

Pioneer Efforts at Transportation With Dummy Engine Met with Failure

(Ohio State Journal, October 25, 1911) TOO many palms of pioneer progress have been accorded Columbus and worn with becoming modesty through the years that have intervened, that now and again one gets lost and no one notices it.

For instance, it is known to few outside of those who were directly interest – and most of those are dead – that Columbus was a pioneer in the matter of suburban transportation. The line has been lost, and its very route partly covered by another line, and the whole incident has passed from the memory of almost all except those who lost some part of the \$25,000 actually expended.

Those who ride to and from their homes on the present Summit Street line may imagine that they are of the first to enjoy transportation facilities to that rapidly developing section of the city – but they are mistaken.

It was in May, 1871, that a company known as North Columbus Street Railway Company was incorporated with a capital stock of \$100,000. The incorporators were Samuel Doyle, William Dennison, Rudolph Williams, M. M. Green, Henry M. Neil, William Preston Brown and Joseph Guitner Doyle was the president, as he was also, the contractor.

Wanted to Reach Older Section.

That part of the present city in the vicinity of Olentangy Park is considerably older than that which is a mile or two south of it, and in the earlier days was known as North Columbus, and enjoyed its own post office and other evidence of near municipal life.

But it did not have extensive stores and it did not have large markets for the country produce that the farmers brought in. Hence there was a continued need of going to the major city. More over the additional elevation which that part of the county enjoyed, by comparison with the territory around the Statehouse, early led to the conviction that it should properly form a residential district for the capital city.

This railroad project then, was founded on those facts and the traffic that it was thought would arise out of them. There was only one difficulty – the men were ahead of their time.

The route selected started at Swan and High streets, near the Union Station, ran east in Swan to Third, north in Third to First Avenue, east in First Avenue to summit Street, and thence north to Mock Road, thence went in that throughfare to Monroe Street where it terminated at the Northwood Heights addition, within a couple blocks of High street. It lacked but a little of being four miles in length.

Had T Rails.

The usual court procedures blocked the early progress of the work, but by 1873 the 30-pound T rails were laid and efforts were made to run trains over the system. The equipment for passenger service is described as “two of Baxter’s steam street cars, which are noiseless and smoke-consuming.” They were propelled by a species of dummy engine on the pattern of those lately used by the elevated railroads in New York and Chicago.

Both the cars and the dummy engines failed to come up to the high expectations entertained for them, and the public also failed to come up for transportation. Moreover, there was continual difficulty in operation. The rails were not heavy enough and there were other physical obstacles. Freight traffic, which it was hoped would develop, failed to materialize.

It did not take the company long to realize that their proposition was not grounded in a vital need of the public, and after about a year of operation, the engines and material were sold to a small town in the northern part of the state and the rails were taken up.

This was the first effort at interurban transportation in the state of Ohio and one of the very first in the United States. It ran through several miles of almost unbroken corn fields and at that time few would have believed that another 40 years would see the entire district a solid block of homes.