

One of my favorite parts of Waxahachie history is the Interurban Electric Railway that transformed life in Waxahachie from 1912 to 1948. As a young girl, my family would go hiking on the abandoned railway tracks and we would hike over the old railway trestle which crosses over Waxahachie Creek as it flows into Lake Waxahachie near my home. The view from the trestle is one of the most beautiful in Waxahachie. We would see remnants of the electrical system by the sides of the track. My family knew it was an electric passenger railway that ran from Waco to Sherman over fifty years before I was born. I always found that fascinating.

The Interurban Railway was a mass transit solution with zero pollution – fifty to a hundred years before its time. By the 1970s until today automobile traffic around Dallas had become so congested and caused so much pollution residents started longing for a mass transit system. Many residents are unaware that we had this pollution free mass transit solution in place in the Dallas area established in 1912 which operated until 1948. I am sure if the Interurban Railway operated today thousands of commuting workers would ride it. It would be a very popular service.

I researched the history of the Interurban Electric Railway and found the following. In 1912, automobiles had been invented but only the wealthiest of individuals could afford to own them and good network of paved roads had yet to be built. There was demand for passenger, freight and mail service between smaller towns typically not served by the larger steam trains. In 1901 the first Interurban rail line in Texas opened in the ten miles between Denison and Sherman. This line was purchased in 1911 by the Texas Traction Company, who had constructed a sixty-five-mile line of their own from Dallas to Sherman and began operation in 1908. The Texas Traction Company purchased a twenty-eight-mile line from Dallas to Waxahachie in 1912. Built by the Dallas Southern Traction Company, the company became known as the Southern Traction Company and the rail line extended to Waco in 1913. A separate fifty-six-mile line from Dallas to Corsicana was also completed.

In 1917 the Texas Traction Company and the Southern Traction Company merged to form the Texas Electric Railway Company and became the largest interurban railway in the South with more than 200 miles of track.

The cars were painted bright red with a creamy gold trim and rode high off the track and swayed back and forth as the train drove. High winds would visibly sway the rail cars with their high center of gravity. Each car had its own electric motor that could accelerate the train quickly and ride at fast pace. In the first trial runs the railway went 28 miles per hour. By 1923 the railway was riding up to 60 mph. In sections of railway south of Dallas the top speed was 40 mph due to electricity capacity constraints in the system.

In Waxahachie the main station was at Interurban Court on College Street. You can still see the area today halfway between the Rogers Hotel and the College Street Pub. The most complex engineering feat of the entire Interurban electric Railway was a 1,454 foot steel trestle in Waxahachie where two steam railroads crossed and the trestle also spanned Waxahachie Creek and its flood zone.

The day the first Interurban Railway train arrived in Waxahachie from Dallas all the prominent citizens in Ellis County where there to greet it. All economic activity stopped and people gathered to see the new railway. An onlooker described it as the happiest day in Waxahachie history.

On the rural sections of the railway the motorman would stop anywhere people would gather – even in front of an individual home the train would stop for new passengers. For just fifty cents you could travel

from Waxahachie to Waco, or Dallas, \$1.50 would take you all the way to Sherman. At its peak in 1920 the Interurban Electric Railway carried 819,000 passengers per year.

Some Interurban Electric lines pulled parlor cars with upholstered armchairs and in summer they had wicker armchairs. With stained glass arch windows and rear observation sections with picture windows it was luxury travel. Drinks were served on board and the Interurban Electric Railway even had dinner service for a few years.

The Interurban Electric Railway had smoking compartments with padded leather seats and even had toilets, a comfort which many of the passengers did not have in their homes. The Interurban also had cars with railway post office sections with outside mail slots so that you could post a letter and have it delivered up and down the line that same day. The trains were kept spotlessly clean and passengers often travelled in their finest clothes.

The Interurban Electric Railway also caused a social awakening enabling the poorest of rural residents a chance to travel and see Dallas, and also helped to create high end retail in Dallas with stores such as Neiman Marcus for rural women wanting some big city luxury. I read young men toiling on farms would smile when they the Interurban Electric Railway go by. They knew that when the weekend arrived they could get dressed up and travel to Dallas or Waco for the day.

In the 1920s the price of an automobile came within reach of many families and the network of roads was improving steadily. Bus companies also began to challenge the Interurban Electric Railway for passengers. As passenger traffic declined in the 1920s and 1930s the Interurban started to carry more freight. The Interurban would often carry the freight at night. The Interurban did not have cabooses so you would see a railway man with a lantern on the rear car at night.

The Great Depression in the 1930s also took a tough toll on Interurban Electric Railway ridership. People simply have the money for such small luxuries and unemployment was very high. During World War II when gasoline was rationed the Interurban Railway had a massive surge in popularity.

After the War the passenger vehicle had clearly become the dominant form of transportation. Then in Dallas on April 10th, 1948 a conductor ignored a message to stop and let another train pass at the Kirkland switch. Two Interurban Electric trains had a slow head-on collision near Royal Lane injuring 48 people. Fortunately no one was killed, but a week after the accident the State of Texas requested the Interurban Railway purchase a more modern signaling system. The accident was expensive enough coupled with cost of a new signaling system the Interurban Electric Railway would be bankrupt. Another theory for the demise of the Interurban Electric Railway was the State of Texas needed much of the land for the proposed Highway 75. Whatever the real reason, the Interurban Electric Railway petitioned the State of Texas to cease operations. Sadly on December 31<sup>st</sup> of 1948 the Interurban Electric railway closed down.

In 2018 Historic Waxahachie Inc purchased a 100 year old Interurban Electric Railway Freight car from a private owner in Palmer Texas. It is going to be refurbished to look as it did 100 years ago and be proudly displayed near the new Waxahachie Amphitheatre.