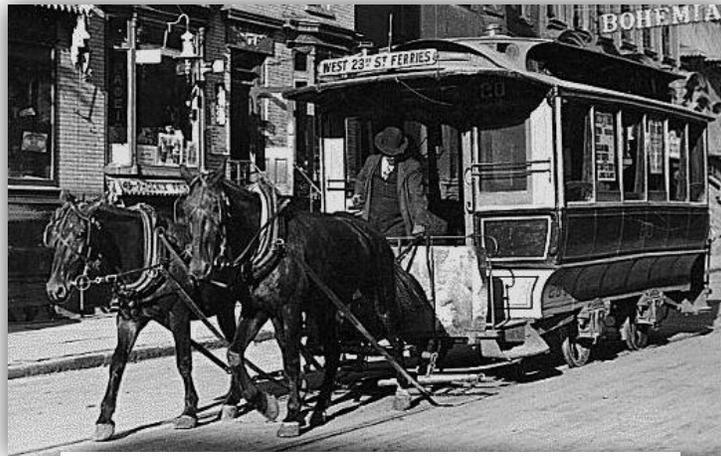

History of the St. Thomas Street Railway



Local History at the St. Thomas Public Library



1879: The Street Railway is built as a project of local investors. It uses horse-drawn vehicles on rails that are 3'6" apart – a narrow gauge. Bylaws regarding the railway include: "When turning the corners from one street to another, the horses or mules attached to the cars shall not be driven faster than a walk," and "the conductors or drivers shall not allow ladies or children to enter or leave the cars while in motion."



A horse-drawn railcar in New York.

3 June 1886: Canada's first electric street railway opens at Windsor, Ontario.

1890s: The ownership of the Street Railway changes hands a number of times, each new owner planning to electrify the system.

1897: The franchise is taken over by a company headed by James Henry Still, and it is agreed between the company and the City Council that the railway will be electrified. The Legislature of Ontario allows the City of St. Thomas to guarantee the Street Railway bonds to the total of \$50,000.00.

March 24, 1898: Construction of the electric street railway begins. According to Percy Locke's *History of Hydro Electric Power in St. Thomas*, only Canadian materials are used to build it – the rails are made in Hamilton, the engine in Amherst, Nova Scotia, the dynamos (electric generators) in Peterborough, and the cars in Ottawa.

1 June 1898: The formal opening of the electrified railway occurs. The updated section of the railroad is six miles in length and cost \$85,000.00.

25 June 1898: Almost an entire page of the St. Thomas *Evening Journal* is dedicated to the topic of the new railway. The author writes: "After over a week's operation, interest in the new municipal toy does not seem to wane, and from all indications there is no likelihood of it waning so long as the fine weather and nickels hold out... A ride around the belt line certainly gives a person more value for their money than can be got for a nickel invested in any other way in St. Thomas."

1898: After the railway is electrified, the company works on developing Pinafore Park to add a recreational destination that will encourage passenger traffic. A summer feature of the street railway is the 25th Regiment Band, who sits in the front car of a train of two and plays for the passengers in the open rear car.

April 1899: A nine hole golf course is constructed in Pinafore Park. In 1908, the decision by the St. Thomas City Council to build a racetrack at the park forces the golf course to relocate.

1900: The railway is sold to a syndicate. The new company is granted running privileges in Yarmouth Township with plans to extend the road to Port Stanley.

November 1902: As a consequence of guaranteeing the railway bonds, the City Council has no choice but to take over the railway with its huge debts.

1902: James A. Bell, former surveyor of the Canada Southern and assistant engineer on the construction of the Cantilever Bridge over the Niagara River, is put in charge of the St. Thomas Street Railway.

2 August 1905: The *St. Thomas Evening Journal* publishes an update of passenger traffic for the month of July. In comparison to traffic in July of 1904, there is an increase of 11,131 passengers.

1 December 1925: Over 300 people gather in the council chamber of the city hall to hear discussion of the St. Thomas Street Railway Company's future. A bus line bylaw is introduced, which means scrapping the railway and supporting a bus service in its place. The electors vote to discontinue the operation of the railway.

12 February 1926: The last street car makes its final run.

