

# Centennial Reflections

*Essays from the  
Oakwood Historical Society*

## Oakwood's public transportation 1870-1970's

*By Harry G. Ebeling*

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.

Later, about the time of our incorporation as a village, a horse drawn street car came up to the "five points" and had a turn table which the driver and passengers used to turn the horse drawn cars around. John H. Patterson had a phone at the gatehouse of The Far Hills for use of the riders to call their homes further out in the plateau for the family to fetch them the rest of the way.

When electric streetcars were invented and put into use, the Oakwood and Dayton View line leased its tracks to The Oakwood Street Railway in 1875. Later, when NCR was employing large numbers of workers, there was a booming traffic south. It wasn't long into the 'teens' before the line was extended to Monterey Avenue where the loop was. Developers were then advertising the virtues of living in Oakwood because downtown was only fifteen minutes away. Initially these were single truck (4 wheel) cars with a choppy ride serving the community during the mid-day hours.

In February, 1912, a fire leveled the car barn at Brown and Fairground Avenues, completely destroyed the barns of the Oakwood Street Railway Co. and partially destroyed the power plant connected with it. This caused a loss of \$50,000 and four cars. The power plant generated electricity from coal fired boilers which may have been the source of the fire. Oakwood resident and Vice President Harrie P. Clegg said that they would rebuild on land recently acquired south on Brown St. (now the Frank Z auto agency).

About 1910-11 the Oakwood Street Railway bought a bigger two truck street car from the New York City elevated system and designed the 400 series cars based on it that were built in the Oakwood Street Railway shops at Brown St. and Fairgrounds Ave. There were six of them designed by general manager Henry Gebhart. They had a capacity of 45-50 passengers and were painted dark brown, and were distinguished by the roof mounted headlight. They were used in the morning and evening rush hours. Two cars were used on the Dayton and Troy traction line for a 5 p.m. run as far as Murlin Heights. That company was also owned by the Clegg family.

In 1930, one of the single truck cars had a collision with a Dayton Fire Truck at East Sixth Street and Brown Street. The firemen claimed that the car was so dark that they couldn't see it. Shortly afterwards the cars of the company were painted silver aluminum with Roman letters and black numbers.

In 1932, a fire at the car barns destroyed practically all of the rolling stock of the City Railway Co. giving it the opportunity to replace the equipment with new electric trolley buses. The buses making their debut in March 1933, were met with public approval and making Dayton the first city in Ohio to use them. Oakwood Street Railway decided to convert its system to the trolley coaches in 1935 and introduced them to its riders on January 19, 1936. The old 400's were dispersed to Argonne Forest Amusement Park on Germantown Pike. One was used as a hot dog stand at the Dayton Speedway and another was used for an office at Crume Brick Co. in Moraine for many years.

Many of us are old enough to remember the dark brown Pullman-Standard trolleys that we used while we were growing up in Oakwood. They served us well during gas rationing of WW II and beyond until we got drivers' licenses. I remember the distinctive cling of the meter box when it accepted the nickel fare deposit for the trip to The Far Hills Theater. After the 1956 general transit merger, The City Transit Company took them out of service and they remained in dead storage until 1959 when they were cut up for junk. Who ever thought Carillon Park would have a place for such a piece of nostalgia?

There's another piece of Oakwood history involving transportation that shouldn't be neglected. It hasn't been that long ago that the bridge on Patterson Rd. had the BUMP before entering Dayton.

The reason of course was the railroad track below. The railroad was originally the Cincinnati, Lebanon & Dayton Railroad, built in 1882. It skirted Oakwood from where it crossed Shroyer Road north of Dellwood and continued down behind the Acorn Drive houses through "the big cut" until it reached a spur at the State Hospital. It continued across Irving Avenue before skirting the U.D. and coming onto the NCR property at the car barn (Frank Z). Originally a narrow gauge railroad, it was converted to standard gauge in the 1890's when it began hauling stone from the Centerville Stone Quarry into Dayton for a business on Longworth Street owned by Harold E. Talbott. The Oakwood part of the right of way was bought by the city in 1979 and is now a bikeway.

The point of this story is that the railroad had a passenger service into Dayton which some citizens of East Oakwood preferred to use before we had street cars. In a taped interview, Pete Riffle, Sr. recalled what a treat it was for him to go into town with his mother on the train as far as South Main Street where they would transfer to the street car. This was because he lived on Shroyer Road, which was much closer to the train stop than hiking all the way to Far Hills Avenue. There was later passenger traffic on this line, as shown by the existence of the Pasadena station in Beavertown behind the now closed Wagner Wood Products on W. Dorothy Lane. The developers of the plat in the area built the station in 1910 and advertised the 5 cent railroad fare for the trip to Dayton.

The Dayton Flood of 1913 devastated Dayton and washed out tracks from west of Pittsburgh to Indiana. Only the D.L. & C. remained open for flood relief because it was on the ridge between the two Miami Rivers. Supplies flowed north into the NCR complex which was the center for flood relief. The Pennsylvania Railroad bought the D.L. & C. in 1924.

In the late 1970's there was brief discussion of the possibility of a light rail transit system on the right of way, but nothing came of it. Considering the price of gas – I wonder —?



The Oakwood Trolley, January 1936 to Nov 1966

**Several views of the trolley cars that serviced Oakwood**