

STREET CARS
FLOWERS AND
PHOTOGRAPHS

by George E Kanary



After a long, cold and gray Chicago winter, the first few days early in the spring bring to the area residents the hope that better days lie ahead, the promise of a beautiful warm season with sunny skies, delicate zephyr breezes and gentle spring rains will bring forth nature's bounty of beautiful flowers. Perhaps because of the bitter Chicago winters, the expectations are greater for local people, and the first springtime flowering trees and buds peeping from the earth are joyously welcomed.

Chicago and many of the surrounding communities take great pride in the civic display of flowers. Chicago, especially, has in recent years created beautiful streetscapes of flowers in decorative planters in the center of wide streets. Chicago and many of its suburbs have long been known for their towering trees, and the lacy green foliage of spring is always something to behold. Truly today, Chicago is living up to its motto, URBS IN HORTO, city in a garden.

Despite its long-time mottos, the other of which is I WILL, it was not always so. Aside from the beautiful trees, one had to visit the Chicago parks, which did put on a marvelous display of floral beauty, or stroll past the mansions of the very wealthy. Other civic and corporate displays just did not exist. Downtown Chicago office towers were built out to the sidewalk with no set-back at street level for plantings. Industrial areas around the city were devoid of anything resembling horticultural beauty.

Certainly U.S. Steel's South Works had no display of flowers at the gates to the plant, nor did the International Harvester McCormick Works or any of the hundreds of other massive manufacturing complexes in the area. It is possible that the employees were much too weary after a long day at work to take much notice. Chicago was a gritty, hard working city, and displays of flowers were left to the Chicago Park District and the back yards of individual homeowners.

During the mid 1920s, a few bright patches of flowers began to appear around the city at, of all places, the streetcar barns. On their own initiative, some of the Chicago Surface Lines employees decided to brighten up a bare patch here and there with various types of plantings. Neighborhood reaction was positive and word reached the management of the company.

A number of things benefiting the employees of the Chicago Surface Lines took place prior to and during the Great Depression. One of the earliest and most appreciated was the founding of the employee magazine, *SURFACE SERVICE*. Begun in 1924 in order for everyone to get the correct information about what was happening system-wide, the magazine provided a forum for various scribes at the respective depots to write monthly columns detailing affairs that had taken place on the cars, at the depots, and in the Lives of the employees and their families. New cars and equipment were described in detail with pictures of the same. And yes, there were even reports of robberies attempted on the cars. Chicago has always been a tough town. Happily, many of these turned out to be only attempts, since many a brave conduc-



▲ The office building is seen here, looking north along Drexel Avenue. — CSL photo, Shore Line Collection. ▼ The same view in the Summer of 2009. —Author's photo



tor or motorman was not easily intimidated by a knife or a pistol and managed to protect the company's money with the assistance of the switch iron or the door handle. These two working implements were wonderful equalizers in a dispute with a burly teamster, as well.

In the 1920s a safety program was begun, detailing in the magazine the safety record of every trainman at every depot or division. Lapel pins were awarded on an individual basis, and the safest depot for the year was awarded possession of the coveted Silver Streetcar, a large scale model of one of the MU cars, fabricated for the company by the Marshall Field & Co. silver department. This award could be likened to the National Hockey

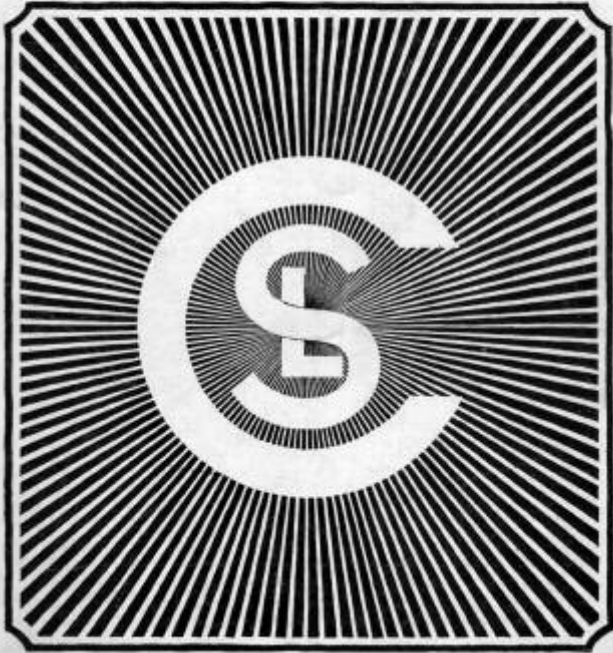
◄ Chicago Surface Lines' executive management encouraged its motormen, conductors and shop men to enhance the appearance of its carbarns through horticultural efforts. Tremendous competition resulted. Awards were given and considerable space in the company's magazine, *Surface Service*, was devoted to these efforts. The Burnside carhouse at 93rd and Drexel, just east of the Illinois Central right-of-way, was a perennial winner. The office building at Burnside, alleged to be the former home of Union Army Civil War General Ambrose E. Burnside, was just south of the carhouse. The surrounding neighborhood and the Illinois Central's shops that occupied the one-half square mile bounded by 95th and 99th Streets, Cottage Grove and South Park (now Martin Luther King), were named in his honor. —The collection of photographs, now held by Shore Line, were donated by Jim Pratt from his father's collection

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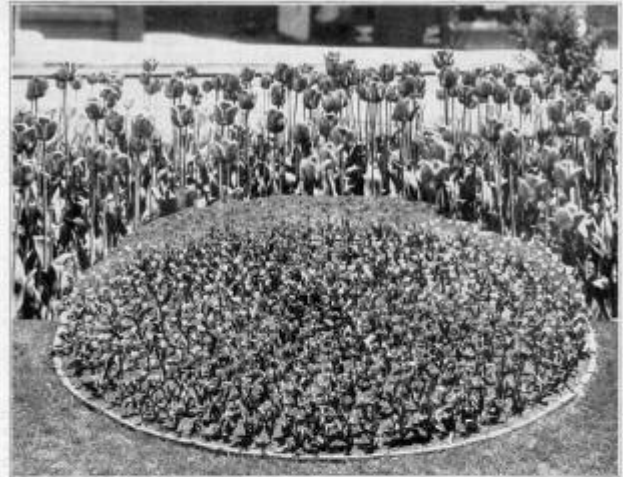
Garden Contest Winners

*Noble Given First Place, Devon Second and North Avenue Third—
Hard Task for Judges*

Something over forty years ago the Editor of SURFACE SERVICE, then a reporter on *The Tribune* was induced to become one of three judges at a colored cake-walk affair. The contest was held on the third floor of the old Pacific Hall at the southwest corner of Clark and Van Buren streets. After a score of dusky contesting couples had strutted their stuff, the judges went into secret session and returned their verdict. Unfortunately the platform upon which they discharged their judicial functions was at the north end of the hall and the exit doors were at the south end. Thus, when the friends of the losing couples heard the verdict and there was a con-

certed and menacing move toward the platform, the judges with commendable unanimity and considerable haste went out of a window and fled to safety down a convenient fire escape. Some years later the Editor was forced to referee a prize baby contest at a Hibernian picnic, and if what the mothers of the babies who did not win said about the unfortunate judge was true, he then and there forfeited all claim to respectability, intelligence and the right to continued existence, except in a superheated and remote region of the hereafter. A rescue squad of policemen escorted him to safety outside the grounds, but his ears still burn when he recalls the blister-

EARLY GARDEN SNAP SHOTS



Kedzie Is Proud of Two Beds Shown Here Together.



Devon's Spring Start.



Burnside's Beauties.



North Avenue's Tulip Bed.

RENTAL PRODUCTS CORPORATION—CHICAGO

Saying it With Flowers

*Experts at Various Car Stations Have Shown Their Neighbors
How to "Doll Up"*



A "Shot Across the Bow" at Cottage Grove



Burnside Disguised as a Suburban Bungalow

A good cure for the "depression blues" is a trip of inspection around depots of the Chicago Surface Lines such as the garden contest committee made recently. A man whose pay envelope has been reduced or who has suffered other lusses must "come up smiling" if he will stroll through the flaming masses of color at any one of a dozen locations on company property, especially if he will spend a few minutes in conversation with the employees who have taken it upon themselves to brighten some of the dreary spots and to make "C. S. L." outstanding as a good neighbor. The head gardener at Garfield or Lincoln Park does not take more pride in his work than does the Surface Lines foreman who has converted a pile of rocks into a mound of smiling petunias or covered an unsightly brick wall with beautiful shrubbery or clinging vines. The pity is that so many of these beauty spots must be hidden from the public.

It is to be regretted that the efforts of those who have attained particular excellence in their floral displays this year are not to be singled out for reward as in the past. The best they can hope for is

the consciousness of having given pleasure to those who view the results, and having merited special mention in these pages. The points of excellence are too numerous to mention, and it would indeed be a task for a disinterested committee to choose the leaders in the several groups for which ribbons were awarded last year.

Noble Street Depot has come back strong with its display and Foreman Striker is to be complimented for having used his own ideas in a complete change which still maintains the high standard set by his predecessor. The committee felt that the late lamented Foreman Raitke would have been proud of this season's showing at his former station. If the east fence were removed from the Noble Street location the whole neighborhood would take on a new air of importance with the gorgeous vista of plants, shrubbery, trees and lawn. The beautiful lily pond of last season is missed, but there is an added effect of charm in the white fence and pergola which divides the long expanse of green. Devon Avenue as usual offers its best view to passengers on the Northwestern

League's Stanley Cup or Football's Super Bowl trophy. The April issue of the magazine was devoted to this every year. In addition to the interdivisional softball and bowling competition, the annual golf outing and the big company picnic, usually held at Dellwood Park and reached by the interurban cars of the Chicago & Joliet Electric Ry. until 1933, were suitably covered.

Possibly the biggest surprise of the year 1928 appeared in the magazine when it was noted that the management highly approved of the plantings that had been placed in small locations around several of the company carhouses. The area was typically little more than cinders and weeds, but the managers, realizing that there was a great deal of landscaping talent among some of the employees, decided to provide the materials, basically the seeds for planting and top soil or loam.

The magazine claimed, "A car station architecturally can hardly be classed as a thing of beauty, but it is quite possible to make it easier on the eye by the judicious and artistic installation of well kept parkway lawns, flower beds in odd corners and window boxes filled with flowers where such decorations are practicable." "The management would like to see a more general development of the gardening idea and a competitive contest is suggested, open to all division forces, car house and transportation."

The article went on to say that a committee of two or three men whose floral interest is recognized in each division should be appointed to look over the available land under their control and lay out a general decorative plan. After determining what will be most suitable for their purposes, a list of the kinds of seeds was to be prepared and forwarded through the division superintendent to the office of the SURFACE SERVICE magazine.

"The character of the seeds and bulbs required by a station will not be disclosed to any other station. Requisition for supplies up to a value of \$25.00 will be approved for each contestant and secured through the best of local seed merchants and arrangements can also be made for the necessary top dressing of loam." It was suggested that an impartial committee of amateur florist gardeners would do the judging of the various gardens and planters and "suitable and desirable prizes will be awarded at the end of the season, due consideration being given to the best use of the available space."

As the program evolved, there came to be five categories.

1. Large, enclosed areas, space available for extensive planting of beds and borders. Burnside, Noble stations.
2. Limited space for beds. 77th, Kedzie, Lawndale, North Avenue, Armitage car stations.
3. Restricted to window boxes and parking strips. Limits, Ardmore garage, 69th, Blue Island, Division, Elston, Lincoln, Archer, Cottage Grove, Springfield Loop House, Grand and Leavitt, and Ogden and 13th.
4. Loops and station plantings. Madison-Austin, Clark-Devon, 39th-Halsted, Vincennes-80th, Archer-Cicero, Milwaukee-Imlay and Clark and Devon. The facilities at the last named locations were to be installed and maintained by the track department.
5. Particular excellence in certain varieties.

That the plan was received as well as it must have surprised the most optimistic of the management. No doubt certain of the men devoted themselves to the new task, while others only

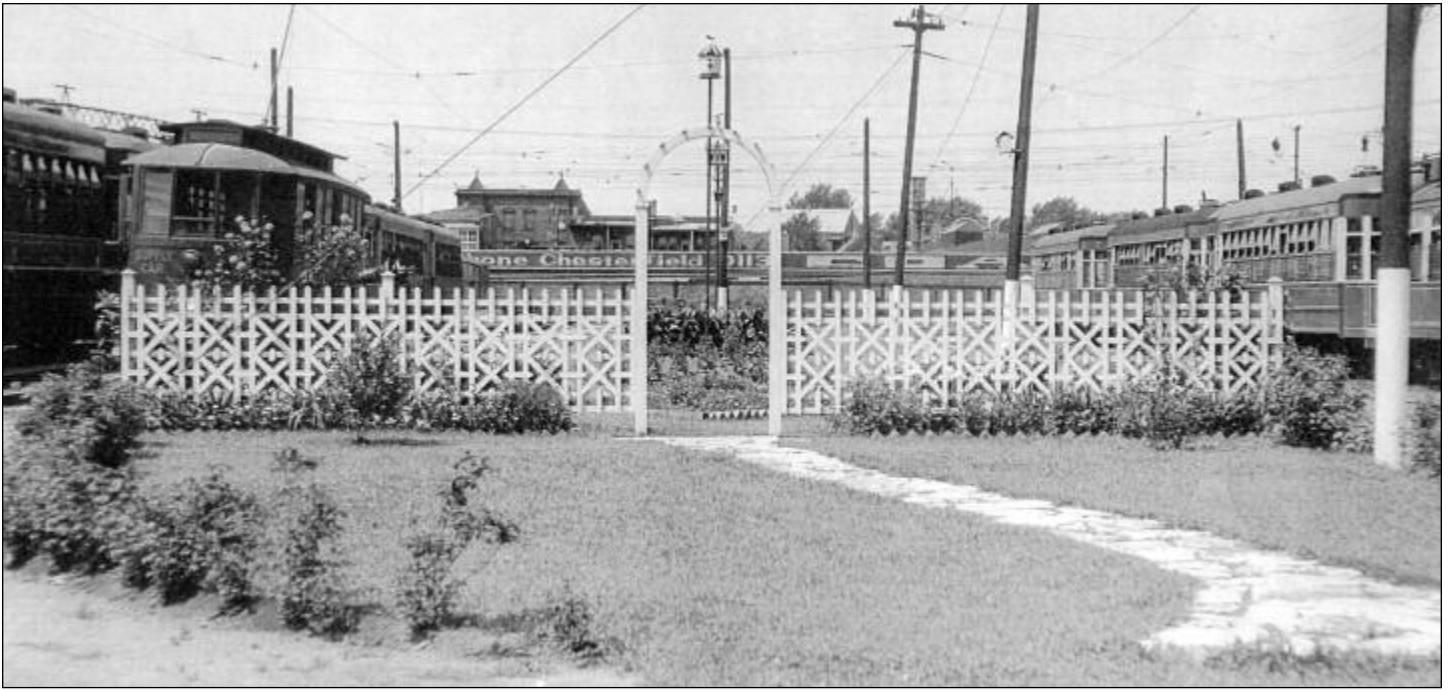


▲ A single Nearside car and a group of St. Louis-built Robertson cars stand near the inviting trellis arch, the canna lilies, pansies and other floribunda. The Nearside, a Cottage Grove car, carries a sign indicating direct service to the 35th and 31st Street gates of the Century of Progress Exhibition of 1934. —CSL photo, Shore Line Collection



▲ One of the gardeners admires his handiwork. —CSL photo, Shore Line Collection

◀ Examples of coverage in *Surface Service Magazine*. —Author's collection. Many more pages from 1928-1947 in pdf format are available on Shore Line's web site, www.shore-line.org



▲ Single-truck supply cars, like the one seen here, were still on the property in 1934.—CSL photo, Shore Line Collection

offered encouragement and saw fit to enjoy the beauty of the finished gardens.

It is not known at this time just how the hard dirt of the new plots was tilled. Perhaps a track department machine was borrowed to break the hard soil.

Possibly W class work cars arrived filled with rich, black dirt for topping. Or, maybe it was all done by hand shoveling. Whatever it took, the program was a big success, and of all of the things that the Chicago Surface Lines did for the community, in addition to providing the highest quality local transportation, this was, by far, the most widespread and appreciated. Letters poured into the company offices praising the beauty of the plantings and the people that made it possible.

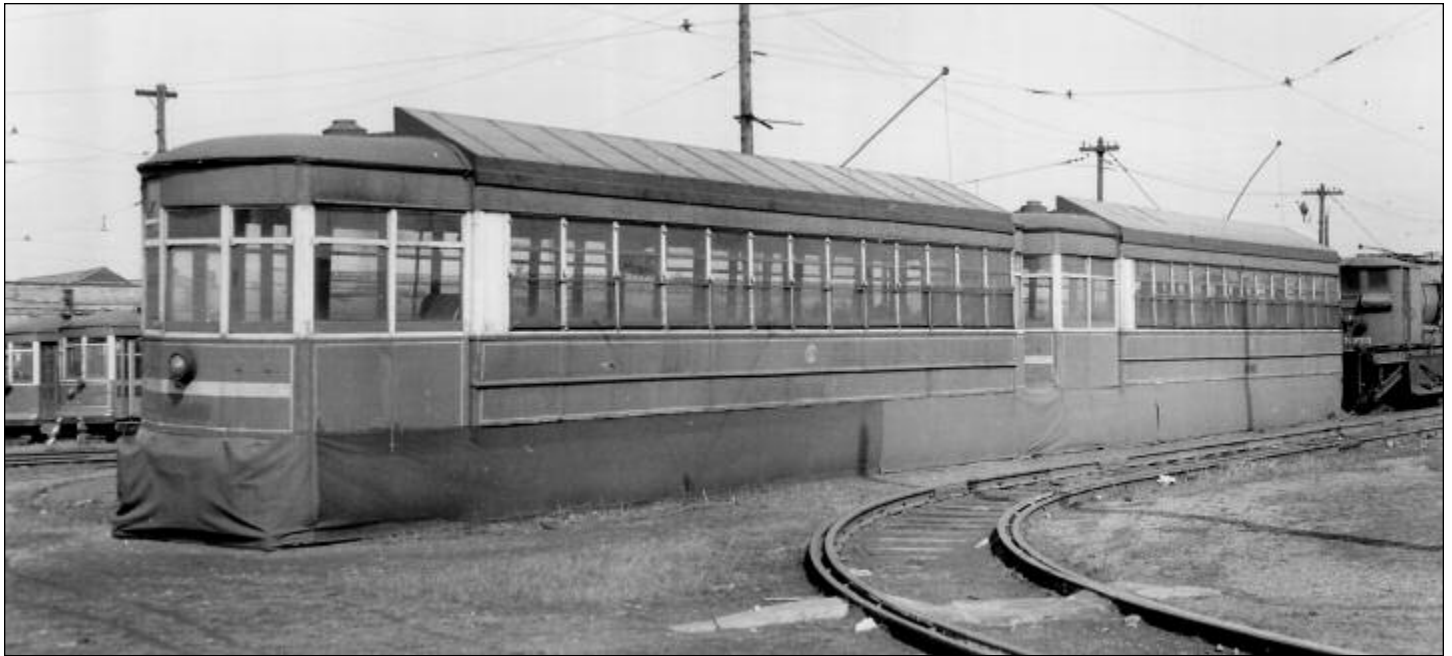
Both men and women were fond of the displays. One letter from a rider of the Chicago & Northwestern suburban train pointed out that the only thing that made him look up from his newspaper was when the train passed the beautiful floral display along Ravenswood Avenue at the west end of the Devon carhouse. The magazine intensely covered the activities at the gardens during the summer, working to stoke the competitive spirit. Judging was accomplished when the blooms were at the height of their glory, and the awards and prizes were distributed at a dinner held at a Downtown hotel.

The momentum of the floral project slowly died down after the Chicago Transit Authority takeover and, with few exceptions, was gone by the 1960s. In a display of managed news, the CTA



▲ Several Nearside cars enjoy the canna lillies, pansies and petunias at Burnside. The catenary bridge in the background is on the Illinois Central Electric.—CSL photo, Shore Line Collection





▲ While Noble car station built a greenhouse as a plant nursery, Burnside converted two Nearside cars, seen here with their glass roofs facing south and with the lower space closed off against the cold. —Photo by Robert W. Gibson, author's collection

released two photos to the newspapers in 1959, one showing how they had improved the loop at Clark and Devon by burying it completely under asphalt, and the other showing the loop as it appeared in 1922, covered with cinders, parked cars and a spur track with a snow sweeper, completely ignoring the beautiful floral display that had been there for the previous 25 or more years.

The "seed" for this article was planted when the managing editor handed the author a stack of photographs taken at the Burnside carhouse in the 1930s. The likelihood is that they were taken by the chief company photographer, Mr. A.R. Chouinard, a camera and darkroom expert seldom seen without an unlit cigar firmly clamped in his mouth. Mr. Chouinard made himself available for all company photography work, in the offices, out on the streets, at the annual company picnic, the ball games, and the flower gardens. He thought nothing of commandeering a line truck to gain a better overall view of an outdoor scene. The views seen here at Burnside carhouse were taken for the 1934 and 1935 flower contests, as well as a group photo of the shop men responsible for the lowest number of pull ins, or car failures system-wide for the month of August.

Burnside's record meant that it had 21 zero days for the month, days with no car failures, with 59,757 miles per pull in. Lawndale finished second that month, and Blue Island came in third.

Most of the names of the shop men differ from the more commonly seen Irish names of the trainmen, instead being names like Nebelsiek, Kazmerczak, Vacca, Uksas, Labanauski, Rachauski and others.

Burnside carhouse was built by the Calumet Electric Street Railway over a period of years from 1897 to 1906 and located on the southwest corner of 93rd and Drexel Avenue. A very plain

building compared to the later Board of Supervising Engineers-designed carhouses, it had at one time a powerhouse and shop building. The powerhouse required the usual railroad siding into the property for the delivery of coal, but power generation was discontinued early on and the powerhouse leveled. The building was closed as an operating depot in September, 1949, at which time many of the lines operating from there had been converted to bus. The remaining car lines were transferred to the 77th and Vincennes carhouse.

The property was hemmed in to the south and west by the intersection of the Illinois Central R.R. and the Belt Railway of Chicago, the Belt Ry. crossing over the I.C. on a viaduct.

Quite a number of small car lines, as well as the long ones, operated from this depot, such as all of the Calumet & South Chicago lines on the southeast side of the city, the Hammond, Indiana lines, as well as the Chicago City Railway lines, such as Stony Island and Cottage Grove. Those two lines also operated out of the Cottage Grove depot at 38th Street, but still constituted the largest number of cars at Burnside.

Legend has it that the green-painted frame construction office building seen in some of the photos was at one time the home of Union Army General Ambrose E. Burnside, of Civil War fame, for whom the entire surrounding neighborhood is named. While possibly true, this cannot be substantiated at this time. The General's memory lives on in the tonsorial term, sideburns, pioneered by him to great effect.

The variety of cars based there must have made it an interesting place to watch the arrivals and departures of the day. Big St. Louis-built Robertson cars for the line across the swamp to Hegewisch and the line to suburban Riverdale. Little safety cars for 93rd

◄ Attractive and well done stone walkways complement the flower beds and expansive lawns at Burnside carhouse. A typical Belt Railway of Chicago four-wheel bobber-style cabooses trails a freight train on the high line which has just passed over the Illinois Central tracks. This view is looking to the southwest. —CSL photo, Shore Line Collection

Street and 87th Street, MU cars, already converted to one-man service, the 5601-5650 class Big Brills for Stony Island, and of course, the Nearsides for Cottage Grove routes 4 and 5, as well as the one-man versions for Windsor Park and South Deering lines.

A loop track was installed to supply the west yard at Burnside, but the Nearsides, being single-ended, had to back into the building.

All this activity took place amid the splendor of the floral displays, but the flowers were never seen by the citizens, only the employees, as evidenced by the photos showing signs cautioning all persons to keep out, except employees on duty. Noble carhouse, in the same category as Burnside with much open space, was likewise out of sight to the citizens. Its display was concealed behind a tall wooden fence keeping it completely out of sight of passersby and even passengers on the Armitage line streetcars, which passed along Paulina Street. The gardens could be seen from the second floor windows of the homes across the street, and those residents appealed to the company to replace the wooden fence with a chain link version, so everyone could enjoy the floral bounty, but this never took place.

Burnside carhouse did not pass into oblivion as did Noble and so many others, but was sold to the Strick truck trailer manufacturing company and used by them for many years. It is presently used by the Groban Supply Company, a firm engaged in the rebuilding of surplus military generators and other equipment, much of which in its un-rebuilt state is stored outside on the tracks leading to the carhouse. Burnside has what is the largest example of exposed trackage left in the city.

If one chooses to visit Burnside and see the big display, perhaps as a side-trip to a visit to the Pullman Historic District just to the south, be prepared to register with the watchman, Mr. Thompson, who lives in a camper on site and has a number of well trained but friendly dogs. Mr. Thompson is an accomplished organist, playing at several of the neighborhood churches and offering lessons in his home at other times.

The Spring season is the best time to visit for viewing the trackage away from the building because the weeds do grow to shoulder height during the summer, a long and far cry from the glorious floral displays of the past.



◀ Calumet & South Chicago supply car Y303 enjoys the sun along the south end of Burnside carhouse. The 1906 addition is apparent in this view. —Photo by Joe L. Diaz, author's collection
 ▲ The barn in the Summer of 2009 being used as a warehouse. The 1906 addition to the barn has been torn down. —Author's photo



◀ The office building as it appeared on the front page of the October, 1937, *Surface Service Magazine*. —Author's Collection

▶ Many of the wonderful company photos of CSL operations that we have seen over the years are the work of A. R. Chouinard. He was known to his friends as Fred, which was derived from his given name of Alfred. Fred was hired by CSL in 1927 principally to document accident cases. His "sideline" work was photos of all nature, including documenting a railfan trip in 1938. Always looking for a different "angle," Fred is shown here atop a tower wagon with his ever-present stub of a cigar and his trusty camera ready for action. —From the November, 1938 *Surface Service Magazine*. —Author's Collection

