



My Ravinia

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past

By Elliott Miller



My mother once told me, that as a toddler, when a train went by, I would jump up and down and excitedly exclaim, "A prain, a prain" [this is not a typo]. I was probably excited about steam-powered locomotives, which were still in service in the early 1950s. Those iron behemoths, with their chugging, hoarse, brain-rattling whistles, the huffing and hissing of exhaust pushed through the smokestacks that belched smoke, spreading soot far and wide, while chugging along the tracks, and, of course, the bell announcing their arrival at a station. How awe-inspiring they were! My wife Carol tells her story of the time her family went to a movie theater and watched Disney's 1956 movie "The Great Locomotive Race." As a two-year-old, she described the experience of watching "The Great Locomotive Race on a big teezee [a big TV]."

Model railroading was a popular hobby in those days. Model railroad setups were common, some modest in scale, some huge, such as the immense one at the Museum of Science and Industry. My parents bought me a small model train set – an American Flyer steam engine, coal car, box car and caboose; and enough tracks to make a circle. I would periodically

periodically take the set out and run it round and round. For excitement, I would leave one of my little cars on the track and stage a train wreck. The limits of my little train set soon caused my fascination with trains to diminish. Nowadays, our love of cars, the Internet, and video games have caused a decline in train mania. Railroad enthusiasts used to visit train stations, marking down the trains that passed. They would collect timetables and other railroad memorabilia. Many books have been written about specific railroad companies and their equipment. Minutia, such as the mechanics of steam-powered engines and the benefit of one device over the other, were common. However, railroads today are mainly viewed as a vehicle to get from one place to another. This article is homage to the days of railroad travel that Ravinia residents experienced.

Terminology Conventions & Credits

- The terms locomotive and train engine are used synonymously.
- Depot versus station: I have been informed by reliable sources, that a train "station" is the stop at the end of the line, whereas "depots" are stops along the route of the railway. My sources use these terms interchangeably and, consequently, so do I.
- The Chicago & North Western steam/diesel Railway: After first mention I call it "C&NW."
- The Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee interurban electric line was commonly called The North Shore Line, and is referred to in this article and sometimes abbreviated as "NSL."
- There were several trolley lines that ran west of Ravinia. These are beyond the scope of this article.

The Historical Background

Because of the configuration of the Great Lakes, Chicago's location has always been a transport hub for goods and people traveling in the northern plains of America. Heading north and south of the Great Lakes required a route along the western shore of Lake Michigan. The route historically taken by Native

(Continued on page 7)

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WELCOME, NEW RAVINIA DISTRICT BUSINESS!

Mil Colibris Bakery & Café, 481 Roger Williams Avenue

Mil Colibris Bakery & Cafe

By Izzy Tolpin

Many think an upstanding cafe is just a place to sip a cup of coffee and eat homemade pastries while reading a book or hanging out with friends. While, yes, this is technically true, I would argue that there's more to what makes a cafe special. The most important characteristics that would make a cafe stand out are the vibe, the variety of goods, and the chef's unique influence.



Opening in November, Mil Colibris Bakery and Cafe hits all of those characteristics. The variety of foods range from Cookies to Conchas or from Paninis to Burritos. The menu items change with the seasons. On top of that the vibe of the cafe is energetic and fun, with there being a stylish wood interior. It's the perfect place to hang out with friends while getting a variety of food and drinks.

The mastermind behind Mil Colibris is Daniela Segoviano, who grew up in Mexico City and moved to the U.S. in 2009. Daniela started cooking around 15

years ago for her family and friends, but that soon turned into a hobby, passion and eventually her job. Her first business was making custom cakes out of her house. However, as time went on, she realized that making cakes from her house did not satisfy her ambitions. She needed to take her business further. And that's why Mil Colibris comes in. By working in her own cafe, Daniela gets the opportunity to express her Mexican heritage in her goods, and make food she likes to eat. Her favorites are donuts and chocolate chip cookies. The customers favor the Poblano feta scone, breakfast burrito and chocolate chip cookies.

Daniela genuinely enjoys cooking because she was most excited to make a living out of what she loves to do. Mil Colibris is open Tuesday - Saturday from 7am-3pm. I highly recommend stopping in for some excellent food! ■



Carson Neely Sets a Goal of Uncommon Fitness for Physical Training Clients at his Ravinia Crossing Facility

By Jeff Stern

Providing a way for others to enrich the quality of their lives can be a reward many wish they could offer, but don't know how to make it happen. Carson Neely took appropriate steps to achieve that goal and has opened a road to fitness to those in search of a professional approach to their individual needs. Well established in a storefront facility at 555 Roger Williams Avenue, designed and equipped to serve customers in Ravinia and beyond, Neely urges others to recognize the benefits of regular, personalized exercises to build up and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Growing up in Grayslake, not far northwest of Highland Park, Neely seemed always to be involved in athletics, with football being a favored sport from the age of seven. Although he studied business and communications at the University of Arizona, he personal-trained there independently at the same time, and later went to work for Equinox in Highland Park, where he remained until that facility was closed in 2020.

Building relationships while developing his skills, Neely was working at another gym in the area when he found commercial space in Al Klairmont's Ravinia Crossing complex that seemed just right for establishing a physical training business of his own. Besides those he had helped while working at other such establishments, Neely also felt a calling to provide physical training programs for those with disabilities that he was certain could benefit from such involvement.

To get the results his approach to personal training aims to provide, Neely starts his relationship with every new client by assessing their condition, which could include any injuries they may have suffered, and asks what goals they may want to achieve. With clients ranging in age from 8 to 80, these can vary widely.

Commuting from his home in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood, he also demonstrates a clear commitment to accommodating clients at hours that are clearly convenient to them to ensure the success of his training on their behalf. He leaves home as early as 5:15 a.m. to meet clients who may be at his door on Roger Williams as early as 5:45. Neely's last client of the of the day can start as late as 6 p.m.



Building and maintaining physical strength requires more than just exercise by itself. Neely has invested heavily in equipment as an integral component on the road to overall fitness. His inventory includes dumbbells, barbells and cables of various weights. If you want to call upon his expertise, be sure to make an appointment. Walk-ins are unlikely to find him available to provide the attention he gives treasured clients while he is focused on serving them. He can best be contacted at Carson@uncommon-fitness.com. ■

Renovated Weil Tot Lot A Boon to North Ravinia Neighbors and Those Beyond

By Jeff Stern

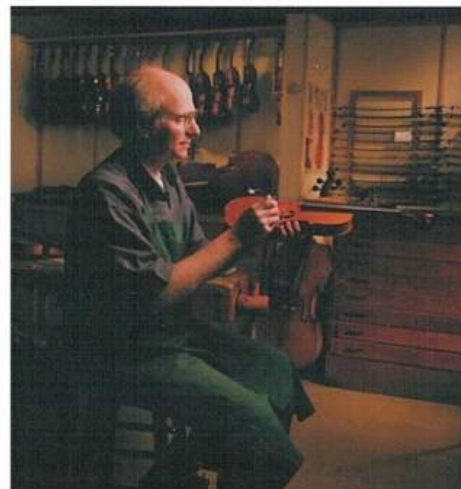
Besides its ideal location along the North Shore amid the rustic ravines that give it a natural charm while inspiring the name that identifies it, Ravinia and Highland Park in general benefit from a Park District that provides and maintains equipment that's appropriate for the leisure-time enjoyment of a wide range of neighborhood residents.

The Weil Tot Lot in Moroney Park is one of several such facilities, and offers a tot swing, a cave climber, forked balance beam, seesaw and what are called small mushroom steppers designed for exercise and play by 2 to 5-year-olds growing accustomed to playing with others their age.



While the equipment that is there now is still new, the land for the park has been owned by the Park District since 1927 and is one of 44 parks with 38 playgrounds the district maintains throughout the city. The tot lot is named for Edward Weil, a former Park Commissioner, whose family made a substantial contribution for new wooden play equipment when the lot was renovated in 1989.

The Park District generally schedules a playground renovation about every 20 years. Although a water fountain is included in every park and playground location, if feasible, the most recent renovation has made an upgraded fountain available to thirsty passers-by just outside the fenced-in lot, along with a new paved sidewalk from the tot lot to the existing pedestrian walkway on St. Johns leading to the corner at Cedar Avenue. ■



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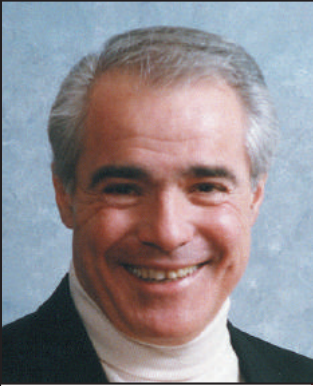
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Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 1)



Stagecoach, Chicago, 1820s (Digital research Library of Illinois Historic Research Library. Thursday, November 21, 2019 Stagecoach Travel in Early Chicago and Illinois)

Americans, French traders, and early European settlers, was the Green Bay Trail. In the north shore the Green Bay Trail mostly ran along the ridge between the Skokie marshes to the west and the slope down to Lake Michigan to the east. Since the path ran along the ridge between the Skokie marshes in the west, and the slope down the shore of Lake Michigan in the east, and it was not interrupted by ravines, it was easier for humans and animals to use heading north and south. This route corresponds to the modern Green Bay Road. The earliest travelers – Native Americans and French traders and missionaries -- came on foot. In most cases, in the days before railroads, European settlers traveled by stagecoach or with a horse-drawn farm wagon.

The stagecoach route ran from Chicago north through Wisconsin into Upper Michigan. When the railroads came the rail lines followed a similar route on the North Shore parallel to the trail.



So. Gree... ay Road, Highland Park, Ill.

Green Bay Road at Ravinia Park – still unpaved in 1910.



A Brief History of the Chicago and North Western Railway

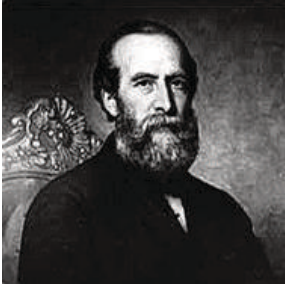
The Chicago & North Western North Line started as the Chicago & Milwaukee Railroad in 1854 with Walter S. Gurnee as its president. By 1855, Walter Gurnee, Mayor of Chicago (1851 – 1853), North Shore real estate speculator, and president of the Chicago & Milwaukee Railroad, took control of the Port Clinton Land Company, a predecessor of

Highland Park, and platted the area for residential settlement. It was not a coincidence that Gurnee had a stake in the railroad and also was acquiring land in the north shore.

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Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 7)

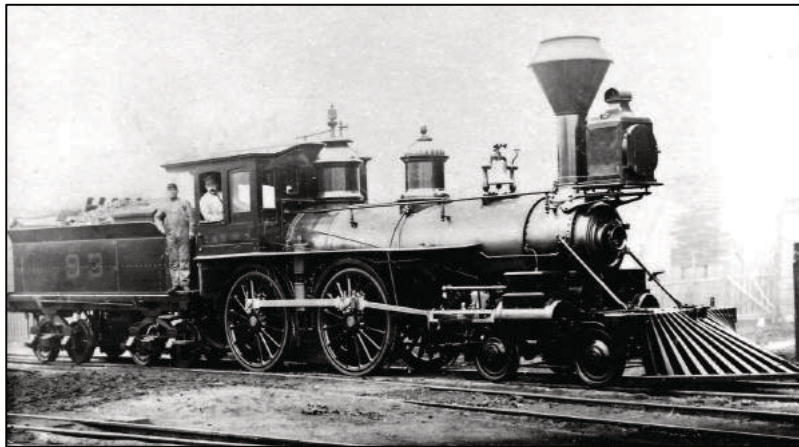


Walter S. Gurnee

Walter Gurnee anticipated a rise in North Shore property sales if it was easier to travel north from Chicago, and he profited from his plan.

Building supplies and tools were loaded onto flatbed rail cars and hauled up the North Shore, where little more than rectangular wooden shacks were erected as depots. The inaugural Chicago & Milwaukee Railroad train to Waukegan arrived at a newly constructed depot owned by the Port Clinton Land Company on Jan. 1, 1855, with the hand-lettered sign "Highland Park" hanging from the depot eaves. It was Gurnee who named Highland Park, inspired by the high bluffs overlooking Lake Michigan, and he hoped the railroad was going to help him sell Highland Park property. Ultimately, in 1868, the Highland Park Building Company bought all vacant lands and set about to populate the place with happy homeowners.

Gurnee and his partners did well buying up and selling land around stations in what would become Lake Bluff, Highland Park, Ravinia¹, Glencoe and Winnetka. The far north suburban village of Gurnee is named after him, but he may not have ever set foot in the area.



A ca. 1860 steam locomotive. Puffs of smoke and fiery sparks heralded the arrival of a wood-burning locomotive and twelve-passenger coach which stopped at the "Town of Highland Park." (Photo courtesy Railroad Collection, Highland Park Archives and Local History Collections)

Marvyn Wittelle provided a colorful account of the first train to arrive in Highland Park:

Bitter winds whipped through Deerfield Township the day the railroad was inaugurated. Groups of shivering people stood beside the rails from Port Clinton to the county line, waiting for the first "Iron Horse" to make its way north down the single-

¹ Gurnee assisted B. F. Jacobs in his acquisition of land to establish the summer resort community of Ravinia in the early 1870s.

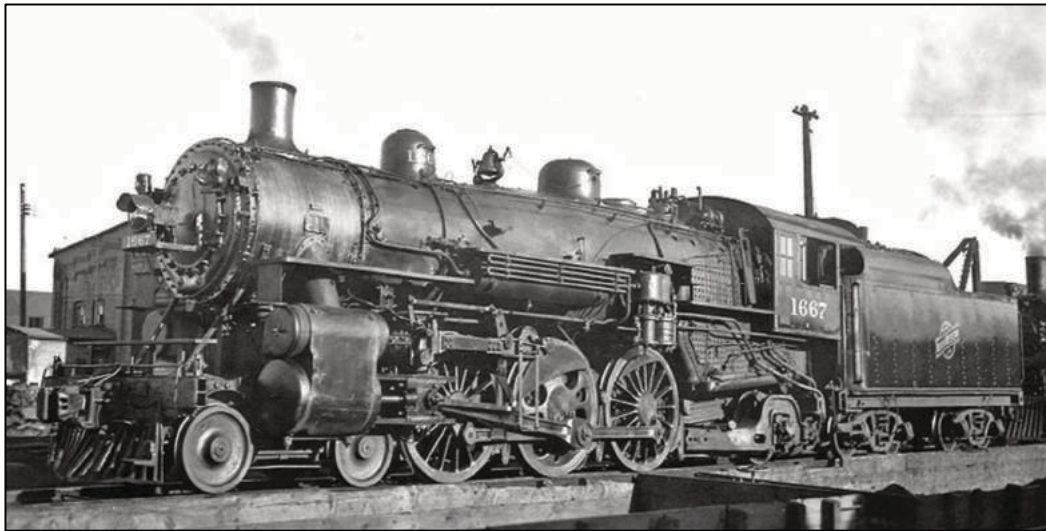
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Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 7)

line track. Spectators cheered when the coach came into view, and Walter Gurnee waved back from behind a glass-paned window.²

The original 1850s rail line, like the Green Bay Trail of old, ran through seemingly endless forests until it arrived at one of its stops. The Chicago & Milwaukee Railroad was eventually leased by the C&NW starting in 1866, and was bought by the C&NW in 1883.



Chicago & Northwestern Steam Engine 1385 from "A brief history of the Chicago and north western line"

EXTRA

RAVINIA STATION ROBBED LAST NIGHT

Northwestern Depot Entered by Burglars
Who Ransack Office but take only
a few Dollars

The discovery was made at about six-thirty this morning that sometime during the night burglars had entered the Northwestern station at Ravinia. Entrance was effected through the north side of the bay window from which the screen had been pulled. A few dollars in pennies, the proceeds of paper sales and the only money left in the cash drawer, was taken, but the agent, W. H. Boyer reports that the ticket files, although scattered about the floor, were intact. Mr. Boyer left the office at about 8:30 last night and returned at 7 this morning at which time the robbery had been discovered by Mr. O. A. Leonard, a Ravinia resident who takes the early train.

Mid-Century's most famous locomotive was built in March 1907 by the American Locomotive Company's Schenectady Works. Between 1901 and 1908, 325 of these 82-ton class R-1's were built for the C&NW, making them the largest single class of locomotives that railroad ever owned. Designed for fast freight service, they also were used for secondary passenger trains and local switching from Upper Michigan to the Dakotas to suburban Chicago. (Courtesy Mid-Century Railway Museum, North Freedom, Wisconsin.)

The "Great Train Station Robbery"

< Crime is not limited to modern times. Here is an example of a heinous act documented on page 1 of the June 26, 1913 issue of the Highland Park Press newspaper.

² Marvyn Wittelle, *Pioneer to commuter: the story of Highland Park*, a steam locomotive ca. 1860 like the earliest train engines that stopped at Highland Park, p. 35.

(Continued on page 10)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

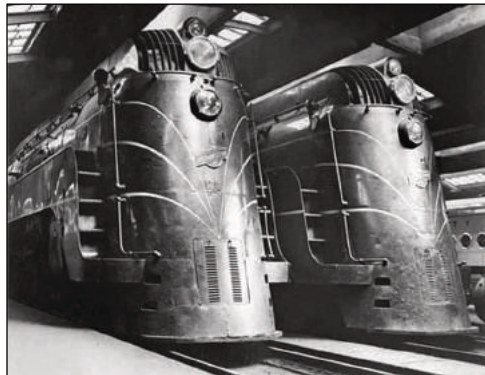
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The Transition from Steam to Diesel Engines

In 1935, Electro-Motive Company unveiled a diesel locomotive for passenger service. The days of railroad steam engines were numbered. The word “dieselization” came into use referring to the replacement of the steam locomotive or electric locomotive with the diesel locomotive. Between the late 1930s and the late 1950s the power available with diesel locomotive engines roughly doubled. Steam engines lasted well into the late 1950s on major American railroads, and in isolated cases into the middle 1960s on small, common-carrier roads. The last steam locomotive fleet in everyday use was retired in the late 1970s.³

Streamliners in the C&NW fleet included these called "Zephyrs." There were many beautifully designed sleek art deco streamliner locomotives in the 1920s and '30s. However, there is something creepy-looking about these engines. These art deco gone Goth futuristic locomotives were built in 1923 for the C&NW.



The Chicago, North Shore & Milwaukee Electric Line (The North Shore Line)

What can a train offer that was more of a comfortable, quieter, soot-free ride than the steam engines? The North Shore Line could; and, In addition, there were dining cars. “Palaces on wheels” was the reaction to the new gaily painted red and orange trolley cars. The North Shore Line was what was commonly known as an electric trolley or streetcar. These trolleys ran on rails similar to trains but were powered by electricity, not steam or diesel engines. In this case, we are talking about interurban trolleys – trolleys that could take you to other towns and are not limited to a city. These trolleys had masts on top that would engage with overhead electrical cables for power. There was a network of overhead wires along the route that powered the engines.

The North Shore electric line began as a Waukegan streetcar system called Bluff City Electric Street Railway in 1894; and by 1898 the line extended through the lake shore communities from Lake Bluff to Highland Park. In 1899 a ten-mile extension was completed to Evanston. Passengers transferred at Evanston to a Milwaukee Road steam train to complete their ride into downtown Chicago. Several years

³ The article “Dieselisation” in Wikipedia.

(Continued on page 11)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 10)

later a new entry into Chicago was laid out from Evanston using several other trolley line companies for their journey downtown.

Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee, commonly called the North Shore Line, was the favored mode of travel for riders from Chicago to Ravinia Park. In fact, it was A.C. Frost, a railroad entrepreneur who owned the North Shore Line in the early 1900s and bought the land to build Ravinia Park in 1904 as a "trolley park" as they were called. Trolley parks, of which there were many in the US, were built by interurban railway owners to boost ridership by enticing riders to take their trolley to the park. Frost built a high-class trolley park with some amusement rides but also a concert pavilion, which ultimately became the venue for the Ravinia Music Festival.

Station platforms were built at Roger Williams Avenue in Ravinia and at Beech Street. For residents of Ravinia, the North Shore Line was frequently used for short trips from Ravinia to downtown Highland Park and to other suburbs in the North Shore. Before the advent of the automobile age, a trolley ride from Ravinia to downtown Highland Park cost 10 cents; and a ticket for a double feature movie at the old Alcyon Theater was 25 cents. To round off the day of fun, a chocolate soda might cost five cents.



The only surviving North Shore Line located at the Illinois Railway Museum in Union, IL

Breezers

Open-air cars were extremely popular in the United States in the 1890s and early 1900s, but they fell out of favor around World War I because street railways could only use them for half the year. These "Breezer" trolleys offered an open-air scenic ride up the North Shore. It was a fun way to travel from Chicago to Ravinia Park and back. It was like an amusement park ride to an amusement park.

(Continued on page 13)



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Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 11)



Riding a "Breezer" was like going on an amusement ride. Courtesy TheTrolleydog.com

Fine Dining Style on the North Shore Line

For longer rides to/from Chicago and Milwaukee the North Shore Line included a dining car, which they called their Tavern Lounge Car. The leading afternoon and evening menu item was what they called the Electroburger, which included a "juicy tenderloin burger on a delicious roll with potato chips, relish, and coffee, tea or milk," all for one dollar. Sandwiches included such unappealing specialties as "Young, Selected, Tender, Tongue," and "Choice, Flavor-Rich Sardines." Their "Flakey Crust Home-Made Pies" sounds a lot more tempting. A menu page was devoted to beverages, which included a surprising selection of mixed drinks, cocktails, liquors, brandies, and liqueurs. North Shore Line riders could also choose from the breakfast menu featuring a meal of juice, eggs, toast, and coffee, all for one dollar.

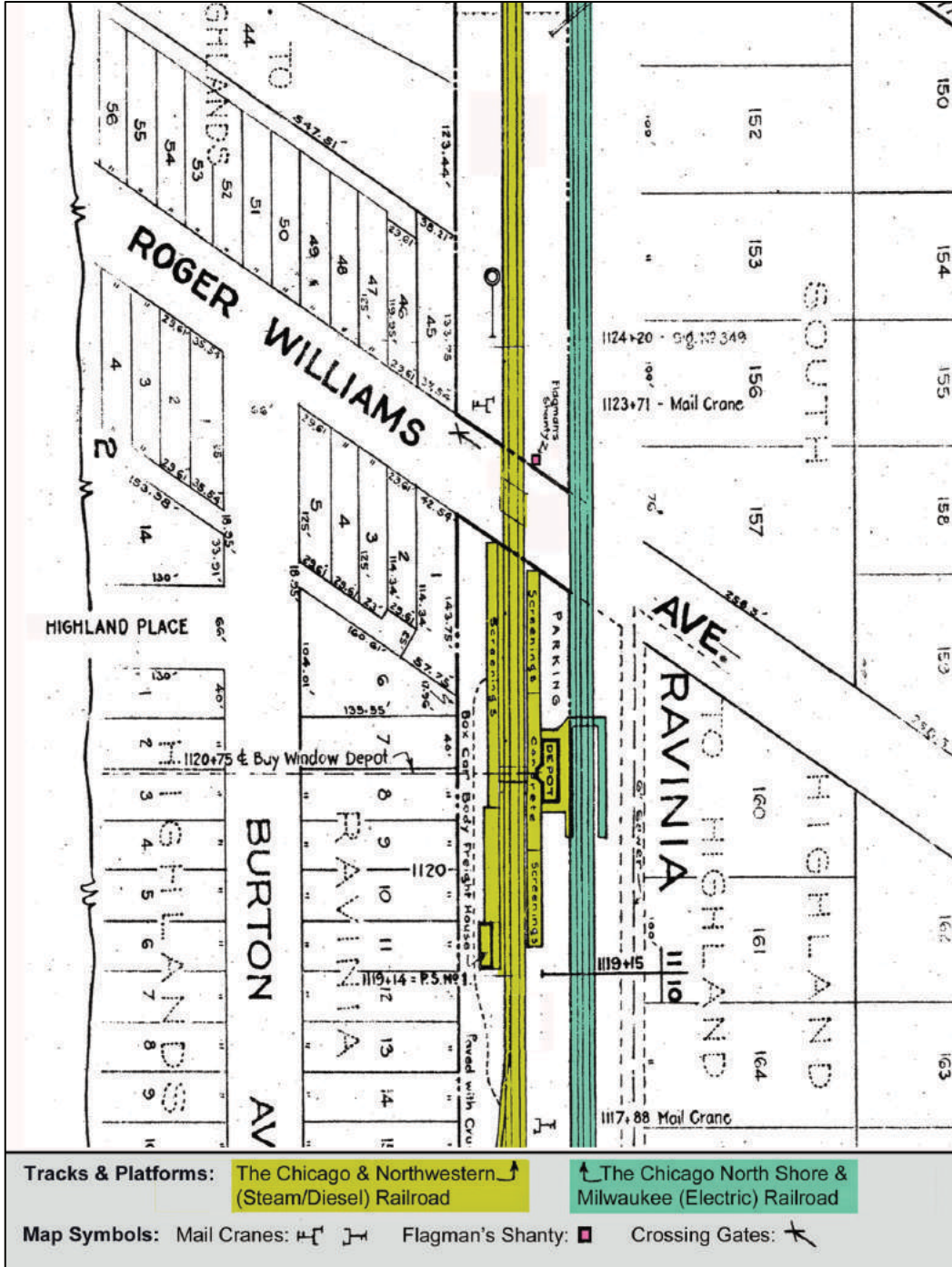


An NSL lunch/dinner menu from 1961 featured "Electroburgers," sandwiches, desserts and a variety of beverages.

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Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 13)



The rail lines of the C&NW (left) and the North Shore Line (right). This map from ca. 1922.

(Continued on page 15)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 14)

The Ravinia (Roger Williams Avenue) C&NW Train Station

Marvyn Wittelle describes the earliest Highland Park train station as a simple, small, rectangular red frame building. The Ravinia station was probably constructed much the same way, but it wasn't built until the early 1870s since there were so few people living in the vicinity. B.F. Jacobs' 1873 subdivision plat shows that there was a Chicago & North Western Ravinia depot by that time. Jacobs must have asked Gurnee to build the station in anticipation of prospective Ravinia property buyers arriving from Chicago: and Gurnee had a stake in Ravinia development.

It wasn't long before a charming train station, built in 1889, adorned Roger Williams Avenue. In the early years of any railroad, depots in outlying areas were commonly simple, prefabricated sheds constructed of lumber precut by the mill and shipped up the line on flatbed cars. Once rail traffic increased and towns developed, these shacks were replaced with more substantial buildings, suitable for passengers along with, if warranted, separate freight facilities. In Illinois, Ravinia's train station is the oldest still in operation!



The original drawing of the front façade of Ravinia's 1889 Depot from the original plans.

The Ravinia Train Station Architecture

According to Ira Bach, a Chicago-based architectural historian:

This [Ravinia] frame depot and an almost identical, but now-demolished, depot at Edison Park were both designed for the Chicago and North Western Railway under the direction of its chief engineer, J. E. Blunt. Like the similar depot erected by the Illinois Central Railroad at 83rd Street, this structure conformed to the arrangement of the typical broad-eaved "shed" depot of the 1870s, and was executed in a similar version of the Queen Anne style. It features an ornate dormer, in this case capped by a pyramidal roof above the station agent's window. As was typical of this style, this dormer (like that at 83rd Street) served no practical purpose. 4

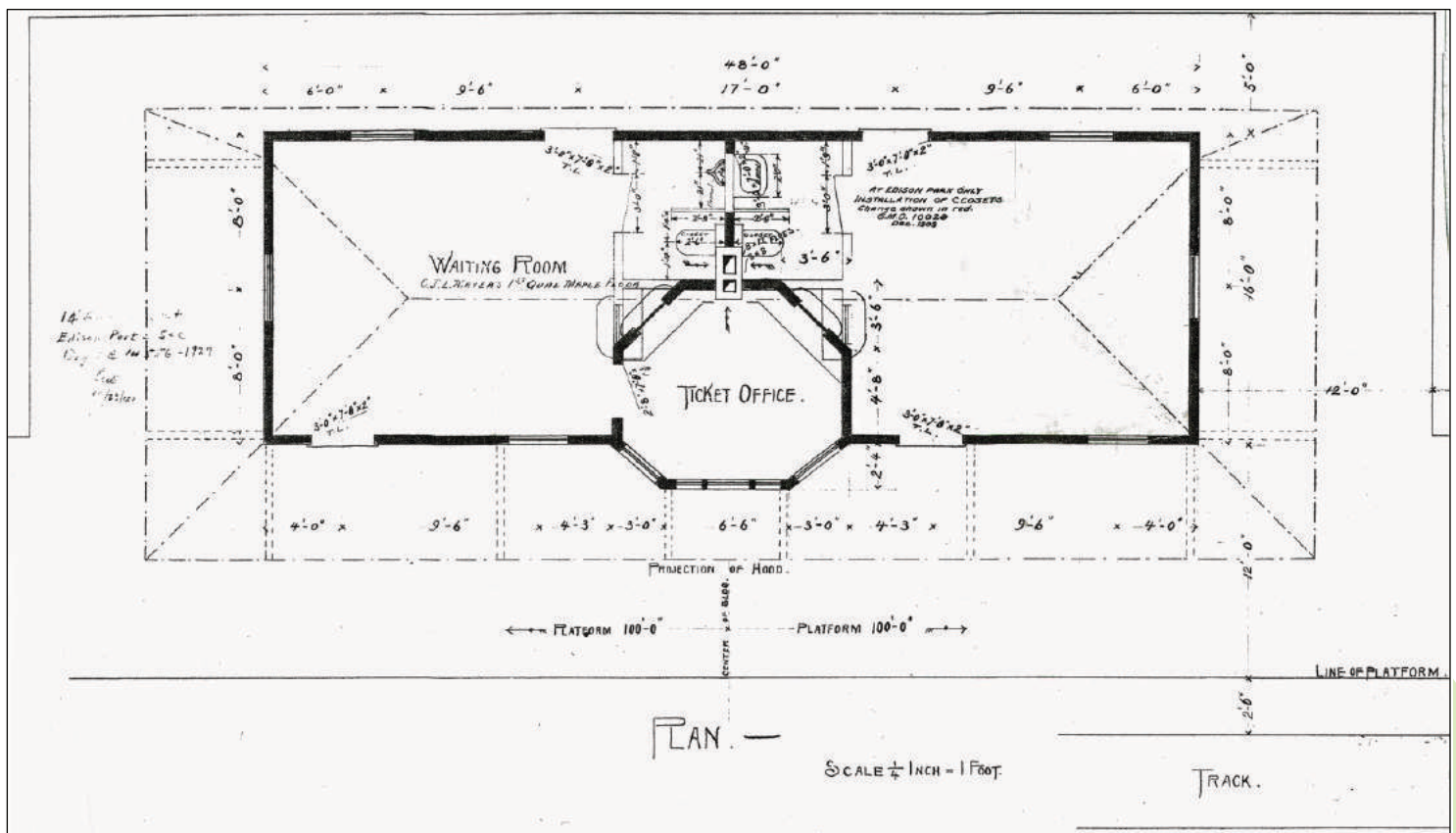
Bach goes on to say the station has received few alterations since its original construction. The weathervane above the dormer is more elaborate than that called for in the initial design. It is a model of the "Pioneer," the first locomotive to operate in Illinois.

4 Bach Ira, and Susan Wolfson, "A Guide to Chicago's Train Stations Present and Past" *(Continued on page 16)*

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 15)

As anyone who has been in the Ravinia Station knows, there are two separate waiting rooms with a ticket office in the middle. What was the reason for this seemingly odd design? The following original architectural drawings of the station layout answer the question. There were separate gender-specific waiting rooms so the men could smoke their smelly cigars and read their newspapers in peace, separated from noisy children. Women and children were better protected from the smelly cigar smoke, unwanted advances, rowdiness, and other inappropriate behavior by men. Such examples exemplify Victorian morals of the 1880s.



The original plans for Ravinia Station

(Continued on page 18)

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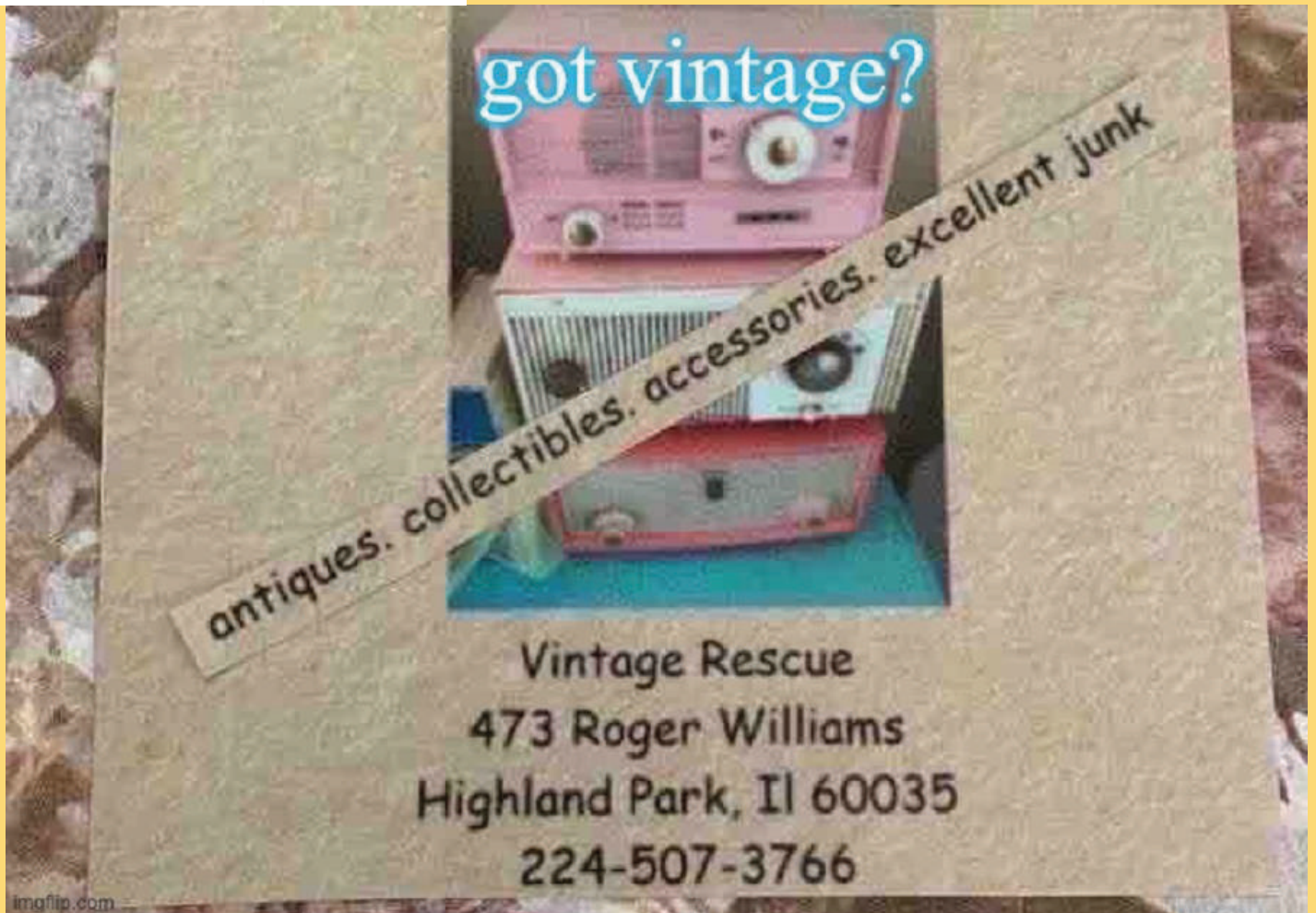
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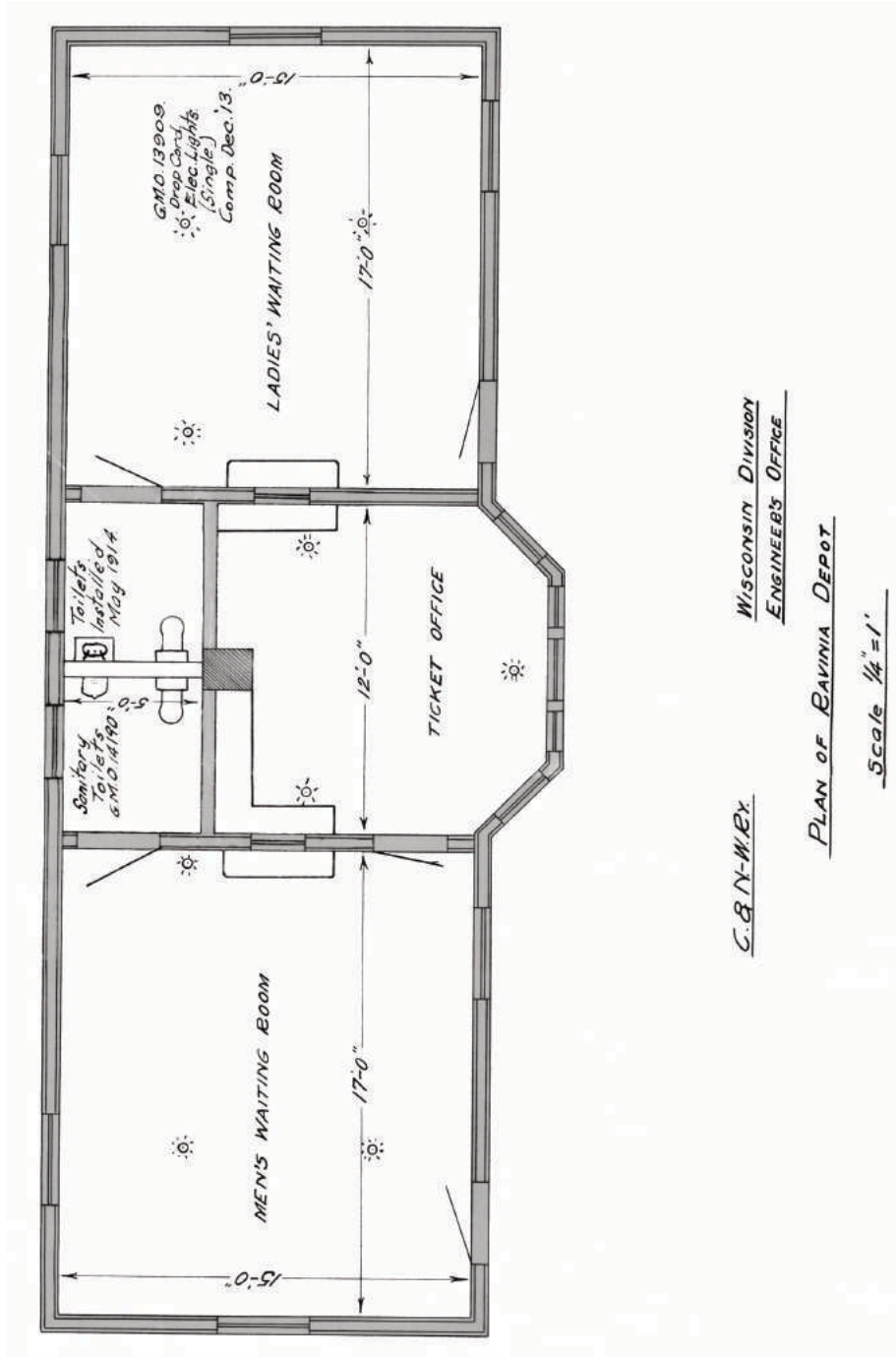
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(Continued from page 16)



(Continued on page 19)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 18)

An extensive yet sympathetic renovation of the station was completed in 1989, the centennial of its construction. A campaign to restore the building developed when it was determined that a simple repainting, suggested by transit advocate Jeffrey Stern and supported by local businessmen, would not be sufficient to save the structure from further deterioration.



A jacked-up Ravinia Station photograph courtesy Highland Park Archives and Local History Collections.

Ravinia depot renovation rolling

By Sheryl De Vore
Staff Writer

Workers hoisted the 20-ton Ravinia train station five feet off the ground and slid it on rollers across beams approximately 40 feet east to its new temporary location Tuesday, in an effort that took more than five hours.

The 99-year-old building will remain at its new location for about two weeks while the rotting foundation under which it sat is rebuilt.

The train station, at the intersection of Roger Williams and St. Johns Aves., was built in 1889 and is the oldest remaining train station along the three Chicago and North Western rail lines, according to an application made for landmark status by the City of Highland Park's Historic Preservation Commission.

AT 8:30 A.M. Tuesday, workers excavated eight holes below the station to make room for the eight 15-ton hydraulic jacks that would raise the station and prepare it for its move.

"The system works so well that we won't break one window and we wouldn't spill a glass of water if it were inside the building," said John Sinde, Metropolitan Railway (Metra) construction engineer as he observed workers pumping 1,000 pounds of pressure into the jacks.

The building was jacked and lifted four times, each time with timber cribbing being added below. A few construction workers worked under the station to readjust the jacks each time.

Then 40-foot steel beams were slid under the building and at approximately 2 p.m., the building was slowly rolled on to more steel beams where it is now resting. An end loader was pinned against the building as the building slid down to its new location. That took about an hour.

DURING THE NEXT few weeks Metra workers will replace the rotting old flagstone and timber foundation with a poured concrete one. Then the building will be moved back to a site which will be a few feet away from its original location.

Work will then begin inside to restore the building to its former brilliance.

"We want to preserve everything we can. Every board we can save, we will," said Sinde. "We want it to look like it did when it was first built."

All original doors will be restored, and windows will be put back at the north and south ends of the stations. Two restrooms will be placed on the south side of the station. And the two rooms, once used as separate waiting rooms for men and women, will be retained to maintain the original design.

THE RESTORATION PROJECT is costing Metra more than \$500,000, which is securing the funds from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and Universal Mass Transit Assn. (UMTA), said Sinde. The project also includes installation of a crosswalk, new lighting and landscaping, and platform and track work.

Approximately 252 passengers had used the station daily until it was closed three weeks ago to get ready for the big move. Passengers are now using a temporary mobile station next door until the restoration is completed, which officials have said will be sometime next summer.

The station project is one of several improvements planned for the Ravinia area, including parking and street improvement. The city also plans to create a new "Jens Jensen" style park on a site at the station's north parking lot. Jens Jensen, one of the premier landscape architects of the early 20th century, lived in Ravinia.

The Highland Park News, January 21, 1988.

(Continued on page 20)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 19)



Ravinia station ca. 1940 (courtesy Etta Pardee)

The Union Pacific Today

In April, 1995 the C&NW's long history came to an end when Union Pacific bought it in April 1995. The two railroads had long collaborated on connections to the West Coast and buying the C&NW gave Union Pacific a connection to Chicago. The trains still stop at Ravinia and are a valuable transportation service.



A Union Pacific north bound train arriving at Ravinia station, October, 2023. Little has changed.

(Continued on page 21)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 20)



1942 View of the Roger Williams Avenue Ravinia railroad crossing

The above October, 1942 photograph of the railroad crossing at Roger Williams Avenue (looking west) shows the two parallel rail lines, the C&NW and the North Shore Line. What looks like a shack on stilts to the right of the crossing is the gate tower, which is elevated for a better view down the tracks. The report identifies the shack on stilts as the "gateman shanty."

Based on an October, 1942 evaluation of the Roger Williams Avenue rail crossing, one gateman was hired to monitor both the C&NW and North Shore Line at the Roger Williams crossing. The gates were manually lifted and lowered by the gateman working cables when trains came and went. Apparently, automated gates were not yet available. Red electric lamps with mercury tube controllers were on the gate arms. The gateman's shanty was elevated due to sight obstructions – trees and bushes along the tracks, and also the location of the C&NW station.

Fan Mail for Station Masters

Station Masters sold ride tickets and generally managed the station. In some places and periods they were also the local Post Master. They were also viewed as a valuable source of gossip, since they meet and chat with many commuters each day. Here is a letter of appreciation from one loyal commuter:

"You can always start the day off right with the pleasant 'Good Morning' of Mr. Edward Welch at Ravinia," William E. Ledbetter, of Highland Park, wrote R. L. Williams, President of the North Western, recently. "It has been the writer's intention for quite a while to write the Chicago and North Western and tell you how courteous, thoughtful, efficient and just plain friendly is the station agent at the Ravinia suburban station.

(Continued on page 22)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 21)

"Mr. Welch has, in the years he has been at this post, made many good friends for the Chicago and North Western Railway. Our station is always clean. It is full of warmth and friendship in the wintertime. Mr. Welch goes out of his way to serve the clients of the North Western who use the Ravinia station. I have heard many people comment favorably about his good graces.

"Mrs. Ledbetter and the youngsters, who use the train occasionally, are assured of starting their trip pleasantly from Ravinia. Mr. Welch sees to that, and Mrs. Ledbetter is very appreciative. The services rendered by Mr. Welch to other individuals would be too numerous to mention.

"Mr. Welch is at his post early in the morning. I know, because I am one of the early morning travelers, and you can always start the day off right with the pleasant 'Good Morning' of Mr. Welch at Ravinia. "We read so much these days . . . of the awards to men and women who have gone beyond their call of duty. Such an award should go to Mr. Welch." 5

The North Shore Interurban and US Postal Service Connection

What are the two "mail Cranes" labeled in the tracks and platforms map? In those days, there was a close connection between the electric lines and the U.S. Postal Service. The Railway played an important role in the transport of mail. In fact, the North Shore Line carried mail from Chicago to the suburbs.



This is the moment a Milwaukee Line mail car snatches a mail pouch from a mail crane while in motion.

In the case of the North Shore Line, mail bags would be loaded into a mail car in Chicago. The outgoing mail was sorted on the train by post office employees into bins which are then put into canvas bags. At

5 Northwestern Newsliner, May, 1946. p. 3, Courtesy Chicago and North Western Historical Society

(Continued on page 23)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 22)

the appropriate location the mail bags were hung on a hook that was swung out and snared by a mail crane. This was done in reverse when mail was sent out from a station. It may be hard to believe, but this mode of mail transfer was commonly practiced at stations at which the train didn't stop, which was mostly successful. However, this maneuver was not without mishap, as we will see below.

The Ravinia Post Office

From the 1920s up until the 1980s, there was a U.S. Post Office on Roger Williams Ave. in Ravinia. It was a fully-functioning post office that received and distributed mail and had P.O. boxes.⁶ Now there is no Ravinia Post Office, and trucks on highways carry the mail between cities.



Ravinia Post Office sign courtesy Highland Park Archives and Local History Collections

Pre-cancelled stamps are special stamps that come in small denominations and are specifically for pre-sorted First-Class Mail and U.S.P.S. Marketing Mail. Mailers apply these special stamps to envelopes at a lower postage price, and pay the difference when they drop off the mail at the Post Office.

Postmasters and Station Masters

Because of the relationship between the interurban railroads and the U.S. Post Office, many station masters were also the community Postmasters. Railroad station masters were important figures in their communities. Why? With so many commuters passing through each day, they knew all the local gossip.

Back in 1997, when we celebrated Ravinia School's centennial, I interviewed school alumni who came for the centennial festivities. One of my best informants was Robert (Bob) Olsen. Bob told me about the time the North Shore Line came through and attempted to snag the mail pouch. The maneuver failed – the pouch ripped open and mail was strewn all over the tracks. Roy Howe, who was both the Ravinia Postmaster and Ravinia Station Master, had to scramble along the tracks to pick up all the scattered letters. Howe was the Ravinia station master and Ravinia postmaster for some time. According to Bob Olson, "Roy Howe was a miserly man – he paid us boys one cent for each special delivery piece of mail."⁷

⁶ Ravinia Post Office sign courtesy Highland Park Archives and Local History Collections.

⁷ Interview by Elliott Miller with Bob Olson, May, 1990.

(Continued on page 24)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 23)

The Decline of the Interurban Electric Lines

Finally, during the early morning hours of January 21, 1963, the interurban cars sped through the snow-clad Illinois and Wisconsin countryside for the last time as the midnight trains from Chicago and Milwaukee made their final runs. At 2:50 a.m. the last southbound train stopped at Chicago's Roosevelt Road station, and five minutes later the last North Shore train rolled into the Milwaukee terminal. The trolley poles were pulled down and hooked, and the lights in the terminal were turned off, ending an American interurban era.⁸

Another account of January 21, 1963, recounts the sad occasion:

Early on a subzero Monday morning, the Chicago North Shore and Milwaukee Railroad – popularly known as the North Shore Line – made its final run after nearly 47 years of service between northeastern Illinois and southeastern Wisconsin. United Press International (UPI) reported, “The last train of the North Shore railroad – one of the nation's last interurban electric lines – rattled its way into history at 2:55 this morning, late for its own funeral.”

That final train was 43 minutes behind schedule in arriving at the terminal in Milwaukee, owing to the harsh winter weather, as well as the derailment and breakdown of other railroad cars en route. Approximately 220 NSL enthusiasts were crowded on board the train's six-car special (only one car usually made the post-midnight runs) for that last ride. “Come again tomorrow night, we'll ride you for nothing” joked conductor Henry Bondy between routine stunts of yelling out “Tickets, please!”⁹

Causes of Locomotive Transit's Decline

Automobiles and buses were the major causes of the collapse of the interurban systems. Add to that the construction of the Edens Expressway, which became the main highway between Chicago, and the northern suburbs. The Edens Expressway was the first highway in Chicago and was opened on December 20, 1951. Buses were a particular threat; they already controlled 15% of the commercial passenger market by 1929, a number which jumped to 38% by 1950.

The construction of the Edens Expressway should be told because it was a tremendous blow to rail ridership in and out of Chicago's North Shore. The photos and text below tell the story of William Grant Edens and the construction of the highway.

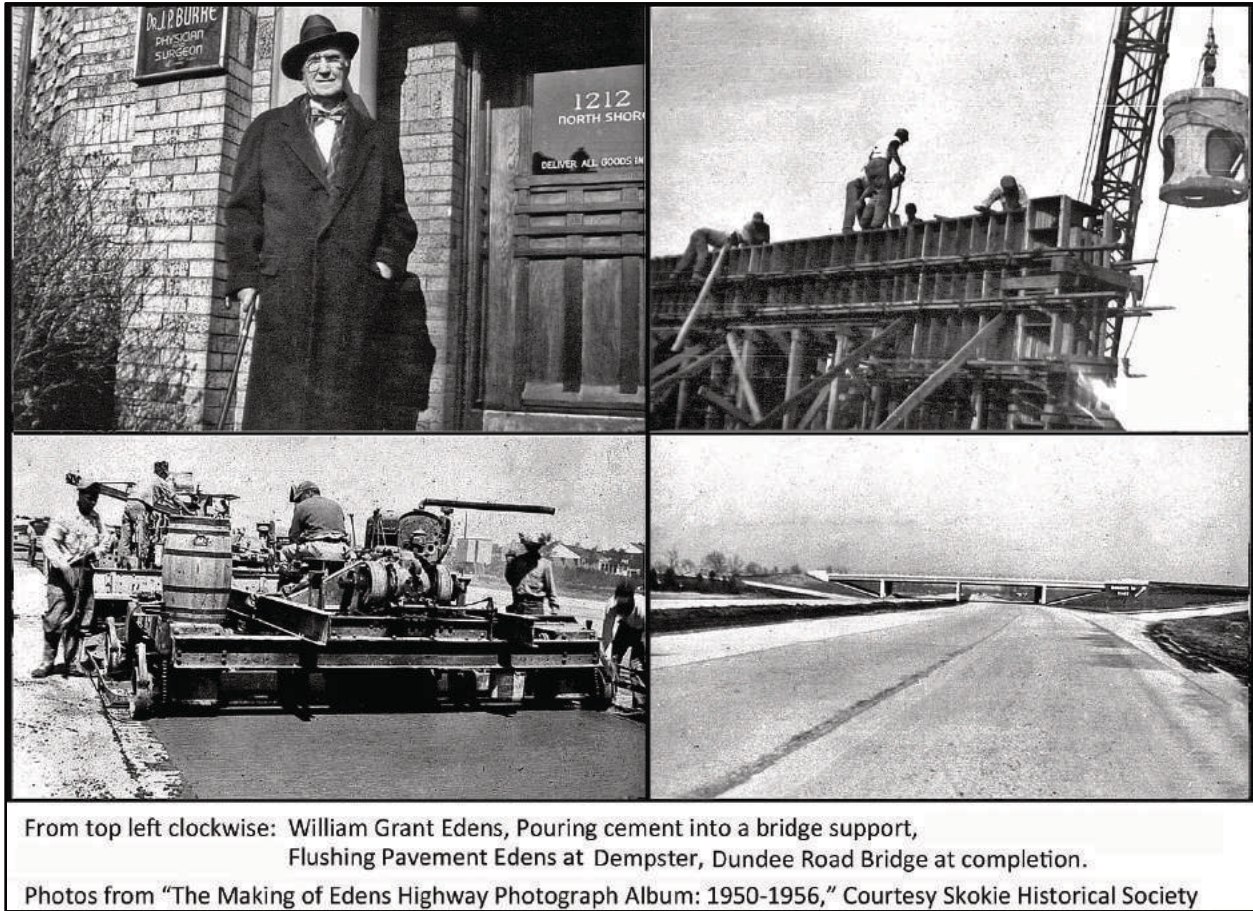
⁸ Quoted from “Chicago North Shore & Milwaukee Railroad” The Milwaukee Electric Railway & Transit Historical Society -- <https://www.tmer.org/milwaukee-streetcar-history/chicago-north-shore-and-milwaukee-railroad-history>

⁹ This article is in: “The Grand Finale of the North Shore Line” <https://transportationhistory.org/2021/01/21/the-grand-finale-of-the-north-shore-line/>

(Continued on page 25)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 24)



Here is the text that accompanied the photo album:

The Edens Superhighway was named after William Grant Edens.

He is the "Father" of highways and superhighways, also is credited with having "taken" Illinois out of the mud by promoting the state's first highway bond issue, which was voted in 1918.

The Edens Superhighway, which will be the most beautiful highway in this Country, when finished, was opened officially December 20, 1951.

Among those at the opening and ribbon-cutting at Peterson and Caldwell Overpass, which is the Southern terminus of the new six-lane expressway, were William N. Brickson, President of the County Board; Charles P. Casey, State Director of Public Works, who acted for Governor Stevenson; Daniel Ryan, Chairman of the County Board's Finance Committee; Major George A. Quinlan, Superintendent of County Highways and Col. William G. Edens, who was the guest of honor.

(Continued on page 26)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 25)

Final Word on the Interurbans

In electric-powered subways and elevated lines today, a third rail is used to power the trains. Remarkably, one electrically powered interurban railway still runs out of Chicago -- the South Shore Line -- which hauls cargo and people from South Bend, Indiana to Millennium Station in Chicago and back, with stops at 20 stations along the way. A favorite attraction for Chicago residents is a trip to the Indiana Dunes State Park on the South Shore Line.



A South Shore Line interurban pulls into the Dunes Park in Indiana. A 1920s SSL advertisement.

Conclusions

The main route south from Fort La Baye, a French military post built in 1684, was the Green Bay trail to Wisconsin. Aside from taking boats along the west coast of Lake Michigan, travelers took the Green Bay trail to avoid slogging through the Skokie marshes, fording rivers, or trying to cross ravines.

The history of our rail systems reflects the geography of our region and the development of modes of transportation over time. Railroads fulfilled a need for speedy travel over long distances in the 1800s. Rail transportation became divided into steam/diesel and electric in the 1900s. Highland Park became a suburb of Chicago, largely because railroads made commuting convenient and fast during the early 1900s. Walter Gurnee's prediction finally came true -- Chicago businessmen began buying property in Highland Park and were building substantial houses for themselves.

The introduction of the internal combustion engine, i.e. automobiles, eventually doomed the electric North Shore rail lines and cut into the profits of diesel train systems, resulting in a consolidation of railroad companies. It is these factors that have shaped Ravinia's rail service in the past.

The demise of the North Shore Line, and the increase in automobile traffic, certainly did not help the worsening environmental problems that we are experiencing. Perhaps the only benefit of the NSL's closure was the creation of the Green Bay Bike Path, which followed the bed of the North Shore Line's tracks from Chicago to the Wisconsin line. The abandoned NSL's rail bed is now known as a Rail Trail. In a sense, we now have the Green Bay Trail, back again in Ravinia, sheltered by trees, for biking, hiking and jogging.

(Continued on page 27)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 26)

Whose idea was it to create bike and hiking paths from abandoned railway tracks? None other than May T. Watts (1893-1975), a former resident of Ravinia, naturalist, and colleague of landscape architect Jens Jensen. She was determined that Americans stay connected to their natural landscape in a time of increasing urbanization, which was the catalyst that led to the formation of the Illinois Prairie Path that was created in the 1960s. Many other rail trails followed, including the Green Bay Trail. On Sept. 25, 1963, the Chicago Tribune published a letter to the editor from Watts about her vision to turn the old CA&E right-of-way into a rail trail.

"We are human beings," wrote Watts. "We are able to walk upright on two feet. We need a footpath. Right now there is a chance for Chicago and its suburbs to have a footpath, a long one. The right-of-way of the Aurora electric road lies waiting. If we have courage and foresight, such as made possible the Long Trail in Vermont and the Appalachian Trail from Maine to Georgia, and the network of public footpaths in Britain, then we can create from this strip a proud resource."¹⁰

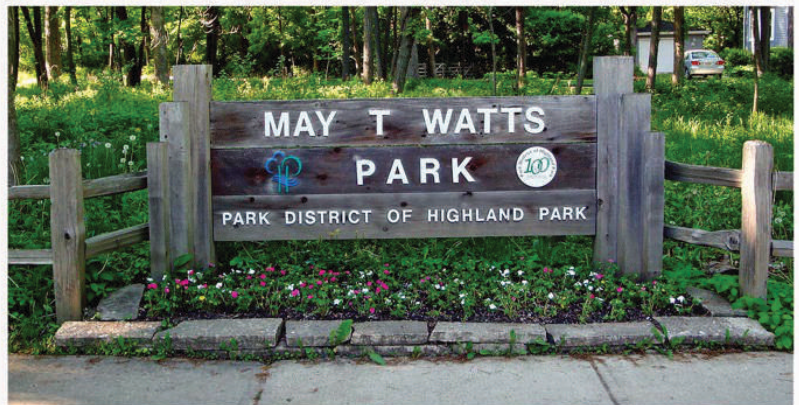
This was the genesis of the Rails to Trails movement. Today, the Illinois Rail-Trail System extends throughout the state.



Mrs. Raymond Watts, left, spoke at Friday's meeting of the Ravinia Garden club on the subject "Adventure With Plants," With her is Mrs. Dudley Crafts Watson, hostess.

◀ May T. Watts, left, giving a magic lantern presentaton to the Ravinia Garden Club members, ca. 1930

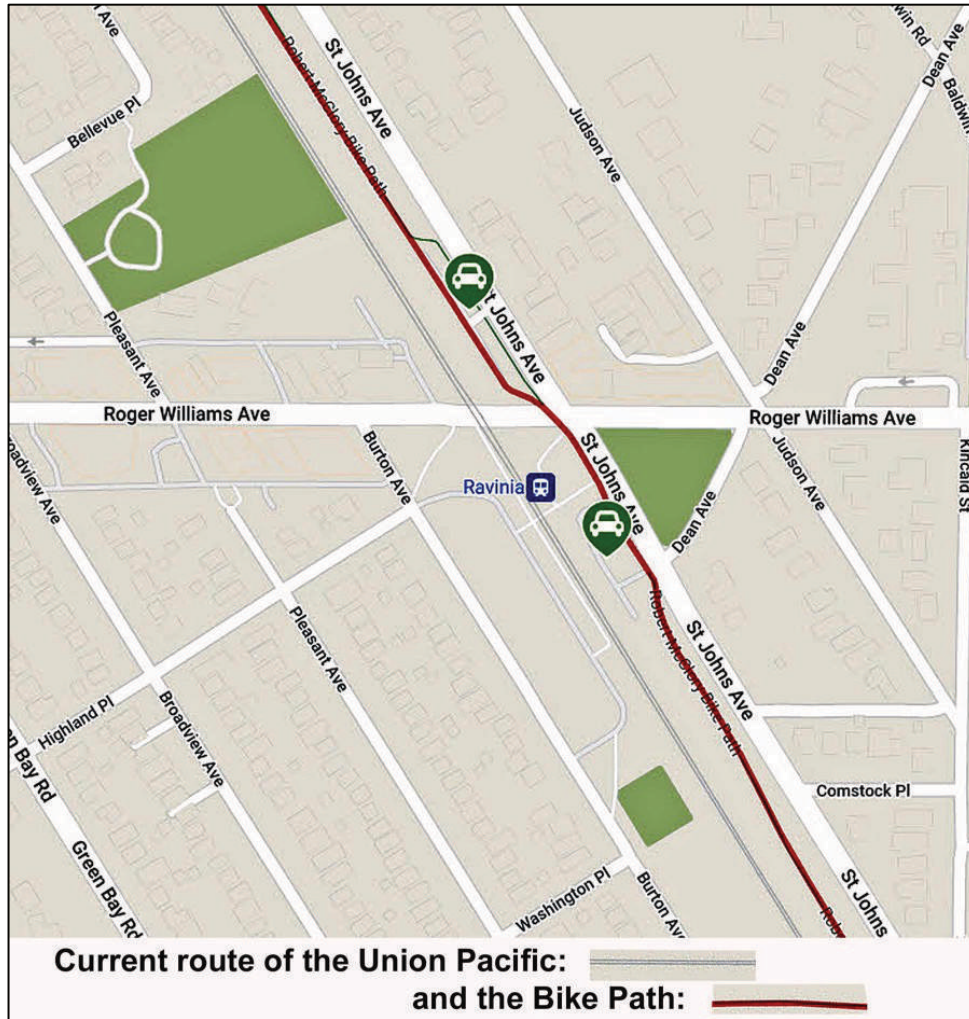
The nature preserve behind Ravinia School was named for May T. Watts. ▼



10 Quoted in "How May T. Watts Inspired the Illinois Prairie Path and U.S. Rail-Trail Movement." Rails to Trails conservancy, *(Continued on page 28)*

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 27)



The defunct North Shore Line rail bed became the Green Bay Bike Path (in red), which proceeds through woods to the Ravinia Station, where it goes around the parking lots and back into woods.

For an enjoyable family trip after reading this article, I recommend a visit to the Illinois Railway Museum in Union, Illinois, where you will see steam locomotives and trolleys, some of which are available for rides on tracks that run through the museum's property. The annual Trolley Pageant (some call it a Parade) at the Illinois Railway Museum is always a festive occasion. Programs start in March, 2024. Their Museum Showcase Weekend in September is a special event. Check online for their schedule for all train operations.

In electric-powered subways and elevated lines today, a third rail is used to power the trains. Remarkably, one electrically powered interurban railway still runs out of Chicago - the South Shore Line - which hauls cargo and people from South Bend, Indiana to Millennium Station in Chicago, with stops at 20 stations along the way. A favorite attraction for Chicago residents is a trip to the Indiana Dunes State Park on the South Shore Line. ■

(Continued on page 29)

Trains and Trolleys of Ravinia's Past (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 28)



Green Bay Trail facing south into Glencoe, December, 2023



Green Bay Trail facing north and south from the Ravinia station parking lot, October/December, 2023

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If you have questions, please contact Doug Purington: doug.purington@att.net.

Regular RNA meetings are normally held on the second Tuesday of every month.

Our next meeting is to be in-person on Tuesday, April 9th