

# Can You Top This?

## Reminiscences of My Trolley Adventures Dating Back to Just Before World War II

By Stanwood C. Griffith

It has been suggested that before my Alzheimer's gets to the point where I can't remember what the subject is, that I should record some of my memories. To summarize, I have ridden almost every company that operated East of the Mississippi River at the end of World War II. I did not get into New England but I have been there since. Bill Janssen and I used to vie with each other as to who had ridden what and the most Birney operations. Now that he is no longer with us it is conceivable that I have ridden more operations than hardly anyone. You can be the judge.

I was born in 1926 so I missed most of the little town operations, and regrettably the Cincinnati & Lake Erie and the Indiana Railroad. I can remember seeing streetcars in Rockford, but didn't ride. My mother and I got off of the New York Central and got onto a river steamer for New York City in 1937, so I probably saw the Albany cars, but don't remember.

People ask how I became interested in railroads as a hobby. I don't know. My parents told everyone that I had always wanted a steam engine in the back yard.

We lived about a block from the C&NW main line to Omaha. It was easy to identify

which trains were going to stop for water, and during my high school years I would jump onto my bike and race down the alley about four blocks to the water plug to talk with the crews. I was brazen about climbing into the cabs, and I was never turned away for some reason. I kept a diary as to what engines stopped, whether they popped off while they sat there, whether he lost his feet in starting the train, and other pertinent data. I would follow the engineers as they "oiled around" and ask questions. I must have been a first class pest but they were always nice. Maybe they liked having someone show an interest in their work.



▲ In 1939 the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City Railway Company, better known as the Crandic, acquired six of the lightweight high-speed cars built in 1930 for the Cincinnati & Lake Erie Railroad. These cars served in Iowa until May 30, 1954, when the Crandic abandoned its passenger operations. Incredibly, Crandic operated these cars with two men, an operator and a conductor. Car 116 is leaving Cedar Rapids on October 26, 1946. The rocking motion of the cars as they sped across the Iowa farmlands gave rise to the unofficial slogan of *Swing and Sway the Crandic Way*.—Thomas H. Desnoyers photo, Krambles Peterson Archive

Stanwood Griffith has lived in the town of Ashton, Illinois, for virtually his entire life. Ashton is 11 miles west of Rochelle on the former Chicago & North Western mainline between Chicago and Omaha. A graduate of the University of Denver, Stan owned and operated a building supply and construction business. He also found time to pursue his interest in electric railways with a 1/2 scale outdoor railway that is powered by overhead trolley. For a short period Stan had a financial interest in the real thing funding the acquisition of Speedrail cars 60 and 61.

When visiting with Stan, bits and pieces of his travels in pursuit of street and interurban railways come out in conversations. We suggested to Stan that he record recollections of his trips across the United States and beyond. Stan would find interesting ways to finance his travels as you can tell from the following. What is present in this magazine is the start of his recollections which covers his first extensive railroad trip. The rest of his story is available on the Shore Line website: [www.Shore-Line.org](http://www.Shore-Line.org)



▲ On Sunday, April 12, 1953, former Indiana Railroad car 65, Crandic car 120, is entering Iowa City. The University of Iowa is in the background.—John F. Humiston photo, Richard Humiston Collection

Everything impresses a kid in an exaggerated way, but I remember vividly what it took to start a train. The engines that stopped were mostly the 2500 series C&NW “Mikes.” The engineer would turn on the sanders, back up about three car lengths so as to have plenty of slack, and then haul way out on the throttle. The first couple of exhausts from the stack were heart stopping. The firemen evidently knew how to fire in order that the whole fire didn’t follow up the stack. It must sure-

ly have lifted bodily off the grates.

I remember how old and stooped the engineers looked with their dirty faces and bib overalls. When I was 65 years old—I was definitely older than they had been—I was 14 years from my retirement from my business, and I don’t think I looked as old and grizzled as those guys did.

In 1941 when I was 15 years old my family went by car to Mexico, and I was old enough to be very much aware of electric railways. The Northeastern Oklahoma had



▲ Freight motor 72, switching in Cedar Rapids on July 15, 1953, finished its career on the Chicago Aurora & Elgin. Diesels replaced the electric motors on October 15, 1953. The railroad continues to operate in 2009. While the original mainline between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City remains, the majority of the freight moves via a former Milwaukee Road line through the Amana Colonies to a junction with the Iowa Interstate that is named in honor of a former president of IAIS, Fredrick C. Yocum. Since its opening for service on August 13, 1904, Crandic has had one owner, Iowa Electric, which is now part of Alliant Energy Corporation. Iowa Electric always looked upon the railroad as a vital element in the economic development of the area which came to be known as the *Crandic Corridor*. Leonard Spacek, the Worldwide Managing Partner of Arthur Andersen & Co. who succeeded Arthur himself in that capacity, started his career as a general ledger accountant for Iowa Electric and was responsible for the accounting records of Crandic. Never forgetting where he started, Leonard would always greet your editor with the following: “Norman, how are the railroads?”—Norman Carlson Collection

evidently been recently converted to diesel as there was equipment here and there, and track, but no trolley wire. We drove through Hartshorne, Oklahoma, and I spotted trolley wire belonging to the Pittsburgh County Railway at the edge of town. I found a gondola car sitting in the street downtown but didn’t see any of their Cincinnati curbside trolley cars.

I did better in Kansas City, Kansas, where we stayed overnight. I wanted to take a streetcar ride but none of the three adults was interested, so my Dad put me onto a streetcar and assured me that it would come back to this point, just stay on the car. Lo and behold, it did. I think that this was my first solo car ride. Kansas City, Kansas, was another place where I rode Birneys. Often these Birney lines were lightly traveled, and the old timers liked to bid on them. They were often referred to as “limber dick lines.”

Mexico City was loaded with old street cars, some with railroad roofs, some with fenders. I wrote to the Trolley Talk section of the Railroad Magazine and reported seeing a car numbered 1 and asking how many other lines had a number 1 in service. We went to Guadalajara and went by a barn with only three cars left not out on line, which I thought was pretty good. At Puebla we followed behind a gray painted car that would be thought of as typical in Mexico. It was old and a complete junker, but full of passengers. It was such a junker that I took a picture of it, but I cannot locate it now.

This was not my first automobile trip. In 1939 we went to California. I was old enough to make note of two different track gauges in the streets of Los Angeles, and we rode the Pacific Electric Catalina Boat train.

As I thought back on this trip, I was mainly impressed by how slow the cars were. I thought that this must be just a kid’s impression, but I rode this same train again in 1950 and my memory was correct. The cars were SLOW. I’ll jump ahead here to a 1950 trip. I was newly married at that time and my wife of six months or so was still tolerant of my far-out hobby and would go with me on car rides. We took the franchise run down to Balboa which ran one car in the morning and evening rush hours. The power was such that I doubt it would have been sufficient for much more. As we got further out on the line the car lights got dimmer and dimmer, and you were aware of each point that the motorman took on the controller.

Of course I had to go ride with the motorman who was in a cab isolated from the rest of the car. I found out that he had quit the C&NW during the war and gone to California. He had worked out of De Kalb, Illinois, and when he found that I lived on the North Western just 25 miles from there, we became big buddies instantly. I got to run the car. Of course being brassy enough to ask never hurts. I had spent three years in the Army by then, and I was not quite so shy. We took a bus from Balboa up to Santa Ana to return to Los Angeles by train.

Getting back to the timeline, when I was in high school I went to a month-long summer band school in Iowa City. I found that I could take a train out of Rochelle, Illinois, about midnight that would get me to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in the early morning. The local station agent could tell from the Official Guide that the Crandic station was just down the street from the C&NW, so I was all set.

There was one of those beautiful yellow ex-C&LE lightweights standing in the street, so I knew just where to go. I was in hog heaven all the way to Iowa City. We were meeting freight trains and northbound passenger cars. It seemed like a very long trip, but I have found that it is common that a first trip seems much longer than ensuing trips. I didn't have a clue about how to find my housing, so I rode around the downtown loop and watched as the car went on its way back to Cedar Rapids.

We were not supposed to ride in any automobiles or go out of town, etc. during the month-long summer school, but I had seen the Indiana Railroad car sitting in the yards at Crandic shops—not in service yet. Not only that, the yard was full of old equipment rusting away. Never mind the rules, I was in the Crandic yards the next weekend. There were a number of shipping tickets wired onto the car in various places, that had served their purpose and there was no reason to leave them, so I didn't!

The University of Iowa's student union in Iowa City must have been designed by a trolley fan. You could sit in there and look out of these big glass windows at one of the most beautiful sights in the world: the Crandic cars going across their Cedar River high bridge. I burned this beautiful sight into my mind. These beautiful yellow cars going across this high bridge in the full sunlight was a sight that you wanted to remember.



▲ Until December 4, 1939, the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern shared the same passenger station with the Crandic in downtown Cedar Rapids. Crandic remained downtown while the WCF&N decamped to 10th Street and Avenue A, across the Cedar River on the fringe of the business district. On May 13, 1939, Crandic train number 4, car 109 is awaiting departure for Iowa City while WCF&N car 102 will operate as train number 1 through the Cedar River Valley to Waterloo.—John F. Humiston photo, Richard Humiston Collection



▲ Iowa was known as the “Land of the Steam Road Trolleys” due to the construction standards and heritage of the lines. WCF&N's line north of Waterloo started as a steam operation. Mainline railroads and concrete roads were predominately in an east-west direction. Much in contrast, the interurbans were predominately built in a north-south direction which accounted for their longevity and strength of their freight businesses. Car 101 is one of three open-end parlor-observation cars delivered in 1914 along with three combination cars to provide a first class service. What is now the baggage compartment on car 101, leaving Urbana, Iowa, on May 30, 1953, was originally a small kitchen to provide buffet services to passengers.—John F. Humiston photo, Richard Humiston Collection



▲ The Cedar River flowed along the entire length of the WCF&N giving it the tradestyle of the Cedar Valley Road. Service between Waterloo and Cedar Falls began on June 9, 1897, and continued with streetcar service until August 1, 1958, outlasting the interurban service to Cedar Rapids which ended on February 20, 1956. This car is crossing the Cedar River in Waterloo near the large John Deere plant.—Stan Griffith photo

One weekend I got really brave and went to Cedar Rapids and walked a long ways to the WCF&N depot in what had been a house. Originally the WCF&N had gone downtown and past the Crandic station. When the streetcars were abandoned the line was cut back to the beginning of their private right-of-way, quite a ways from downtown. The line crossed one end of the Milwaukee's yard not too far from the station and bumped over 10 tracks.

The WCF&N was a well maintained railroad with fairly heavy rail, 90-110 pound, on the mainline between Waterloo and Cedar Rapids. Heavy for those days, and really heavy for an interurban. Its reason for existence was an industrial belt line around Waterloo that served John Deere and a lot of industry.

The passenger trains ran into town over what had obviously been streetcar trackage to a station where they backed in beside the station. Out in front of the station you connected to the car to Cedar Falls. This was a real dandy ride. At this time you rode the ex-Savannah cars bought in 1932. They didn't have the Knoxville master units yet. The line to Cedar Falls was originally a streetcar that had become industrial trackage, except that it still went through people's back yards and did all sorts of long ago things.

This line also served what had been a Women's Army Corps (WAC) training center during the war, and used to originate 2- or 3-car weekend liberty trains to Cedar Rapids. The mainline trains consisted for the most part of big heavy single cars that had been bought as 3 2-car trains, a straight passenger car with a baggage compartment and a car with an open observation deck with brass rails and the whole nine yards on the rear and a control stand in the front.

The WCF&N had originally been a steam road and boasted a roundhouse served by a turntable. This was great until 1954. The roundhouse caught on fire and burned up all but two passenger cars. They were at the mercy of the turntable. Car 100 eventually went to the Iowa Southern Utilities and ran out to a sub-station on the Moravia line. It eventually burned up also, in a car barn fire on the former Mason City & Clear Lake.

Also leaving from this station was the car to Waverly. This was light rail, 65 pound, and the only reason for its being seemed to be an industry in Waverly that made truck-mounted backhoes on ex-



▲ WCF&N's steam road heritage is evident in this photo of the roundhouse and turntable at its shop facilities in Waterloo. A fire in this facility on October 31, 1954, hastened the end of electric operations. Only one interurban car and one streetcar survived the fire. Four electric freight locomotives were destroyed in the fire. Diesels replaced the electrics on freight trains on July 1, 1956. The WCF&N was the "terminal switching carrier" in Waterloo and much of the operation in Waterloo survives in 2009 as part of the Canadian National Railroad.—Stan Griffith photo

Army truck chassis. It crossed the IC mainline in a very photogenic way. Everybody has seen this picture. I evidently rode all the way with my elbow out the window, and I accumulated a severe sun/wind burn, along with these wonderful memories.

This adventure year of 1942 whet my appetite to learn more about the Iowa lines. In the summer of 1943, I used the excuse of going out to Iowa to see some of my band school buddies to persuade my parents to allow me to go. They never found out the details of my trip which was a good thing.

I took the C&NW from Rochelle to Cedar Rapids, the WCF&N to Waterloo and then rode my thumb to Charles City for the Charles City Western. This was primarily a switching operation for the Oliver Tractor Co. They had a really nice passenger car that carried mail to a connection at Marble Rock on the Rock Island and also ran two trips to Colwell, Iowa, on the other leg of the line. After riding for about an hour with the crew in the cab of the steeple cab, I rode the passenger car mail run. The car at one point went several miles with no grade crossings and the motorman came back into the car and visited with me while the car ran itself. If I remember right, I was the only passenger. Incidentally, this car is now at the Boone & Scenic Valley tourist operation at Boone, Iowa, still in pristine condition.

Next stop was the Mason City & Clear Lake at Mason City. At this time there

really wasn't a lot of fan information around, and I don't remember how I came to know about all this stuff, but I was an early-on member of the CERA and got their Bulletins. I also don't remember having to walk inordinate distances to find carbarns and so on. Bear in mind this was during the height of the war—1943—and there just wasn't anyone driving anywhere.

I found a steeple cab switching and they gave me a ride. They said that they had already switched over 200 cars that day, so there was a time when these lines were busy. At the car barn there was an old sway backed center door car. It obviously had seen better days, and also obviously was not in service.

Evidently on my steeplecab ride we went to Clear Lake as I remember asking



▲ This interesting view is at the Cedar Falls end of the streetcar operation.—Stan Griffith photo

about some unused track which the crew said had led down to the Lake for tourist traffic. This trackage to Clear Lake from the carbarn, which was midline from Mason City, has been used and then not used as they were able to locate industries. Currently [2009] it is still intact and runs parallel to a county blacktop and would be an ideal fan operation except for the paucity of population thereabouts, and so no fans.

This line is still operating with beautifully painted steeple cabs which the owner and a brakeman leave in strategic locations and then go by automobile from one motor to another. They are also restoring a North Shore car which is operable.

I hitchiked to Clarendon, Iowa, from Mason City and took the train to Sioux City. I have always been a Birney fan and this operation was like falling into a bucket of honey. The operation was all Birney except for a through routed line with a long suburban private right-of-way on each end. This used large double-truck wood-bodied cars. These cars were stenciled "built in Sioux City." I remember clearly seeing a body in the shop being rebuilt. They took good care of their cars.

My entrance and exit from Sioux City was a bit unorthodox. At Clarendon, Iowa, the Illinois Central had a yard and some passenger cars, one of which served as my bedroom for the night. I got onto the IC passenger train and put my satchel in a baggage rack. Then I went out and climbed onto the end of the first passenger car which evidently was a baggage car and had a doorway. I stood in the doorway all the way to Sioux City. This was an interesting ride as it was next to the locomotive. I remember the water sloshing out of the tank onto the deck and the oscillations of the tender as we rocketed along.

When we got to Sioux City I went into the passenger car and got my bag and then went into the station restroom. I was horrified at how dirty my face had gotten from the smoke and dirt from the ballast. I managed to clean up my face, but I am sure that my clothes got all that filth too. I had put on my raincoat over my clothes which was a good thing.

I have always managed to stretch my fares pretty well and by getting a transfer when I paid my five cent fare on the Birney, and not getting off at the end of the lines, I was able to ride all but one line for only one fare. I did get off the car at the barn and the



▲ Electric operation began on the Mason City & Clear Lake Railroad on July 3, 1897. Its electrified freight service, now the Iowa Traction Railroad, continues in 2009, the longest continuous period of interurban freight operations in the United States. Freight service is powered by classic interurban freight motors that are now over 80 years old. On October 15, 1955, motor 52 is switching the pipe line terminal just east of Clear Lake.—John F. Humiston photo, Richard Humiston Collection

staff was very cordial and ran a car out for me to photograph. I asked if I could back the car into the barn which they let me do, but from the front of the car it appeared that it was going to hit the doorframe and I had to be reassured that it was going to go in and not knock the barn down.

Lincoln, Nebraska, was next but there was no passenger service between the two cities. I can't remember how this worked, but I found out that the Burlington ran between the two cities and I called up the yard office. They told me that there was a freight going to Lincoln in about an hour. Why they would give out that information to me, a complete stranger, and at the height of a war, is a great mystery, but they did. I had to ride a Sioux City Transit bus, one of only two company bus lines, to get to the yard. I got into an empty gondola car—well removed from the smoke of the locomotive—and settled in for my transport to Lincoln. And the Omaha, Lincoln & Beatrice. Well, the price was right anyhow.

Lincoln had two lines left, a double truck line and a Birney line with walk around trolley poles. I stayed at the "Y" overlooking the Birney line and soaked up atmosphere. Somehow I found the OL&B, which was the remains of an interurban line from Lincoln to Beatrice, Nebraska. It was now owned by a construction company and was a switching operation. The crew was friendly and let me ride in the cab with them.

My freight train ride opened a new avenue of travel to me, and I used the same low budget transport going from Lincoln to Omaha. When we got into Omaha the train stopped and I looked down the street. Lo and behold, a streetcar was laid up at the end of a line. Talk about things working out!

I must have stayed in Omaha several days as I managed to ride about all of the lines, and also the intercity line across the Missouri River to Council Bluffs. This was a two-man line, the only one, because of having to flag at a major rail crossing. Council Bluffs was another all Birney town but not as interesting as Sioux City. I did, however by steeling myself, manage to ride all of the lines.

My freight train adventures had worked out very well so far so I went down to the C&NW yard and found a Class H, 4-8-4 getting ready to go east. I got onto a car and eventually we went. These big engines were fast and we really sailed, until all at once the train stopped—out in the country. This was a double-track line so I decided it would not be long, but it was. The train just sat and sat. They were evidently practicing for the Union Pacific takeover 50 years later. Since it was parallel to a highway I finally got off and hitchhiked the rest of the way to Marshalltown, Iowa.

On the way I went through Tama, Iowa, and I saw a bricked-up portion crossing the highway. I had known that the Crandic parent company had had a shortline

known as the Tama and Toledo, that delivered coal to their power house. I must have stopped at this town for a while because I found out that the motive power was sort of a flat car described in layman's language as a "handcar" with a Cat engine, that they used to switch the coal cars. I have a picture of this, and it was probably a Plymouth engine, or perhaps a Whitcomb. I can't see the builder's name on the picture, but definitely not a handcar.

I had a buddy from music camp living in

Marshalltown, and I stayed there a couple days with him. Got a midnight train on the M&StL to Des Moines. We got to Des Moines about 3 a.m., and I looked out the window and here are eight streetcars sitting outside the train. By the time I got off and organized, the cars had left, but I found that the owl services all met in the middle of town every hour on the hour. At least this time, my face was clean.

I am sure that I rode everything in Des Moines. I stumbled onto the Iowa Transfer,

an electric switching operation. They had one large motor with a pantograph. The master mechanic told me that it came from the WCF&N and that he had come with it and overseen its rebuilding when he came to Des Moines. They were working two shifts at this time, the first shift was eight hours, the second went on until they were through classifying the cars in the yard, no matter how long it took. This line served as a terminal yard for the incoming lines into Des Moines, and they classified these cars for connecting lines. It was a multi-tracked linear layout and I think that the operation is entirely abandoned as of 2006.

The streetcar also took me by a yard FULL of small Fort Dodge Des Moines & Southern steeple cabs, obviously not used recently. These were really small. I saw my first net-covered street car trolley wire at a Fort Dodge Line crossing. I rode through the second story of a carbarn used as a line end, car turn back point.

I went to the Des Moines Railway offices and was well received. The company had 90 street cars, 60 trackless trolleys, and 50 busses, circa 1943. Most of the streetcars and all of the busses were stored outside. Wonder how this worked in the winter? They had four trackless trolleys from Tulsa. These were very small, not much longer than the trolley poles, and had single tires on the rear, and were cute as a kitten. They were only used for rush hour.

There were two long suburban lines that the DMRy operated. The first one, owned by the Des Moines & Central Iowa, went seven miles south out of town to Fort Des Moines. DM&CI served some warehouses at the base. The streetcars really went on this open track. The motorman told me that a cop had timed him at 42 mph on this open track. The other suburban line with city cars was to Urbandale, which is northwest out of town. The line was owned by DMRy; however it connected with the DM&CI in West Des Moines. I remember thinking that there were no freight customers at Urbandale.

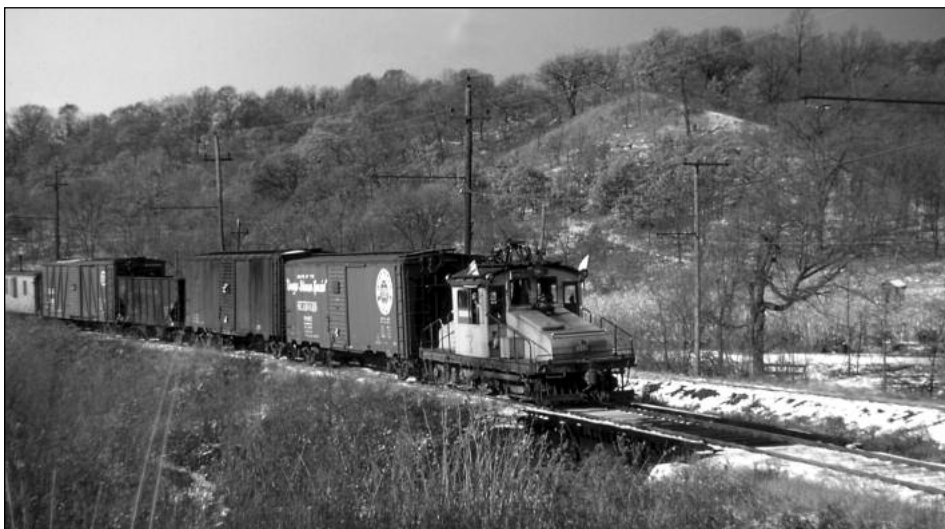
This was the perfect set-up for express rush hour service right to the heart of Des Moines, because they also had a direct route to downtown. The city cars could use the interurban's right-of-way from West Des Moines to downtown.

There was a paired trackage arrangement near the interurban terminal. The DM&CI owned most of the terminal



▲ The Iowa Transfer Railway was essentially a joint facility operated for the benefit of its owners and connecting railroads providing yard and interchange services in downtown Des Moines. It was electrified in the interest of smoke abatement. Its sole locomotive was formerly WCF&N 180. Electric operation ended in 1950 when the overhead wire system needed considerable work. Diesel operations ended in 1970 when the owning roads began to operate the yard themselves. —Blair Foulds photo, Norman Carlson Collection

▼ Fort Dodge, Des Moines and Southern, The Fort Dodge Line, was another Iowa interurban that traced its roots to a steam railroad. There were branches to Rockwell City, Webster City and Ames off of the mainline between Fort Dodge and Des Moines via Boone where the operating headquarters was established. Stan observed a yard full of small steeple-cab locomotives in Des Moines. There were six of those units, built in 1911 and 1912, together with an eclectic mix of box cabs and three four-truck motors from the Oregon Electric. On Saturday, November 3, 1951, one of the steeple-cabs is handling a short southbound freight at Fraser, Iowa. —John F. Humiston photo, Richard Humiston Collection





▲ A diamond on the prairie is the best way to describe the Des Moines & Central Iowa's crossing of The Milwaukee Road's branch to Boone at Granger, Iowa. Three former Lake Shore Electric Railway interurbans were acquired in 1939 to replace the original fleet of wooden cars which had become known as "flexible flyers." Passenger service on the line east to Colfax was abandoned in August 1941 and the last cars ran northwest to Perry on September 28, 1949. In 1898 the management of Des Moines City Railways, the local streetcar company, created a separate entity, Inter-Urban Railway Company, which was the predecessor of the DM&CI. For a 20-year period beginning in 1949 the DM&CI was a diesel-powered short line owned by Murray Salzberg. On July 29, 1968, Salzberg sold the company, along with the Fort Dodge Line to the Chicago & North Western. Yes, believe it or not, that switch lamp on a switch stand is the "protection" for the railroad crossing.—Stan Griffith photo

trackage. However the streetcar company owned one track through the terminal that had two separate connections to the rest of the city system. One connection was to Grand Avenue to accommodate streetcars going downtown and the other was to Second Avenue to accommodate Fort Dodge line cars in prior years.

The DM&CI had a little yard on the Fort Des Moines side of town, and in retrospect I suppose they used the city track to connect with the rest of the system, and probably to the Iowa Transfer yard.

When I rode to Urbandale, we had one of the few older generation cars following us, and the motorman miscalculated his stopping distance and crashed into our rear at a stop. All it did was crack the lens on the headlight, so I'm sure no accident report was made, but it added a little excitement to the trip.

The DM&CI station was an old freight house set at right angles to the street, but everyone I asked knew exactly where it was. At this point they were hauling multiple carloads of soldiers from Fort Dodge, a base on the DM&CI Perry line, to downtown Des Moines. The highlight of the small yard, at the station was a parked former Des Moines streetcar. It was painted basic white, and lettered and numbered

999 Jr. The fans had repainted it, then put all sorts of railway decals all over it, and used it for fantrips around town.

I think that the Des Moines streetcar frame that the Boone guys currently [2009] have in their barn is the remains of this car. This car was one of the cars replaced by the 1930 order of McGuire Cummings single-enders. These were really nice cars and furnished all of the base service. The McGuire family were major stockholders of the Des Moines Railways, so naturally they had McGuire-Cummings equipment. This was a precursor of National City Lines shennagans. Their plant at Paris, Illinois, probably needed work about 1930, so Des Moines got some cars.

One of the unique features of these cars was a round hole in the floor just to the side of the controller. The hole was about the size of a quart bottle, and it had a pivoted cover that could be kicked aside. I asked the motorman what it was, and he said that in the early days the crews couldn't smoke, so they would chew tobacco and could spit through the hole. I asked if they often missed and he said no and demonstrated. I am sure it was even easier when the car was not moving.

The DM&CI had bought three Lake Shore Electric steel cars in 1939 and put

them to good use serving the military base at Fort Dodge, northwest of town on the Perry line. The cars were single-end, and ran two cars back-to-back out to the base and to downtown Des Moines during the war. They also leased a bunch of the older cars from the Crandic to help handle the military traffic. Not too many small, rural interurban lines served two military bases in the second war.

The car that I rode was a single Lake Shore car that went all the way—about 30 miles—to Perry. The car was pretty well filled, and I swung aboard through the baggage door. There were several guys riding up there, and at Perry the conductor asked me if I was a friend of Harry, the motorman. When I said no, he collected a fare from me. The DM&CI was strictly a rural operation and in addition to the military base, they served rural grain elevators along the line, which probably kept the line alive.

On the way out to Perry, we met an electric track speeder. This was obviously home built and was a section car with a trolley air compressor motor for propulsion and a trolley pole, which was totally out of scale with the rest of the car. It almost looked as though it should tip the car over backward, but it obviously worked. I have a picture of this, and I have never found a fan who has ever seen anything comparable.

The C&NW eventually bought both the DM&CI and the Fort Dodge Line and switched to diesel, then abandoned them piece by piece. The Boone & Scenic Valley fan line now runs from Boone, Iowa, out to and across "High Bridge," a scenic wonder and drawing card. The B&SV is an aggressive and progressive fan operation, and very much alive. They bought a brand new Chinese steam engine, which is the obvious star of the line. They also have an electrified section from their station to downtown in Boone, served by the beautiful Charles City interurban car referred to before.

The Fort Dodge Line and also the WCF&N were 1,200 volt lines because of their heavy freight. The Fort Dodge had just doubled their passenger runs from two round trips to four,—this was 1943—Des Moines to Fort Dodge. I got a new conductor, and he didn't know anything about the line, so I didn't learn much. I went on to Fort Dodge and then back to Boone on the C&NW and home. This ended my first major fantripping.



▲ While the perception of many is that Iowa is flat as a pancake, that is certainly not true in the northwest corner of the state. Just northwest of Boone is the famous “high bridge” over a valley alongside the Des Moines River. The bridge remains in 2009 as a part of the Boone & Scenic Valley Railroad operation. We are looking west as car 62 crosses the bridge during a Central Electric Railfans’ Association excursion on July 13, 1940.—*John F. Humiston photo, Richard Humiston Collection*

▼ With their roof mounted bells, 9'-10" width and wooden construction, cars operated by The Fort Dodge Line looked more like steam railroad cars with trolley poles than a classic interurban car. Car 62, which was built by American Car Co. in 1916, followed the remainder of the fleet which was built by Niles Car Co. in 1907. On Saturday, November 3, 1951, car 62 is operating on another CERA trip as it passes through the Boone Yard. On the left is car 71, on the mainline is car 72 operating as train number 1. On the right side of the photo is car 82 and one of the former Oregon Electric freight motors. These passenger cars operated for the entire period on the interurban passenger service which ended on August 31, 1955. Diesel operation of the freight service began in 1949. In 1954 the Salzberg controlled DM&CI acquired the Fort Dodge Line which in turn was conveyed to the C&NW along with the DM&CI in 1968. Little remains of either of these two interurban lines in 2009.—*John F. Humiston photo, Richard Humiston Collection*

