

Centennial Reflections

Essays from the Oakwood Historical Society

Oakwood's public transportation 1870-1970's

By Harry G. Ebeling / Updated by Tom Morrow (2019)

All writers about early Oakwood attribute its rapid growth to the transportation system that carried people to and from Dayton employment. Even Harman, Mitchell, Haas & Dixon, the developers of the first plat in 1872, provided a one mule street car which went up Oakwood Avenue to the corner of Harman as an inducement to buy lots.

The story begins on May 2 1870, when the first horsecar line opened in Dayton on Third St. A horsecar line was begun to Dayton View shortly thereafter, and a third line which would become the Oakwood Street Railway (OSRy) was incorporated on July 20 1870 by John Patterson, John W Stoddard, William Dixon, Patterson, Mitchell and John A McMahon. Routing: Main/First to Fifth to Brown to Warren and thence south to the terminus of the route at the junction of the Warren street road to the Lebanon Pike.

The OSRy was constructed over the next year and a half. The Patterson Mill at Brown St and Rubicon Creek was demolished in order to provide stones to build a bridge for the horsecar over Rubicon Creek. A carbarn for the line was built on the Dayton side of this bridge. The line was reported to be built as far as Lebanon Pike, with the founders of Oakwood continuing it themselves another one-third of a mile up the hill, making the southern terminus at Oakwood Park, on the lands belonging to Haas, Mitchell, Dixon and others.

On Oct 19 1871, Dayton View and OSRy agreed to use common tracks downtown. On Dec 18 1871 the OSRy started operations between the carhouse at Rubicon Creek and Downtown Dayton. Isaac Kiersted was the first passenger. In June 1872, the OSRy agreed to lease the Dayton View line, and thru operations from Salem/Grand to Brown/Caldwell started. On July 3 1872 the OSRy was extended to Parrott's house. Fare was a nickel from there to downtown. By Aug 1872, the schedule to go up the hill from the carhouse was 6 times per day, but increased to half hourly service on Sundays.

In 1875, economic conditions forced the bankruptcy and foreclosure of the OSRy. Bought in court by the original investors plus others, they vowed to improve the railway. More instability followed, with Charles Clegg emerging as the President of the line in early 1876. In April 1876, the OSRy announced their primary route was going to be between Dayton View and the carhouse, with "an occasional car to the Hill." Ten runs a day were scheduled for the service to Oakwood.

Presumably due to lack of population, at some point the line stopped running entirely to Oakwood, terminating at the carhouse. In Feb 1886, the carhouse burned to the ground, and a second carhouse and a separate

stable was built at the corner of Brown and Fairground. The stable, at 1141 Brown St, still stands in 2019.

The OSRy was converted from horse to electric on May 16 1895, with the line being extended to the intersection of Oakwood Ave and Far Hills Ave where a turning loop was built. Sixteen single truck cars were bought from Barney and Smith, and began service. Fourteen more cars of a similar design were bought between 1896 and 1907. The Cleggs moved six cars to the Piqua Street Railway in 1906-1907. Later, six larger double truck cars were built in the OSRy shops between 1910 and 1918 to expand service. All the OSRy cars were a dark brown, which would later become an issue.

On Feb 3 1912, the carhouse at Brown and Fairground burned to the ground, with most of the cars being saved. Land had previously been purchased across Rubicon Creek from the first carhouse, and a new carhouse was built there, which lasted in transit service until 1956.

The primary reason for most street railways was to encourage the sale of properties and homes along the line, as an incentive for residents to have transportation to work, shopping and pleasure. The OSRy didn't populate the properties in Oakwood proper as much as the original founders had hoped. Only about 112 homes had been platted in metropolitan Oakwood by 1895, with a few more farmhouses existing but not platted by then. Getting up the hill on unpaved Far Hills Ave was not optimal, and thus growth of Oakwood on top of the hill was stunted.

JC Spaite and EO Wright, real estate developers, got a franchise to extend the OSRy up the hill in part to serve their development, Park Hill, in the four blocks on the east side of Far Hills south of Patterson Rd. This extension was built down Far Hills Ave to just past Forrer Blvd over the summer and fall of 1915, with the line opening for service on Jan 1 1916.

Prior to Park Hill, 409 lots had been platted in Oakwood. By the end of 1917, 1291 homes had been platted, with most of the growth on the top of the hill. Another extension of the OSRy was built in 1918 to a loop at Far Hills and Monteray, which enabled further growth of Oakwood to in excess of 3400 homes.

In 1930, a Dayton Fire Department truck was involved in a nighttime accident with an OSRy car at Sixth and Brown. The DFD reported that the dark brown car was almost impossible to see, which prompted the company to repaint the cars into silver/aluminum paint scheme, which they kept until the end of service.

Streetcars continued operation thru the 20s and 30s. In May 1935, the OSRy's Dayton franchise came up for renewal. At that point, they were operating 40 year old cars on the line, and the track and infrastructure was totally worn out. The company pushed to convert the line to trolley bus, which had been proven out by the Dayton Street Railway, after their carhouse burned in August 1932. This conversion was approved.

On Jan 19 1936, fifteen trolley buses built by Pullman Standard went into service, with the line being extended again down Far Hills to loop in the middle of the street at Dell Park in front of the Far Hills Theatre. The streetcar bodies were sold, with four of them (2 small and 2 large) ending up at the Argonne Forest park, another as a hot dog stand at the Dayton Speedway, and another as an office at the Crume Brick Co in Moraine. The new trolley buses were brown, similar in color to a Hershey Bar wrapper.

In 1950, the trolley bus line was extended to Dorothy Lane, where the buses looped via Shafor Blvd and

Brydon Rd. In October 1956, City Transit and OSRy merged, and the Oakwood trolley buses were pulled out of service, never to operate again.

From Oct 1895 to Sep 1941, an interurban line, starting out as the Dayton Traction and ending as the Dayton Suburban Railway, operated in the space between the old canal and the Oakwood hill in the north end. This line connected Dayton with Cincinnati, and owing to the difficulties of getting to it (only west Oakwood, after going down the steps at Sugar Camp could reasonably use it), didn't have a lot of Oakwood traffic. But it was transportation that went thru Oakwood.

Another transportation line was the steam train of the Cincinnati Lebanon and Northern, later renamed the Dayton Lebanon and Cincinnati. This line was built as a method to get stone quarried in Centerville to Dayton, as well as providing coal to a branch to the Asylum on Wayne Ave. In Oakwood, it ran in the cut on the east side of Oakwood adjoining Dayton (now a bike path in 2019). It continued to the south of UD along Rubicon Creek, past NCR, and north along the river to the railroad elevation. It did not go to Union Station, its depot at a bridge over Washington St.

There was passenger service on the line, which resulted in the building of the former Pasadena Station on Dorothy Lane, to serve the Pasadena Plat. However, more convenient service to this plat was available on Wilmington Pike in the form of the Dayton & Xenia interurban. By the mid 1910s, the DL&C schedule shows only two trains per day. Not surprisingly, the fact that the line ended outside downtown, necessitating a transfer to an OSRy streetcar at Brown St or a People's Railway car at Washington to get to downtown was another factor in its lack of success. There are recordings of individuals who told stories of riding the DL&C, but there just weren't enough of them to make the service viable and the line stopped passenger service in 1928, but continued freight service until the 1970s.

The major claim to fame for the DL&C was that by virtue of this line largely avoiding the Great Miami River, it was not adversely affected by the 1913 flood, and provided a method for relief trains to reach Dayton after that tragedy. In the 1970s, a plan to build a light rail line in that corridor was floated, but for various reasons, was never acted upon.