



Interurban Railways

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

Interurbans were electric-powered railways used in the 1890s through the 1930s. Although existing steam-powered trains moved passengers more quickly, their infrequent stops left many commuters walking several miles from station to destination. Because Ohio is mostly flat and has many small towns, it was a major center for the sudden national interurban boom at the turn of the century. Urban and rural residents alike enjoyed the lighter interurban cars whose electric power made them cheaper, cleaner and more flexible. Interurbans offered unprecedented mobility for rural families visiting the city, and quicker delivery service for farmers and businesses. Ridership decreased, however, when interurban companies failed to maintain their equipment during the metal shortages of World War I. Eventually, interurban tracks were torn up and replaced with larger roads to accommodate the newly-produced automobiles. Although they no longer operate, their brief success connected Ohioans across the state in patterns similar to today.

Important Dates

- May 1887: Frank J. Sprague improves the electric streetcar design, leading to increased feasibility and interest in the interurban.
- December 28, 1889: The first interurban car in the United States runs between Newark and Granville.
- 1895: The Akron Bedford Cleveland Railroad, one of the most robust interurban lines, is constructed.
- 1901: The Everett-Moore Syndicate organizes the Lake Shore Electric Railway.
- 1904: The Ohio Interurban Railway Association forms to promote cooperation between competing railway lines.
- May 16, 1907: Randal Morgan, W. Kesley Shoepf and Hugh J. McGowan consolidate several individual railway companies into the state's largest syndicate, the Ohio Electric Railway.
- 1910: A comprehensive map of Ohio's interurban railways is released for passengers.
- 1913: The Great Dayton Flood damages aging tracks.
- 1939: The final interurban line in Ohio converts from passenger to freight at Youngstown.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), proximity or as phrases: interurban, interurban train, interurban car, electric railroad, electric railway.
- Limit your search by date to find information about specific parts of the interurban boom.
- Search newspapers in all states, not just Ohio.

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- ["A Hot Motor"](#) *Stark County Democrat* (Canton, OH), October 5, 1893, Image 5, col. 2-3.
- ["South We Go"](#) *Marion Daily Mirror* (Marion, OH), May 18, 1907, Image 16.
- ["Caldwell-Boise Electric Railway Great Success"](#) *Caldwell Tribune* (Caldwell, ID), August 24, 1907, Image 1, col. 3-6.
- ["Storm Destroys Much Property"](#) *Perrysburg Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), July 18, 1913, Image 2, col. 5.
- ["Busy Times Ahead for Bigelow!"](#) *Labor Advocate* (Cincinnati, OH), February 19, 1916, Image 1, col. 1-3.