



Street Cars and Interurbans in Pontiac ... as I remember them.

By - Fred Gibson

Looking out of a large bay window in a very old farm house in winter, watching the snow flakes drift downward with my mother at my side, is one of my earliest memories. This was an evening about 1915 when I was four years old. I remember seeing apparent lightning flashes in the sky, but without thunder. My mother assured me that it was not lightning, that the blue flashing in the sky was caused by the wet snow on trolley wires when the interurbans passed by. The arching blue flash in the softly drifting snow was a beautiful sight, to say the least, and was the first time I became aware of the trolley cars on Woodward Avenue. I have been fascinated by electric cars ever since. This scene took place in the farm house where I was born on Square Lake Road in Bloomfield Township about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile east of Woodward Avenue. The account that follows of the interurbans and street cars in the Pontiac area is mostly from memory, but I have done a certain amount of research to fill in the years before I was born.

I do not remember the exact date when I rode on an interurban car for the first time. It was probably 1915 or 1916. But I do remember riding on the cars and the circumstances which led up to it. In those days, we traveled mostly by horse and buggy. When my parents wanted to travel to Pontiac, they would "hitch up" Maude, our trotter, to the buggy and drive east to Woodward Avenue. When we arrived there, we would tie Maude to a tree and wait for the next north bound interurban to come along Woodward Avenue. As the car approached, my father would signal the motorman by standing next to the track and waving his hand. At night, he would use a flashlight. When the car stopped for us, getting on was not easy. The first step was so high that the conductor would extend his hand to assist one to make the first step. Once on the interurban we would search for a vacant green mohair seat in the back part of the car. I always liked to sit next to the window. The front section of the car was reserved for smoking patrons and was called the "smoking section". The seats in this section of the car were trimmed in black leather. After the car began to move toward Pontiac, the conductor would collect the fare. He was always polite and dressed in an elegant blue uniform. When he received our fare, he would record the amount on a dial situated above the door on the smoking section partition. This done, he would pull a cord, a bell would ring, and the amount of our fare would be recorded on the cash register. As I was small, everything about these cars seemed so large to me. They also seemed to travel quite fast. In later years I was to learn that their top speed was 50 miles per hour. Autos in those days were permitted a top speed of 35 miles per hour on Woodward Avenue, so the interurbans would pass them by. This was an extra thrill for me. My only regret was that the ride into Pontiac from Square Lake Road took only 20 minutes.

Another experience I had with the interurbans at this time came about as a result of our dairy farm. In those days, due to the lack of refrigeration, milk had to be delivered to the creamery on a daily basis. Every morning, my father and

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Spring Lecture Series

At the Carriage House at Governor Moses
Wisner Historic House, 405 Oakland Avenue, Pontiac
Tuesday Evenings - 7:30 P.M.

MARCH 15

"The Revitalization of Main Street"
Stuart Rodgers, A.I.A. of Franklin

A slide presentation from an architect's viewpoint of the three mid-western towns chosen by the National Trust for Historic Preservation for the restoration of their "main streets". The slides will show the "before and after" of this program, the improvements made with the appropriate signage and street furniture.

MARCH 29

"Auto History in Miniature"
Bruce J. Annett, Jr. of Pontiac

Mr. Annett will focus on models of the full-size automobiles offered as promotional items by car companies for more than 35 years. Originally sold as toys for a dollar or two, some models have increased in value more than 600 times in the last 10 years. The audience is invited to bring an item from their own collection for Mr. Annett's evaluation and comments.

APRIL 5

"Hardtack and Coffee"

When an authentic Union soldier dismantles his gear representing "life on campaign", and when a woman of the 1860's tells you how her life was changed by the rebellion, and you examine her washboard, irons, carpetbag, tintypes and books, history begins to come alive. Presented by the Detroit Historical Department and their Fort Wayne Restoration, this costumed team representing the Civil War era offer an opportunity to almost feel you are sharing their "hardtack and coffee"

APRIL 12

"The Shakers"
Mrs. Kenneth E. Brooker of Bloomfield Township

A slide presentation depicting the history of the Shakers, their furniture and accessories. Mrs. Brooker is one of the foremost authorities on the Shakers and has a vast collection of their furniture in her home. She will bring a number of small pieces from her collection.

ADMISSION

Members - Free

Non-members - \$3.00 each lecture

\$10.00 complete lecture series

For further information call Wisner House - 338-6732

Craft Workshops Planned

The Wednesday crafters of Pine Grove are planning to meet only once a month during January, February and March immediately following the Board of Directors meetings. The January meeting was held on Wednesday, the 19th, and was a potluck lunch accompanied by a "show and tell" session. New items which the crafters may want to produce for the Potpourri Shoppe during 1983 were shown and discussed. They especially welcome suggestions for 10¢ and 25¢ items which would be attractive to school children who tour Pine Grove in the spring and wish to spend their souvenir money.

A candlewicking workshop will be held on Wednesday, February 16th from 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. in the carriage house at Pine Grove. The class will be taught by Trudy Long and Carol Spurlin. There will be a \$2 per person fee and attendees are asked to bring ½ yard of unbleached muslin material. Thread will be provided.

A workshop on chair caning to be held on five consecutive Tuesdays during March is planned to begin March 1st. Jack Moore will conduct the class from 9:00 A.M. to 10:00 A.M. each Tuesday morning. There will be a fee of \$20 for the entire course. Each participant must bring his own chair to be caned and materials. A call to Jack at 682-3188 between 5:00 P.M. and 6:00 P.M. may be made to obtain information about the materials required. A minimum of 5 persons will be required to hold the class. Receipt of your check at Wisner House on or before February 25 will confirm your reservation.

On March 16th from 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. there will be a workshop on Ukrainian Easter Egg Decorating. Grace Carafelly will conduct the class. There will be a fee of \$10 and materials will be provided. Receipt of your check at Wisner House on or before March 2nd will confirm your reservation.

On consecutive Wednesdays, April 20 and 27, a two-session workshop on stenciling will be conducted by Kim Friend, the "Village Stenciler". The sessions will be held in the Pine Grove carriage house from 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. Stenciling of all kinds of materials will be taught. A fee of \$20 will be charged which will cover the cost of both sessions and a work kit. We must have a minimum of 10 enrollees and a maximum of 20. Receipt of your check at Wisner House on or before March 31st will confirm your reservation.

For further information concerning any of the workshops call Mary Ann Treas at 338-6732

President's Message

During these winter months, in keeping with our continual effort to balance the budget by conserving energy costs, the Governor Moses Wisner Historic House and Museum buildings are closed to tours.

This is one of the busiest times of the year, however, for the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society members and volunteers. Many committees are busy formulating and completing plans for the opening in the spring.

One of the purposes of our organization is to make persons aware of our earlier Oakland County history and culture. To do this the Education Committee is working on a program to better teach present day school children, as well as their teachers, about school and family life during the era of the one-room schools in Oakland County. This era ended during the 1940's when school districts in the county became consolidated and the children were then bused from the rural areas to a central school system. Even the teachers of today have little knowledge of those one-room school days.

The Craft Committee has set up a number of workshops to improve and enlarge their skills for making different and unusual gifts for our Potpourri Shoppe. These classes are open to other historical society members as well as the general public.

Due to the effort of the Program Committee several excellent programs will be presented during the coming year, beginning with the Spring Lecture Series on March 15th. As in the past, these lectures are for the enjoyment of all Society members as a part of your membership. Do take advantage of them. Short talks pertaining to appropriate historical subjects will be given at the conclusion of several of the monthly Society Board Meetings, and members are also welcome to attend any of these. I've been told that the program planned for the annual dinner in May will be one of the best ever.

Compiling an inventory of all our artifacts in the Wisner House Collection, researching the correct period of wallpaper in preparation for refurbishing one of the downstairs sitting-rooms, deciding on a pleasing arrangement of furniture and accessories in all the rooms for the pleasure of our tour guests when the house is opened in the spring, are priorities that the House Committee has set to work on during these winter months.

While the grounds and gardens require almost no care this time of year, and as yet, no snow removal has been required, the members of the Maintenance Committee keep busy building shelves for better storage of our records and artifacts collection, painting and taking care of the never-ending repairs that keeps our historic complex in the best of condition.

A new Committee for Promotion was set up this year to explore different and as yet untried ideas for adding income as well as interest to our Society. As times goes by, we will be hearing more from this committee.

Keeping abreast of all of these other committee activities are members of the Publicity Committee, whose work is to get the word out to the public at large about all the interesting things our Society is involved with. It requires a constant effort and that committee meets often.

In spite of the fact that our Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society has been organized and active in promoting the historic culture of all of Oakland County for over 100 years and our headquarters has been located in the Governor Moses Wisner House one of the oldest landmarks in Pontiac, for nearly 40 years, there are still those who say they've never heard of us.

That can easily be changed! Each one of you members can be a part of the Publicity Committee by inviting one, two or three persons to come and see all the great things we have here. It will make a difference.

Ruth G. Priestley

Genealogy Class To Meet

Dorcus Wolf, a well known teacher and member of our Society, will conduct a nine week beginners' genealogy class.

Classes will begin on Tuesday, March 29, 1983 at 1:00 P.M. in the Drayton Plains schoolhouse on our grounds.

There will be four field trips to important resource centers for Michigan genealogical research.

Registration for these classes must be received in the Wisner House office no later than March 15th accompanied by full payment of the fees—\$20 for members - \$25 for non-members. Expense of the field trips is not included.

Streetcars and Interurbans Continued

grandfather would deliver our milk cans to the interurban stop at Square Lake Road. This was done in our buggy and I was permitted to go along. The interurban freight motor-car was scheduled to pick up our milk. I was often allowed the privilege of riding in the "cab" of this freight motor-car from Square Lake Road to Bloomfield Center, actually a very short distance. I would be placed on the next local interurban headed for Pontiac and returned to the Square Lake Road stop. The freight motor-car would continue on its way to Detroit and the creamery.

THE INTERURBAN LINES TO PONTIAC

The first trolley line in Pontiac was built about 1895. It was a combination interurban - street car line as it served both the city of Pontiac and the suburban area around Sylvan Lake. This company was known as the Pontiac and Sylvan Lake Railway. It operated from a point in Pontiac located at Jackson Street and S. Saginaw St. to the Sylvan Lake area, terminating on Garland Avenue at Pontiac Drive in Sylvan Lake.

A year later, two other companies began to lay interurban tracks in the direction of Pontiac. The Oakland Electric Co. first constructed interurban tracks between Detroit and Royal Oak, then extended the line to Birmingham. Service to Birmingham began in 1897. As Pontiac was a growing community, the Oakland Electric Co. decided to extend their service. The tracks were first laid thru Circle City, now Bloomfield Hills at Long Lake Road. At this point, their planned extension to Pontiac was delayed temporarily due to obstacles, concerning right-of-way. Woodward Avenue was a toll road at this time. Alternate routes were studied but never materialized. Concessions were made with owners along the line and tracks were completed to the city limits of Pontiac in 1897. As the company needed additional funds, a new company was formed and named the Detroit and Pontiac Railway. The tracks of the Detroit and Pontiac Railway were laid along the east side of Woodward Avenue from Eleven Mile Road to Pontiac and were double track all the way.

When the railroad reached Pontiac, the owners anticipated entering the city and laying tracks on Saginaw Street. Unforseen developments hindered this progress temporarily. When a person arrived in Pontiac at this time on the interurban, you would have to be drayed by wagon or carriage from the south ci-

ty limits of Pontiac to Jackson St. where one could board a city car. This inconvenience lasted only a short time and street car tracks were laid on Saginaw Street in Pontiac. The line progressed north on Saginaw St. through downtown and out Saginaw St. to Clark St. Here the cars turned left on Clark St. and continued west to Oakland Avenue. This was the waiting point for interurbans to begin their trip back to Detroit. They would turn left on Oakland Ave. and proceed south through downtown Pontiac.

A third interurban line was constructed toward Pontiac in 1899. The Grand River Railway, who had constructed lines to Farmington and Northville, considered expanding their tracks to Pontiac, via Orchard Lake. They hoped to connect with the Pontiac and Sylvan Lake Railway at Sylvan Lake. This new line was to be known as the Detroit and Northwestern Railway. The Detroit and Northwestern did not reach Orchard Lake without a problem. To get there, they had to cross the Grand Trunk tracks near Orchard Lake. When permission to cross the Grand Trunk tracks were not granted, an "overpass" bridge was constructed. This overpass was located adjacent to property now known as St. Marys College. This allowed the interurban line to continue toward Sylvan Lake and connect with the line there. Some evidence of this overpass can still be seen today. When the Detroit and Northwestern connected up with the Pontiac and Sylvan Lake Railway and continued into Pontiac, new problems developed. The Detroit and Pontiac Railway, now operating in Pontiac, would not permit the Detroit and Northwestern to operate on their tracks. Because of this, a "third" set of rails was installed on the west side of Saginaw Street from Oakland Ave. to Jackson Street so the Detroit and Northwestern cars could reach Jackson St. where they would turn around and begin their journey to Detroit, via Farmington. This arrangement was to last for several years. The "third" set of tracks did not disappear until 1927 when Saginaw Street was repaved. The Detroit and Northwestern became part of the Detroit United Railway (DUR) system and discontinued operating through Farmington in 1927. Pontiac City Lines continued to operate street cars as far as Orchard Lake.

INTERURBAN CARS IN PONTIAC

I never had the opportunity to see the first interurban cars which operated to Pontiac in 1898. They were built by the Kuhlman Car Co. and were numbered #1 to #9. When the Everett-Moore

group purchased most of the interurban and street car lines in Michigan in 1901, they renumbered the cars to #7101 to #7109. After the Everett-Moore purchased the system and renamed it the Detroit United Railway, they did not extend or add too many routes in Michigan. But they did purchase new cars. The Pontiac Division received sixteen new single end type interurban cars. They were purchased for the Pontiac Division only. They had open back platforms, storage air and could travel about 50 miles per hour over the rather rough track on Woodward Avenue. Three additional cars of this type were purchased in 1910 but were different in that they had Tomlinson Couplers and pneumatic air pumps (for brakes). These three cars could be coupled together. This group of cars was numbered 7114 to 7131. In 1916 the Detroit United Railway ordered another set of cars for the Pontiac Division. Ordered from the Kuhlman Car Co. there were sixteen cars in all; eight contained traction motors and the other eight were used as trailers. They were numbered 7131 thru 7147. These cars provided excellent service between Pontiac and Detroit. In 1923, when passenger service began to decline, the trailers were taken out of service. Four of them were rebuilt and made into motor cars. They were painted a red, white and blue color and were named "The Royal Blue Limiteds". They were equipped with special interior detail including special wicker seats and carpet. They were renumbered 8021 to 8024. I remember three of these cars and have photos of them. I never saw #8023. A custom in those days was to put Indian names on the sides of cars. Three names used on these cars was "Cayuga," "Oakland," and "Sauks," At one time, one of these cars was named "Huron."

Another car I remember well and should mention here is the "Yolande" #1026. This was a special service car for charter service. It contained special chairs, tables and a coffee bar. It not only traveled on the Detroit United Lines but could be operated on other connecting lines.

The last group of interurban cars purchased for the Pontiac-Detroit Woodward Avenue line were ten lightweights, numbered 3301 to 3310. Purchased from the Kuhlman Car Co., they never were very satisfactory so they were rebuilt and sent to the city of Flint for operation there.

I do not remember too much about the Detroit and Northwestern cars. I never rode on them. Several different types of cars were operated on this line.

Unfortunately the line could not compete with the Woodward Avenue Line for patronage because of the extra time it took to get from Pontiac to Detroit on these cars. Service was suspended altogether in February 1927.

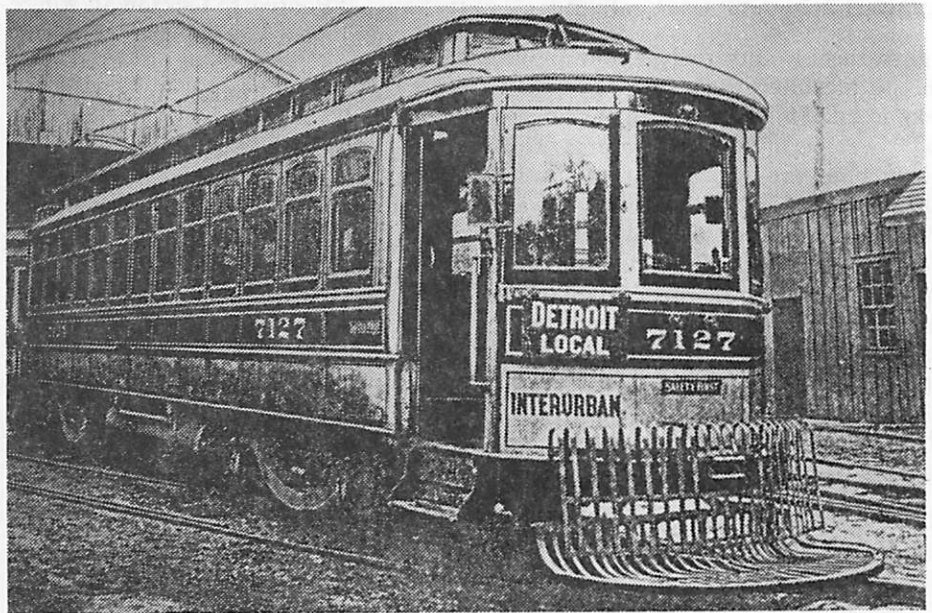
STREET CARS IN PONTIAC

In the early years of Pontiac's history, the interurbans entering the city provided most of the city service. However, the city did have a few street cars which operated on Saginaw Street. There was also a "loop" line which operated out Huron St. to State St. out State St. to Johnson Ave. Johnson Avenue to Oakland Avenue and then back to Saginaw Street. The first fleet of city street cars that I remember were the small single-track Birney safety cars. These were purchased to provide service on the new lines that were constructed about 1920 to serve the Pontiac Motor plant, out Edison St. and the Sanford St. line which provided service to the south end of Pontiac and the General Motors Truck plant. This fleet of street cars provided service for about ten years.

At the same time as the city of Pontiac repaved and improved Saginaw Street, the Detroit United Lines purchased ten double truck street cars for the Pontiac City service. They were purchased from the Kuhlman Car Co. and contained 49 seats. They were numbered 3250 to 3259. These cars were introduced to the public in March 1928. In keeping with the Detroit United Lines practice of installing Indian names on Pontiac Division cars, these ten cars had the following Indian names on them. Chief Pontiac, Cahokia, Me-Nah-Sa-Gorning, Michilimackinac, Tuscarora, Ka-Ka-On-Quet, Shawnee, Algonkin, Seneca, and Wesegah. The color of these cars was quite attractive - maroon with light blue belts, ivory trim around the windows and a grey roof. Much different than the traditional canary colored cars with orange panes of the earlier days.

CONCLUSION

As a final thought, this can be said about the electric car. It was clean, safe and provided a very necessary service to our community at a time when it was needed. The auto industry grew and the need for public transportation diminished. Folks would rather ride in the comfort of an automobile than ride on a street car. This same situation prevailed all around our country and because of it, interurbans and street



Early interurban car used on Detroit to Pontiac line.

Conclusion continued . . .

cars disappeared. The last street cars operated in the city of Pontiac in 1931. The only evidence we have of this industry today are the rails buried in concrete, which lay under Saginaw Street.

*Fred Gibson is a life long resident of the Pontiac area, now retired from local business, he has actively pursued the study of the history of trolley car transportation.

Justice to be Restored

The statue of "Blind Justice", familiar to many as she stood on the dome of the old county courthouse in downtown Pontiac, will soon have a new "home".

For more than twenty years, since the razing of the old courthouse, the statue has been stored awaiting restoration.

The Oakland County Bar Association has undertaken the responsibility of raising the monies necessary for the statue restoration and the construction of a base and plaque.

Working with the Oakland County Cultural Council, the bar association has arranged for her restoration at a local foundry. The "unveiling" will take place at dedication ceremonies on Law Day, May 1, 1983. The sight for her final display will be in the courtyard of the south entrance of the county courthouse, 1200 North Telegraph Road.

Field Stone Sought

The Society welcomes gifts of field stone (6"-12" in diameter) for use in completing the authentic outer surfaces of the carriage house basement. Broken concrete is not acceptable.

Calendar Of Coming Events

- February 16** - 9:30 a.m. Board of Directors Meeting followed by Visual Concepts Film
- February 16** - 1:00 pm-3:00 pm - Candlewicking Workshop
- February 25** - Last day to make Chair Caning Workshop Reservations
- March 1** - 9:00 am - Opening Session, Chair Caning Workshop
- March 2** - Last day to make Ukrainian Easter Egg Decorating Workshop Reservations
- March 15** - 7:30 pm - "Revitalization of Main Street" Lecture
- March 15** - Last day to make Genealogy Class Reservations
- March 16** - 9:30 am Board of Directors Meeting
- March 16** - 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm - Ukrainian Easter Egg Decorating Workshop
- March 29** - 1:00 pm - Opening Session Genealogy Class
- March 29** - 7:30pm - "Auto History In Miniature" Lecture
- March 31** - Last day to Make Stenciling Workshop Reservations
- April 5** - 7:30 pm - "Civil War Era" Lecture
- April 12** - 7:30 pm - "The Shakers" Lecture
- April 20** - 9:30 am - Board of Directors Meeting
- April 20** - 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm - Opening Session Stenciling Workshop
- May 18** - Annual Dinner

Membership Gifts

Make a friend or relative happy by giving him a membership in the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society.