

The Dayton Electric Railway
Collection

MS – 209

Wright State University
Department of Special Collections and Archives

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Introduction

The Dayton Electric Railway Collection was discovered while the Wright State University Archives were in the process of moving to their present location. The donor is unknown. The public retains all literary rights and there are no restrictions. The collection consists of three series made up of eleven files that are contained in one Hollinger box of .05 linear feet.

Brief Historical Sketch

The Dayton Electric Railway Collection should be of some interest to local historians since it chronicles the evolution of the Dayton area transit system from 1907 to the 1930's. History indicates that the first streetcar lines, the earliest of which had been chartered in 1869, were not founded for profit from fares, but to open up the outlying farm lands to real estate development. Until 1887, the motive power of all city lines was horses and mules. In 1887, however, the White Line became the first railway company to operate on electricity. Thus Dayton has the distinction of being one of the earliest cities in the country to use electric power for transportation. It should be noted that at the end of 1909, Dayton had one hundred miles of railway tracks.

According to the collection, the city was serviced by four streetcar lines in 1918. They were The City Railway Company, The Dayton Street Railway Company, The Oakwood Railway Company, and The Peoples Railway Company. By 1930, this system had proliferated into six separate railway companies operating eleven streetcar lines, but no major bus line. Little cooperation existed between the different companies. For a city that was the size of Dayton, such a condition was unparalleled in the nation. The results of this hodgepodge system were predictable – duplication of service, reduced schedules, and reduced revenues for each line. A 1930 study concluded that the railway system, because of its poor financial status, could not keep up with the growth of the city, which was estimated to be twenty-five to thirty percent per decade. Nor was uncontrolled growth of a transit system, although on a lesser scale than in Dayton, unique to that city. . To quote from the 1930 study: “Uncontrolled transit development by private enterprise is more responsible than any other factor for the congestion from which our cities are suffering.”

The authorities of Dayton certainly were aware of this chaotic transit situation. There was an attempt in 1929 to merge all railway companies into one corporation, The Dayton Railway and Transportation Company. Since additional research could not find a transit company by such a name at that time, it can be assumed that nothing ever became of this organization. Apparently the exigencies of World War II made consolidation imperative. It seems that The City Railway Company in 1943 emerged as the one line that would service the Dayton area. As far as can be determined, The City Railway Company was succeeded by the City Transit Line around 1953. The privately owned City Transit Line was eventually taken over by the publicly owned Regional Transit Authority of today.

Scope and Content

The Dayton Electric Railway Collection is divided into three series that cover the time span from 1907 to about 1930. Series 1 is composed of official documents dated from 1918 and continuing to circa 1930. The series is separated into nine files which are arranged chronologically as follows:

- Files 1-5 from 1918 to 1920
- File 6 year 1921
- File 7 year 1926
- File 8 circa year 1928
- File 9 circa year 1930

Series 2 is made up of file ten containing miscellaneous items such as time cards and schedules, a newsletter, pamphlets as well as advertisements. Series three comprises file eleven that consists of two maps of positive feeder lines.

The series and files that may be considered important are file eight, file nine, series two, and series three. File eight indicates that as far back as 1929 a company was organized that would bring together all of the extant city and inter-urban railways into one corporation. File nine constitutes a study that discusses the problems of the Dayton railway system as well as the inter-urban lines. It proposes solutions and suggests a transit plan for 1950.

Of special historical significance is Series 2. Among other documents, it includes a history of the 1918 arbitration proceedings between the management of the streetcar lines and its employees' union. Involved in the arbitration were both the governor's office and the National War Labor Board. Also important is a reprint of a speech by a Dr. John Wesley Hill indicating the nature of labor and management conflicts in the early 1920's.

Series Three has some value insofar as it shows the street names of Dayton and their layout in 1916.

Container Listing

Series I: Official Documents

<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	1	Outline, Suggested Operating Franchise, Urban Railway System. Defines obligations, privileges of railway companies. Proposed Street Railway Franchise Ordinances.	1918
	2	Tentative Report # 2. Authenticates the Urban Street Railways extant in 1918.	
	3	Tentative Report # 3. Itemizes the estimated net earnings of all four local companies. Also includes graphs.	
	4	Appendix to Recommendations Re: Application of Dayton Railway Companies for Immediate Fare Increase. Date of past operations, financial conditions, etc. Of four local companies from 1914 to 1917	1914-1917
	5	City Railway Schedules. Regular schedule, Saturday and Sunday schedules	1920
	6	Accountant's Report: The Street Railway Companies of Dayton. Very critical of railway operations. Covers seven years.	1921
	7	Security and Service Report Re: City Railway Company; itemizes normal expenditures for 1926. Comparison with Normal Line Standards for March 1926	1926
	8	Possible Application for a Franchise. Apparent attempt to unite local railways into one corporation.	1929
	9	Study of the Dayton and Inter-urban Transit System. Deals with the problems and solutions of the Dayton system	1930

Series II: Miscellaneous Items

<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	10	From 1907 to 1923. Items included are: Announcements of meetings and trips, advertisements, solicitations of funds for lobbying effort, history of a labor arbitration, newsletter, and pamphlets.	1907-1923

Series III: Maps

<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	11	Maps: Two maps of Positive Feeder Cables	