

FIRST TRIP OVER THE ELECTRIC RAILWAY

Packed With Human Freight, Car No. 1, Brilliantly Lighted, Travels Over a Portion of the Road Amid Great Excitement.

Introduction: *The advent of trolleys, also called the street railways, appeared initially in urban areas, New York in 1833 and three years later in Boston. They were rather simple, horse-drawn conveyances pulled along tracks. After several decades and new technology with innovations in construction such as the underground cable system pioneered in San Francisco and the introduction of electric cars, there occurred an accelerated use of trolleys throughout the country in the latter part of the nineteenth century.*

The possibility that Columbia County might benefit from this new mode of transportation started to surface when the Bloomsburg Electric Street Railway Company received a charter in 1892, promoted by local investors. They envisioned a line two miles within the limits of Bloomsburg. It failed to materialize since the projected traffic would not generate sufficient revenue to warrant the financial investment. Two other companies organized in the 1890s contemplated developing a trolley transportation system in the Bloomsburg area: North Susquehanna Transit Company in 1895 and the Bloomsburg and Berwick Electric Railway Company in 1899. These two companies envisioned trolley lines connecting the three towns, Bloomsburg, Berwick, and Danville. However, the plans of these two companies never transpired.

It was not until these two companies decided to merge and collectively form the Columbia and Montour Electric Railway Company on October 31, 1899, with headquarters in Bloomsburg, that Columbia County had its first the trolley line. Investors from Harrisburg were crucial in providing the capital for this company. Construction began on March 8, 1901, that included the powerhouse and car barn at the site of the former Bloom Iron Furnace, William Neal & Sons, located south of Old Berwick Road, east of Cherry Street, near the North Branch Canal. From this location the trolley lines would go to Berwick, Bloomsburg proper, and Catawissa. The Berwick line went east on Old Berwick Road passing through Espy, Almedia, Willow Grove, and Briar Creek. The line from the car barn entered Bloomsburg went west on Seventh Street, then north on East Street to Main Street, west on Main Street to Fishing Creek, and then south to the Aqueduct Bridge and from there to Catawissa Bridge at the Susquehanna River. At Market Square the line also went south to Fifth Street, and the east to connect to the line at East Street. The company by 1902 had built sixteen miles of track. Two years later the Danville and Bloomsburg Street Railway Company completed a line to Bloomsburg by connecting to the Columbia and Montour line near Fishing Creek.

The following article appeared in The Democratic Sentinel, August 2, 1901, that gave a vivid description of the first trolley ride in Bloomsburg that occurred on the night of July 29. This event signaled a very significant advancement for the area with a dramatic improvement in local travel compared with relying upon the horse. The trolley era for

Bloomsburg would have a short time span of twenty-five years due to the development of the automobile and buses. The end came in 1926 when the trolleys ceased to operate to Danville on March 2 and to Berwick and Catawissa on June 26.

For additional information about the local trolley era, please see North Branch Trolleys by Gene D. Gordon, Historical and Biographical Annals of Columbia and Montour Counties, Pennsylvania, and an article by Robert Dunkelberger in the forthcoming book, Discovering Bloomsburg: A Bicentennial History.



Construction of the Columbia & Montour Electric Railway Line at Fifth and East Streets

It wasn't what you might term a "trolley party," and yet it was a party of trolley riders. There was no formality about the affair, but it was gotten together in a sort of impromptu manner and without regard to prominence or social distinction, the object most to be sought after was to get a place on the car somewhere or somehow and to have the pleasure and satisfaction of saying: "I had a ride on the first trolley car that ever ran over the Columbia and Montour Electric Railway."

And what a motley throng it was. It was cosmopolitan in the strictest sense of the word. The big trolley car was packed with struggling humanity from the officials, the contractors and their wives, daughters and friends down to the street gamins of the Fourth Ward. And they were packed in like sardines in a box. Everybody was rubbing elbows and there wasn't hardly an inch of available space on the car that wasn't taken up.

And thus it was that car No. 1 of the Columbia and Montour Electric Railway made its first trip over the road from the power house to Jefferson street shortly after ten o'clock last night, and the car and its load of human freight was the signal for shouts from hundreds of throats, while here and there one could see the sputter of Roman candles in honor of the occasion.

It wasn't generally known that Messrs. Scanlan & Co. intended operating a car last evening, but in order to satisfy public curiosity, they put men to work in shoveling off the track, while a large force was used in getting the car on the track at the power house and getting it ready to run. About ten o'clock this was accomplished and all was in readiness and then followed a general scramble by old and young to get aboard.

As the brilliantly lighted car swung around the curve at the corner of East and Seventh streets it presented a beautiful sight and its coming was hailed with joyous shouts by hundreds of people who were lined along the pavement all the way up East street and in its wake followed dozens of boys and girls and older folks, too.

The car was in charge of W. G. Barlow, electrical expert, of Lewistown, and who is superintendent of the Lewistown and Readsville Electric Railway. Mr. Barlow gave his attention to the brake and kept a careful watch on the track ahead as the car moved slowly over the rails, while Miss Winifred, the charming and attractive daughter of E. L. Mumma, presided at the Westinghouse controller and diffused the electric current through the car sufficient to run it.

The progress of the car was slow but triumphant and everywhere along the route its appearance was awaited with unmistakable interest. The first trip was accomplished without difficulty save for trouble experienced in getting the car back on the track where, owing to a small stone, it had left the rails in front of residence of Hervey Grotz, on Main street. Otherwise everything worked nicely and several trips up and down Main street were made before the car was finally taken back to the power house for the night.

Miss Mumma was complimented highly by a number of her friends on her rare ability as a "motorman," and which she seemed to thoroughly enjoy, as we overheard her remark that "it has always been one of the ambitions of my life to run an electric car." This opportunity was given her last evening and she made use of it to the fullest extent. The young lady also possesses the stone which threw the car off the track, and this she proposes to retain as a memento of the memorable occasion.

Among those noticed on the car last evening were Mr. and Mrs. M. F. D. Scanlan, E. L. Mumma and daughter Winifred and son Benjamin, E. R. Sponsler, W. M. Terry and son Paul, of Philadelphia; Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Schuyler, F. W. Harn and Misses Annie and Edith Maize, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Magill, Mr. and Mrs. W. S. Rishton, J. H. Maize, Esq., D. G. Hackett, I. D. White, C. B. Ent, C. H. Reimard, Bart Bisel and many others whose names we could not recall.

Before the car started an attempt was made to count those who got on and Mr. Scanlan, after counting 168, got tired and quit, while Michael Flaherty kept up the count until it numbered 180, when the urchins began swarming around it like a lot of bees and began jumping on wherever they could get a foot hold. During the trip M. Flaherty occupied a position on top of the car, where he kept the trolley wheel in place on the wire.

This morning car No. 1 made the trip up the road almost to Lime Ridge and repeated the trip again this afternoon. All along the route the car and its occupants were the recipients of cheers from an admiring populace.