

STREETCARS

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Vinson found an important partner for his new venture — Johnson M. Camden of Parkersburg, who had made a fortune in oil and real estate before serving in the U.S. Senate. Once Camden came aboard, the company's name was changed to the Camden Interstate Railway Co., which soon linked Huntington, Catlettsburg and Ashland.

When Camden died in 1908 the streetcar system reverted to its previous name, the Ohio Valley Electric Railway Co.

Over the years, the system was steadily expanded. Two long sections of the east-west route through Huntington were double-tracked, the downtown loop was enlarged and the Ritter Park route was extended to Spring Hill Cemetery.

During Huntington's first decades, nearly all its residents lived in the narrow strip of land between the Ohio River and the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway tracks. But as Huntington grew, the South Side evolved into one of the city's premier residential neighborhoods.

One of the things that made that possible was convenient, dependable streetcar service. In an era when few families owned an automobile, many people moved to new homes on the South Side, knowing they could rely on the streetcar to get them to and from work.

The advent of bus service ultimately doomed Huntington's street railways. In the mid-1920s, the Ohio Valley Electric Railway organized a new affiliate, the Ohio Valley Bus Company, and began offering bus service between Huntington, Kenova and Ironton, Ohio.

In 1928, Ohio Valley Bus established a bus line along 11th Avenue. In 1930, it started a Monroe Avenue line. And in 1933, it inaugurated bus service to the new Veterans Hospital that had opened in Spring Valley.

Fred W. Samworth became Ohio Valley Electric's president and general manager in 1933. Samworth was convinced that buses, not streetcars, were the answer to the city's future transit needs and set about completely converting to bus service.

This was accomplished on Nov. 7, 1937, when the last streetcar made its final run and Huntington became the first city in West Virginia to be served entirely by buses.

Wheeling

The Citizens Railway Company began trolley service in Wheeling in 1863 with horse-drawn cars that traveled on wooden tracks. In 1887, the Wheeling Railway Company absorbed the earlier firm and soon retired the horses, replacing them with electric cars.

In 1899, the Wheeling Railway Company was reorganized and given a new name, the Wheeling Traction Company. Over the years, it had extensive trolley operations on both sides of the Ohio River. In 1912, the Pittsburgh-based West Penn Railway bought the stock of Wheeling Traction but allowed it to continue operating as a separate company.

West Penn invested millions of dollars in upgrading Wheeling Traction, rebuilding its track and overhead electric lines and purchasing new cars. In 1924, the company had 103 miles of track in operation, 640 employees, 100 passenger cars and five freight cars. And that year saw it carry an impressive total of 27 million passengers on its various West Virginia and Ohio routes.

But the arrival of the Great



WEST VIRGINIA STATE ARCHIVES | Courtesy photo

This 1910 photo shows a streetcar in Sistersville headed for a game at the baseball field located adjacent to the Paden Park Pavilion.

Depression in 1929 quickly slashed that ridership by 30 percent. At this point, West Penn made it clear it no longer intended to subsidize what had become a money-losing operation.

In 1933, the property of the Wheeling Traction Company was sold at public auction to its employees who had organized a new company, the Co-Operative Transit Company. The employee-owned company continued to operate trolleys but increasingly converted its routes to bus service. On April 14, 1948, the last Wheeling trolley was retired.

Clarksburg-Fairmont

The Monongahela West Penn Public Service Company, part of the giant West Penn System, headquartered in Pittsburgh, was the biggest interurban system in West Virginia, with street railways in Clarksburg and Fairmont, a main line connecting the two cities, and branch lines to Mannington, Fairview, Bridgeport and Weston.

In the summer of 1890, Fairmont Electric Light and Power began operating a 30-kilowatt plant on the Monongahela River, providing the city with electric lights. By 1900, the Schmulbach brewing interests of Wheeling acquired control of Fairmont Electric and built the city's first electric streetcar line.

In 1903, local businessmen bought the company back and incorporated it as the Fairmont and Clarksburg Traction Company. As demand for lighting and other purposes supplanted electric streetcars as the major market for electricity, the company name and corporate strategy continued to evolve.

In 1921, the company changed its name to Monongahela Power and Railway Company. Two years later, it was renamed Monongahela West Penn Public Service Company. Like most interurban streetcars, West Penn's trolleys were powered from an overhead electric wire. The cars themselves were larger and heavier than typical city streetcars and were painted in a stand-out bright orange.

Around 1945, West Penn exited the streetcar business, selling out to City Lines of West Virginia, which by 1947 had converted the system to a total bus operation.

Parkersburg-Marietta

Trolley service in both Parkersburg and Marietta, Ohio, began in the 1880s with horse-drawn cars and within a few years graduated to electric cars. Marietta began running electric cars in 1895. When



WEST VIRGINIA STATE ARCHIVES | Courtesy photo

The Wellsburg, Bethany & Washington Railroad operated trolley service north of Wheeling until it shut down in 1926. Despite its name, the little line's builders ran out of money before it reached its intended destination of Washington, Penn.

Parkersburg introduced its new electric cars in 1898, more than 7,000 fares were collected the first day they operated.

At first, the car lines in the two cities were separately owned, but ultimately they were combined as the Parkersburg-Marietta Interurban Railway Company, headed by C.H. Shattuck.

The merged company built a new line from Parkersburg to Williamstown, a major undertaking. But soon an even bigger project was at hand when H.B. Foyt and his partners began construction of a bridge over the Ohio River connecting Williamstown and Marietta. The bridge, completed in 1903 at a cost of \$900,000, enabled the company to run trolleys from Parkersburg to Marietta and back from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

In the 1920s, the growing number of cars on the road prompted a continuing decline in trolley ridership, a problem accelerated when the Great Depression hit in 1929. Trolley service in Marietta was halted in 1931, and portions of service in Parkersburg were phased out. But trolley service between the two towns continued until 1947, far longer than most other systems.

Charleston

Horse-drawn streetcars began serving Charleston in 1888. W.W. Hazard acquired the line in 1898. He organized the Charleston Traction Company



JAMES E. CASTO | Courtesy photo

This vintage postcard showing two Ohio Valley Electric Railway (OVER) streetcars at Huntington's Frederick Hotel is undated, but the design of the automobiles parked at the curb suggest the card dates from the 1920s.

and began electrifying the system, which then changed hands several times during the early 1900s.

In 1902, the system became the Kanawha Valley Traction Company. In 1910, former U.S. Sen. William E. Chilton, former governor W.A. MacCorkle and others purchased the system and renamed it the Charleston Interurban Railroad Company. Chilton and his partners then provided the capital needed to greatly expand the system.

Three streetcar loops were established within the Charleston city limits. In 1912, the South Charleston line was extended to St. Albans and a line was built to connect the new

town of Dunbar. The Kanawha City bridge was built in 1915. And the line was extended to Cabin Creek in 1916.

The Charleston Interurban Railroad was a profitable venture in the 1920s, but with the arrival of the Great Depression it soon was running deeply in the red. The company went bankrupt and was purchased in 1935 by the newly formed Charleston Transit Company, which replaced the streetcars with buses on June 29, 1939.

Princeton-Bluefield

The Princeton Power Co. was formed in 1908 by Samuel J. Evans to provide electric power, coal, ice and street

railway service in Princeton. The town's first trolley began operation between the Mercer County courthouse and the Virginian Railway passenger station, a distance of a little more than a mile.

About the same time, the Appalachian Power Company's Bluefield Street Railway started operating a 10.5-mile trolley line with a number of stops, including the Norfolk & Western Railway station.

In 1916, the Princeton Power Company began operation of an interurban trolley line of some 13 miles that linked the Mercer County courthouse (and connected there with the affiliated Princeton trolley line) and the N&W station in Bluefield (where it connected with the Bluefield Street Railway).

In 1920, Princeton Power purchased the Bluefield Street Railway from Appalachian Power. In 1928, the name of the whole trolley operation was changed to the Tri City Traction Company.

Buses replaced the Bluefield city trolleys 1937 and Princeton's trolleys in 1940, but the interurban continued on until it was replaced with buses in 1947.

Sistersville

In 1888, Sistersville was home to only 600 people. A decade later, thanks to the discovery of an enormously rich oil field, the Tyler County community's population in 1898 had boomed to more than 7,000. The busy town was served by three trolley lines.

In 1903, the Union Traction Company began service between Sistersville and Paden City. From there, the company went on to complete an 11-mile line to New Martinsville. The line remained in service until 1925, when the West Virginia State Road Commission purchased the right-of-way to construct State Route 2.

Also in 1903, the Parkersburg & Ohio Valley Electric Railway built a line between Sistersville and Friendly. Only five miles long, it was abandoned in 1918.

In 1913, the Tyler Traction Company built a 13-mile track between Sistersville and Middlebourne, the county seat. The first trolley of the day left Sistersville at 6:30 a.m. and the last car left Middlebourne at 7 p.m. The ride between the two towns took 40 minutes. The line carried both passenger and freight traffic until it ceased operation in 1930.

Wellsburg-Bethany

Built by a group of local investors, the Wellsburg, Bethany and Washington (WB&W) Railroad operated trolley service north of Wheeling until it shut down in 1926. Despite its name, the little line's owners ran out of money before it reached its intended destination of Washington, Pennsylvania.

The first trolley rolled into Bethany on Sunday morning, June 7, 1908. The event was celebrated by Bethany College President T.E. Cramblet as a "great day for Bethany."

Transportation historian Boragan Tanner notes in "The West Virginia Encyclopedia" that many local residents "believed the 'Toonerville Trolley' comic strip was based on the antics of the WB&W."

Folks in many other small towns were similarly convinced that their little rickety trolley line was the inspiration for the popular newspaper comic strip, which debuted in 1908 and ran until 1955. But strip creator Fontaine Fox said he got his idea when he saw a rattletrap streetcar during a visit to West Chester County in New York.

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PARKS

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Today, the association says, only 11 of the nation's trolley parks remain in operation.

Camden Park, West Virginia's only amusement park, is one of them. Like streetcar lines in other towns, the Camden Interstate Railway Co. established a small park in an effort to boost its weekend and holiday ridership. Crowds of fun-seekers would ride the trolley to the tree-lined park, located just west of Huntington. Later, a dance pavilion was built and a few simple amusement rides were added.

When the streetcar line opened Camden Park in 1903, it hired Col. E.G. Via as the park's first manager. Via bought the park in 1916 and ran it until his death in 1946. Huntington furniture dealer

James P. Boylin then purchased the park.

In 1980, the Boylin family sold the park to out-of-town owners, a move that proved disastrous. The new owners neglected essential maintenance and, when they found themselves deep in debt, even sold off the hand-carved wooden horses that once graced the vintage carousel, replacing them with replicas.

In 1995, the Boylins reclaimed the park. Since then, the family has invested time, money and effort to bring the park back from the brink.

In the early 1900s, West Virginia had several other trolley parks, including Terrapin Park in Parkersburg, Tyler County's Paden Park and Luna Park in Charleston.

In 1898, Charles H. Shattuck, president of the Parkersburg Electric Power and Street Railway, built a trolley park at the intersection of Dudley Avenue

and 25th Street. He named it Terrapin Park because of a small humped-up knoll on the property. The following year, he built the Terrapin Park Casino — not a gambling casino as we use the term today, but a multi-purpose building that included a 2,000-seat auditorium.

In 1913, Henry L. Brenig expanded Terrapin Park by adding a roller coaster, carousel, dance hall, skating rink and other attractions. In 1916, Paul and Jack Crane took over the park and had two good seasons. But when the park closed for the season after Labor Day in 1918, a fire broke out that all but leveled it. The owners had no insurance and the park was not rebuilt.

In 1904, the Ohio Valley and Duquesne Glass companies partnered to build Paden Park on land in south Paden City, installing a baseball field, open-air dance floor, confectionery



JAMES E. CASTO | Courtesy photo

Like streetcar lines in other towns, the Camden Interstate Railway Co. established a small park to boost its weekend and holiday ridership. Here's an early view of the Camden Park Streetcar Station. Today, Camden Park is West Virginia's only operating amusement park.

and carousel. The park proved popular but didn't come into full flower until 1909, when the Union Traction Co., which op-

erated the Sistersville-New Martinsville trolley line, built the two-story Paden Park Pavilion.

The pavilion's first floor had a large ballroom that replaced the open-air dance floor on the park grounds. The second floor featured a big skating rink. Although the last trolley in Tyler County ceased operation in 1930, Paden Park lived on until 1943.

Opened in 1912 on the West Side of Charleston on the north bank of the Kanawha River, Luna Park had a roller coaster, a dance pavilion, a roller rink and live entertainment, but its primary attraction was a huge 200,000-gallon swimming pool.

According to a 1913 newspaper article, the streetcars of the Charleston Interurban Railroad carried passengers to and from the park at a rate of 1,200 an hour.

A 1923 fire destroyed most of Luna Park. It never reopened. Eventually, residential housing was constructed on the former park grounds.