

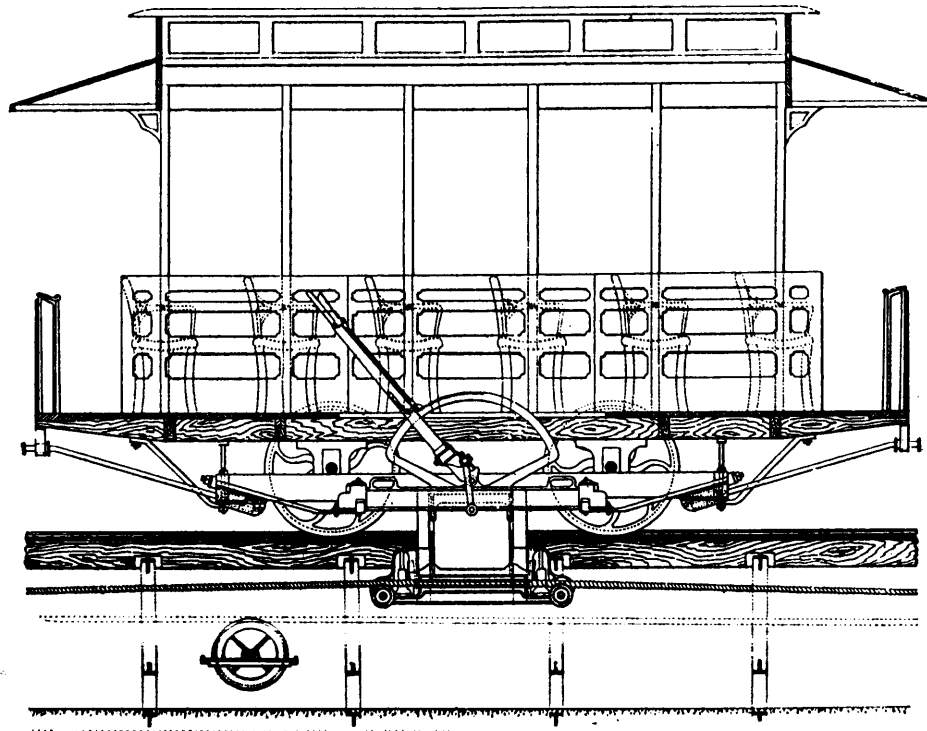
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On Cable Cars and Lunch Rooms EARLY STREETCARS IN HYDE PARK

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The articles that appeared in the Spring and Summer, 1997 issues of Hyde Park History on an earlier occupant of the building in which the Hyde Park Historical Society's headquarters are now housed continue to attract attention. As you may remember, Alta Blakely reported on "Steve's Lunch," a small restaurant run by Greek immigrant Steve Megales that occupied these premises beginning around, it was thought, 1948. A very interesting letter has recently arrived that provides insights into an even earlier period in the history of the building.

The letter, which appears on page 10, is from the granddaughters of Turney Keller, the man who, they report, converted what was a cable car waiting room

into other uses. Mary Belle Keller Johnson and Judy Keller Levatino tell us that, from as early as 1898 until 1952, the building was operated as a short order restaurant by the Keller family. Prior to 1898, they say, the building was used as a warming room for "trolley personnel." When placed within the context of the development of Hyde Park's public transportation systems, this new information adds greatly to our knowledge of the history and uses of our building.

CHICAGO STREET TRANSPORTATION ORIGINS

In the early years of Chicago's history, travel about the city's streets was accomplished on foot, by horseback or by horse and carriage. The latter could be hired with driver by the day or by the mile in cabs called hackneys or hacks. Omnibuses, large horse- ➤ 2



◀❶ drawn enclosed wagons with seating for multiple passengers, first appeared on Chicago streets on regular schedules in 1850. The introduction of street rail transportation in the city, however, began nearly 141 years ago when a horse drawn car line began operations on April 25, 1859. It was built by the privately owned Chicago City Railway Company (CCR), which had been awarded the city's franchise for the South Side of the city. Two other companies held franchises for the city's north and west sides. The CCR cars ran on rails along State Street from Madison Street to 12th Street (now Roosevelt Road). In the months following, the company built an extension of the line first to 22nd Street (now Cermak Road), then eastward down 22nd Street to Cottage Grove Avenue and, finally, from Cottage Grove to 31st Street. The immediate goal of these extensions was to provide transportation to the Illinois State Fair, which, in the fall of 1859, was located on land along Cottage Grove. The major advantage of using rails (originally wooden beams wrapped in iron sheetmetal) for hauling wagons with passengers was that the rails provided smoother, more comfortable and faster transportation than could be obtained from wheels rolling over the irregular unpaved roads of the time. Basic street car fares of a nickel a ride were set by city ordinance in 1859 and kept at that same level until 1919.

The demands and opportunities of population growth and commercial and industrial development in the city and its suburbs encouraged expansion of the CCR. The increase in the number of cars, horses and track owned and maintained by the CCR grew exponentially, as did ridership. In 1859, for example, the company consisted of only four cars and twenty-five horses operating at twelve minute intervals on about three miles of track and carried many tens of thousands of passengers a year. Annual ridership rose to 3.5 million only three years later. By 1867 the CCR owned fifty-three cars and 375 horses, employed 198 men and operated over 12.5 miles of track. The number of passengers that year totaled more than five million. Six years later, in 1873, the CCR was running seventy-five cars and 600 horses operating at four minute intervals on twenty-three miles of track and was transporting at least six million riders a year. Only seven years later, at the end of 1880, the system had more than doubled in size to 46.679 single track miles traversed by a fleet of 292 cars and 1,468 horses. In short, in that twenty year period, from 1859 to 1880, the company experienced growth that involved 15.6 times more track, 58.7 times more horses, and 73 times more cars carrying many millions of passengers annually!

As the CCR expanded the length of its horse car lines to meet demand, problems of keeping its system coordinated and its costs under control grew apace.

The cars and rails, once installed, had long lives and were relatively inexpensive to keep up. Aside from the investment in manpower and supervision, the key variable in the cost of operating the system was the care and feeding of the horses. Although perhaps one or two horses might draw one car, they could only work four or five hours a day. This meant that shifts of fresh horses had to be kept on hand for each horsecar in order to maintain a twelve or sixteen hour a day schedule. An entire system of men and equipment had to be developed around simply sustaining the horses. Moreover, the horse was relatively slow, not always reliable, susceptible to disease, and, glaringly apparent to one and all, associated with a "residue" on the streets that raised public health concerns. One horse could produce as much as twenty-two pounds of manure a day. Its required disposal, in fact, actually became an ancillary business undertaking. All in all, then, there were problems associated with a large-scale system of horse drawn passenger cars that were well recognized fairly early. This didn't mean that the CCR stopped building horse lines. only that its management was open to the idea of finding alternative forms of power to pull its cars. As it happened, Hyde Park would become the focus of the CCR's attention.

HYDE PARK AND ITS STREETCARS

There is more to the early history of streetcars in Hyde Park than cable cars. After the Civil War, the city's horse car lines began to look beyond Chicago's borders for their growth. On March 5, 1867, the Chicago and Calumet Horse and Dummy Railroad Company (CCHDRC), an affiliate of the CCR, was incorporated under Illinois law to establish street rail lines for "cars drawn by horses or cars with engines attached, commonly called dummy engines, for the carrying of passengers." Its focus of service was to be the area of Cook County south of the city's border at 39th Street and east of State Street, in short, virtually the entire area of the Village of Hyde Park. A year later, in 1868, the Board of Supervisors for the Village of Hyde Park authorized this new CCR affiliate to lay tracks from 39th Street extending south from the CCR's preexisting tracks in Chicago proper. Implementing this resolution launched the robust expansion of the CCR in succeeding decades.

HORSE DRAWN CARS

Hyde Park's streetcar system apparently went through two phases prior to the introduction of the cable cars. The first of these, an unexpected finding, was that horse drawn streetcars seem to have run on rails down 55th Street in Hyde Park. A map that dates from that period (Wright: 1870) specifically identifies a horse car line running down Cottage