

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Fall 2006

Volume 41, Number 3

The 1894 Pullman Strike
and the Death of
Switchman Charles Luth

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A Little-Known Railway That Couldn't
The St. Paul Southern

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Looking west from the Robert Street Bridge, this 1920s photo shows a St. Paul Southern car headed outbound for South St. Paul and Hastings. Between 1900 and 1910 the combined population of these two Dakota County communities increased 38.5%, encouraging construction of the interurban. But the line's ambitions to build on to Cannon Falls and Rochester went unfulfilled, and it eventually succumbed to automobile and bus competition. Photograph courtesy of the Minnesota Transportation Museum. See John Diers's article beginning on page 4.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 41, Number 3

Fall 2006

THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect,
preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public,
recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make
available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major
responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

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and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

Transportation is the theme for this issue's two main articles: a history of the short-lived St. Paul Southern electric interurban railway, and an exploration of the social and economic implications of the 1894 Pullman strike in St. Paul. The latest addition to our series, "Growing Up in St. Paul," presents a lyrical account of childhood in the Frogtown neighborhood in the 1930s. And a book review introduces a significant compilation of the letters of Bishop Loras, who sent priests from Dubuque in the 1850s to minister to the population of the new Minnesota Territory.

These articles, with their varying subjects and approaches, illustrate the different ways this magazine addresses its mission to preserve and highlight the many facets of Ramsey County history. We hope you will be able to contribute a little extra this year, through our annual appeal, to strengthen the financial base that allows us to present such great material on a continuing basis.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

A Little-Known Railway That Couldn't The St. Paul Southern

John W. Diers

The Great Northern and Northern Pacific railroads are synonymous with St. Paul's historic role in the opening of the Pacific Northwest, but along with these transcontinental giants there were others, among them an obscure electric interurban, the St. Paul Southern Electric Railway. Built to connect Rochester with St. Paul by way of Hastings, Cannon Falls, Red Wing, and other intermediate points, it never laid a rail beyond Hastings. Instead, the Southern, as it came to be known, achieved distinction as one of the least successful interurban electric railways ever built—a notable accomplishment in an industry that was defined by unfulfilled expectations and financial ruin.

The electric interurban was a cousin of the urban trolley car. It used the same technology, grew to maturity at about the same time, and suffered automobile and bus competition with similar results. In a road-starved, rural America before World War I, some 14,000 miles of electric interurbans linked small towns with each other and with larger urban centers. Many were extensions of a nearby town's trolley system and ran alongside the dirt roads of that era. A few were grossly overcapitalized by promoters who lured investors with promises of easy profits and then built the line to inferior standards. These failed early. Others were soundly financed, often by electric power companies, and engineered to railroad standards. Among them, three Chicago inter-

urbans (the Chicago Aurora and Elgin, the Chicago North Shore and Milwaukee, and the Chicago South Shore and South Bend) became major commuter railroads linking Chicago with the western suburbs of Aurora and Elgin and the nearby cities of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and South Bend, Indiana. Elsewhere, Illinois Traction, later Illinois Terminal, became an important passenger and freight carrier serving St. Louis and cities in central Illinois. In California the Pacific Electric, a subsidiary of the Southern Pacific Railroad, fostered growth in Los Angeles long before the freeways. These interurbans and others like them hung on into the 1950s and '60s.

Nationally the first spurt of interurban construction came in 1895–1904. New

construction slowed, briefly, following the Panic of 1903. Sharp-penciled Wall Streeters noted that interurbans in New York State were earning only \$530 a mile against fixed charges of \$1,250 per mile. Predicting a shakeout, they recommended clients stay away from interurban stocks. Construction resumed, however, in 1906 and continued through 1908. The Panic of 1907 brought another slowdown. After 1916 nationwide construction never exceeded 100 miles per year and the miles of road that were abandoned exceeded additions. No new mileage was built in the country after 1927—the start of a relentless trend that would erase most of the industry before World War II.

The exuberance driving electric railway promoters elsewhere didn't reach Minnesota until the interurban building boom had begun to wane. As a result there were only three electric interurbans built in Minnesota, besides the extensive network of the Twin City Rapid Transit Company (TCRT). These were the St. Paul Southern, The Minneapolis Anoka and Cuyuna Range, which had ambitions to reach the Iron Range but only got as far from Minneapolis as Anoka, and the Mesaba Railway, which operated between



*Promoters built the St. Paul Southern, and great expectations were in the air on November 17, 1914, when crowds turned out in Hastings to hear speeches and celebrate the arrival of the first car. There was much talk of building to Red Wing, Lake City, Rochester, and beyond. The *Hastings Gazette* echoed this optimism, but it also noted the large number of automobiles in town. Unfortunately, no one saw the connection. The Southern was a house of cards. It was built entirely on credit and never earned enough to cover operating expenses, much less pay off its debt. Four years after this celebration, it was bankrupt, and ten years after that it would be gone. Photo by Randolph. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*



Car 52 was one of four interurbans built by the Niles Car Company of Niles, Ohio, at a cost of \$8,490 and delivered to the Southern in 1914. The cars were all wood construction with a wood under-frame—unusual in that steel cars were coming into general use. Car 52 was 51 feet long and weighed 29 tons. It could accommodate 54 passengers—moving them along at a top speed of 55 miles per hour. This photo was taken in the Inver Grove yard sometime before 1920. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.

Hibbing and Gilbert. Three other lines—The Minneapolis St. Paul Rochester and Dubuque Electric Traction Company, which built as far as Northfield and later became the Minneapolis Northfield and Southern; the Electric Short Line, which ran from Minneapolis to Gluek via Hutchinson; and the Minnesota Northwestern, which connected Thief River Falls with Goodrich—were built to interurban standards, but they all used self-propelled gas-electric equipment.

Great Expectations

Understandably, a few skeptics probably scratched their heads back in August 1911 when St. Paul newspapers carried reports of a proposed electric interurban from St. Paul to Rochester. After all, another venture, the Minneapolis St. Paul Rochester and Dubuque Electric Traction Company (aka the Dan Patch Line) had only recently begun service from Minneapolis (54th and Nicollet and a connection with TCRT's Nicollet Avenue line) to Northfield and planned to build on to Rochester. And there were other grand plans and proposals to build more inter-

urban railways in southern Minnesota—none of which ever came to pass. Even so, there were still communities without rail service and others located on branch lines with infrequent or irregular service, or poor connections with the Twin Cities. The need for improved transportation was

there. The Chicago and North Western and the Chicago Great Western served Rochester, but neither offered a fast, direct route to Minneapolis and St. Paul. The Mayo Clinic wanted better rail service to the Twin Cities as did intermediate communities, Cannon Falls among them.

The Southern's promoters incorporated in Delaware in 1913 and issued construction specifications for the building and equipping of an electric railway that would

Extend from a point in the City of So. St. Paul (where connection will be made with the end of the Inver Grove line of the Twin City Rapid Transit Company) to respective points in the business center of Rochester, Minnesota and of Red Wing, Minnesota, passing through a number of intervening communities, and to such other points as shall be mutually agreed on by the Railway Company and the Construction Company within the one hundred and twenty-five miles (125) miles specified in contract attached hereto.

The line would have a maximum grade of 2.5%, use 70 lb rail set on white oak ties in gravel ballast. Six electric substations along the route would take high voltage alternating current from the River Falls Power Company and convert it to 600-volt direct current for delivery to the trolley contact wires. There would be a private telephone system for dispatching.



In 1915 one of the first St. Paul Southern cars to operate through downtown St. Paul is displayed on Robert Street between Fifth and Sixth. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.



The Southern's electric substation at Pine Bend took alternating current at 33,000 volts, purchased from the River Falls Power Company, a predecessor of NSP, and converted it to 600-volt direct current. Inside the substation was a device called a rotary converter, a large alternating current electric motor powering a direct current generator that fed the DC power to the overhead trolley wire. There were two substation operators. The first, or day, shift operator resided in Hastings. The second, night, shift operator lived in a company-owned house adjoining the substation building. The Southern's only work car rests outside the substation. It was used to haul materials and supplies and plow snow. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.

Eighteen passenger cars, four express cars, and two electric locomotives were to be acquired. Passenger cars would have a top speed of 60 miles per hour. There were to be three carbarns. Two, one at each end of the line, in Inver Grove and Rochester, were described as terminal carbarns. The third, to be built at an unspecified location, would be a general shop and office building for heavy repairs and used as a crew base. The company would make its headquarters in the Pioneer Building in St. Paul.

When it opened on November 17, 1914, the St. Paul Southern had completed only 17.54 miles of track from a connection with the Twin City Rapid Transit Company's South St. Paul-Inver Grove line at Concord and Linden Street to a wye at 2nd and Tyler streets in downtown Hastings. There were a few scattered farms along the line but little development except near Inver Grove and Hastings. From Inver Grove the single-track line climbed out of the Mississippi River valley roughly paralleling the Chicago Great Western and Rock Island railroads. Cutting across country through farmland, it met and then ran alongside

what became Minnesota Highway 52. Following a generally south-southeastward direction it encountered three rural stops: Birch Lake, Ryan, and Highland, which were simple three-sided open shelters. Taking a sharp turn to the east at Pine Bend it again cut across country to a point called Brown's Crossing where it

encountered and crossed the main highway running toward the abandoned town site of Nininger. From Brown's Crossing it continued east passing the unsheltered Spring Lake stop, across an impressive cut and fill near Jacob's Road, and then on to Wilson. From Wilson it left the side of the road and ran through open country descending into Hastings on a 2.5% grade called Featherstone Hill. Once in town the line ran down 5th Street to Vermillion Street, then along 2nd Street to the wye at 2nd and Tyler.

Four interurban cars were delivered by the Niles Car Company of Niles, Ohio, in 1914 at a cost of \$8,490.00 each (1914 prices). Two were combination baggage-passenger cars and two were passenger cars. Interestingly, at a time when most electric railways were buying steel cars or cars with steel under frames (for safety and durability), these four were all wood—a type of construction the Twin City Rapid Transit Company abandoned in 1905. The cars were 51 feet long, weighed 59,000 pounds, and came with four 70 horsepower motors capable of a top speed of 55 miles per hour. The baggage-passenger cars could seat 48 persons, the passenger cars 54. Painted a deep orange, they were classic interurbans with arched windows and clerestory roofs.

The company leased space for a depot and offices in a building at 315 East 2nd Street in downtown Hastings. It built an



A Southern car trundles down Second Street West in Hastings on the first leg of its trip to downtown St. Paul. The streets are unpaved and only five automobiles are visible in this 1915–1918 postcard view. Postcard courtesy of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.



The St. Paul Southern built a track connection to the Twin City Rapid Transit Company's St. Paul-Inver Grove Line at Concord and Linden in South St. Paul. From there an operating agreement permitted the Southern to use TCRT's line into downtown St. Paul where it followed a loop route from Robert Street to 8th Street, to Wabasha Street, to 5th Street, then back to Robert Street. Here, in the mid 1920s, an outbound St. Paul Southern car crosses 3rd Street (today's Kellogg Boulevard) approaching the Robert Street Bridge. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.

electric substation building and a small house for the substation operator at Pine Bend. A single stall carhouse was constructed at Faulkner Avenue and Francis Street in Inver Grove. It never built a main repair shop. Instead, it contracted all of its mechanical work to Twin City Rapid Transit Company's Snelling Shops.

Although it eventually obtained a favorable agreement with TCRT to use its tracks to enter St. Paul, it wasn't able to start through service until August 22, 1915. Until then, passengers had to transfer at Linden Avenue in Inver Grove—an arrangement hardly conducive to build-

ing ridership. Complicating matters, the River Falls Power Company was late in hooking up its high-tension line. Once it was connected, cars still had trouble getting in and out of Hastings because of low voltage. Another substation was needed but never built.

By the end of 1914 promoters had spent \$611,000, all of it borrowed money, to build and equip the Southern and would need to raise many thousands more to complete the line. It was also pressuring its creditors to take stock instead of cash to shore up its shaky treasury, a sure sign of troubles. Still, Hastings put on a huge

civic celebration on November 17 to welcome the first car. Newspapers reported that among the guests were Governor Adolph O. Eberhart and Senator Albert Schaller. The Hastings mayor decreed a half-day holiday and the business community responded with flags and bunting. A Community Club concert featured vocal solos and piano numbers by local talent, and the Women's Club provided a barbeque luncheon where, reportedly, nine quarters of beef, 1,500 pounds of dressed meat, 500 pounds of wiener-wurst, a thousand loaves of bread, hundreds of gallons of coffee, and buttermilk



A receivers certificate is basically an unsecured loan and the Southern—in bankruptcy—was selling them to stay afloat. This certificate was issued specifically to pay for wheels for the cars and coal for the winter of 1926-27. It was a sure sign of desperation. Courtesy of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.

from the local creamery were consumed. Of course there was speechmaking and “the movers in the new enterprise were congratulated upon their great success in completing the first section of the road, with best wishes for its final completion to the Iowa line.”

Less significant at the time but far more prescient than the event itself was a sidebar in the newspaper remarking on the swarms of automobiles in town, brought in, supposedly, to drive guests

around town—of course, no one realized, or dared admit if they did, how ironic this was, and what it meant for the Southern’s future.

Disappointment

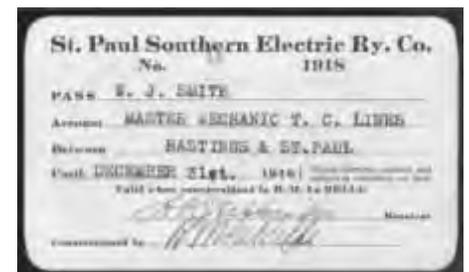
When through service began on the Southern, schedules called for hourly departures from downtown St. Paul and Hastings. The first and last cars from Hastings were at 6:15 AM and 10:15 PM and from downtown St. Paul at 5:40 AM and 11:10 PM with cars consuming approximately 90 minutes to cover the 24.85 miles from downtown St. Paul to Hastings at a scheduled speed of 18 miles per hour, hardly a high-speed performance. Cars could manage upward of 35 or 40 mph on their own private right-of-way but were slowed considerably once they entered TCRT tracks at Linden and Concord and fell into line with city cars making local stops on Concord and Robert streets all the way downtown. Arriving there they looped through the business district via Eighth Street, Wabasha Street, Fifth Street and back to Robert Street. The railroad didn’t use a downtown depot except for a short time when it leased space in a building at 109 East Eighth Street to handle small items of freight and express. That depot along with the job of freight agent were abolished during 1917 as the road’s finances deteriorated. At the same time its downtown routing was shortened to provide more recovery time in the schedule. That route was via Third Street, Sibley, Fifth Street, and then back to Robert Street.

Between Inver Grove and Hastings the timetable showed scheduled stops at Birch Lake, Ryan, Highland, Pine Bend, Brown’s Crossing, Tyner, Spring Lake, and Wilson. However, flag stops would be made anywhere, mainly to accommodate farmers whose land the interurban passed through.

Ridership looked encouraging, the line doing a modest commuter business between St. Paul and Hastings. As the Dakota county seat, Hastings also attracted business people and lawyers from St. Paul and South St. Paul on county government business. Traveling salesmen used it to call on Hastings merchants. It was also a popular and convenient way

to go to St. Paul on shopping trips, medical appointments, or to visit friends and relatives. For youngsters living on nearby farms it was the “school bus” that took them to classes in Hastings. Afternoon dismissals occurred just before a car left town and there are many stories of kids chasing the cars up Vermillion Street after school let out rather than waiting an hour for the next one to leave town. Fishermen from St. Paul used the cars to reach Spring Lake, a popular recreation spot on the Mississippi River.

Casual riders, commuters, traveling salesmen, students, and fishermen, however, would never provide enough revenue, much less a profit. Nor was there any carload freight traffic. The line had a connection with the Chicago Great Western at Inver Grove, but there were no on-line shippers. And even if there were, the Southern never owned a locomotive that could haul a train of freight cars. Mail and express business was also light. For any hope of success the Southern had to reach Rochester and the intermediate towns. It continued work on the line south of Hastings. By the end of 1915 grading was completed on another twenty-three miles to White Rock. The *Electric Railway Journal*, an industry trade publication, and local newspapers noted in October 1915 that the company was pushing closer to Zumbrota and that discussions were underway with the Chicago Great Western to lease and electrify twenty-five miles of its track from Zumbrota to



As a courtesy, railroads often issued passes to important officials of other railroads or companies with which they did business. This pass was issued to W. J. Smith, Master Mechanic for the Twin City Rapid Transit Co. The Southern relied on TCRT to maintain its passenger cars and Smith headed up its maintenance operations at the Snelling Shops. Pass courtesy of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.

Rochester. Failing that, management told the press it would finish grading by May 1916 and have the entire line in service by December.

It never did.

The Southern was in trouble. It was heavily mortgaged, and high interest rates on its debt made it impossible for the road to show a profit. Its first annual report detailing operations from November 17, 1914, to December 31, 1915, showed a gross income after operating expenses of only \$1,742. Adding interest on the debt produced a net loss of \$8,321. A warning of further troubles came in a letter to stockholders from President A. Hirschman dated January 25, 1916. Enclosing a copy of the treasurer's report he commented that the company spent \$18,712.61 for "work incidental to organization which was paid out of operating income," and goes on to ask for help.

We need your help to raise this money to pay off all our bills by the sale of some of the first mortgage bonds which we have on hand and ask if any of you can help the company along by purchasing some of the bonds.

Business improved somewhat during 1916, the company reporting an increase in revenues of \$6,022.98. That, however, was eaten up by interest charges resulting in a net loss of \$7,804.73, which, when added to losses already on the books, produced a cumulative loss of \$23,628.45 since the start of operations.

It was getting worse.

At the December 12, 1916, board meeting it was reported the company owed Twin City Rapid Transit Company \$1,315.42 for maintenance work on its interurban cars. The Southern's secretary was directed to pay \$500 on the account with the balance to follow later. At the January 23, 1917, board meeting the chairman was directed to appoint an auditing committee and pay no bills unless approved by three of the committee members. It also acted to abolish the positions of general manager and claims agent, their work to be done presumably by the company president and its legal counsel, respectively. At the March 14, 1917, meeting the treasurer reported that payroll was due the next day and that the amount due was \$200 more than the

Fighting Snow



Southern work motor



Smashing Snow



Aftermath

Minnesota blizzards typically overwhelmed the Southern, and a big storm usually brought all operations to a halt. Its sole piece of work equipment (top) was rebuilt from a passenger car destroyed in a 1917 fire. It could haul supplies and handle summertime chores, but it lacked the weight and power to punch through snowdrifts. Occasionally, a passenger car was called out for snow duty (middle). Its front windows had to be boarded up to keep the compacted snow and ice from crashing into the motorman's compartment.

The worst area on the line after a snowfall was between Pine Bend and Hastings. A deep cut near what is now Chamberlain's Pony Farm was notorious for drifting (bottom). One especially bad storm buried a car for three weeks. The motorman and conductor had to dig steps in the snow-filled cut so they could scale the drifts and reach safety at a nearby farm. All photos courtesy of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.

funds on hand in the treasury.

Nor was nature cooperating. The company owned no work equipment, specifically a snowplow. Snowstorms regularly closed the line, sometimes for days at a time. Cars, unable to smash through drifts because of the low line voltage, stalled, becoming stranded until section crews could dig them out by hand. Even the solution to the snowplow problem came as the result of a disaster. An electrical fire destroyed interurban car #1, a combination baggage-passenger car, in early 1917. Though short on funds the company decided to salvage the trucks and motors from the #1 and use them in a combination work motor-snowplow, which TCRT subsequently built for the Southern at the Snelling Shops.

Receivership

Late in 1917 the Board was formally advised by Northwestern Trust Company that it was in default on its first mortgage bonds and that the bondholders were initiating foreclosure proceedings. The St. Paul Southern was placed in receivership in 1918, and for a time it appeared the road might pull itself together and successfully restructure. Hopeful of improved economic conditions after World War I, the receiver borrowed additional funds and plans were announced to go forward with the Rochester extension. The Southern tried to build business by running extra cars from St. Paul for special events in Hastings. It also offered early morning runs for fishermen to Spring Lake. The response was very disappointing. All thought of an extension to Rochester had to be given up. The hoped-for economic improvements after the war did not materialize and the country entered a business recession. By 1923 paved roads were bringing more and more bus, auto, and truck competition. In the December 21, 1923, issue of the *Hastings Gazette*, the receiver, E. E. Tuttle, stated that continued operation of the line was in jeopardy. Blaming bus and auto competition he reported a loss of \$4,855.79 in revenues for August, September, October, and November of 1923 compared to the same months in 1922. The same *Gazette* commented that:

Electric cars do not run well on losses; nor do they run long. It takes patronage, liberal and consistent, the year round to assure service of this kind to the public. . . . The situation has resolved itself into a question of what kind of transportation and service is desired by residents of the communities through which the trolley line operates. . . . Can Hastings afford to lose the service offered by the electric line? And if it does can any other method of transportation adequately care for the traffic that effects (sic) in so vital a manner, the welfare of this city?

That question would have its answer shortly.

The Southern kept trying. The *St. Paul Dispatch* on February 8, 1924, carried a story of a meeting between St. Paul business leaders and St. Paul Southern officials who appealed for their help in securing more traffic for the line. It proposed building a freight and express terminal in St. Paul as a way to attract additional business. It isn't known if the railway was seeking financial assistance for the project. While the St. Paul delegation expressed support and interest, nothing ever came of it.

In a last ditch effort in February 1926 the company petitioned the Minnesota Railroad and Warehouse Commission to restrict or eliminate the motorbus competition that was taking away its business. Every business owner in Hastings signed the petition along with a thousand or more of its citizens. The Railroad and Warehouse Commission declined to take any action.

The line had other patrons, but it isn't known if they could be persuaded to sign petitions because their type of business had nothing whatsoever to do with transportation and was discouraged by the Southern. The railroad stored a car overnight on a siding in Inver Grove to position it for a morning run. Local swains took notice and determined it a perfect accommodation for plying young ladies with cigarettes and bathtub gin. The *St. Paul Dispatch* of February 23, 1924, advised its readers that neighbors and railroad officials were scandalized at the goings on and resolved to put a stop to these "petting parties." The car was secured with locks.

Abandonment

The Southern's final public timetable, published on May 28, 1928, listed five round trips on weekdays, six on Saturday and Sunday. By then it was hopeless. Euthanasia came on July 31, 1928. Out of money, the line and its rolling stock and track were so deteriorated that continued operation was impossible. Cars lurched and shuddered as they struggled up the hill out of Hastings. The high-speed electric line of sixteen years before was reduced to a rolling, swaying pile of junk.

Four years later on January 26, 1932, a Southern car body, left by the scrappers, was rescued from the weeds alongside Concord Street in Inver Grove and hauled aboard a trailer for one last run. The car would become a diner and sit on St. Paul's Marshall Avenue near Snelling for another thirty years until it finally turned to dust. But that day the ghosts aboard the car must have thought they were still fighting the grade up Featherstone Hill because a newspaper reporter witnessing the scene for the *St. Paul Dispatch* wrote:

A St. Paul moving concern equipped with a big trailer slung the old electric car aboard and started hauling it to St. Paul. . . . Reaching the slight grade coming north to Grand Avenue about 11 AM, the truck was unable to keep the heavy load in motion. It stalled and blocked traffic nearly half an hour while aid was given. A live stock trucker backed his big truck and coupled on tandem fashion with a heavy chain. With another truck pushing from the rear the three got the old streetcar over the hump and it continued on its way with one truck drawing it along.

Legacy

The St. Paul Southern left only a trail of disappointments, and after eighty years it's easy to conclude—with hindsight—that it was irrelevant from the beginning and should have never been built at all. That, however, ignores that in 1910–12 there were few automobiles in the Twin Cities and fewer elsewhere in Minnesota. Roads between cities and towns were called "improved" if graveled. Passenger train ridership was increasing every year and the railroads were making large investments in their passenger train busi-

ness—buying new cars, locomotives, and building new depots. The Great Northern opened its new passenger station in Minneapolis in 1914, the same year the St. Paul Southern began service. New York’s Grand Central Terminal opened in 1913 and Penn Station in New York opened just a few years before. Planning for a new union depot in St. Paul was getting underway. Responding to increasing demand, the Twin City Rapid Transit Com-

pany was expanding its system in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Banks and other large investors saw railroads as solid, safe investments and were prepared to back them. Electric interurbans demanded closer scrutiny, but they still attracted capital. There was reason to be optimistic. No one could foresee what the automobile and improved highways would do to American travel habits.

Regardless, the Southern had dif-

ficulty attracting capital and paid a premium for the funds it was able to secure. Most of its backers were from St. Paul, Hastings, or communities between Hastings and Rochester. Civic “boosterism” undoubtedly influenced much support for the line. Had the Southern been built in 1904–05 and completed to Rochester, there might have been enough traffic to sustain it for a time, at least long enough for it to make some money for its

“Rumors were circulating that the Southern was about to close. . . .”

A Memory of the Southern

This is a business history of the St. Paul Southern, but what about the people who built the railway and tried to make it a success? Sadly, very little is known about them, and their personal stories are largely forgotten. Mostly they are just names on documents or in newspaper stories. The Southern ceased operations in 1928, seventy-six years ago—long before there was any interest in documenting and preserving the history of electric railways. That along with its dismal financial record and short life, going from opening celebration to abandonment in just fourteen years, made it a forgettable venture.

That was certainly true for its 900 shareholders, mostly small business people or farmers in Minnesota. Many of the latter received stock in exchange for the land they sold to the company for its right-of-way. Then there were its officers and directors, also shareholders. They were in 1917: Irving Todd Jr. (President), Otto Ackerman (Vice President), R. M. LaBelle (Secretary-Treasurer, General Superintendent and Purchasing Agent), C. P. Kucler (Auditor), A. R. Waldrige (General Manager), Louis Hoffman (Electrical Engineer and Master Mechanic), P. E. Sievert (Chief Engineer-Power Station), and Carl Erickson (Engineer-Maintenance of Way). Directors included Irving Todd Jr., Otto Ackerman, E. E. Tuttle, T. A. Brown, F. W. Finch, (all of Hastings), F. B. Seager (Cannon Falls), T. H. Bunn (Pine Island), and A. Hirschmann (St. Paul). Finally, there were its employees. Never more than fifteen to twenty over the years, they were the motormen and conductors, car repair workers, track hands, office workers, and agents.

Mary Blanche Lovejoy of Hastings remembered the Southern in a 1976 reminiscence for a Hastings newspaper. Her father, Tyler Lovejoy, was a motorman for the Southern.

My dad, Tyler P. Lovejoy, began working for the streetcar

line as a motorman. He also worked as a conductor if two motormen were scheduled for a run.

The men worked a different schedule every other day. The long day began at 6:20 AM and ran until 12:30 PM or thereabouts, and then they came home for awhile and went back about 6 PM for the evening run, and the next day worked from 11 AM to 7 PM.

I remember that dad went to St. Paul for a physical with the Twin City Lines physician before he could go to work. He passed it, of course. In fact, I remember few times that he ever complained of anything in his long life. He missed no time from work during the 10 years he worked for the Southern. And during the flu epidemic of 1918 worked from 6:20 AM until 1:30 AM.

Most working people were in the same boat. The families had roofs over their heads, heat to keep warm, plenty of food and warm, if not fancy, clothes. Most of us finished high school and many managed advanced schooling on the salary of \$125 a month. . . .

The line was single track, except at the sub-station at Pine Bend where it was double so the cars could pass each other. There was also a small house at Pine Bend where the night man and his family lived. My cousin, Hank Lovejoy was night man at one time, and we went out to spend Christmas day by streetcar. Ray Lawrence, W. A. Hathaway, and Pete Sievert were some of the sub-station men.

The night man turned on the power for the line at 6:20 AM and worked until the day man came out from Hastings on the first run. He worked until 4:30 PM or so and then the night man took over again until the last car returned to Hastings. He then turned off the power for the night.

One accident that I recall was when dad was motorman. He was coming from Inver Grove toward the sub-station on

the single track. He said that he could tell he wasn't getting the amount of power he should have had, so he called his conductor up front to be sure they had orders to proceed. He was going slowly when around a bend the work car was coming straight at him on the single. He was able to stop the car, and just before they met head on, he had time to put the car in reverse and step off the front end. The car traveled backwards about a mile before the conductor could stop it. The front end of the car was smashed in, they thought that dad was killed in the accident, and he did turn his ankle, but that was all.

One of the advantages of working for the Southern was a family pass over the Southern line. We paid five cents over the



Irving Todd Jr. (right) stands proudly in front of a Southern inter-urban car with an unidentified man and woman. Todd was president of the Southern from 1917 until the early 1920s. The car is on 2nd Street near the wye at 2nd and Tyler. To the right another Southern car can be seen standing on Tyler Street in front of the Milwaukee Road passenger station. This undated photo was taken sometime between 1917 and 1920. The Milwaukee Road passenger station survives in 2006. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.

Twin Cities lines. I think the fare was 50 cents.

It was a beautiful ride through the countryside. . . I wasn't the only one who traveled the Southern during school days . . . many of the country kids came to high school by streetcar. And many Hastings students went to college in both St. Paul and Minneapolis by streetcar.

Rumors were circulating that the Southern was about to close, and men joked about the crab grass being the only thing that kept the rails on the ties, little repair work was done.

July 31, 1928, was the last day they ran. The men were told when they came in from their runs that they were through.

When the streetcar operation ended, the rolling stock was sold at public auction on the north steps of the courthouse with Conrad Kuechler as auctioneer. Earl Gaus attended the auction and recalls that everything was purchased for much less than it was worth by Paper Calmenson Co. of St. Paul.



Southern motormen and conductors were all spit and polish and proud of their work. Here, Tyler Lovejoy (right) is seen with conductor, Ray Spellman, alongside their car, which is standing on the wye at Tyler Street. The Milwaukee Road depot is out of view on the right. In this mid 1920s view, Hastings' streets are paved and the automobile on the left can travel all the way to downtown St. Paul on improved highways. Sadly, the Southern's days were numbered. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.

Earl tells me that he slept at the sub-station and Ed Lidstrom ran over the tracks in a handcar at night to prevent thievery, until they were able to tear up the tracks.

Source: The Mississippi Valley Star, February 25, 1976.



Conductor Ed Lidstrom (left) and motorman William Ryan stand in front of their charge at the Tyler Street wye while a lone passenger peers at the camera.

investors. A carload freight business and favorable interchange arrangements with connecting roads in St. Paul would have made a difference. That, however, would have required a direct entry to St. Paul on private right-of-way, adding more construction expense and debt, and even then the line would have had a very difficult time with motorized competition. Its passenger service would have vanished early, and whether it could have sustained itself as a short line freight hauler is doubtful. What is known is that as an interurban electric railway competing with paved roads, automobiles, trucks, and buses, it had no future. Nationally, by 1928 interurbans on average were returning a mere 0.9 percent on investment, and 914 miles of line were up for abandonment—the St. Paul Southern's 17.8 miles among them. Like other electric interurbans it was overtaken, overwhelmed, and made obsolete by internal combustion technology. Its story was predictable and the ending inevitable.

Remnants

When the Southern ceased operations, the Twin City Rapid Transit Company extended its South St. Paul streetcar line over former Southern tracks from Concord and Linden Street in South St. Paul to Faulkner and Francis in Inver Grove. This extension didn't bring in enough business. It was abandoned in 1933.

Portions of the Southern's right-of-way could be seen into the late 1940s and early '50s until much of it was obliterated by highway construction. The former substation building at Pine Bend was razed for industrial development sometime in the middle of the 1950s. Tracks in Hastings' streets were removed as part of a World War II scrap metal drive. Today, a sharp eye can still spot short sections of the right-of-way alongside Concord Street in Inver Grove. A walking path at the west end of Fifth Street is all that remains of the line in Hastings.

Sources

The St. Paul Southern is an elusive subject. Its physical presence has been wiped away by highway improvements, housing projects, and the weathering effects of nature. Its business records,

those that survive, are scattered. The people who worked for the Southern and those who rode its big interurban cars are gone. Mostly, the Southern went unnoticed. There were few electric railway enthusiasts in the 1920s. Streetcars and interurbans were commonplace and unremarkable, and people outside the electric railway industry generally ignored them. If anything, they were considered old fashioned.

That changed in the 1930s as the industry went into decline and large systems became bankrupt and were abandoned. By the 1940s and early '50s the few operations that remained were the subjects of intense interest. People were pointing their cameras at streetcars and interurbans. Rail enthusiasts chartered aging cars for one last ride before a system shut down or switched to buses. Electric railway museums were established and preservationists worked to save the few remaining examples of rolling stock. In 1960 Stanford University Press published the *Electric Interurban Railways in America* the first comprehensive history of the interurban electric railway industry by two highly regarded transportation economists and historians, George W. Hilton and John F. Due.

All of this came much too late for the St. Paul Southern. Anything that could be turned into cash was sold for scrap. The company's business records were destroyed or dispersed. A few came into the possession of employees who kept them as personal mementoes. Others found their way to private collectors of railroad memorabilia. Over time some of this material has found its way to historical societies and museums.

Primary sources for this article were found at the Dakota County Historical Society, which maintains an excellent collection of newspaper stories, photographs, and business records—the latter includes correspondence, employee notices and bulletins, minutes of meetings, and financial records.

Following his death, the family of Eugene Corby, a former Twin City Rapid Transit Company employee and an avid collector of electric railway memorabilia, donated considerable material on the St. Paul Southern to the Minnesota Streetcar

Museum, which made it available to the author. The Minnesota Historical Society also has a limited amount of material on the Southern in its collections. *The Electric Railway Journal*, an industry trade publication from the middle of the 1890s through the early 1930s, has a few brief articles on the Southern. The James J. Hill Reference Library in St. Paul has a complete collection of the *Electric Railway Journal*, but access to it is generally limited to researchers and historians because of the age and condition of the volumes.

Secondary sources specific to the Southern include *Interurbans Special No. 14, Electric Railways of Minneapolis & St. Paul* by Ira Swett published by Interurbans Press in 1953. This short book is primarily a history of the Twin City Rapid Transit Company, but it also has a brief treatment of the Southern. It has been out of print for many years and copies are difficult to locate. The Minnesota Historical Society has a copy.

The best and most detailed account of the Southern is in the *Electric Railways of Minnesota* by Russell Olson, published by the Minnesota Transportation Museum in 1976. It, too, is out of print, but copies can be located in libraries and at the Minnesota Historical Society or purchased on the Internet or in used bookstores. In the opinion of this writer the best overall business history of the electric interurban is Hilton and Due's *Electric Interurban Railways in America*, recently republished in paperback from Stanford University Press.

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This headstone in Oakland Cemetery marks the final resting places of railroad switchman Charles Luth and his wife, Pauline. For more on how Charlie Luth died in St. Paul's labor violence of 1894, see Gregory Proferl's article beginning on page 14. Photograph by Maureen McGinn.

R.C.H.S.
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