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FOX RIVER LINES

m a g a z i n e



Issue 02-2, Summer 2002

Blackhawk Extension Comes to a Successful Completion!



Coleman Grove shelters then and now: the new Fox River Trolley Museum station at Blackhawk Forest Preserve (above) and AE&FRE Stop 49 (Coleman Grove) in 1935, looking northbound (left) and southbound.



The June 2002 completion of the Blackhawk Forest Preserve Extension represents the culmination of work that officially began in 1992, when the Museum's Board, Chief Engineer *Ralph Taylor* and then President *Fred Lonnes* created the Blackhawk extension project. First proposed in the late 1980's by the Museum's Long Range Planning Committee, the Museum Board considered the Blackhawk extension a key long-term goal in the Museum's long-range development. After further definition and refinement of the extension plan by the Museum's team, the extension proposal was officially submitted to the Kane County Forest Preserve District in August 1992. Since that time, management of extension

construction for the Museum's trolley operations into the Blackhawk Forest Preserve has been under the direction of the project management team: Project Manager, *Fred Lonnes*, Chief Engineer, *Ralph Taylor* and Chief Lineman, *Chuck Galitz*.

In addition to *Fred*, *Ralph* and *Chuck*, this project would never have succeeded without the hard work and dedication of all of the Museum's active membership. Also critical to the project success were the contributions of the management and staff of the Kane County Forest Preserve, the volunteer efforts of professional surveyors and railway engineers and the quality work of the project's major contractors: Swanson Rail Contractors, Aldridge Electric Inc., Hillquist Excavating and MIC Inc.

Built at a cost of more than \$700,000, which includes both substantial donations by museum members and funding from Illinois and Kane County, the serious work of building to Blackhawk began in 1997. At that time, Museum member *Peter Orum* prevailed upon State Senator Doris Karpel of our district to secure an Illinois Historic Preservation Grant to finance the initial construction. With the assistance of Jack Cook, President of the Kane County Forest Preserve Commission, and Caryl Van Overmeiren, County Board Vice Chairman, additional funds from the county's Riverboat fund were secured to complete the project whose opening we are celebrating today.

Ed Konecki



Partnership in Preservation and Restoration

This issue of Fox River Lines is dedicated to all of the people who helped to open the first new electric trolley line in Kane County since 1939. This season, as many of us take our first ride through the Blackhawk Forest Preserve, our thoughts may turn to the driving force that created this new line-partnership. All of us at the Museum are partners in both preserving our transportation past and restoring this past to the present. The way that

everyone, both in and outside of the Museum organization, has worked together-from planning to construction and on to completion is amazing to reflect upon. Without your effort and dedication, there would be no Blackhawk trolley.

Even more exciting, is how our Museum reached out and created a partnership with the Kane County Forest Preserve. The Forest Preserve's goals and efforts in preservation and restoration in the Blackhawk Forest Preserve create wonderful synergy with our own preservation and restoration efforts. Working together over the past 10 years-including 3 years of construction, both organizations have created a unique environment where visitors can simultaneously enjoy through our joint restoration efforts, the preservation of our natural habitat and our transportation heritage.

There is still a long way to go at the Museum. Many Museum tasks remain to be done, from creating new storage and restoration facilities, maintaining and restoring our collection, through creating a facility for our visitors to learn about and understand our preservation and restoration efforts. These goals are achievable, fueled by the partnership of our members, the Forest Preserve, the Village of South Elgin and all of the other people in our community that worked for the goal of the Blackhawk Trolley.

Ed Konecki



Mission

To preserve and interpret Chicago's electric transport era that began in the 1890s and peaked before 1950. The electric transport era is significant because electric railways, including interurban, rapid transit, and streetcars, helped the Chicago region grow to be one of North America's great metropolitan areas. The Museum strives to show that electric railways were more than convenient, they were and are a way of life for generations of people from all walks of life.

The Museum fulfills this mission by preserving, interpreting, and operating historic railway vehicles on its demonstration electric railway, over the Aurora, Elgin and Fox River Electric route at South Elgin, Illinois. Furthermore, the museum preserves, displays and interprets smaller artifacts, photos, oral histories, and documents which help relate the importance of electric transport in and around the Chicago Metropolitan Area, putting them in context with their surroundings and era.

Take the Throttle

The Fox River Trolley Museum is kicking off a new program this year called "Take The Throttle". It will give non-members and current members the opportunity to operate one of the antique cars round trip from Castlemuir to Blackhawk under the supervision of a qualified motorman. The person will be given a brief overview of the car, operating characteristics, static training and then the actual operation on the main line. The program is only offered outside the normal museum operating hours of (11 AM to 5:00 PM) on Saturday and Sunday.

The introductory pricing will be \$80 for a non-member (includes a one year family membership) or \$60 for a current member. The person will receive a certificate with their name, car number and date that they operated the car. Space during this first year will be very limited. Make your requests at the depot or to *Jim Gonyo*. As always, if you would like to be part of the regular operating crew, contact *Jim Gonyo* at (630) 964-4366 for information.

Jim Gonyo

2002 Meetings

At its January 19, 2002 meeting the Fox River Trolley Association Board set the following dates, times and places for its meetings as well as Members Day and Annual Members Meeting.

THE TIME AND PLACE ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

Contact Jim Gonyo, Secretary, at 630-296-2780 for latest information.

Saturday, March 23, 1:00pm: Council Chambers -
South Elgin V. H. 10 N. Water Street

Saturday, May 18, 7:00pm: Council Chambers -
South Elgin V. H. 10 N. Water Street

Saturday, July 6, 7:00pm : Council Chambers -
South Elgin V. H. 10 N. Water Street

Saturday, September 7, 7:00pm: Council Chambers -
South Elgin V. H. 10 N. Water Street

Other Meetings or Member events:

Saturday, April 27: Spring Members Day Museum Grounds -
1pm to 4pm, Council Chambers -
South Elgin V. H. 10 N. Water Street - 7pm

Saturday, October 5: Annual Members Day -
11am to 5pm - Museum Grounds

Saturday, October 12: Annual Members Meeting - 1pm -
Council Chambers - South Elgin V. H. 10 N. Water Street

The Early History of Coleman and Coleman Grove

Coleman is a nice name for a town. I have been to Coleman, Wisconsin which has a good family restaurant that also sells GREAT frozen custard!

Coleman, Illinois, on the other hand, is not a town but a location on two railroads. Coleman, IL plays an important role in the museum's history. Railroads needed to identify important locations on their rail lines even if there was not a town at that location. The name "Coleman" came from the family who sold the land to the railroad on the west side of the Fox River. Thus the railroad named the station "Coleman."

In 1886, Illinois Central officials decided that they needed a direct connection to Chicago. They built a connection from Freeport, Illinois into the Windy City. Local papers in April 1887 stated that the Illinois Central (ICRR) had begun constructing the Fox River bridge in earnest. They also stated that the ICRR initially employed 200 laborers and about 25 additional Italian workers were arriving daily to help build the new railroad. The first revenue ICRR trains operated through Coleman, IL on August 6, 1888.

The second railroad arrived at Coleman, Illinois in 1896. The trolley line that the museum uses was built in the spring of 1896 by the Carpentersville, Elgin & Aurora Railway (CE&A). In April, the electric railway's contractor initially built a track connecting to the ICRR at Coleman, IL for the delivery of construction equipment and materials to build the CE&A. The contractor also set up a camp at Coleman for his construction workers. As with the ICRR a few years earlier, building of their Fox River Bridge was a high priority for the electric railway. The CE&A crossed the river at the Five Islands location just south of Coleman. One of these islands was used to reduce the total length of bridge to be built. The bridge along with the track and wire from Elgin south to the bridge were completed on June 9, 1896.

On the following day, CE&A officials ran a test trolley car from the south side of Elgin to Coleman and return. The trip took only 14 minutes in each direction. This time was very fast when compared to walking or horseback riding, which were the other travel choices of the time.

When the trolley line was built, peoples' daily lives were very different from the experiences of today. People worked six days a week. They put in 10 hour days Monday through Saturday. Some retail clerks worked 12 to 13 hour days. Sunday was the only day for recreation. Very few people had electricity and there was no air conditioning. Transportation wise, only one in ten people in Elgin owned a horse. Until the streetcars arrived, people got around town by walking, or riding a bicycle if they owned one.

Electric streetcars and interurbans provided a dual benefit of moving people to new and farther destinations and creating a cooling breeze for its riders. Chartering trolleys for a group to ride around town on a hot summer day or evening became very popular. Trolley parties sometimes chartered two or three cars and had a small band accompany the trip for additional entertainment. Trolleys also provided affordable transportation to parks and picnic groves for rest and recreation.

Regular trolley operations began between Elgin and Coleman on Sunday June 20, 1896. "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 30 minute interval frequency. In the summer months the grove at Coleman was full of

picnickers and sightseers," reported the *Elgin Courier*. Thus Coleman Grove park dates back to the first day of trolley service on the interurban electric railway.

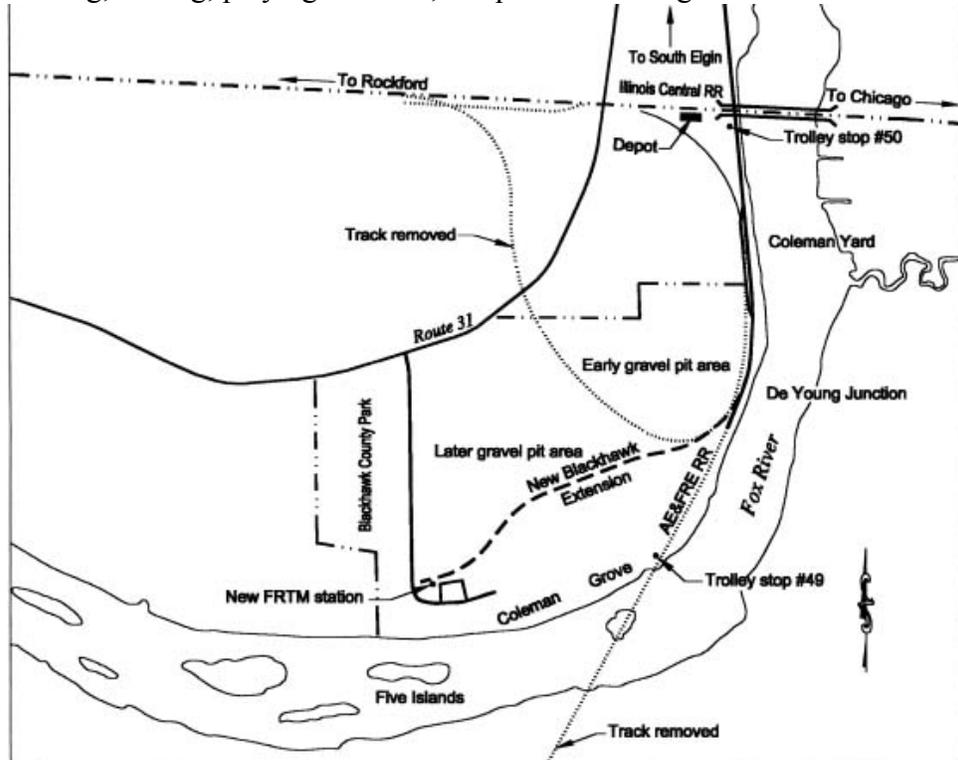


Coleman Station of the AE&FRE in 1935.

Another Elgin newspaper reported more information about Coleman and Coleman Grove on the first day of trolley operations; "Quite a number of Elgin people journeyed over the new electric line to Coleman Sunday. The road goes through some beautiful scenery, and the grove at Coleman was full of picnickers and sight-seers. The construction employees at work on the unfinished track attracted considerable attention, as did the dozen or two enthusiasts, who waded around in the river and fished. Some nice strings of black bass were captured during the day. Several camping parties have located in the pretty groves along the Fox River and all appear to be having a good time. Hereafter, people will not have to go thirty or forty miles by railroad to find a place to picnic; a little street car ride will do the business. The Illinois Central railroad announced it will stop all passenger trains at Coleman, and it is said that the fare from here to Chicago via the Illinois Central will be lower than over either of the other railroads." The connection with the ICRR at Coleman was Stop #50 on the electric interurban line.

The first day of trolley service to Coleman ended with two construction trains colliding at Coleman. As the grade on the connecting track to the ICRR is very steep, the conductor told the engineer not to attempt to bring down more than two cars at a time, but the engineer coupled on to all five loaded flat cars. The engineer intended to stop before reaching the steep grade, however, and take but two cars down at one time. The train reached the steep grade before the engineer realized it, and as there were no air brakes on the flat cars, they `scorched' down the steep grade. The engineer reversed the engine and he and the fireman alighted as gracefully as circumstances 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 borrowed ICRR steam engines. Luckily, nobody was hurt and the locomotives were repaired in short order.

Parks and picnic groves were very popular destinations. Coleman Grove, located at Stop #49 on the trolley line, was a popular picnic grove. Coleman Grove was on the west side of the Fox River at a very scenic 'S-curve' bend in the river known as "Five Islands." The beautiful picnic areas in the grove of trees and the scenic river were its main attractions. It offered refreshments, spring drinking water along with boat rentals. Newspapers reported activities at Coleman Grove to include picnicking, boating, fishing, playing baseball, croquet and other games.



Map showing Blackhawk Extension alignment as related to the Gravel Pit and Illinois Central facilities at Coleman circa 1935.

Large group picnics were mentioned in local newspapers. On Thursday July 15, 1897, the Elgin paper reported, "The Prospect Street Church Sunday School with the Mill Street Mission and their friends will picnic at Coleman Grove on Friday. The car will leave Prospect & Lowell streets at 8:30 a.m. and Highland and North State street at 9 a.m. Picnic tickets sold on the cars will be good returning on any car. A large crowd is expected and a jolly time anticipated with games, basket lunch, etc." After the picnic, the newspaper reported, "The Prospect Street Sunday School picnic was a decided success yesterday. Leaving the church at 8:30 a.m., the picnic party went to Coleman Grove via the electric line and returned to Elgin at about 5 o'clock. Two trolleys loaded with picnickers enjoyed a wonderful day. The day seemed very short, with base ball, croquet, foot-races and dinner-especially dinner to help make time fly. The Mill street mission was of the same party and all seemed to enjoy themselves to the full extent."

Coleman Grove became very popular and quickly and well known. Two days before the previous mentioned picnic an even larger gathering was held at Coleman Grove. The newspapers reported, "Mayor E. W. Brown of Rockford, made 1,600 of the poor children of that city happy, Wednesday, and added a big jewel to his crown as a philanthropist. The children were taken to Coleman, 45 miles east of Rockford on the Fox River, midway between St. Charles and Elgin. The Illinois Central Railroad furnished a

16 car train for the trip to Coleman. It is one of the prettiest spots along this beautiful stream, and is destined to give pleasure to many another picnic party. It is on the Illinois Central railroad and the Elgin and Geneva electric line, at the big bend in the river.

The youngsters drank 28 barrels of lemonade, ate 4,000 ham sandwiches and other refreshments in proportion, the whole having been provided by Mayor Brown. Chief of Police Bargren and six officers, the matron of the hospital and four nurses, a hotel chef and a band of eight pieces were brought along. It was a great day. All sorts of games and amusements had been provided for the little folks and it was the greatest excursion that ever went out of Rockford. Not an accident occurred, nobody was sick, and the enjoyment of the day was perfect."

Regular through electric car operations between Elgin and Geneva began on July 16, 1896. Ridership on the new electric railway was substantial. In December 1896, the railway took two of its old Elgin street cars and located one at Dunham and another at Coleman stations to provide shelter for waiting passengers. Many people transferred between the new trolley line and the Illinois Central at Coleman.



CERA fan trip at Coleman with Illinois Central freight train crossing the Fox River Bridge in 1940.

The Illinois Central depot at Coleman was manned 24 hours a day all year long with three working shifts. A wood stair led down from the ICRR station platform to the small platform and shelter on the electric trolley line stop at Coleman. The trolley line's shelter was on the south side of the ICRR bridge on the west side of the trolley line.

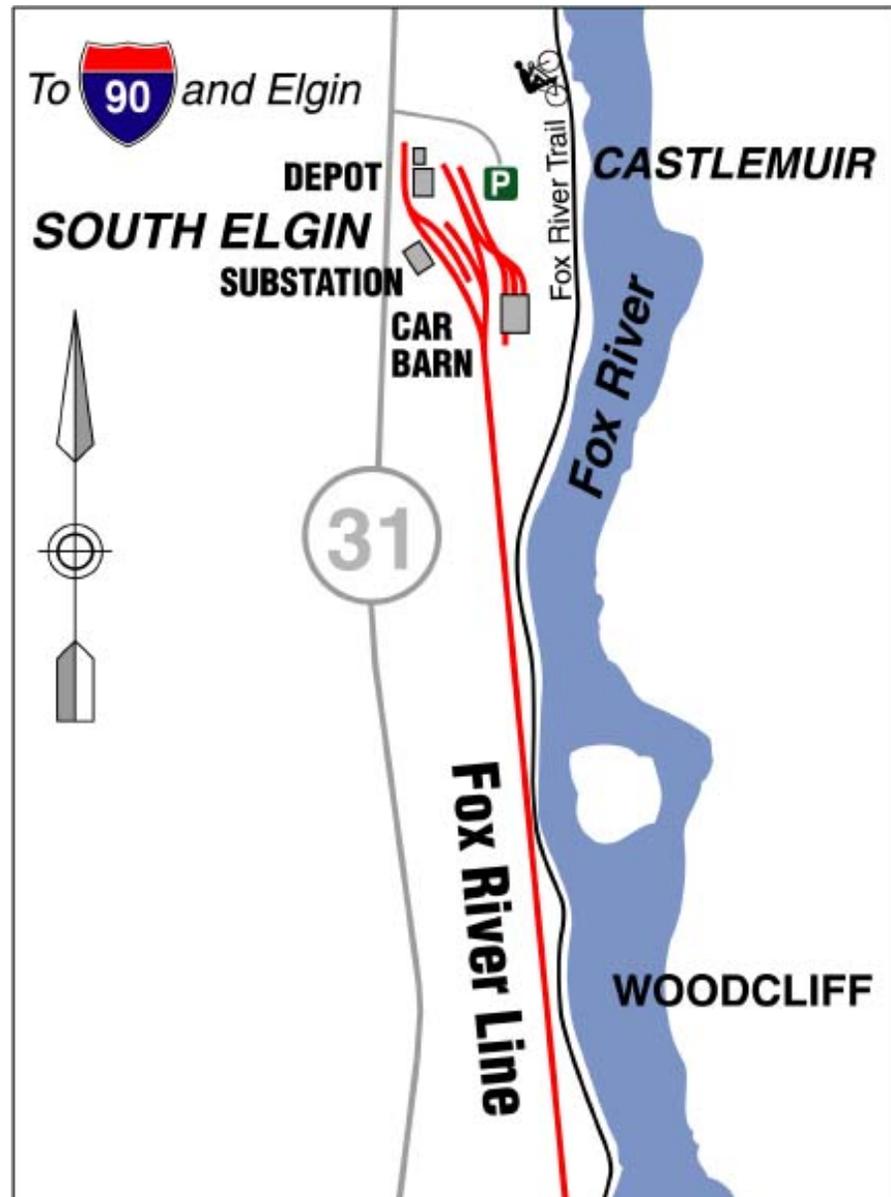
The Carpentersville, Elgin & Aurora also was interested in freight business. They ordered an electric locomotive which arrived July 18, 1896. A local newspaper reported. "The capacity of the motor is six loaded cars, which can be drawn with ease. It is enclosed in a small car and somewhat resembles the snow plow."

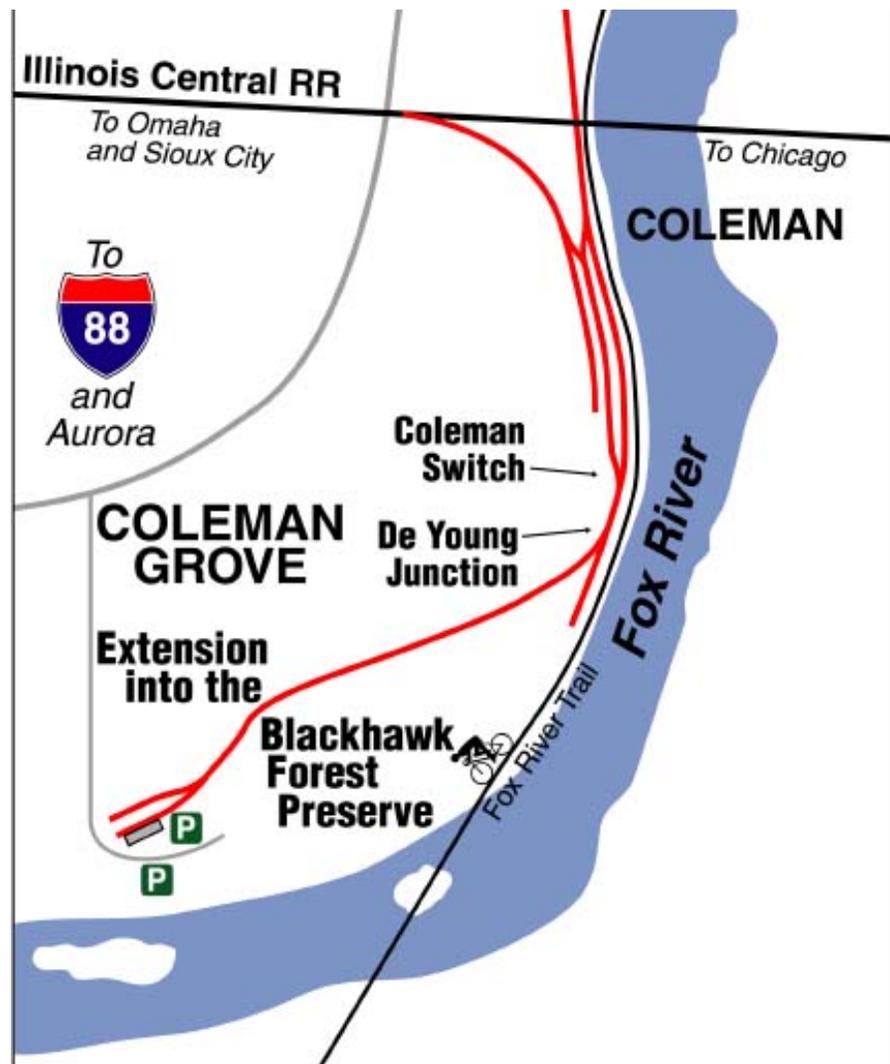
The interurban built a side track off of their line to the Elgin Asylum coal sheds in September, 1896. CE&A began hauling coal from the ICRR to the Asylum that same month and began serving other customers in South Elgin over the next few years. The two railroads interchanged (transferred) many freight cars at Coleman over the next seven decades. The interchange tracks at Coleman still exist and are in use by the museum.

The ICRR realized the value of the large gravel and sand in the hills in the Fox River Valley and used some of it in construction of the railroad. The railroad purchased additional land from the Coleman family just west of the river and electric railway tracks and south of their tracks to create their own gravel and sand pit. The railroad built tracks into their new gravel pit off of the interchange track to the CE&A. This gravel pit is now a part of Blackhawk Forest Preserve.

Andy Roth

Fox River Trolley Museum Map





Fox River Trolley Museum Extension to Blackhawk Park

The trolley extension to Blackhawk Forest Preserve connects with the museum's railroad heritage. The Fox River Trolley Museum, the Kane County Forest Preserve District and the Village of South Elgin have worked together to create a trolley stop to serve Blackhawk Forest Preserve similar to the way the original Carpentersville, Elgin & Aurora served Coleman Grove and South Elgin a century ago. Today's picnic grounds, water wells and the boat ramp mimic many of the activities that existed at Coleman Grove. The attractive and relaxing views of the Fox River at the Five Islands location still provide a great place to bring friends and family to enjoy a day outing. The bicycle path bridges, built on the electric railway's concrete bridge piers, add a new element to view the middle of the river and one of the islands without getting ones feet wet. A walk across this bridge to enjoy the sights and sounds of the river is highly recommended. One just needs to keep and eye out for any novice bike riders rolling down the former electric railroad grade on the south side of the river.

The new Blackhawk Station has a shelter built to reflect the original trolley shelter located at Stop #49 on the north side of the Fox River bridge. The earth embankment for the original shelter and a concrete trolley pole foundation can still be found just north of the old Five Islands bridges. A portion of the track extension was built on the grade of the Illinois Central track that served their gravel quarry. The initial ICRR track embankment, where it climbed up to cross Route 31, can still be seen in the quarry. Charcoal cinder piles from the coal fired steam shovels used over half a century ago to excavate the gravel were found in the pit when the extension was built.

The museum used authentic railroad materials to build the extension. Steel rails came from the former Nickel Plate Railroad near Edwardsville, IL. Former Milwaukee Road station platform bricks from Elgin were employed in paving the new low level platform at Blackhawk Station.

The beginning of the trolley service to Blackhawk Forest Preserve in June, 2002 celebrates the 108th anniversary of the original trolley service to Coleman Grove. The museum's trolley rides along the Fox River to Blackhawk Forest Preserve truly allows the public to ride into the past and experience the sights, sounds and the feel of a slice of Kane County's heritage.

Andy Roth

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