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It was possible and someone actually did it— a ride by electric traction from New York to Chicago. Introduction by H. Roger Grant

Travel account edited by H. Roger Grant

"Interurban fever" once infected America's transportation builders. Traction mileage exploded after the industry's debut during the depression years of the mid-18.90s, Nearly one thousand miles of track were operating in 1897; by 1905, there were 8,000. In 1915, the country's interurban network peaked at slightly over 15,000 mites. Although Ohio and Indiana were the heartland of the interurbans, lines could be found connecting such remote communities as Sheridan and Monarch, Wyoming and Warren and Bisbee, Arizona.

During the industry's formative period, most companies were small operations, likely less than fifty mites long. Even during the heyday of the interurban, few traction giants emerged, and truly integrated regional systems were exceptional

Yet, before the motor era destroyed the interurban, its future seemed bright. Indeed, electric tmes quickly laced large sections of the country, especially New England and the Old Northwest. By the first decade of the twentieth century, some traction companies had established popular and profitable through inter-line service. For excrnples six "limited" cars daily uthisked tratjelers the 162 miles between Dayton and Toledo over the trackage of the Dayton & Troy, Western Ohio, and Toledo Urban & Interurban roads, much to the chagrin of competing steam carriers.

One resourceful individual, d. S. Moulton, an assistant attorney for the Interborough Rapid Transit Company of New York City, demonstrated the growing maturity of the interurban. In an August 1909 letter to Henry W. Blake, editor of the ELECTRIC RAILWAY JOURNAL (a copy of which IS on deposit in the American History Research Center Of The University of Akron) , traveler Moulton immodestly claims to have been the first to use traction to journey most of the way from New York City to Chccago. But this marvelous document holds greater significance; it graphically reveals the overall scope of America's electric railway construction. While Moulton's motives for publicizing his travels are not known, it is easy to speculate about them. In writing to a prominent and presumably influential industry spokesman, Moulton probably sought to underscore the obvtous possibilities of longdistance electric-powered transportation\_ And in the same vein, he likely ujanted to propose that extensive

The Fonda, Johnstown & Gloversville (1894-1938) not only linked its namesake communities but ran to neighboring Amsterday and Schenectady as well.

Viewed in Gloversville, the "Schenectady

Limited" ot the FJ&G was a heavy St, Louis wooden interurban car, one that

J. S. Moulton likely rode between Schenectady and Amsterdam in August 1909.

traction treks could be greatly facilitated if better connections were made at junctions and w if carriers WOUld offer complete information regarding times and costs to potentia[ patrons. Finally, Moulton penned to his description of this intriguing trip a complete itinerary, including roads, fares, and schedtiles:

far as I am able to learn from many inquiries this is the first trip made from New York to Chicago over electric lines for so large a part of the way. To be exact, the trip started from Hudson, New York, because the electric street railway service from New York City extends at present only as far as Tarrytown and the time lost in going to that town and then taking a train of the New York Central & Hudson River Railroad to Hudson would add nothing of value to the journey.

"Leaving New York City at 12:30 a.m. by the New York Central road, I arrived at Hudson at 4:47 a.m., which gave me a full hour before taking the car of the Albany & Hudson Traction Company at 6 0'clock. I had breakfast at Electric Park on the line of this road and shortly after leaving there A, p. Deeds, general freight and passenger agent of 73

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The Utica & Mohawk Valley Railway (1903-1933), which operated a doubletrack Jine between Rome, Utica, and Little Falls, used the above wooden equipment until 1916 when heavy steel cars entered service.

Car 502 Of the Oneida Railway iS stopped at the road's first station west of Utica, Clark ts Mills, New York. In 1907 the parent New York Centra/ electrified fortynine miles of the West Shore Railroad between Syracuse and Utica. This electric operation lasted until 1990.

the company, joined me and traveled as far as Albany. T took there the car of the Schenectady Railway at 8 a.m. and arrived at. Schenectady, a distance of 16 miles, at 8:45. At 9 0'clock I took the car of the Fonda, Johnstown & Gloversville Railroad for Amsterdam. Arriving at Amsterdam at 9:41 a.m., it is possible to go to Fonda by electric line, but the distance gained ig so small that I took the New York Central road to Little Falls, a distance of 39 miles between Amsterdam and Little Falls, Leaving Little Falls at 12:30 p.m. on the Utica & Mohawk Valley Railway, the entire route of 23 miles to Utica was a trip that was made beautiful by the scenery. This trip was made in an hour. At 2:05 p,m, I took the limited car for Syracuse, a distance of 49 miles, which we traveled in one hour and 28 minutes. The country is fully as interesting as that between Little Falls and Utica. At 4:30 p.m. I took the car of the Auburn & Syracuse Electric Railroad for Auburn, 26 miles away, and a wait of 30 minutes gave me time for supper and to see a little of the city,

'I left Auburn at 6:30 p.m., taking the Auburn & Northern road and the Rochester, Syracuse & Eastern Railroad, by way of Port Byron for Rochester, a distance of 66 miles. The train was on time at Rochester and, getting there at 9:45 p.m., I found T had traveled 387 miles, of which 233 miles were on electric roads. I was not fatigued in the least and, after going to the hotel, went out and walked about the city for an hour. Remaining at Rochester all nigKt, T started at 9:50 0'clock the next morning, taking a local

View of Trolley Car at Clark Mills,

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car to the city line, where the car of the Buffalo, Lockport & Rochester Railway started for Lockport at 10:20 a.m. J. M. Campbell, general manager of this road, met me at the Rochester end of the line and went with me to Lockport, a distance of 56 miles, and made my ride very enjoyable by explaining the signal system and the interesting points of the country through which we passed. Riding in the motorman's cab gives a much better view of the country. I arrived at Lockport at 12:18 p.m. within a few steps of the car of the International Railway, which leaves there at 12:20 p.m. for Buffalo, 25 miles distant. I reached the latter city at 1:25 p.m. It was remarkable to find that the electric lines, with their long runs and many stops in the different cities and villages, made almost exact schedule time. At Buffalo I called on J. C. Calisch, of the Buffalo Lake Erie Traction Company. Mr. Calisch said he was glad to meet a man brave enough to undertake so unique a trip. He was wrong in suggesting that bravery was needed, because the trip affords pleasure all the time. At Buffalo T went through the city on a local car to the city line, now called Lackawanna City, where the Buffalo & Lake Erie Traction Company has its terminal. In this trip of 88 miles on the lines of this road to Erie, Pennsylvania, the cars pass through a great grape belt. At Fredonia, on this line, I had to wait a few minutes. After a beautiful ride of six hours, I reached Erie at 9 where I remained all night, having covered that day 169 miles entirely on electric roads,

'At 7 0'clock the following morning I started over the road of the Conneaut & Erie Traction Company for Conneaut, a distance of 33 miles, arriving there at 8:55 a.m. A wait of 30 minutes gave me time to set back my watch one hour, as I was traveling then on western time. Leaving Conneaut at 9:30. a.m. on the Pennsylvania & Ohio Railway, I traveled to Ashtabula and there took a car of the Cleveland, Painesville & Eastern Railroad via Painesville, for Cleveland. The distance from Conneaut to Cleveland is 73 miles, Cleveland was reached at 12:50 p.m. and after lunch I left at 1:30 p.m. on a limited car of the Lake Shore Electric Railway for Toledo, a distance of 120 miles, via Sandusky, which was made in four hours and 20 minutes without change, After supper at Toledo, I went to the terminal of the Ohio Electric Railway and took the 8 p.m. car of that company for Fort Wayne, Indiana, via Lima,

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Ohio. As I did not leave Toledo until so late, I did not stay on the car until Fort Wayne was reached, but thought it better to stop at Lima, where I arrived at 10:55 p.m. 'On the following morning . took the 10:15 a.m. (Ohio Electric) ear . a distance of 60 miles to Fort Wayne, which was reached at 12:10 p.m. At Van Wert, Ohio, the Manhattan limited of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which parallels the electric line at this point, came up, but we passed the steam train and kept ahead of it, At Fort Wayne 1 had dinner. . . . After supper (I) took one of the cars of the Fort Wayne Wabash Valley Road to Wabash . I remained at Wabash that night and started for Warsaw at 8:55 a.m. on the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago & St, Louig ('Big Four') steam road. After traveling a distance of 33 miles between these points T reached Warsaw at 11:36 a.m., 30 minutes late. By this fall the road will be from Fort Wayne to Peru, Indiana, on the Fort Wayne & Wabash Valley Traction Company road and thence to Warsaw by electric line, as the road now under construction will make the electric line route complete at that point, and therefore complete in the west.

"I left Warsaw at 1:30 p.m. for South Bend, Indiana, over the lines of the Winona Interurban Railway and the Chicago, South Bend & Northern Indiana Railway, reaching South Bend at 3:40 p.m. I remained there until 5:30 p.m. taking a limited car on the Chicago, Lake Shore & South Bend Railway for Chicago, a distance of 90 miles, passing through the industrial settlements of Michigan City, Gary, and Hammond and reaching Pullman at 8:15 p.m. I took the suburban line of the Illinois Central Railroad to the central district of Chicago.

"It took me three full days and 21 hourg from the time I left New York to get to the central (business) district of Chicago. The actual running time was 45 hours and 24 minutes. I traveled 1,143 miles, 956 miles on electric cars and 187 miles on steam roads. In one day of a little over 15 hours I traveled 298 miles on electric lines and the best of it all was that T gaw the country pretty generally as well as the cities, towns and villages. These places are not seen by the traveler on steam roads. The electric lines pierce these places, the steam roads skirt them. About a year ago I made the trip by electric line to Philadelphia from New York, a distance of a little over 90 miles, and I thought I did well to cover it in nine hours,

The covered third-rail of the Oneida

Railway is evident in this 1909 View.

"The actual traveling time could be reduced several hours and as soon as T finished the trip and returned home I made a careful calculation and found that the actual traveling time could be reduced to 31 hours and 10 minutes. I had a fine and comfortable trip and shall certainly repeat it at the earliest practicable time, cThe fare, including all steam fare from New York to Chicago was $19.67 and the other expenses, including those for four nights at hotels, were $12.

"The roads on which I traveled, the time, distance and fare were ag follows:

\*From New York City to Hudson, New York Central road, 115 miles, fare $2.30, leaving 12:30 a.m., arriving 4:47 a.m.

Completed in 1909, the Rochester, Syracuse & Eastern Railroad boasted a high-speed electric line between Rochester and Syracuse. Later part of the Empire United Railways, the service ended in

1931. A R.S.&E. car crosses the Erie

Canal at Lyons, New York, west of

Syracuse,

"From Hudson to Albany, Albany & Hudson Traction Company, 38 miles, fare 60 cents, leaving 6 a.m., arriving 8 a.m.

"From Albany to Schenectady, Schenectady Railway, 16 miles, fare

25 cents, leaving 8 a.m., arriving

8:45

"From Schenectady to Amsterdam, Fonda, Johnstown & GloversVille Railroad, 15 miles, fare 25 cents, leaving 9 a.m., arriving 9:41 a.m.

"From Amsterdam to Little Falls, New York Central road, 39 miles, fare 82 cents, leaving 10:26 a.m., arriving 12:02 p.m.

"From Little Falls to Utica, Utica & Mohawk Valley Railway, 23 miles, fare 35 cents, leaving 12:30 p.m., arriving 1:30 p.m-

"From Utica to Syracuse, Oneida

