

WILLOUGHBY'S GOLDEN RAILROAD ERA



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LAKE PORT ELECTRIC FREIGHT

By Blaine Hays



A century ago, every port city between Ashtabula and Sandusky was served by one of two interurban systems that operated along Ohio's north coast. These were the Cleveland, Painesville & Eastern (C. P. & E.) to the east of Cleveland and the Lake Shore

Electric (L. S. E.) to the west. At a time early in the second decade of the 20th Century, these interurban companies were rebuilding infrastructure to accommodate the fast growing freight business.

From today's changed landscape, it is difficult to fathom the influence the interurban systems once wielded. It was the big electric trolleys that darted across the northern Ohio countryside which provided area farmers with the very first same-day delivery of their goods to market. By the end of the first decade as interurban passenger business was being quickly eroded by the presence of the automobile, even greater emphasis was placed on the freight business.

The Cleveland, Painesville & Eastern: This system began as a connection between the Nickel Plate depot in Painesville and Fairport Harbor. The interurban was chartered on April 25, 1895, to connect the Painesville city streetcars to the street railways of Cleveland. The first car operated on July 1, 1896.

At Rush Road switch near Willoughby the line diverged into two routes. The original route traveled Euclid Avenue to downtown Cleveland. The other route was known as the Shore Line because of its proximity to the shores of Lake Erie; it entered Cleveland via Cleveland Railway's St. Clair streetcar line.

Major stops were Ashtabula (where it directly connected to the Conneaut & Erie Traction Company for passage to Erie, PA), Geneva, Madison, Perry, Fairport, Painesville, Mentor, Willoughby; from here the Shore Line reached Willoughbeach and Collinwood while the Main Line traveled through Wickliffe and Euclid. The destination for both routes was downtown Cleveland.

The Cleveland, Painesville and Eastern and The Lake Shore Electric were essential links to a colossus of routes that made through delivery of freight possible from western terminals in Cincinnati and Indianapolis to eastern terminals such as Erie and Buffalo.

Prior to the onslaught of the automobiles the interurbans were essential to transporting people from the heart of one small town to the heart of another with convenient intermediate stops at intersecting roads. However, after October 1, 1908, when the first mass-produced auto was manufactured by Henry Ford, the interurban services merely duplicated what the auto was built to provide. Interurban passenger revenues began to decrease in direct proportion to the number of autos on the streets.

Originally these lines were built as passenger-only services, but by the time of the Depression the inter-line freight business had overtaken it in importance. Initially, however, speeding freight shipments on the electric lines was hampered by long slow drags down city streets and over archaic circuitous track patterns.

It was in these times that interurban operators looked to invest in higher-speed center-city access. By then, however, the syndicates routinely experienced economic recurring highs and lows, hampering timely improvement implementation. The result was that the solutions came too late to usefully turn around the situation.

Early in this lunge toward faster service, the promoters of The Western Ohio Railway brought about the idea to use a quick short cut route through Lima, Ohio, to speed arrival at important eastern terminals. In January 1906 it formed what became known as the Lima Route to realize its dream of achieving a "gateway to the east."

It soon became apparent that both syndicates, the group that controlled the L.S.E. that was headed by Allison H. Pomeroy and M. L. "Jacob" Mandelbaum and the group controlling the C.P. & E. headed by Henry A. Everett and Edward W. Moore, were eager for expansion and improvement. The Pomeroy-Mandelbaum group was almost reckless in its determination to link Toledo, Cleveland, and Cincinnati with electric railways.

Concurrent to this, the Everett-Moore group was trying to connect Toledo with Detroit. In the meantime The Cleveland, Painesville & Eastern line was desperate to find a speedier way to enter downtown Cleveland. To this end Ed Moore was

cultivating a good relationship with Cleveland railroad financiers Oris P. & Mantis J. Van Sweringen. The Van Sweringen brothers got their start with electric railways and were sympathetic to the problems of the interurbans.

In 1916, shortly after acquiring the Nickel Plate Railroad, the Van Sweringens were planning a right-of-way alongside the railroad that would provide the interurbans better access. The Vans were also going to operate a rapid transit system over these tracks that would offer riders a speedy trip through downtown Cleveland and then a quick sprint west paralleling the railroad to where a connection could be made with the Lake Shore Electric.

Moore's favor with the Vans resulted in approval for the Cleveland, Painesville and Eastern to enter this new line from the east over an East Cleveland route that was called Nickel Plate East. The Lake Shore branch was known as the Rocky River route and was called Nickel Plate West.

The financially weak C.P. & E. would provide the link to the Pennsylvania border and connections to western New York. Interline freight movements over the Cleveland, Painesville and Eastern and the Conneaut and Erie Traction Company would provide the vital connections via the Buffalo & Lake Erie Traction Company.

On February 12, 1924, the new routes were formally proposed. In a comprehensive plan comprising the entire Cleveland area, the Van Sweringen-owned Cleveland Traction Terminals Company called these routes #4 Nickel Plate East to Bliss Road on Cleveland's eastern fringe, and #5 Nickel Plate West to the railroad's West 110th Street yard. Unfortunately for the cause of saving the freight business, the costly and massive construction needed was not quickly accomplished.

Later, even as the financial condition of the C.P.&E. continued to worsen, the Van Sweringens renewed their proposal on December 19, 1925. The two Nickel Plate traction routes were made a priority, and construction began in earnest on the eastern portion of the route. But it came too late. The weakened C. P. & E. could not be saved and abandonment ensued on May 20, 1926. Thus, this all-important Cleveland freight gateway was ruined.

Along the west side of the city the Van Sweringens had made two-track space provisions on every bridge along the NKP route. Construction of tracks to bring the L.S.E. cars into the heart of downtown Cleveland, however, failed to materialize. After the fall of the C.P. & E., freight service east of Cleveland continued to be provided by the Northern Ohio Traction and Light Company into the fringe of Pennsylvania using the Penn-Ohio system.

The bustling Cleveland freight terminal faced East 9th Street between Bolivar and Eagle Avenue. It opened on October 24, 1903, and replaced an earlier storefront operation at St. Clair and Ontario. It was operated by the Electric Package Agency, but was known in the Cleveland commodities market as the LCL House. This acronym was a freight classification meaning 'less than carload' and indicated that it was necessary to have more than one shipper to make a payload.

The partners in this venture were the Northern Ohio; Cleveland, Painesville and Eastern; Lake Shore Electric; Cleveland, Southwestern and Columbus, and The Cleveland Railway Company, the local streetcar operator. In the waning days of the freight era when only the Lake Shore Electric remained, the Central Viaduct was condemned and closed to traffic on April 4, 1935, thus cutting off access to the downtown freight terminal.

The dreams of a through eastern freight connection to Pennsylvania and New York were dashed at noon on May 20, 1926 when motorman Judson Loucks piloted the last C.P. & E. car from Cleveland to Painesville. The line today is remembered through the words of a song written by former employees:

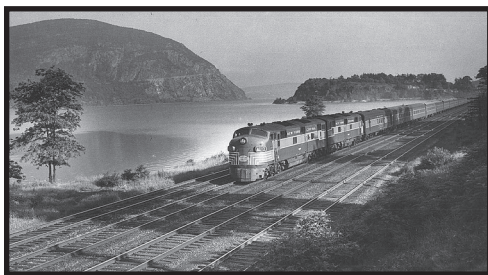
"Let us all turn back to the bull pen,
And dream of Willoughby,
The yarns they told, they could never grow old,
With the days of the C.P.&E.
I loved to hear that trolley
That hummed so merrily,
The whistle shrill, I hear it still
On the cars of the C.P.&E.
Those days are gone forever,
With me you'll all agree,
We had money to lend, and money to spend,
When we worked on the C.P.&E.

A significant remnant of the interurban freight era remains. Construction on the route traveling east from Cleveland along the Nickel Plate line continued until depression pressures forced cessation in 1932. All right-of-way grading had been completed and catenary supports for overhead wires installed as far as Superior Avenue on the eastern branch. Ghosts of embryonic stations lined the rights-of-way. These forlorn Van Sweringen rights-of-way remained untouched for twenty years until the city-owned Cleveland Transit System obtained a loan from the federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation to build a two track rapid transit over the route.

Ground was broken on February 4, 1952 at Windermere Car barn and a 13.3 mile rail rapid transit began service in two segments; east of the Terminal Tower on March 15 and to the west on August 14, 1955. This system operates today as the Red Line of the Regional Transit Authority.

LAKE SHORE & MICHIGAN SOUTHERN

By Sheldon Lustig



The New York Central served the Cleveland industrial areas in the Flats and along the Lakefront from two different mainline routes. Historically, the east-west mainline was that of the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern

(nee-Cleveland, Painesville & Ashtabula east of Cleveland and the Junction RR west of Cleveland which formed a through route in the early 1850's) while the north-south route was that of the Cleveland, Cincinnati & St. Louis (familiarily known as the Big Four RR), nee- Cleveland, Columbus & Cincinnati RR of the 1840's.

Built along what was then the shoreline, the Lakefront route served numerous industries from E. 55th St. to Whiskey Island but had little access to the bustling dock and river areas. There was a support yard at E. 55th which served such industries as the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company and the Municipal Light and Power generating stations, Park Drop Forge, The White Company (White Motors), East Ohio Gas, several customers and the Team Track of the King St. Lead, and the Silver Plate interchange with the Pennsylvania RR.

At E. 26th St., the NYC had a roundhouse and coach/Railway Express yard which supported operations at both the Railway Express Agency at E. 26th St. and the Union Depot which was located on the south side of the right-of-way at W. 6th St. and which was also used by the Pennsylvania RR. (This depot replaced the original station which was located on the north side of the right-of-way.) Additional yard trackage was constructed on the north side of the mainline at E. 26th St. as land municipal dumping created more land by filling in some of the lake. Interestingly, throughout much of the 1950's and 1960's, underground fires in the former dump area created a perpetual cloud of steam and smoke in this area which today includes the Memorial Shoreway (SR-2) and Municipal Parking Lots as well as part of the RTA's Waterfront Line.

The only NYC access to the actual dock areas of the Lakefront was an industrial spur which served the E. 9th St. Piers. This track crossed the Shoreway at grade in order to reach the facilities of the D&C and C&B steamship lines. After the opening of the adjacent Cleveland Municipal Stadium, this trackage was also used on occasion for special traffic for baseball games, football games, and other sporting events. Proceeding westward, the NYC crossed the PRR at a 90-degree intersection as both lines dodged the piers of the W. 3rd St. Bridge, passed the Civil War-vintage Union Depot, was crossed by and junctioned with the Big Four, junctioned with the PRR, crossed the Cuyahoga River on a gantlet-tracked swing bridge, split from the PRR, interchanged with the B&O, and proceeded upgrade across Whiskey Island. All of this trackage had a 10 mph speed limit, and the only interlocking was for the Big Four Wye. Switchtender positions covered all of the other junctions. This style of operation lasted until the ancient swing bridge was replaced by the present double-tracked vertical lift Bridge #1 and the controlling DB tower interlocking in 1957 and the spaghetti-like trackage was straightened in the early 1960's. Throughout this

period, the premier passenger trains (such as the 20th Century Limited, Commodore Vanderbilt, New England States, Ohio State Limited, Pacemaker, and Chicagoan) of the NYC along with numerous Mail and Express trains which bypassed Cleveland Union Terminal ran through this very restricted trackage and some changed crews here.

Interestingly, there was no direct access from the former LS&MS to the dock operations until after the Big Four was merged into the NYC in 1906. Subsequently, an industrial lead was constructed to access the former Big Four dock properties, and in the late 1950's, the Lakefront Mail Hall Parcel Post Annex was constructed thereon. In its last years, this facility saw the arrival and departure of the overnight trains to Cincinnati and St. Louis, with passengers being cabbed from CUT to the Lakefront. (This allowed the NYC to eliminate the transfer crew whichj shuttled the head-end cars between the Lakefront and the Terminal.)

Tale of Willoughby's "Girl in Blue" is still mystical

One of the most famous railroad mysteries of all time is centered in Willoughby. The incident occurred in 1933 and the mystery behind it was never solved. Here is the story as written in The Cleveland News in 1946 by reporter Harry Christiansen: Mystery of "Girl in Blue" Unsolved

Today marks the anniversary of a famous Christmas mystery – the tragedy of Willoughby's Girl in Blue.

Twelve years and thousands of trains have passed by the lonely Second St. crossing since the unknown girl walked into the path of a fast locomotive. The secret of who she was is still locked with her in a grave in the Willoughby Cemetery near the crossing where her life was snuffed out.

Although the years have rolled on, people still come to leave flowers at the grave which is marked with this inscription: "In memory of the Girl in Blue – killed by a train December 24, 1933 – Unknown But Not Forgotten."

From where the Girl in Blue came is a mystery. At 3 a.m. she stopped at Mrs. Mary Judd's tourist home on Second St. and rented a room. She was pretty, and about 20 years old. Next morning she arose, and asked if there were any church services in town. She was dressed in blue --- coat, hat, sweater, scarf. Her eyes were also blue. She said "Merry Christmas" to Mrs. Judd and walked into Second St. A few minutes later she was seen walking into the path of the train.

All attempts to prove her identity failed. Almost 50 people came to the funeral parlors, but they didn't know her. The citizens of Willoughby donated a small plot of ground in the village cemetery, and her secret went to the grave with her. The pilgrimage to the grave continued, and in 1936, Henry Heaverly, sexton of the cemetery, and a few of his friends marked the grave, An evergreen tree grows on it today (1946) It was donated by someone in Maine.

Chief of Police James Billson today said the mystery is still officially unsolved. All records were destroyed long ago. Citizens of Willoughby have contributed money for perpetual upkeep of the grave, and the Girl in Blue sleeps on, in the quiet cemetery which is undisturbed except for the shriek of railroad whistles at the Second St. crossing.

Sheldon Lustig is a director of the New York Central System Historical Society and has authored railroad articles of both historical and current interest.



NICKEL PLATE RAILROAD

by Howard Speidel



In 1879 a syndicate of New York bankers, headed by George Seney of the Metropolitan Bank, and additional investors, organized and operated the Lake Erie and Western Railway, a combination of short lines in Indiana, Ohio and Illinois, extending from Fremont, Ohio to Bloomington, Illinois. The L & W connected with William Vanderbilt's Lake Shore and

Michigan Southern Railway at Fremont, Ohio. In order to reach new sources of revenue, the LE&W proposed several extensions of the railroad and carry the line to Cleveland, St. Louis and Chicago. These new branches would be built on the right of way of defunct railroads, canals and new land acquisitions. On February 3, 1881, the syndicate met in Seney's New York bank and organized the New York, Chicago and St. Louis Railway Company. This new railroad was to extend from Cleveland, Ohio to Chicago, Illinois, with a St. Louis branch from Fort Wayne, Indiana to St. Louis. On February 18, 1882, the company was formally incorporated in the states of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois as the New York and Chicago Railway.

In the winter of 1879-1880 surveying was started for a competing railroad to Vanderbilt's Lake Shore Line between Buffalo, New York and Cleveland, Ohio. This new railroad was incorporated in the states of New York and Pennsylvania as the Buffalo, Cleveland and Chicago Railway. On April 13, 1881 this company was acquired by the Seney syndicate and consolidated with the New York and Chicago company to form the New York, Chicago and St. Louis Railway Company. The company's headquarters were established in Cleveland.

The 513 mile railroad between Buffalo and Chicago was completed in approximately 500 days. This required the construction of 291 trestles and 49 bridges, including 12 major wrought-iron viaducts on the east end for a total of 2 ½ miles. That included the 3,000 foot viaduct and swing style drawbridge to traverse the Cuyahoga River valley in Cleveland. On October 29, 1881, the first passenger train was operated as an inspection excursion between Cleveland and Painesville.

The NYC & ST.L built its main repair shop in Chicago along with a 16 stall roundhouse. A smaller shop with a 22 stall roundhouse was built in Conneaut, Ohio. Other roundhouses were built in Buffalo, Bellevue, Cleveland and Fort Wayne. Divisions were established between Buffalo and Conneaut; Conneaut and Bellevue; Bellevue and Fort Wayne; and Fort Wayne and Chicago. Classification yards were built in Buffalo, Conneaut, Cleveland, Bellevue, Fort Wayne and Chicago. The railroad would begin operation with 30 locomotives and approximately 1,000 railcars.

The final inspection train, for the completed railroad, departed Chicago, Illinois on August 30, 1882 and arrived in Buffalo late the following night after many "incidents" including the New York Central's refusal to handle the private car of the NKP president. The Nickel Plate officially opened for business on October 16, 1882. In Bellevue, Ohio a ceremony was held with the driving of a special spike that was hand-forged and nickel plated. It was driven in the center of the turntable as an appropriate location to mark the end of construction. The spike was subsequently removed and put on display at the company's headquarters and Cleveland Union Terminal.

During the summer of 1882, while construction was being completed, the Seney syndicate was secretly negotiating with Jay Gould, of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western; Central Railroad of New Jersey, the Wabash and the Union Pacific, who was in direct competition with Vanderbilt and the Lake Shore Line. Gould had wanted the Nickel Plate as an eastern outlet for the Wabash in Toledo and Detroit. This would then connect with the DL & W at Buffalo and on to the east coast. Vanderbilt also expressed an interest in acquiring the Nickel Plate to avoid a rate war with a parallel route. While Gould was on a trip to the west, Vanderbilt purchased a 53 percent controlling interest in the Nickel Plate. The purchase took place on October 25, 1882, approximately one week after completion of the railroad.

The nickname "Nickel Plate Road" has quite a history in its legend. One version, from the Cleveland Herald, credit's the Norwalk Chronicle with its origin. The NYC & ST.L had promised both the communities of Norwalk, Ohio and Bellevue that the right of way and rail yard would be built though each respective community. When the railroad opted for Bellevue instead of Norwalk, the Chronicle called the promises and reputation of the railroad "nickel plated" or fake. The Chronicle gives a different version and claimed that they referred to the NYC & ST.L as the "Nickel Plated" road before the railroad had actually decided to build in Bellevue. And still another version is attributed to William Vanderbilt who was to have said "For what I paid for the price we paid for it, it ought to be nickel-plated".

The New York Central controlled the Nickel Plate until 1916 when it was purchased by Oris P. and Mantis J. Van Sweringen of Cleveland, Ohio. The brothers purchased the Nickel Plate to acquire a right of way for their Shaker Rapid light rail line to reach downtown Cleveland. In 1924 the Vans also acquired the remnants of the Lake Erie and Western which gave them access to Indianapolis, Indiana and Peoria, Illinois. It also acquired the Toledo, St. Louis and Western (the Clover Leaf), which provided access to railheads at St. Louis, Missouri. The Vans also acquired controlling interests in the Chesapeake and Ohio, Pere Marquette and Erie railroads. In 1929 these roads pooled their mechanical talent and formed the Advisory Mechanical Committee. The AMC would oversee and consolidate the mechanical operations and planning for all four railroads. Their decisions would be critical in the design, building and maintenance of future locomotives and rolling stock for the railroads. It was the AMC's recommendations that brought about the famous Berkshire 2-8-4 locomotives that became famous on the NKP.

During the Van's ownership, the Cleveland Union Terminal project was realized and served as the company's headquarters for its remaining days. The railroad was never heavily industrialized. Less than one-fourth of its business originated on line so the Nickel Plate strived to compete in an extremely competitive transportation arena to with the best service. Their operation was dedicated to the science of moving high-grade freight with dependability and dispatch. Their motto of "High Speed Service" was the mantra of each employee. Austerity and a continued dedication of manifest freight handling got the Nickel Plate through the great depression and prepared the road for greater responsibilities during World War Two. The Nickel Plate remained competitive during the War and continued to up-grade its physical plant with the strengthening of key bridges and the addition of Centralized Traffic Control.

In 1947 the Nickel Plate severed ties with the Chesapeake and Ohio. In 1949 the Nickel Plate leased the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad for 99 years. This gave the Nickel Plate access to the coal fields of southeast Ohio. The Nickel Plate Road remained profitable into the 1950's. Mergers involving other railroad greatly affected the Nickel Plate. The Erie and DL & W merger, and the proposed New York Central hook-up with the Pennsylvania led the Nickel Plate towards an eventual merger with the Wabash and Norfolk and Western. Merger talks were officially announced on May 17, 1960 and merger took place on October 16, 1964 with the Norfolk and Western being the controlling railroad.



Special thanks to Northern Ohio Association of Railway Societies (NOARS). Permanently Preserving Northern Ohio's Railroad and Transit History A Lifetime Interest in Railroads. Many of us in the Northern Ohio area have engaged in, as our life's interest, the collection and preservation of railroad and rail transit materials. As we get older one question looms above all others - what can be done to assure that the materials are kept safe, are appreciated, and will go on to assist future historians in the continuing quest to properly display and interpret rail history.