

THE GOLDEN AGE
OF
THE ELECTRIC RAILWAY

by: Ruth Celesta Miller
James Chauncey Miller

1972

The era of street cars in Butler County came and went since 1900. In 1900 the Butler Traction Company moved its first cars on Butler streets. They purchased and opened Alameda Park in 1901.

In 1905 a company was formed that purchased a right-of-way between Etna and Butler. This company was franchised as the "Pittsburgh and Butler Street Railway." It was owned and operated by Charles Gibson, E. C. Tennis and a Mr. Hurd who once owned and lived in Treesdale. Office holders or shareholders were Charles Hosford of Butler, Mr. Stephens of Gibsonia and Greers and Brandons both of Butler.

Mars council granted the company the franchise to operate on the entire length of Clay Avenue, January 23, 1905. The same year Butler Council gave the company the consent to operate on the streets of Butler.

This road was nicknamed the "Butler Short Line." In later years this road was often mistaken for the "Harmony Short Line." These were definitely two different lines and many miles apart except at their terminals. The companies were separate in routes as well as terminals.

The Butler Short Line entered Butler via Sullivan Avenue, West Cunningham Street and Main Street to the court house. In a fairly short time the cars ran over East Wayne Street viaduct to Center and Zeigler Avenues.

The Butler Short Line entered Pittsburgh via Butler Street, Etna, following the railroad to Millvale and over the Sixth Street bridge, Sixth Avenue, Penn Avenue and ended on Stanwick Street. The passenger terminal was on Stanwix Street and the freight station was on Duquesne Way. During repair work on Duquesne Way, the freight station was on Anderson Street, Northside. Later it was moved to the old Exposition building and remained there until the line was abandoned.

The "Harmony Line",^{which} first operated as the Pittsburgh-Harmony- Butler-New Castle Railway, was put into operation in 1908. This line entered Butler by way of West Wayne Street. The station was adjacent to the Ford Agency yet remaining of Wayne Street. Both passenger and freight were handled from the same terminal. It entered Pittsburgh via East Street and Evergreen Avenue.

The first task after getting the proper franchises was to buy the rights-of-way and survey. Some property owners were glad to have close transportation and donated land. Especially the farmers who did marketing in both Butler and Pittsburgh. Both of these lines gave an economic boost to both cities.

The survey was not too difficult. The Surveyors followed parallel with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the eighteenth meridian from Etna to Mars. At Mars they left the railroad to the west and continued along the meridian giving the line a slight north-easterly direction. Slight deviations were made due to the contours of the land.

Next was to prepare for laying the track. Cuts were made through the hills, low places were filled by the excavation of the hills and three viaducts were built over streams and railroads. The largest cut was on the J. A. Humes property about two miles north of Mars. The earth taken from this cut was used to fill a low place on the adjoining farm of E. A. McCandless. The second deep cut was at West Hoffman. A very high viaduct was built over Thorn Creek and the Bessemer RR just east of Renfrew. The second viaduct was over West Hoffman, over Pine Creek and the B & O Railroad. The next viaduct was into Butler before entering West Wayne Street. Hence the Wayne Street Viaduct.

The work of the cuts was mainly done with pick and shovel and some with scoops drawn by horses. Clarence McCandless used his farm team for the scoop. As soon as a temporary track could be laid a small dump car was used. Clarence and Mike ~~XXXXXX~~ Dunhaver operated this car by hand brakes down grade then a mule was used to draw up the grade. Dynamite was used to break the rock. The laborers were men of the surrounding communities

with the addition of a few Italian recruits from the "cities." Those who came from a distance lived in the old Plummer House at Hutchman stop-now occupied by the Blackburn family. and some lived in a house on the John Lloyd property. Mrs. Emma Clark kept them supplied with produce as well as eggs, butter and milk. Mrs. Margaret Miller baked bread. Mr. Beach was the superintendent of the entire construction operation.

The laying of the track required many small bridges. Small shelters or stations were built at the various stops. There 74 stops in all and a few had no buildings. After the final track was laid a small locomotive was used to haul ballast and whatever was needed. All of the ~~XXXXXX~~ material was transported to Mars of the B & O Railroad. Men with horses who had hauled for the oil wells did the transporting from that point. At the brickyard the "Short Line" operated on the Band O siding thus the transfer used men who could shovel. From the Mars siding John T. Hutchman, Dale Walters and David Roberts used their teams. The little steam locomotive attached to several dump cars was operated by George Logan.

Frank Hamilton and Floyd Lyon helped set the poles. James P. Merrileas was among the first linemen. R. H. Rape, superintendent of the Butler Railwya was in charge of the electric installation.

A large power house was built near Renfrew. It was a large brick building and contained ~~l~~ large steam boilers similar to those used at oil wells in ~~that~~ day. They were heaped with coal shipped in by railroad at the Butler branch of the B & O. A dam was built in Thorn Creek to furnish water supply. Steam turned turbines which in turn rotated the dynamoes which created the electric power. Sub stations were erected in the car barns, Butler freight station, Allison Park and Gibson. For a short time a small substation stood on the right side of the track near the reed mill and brickyard. Across the track from the barns, four large transformers were placed on the bank of the creek. This was during the last few years of operation.

● The car barns was a very large brick building which housed the sub-station, black smith shop, carpenter shop, paint shop, storage for the cars, superintendents office, dispatchers office, a room for the trainmen and a regular store room for all supplies.

The cars were built by the Niles Car and Manufacturing Company, St. Louis, Missouri. They were shipped in parts on the railroad and assembled at the barns. They differed from other electric cars in that they had a pole and a pantagraph or "kite." The pole was used in the cities and

the "kites" were used in the country. The local cars had seats like those of the railroads. In the passenger department the seats were upholstered with green plush material. In the smoking compartment the seats were covered with black leather. There was a third compartment for express.

The "Marsonia" was an exceptionally large car. It was carpeted and had upholstered chairs instead of seats. The chairs were not fastened to the floor and could be moved about easily. This car had no smoking or baggage room. It was used principally for the officers and special groups. It jumped off the track at the south end of the Wayne Viaduct and was destroyed by fire. William Bowman was the motorman and the conductor is forgotten. No one was injured. The other cars were numbered and always referred to or scheduled by its given number. This car was replaced by 111. Instead of chairs it had regular seats. It was very up-to-date in decor and was used for officials and groups. It was also used as a "Flyer" or "Limited."

Local cars made the run from Mars to Butler in forty-five minutes and to Pittsburgh in one hour and twenty minutes allowing for stops and meeting cars. All local cars left both terminals on the hour and half hour. Butler "Flyers" left Pittsburgh at 9:30 am, 1:30 pm and 5:30 pm. Pittsburgh "flyers" left Butler at 8:00 am, 12 noon and 4:00 pm. The "Flyers" made the trip in one hour thirty minutes.

There were two day freights and one night freight. Milk was delivered by the first day freight unloading some at different stops beginning at Vilsack. The largest quantity was for Rieck-McJunkin at the Pittsburgh station. The next largest quantity was for the Miller Brothers, Millvale. ~~and~~ Kleber Brothers at Vilsack were third dealers in milk. There were a few others who received a can or two. Most cans held five gallons and a few were ten gallons. Every Saturday morning a freight for farm produce other than milk was scheduled earlier in order to reach Allegheny and Pittsburgh markets early in the morning. Fruits, vegetables, butter, eggs, dressed meats constituted the most freight. Box cars and flat cars were used for larger things as bricks, lumber, groceries, flour, sugar, molasses (barrels) and grain. Other items were cows, horses, and mules in the box cars. The Velte Foundry shipped very large valves used by the Spang Company in Etna.

The track was single with twenty sidings where the cars met. The cars were heated by cylindrical shaped stoves that burned anthracite coal. This made little smoke or pollution. Pipes arranged along the floors on both sides of the car carried hot water from an oblong shaped tank called a "pig." The only time bituminous coal was used was during World War I. The power house and stations used bituminous coal where there was no gas.

A survey and some excavations were made for the extension of the line to Grove City. Due to financial difficulties the project was abandoned.

The aftermath of World War I caused the company to place it in the hands of a receivership under the supervision of Mr. Bert Smyers. He was to reorganize the company trying to put it on a paying basis or if not to sell. The line with all equipment was sold to the Russell H. Boggs Foundation, owner and operator of the "Harmony Route." They continued to operate both lines until the death of Mr. Boggs. It was passed on to his heirs and successors who sold to David I. McCahill and associated who operated the system until the spring of 1930. It was again placed into receivership hands and continued in operation until the spring of 1931. The receivership at the advise of the owners petitioned Federal Judge Schoonmaker to issue an order to discontinue the service and operation of the "Butler Short Line" which was then called the Pittsburgh - Mars - Butler Railway or "Mars Route". The patrons along the route together with the employees tried to keep the cars running but Judge Schoonmaker overruled and the last car left ~~away~~ Pittsburgh at 11:30 pm, April 22, 1931. A. P. Craig was motorman and Richard Palmer the conductor. Transportation and freight rates were not exorbitant. Commuters tickets could be had at a reduction. Several increases were made but never beyond reason.

Both electric lines were a great help to students who aspired to higher education. At the time Butler had one of the best business colleges in the whole U.S.A. The college was conducted by Prof. A. F. Regal. Butler High School had a four year course where the others had three. Many students took advantage of the fourth year.

Following the abandonment of the electric railways, Mr. McCahill instituted a bus service under the title "Harmony Short Line Transportation". The buses after a few years went the way of the "Short Line". Gradually they dropped the service. Several years ago the bus service between Pittsburgh - Mars - Butler was discontinued. Today in 1972 the only public transportation for Mars is a Butler Motor Transportation bus that extends its service to patrons in Evans City, Mars, Valencia on the second Tuesday of each month. It is really a chartered bus and not for the general use.