

From Horse-drawn to Electric: A Brief Ride through the History of Streetcars

During the late 1800's, a solution was needed to the transportation problem due to the growth of the Portsmouth area. As a result, on March 24, 1873, the first Portsmouth street railway system was created. Actual construction of the lines began in 1877 with the route starting at the Front Street landing to Market Street, to Second Street then to Chillicothe Street to Ninth Street, then to Offnere and north to Greenlawn cemetery.

During its first fourteen years of operation, the carriages were horse-drawn. The Portsmouth Street Railroad Company was often referred to as the G.O.P., or 'Get Off and Push'. The last car drawn by horse was on July 21, 1891, and the city was without service for two years.

The first extension of the new electrical system made its way five miles in length to New Boston. With an enthusiastic public in attendance, a dedication for new operation was held November 16, 1893. Citizens proclaimed, "It's like a little bit of Chicago here now!"

As new tracks had been laid, the first trip to New Boston was shortly thereafter. The four cars in operation held twenty-four people and seated two to a seat. The social outing of the time was 'street car' parties to Millbrook Park to enjoy the theater, the merry-go-round, the roller coaster, dancing at the pavilion, baseball or a picnic.

With the population growth during the turn-of-the-century, transportation improvement again was needed. By 1903, an extension was made from Millbrook Park to Sciotoville. A round trip fare was priced at just fewer than fifteen cents. The early 1900's brought hopes for an interurban line that would run from

Portsmouth to Jackson and other southern Ohio cities. The first interurban line ran from Sciotoville to Franklin Furnace in 1915 with an extension to Hanging Rock and a Wheelersburg stop added in 1916. Public operation from New Boston to Ironton began in November of 1917 but was suspended in 1930.

Through many changes, company by-outs, track reroutes, floods, accidents and ever-changing demands, the last streetcar began its last ceremonial run at 1 a.m. on January 12, 1939 from Second Street to New Boston and back. The car was filled to capacity. That very morning city buses took the place of streetcars as the popular mode of transportation.