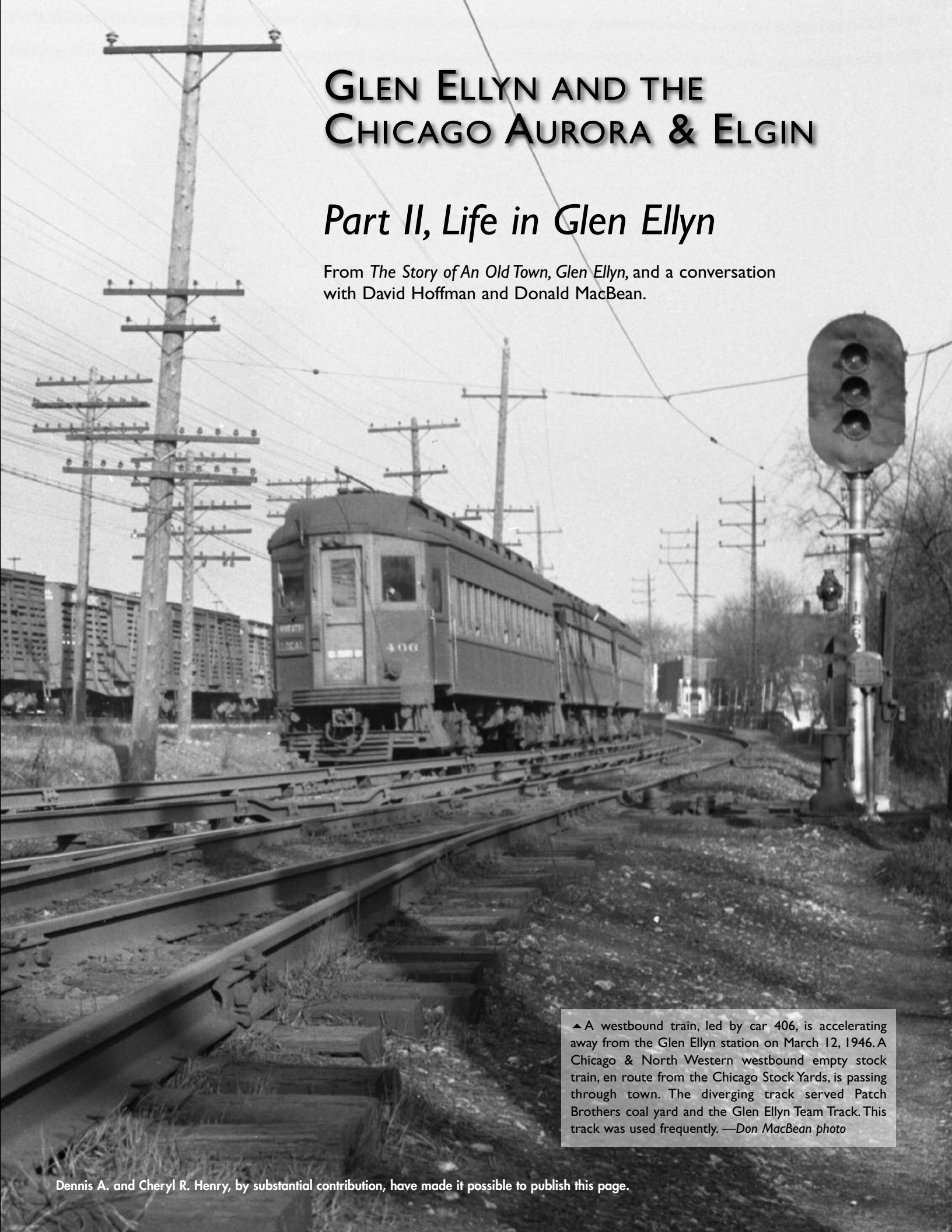


GLEN ELLYN AND THE CHICAGO AURORA & ELGIN

Part II, Life in Glen Ellyn

From *The Story of An Old Town, Glen Ellyn*, and a conversation
with David Hoffman and Donald MacBean.



▲ A westbound train, led by car 406, is accelerating away from the Glen Ellyn station on March 12, 1946. A Chicago & North Western westbound empty stock train, en route from the Chicago Stock Yards, is passing through town. The diverging track served Patch Brothers coal yard and the Glen Ellyn Team Track. This track was used frequently. —Don MacBean photo

When the Aurora Elgin & Chicago began operations in 1902, the Chicago & North Western and its predecessor, the Galena & Chicago Union, had been operating for 53 years. Talk of an interurban line between Chicago and Aurora began in 1891 and in 1899 two competing companies were organized by rival interurban syndicators to build an electric railway between Wheaton and Chicago. Surveying and land acquisitions started that year for a line that would be south of the C&NW. By 1901, with construction underway, the Everett-Moore interests became the controlling shareholder with the Pomeroy-Mandelbaum syndicate maintaining a minority interest.

To gain some understanding of life in Glen Ellyn during the interurban's early years, we will extract some of the conversation that appeared in the book, *The Story of An Old Town – Glen Ellyn* by Ada Douglas Harmon. This book, which was published in 1928, is from the collection of David Hoffman. But, first, we will reach back to some recollections of Amos Churchill, speaking about his parents arriving from

Syracuse, New York in June 1834.

Upon arrival, they headed west for Bob Reed's settlement in what is now Elmhurst by ox team pulling a wagon. The "Chicago Prairie" to Oak Ridge (now Oak Park) was covered by water with prairie grass and wild flowers in bloom, waving in the breeze. Later, they settled along the DuPage River on what is now the north side of St. Charles Road. The area became known as Churchill Corners, the first name for what became Glen Ellyn.

Their neighbors were Indians, who, while peaceful, had extreme curiosity about everything that new settlers did. The Indians would stand in the door and watch them eat. They would inspect everything that came to the settlers. The Indians thought that a box of axes was some form of money. Settlers would hunt and camp along the Army Trail, today's Army Trail Road, which was the first public highway between Chicago and Elgin.

Trips to Chicago could become an adventure. They followed an old buffalo trail that is now St. Charles Road. Men would ride on oxen pulling a wagon. Forging the Des Plaines River, at what is

now Lake Street just east of First Avenue, could be problematic.

On one crossing, when the river was high, the oxen went down into the water. The men floated off the animals. The rush of the current tipped over the wagon and the men grabbed the wagon. The oxen swam for the opposite shore, pulling the wagon and the men with them. Upon their return from Chicago, they constructed a foot bridge over the river. Unloading their goods from the wagon, the men carried them across the river. The oxen swam across, towing the wagon.

A few years later, in 1848, this location would become the first terminal of the G&CU. During the following year the river would be bridged and the G&CU would reach Glen Ellyn.

Amos Churchill was elected the village president in 1896. He was instrumental in getting the C&NW to construct a new brick station. The favorite train was the 5:05 making the trip to Chicago in 38 minutes. Fares were: one-way, 58 cents; round trip, \$1.15; ten-ride, \$4.50; 25-ride, 6.00 and monthly, \$7.10. Horse-drawn liveries were moving people around town and from



▲ The effort of the Glen Ellyn Plan Commission to get "the most beautiful one (station) on the line" is self evident. The original station, which was the standard design of the AE&C, is facing demolition in the 1926 view. —Company photo, George Canary Collection

the train station to the Glen Ellyn Hotel.

In 1901, the electric railroad, named that year as the Aurora Elgin & Chicago, was built through the village. A. R. Utt was appointed as the ticket agent and he served for 15 years. A significant milk business was built up by the interurban. Also in 1901, the first telephone exchange was established in town.

Two years later, the first automobile appeared, a Franklin, owned by S. T.

Jacobs. "It was painted red and the springs were none too good. It also had a door in the rear by which one entered, lifting up the seat to do so. Ten cents for a ride in it was charged for the benefit of a church social. Gretchen Jacobs McChesney was the first woman in Glen Ellyn to drive a car." The McChesney family members still live in town and some of them own and operate the McChesney & Miller Supermarket.

From the perspective of 1903, "In the old days, grain was a big business, and if you notice the structure west down the (C&NW) tracks, you'll see that there really is a little elevator and a windmill sort of edifice there. In those old days, they used to load cars of grain by wind power, and sometimes had to wait several days for the fortune to favor them with enough power to get the grain elevated. One carload of bran, remember(ed) with special vividness, took



Wooden cars built for both the Chicago & Milwaukee Electric (North Shore Line) and the AE&C served Glen Ellyn. ▲ Car 141 is leading a westbound train of "North Shore Woods" in June 1938. While these cars tended to "nose" on both the North Shore and CA&E, they rode pretty well on the CA&E, due in part, that they did not operate as fast as the CA&E cars. Thus, they tended to be assigned near the ends of the rush hours so as not to delay following trains. ▼ Car 307 is operating solo on a westbound Wheaton local in June 1939. —Two photos Frank Krejcik, Walter Keevil Collection





▲ In June 1946 car 417 is heading an eastbound train near Park Boulevard. The circular concrete building on the C&NW houses the automatic train control system technology. The slow sign at the far left of the image was the “set-em up point” for braking for the Main Street station stop. On the CA&E speed restrictions were “observed more in the breach than in the observance.” The trains would decelerate from to their station stop in 2-1/2 blocks. Usually the gates at Main Street were not all the way down when the “Cannonball” entered the Main Street crossing. ▼ Grade crossing protection consisted of manually operated four quadrant gates with a street bell that can be seen just in front of the train. Outside of the image to the right was a set of crossing flashers on the south side of the track. This westbound train is approaching the Forest Avenue crossing and the cab is turning off of Stewart Avenue. —Two photos Frank Krejcik, Walter Keevil Collection



days to get transferred to the (rail)car from the bin. Later, an electric motor was installed, getting its power from the third rail, and this was almost more trouble than the wind because of the unevenness of the current. As trucks came in and horses went out, and the pastures changed into subdivisions, the major business shifted from grain to lumber and coal.”

In 1904, the first electrical shop was started in the village, and wooden sidewalks “became the order of the day” in the downtown area. On May 3, 1906, the Glen Ellyn Hotel was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. The fire was observed by Conductor Garrow of C&NW freight train number 133. He notified the station agent, who phoned in the alarm. The AE&C brought large numbers of people from Wheaton and Lombard to observe the fire. Trains were stopped so through passengers could get a brief view of the fire. In 1907 a water system was installed in the village. The post office was in a hardware store.

The Glen Oak Country Club opened in 1908, the same year women voted for the first time. Members of the Women’s Club “electioneered and sprang a surprise in the village by commandeering all the vehicles in town and rounding up every woman in the place. They were at the station (most likely C&NW) at 5:30 A. M. serving coffee and donuts to every commuter. It was the most exciting election for schools ever held in the village. The women won and elected Charles Hudson president of the

school board.” By 1910 Glen Ellyn’s population was 1,713, and the population of Milton Township was 6,353.

Despite there being only four automobiles in town, the Glen Ellyn Auto Co. was opened, at first, in an ice house. “It would only hold one car,” said Otto Miller, who with his brother Herman opened the business, “But we did most of our work outside under a tree.” There was enough work to keep them busy. “We had to tow them in with horses, but they never got far those days, only about half way to Naperville or out to the Great Western tracks.” By 1928 there were 1,609 auto licenses issued in town.

Early in 1911, the Women’s Club circulated a petition to abolish a local saloon. “Most of the village folk signed it, though some predicted a terrible calamity for the village to have it discontinued.” The saloon doors closed “officially” on February 14th. Flushed with success, the women voted to drop the club’s membership limitation of 30. That same year saw the organization of the town’s first Boy Scout troop.

In 1912 the village granted a 25-year gas and electric franchise to the Insull interests. However, the most exciting event was the filming in town of a movie of the Black Hawk Indian War. Glen Ellyn Lake was a prop for a river crossing and horses and wagons struggled through. Costumed Indians would come through the water on their ponies “whooping and hollering.”

October 15, 1915, was the official date of the village ordinance for assessments of sections of Pennsylvania Avenue, Main

Street and Crescent Boulevard for street paving. “The opening of the paving on Pennsylvania, which came first, was an event of first magnitude, and people, wheeling baby carriages, walked over to look at the shining stretch of concrete, getting a big thrill out of the sight. The street had been torn up for months, practically impassable.” The laborers carried pails of water for blocks to mix the concrete. At the end of 1928, there were 40 miles of paved streets.

Much in contrast to Glen Ellyn, Lombard paved its streets with asphalt laid on a dirt sub-base. The original concrete paving in Glen Ellyn lasted for decades with portions of the original paving on Hill, Main and Park Boulevard lasting until the 1990s when new concrete was laid.

Glen Ellyn High School opened as a two-year course school in September 1915 and graduated its first class in 1917. Prior to this, students traveled to Wheaton to attend high school. By 1920 Glen Ellyn was no longer considered a “pleasant country town.”

It was now considered a “thriving and prosperous suburb of Chicago.”

Joy Morton announced the opening of the Morton Arboretum in 1922. Located between Ogden Avenue and Roosevelt Road, it could be reached “by motor” from the Glen Ellyn stations of the CA&E or C&NW or the Lisle station of the Chicago Burlington & Quincy. Morton, owner of the Morton Salt Company, owned “much” real estate in Chicago and 2,000 acres in DuPage County.



▲ This westbound rush hour train is leaving the Taylor Avenue station on August 31, 1951. The track crew is working late this evening. —Kunecke-Krejčík photo, Walter Keevil Collection



The parade of C&NW passenger trains through Glen Ellyn was most interesting. ▲ Hudson-type locomotive (4-6-4) 4009 is leading a “man-of-all-work” eastbound past the Alexander Lumber Company as it approaches Main Street. The roof of the CA&E’s westbound platform can be seen in this view from the CA&E gate tower. ▼ Union Pacific 996, an E-6, was ordered in August 1940 as part of an order for six paired “two-unit locomotives.” 996 was part of the pair that was originally numbered 9-M-1 and 9-M-2 when delivered early in 1941. In its second renumbering it became 996. On August 9, 1950, the unit is leading eastbound train 106, *The City of Portland*, through Glen Ellyn. —Two photos Fielding Kunecke, Walter Keevil Collection



(When the Federal government, in their second anti-trust case, forced the Fuller family to divest some of their salt production interest early in the 20th Century, Edward L. Fuller selected his western representative in Chicago, Joy Morton: to take control of the divested assets. Thus, the Morton Salt Company was created. Fuller also purchased the Genesee & Wyoming Railroad near Rochester, New York. His great grandson, Mortimer B. Fuller III, continues in 2011 as Chairman of the Board of Genesee & Wyoming, a network of regional and short line railroads.)

By 1926 Glen Ellyn had a population of 6,800 with 924 pupils in grade school and 485 students in high school. This was the

year that the new CA&E station opened in town. Ms. Harmon reported the following: “The new Chicago Aurora and Elgin Electric railroad station is built and is the most beautiful one on the line, its beauty due to the Glen Ellyn Plan Commission, which urged the company to discard its commonplace plans for ones more in keeping with the contemplated development of the village of Glen Ellyn. The village is grateful to the authorities of the electric road for co-operating so effectively. John Archibald Armstrong was the architect.”

In this era the CA&E had 125 daily trains to and from Chicago. Bridge games on the train were very much a part of the social life of Glen Ellyn residents. The vil-

lage was also home to employees of the CA&E and at least one person who worked for the Chicago Rapid Transit Company. Much cleaner than riding behind steam engines, the CA&E was the preferred railroad in town.

Railroad employees visited the schools to constantly warn students about the danger of the third rail. Many parents forbade their children from crossing the railroad. In those days parental restriction was obeyed. In these early days, the thought that the “third rail” would disappear was never considered. However, for the 55 years that “electric” provided passenger service, it was a significant part of the fabric of Glen Ellyn.



▲ In the days before radios, the brakemen rode the car roofs to pass signals to the engine crew. This local is crossing Prospect Avenue as it prepares to “drop” the cars into the siding between Prospect and Main Street. Both of these operating practices are not permitted in 2011. ◀ Pacific (4-6-2) 1587 is leading an eastbound “Scoot” on August 9, 1950. It is passing the Alexander Lumber yard as it slows for the station, just ahead, east of Main Street. The one-story building with the open door is the former C&NW freight station. —Two photos Fielding Kunecke ◀ Pacific 2225 is powering this eastbound version of the Freeport Local which served as a “scoot” between West Chicago and Chicago. There is a Railway Post Office (RPO) car behind the locomotive. This was the only train that served Glen Ellyn with a working mailcar. The station agent is dealing with mail as the conductor waits to give the “Highball.” —Frank Krejčík photo, three photos Walter Keevil Collection