



FOX RIVER LINES

m a g a z i n e



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Building the Fox River Line

Editor's Note:

This is part one of a three-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 second will appear in a future issue of "Fox River Lines." Microfilms of many Fox River Valley newspapers provided the basis for these two 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 1) - Elgin-Carpentersville



A car at the Fox River bridge in Carpentersville. Note the waiting room nestled by the tree to the right of the car.

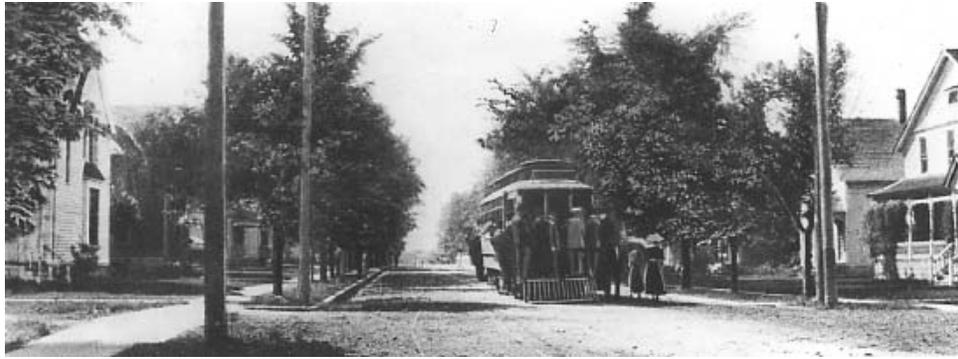
In 1996 the Fox River Trolley Museum celebrated the 100th anniversary of the railway over which it operates. This anniversary and interest in the "new Millennium" has sparked an interest in the Museum's railway heritage. The catalyst for the construction of the railway began with the building of streetcar lines in Elgin and Aurora. The interurban's heritage is interwoven with the development of the Fox River Valley. Not only did the valley's development create the need for the interurban, but community development was enhanced and accelerated by the speedy trolleys traveling along the river. The Fox River Valley interurban system began in Elgin and Aurora.

Electric streetcars were preceded by horse-car street railway lines operating in Elgin and Aurora in the 1880's. By the late 1880s, there was talk in many cities around the country about a new form of electric powered transportation. The success of Frank J. Sprague's electric trolley innovations in 1888 started a virtual explosion of growth for street railway transportation across the entire country. Existing horse-car lines began to convert to the new electric propulsion technology and new street railways were being built in cities that never had a horse-car street railway.

A number of investors, many of them prominent Elgin citizens, incorporated the Elgin City Railway in 1889. The Elgin City Railway (ECR) purchased Bruce Payne's single-route horse-car street railway operation on October 10, 1889. Three "un-powered" streetcar trailers were purchased and put into operation in mid-December 1889. The new company quickly rushed the trailers into service, still pulled by horses, to prove to the Elgin community that the ECR was a bonafide company. The three trailers augmented the five horse-cars acquired with the purchase of Payne's company. The ECR began construction of an electrically powered streetcar system in early 1890. Just after midnight, in the very early morning of July 4, 1890, the first electric streetcar ran out of the carbarn under its own power. The sparks made from the rusty rails and the new trolley wire on the first run created quite a sight for the promoters and the 200 people who stayed awake to watch the event. The route along Chicago Street between downtown and Oakwood Park was Elgin's first operating electric line. Within the next three weeks, electric streetcar lines along Douglas Avenue, St. Charles Street, State Street and Highland Avenue became operational.

Aurora's first electric powered streetcar operated on March 16, 1891. Aurora's electric powered streetcar system was built and operated by the Aurora Street Railroad. The chief financial backers were located in New York City. The Elgin and Aurora street railways were originally separate companies. The one thing both cities had in common was some of the earliest developed electric street railways in the country. The street railway's financial backers were entrepreneurs in the fledgling new technology. Electric powered streetcars were a enormous leap forward in technology during that time period. Transportation in the 1890's consisted of walking, horses, bicycles, steam locomotive powered trains and boats. Many "roads" at the time were "dirt" wagon paths. The streets in Elgin and Aurora consisted mainly of dirt, with wood plank sidewalks in the

downtowns. When it rained, the dirt streets quickly turned to mud and become rutted.



A rush hour car on Second Street, Dundee. The rush hours were bi-directional . . . riders going to Elgin from Carpentersville and Dundee to the Watch Factory and from Elgin and Dundee to Carpentersville to the Illinois Iron and Bolt Factory.

The electric powered streetcars were a big success. The first day of operation, Elgin City Railway collected 4,406 fares. Fare collection started at 11 o'clock in the morning, many hours after the electric cars began running that day. People came from many places in the valley to see and ride this new form of transportation.

Trolley parties quickly became a popular activity in both Elgin and Aurora. They consisted of at least one, and many times three or more, trolleys being chartered for a special ride. These special rides took groups to and from various destinations such as local parks or they simply rolled continuously around town. These chartered trolleys were usually decorated with various combinations of banners, bunting or anything else imaginable. Singers and musicians were quite often hired to ride along on the trolleys to add additional entertainment for the guests. Elgin and Aurora had many affluent citizens because of the many manufacturing companies that called these towns "Home". Streetcars were also affordable to the general public with their fare of five cents for adults and three cents for children under 12 years of age.

The popularity and success of the two streetcar lines led to the extension of service to other parts of Elgin and Aurora. In Elgin, talk began about the possibility of extending electric streetcar service beyond the city's limits to suburbs such as Dundee. Elgin was not considered a part of Chicago and its suburbs at the turn of the century as it is today. Elgin was the center of a dairy producing region that existed in and beyond the Fox River Valley. Elgin had a Board of Trade whose sole purpose was the sale of butter. The Elgin Board of Trade set the price of butter for the entire region and beyond. Elgin was also home for the famous Elgin Watch Factory and a large sewing machine manufacturer that also made bicycles.

As the talk continued about extending electric streetcar service, the Dundee Rapid Transit Company was formed in Dundee. The company stated plans to build an electric streetcar line to Elgin and sell electricity and electrical equipment to the community. The Dundee Rapid Transit Company succeeded in building its electric plant and sold electric

machines and the electricity to power them. However, it never built its railway line, and hopes of an electric railway faded away. The company received permission to change its name to "The Elgin Illumination Company" in July 1895 and to move its office to Elgin at that time.

In early March 1895, talk again surfaced about building an electric railway line between Elgin and its suburbs of Dundee and Carpentersville. A gentleman claiming to represent eastern capitalists was in Elgin on March 8th looking at the prospects of building an electric line from Carpentersville to Aurora. Investors in the Elgin City Railway were also looking to extend their electric streetcar system beyond Elgin up and down the river. The ECR investors decided to act quickly on extending their system, thus beating their competition to the prize. However, they discovered because of the absence of some stockholders and certain necessary legal formalities to amend the existing companies franchise with Elgin, delay would ensue and it might be mid-summer before construction could begin. Therefore, to expedite matters, they incorporated a new company, the Carpentersville, Elgin and Aurora Railway Company (CE&A), to build and operate the new extension. The fact that one of the investors of both railway companies was the mayor of Elgin assuredly helped move matters along. The Elgin City Council passed an ordinance for the construction of streetcar tracks on additional city streets to the north city limits on March 22, 1895. On March 16th, the Village of Carpentersville passed its ordinance allowing the construction of the CE&A on or along public roadways in their town.

The original plan for the railway alignment was to build northward out of Elgin past Trout Park along the east side of the river. The railway would remain on the east side of the river all the way to Carpentersville, passing by the large milk condensing plant on the south side of Carpentersville. However, the citizens of East Dundee refused to allow the railway to build within their village limits. They were soured by the previous failed promises of electric railway connections to Elgin, and doubted this new railway would actually lay rails. East Dundee wanted to wait for a better, guaranteed offer. West Dundee was willing to host the CE&A and approved an ordinance on April 4, 1895 to allow the railway to build on public roads within their city limits. Also by mid-April, Kane County had approved the railway to build on public rights-of-way in necessary portions of unincorporated Kane County between Elgin and Carpentersville.



Car 146 crossing the Fox River on the Dundee bridge.

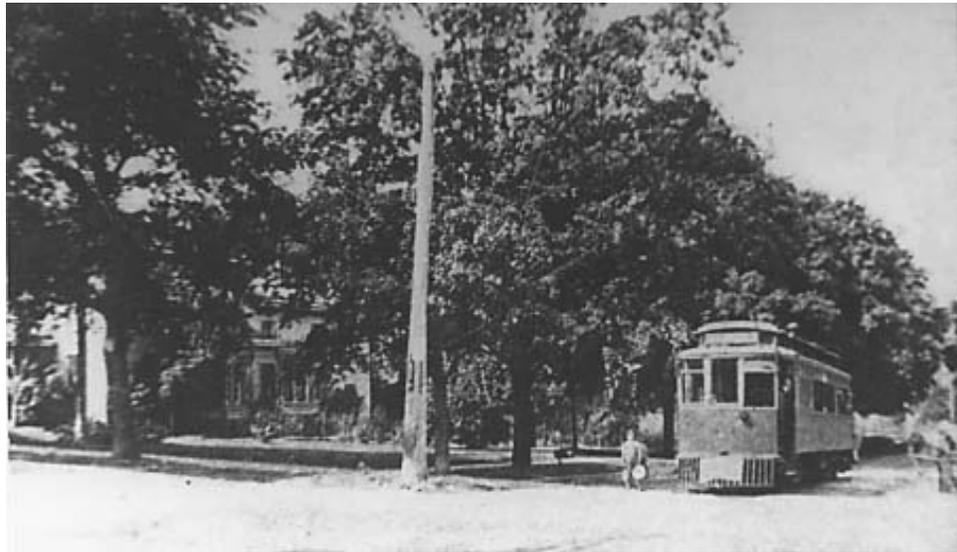
The final alignment of the Carpentersville line was an extension of the Dundee Avenue streetcar line northward, turning westward onto Congdon to Duncan Avenue. The cars would then proceed northward over Duncan Avenue for two blocks to the city limits and then continue on private right-of-way past Trout Park all the way to nearly East Dundee, paralleling the Chicago and NorthWestern Railway (C&NW). Just south of East Dundee, the track turned west to cross the C&NW and the Fox River. The Fox River bridge piers still stand today. The railway then turned northward and passed through West Dundee on Second Street to the west bank of the river, just north of downtown. The line then turned northwesterly and followed the river along Lincoln Avenue to Main Street in Carpentersville. The railway turned east onto Main Street for only one block and stopped in front of the large building of the Illinois Iron & Bolt Company on the east side of the river.

Construction began in earnest after the route had been secured and finalized. J. B. Lane, President of the company, went to Evansville, Indiana to order wood ties and then to St. Louis to order electric cars. Twenty-four carloads of rails and fifteen carloads of ties arrived in Elgin during the first few days of May. On May 5th, Mr. Lane was quoted in the Elgin Daily News saying "... the Carpentersville, Elgin & Aurora electric railway will be laid from Elgin to the river south of Dundee within three weeks. A force of over a hundred men are now employed on the line and they are working in the vicinity of Trout Park". Rails were being installed on Congdon Avenue the following week. A 22-foot high stone culvert was built over a ravine just north of the city limits as the railway dropped down the hillside. The track dropped 68 feet down the hill on a steep grade of 4.25%. The contractor used 40 teams of horse-drawn wagons to move all of the materials and earth for this project.

Construction proceeded quickly under the direct supervision of Mr. Lane. Douglas Avenue cars were able to begin running as far as Trout Park on Sunday May 19, 1895. Trout Park was a very popular destination at that time. Trolley cars were operating to the east side of the Fox River bridge by June 2nd and to Main Street in West Dundee on Sunday, June 23rd. On this first day of service to Dundee, the railway collected over 2,600 fares between Dundee and Trout Park. Trolley service to the end of the line on

Main Street, Carpentersville began on July 5th. Over 3,000 fares were collected on that day. Many people rode from Carpentersville. The total distance of the route from Fountain Square in Elgin to the end of the line in Carpentersville was 5.8 miles. The total cost of the construction was estimated to be between \$40,000 and \$50,000, a large amount of money for the time.

Because the CE&A was a separate railway, at least on paper, management decided to have passengers transfer from Elgin streetcars to the Dundee/Carpentersville cars at Trout Park. This was done to keep the financial records separate for the two companies. The CE&A began service on the line with trolleys running every 30 minutes. Trolleys left Dundee southbound at quarter of and quarter past the hour between 6:45 a.m. and 10:20 p.m. (The last car of the day was scheduled to leave five minutes later.) The fare was set at five cents on each railway line or a total fare of ten cents for adults to go from either Carpentersville or Dundee to Elgin.



On a pleasant summer day, riders board a CE&A car on Second Street in Dundee.

Two of the new CE&A trolley cars arrived in Elgin on July 16, 1995. The Elgin Daily Courier described the new cars in an article. "They are of the latest pattern and were manufactured in St. Louis. Each is an adjustable car that can be used with open or closed sides and when the sides are down, they have the appearance of the present open cars. They are built for speed as well as comfort and the seats are arranged the same as those on the steam roads. They have double motors of fifty horse-power. There is seating capacity of thirty people in each car and on account of cleanliness, matting is used for seat coverings. The cars are certain to prove popular".

The Chicago and NorthWestern was operating five daily round trips through the towns of Elgin, Dundee and Carpentersville at this time. The C&NW quickly felt the pinch of its new competition, even though streetcar patrons had to change trolleys at Trout Park. The C&NW was selling between 100 and 300 tickets a week between Dundee and Elgin before the trolleys began service. Afterward, the C&NW Dundee agent

was selling about 25 tickets a week. However, there was enough demand for service along the Fox River that both railways benefitted. For example, on Saturday August 1, 1896 about 12,000 Bonnie Scots picnicked at Trout Park. The C&NW used 116 coaches to bring people to the park; over 3,500 tickets were sold by the C&NW in Aurora alone. The trolley line sold over 20,000 fares that day as well.

On November 1, 1895, the Carpentersville, Elgin & Aurora Railway adjusted its schedule for the winter months. The new schedule had cars running through between Carpentersville and Elgin, eliminating the necessity to transfer cars at Trout Park. Cars ran on an hourly schedule, departing Fountain Square on the hour and Carpentersville on the half hour. Douglas Avenue cars ran within the Elgin city limits every 15 minutes. The hours of the Elgin City Railway employees were also reduced from 17 to 11 hours a day for the same pay. From the beginning of operations through October 1895, over 80,000 passengers were carried on the new line north of Elgin. The Dundee Hawkeye comments' summarized the success of the new interurban, "It is understood that the Dundee and Carpentersville line has paid remarkably well since it was put in. It will not pay as well in winter, but has shown the stockholders that the proposed line along the Fox River will be popular and will undoubtedly pay well."

- **Andy Roth**

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

In Memoriam **JOE FRANTA**

The museum has lost a good friend and a good member in the untimely passing of Joe Franta.

He came in as an associate member, did his two years of service to apply for regular membership, during which he revived the "*Fox River Lines*" newsletter. Joe recognized the social needs of the membership by heading up "Members' Day" and other activities complete with special events and games. He knew how to throw parties and used this skill for the benefit of the museum.

He served on the board of directors and even served as president of the Association. Joe and his family hosted many a board and committee meeting at their home and there was always entertainment, snacks and even a meal.

The history of the AE&FR was a personal passion which he pursued with remarkable results. Interviews with Bob DeYoung former owner/engineer and landlord to the museum; Speed Warland, one of the bus driver/motorman of electric freight era and others brought insight to the story of the railroad which he shared with us. He set about to collect for the Association, many historic photos and even movies that help us envision the history we are trying to relate. He even photographed and video taped "his" era with the railroad. He even expanded his interest and drive to the CC&P forming an interest group.

When his employment status changed he kept it to himself until he saw that he could no longer dedicate the time and energy to the museum as he once did. I believe this was painful for him but he made the right choice for his family when he resigned from his formal museum responsibilities due to the demands of his new job.

But even then he was willing to help others when asked. Many of his prints from his collection and his VCR tape player have been used for model railroad shows. He even intervened to get us a "modern" dollar bill accepting soda machine.

He was a family man. He was proud of his children, Dawn and Joey as well as being respectful of his wife Ranae.

I know he looked forward as we all do to the Museum's development and improvement. The last time I saw him was in the late fall of 2000, walking the new extension with Ranae. We exchanged pleasantries, they went one way and I another. Thank you Joseph P. Franta; husband, father, museum member and friend. You will be missed.

- **Joseph R. Hazinski**

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