February 2021

**Goings On at Seashore -**

From various Seashore updates: Work continues this week on Lexington & Boston 41, and the upgrades we are making to our Visitors Center fire protection system. Repairs to Riverside Carhouse were also addressed to fix two doors, one on the north side and one on the south side, that had sustained damage during the 2020 windstorms. Repairs will continue in Riverside to address issues with the weight system in place to open/close the barn doors in time for Opening Day on May 1. Work on the Bus Display Area has ceased for the moment, but when the weather conditions change in March or April, work will resume.

**Organization Chart -**

A revised organization chart as published in mid-February follows:
Do You Recognize?

Last Month’s Do You Recognize -

The Sterling, Dixon & Eastern Electric Railway was incorporated in 1902 with the intent of operating an interurban service between Sterling and Dixon, IL. Total track was just under 20 miles with 12.8 miles of interurban and just over 5.5 miles of town lines plus yard and other track. The interurban was all private right-of-way with a width of 40 feet between the city limits of the endpoint cities. The railway paralleled the Rock River and the existing highway connecting the two city endpoints. In 1920 a paved highway (the Lincoln Highway) was constructed between the two cities and parallel to the railway. This short stretch of highway was part of one of the earliest transcontinental highway routes across the United States.

Support for the proposed railway came from John I. Beggs of Milwaukee, President of the Milwaukee Transport Company, who was associated closely with the electric utility boom under Thomas Edison. He worked closely with Thomas A. Edison and consequently became one of that small group known as Edison Pioneers. This involvement with electricity led him into the street railway business and, at one time, to acquire a controlling interest in the St. Louis Car Company as well as many other transport ventures. A second prime supporter of the railway was Henry C. Higgins an experienced electric railway promoter.

Sterling, where the railway’s main offices were initially located, gave the line a 50 year franchise. The Union Electric Railway Company had done construction in this city in the late 1880s including laying track within the city and also ordering four cars from the Pullman Palace Car Co. By 1890 the firm was ordered to remove its rails etc. and ultimately was sold at a Sheriff’s sale in 1894.

Dixon initially awarded a 20 year franchise and in 1912 it was extended to February 1960. This second city had a number of companies incorporated and franchises awarded for railways to build various routes from the city. None of these came to fruition other than our line. The company offices moved here in 1907. This city was also the boyhood home of a 20th century U.S. president.

Work on the interurban began in 1902 and the track was completed in late 1903 but a dispute with the Illinois Central Railroad concerning crossing the right-of-way in Dixon held up completion. Overhead was strung as track was laid so as to use electric cars during the construction but this was not totally successful and second-hand American type steam engine was acquired for the work. Interurban service finally began with a special car full of dignitaries being operated in the second week of May 1904, a special chartered car by a national fraternal organization ran some two weeks later, and regular service began on May 26, 1904 using four new cars (#21 - #24) from the St. Louis Car Company. Four double-
and a new interurban (#104) came from McGuire-Cummings in 1912.

The Chicago and North Western Railway also ran between the terminal cities but its smokey and relatively infrequent service offered no real competition to the fast and clean hourly service offered by our railway. In 1913, with a well maintained infrastructure, running time on the electrics was reduced to 45 minutes. In 1920 the running time between the downtown terminals returned to one hour.

The interurban profited from some temperance-driven instability in the endpoint cities. Repeated local elections kept the cities’ status as dry or wet in flux. Every time that one or other endpoint went dry and the other wet the railway could expect a surge of business, perhaps a little intoxicated on the return trips, but good business!

City operations were set up in both Sterling and Dixon with service starting in mid-May 1904. The local lighting company had built a park in the easterly endpoint city that included a bandstand, dance pavilion, and dining hall. Our railway eventually took over the park to promote ridership. The westerly city also received its own park with a fairgrounds and race track. A spur and a 2,000 ft. siding were provided but the park and its service only
lasted a few years as the park proved unprofitable. City services were inaugurated with second-hand Pullman-manufactured city cars (#11-15) from Milwaukee. Two more cars (#16-17) were purchased second-hand from the same original owner in 1906. Two second-hand single truck open trailers were also purchased in 1904. In 1909 four new city cars (#25-28) were purchased new from the St. Louis Car Company with older city cars (#11-16) being scrapped shortly thereafter. Another new city car (#31) was acquired from McGuire-Cummings in 1912 but it unfortunately had excessively high steps for city operations especially considering women’s fashions of the day. In 1922 as the line’s end neared two new Cincinnati Car Company Birneys (#32-33) were acquired. It appears that these were both assigned to city operations in Sterling.

Freight service was never a major component. A box motor handled baggage and freight. There was some milk business and mail pouches. Of course I suppose the infamous gravel business would fall under freight. An express motor (#94) by St. Louis
Car Co. was acquired second hand in 1904. Freight motor #30 came new in 1912, another McGuire-Cummings product, also serving as a sweeper and a plow. No. #30 replaced the 1896 St. Louis express motor.

In 1911 the original investor group sold their interests in the railway and associated power companies to Samuel Insull. Insull believed in dependable service in his systems and planned for such. However, the depression destroyed his empire with our line not even surviving until the collapse of his empire in the depths of 1929. By 1917 revenues were declining and with the completion of the paved highway between the endpoint cities revenues imploded. A striking irony in the construction of the paved highway was that the railway sold and transported to contractors much of the gravel and fill used in the construction of the paved highway and surrounding roads that precipitated the line’s downfall.

The advent of the paved road in 1920 brought the onset of a rapid decline in traffic. In 1924 the line carried just over 339,000 passengers with less than 25 percent of these being patrons of the interurban and the rest being city service patrons in the terminal cities. This compared with over 891,000 patrons in 1911-12, an over 60 percent decline in traffic. The interurban fare had increased from 25¢ to 30¢ in 1910. By 1925 the interurban was operating a two hour headway. City fares were specified at 5¢ in the original franchises, these were increased to 8¢ in 1920.

The line’s fiscal condition was uniformly poor. Out of 21 years it experienced a deficit in 12 of them, not even covering operating costs in the last 4 years. The line was kept in good repair and was well run thanks to its being part of the Insull empire from 1918 onward but it never paid a dividend nor covered the costs of its construction.

The end came fairly quickly in 1925. In July 1925, faced with soaring costs and plummeting ridership, the company applied to the Illinois Commerce Commission to abandon the line. September 1925 saw the abandonment approved and after notice to the public actual
operations ceased on October 5, 1925. The railway retained the right-of-way for its commercial electric transmission lines. For readers seeking further information there is a small article in CERA Bulletin #99 (1955) and the detailed ERHS Bulletin #40 (1963) - Sterling, Dixon & Eastern RR. - around 27 pages by Phillip Keister.

This Month’s Do You Recognize -

This month’s line-of-choice is yet more obscure than January’s. Our line started out as part of the aspiration to build an interurban between the second and third largest cities in its state, a distance of approximately 75 miles. The interurban received a 99 year charter from the state in August of 1891. Starting from the westerly (second-largest) city there were 4.5 miles of double track installed with service beginning in early April 1893. Another two miles of eastward track was added in 1903.

Slightly to the east of midway between the intended endpoints of the proposed interurban was a primarily agricultural town and county seat of 9,180 (1900). The town became a city in 1915. The area was mainly agricultural with the biggest employer being a farm implements manufacturer with some 1,300 employees by 1910. In 1910 a Canadian firm purchased a controlling interest in the firm. The factory actually continued in operation until the mid-1950s when a combination of labor strife, poor management, and changing competitive conditions saw a final shutdown in 1958.

As the interurban was proposed to pass through this community, the company wanted to preserve its franchises and routes over the main streets of the town. Therefore, in 1903 some two and a quarter miles with double track was constructed in the town along with a power plant and car barn. Service began in September of 1903 with two cars although apparently additional equipment was available “if needed”. Over the next several years it became evident that the hoped-for 75 mile interurban was not likely to become reality. Actually some half dozen proposals for service over various routes between these same endpoints failed to develop. Around 1912 the double track was replaced with a single line and sidings. An isolated two-mile line in a
small agricultural community could not develop significant traffic. Additional financial woes resulted from the fact that some town road restoration promised at the time our line started was still incomplete a decade later and involved a legal dispute. By 1913 demands that these repairs be completed combined with the low traffic and ongoing financial woes of the little two mile line caused the initial interurban firm (by now a 6 mile suburban line with no further aspirations) to indicate its intent to close the little isolated franchise-holding line midway on the non-existent interurban.

A group of local businessmen formed a new Traction Company named after the community and in early 1914 they received a certificate of convenience and necessity from the state public service commission and 50 year franchise from the town council. In mid-April the president of the original interurban company announced that on May 19, 1914 the new Traction Company would assume ownership of the 2.25 mile operation including the powerhouse, dynamo, carbarn, and four or five cars. Service began with two cars and some additional in reserve. The little line struggled on for a little over a decade. It is rumored that some businesses in the city, probably belonging to the line’s investors, paid excessive rates for advertising on the cars as an indirect subsidy to keep the wheels turning. Interestingly, even the 1914 document transferring the franchise rights still granted the Traction Company the right to make limited stops on cars involved the interurban operation - a dream long dead by the time of the change of companies.

The change in ownership of the street railway in 1914 somewhat coincided with the community transforming from a town to a city in 1915. This added some confusion to the road restoration debate previously mentioned. Legally neither party at the start of the argument existed at the end. In the year 1915 the city assessors had assessed the Traction Company slightly over $28,000 (almost $730,000 in today’s money) related to past betterments resulting from paving the streets along the rail line. The primary bone of contention was regarding drainage. The Traction Company, reading the black letter law, insisted that it was only liable for assessment of work between its rails and either 18 inches or 24 inches on either side of the track (conflicting language in
regulations). The city argued that drainage was obviously required and drains extending two feet from the rails accomplished nothing as a drainage system was needed to remove the water and therefor the railway was responsible for their share of the entire drainage system. The railway appealed to the state Supreme Court (Should anyone be interested - in this state the Supreme Court is a trial-level court of general jurisdiction with its Appellate Division being the highest intermediate appellate court). That state’s highest court is the Court of Appeals sitting in the state capitol (In most states this would be called the state supreme court).

Apparently the courts finally agreed to a greater extent with the railway and a large component of the assessment was eliminated.

Reality finally caught up with the little line in June of 1927 when the electrics made their last two and a quarter mile foray. Although having no relationship for the past 13 years the little suburban line, nee interurban, that started it all failed some three years later. Service was replaced by motor coach company that continued until 1971 when the service was absorbed by a regional transportation authority.

Photographic and roster data is extremely limited for both the original “interurban” and its successor in the remote midpoint. The original operator supposedly had twelve cars operating out of its westerly origin line of 6.5 miles at its peak and another two at our line’s remote location of 2.25 miles “with available spares”. After the sale of our line to the Traction Company it supposedly ran with two cars “with available spares”. In 1914 Kuhlman records the sale of two 21 ft. closed cars (No’s #100-101) to the Traction Company. The original “interurban” had purchased two 26’ 4” double-truck semi-convertible cars (No’s. # 100-101) from Brill in 1903 - it is not evident if these operated on the remote mid-point line. The Traction Company is also known to have operated a 21’ 8” Kuhlman semi-convertable closed car (No. #33) acquired second hand in 1924 from a line in a neighboring state.

There is also an image of a Kuhlman car No. #154 identified as belonging to the Traction Company - however the order number indicated is attached to a group of cars delivered to a Canadian carrier in 1917 - no railway name is shown in the image, only car and order number. I could find no record of a transfer from the Canadian firm.
A Library Committee meeting was held through Zoom on January 9, 2021.

The next Library Committee meeting will be held through a virtual Zoom meeting on March 13, 2021 at 10 AM. Materials and login information will be distributed.

The Library Committee’s meetings on Saturdays (10AM) will tentatively be virtual meetings on a bimonthly basis on the odd months. Updated information will be forthcoming.

Saturday - Workshops only (10AM - 2 PM) are still cancelled.

The Wednesday Evening Workshops are still cancelled - hopefully resumption in the future.

For further information/questions concerning the Library please contact Randy Leclaire (207-641-9324 - text preferred) or Karen Dooks (781 799-5868).

By Karen Dooks, Chair

Links:

More than 1000 of the images are accessible online = https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_images/

Facebook page = https://www.facebook.com/groups/44932548777/

Seashore Library On-Line Resources -

A library resources page originally developed by Amber Tatnall dealing with useful and interesting resource material including among other things links to some three decades of the Street Railway Journal and the Electric Railway Journal on line is located at on line resources: https://virtual.yccc.edu/c.php?g=238406&p=3225494&preview=7b52901d1f51db2b76cb2a141ca8589c

or this handy tinyurl works as well: http://tinyurl.com/zwhndoe

The Library continues to upload material to the various sections of DigitalMaine - The DigitalMaine Repository is a partnership of the Maine State Library, Maine State Archives and community institutions around the state.
The uploads to the new documents area are quite fascinating as they allow you to literally leaf through the documents.

[https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_museum/](https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_museum/)
[https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_blueprints/](https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_blueprints/)
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Please remember when sending donations for the library to note that it is for Library Development – Fund 951.

**An Interesting Read:** - Chicago City Railway Co. from 1913
Main Line - Availability

If you are not on our direct distribution list and would like to be please drop a note to TheMainLine@ramsdell.com.

Regards, Ed Ramsdell, Editor The Main Line

TheMainLine@ramsdell.com

http://www.trolleymuseum.org