

Streetcar helped give people mobility

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By David Litogot
special writer

Living in the Detroit area, one cannot help hearing about speed limits, traffic jams and people movers. Farmington once had a "people mover" of sorts — a streetcar system.

This trolley system was a major factor in making Farmington part of the Detroit metropolitan area between 1900 and 1930. It provided a means for workers to reach their jobs, students to attend schools, businessmen to send their merchandise and fun-seekers to search out theaters and restaurants.

Since Farmington never had a regular railroad, the electric interurban was the way in which people from this area could reach Pontiac, Detroit, Northville and beyond.

The network of tracks entered Farmington from the north along Orchard Lake Road, from the south along Farmington Road and from the southeast with tracks following Grand River. The track intersection at Orchard Lake and Grand River was called Farmington Junction.

Here was a passenger stop and a freight shed. Nearby was the Power House, which provided the electricity for the system. Some people called this large brick building the Old Winery, but it was built in

1899 to provide direct current for the interurban. In fact, its nine steam turbines produced enough power to even light some businesses in town — giving Farmington its first taste of electricity. The building also contained a waiting room, a dispatcher's office and a main headquarters for the system.

Across the street, where the Farmington Plaza is today, stood the car barn and the repair shop. Up to 50 cars could be stored there for the night.

NEARBY, STOOD a restaurant called the Pig and Whistle (later the Blue Moon Inn), whose owner was so stubborn to sell that Orchard Lake Road had to curve around his property to reach Grand River.

Going north and south along Orchard Lake, a passenger could board or get off every mile or half mile.

The Grand River line took one into Detroit or west to downtown Farmington. Near Farmington Road the tracks took a route through what is today the parking lot of the Farmington Shopping Center to get to Farmington Road. At Farmington Road, the tracks headed south to Eight Mile Road and then west to Northville.

Originally, the tracks looped at the corner of Farmington Road and Grand River, but the later shortcut

footprints in history

eliminated that sharp curve. Near this corner, there was another passenger stop and a freight loading dock.

Freight was usually hauled at night on special cars. Such items as lumber, coal, oil, cement, lime, plaster and milk in 85-pound cans were shipped to Detroit and other surrounding villages that were connected to the system.

The system came to Farmington in 1900. Before this, Detroit had a streetcar service for almost 40 years — first using horses to pull the cars on wooden tracks, then utilizing electricity delivered to each car by means of an overhead wire and a sticklike cable held against the wire by a pulley. Once in a while, the pulley would come off the wire and the conductor would have to climb up and reconnect the circuit.

The Detroit and Northwestern Railway laid down Farmington's first tracks. The DNR was sold to the Detroit United Railway in May 1901 and our streetcar service was called

either the DUR or the Interurban (some people mistakenly call it the Detroit Urban Railway).

BY 1910, the DUR was so popular that it was the major means of transportation to other communities for 20 years. One could hop a trolley at 5:25 a.m. in Farmington and be in Detroit an hour later. Another car left at 7 a.m. and cars left hourly until 11 p.m. There was a timetable posted at all passenger stops and in the Enterprise. (Time was listed in Central Time. Michigan didn't go to Eastern Standard Time until the 1940s).

In open areas, the cars could reach speeds of 50 miles per hour. There were smoking and nonsmoking sections divided by a partition — sometimes just a curtain. Women, of course, were not allowed to be in the smoking section.

Some cars had toilets that emptied out onto the tracks — but only while it was in the country.

There were special funeral cars that went to the Green Lawn Cemetery on Telegraph and Grand River. They were painted black and carried the casket in the front. Another car was equipped with a snow plow mounted on the front that made high snow drifts alongside the tracks after a heavy snow.

Each of the early cars had two workers — a motorman, who drove the car, and a conductor, who was in charge of the car. The motorman would blow the loud horn at each intersection and ring the bell when in the city.

The fare was 2 cents a mile until 1924. Then it was almost doubled when financial problems began to affect the DUR.

Next month: The decline of the DUR.

Sources: The Farmington Railroad in 1900, Marilyn Gaul; The Orchard Lake Division of the Detroit United Railway, Raymond Radway; The Detroit Street Railways Vol. I, H. Schramm, Hennepin, Duwamish, Farmington, A Pictorial History, Lee S. Peet; and Heritage Homes of Farmington, Ruth R. Mochlinman.

YMCA highlights

These YMCA highlights appear courtesy of the Farmington YMCA, 28100 Farmington Road, Farmington Hills. For information, call 553-4020.

REGISTRATION BEGINS

The Farmington Area YMCA opens registration on April 13 for all spring classes. Activities for all ages are offered from swimming to dog obedience. View our brochure and find the class just right for you.

SWIM WEEK

Learn basic safety and water skills prior to diving into summer fun. Learn to swim with a five day crash course. All 6-to-12-year-olds who are beginner swimmers will be presented water safety and basic swimming skills. The annual learn-to-swim campaign has been set for April 20-24 at different times of the day to suit individual needs. A minimal fee is charged. Adult lessons are also available. See our brochure for full details.

FIRST AID

First aid for the Cabbage Patch doll, a course that is aimed to teach children basic first aid. This fun course has been set from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. April 25. This course will teach second through sixth graders how to control bleeding, poison control, water safety, using the phone, Heimlich maneuver and more. If you don't have a cabbage patch doll, any doll will do. Please bring a bathing suit.

APRIL ADVENTURE

April 20-24, first through sixth graders find constructive activities at the YMCA. Games, crafts, swimming and a field trip. Call now and join in our spring vacation fun.

T-BALL

T-ball is a fast action game similar to baseball. The ball is placed on a tee to insure that each child has the opportunity to hit the ball. The ball is made of a sock type cover and is soft to prevent injuries.

As with all YMCA youth sports, the child comes first. Coaches will work with players to keep winning in its proper perspective. All players will play at least half of every game. The only thing warming the bench during "T" ball is the sun.

Registration for spring T-ball begins April 10 and runs through April 15. Children in kindergarten and first grade comprise one league while second and third graders make up the other league. Fees for YMCA members are \$15 and \$25 for Program Members. Registration is limited.

FITNESS VACATION

Women's fitness vacation sponsored by Detroit Metropolitan YMCA on June 14 to 19 at Camp Ohlivesa (near Milford). Activities include exercise programs, swimming, tennis, nutritious meal, fun and fellowship. Cost is \$195 for members and \$235 for program members. Call Shirley Eyster (director), 642-8031 or YMCA Camping Services, 962-1590. Enrollment is limited so call now.

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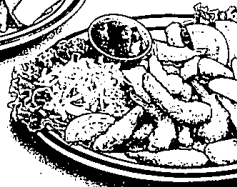
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