"No Good Deeds Go Unpunished"— The Sad Story of The Waukegan, Rockford & Elgin Traction Company

By William R. Coulson

The Waukegan, Rockford, & Elgin Traction Company is one of the more obscure and short-lived railroads in the Chicago area. Unlike most of the "pie-in-the-sky" interurban ventures of its era, however, the WR&ETrCo actually ran a railroad – from 1911 to 1924. But it never reached Waukegan, never reached Elgin, never reached Rockford, and never used traction!

The recent discovery in a dusty Waukegan basement of 39 original hand-notated 1910-1911 land deeds for the line's right-of-way acquisition has shed a new light on the forgotten railroad and its era.

The WR&ETrCo began in 1909 as an ill-fated but grandiose plan by Waukegan promoters Robert Wynn and J.K. Orvis to construct an electric interurban from Waukegan to Fox Lake and then all the way to Rockford, with a branch from Fox Lake down to Elgin. Efforts to fund and acquire such an ambitious right-of-way quickly foundered. The Waukegan city council tried to extort ever more financial "concessions" from the company, and efforts to sell stock shares in the enterprise were not successful. Only in the roadless areas of southwestern Lake County did the local people greet the proposal with enthusiasm and money. So the WR&ETrCo contented itself with first trying to build part of the shorter branch from the C&NW at Palatine north toward Fox Lake.

Under Illinois law, railroads had eminent domain powers to acquire their rights-of-way. If the railroad and the landowner could not agree on a price, the railroad could sue and the court would determine the fair price for the land. Obtaining the right-of-way involved first surveying the desired route, obtaining options to buy the strips of land from the owners, acquiring required franchises from towns along the route, grading the proposed route, getting deeds for the land from the owners or filing condemnation suits, and only then laying the ties and the rails.

Financing and land acquisition required good lawyers, then as now. The recently found deeds and notes had been the property of one of the railroad's Waukegan founders and attorneys - Claire C. Edwards. Edwards later became a judge and ruled on many of the line's subsequent receivership issues. The deeds trace the road's right-of-way from Palatine up through Lake Zurich and then north to Wauconda, where the line ended at today's Route 176 in Memorial Park.

The WR&ETrCo ran this 12-mile railroad under the operating name "Palatine, Lake Zurich & Wauconda Railroad." It was never electrified. The road was nicknamed "The Old Maud," for reasons unclear until now. The line's operating history is detailed in the late Richard Whitney's excellent 1992 book "The Old Maud," and at the Palatine, Ela, and Wauconda Historical Societies. The story of the line's construction, operation, and demise is illuminated by the recently discovered deeds and notes.

To raise funds to construct the railroad the promoters held lavish public rallies throughout the area at which stock subscriptions were solicited. Many of these rallies teased the locals with vague promises of future expansion; but towns like Schaumberg Centre, Lake Geneva, and Fox Lake never saw any rails. Two survey teams planned the route, one working south from Wauconda and one working north from Palatine. In July of 1910 the promoters walked the entire proposed line, obtaining options from the farmers and needed newspaper publicity. The WR&ETrCo surveyed a route north from Palatine to Wauconda and all the way to Fox Lake, and even
obtained land options up to Volo.

In 1910 this area was all farmland. There were no paved roads, only muddy wagon trails. Palatine was home to 1,144 people; Lake Zurich's population was just 304, and Wauconda's was only 368 souls. The farmers and the dependent local businessmen desperately wanted the railroad. Many of them signed options to donate a 100 foot wide strip of their farmland to the railroad. Once the route was announced, many of these farmers volunteered crews to clear brush and trees from their parts of the right-of-way.

In July of 1910, Charles Patten, who owned the Palatine Bank, was named President of the line. That fall Palatine, Lake Zurich, and Wauconda each granted the road a franchise to operate through their villages. There were no extortionate demands as happened in Waukegan. For $1, Wauconda also leased to the railroad the present Memorial Park area for 50 years. This turned out to be at the very end of the right-of-way, as Wauconda also declined to permit a bridge north over Main Street. Lake Zurich's franchise approved a bridge over the EJ&E tracks, and a connection from the WR&ETrCo to the EJ&E, but denied permission for any crossing at grade there.

Grading officially began August 24, 1910, just north of Palatine on the Engeling and Converse farms. Many cuts and fills were needed to traverse swampy and hilly terrain. It was heavy work with horse-drawn wagons and steam shovels. The road decided to build the line north from Palatine as funds were raised. So the options were exercised and the formal warranty deeds signed by the farmers. The recently discovered original deeds are dated from March 15, 1910, to April 15, 1911.

Each typed deed is bound with a blue cover, stamped “Waukegan, Rockford & Elgin Traction Company.” Each includes the legal description, the legal conveyance language “for railroad purposes and appurtenances,” the release of any damage claims to the “adjoining lands,” any special conditions, and a notarization. All but two of the 39 deeds simply recite the payment of “$1 and other valuable consideration,” a legalistic convention. All but two are warranty deeds; that is, deeds that convey full title outright to the WR&ETrCo. Eleven of the deeds expressly required the railroad to install farm crossings, stops, platforms, shelters, or drains. The 100-foot strips of land are defined not only by legal description, but also, on 25 deeds, by attached plats which together sketch in detail the entire right-of-way to Wauconda. The deeds are signed by the seller and the notary. Many of them contain handwritten notes by the railroad’s officers and attorneys; “OK J. Orvis,” for example. The accompanying chart lists each deed by grantor, date, Township Section, precise location, and special requirements.

Digital scans of several of the original deeds and plats can be viewed and downloaded by Shore Line members at www.shore-line.org/pdfs/good-deeds.

Negotiating the options and getting the deeds written up and then signed and notarized could not have been cheap or easy in 1910. The farmers were isolated, without telephones, on muddy dirt roads. Each land title had a distinct history – the

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Invitation and original timetable from a newspaper. —Author’s photos, courtesy of the Palatine Historical Society

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Chicago, Palatine & Wauconda R. R. Co.

F. R. Watson, Superintendent, Wauconda, Ill.

Subject to change without notice

Central Standard Time

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* Daily except Sunday  [ Sunday Only ]

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Ford and Feddeler properties were held by estates, for example; while the Dinan land was in litigation over who owned it. Drafting the legal descriptions for 100-foot wide strips was truly an art, and the surveying had to be precise to measure the boundaries in feet as they did. Each signature had to be witnessed and notarized by a notary. Fortunately, several of the railroad’s officers were lawyers and notaries – they carried the written deeds to the farmers for one-stop-service. Investors J.K Orvis, President Charles Patten, Emil Ficke, and E.W. Brooks each notarized many of the deeds. A company wagon had to slog up and down the surveyed farm roads to obtain these signed deeds. The Sinnott property heirs all lived in Los Angeles and Alameda, so lawyers in California were hired, by correspondence, to obtain the signatures and notarizations. All this took time; yet was essential before track-laying could begin.

In fact many of the 100 foot wide strips of land were donated by farmers eager to have the line cross their property. The route was designed to skirt the edges of the farms, rather than cut through their centers. Only two of the deeds stated the price. In Palatine 4.41 acres of the Engelking land sold for $882 – $200 an acre. In Wauconda the Gilberts quit-claimed a lot for the Wauconda depot for $700. Only the Courtney brothers, John and James, whose land was south of Lake Zurich, failed to come to an agreement with the railroad. The only condemnation action filed by the WR&ETrCo resulted in a judgment of $500 for the Courtney strip of land. The lawyers for the WR&ETrCo, pro bono, were Orvis & Beaubien of Waukegan.

In a Financial Statement dated July 10, 1911, the WR&ETrCo reported that the cost of the “100 foot right-of-way and franchises” was $37,200. This averages out to about $260 an acre for the 144 acre right-of-way. One can only wonder what the “cost” of a village franchise was in 1910!

In addition to the Courtneys, the railroad had trouble with the Lake Zurich Golf Club north of town. The surveyors had planned the road to cross the land of the exclusive club – which has included Daniel Burnham, Chester Gould (of “Dick Tracy” comics fame), and Dr. Robert Lawson, the Chief of Children’s Memorial Hospital, among its members. Club men learned that under Illinois law a railroad
could not condemn cemetery land. So, in the best Chicago tradition, they incorporated the parcel in question as a cemetery, and supposedly buried four cadavers there from the medical school. A sarcastic headstone was placed at the burial site, which stated that the men were “interred to foil the vile machinations of a huge and heartless railroad.” Huge? No doubt most of the golf club’s members had a larger net worth than did the poor WR&E TrCo!

The headstone also purported to identify the interred men: “Lathrop Washington, a Unitarian”; “Terrence O’Brien, a Roman Catholic”; “Irving Cohen, a Jew”; and “Jackson Washington Johnson, an Afro Baptist.” Who knows who these men really were?! Who knows if they were even buried there?

The exclusive private club continues to commemorate this unique railroad history. The original headstones over the “burial site” near the sixth fairway were removed long ago “to prevent vandalism.” Similar wooden replacement markers have been placed not far from the venerable clubhouse, neatly arranged among stately shade trees. These markers are taken indoors each winter and reinstalled each spring. Ironically, reposing nearby is a Cedar pole ties were frequently all the railroad could afford.

The first revenue run was a month later – 2 miles up to Dundee Road for a picnic in Dr. John Wilson’s Deer Grove Park. The track ran west parallel to the C&NW connection at Palatine for about a mile, and then turned north through the Converse farm, with a platform stop at Baldwin Road. A 16-foot deep, 700-foot long cut was dug through the farm, and the route then sloped gently upward to Dundee Road. The trestle over the West Branch of Salt Creek was not yet built, so passengers had to detrain and walk to the park. By November the track was laid (using second-hand rail) 2 miles further to the Quentin Corners stop (just north of Long Grove Road near Rand Road). Track work was then suspended for the winter months.

After crossing Salt Creek over the timber pile trestle built on the Langhoff parcel, the deeded right-of-way swung west, crossed Quentin Road (near the Deer Grove platform stop) and then paralleled Quentin Road north through the Ela farm and the swampy Sinnott property into Lake County. The right-of-way continued north through the Fischer, Bockelman, and Wiehrdt farms to the Ela platform stop at Rand Road. It ran north across Cuba Road (the Putnam platform stop) through the Sturm, Fred Kropp, and Gibbs farms. Before crossing Cuba Road, the right-of-way had to negotiate the 868-foot high rock-hard clay of Windmill Hill (now in Kildeer). North of Cuba Road, the line swung west around the Henry Kropp farm curve – a wetland – and paralleled Old Rand Road northwesterly into Lake Zurich through the Buhmann, Roberston, Courtney, and H. Berghorn farms. In Lake Zurich the Kuebker and Ficke families deeded land for the trestle over the EJ&E Railroad and for the connecting freight spur north of the crossing. The Ficke Hotel was used as a temporary depot.

Fundraising continued, spurred on by the visible construction progress. In May 1912 Dr. Wilson formally opened his Deer Grove Park and welcomed passengers from Chicago who made the connection from the C&NW at Palatine. By August 25 the tracks reached Lake Zurich, but the steel bridge over the EJ&E was not completed until December. Like its used rail, the WR&E TrCo bought the bridge second-hand. Seven percent grades took the track up over the steel bridge and down again. Lake Zurich volunteers painted the steel trestle for the railroad.

North of Main Street in Lake Zurich the deeded right-of-way traversed through lake outlet sloughs on the Robertson and Hoefl land. Then it curved northwest around the
golf club through the Patten farm, and ran north through the Koffin, Lichtfeld, Hayes, Meyer, Dinan, Pepper and W. Berghorn farms to the intersection of Rand Road and Old McHenry Road. This was the Lakes Corners platform stop on the Feddeler property. The route then paralleled Rand Road on the west, across the Brown and Cook farms in the southwest corner of Fremont Township, to Ivanhoe Road on the Stroker farm, and then west of Main Street up into Wauconda. Volunteers would show up along the right-of-way to help lay the ties and rails. There were no unions and no OSHA in that time and place! Strips through the Wells, Ford, Kirwan, and Gilbert farms and a 4-foot cut brought the railroad into the leased end-of-the-line at Main Street, Wauconda. There a local women’s club held a pot-luck supper to raise money for a wooden depot!

The deeds and the records reflect that the railroad also built three 14-foot high timber pile cattle trestles under the tracks (Ela, Feddeler, Kropp parcels), and two such trestles under the track for drainage (Robertson, Dinan parcels). These required more fills and cuts. Six other grantors required cattle crossings at grade across the tracks. These kinds of farm crossings are still demanded today by farmers along proposed high-speed rail lines. The WR&ETrCo also contracted for 24 miles of wooden fencing, much of which was promptly “liberated” by the locals for firewood.

In October 1912 the WR&ETrCo decided to use the doing-business-as name “Palatine, Lake Zurich & Wauconda Railroad” to reflect its actual destinations. Another vicious winter halted work. Finally, on May 10, 1913, 21 months after construction began, the last spike was pounded in Wauconda. The communities had invested heavily in money, land, and labor to make the railroad a reality. Now they had to utilize and maintain it. The WR&ETrCo reported that it had spent $111,000 to build the line. The railroad carried passengers from Chicago and Palatine to Deer Grove Park and to the resort lakes areas around Lake Zurich and Wauconda. Passengers traveled into Chicago for theater and sports events. Freight included milk, ice, coal, grain, cattle, industrial products, U.S mail, express parcels, lumber, and, ominously for the railroad, gravel and cement for road paving. Freight was interchanged with the EJ&E and with the C&NW. When the mail arrived each day at Lake Zurich and Wauconda, schoolboys would scuffle for the honor of unloading the mail sacks and lugging them to the Post Office.

The run from Palatine to Wauconda took from 40 to 60 minutes. The road scheduled up to three round trips a day, usually mixed trains. The railroad built depots in Lake Zurich, and in Wauconda, and shared the C&NW depot in Palatine. It had platforms at Baldwin Road, Deer Grove Park, Ela (Quentin’s Corners), Putnam (Cuba Road), and Lakes Corners (Rand Road at Old McHenry Road). In practice the road would stop anywhere it needed to. This constant starting and stopping over a mere 2 miles quickly wore down the aged steam locomotives.

The railroad bought, of course, used steam engines and rented passenger cars from the C&NW. Local carpenters also constructed passenger cars from flatcars – building wooden walls and steps and roofs on the flatcars. They had no heat, and no lights. Later, the line also bought a used gas railcar, and then a new gas railcar for passenger use. In 1913 the railroad paid a whopping $1,500 for 0.75 acres in Palatine to extend the line eastward to Bothwell Street and the C&NW depot.

Despite the infusions of cash, land, and labor by the locals, the PLZ&W (as it was now called), was in trouble from the beginning. By May of 1914 it was delinquent on its real estate taxes. In October of that year a creditor sued and the road was placed in receivership. Costs of electrification were prohibitive, and by now even Wauconda opposed putting up catenary. The road had no snow removal equipment. Fierce winter storms often buried the roadbed, especially in the numerous cuts, and the line had to shut down for weeks at a time. Once again, the locals chipped in and volunteers with shovels cleared the line. Mudslides the rest of the year into the poorly-drained cuts also interfered with the operation.

The second-hand steam locomotives frequently couldn’t get up the ramps to the steel bridge over the EJ&E at Lake Zurich. Sometimes the passengers had to get out and walk across the EJ&E; sometimes the engineer would back up and get a running start to try again. Derailments were too common, as the engines would split the poorly ballasted track. These, and other stoppages, caused even the supportive locals to refer to the railroad as the “Palatine, Lake Zurich, and Walk.”

But the road soldiered on. In 1916 a new startup – the Chicago, Fox Lake & Northwestern Electric Railway contracted to buy the PLZ&W for $50,000 cash and $150,000 in notes. Within a year the buyer defaulted and no sale was consummated. In 1916 Henry Ford sold 472,000 Model T cars at $360 apiece. The public started to clamor for paved roads.

On April 6, 1917, the US declared war on Germany. An 8% war tax and limits on freight fares further depressed the bottom line. Then the US Boiler inspectors condemned the line’s two locomotives, necessitating fast, costly repairs. One ray of hope was the opening of the DeSmet Quartz Tile factory along the right-of-way south of the Wauconda depot. DeSmet produced
quality floor tiles for sale around the world and later, roof tiles, and became an important freight customer.

In 1918 the C&NW sued for $12,000 owed to it, and the receiver ordered the railroad sold at auction for a minimum of $68,000. There were no bidders! The Court eventually approved the sale of the railroad to a committee of note holders for $60,000, to be paid over time. In November the order to dismantle the railroad for scrap was vacated.

The committee buying the railroad just barely met the deadline to raise the money for the purchase. In July 1919 the Court ordered the lands deeded to the WR&ETrCo to be re-deeded over to the committee, which incorporated as the “Palatine, Lake Zurich & Wauconda Railroad.” All WR&ETrCo stock became worthless. The new owners issued 6% bonds, due in 1939. No payments were ever made on these notes.

Also in 1919 the railroad bought, on credit, its new gasoline railcar from the White Motor Company. This was cutting-edge technology at the time, and the car was featured on the cover of Scientific American Magazine. With it, the road could carry passengers even when the steam locomotives were out of service, which was often. The railroad never made a single payment on this purchase. In June of 1919 the state and county began paving Dundee Road and Quentin Road. The PLZ&W carried loads of the paving materials for this project.

In 1920 Myron Detrick was named the new president of the PLZ&W. He paid thousands of dollars in railroad bills out of his own pocket to keep the line alive. The Transport Bill was enacted in Washington, which guaranteed a 5.5% return for railroads. Detrick’s efforts to interest Sam Insull and the C&NW in buying the line were fruitless. In September Detrick filed a petition to abandon the railroad. This quieted the creditors, and Detrick withdrew the petition in October. DETrick then put in a siding at Deer Grove Park, for which the Forest Preserve paid the road $1,000. And Detrick built a new engine house in Wauconda as an addition to the DeSmet Tile building. This kept the old, used locomotives in working condition for a while. Then in July a road section foreman was tragically killed when he fell under a moving train at Wauconda.

In April 1921 the directors changed the road’s name to “Chicago, Palatine & Wauconda Railroad,” thus alienating the good people of Lake Zurich. Huge snowdrifts closed the line during the winter. To raise money to paint the passenger coach, the Wauconda Ladies Club held another supper event. In September of 1921, contracts were let to pave the Volo-Wauconda Road. The railroad shipped the gravel and other materials to the sites. A check from the Federal government under the Transport Act paid down some bills and overhauled the aging locomotives.

It was not until 1922 that the Government removed the 8% World War I tax. But this was coupled with a mandated reduction in freight rates. And the government began paving Rand Road between Wauconda and Lake Zurich. Early the next year bus and taxi companies were formed to operate on these new government-provided roadways. Snowstorms in March 1923 again closed the line for weeks. In May a fireman’s legs were severed in a switching accident in Palatine. In September at Dundee Road a train struck
an auto speeding along the newly-paved highway. Despite the overhauls, in December 1923 the ICC again condemned the road’s two locomotives.

Myron Detrick paid for another used locomotive out of his own pocket. January 1924 snowstorms again shut down the line. The U.S. Mail contract was cancelled. In February the government finally paid the road $4200 for its wartime deficits – too late. In July the road was sold on contract for $85,000, but the buyer soon defaulted. There was little hope. After the July 4 weekend, at the government’s safety urging, Detrick suspended service. Heavy rains in August then swamped the cuts on the railroad, where drainage had always been substandard. The C&NW blocked its connection. In September Claire C. Edwards, now a Circuit Judge, appointed Detrick as the line’s Receiver (the same Claire C. Edwards who had saved these deeds). In November of 1924 clandestine and illegal runs were made from the DeSmet plant in Wauconda with roofing tiles down to the EJ&E connection at Lake Zurich. That was the end of the PLZ&W.

The railroad had, through sheer will, survived a host of catastrophes: second-hand rails, untreated homemade ties, inadequate grading and drainage, massive snowdrifts, mudslides, sinkholes, quicksand, water springs, earthquake tremors, third-hand locomotives, amateur volunteer labor, boiler condemnations, a scarlet fever epidemic, coal strikes, a milk-farmer revolt, the arrests of three of its officers, a hoof-and-mouth disease epidemic, a World War, continuous debt, defaulting buyers, derailments, deadly accidents, two abandonment petitions, and Government price caps. It was a railroad that only its parents could love! But what it could not survive was an idea whose time had come: the automobile.

It took decades to wind down the PLZ&W. Receiver Detrick sadly presided over the burial of the road. Lake Zurich paved over its Main Street crossing, and the rolling stock could not be moved out from Wauconda. A proposed asset sale to a scrapper in 1926 fell through when only half of the bondholders tendered their notes. The Village of Wauconda took back its land under the defaulted lease. The Wauconda depot was sold in 1929 and moved for use as a residence. The Lake Zurich depot sat rotting until 1942, when it was moved to Whitney Point at the lake...
to serve as a bathhouse until torn down. In 1932 an engine house fire destroyed the wooden rolling stock. In 1935 the steel trestle over the EJ&El at Lake Zurich was torn down for scrap. In 1937 the rusting engines were cut up for scrap and sold.

The right-of-way land, so carefully acquired in 1910-111, dissolved away over time. The Wauconda depot site was sold for $800 and was given to the Methodist Church in 1929. Later that year, yet another proposed sale to a scrap buyer, this time for $88,000, fell through. The road’s real estate tax certificate buyer tore out some rails in Deer Grove, further severing the right-of-way. In 1931 the Cook County Forest Preserve paid $20,000 to Receiver Detrick for the right-of-way through the preserve. Numerous squatters who had built cabins on the land were evicted. A report by the Chicago Title Company in 1930 listed numerous technical defects in the deeds under which the railroad had operated, such as inadequate parcel descriptions, omitted co-owners, and minors signing the deeds. The land titles were a mess.

Some of the farmers simply took back their land – there was no railroad to object. Other segments were acquired by tax sale buyers or by adverse possession over many years. The tracks were torn out bit by bit – the rails at Palatine remained until 1940. The widening of US 12 – Rand Road – in the 1950s paved over long stretches of the right-of-way; a fitting burial of the railroad by the highway!

The PLZ&W was ahead of its time in one respect: it anticipated correctly the path of future development. Most of the right-of-way deeded land, not paved over, is now covered by suburban housing developments, from Palatine all the way north to Wauconda. Cuts and fills were leveled long ago, and wooden cattle crossings bulldozed away. The right-of-way serves in many places today as property line borders.

The genesis of the line’s nickname “The Old Maud” is “uncertain,” according to Richard Whitney’s book. Later writers claimed that it was named after a comic strip “Maud the Mule,” but no contemporary records support this theory. Maud the Mule was a stubborn, vindictive comics character that liked to kick farmers, and was unrideable. While these attributes might well have described the railroad in its later years, at the road’s founding they would not fit the optimistic promise held by area residents. Whitney also posits that there was a woman in Waukegan named Maud believed to be related to the line’s general manager. The role played by the railroad’s co-founder and attorney – Claire C. Edwards, who saved the deeds for posterity in his sister’s Waukegan home, may finally explain the origin of the name. For Claire C. Edwards’ younger sister was Maud Edwards. Maud Edwards was given the deeds by her brother Claire. She had married Hervey Coulson, a Waukegan lawyer and Justice of the Peace. Maud kept the deeds until her death in 1971, after which they were stored in Maud’s son’s home in Waukegan. Maud Edwards likely is the “Maud from Waukegan” whom Richard Whitney believed was the source of the railroad’s nickname.

Not surprisingly, very little of the right-of-way is discernable today. At Palatine the road began in back of the 1895 building now occupied by the Lamplighter Inn (photos of the PLZ&W trains adorn the walls), near today’s Metra Station. It ran parallel to the CS&NW westward, then turned north just before Stephen Drive and ran adjacent to the Palatine Golf Course up to Dundee Road. Fill is still evident just to the east of the Palatine Trail bike/hiking path as it approaches Dundee Road. Across Dundee the wooden timber pilings and iron supports for the trestle...
over the West Branch of Salt Creek can still be seen, just to the west of the old concrete footbridge. The fill north of the creek still exists, before the path turns left and joins the hiking path in Camp Reinberg, in the Cook County Forest Preserve. A dilapidated concession stand abuts the right-of-way, and a ramp for loading supplies is still evident. The right-of-way then crosses Quentin Road north-west as a horse trail.

To appreciate the development which has swallowed the right-of-way, one can drive north today on Quentin Road from Camp Reinberg. Turn left onto US 12 (Rand Road) at Quentin Corners and drive north past Windmill Hill and the Kropp wetlands on the right. Turn right off US 12 at Old Rand Road all the way into Lake Zurich. The right-of-way is along the east side of the road. In Lake Zurich the PLZ&W crossed over the EJ&E from today’s True Value Hardware store into today’s Lions/Blau Park. The 1895 EJ&E depot still stands, in private hands, near where the freight spur connected north to the PLZ&W. Some fill on the north side of the EJ&E crossing can be seen. The village bought the right-of-way north past the depot site and turned it into Lions Drive. The depot site is presently occupied by a day care center in the old post office. The site of the Ficke Hotel across the street is now the Lake Zurich Village Hall. Traveling north on Lions Drive, past the Oak Ridge Marsh Nature Park on the Robertson farm, the curve to the left is where the railroad and Charles Patten had to adjust the survey to avoid the golf club’s “cemetery.”

North of Miller Road, the right-of-way passes through undeveloped woodlands as it approaches US 12 west of Virginia Avenue. At Old McHenry Road, widened US 12 has swallowed up much of the right-of-way. Into Wauconda on Old Rand Road the right-of-way passes the former engine house/DeSmere Quartz Tile building, which, despite a tornado and then a fire, still stands at the end of Kent Avenue. It has been covered with aluminum siding and altered somewhat. It is occupied today by Campbell International, Inc, which makes cabs for industrial machines. The route then runs north through an expanded Wauconda Cemetery, ending at Route 176 in Memorial Park where the Veteran’s Monument stands. The Federated Church occupies the depot site. The depot is still a residence at 172 Maple Avenue, near the grade school. And it still looks like a depot!

None of the farm family names on the deeds appears today on Lake County’s land plats (available at the Lake County Museum in Wauconda). Many still did appear on the 1940s plat; but by the 1960s the farms were all gone. Hopefully, these families “cashed in” on grandfather’s land and sold out to the developers for heady sums.

The PLZ&W is still celebrated at the Palatine, Ela, and Wauconda Historical societies. Tickets, timetables, photographs, and even rail spikes can be examined. On YouTube, the tribute ballad “The Old Maud” can be heard, sung by The Dan and Jenny Trio.

The sad story of the WR&ETrCo is a story of its time. Volunteers, land donors, and risk-taking investors created and nourished the line. But the railroad was doomed. There was no margin for error. It was never able to partner with an electric company to provide cheaper traction power. Its right-of-way was quickly, cheaply, and poorly graded and drained. The road traversed just 12 miles through sparsely populated farmlands. And it failed to anticipate the speed with which Henry Ford would mass-produce affordable cars, and the attendant public clamor for paved public roads. Yet it is still a remarkable railroad story – even if it never reached Waukegan, Rockford, or Elgin. Truly, no good deeds went unpunished for the WR&ETrCo!

Sources
39 original WR&ETrCo deeds, 1910-1911
25 attached plats, 1910-1911
Author’s field research and interviews, 2013
Wauconda Public Library, Julie De Reu
Wauconda Historical Society, Lynn McAlister
Ela Historical Society, Harold Chisamore
Palatine Historical Society, Denise Limburg, Joe and Dan Petykowski
Lake County Discovery Museum, Archives, Diana Dretske
Lake Zurich Golf Club, Glen and Mary Ann Fuller
“North Shore Line Memories,” by George Campbell, 1980, Domus books
Rand McNally: Chicago 6-County Street Finder (Township Section maps)
Location I. The entrance to the Lake Zurich Golf Club is off of Old Rand Road north of town. The mock cemetery was a diabolical scheme hatched by club members to force the railroad to go around the club. —Two photos Joe and Dan Petykowski, Palatine Historical Society  A restored 1890s horsedrawn coach, which was used to transport club members from the railroad is exhibited on the golf club grounds. —Author's photo
Waukegan, Rockford & Elgin Traction Company—DEEDS—1910-1911

By William R. Coulson

Right-of-way parcels, from Palatine north to Wauconda, with modern references. Generally 100-foot wide strips of land

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<td>11-19-1913</td>
<td>Palatine 15</td>
<td>12 Nicholas and Mary Baker</td>
<td>4-4-1911</td>
<td>Ela 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This 0.75 acres was bought by the railroad for $1500 after it was built to Wauconda in 1913. The strip ran southeastward along the C&amp;NW in Palatine and extended the southern end of the line to Bothwell Street. Price was about $2,000 an acre. This deed was not among those recently discovered.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Joseph and Sophie Kitson</td>
<td>9-24-1910</td>
<td>Palatine 15</td>
<td>13* Dan and Sophia Sturm</td>
<td>12-14-1910</td>
<td>Ela 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land along the north side of the C&amp;NW railway. Deed notarized by Railroad President Charles Patten, also owner of the Palatine Bank.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.41 acre strip along C&amp;NW right-of-way (0.37 mile). Curve north between today's Stephen and Walden Drives. Required a &quot;station or platform for use of patrons,&quot; $882 paid - $200 per acre.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Edwin and Zilpha Converse</td>
<td>2-14-1911</td>
<td>Palatine 15 and 10</td>
<td>15 Eleanor Gibbs</td>
<td>10-28-1910</td>
<td>Ela 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 acre strip north from Engelking (about 1 mile long). Required RR to &quot;forever maintain division fences&quot; and &quot;maintain and keep in the condition now existing the drain or drains underlying the road bed&quot; and &quot;running across the lands&quot; conveyed. Fills needed to Baldwin flag stop just south of Baldwin Road (Northwest Highway, US 14). 700-foot long &quot;Converse cut&quot; north of Baldwin Road was 18 feet below grade: causing mud and snow shutdown. Now along and west of the Palatine Hills Golf Course and the Palatine Trail (biking and walking) Now developed for housing. Converse ran along golf course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Frederick and Reka Langhoff</td>
<td>3-21-1911</td>
<td>Palatine 10</td>
<td>16 Henry and Sophia Kropp</td>
<td>10-15-1910</td>
<td>Ela 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.08 acre strip (about 0.5 mile). Plat attached. Plat north to Dundee Road into Cook County Forest Preserve, east of Quentin Road, over West Branch of Salt Creek. Fifteen foot timber pile trestle built over Creek. Deed notarized by President Patten. Now Palatine Trail as it nears Dundee Road. Fill visible. Timbers and iron supports for trestle still visible in creek, just west of the old concrete footbridge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 John W. and Emily Wilson</td>
<td>March 1, 1911</td>
<td>Palatine 3</td>
<td>17 Jacob and Johanna Buemann</td>
<td>3-1-1911</td>
<td>Ela 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.86 acre curved strip (0.32 mile). Plat. Sold by veterinarian Dr. Wilson, the founder of Deer Creek Park, north from the Salt Creek Branch north of Dundee Road. Plat visible today, then curves west and crosses Quentin Road. Deer Grove Park stop was just east of Quentin Road crossing. Today it is Camp Reinberg, Cook County Forest Preserve. Plat joins hiking trail northeast through camp to Quentin Road crossing, which is now a horse trail. Crumbling concession stand abuts the right-of-way, with rear supply chute evident.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Caroline E.H. Ela</td>
<td>March 15, 1910</td>
<td>Palatine 4</td>
<td>18 John and Julia Robertson</td>
<td>10-10-1910</td>
<td>Ela 28 and 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.26 acre strip (0.6 mile) north to Sinnott property. Plat attached. A 14 foot timber pile trestle cattle crossing was also installed. Ela Township named after this family. Deed notarized by President Patten. Today it is in Deer Grove Forest Preserve, paralleling west of Quentin Road northerly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Delia and Kathryn Sinnott, and Weber and Murphy heirs</td>
<td>March 15, 1910</td>
<td>Palatine 4</td>
<td>19 John and James Courtney</td>
<td>12-6-1910</td>
<td>Ela 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.92 acre strip north to Lake County line (0.25 mile). Plat attached. Grantsors lived in Los Angeles and San Francisco, so railroad needed California lawyers and notaries. Plat shows three large swamps, fills needed. Today this is in Deer Grove Forest Preserve at Lake County line west of Quentin Road.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Rosalie Fischer</td>
<td>11-18-1910</td>
<td>Ela 33</td>
<td>20* John and Julia Robertson</td>
<td>10-20-1910</td>
<td>Ela 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.17 acres (0.5 mile) Strip north up to Long Grove Road Deed recorded; but absent from deeds found in basements. Today strip is developed, defines lot lines, runs northing between Rue Jardin and Deer Valley Drive in Deer Park. Area developed for housing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Henry and Mary Bockelman</td>
<td>2-14-1911</td>
<td>Ela 33</td>
<td>21 Henry and Emma Berghorn</td>
<td>2-11-1911</td>
<td>Ela 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 acre strip (0.25 mile) north from Long Grove Road. RR agreed to &quot;forever maintain division fences,&quot; and to maintain the drains underlying the road bed and &quot;running across the lands&quot; conveyed. Area now developed, with a field, border between Kildeer and Deer park.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Frederika Wiehrdt</td>
<td>11-19-1910</td>
<td>Ela 33</td>
<td>22 Fred and Ellen Kuebler</td>
<td>9-8-1910</td>
<td>Ela 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 acre strip (0.125 mile), north up to Sturm farm. Deed recorded, but absent from deeds found in basement. Ela stop was on this property (south of Rand Road west of Quentin Corners and Quentin Road). Now in Kildeer. Quentin Corners now a traffic-choked intersection.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Nicholas and Mary Baker</td>
<td>4-4-1911</td>
<td>Ela 33</td>
<td>23 Tillie Ficke</td>
<td>8-10-1910</td>
<td>Ela 20 and 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.84 acre (0.15 miles) strip north to and across Rand Road (US 12) from Wiehrdt farm. Plat attached. Siding added later. In 1957 the Sturm family was the first to sell out to developers. Today strip is east of where Sturm Rd. nears US12, Rand Road.</td>
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</table>

*Quiltclaim deed releasing any interest through a 1908 mortgage on the Sturm property.*

*Deed notarized by E.A. Ficke, Lake Zurich investor in the railroad. Deed notarized by E.A. Ficke, Lake Zurich investor.*

*The "Kropp farm curve," this wooded, undeveloped wetland area today is just South of the Bishop's Ridge housing development in Kildeer.*

*Small 0.78 acre strip (0.065 miles), from Kropp land northwest. Plat attached.*

*2.78 acres in a 100 foot wide strip (0.23 mile) in Section 28, and 2.37 acres (0.2 miles) in Section 21 along the east side of Old Rand Road and Beechwold toward Lake Zurich. Plat attached. One of three parcels deeded and notarized by the Robertson family.*

*This was the lone condemnation suit brought by the railroad. $500 awarded to Courneys. Land is east of Old Rand Road north of above Robertson strip. Used as tracklayers camp during construction. Railroad attorneys was firm of Orvis & Beaubien.*

*4.20 acres in a 133 foot wide strip east of Old Rand Road northwest toward Lake Zurich (0.26 mile), near Evergreen Street. Plat attached. Evergreen Street crosses the right-of-way.*

*2.43 acres in a 133 foot-wide strip east of Old Rand Road northwest toward Lake Zurich (0.15 mile) Deed notarized by E.A. Ficke, Lake Zurich railroad investor.*

*4 acres in downtown Lake Zurich south of the EJ&E tracks. The deed provides that the street grades "shall be the same grade as the trackage of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern tracks." Today is near Ela Area Public Library. The steel trestle railroad bridge over the EJ&E ran across from today's True Value Hardware store northward into what is now Lions Park. On the north side bridge approach some of the 17-foot high fill is still visible.*

*10 lots in downtown Lake Zurich north of the EJ&E tracks., and a strip of lane running north from the Ficke Hotel. Tillie lived in Dwight, Illinois. Son Emil was Ela Township Supervisor and railroad investor who notarized several of the deeds. This area was a marshy outlet of the lake in 1912. Across the tracks from the Ficke Hotel the depot was built (today a day care center occupies the site, in a former Post Office) The Ficke Hotel site is now occupied by the Lake Zurich Village Hall. Today much of this land is now Lions/ Blau Park. The strip northward is now Lions Drive. Depot was moved to Whitney Point on the lake in the 1930s and served as a bath-house for years.*

By William R. Coulson
Land Deed Locations

44 Village of Wauconda Lease
43 C. & E. Gilbert
42 Arthur Kirwan
41 B. & L. Hammond
40 J., M., & W. Ford
39 Dr. Charles & Fannie Wells
38 George Stroker
37 Emerson & Elizabeth Cook
36 Darwin & Sarah Brown
35* F. & M. Feddeler, et all
34* William & Eliza Berghorn
33 William & Emma Pepper
32 Winifred Dinan
31* Peter & Ida Meyer
30 Katherine & Michael Hayes
29* Louis & Minnie Lichtfeld
28 John & Sophia Koffin
27* Charles & Mary Patten
26 Fred & Emma Hoefi
25* John & Julia Robertson
24 E., L., & J. Dymond
23 Tillie Fiecke
22 Fred & Ellen Kuebker
21 Henry & Emma Berghorn
20* John & Julia Robertson
19 John & James Courtney
18 John & Julia Robertson
17 J. & J. Buhmanner
16 Henry & Sophia Kropp
15 Eleanor Gibbs
14 Fred Kropp
13* Dan & Sophia Sturm
12 Nicholas & Mary Bake
11 Frederika Wiehrodt
10 H. & M. Bockelman
9 Rosalea Fischer
8 D. & K. Sinnott, et all
7 Caroline E.H. Ela
6 John W. & Emily Wilson
5 F. & R. Langhoff
4 E. & Z. Converse
3 S. Engelking, J. & C. Peaser
2 Joseph & Sophie Kitson
1 August Hackbarth

*Digital scans of several of the original deeds can be viewed and downloaded by Shore Line members at http://www.shore-line.org/pdfs/good-deeds
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grantor</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Township &amp; Section</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Township &amp; Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edith, Lida, and James Dymond</td>
<td>1-3-1911</td>
<td>Ela 17</td>
<td>6-35</td>
<td>Ela 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John and Julia Robertson</td>
<td>4-24-1911</td>
<td>Ela 17</td>
<td>7-11-1911</td>
<td>Ela 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred and Emma Hoelt</td>
<td>3-21-1911</td>
<td>Ela 17</td>
<td>8-1-1911</td>
<td>Wauconda 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles and Mary Patten</td>
<td>2-15-1911</td>
<td>Ela 17</td>
<td>8-15-1911</td>
<td>Wauconda 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis and Minnie Lichtfeld</td>
<td>2-25-1911</td>
<td>Ela 8</td>
<td>8-15-1911</td>
<td>Wauconda 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine and Michael Hayes</td>
<td>3-4-1911</td>
<td>Ela 7</td>
<td>8-15-1911</td>
<td>Wauconda 36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter and Ida Meyer</td>
<td>2-22-1911</td>
<td>Ela 7</td>
<td>8-15-1911</td>
<td>Wauconda 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winifred Dinan</td>
<td>4-1-1911</td>
<td>Ela 7</td>
<td>8-15-1911</td>
<td>Wauconda 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William and Emma Pepper</td>
<td>9-10-1910</td>
<td>Ela 6</td>
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<td>Wauconda 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William and Eliza Berghorn</td>
<td>9-8-1910</td>
<td>Ela 6</td>
<td>11-9-1911</td>
<td>Wauconda 25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Location J.** Old Maud’s engine house as it appears today. — Two photos by the Author

**Location K.** We are looking north in Memorial Park at the main intersection in Wauconda. To the left out of the photo is Barrington Road. Crossing from left to right is Liberty Street, Illinois Route 176 and on the right is Main Street. This was the site of the railroad’s northern terminal. — Two photos by the Author