

1872 Critique of the Columbus Street Railways

In 1872 Columbus had three streetcar companies all powered by horses. They were the High Street, Long Street and Friend Street (Main Street) lines. In the nine years since Columbus saw its first horsecar line they had gone from a Civil War novelty to a critical public convenience. The Ohio State Journal published this critique of the three existing systems, part tongue in cheek, part critical and part wishful.

Street Railroads

A Chapter on a Popular Method of Local Transit Street Railroad Travel as a promoter of Dyspepsia The Management of Columbus Lines

(Ohio State Journal, October 26, 1872) - The grave observation of the Philadelphia Star that dyspepsia and kindred diseases have increased in proportion with the extension of the street railway system; will fall upon Columbus readers as an exceedingly good joke. The Star says that in Philadelphia, where the street railroad system has approximated perfection, affording rapid, cheap and comfortable transit in many directions, "many merchants, lawyers, mechanics, and men and women of all professions, having these conveniences for going to and from their respective places of business, have almost abandoned walking, although the distance could easily be reached by foot, in from ten to fifteen minutes." We don't pretend to deny that the failure to take exercise in the Quaker City may provoke "dyspepsia and kindred diseases." In Columbus things are different. Many of the Columbus cars are not only effectual preventives of dyspepsia, but a sure cure for cases of long standing. Let a man enter a High Street car at the South End, for instance, run off the track at every alternate switch till he reaches the National Hotel; then wait for ten or fifteen minutes and be bounded over a dozen railroad tracks, solicitous every moment lest a yard engine shall suddenly cut off the mad career of the fiery untamed steed that hauls the "poor man's carriage," and then run for a block or two over cobble stones and in ruts that have been excavated by the car wheels at the sides of the track! If the exercise of his body, and the more violent exercise of his temper don't overcome any predisposition to dyspepsia, that man had better arrange his affairs with a view to early dissolution.

But, the question is not as to whether street railroad lines will be used by the people to detriment of their own health. They are intended as a popular means of transportation, and it is a great public importance, as the city grows, that they should be conducted so as to secure the greatest convenience and comfort to the public. Street railroads are no longer luxuries; when the city was small, and every man lived within a short distance of his business, and when business interchange involved but little time, the natural method of locomotion did very well; at our present stage of progress, walking is a loss of time to the business man, and a positive

burden on the working people who have been driven by the rapid advance of property far away from their employment to seek homes.

We are not disposed to severely criticize the managers or lessees of the lines in this city. Except when the rolling stock is overburdened on occasions of extraordinary travel to the fair ground or other points east, the Friend street and Long street lines are possible exempt from these annoyances commonly classed as delays and running off the track. On the High street line, a prime cause of delay is the impossibility of running all the cars across the switch yard of the railroad companies. Freight and other trains obstruct the thoroughfare so frequently that it is impossible to run through and keep up anything like regularity. If High street ever ceases to be a switchyard we may hope for some improvement in this particular. But the frequency with which the cars jump the track is most vexatious; the time consumed in getting on again frequently delays every car on the road. Now it doesn't seem reasonable that car drivers in Columbus may not become as skillful as drivers in other cities, where you roll along for miles without an interruption. If the secret is not in a frequent change of employees, it must be in a bad condition of the track. In this connection it is due to give the High street line credit for new cars, superseding old ones, which had become a disgrace to the city. There are still a few on the line that would make very good kindling wood.

We hesitate to attach all the responsibility for the ills that patrons of the street railroads are heir to, entirely to the managers and lessees thereof. It is an unpleasant feature of the business that the revenue from the street railroads does not justify heavy expenditures. This brings us to the question - how shall the business be improved, and at the same time the interest of the people best sub served? Would not a unification of the street railroad interest induce a larger patronage, and enable the managers to better serve the public; or is the street railroad system of Columbus so stupendous that it can't be run under one management? We have three lines of road, but the individual who for instance, desires to reach a point on Friend street from a point on Long must pay three fares and make two changes of cars or walk and he will generally walk. The Long street road will be extended to the fair grounds and may be connected with the Friend street line, thus forming a circuit by way of High, Long and Friend. Why can't cars be run in a circuit? Other street lines will undoubtedly be built within a few years; but the probabilities are that none of them will pay very heavy revenues until a system is adopted that will prevent the necessity of paying a new fare for every street you go on. People don't generally get on a streetcar merely to ride up the hills and then down again.

While on the subject of street railroads we introduce a description of new motive power recently adopted in New Orleans with great success. It is the invention of Dr. Emilie Lanno, of New Orleans and thorough tests show that between it and mules or horses there is a difference of 33 percent in favor of the new method. The following description of the "fireless engine" will be interesting to all concerned in the management of street railroads: "The driving engine is of ordinary character. It has a reservoir large enough to contain three hundred gallons of water with steam room above it. The boiler is of steel, and is well covered with non-conducting material to prevent the radiation of the heat. The motive power of this engine obtained by means of the compression of steam in water, the steam being [obtained] from a stationary boiler at the end of the track, which dispenses with the firing up process while under way. The steam with which the engine is charged is sufficient (according to the capacity of the boiler) to

perform a trip of from ten to fifteen miles. At the time of charging the temperature in the boiler it is about 380 degrees Fahrenheit the pressure of steam being about one hundred and seventy pounds to the square inch. There is not the least danger of explosion in using this apparatus as the pressure in the reservoir can never rise above the point reached at the time of charging and it is necessarily constantly diminishing as the power is expended. So simple is its construction there is less skill required in handling this locomotive than a horse or mule.