. Our Contractor, Swanson Contracting, was able to complete most of the work by the end of September. Mention must also be made of the generous donation of trucking services for a portion of the ballast stone by Hillquist Brothers of Geneva.

At the end of the year all the track has been constructed and we are ready to start on the next phase of the project, trolley wire and passenger facilities. The Museum's Chief Engineer, Ralph Taylor, has indicated that the wire plans and details will be completed in December so that we can go out for pricing and start the hanging of the trolley wire.

- Fred Lonnes

Fox River Lines Staff

Managing Editor—Don MacBean, 817 College Ave. #5, Wheaton, IL
60187
(630) 665-2581 E-mail DMacbRR@aol.com

Layout and Graphics— Jack Sowchin

Fox River Lines is the official publication of the Fox River Trolley Association, Inc., an Illinois not-for-profit corporation. It is published four times per calendar year for distribution to members and friends of the museum. Reproduction of Fox River Lines, either in part or in its entirety, is strictly prohibited without prior permission from the editorial staff or the FRTM board of directors. Copyright © 2001 Fox River Trolley Association, Inc.

Submissions: Submission of stories from members and others is necessary to publish *Fox River Lines*. Feature length articles are always welcome and considered. Please contact the staff before undergoing a project. Contributors submit materials with the understanding that no monetary compensation is provided.

Correspondence: Comments, suggestions, and corrections relating to Fox River Lines should be directed to Managing Editor Don MacBean at the address listed above. The editorial staff appreciates your feedback.

[home page](#) | [information](#) | [history](#) | [membership](#) | [news cars](#) | [newsletter](#) | [for kids](#) | [links](#)

© 2005 Fox River Trolley Association