



SEASHORE TROLLEY MUSEUM | Courtesy photo

Built in 1924 for the Wheeling Traction Company, Car No. 639 was retired in 1948 and sold to a streetcar line in Little Hocking, Ohio. When it again was retired, it was purchased by a doctor who converted it into his office. When the doctor died, his daughter donated the car to the Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunkport, Maine, which has faithfully restored it.

## The Mountain State streetcar era

### Before they reached the end of the line, trolleys helped towns grow and connect

By James E. Casto  
For Daily Mail WV

*“Clang, clang, clang, went the trolley  
“Ding, ding, ding went the bell  
“Zing, zing, zing went my heartstrings...”*  
— From *“The Trolley Song,”* as sung by Judy Garland

The clatter and clang of the streetcar — often called a trolley — once was a familiar part of daily life in a number of West Virginia communities.

The nation’s first streetcars traveled on rails but were horse-drawn. Putting the vehicles on rails meant that horses could pull a greater load and do so more quickly. Then a Connecticut-born engineer, Frank Sprague, came up with the idea of putting the horses out to pasture and instead powering streetcars with electricity, drawn from a wire strung overhead.

In 1887, Sprague began installation of a 12-mile electric railcar system in Richmond, Virginia. When placed in service on Feb. 2, 1888, it became the first electric railcar in the world.

The expansion of good roads, the growth of automobile ownership and the onset of the Great Depression combined to ultimately silence the clang, clang, clang of the nation’s trolleys. But from the late 1880s to the 1930s, electric streetcars were the quickest way to get across town or venture to a nearby community. They allowed people to travel in 10 minutes as far as they could walk in 30 minutes.

Streetcars helped towns grow



Herald-Dispatch file photo

Huntington’s first electric streetcar began operating in December of 1888. Traveling along 3rd Avenue, the single-track line connected the city’s downtown with the Ensign Manufacturing Company’s plant at 24th Street and the Guyandotte neighborhood.

by opening up new areas for residential development. And interurban lines enabled neighboring towns to be connected as never before. Little wonder they were quickly adopted by many communities, including several in West Virginia.

By 1902, America’s cities were served by a total of 22,000 miles of streetcar track. Just five years later, in 1907, that figure had grown to 34,000 miles. By the 1920s, the nation’s streetcars were carrying more than three billion — yes, that’s right, billion — riders a year. Let’s take a look back at

what the streetcar era was like in West Virginia.

#### Huntington

As elsewhere in the nation, Huntington’s first streetcars traveled on rails but were horse-drawn. The Huntington Electric Light and Street Railway Company began operating an electric streetcar line along 3rd Avenue in December 1888. In 1890, a rival streetcar company built what it called the Huntington Belt Line.

Although initially successful, Huntington’s street railways soon were operating in the red.

The same was true for those operating in the Kentucky communities of Catlettsburg and Ashland.

Huntington businessman Z.T. Vinson was convinced there was a profit to be made if all the existing lines could be acquired and service established that connected the three communities. He organized the Ohio Valley Electric Railway Company, took options on the lines in Huntington, Ashland and Catlettsburg and went looking for investors.

SEE STREETCARS, 4B



JAMES E. CASTO | Courtesy photo

In 1899, Charles H. Shattuck, president of the Parkersburg Electric Power and Street Railway, built the Terrain Park Casino — not a gambling house, but a multi-purpose building that included a 2,000-seat auditorium.

## Trolley parks drew crowds of fun-seekers

By James E. Casto  
For Daily Mail WV

Before today’s giant theme parks with elaborate rides named for cartoons, movies and superheroes, there were trolley parks.

The parks were built by trolley companies at the end of the line in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a way to get workers and their families to ride streetcars and railways on weekends and holidays. At first, they were simple

picnic groves, but most later added carousels, other rides and live entertainment.

By 1919, just after World War I, there were more than 1,500 amusement parks around the country, and most of them were trolley parks, according to the National Amusement Park Historical Association. But as autos replaced trolleys, the streetcars and their parks faded away.

SEE PARKS, 4B

### Charley West says ...

*I propose a motion to bring horse-drawn streetcars back to West Virginia’s towns. Do you vote Yay or Neigh?*

