The history of the Interurban Railroads of Hancock County
What Is an Interurban?

- A type of railroad
- Electrically-powered inter-city railcars
- Designed for higher-speed and more comfort than city streetcars (trolleys)
- More lightly-built trackage and infrastructure than steam railroads
- Primarily hauled passengers rather than freight
- First Indiana interurban ran January 1898
- Last Indiana interurban is the South Shore (last downstate was 1941)
What Is an Interurban?
What an Interurban Is Not...

RAILROAD MOTORCAR

STREETCAR
How Were They Built?

- Used tracks within city streets in most cities
- Used private rights-of-way between cities
  - Paralleled steam railroads
  - Paralleled roads and highways
  - Separate rights-of-way
- Private rights-of-way were typically deeded (rather than easements)
- Cities granted franchises to use city streets
How Were They Built?
How Were They Built?

- Depots fell into a few general types...
  - Purpose-built
    - Greenfield #2, Shirley, McCordsville
  - Store-front
    - Greenfield #1, Fortville #1, Knightstown
  - Converted houses
    - New Palestine, Fortville #2, Charlottesville, Cumberland?
  - Combination substation/depot
    - Maxwell, Mohawk?, Ingalls
  - Waiting shelters/platforms
Why Were They Built?

- To connect farm towns to big cities
  - Poor roads prevented convenient travel
  - Intercity networks developed
- As competition to the steam railroad monopolies
  - More frequent, cheaper, and convenient
- Just because
  - Financiers
  - Community rallying
  - Customers for electric utilities
Why Did the Companies Fail?

- Poorly financed
- Competition from automobiles and buses
- Aging equipment compared to buses
- Loss of subsidies from power utilities
  - By 1937, the SEC began enforcing anti-trust laws against holding companies
- Lawsuits/insurance claims
  - Significant wrecks bankrupted a few companies
The Indiana Interurban System

[Diagram showing various interurban lines and cities in Indiana.]

- Terre Haute Indianapolis & Eastern Traction Co.
- Indiana Railways & Light Co.
- Lafayette,
- Evansville, Suburban & Newburgh Railway
- Evansville & Ohio Valley Railway
- Southern Indiana Gas & Electric Co.
- Indianapolis & Cincinnati Traction Co.
- Bluffton, Geneva & Colina Traction Co.
The Indiana-Ohio-Michigan Systems
The Hancock County Lines
The Hancock County Lines

- Indianapolis & Greenfield Rapid Transit
  - Cumberland, Greenfield, Charlottesville
- Union Traction Company
  - Fortville, McCordsville
- Indianapolis and Cincinnati
  - New Palestine, Carrollton
- Indianapolis, New Castle and Toledo
  - Mt. Comfort, Maxwell, Shirley
- Indiana Railroad
I&GRT/I&E/THI&E
Organized February 1899
- Principal investors were from Greenfield, including Elmer and Nathan Binford, Francis Banker, Lorenzo McDonald, and Christian Kirkpatrick

Opened Indianapolis-Greenfield, June 19, 1900
- 21 miles of track parallel to National Road

Opened Greenfield-Charlottesville, May 12, 1902
- 9 miles of track parallel to National Road

Seven passenger cars provided hourly service to Indianapolis

Merged into the Indianapolis and Eastern, July 1, 1902
I&GRT: Greenfield
I&GRT: Greenfield
I&GRT: Greenfield Shops
I&GRT: Greenfield Shops Map
Indianapolis and Eastern

- Primarily Indianapolis investors looking to expand eastward
- Opened Charlottesville-Knightstown, July 1902 (4 miles)
  - Broke the Knightstown smallpox quarantine, August 1902
- Made connection to another interurban line from Richmond at Dublin, 1903
- Six trains per day, Richmond-Indianapolis
- Hourly service, Greenfield-Indianapolis
I&E: Coach

Suburban Coach for Indianapolis & Eastern Ry. Co.
Terre Haute, Indianapolis & Eastern

- Bought the I&E in 1907
- Created a continuous route under one company across Indiana
  - Terre Haute-Richmond
- Overextended
  - Branches to Lafayette, Martinsville, and elsewhere
- Underfinanced
  - Constantly in receivership
- Sold at auction, May 26, 1931
  - Became part of the Indiana Railroad System
THI&E: Cumberland
THI&E: Greenfield Depot
THI&E: Greenfield Depot Map
THI&E: Knightstown Depot
THI&E: Knightstown
Union Traction Company of Indiana
Based in Anderson
Earliest interurban and strongly financed
Opened Anderson-Indianapolis line, January 4, 1901
  Paralleled the Big Four railroad from Pendleton to Lawrence
Sold at foreclosure sale to Indiana Railroad, July, 1930
UTC: Fortville Depot Map 1914

Main Street

Staats Street
UTC: Lawrence Depot
Disaster at Alfont

- Alfont was/is just west of Ingalls at CR 750W
- February 2, 1924
- 21 people killed, 36 injured
  - Many burned in the post-accident fire
  - One of the worst interurban wrecks ever
- Head-on collision between two passenger trains caused by ignoring train orders and limited visibility
- One of the causes of the UTC bankruptcy
Disaster at Alfont

Fig. No. 1.—View of point of accident from first curve west thereof.
Fig. No. 2.—Approaching from east: point of accident just beyond curve; there is a one-car train a short distance beyond point of accident, obscured by pole line.
Disaster at Alfont

Fig. No. 3.—Remains of two cars after removal to sidetrack.
Indianapolis and Cincinnati
Opened Indianapolis-Rushville line, February 20, 1905
- Rushville-Connersville, October 1906
- Experimented with AC power
- Half of double route to Cincinnati that was never finished
  - Other half went to Greensburg via Shelbyville
- Sold at receivership sale to Indianapolis and Southeastern Railroad, April 1928
- I&SE abandoned all service, June 20, 1932
I&C: New Palestine Depot
Indianapolis, New Castle & Toledo
Chartered November 1904
- More substantial engineering (grades/bridges)
- Funding was harder to obtain
Opened New Castle-Shirley line, January 20, 1910
Opened Shirley-Indianapolis line, June 29, 1910
One of the later interurbans built in Indiana
Sold at foreclosure sale to Indianapolis, New Castle & Eastern, June 1, 1912
INC&E leased to Union Traction, October 1912
INC&T: Shirley Depot
Indiana Railroad was a company and a collaboration of the remaining downstate interurbans for their mutual benefit:

- Merged timetables
- Operated as one company
- Held by Midland United (a utility company)

IRR was based on the Union Traction Company, bought in 1930, and the THI&E, in 1931.
Indiana Railroad

- The Greenfield line was acquired June 29, 1931, and abandoned January 5, 1932
  - Competition with cars and buses on adjacent US 40 to Indianapolis, both for passengers and physical space
  - IRR buses were offered to connect with remaining interurban rail lines at Maxwell and Pendleton
  - Indianapolis-Richmond interurban trains were then routed via New Castle and Dunreith
Indiana Railroad

- The UTC lines (including the INC&T) were acquired in 1930
  - INC&T line through Maxwell and Shirley was used as the Indianapolis-Richmond-Dayton routing after the Greenfield abandonment
    - Abandoned May 9, 1937
  - UTC main line through Fortville and McCordsville was part of the next to last major interurban route in downstate Indiana
    - Abandoned January 18, 1941
IRR: Power Substation near Fortville
What Remains Today

- Rights-of-way
  - Noticeable grades, cuts, fills
  - Tracks under the street pavement
- Power lines
  - High voltage power lines follow the routes of the I&C and INC&T interurbans
  - Power lines also follow the I&GRT route along the edge of US 40
- Buildings
  - Depots
  - Car barn/shops
- Bridges, bridge piers and abutments, culverts
- Preserved cars
Remains: Power lines
Interurban Buildings Remaining in Hancock County
Remains: New Palestine Depot
Remains: Greenfield Car Barn/Shops
Remains: Greenfield Depot 1984 (now gone)
Remains: Greenfield Tracks 2002
Remains: Charlottesville Depot
1984

Ronald Stuckey Collection
Remains: Cumberland Depot
Remains: Maxwell Depot & Substation
Remains: Fortville Substation
Remains: Fortville Substation
Remains: Knightstown Depot
Interurban Bridges Remaining in Hancock County
Remains: Culvert
Remains: Bridge near 400E
Remains: Ingalls Memorial

INTER-URBAN PARK

BICENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION

FOR TWENTY ONE PERSONS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE HEAD ON CRASH OF TWO INTERURBAN TRAINS AT ALFONT ON FEB. 2, 1924. PRESENTED BY MADISON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOC. & RESIDENTS OF INGALLS AND GREEN TOWNSHIP. AUGUST 1976.
Remains: Preserved Cars
Remains: Preserved Cars
Questions? Comments?
Credits

- Photos
  - Greenfield Historic Landmarks
  - Hancock Co Historical Society
  - Indiana Historical Society, Bass photo collection
  - Sanborn Map Company
  - Ronald Stuckey
  - Jan Giradot
  - Gene Ingram
  - Tom Strickland
  - Tom Williams
  - Others I know I’ve forgotten
Books

- Electric Railroads of Indiana, Jerry Marlette
- Indiana Railroad: The magic interurban, George Bradley
Upcoming GHL Events

- Walking tour of downtown Greenfield
  May 21, 10:30 a.m.
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