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Article Summary: Projected interurban lines out of Omaha generally failed to materialize or became mere suburban lines. One interurban scheme after another went through cycles of reorganization and refinancing. The interurban era ended with the advent of the automobile and the construction of good roads.

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Interurban Projects In and Around Omaha

By E. Bryant Phillips

INTERURBAN promotions often engendered more enthusiasm in outlying towns than in the larger city which may have been involved. Thus, the story of a projected interurban from Omaha to Lincoln was dealt with in a previous article pertaining to interurban projects in Lincoln, since more enthusiasm and more actual interurban operation occurred in Lincoln than in Omaha.¹

It will be seen that considerable activity occurred in Hastings, Fremont, and South Sioux City, relative to interurban projects which were supposed to radiate out of Omaha. And, as in the case of interurban promotions in Lincoln, it will be shown that the projected lines out of Omaha became mere suburban lines or failed to materialize at all.

Because Council Bluffs is essentially a part of metropolitan Omaha, and because of the prevailing urban characteristics of the tram line between these two cities, the story of this intercity electric line will not be included in the scope of the present article.² Similarly, several early adventures such as the steam "dummy" rail line from Omaha to Benson in 1887 and the Omaha Belt Line Railway will be ruled from consideration here since they differed from typical interurban operation in several important respects.³

¹E. Bryant Phillips, "Interurban Projects in Nebraska," *Nebraska History*, XXX (June, 1949), 163-182.

²E. Bryant Phillips, "A History of Street Railways in Nebraska," Ms. Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1944.

³*Ibid.*

Omaha and Southern Interurban Railroad

An interurban from Omaha to Plattsmouth via Fort Crook had been considered intermittently since 1890. The fact that Dr. S. D. Mercer was chief promoter of the Omaha Motor Railway in 1887 and of Plattsmouth's street railway the same year seemed certain to result in interurban connections. But nothing came of this particular day dream of Mr. Mercer's, nor of the hopes of Bellevue and Fort Crook advocates in 1901 and 1902 as well.⁴ It remained for the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway to incorporate the Omaha and Southern Interurban Railroad (1906), and to project a million dollar line to the south of the metropolis.⁵ A car line was laid beyond South Omaha (Railroad Avenue, Country Club, Bellevue, Fort Crook) and big yellow cars were running to Fort Crook late in 1906.⁶ Hourly service was provided and a commutation fare of twenty-five cents for a round trip was offered.⁷ The service was immediately popular (364,687 passengers were carried in 1907) and the parent company (Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway) planned several interurban extensions for the following year.⁸ Although the Nebraska legislature failed in 1907 to pass a law permitting street railways to project interurban lines outside their urban areas,⁹ the fact that a separate corporation such as the Omaha and Southern could accomplish its master's will, made no interurban scheme impossi-

⁴*Omaha Daily Bee*, March 2, April 13, June 25, 1887, November 2, 1895 June 14, 20, 1897, June 20, 1901, November 8, 1902, February 18, 1909; *Omaha Daily Republican*, January 1, 1888; *Omaha World Herald*, January 9, 1896; J. M. Wolfe, *Nebraska State Gazetteer* (Omaha: J. M. Wolfe, 1894); Herbert Leslie Glynn, "The Urban Real Estate Boom in Nebraska During the 80's," Ms. Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1927.

⁵*Omaha Daily Bee*, May 7, 1905; *Omaha Daily News*, January 7, 1906; *Omaha World Herald*, January 7, May 20, 1906.

⁶*Omaha World Herald*, October 21, 1906.

⁷*Omaha Daily News*, October 20, 1906.

⁸U. S. Census, *Street and Electric Railways*, 1907, p. 504; *Omaha World Herald*, November 11, December 18, 1906, January 1, 1907; *Omaha Daily Bee*, December 18, 20, 1906.

⁹*Omaha World Herald*, January 15, April 2, 1907; *Lincoln Evening News*, February 11, 1907.

ble. But whether sane counsel prevailed or other causes intervened, it makes little difference; the Fort Crook line was built no further southward. The company advertised "scenery along the line" as an inducement for patronage in 1911.¹⁰ It applied for and received a rate increase in 1919 (from five to seven cents for each of three zones), claiming accumulated deficits of \$37,004 in thirteen years.¹¹ Its poor service, especially the necessity for transferring to city street cars in South Omaha was cause for a threat of removal of the Seventh Corps Area Headquarters from Fort Crook in 1921.¹² And finally its tracks were taken out and bus service was substituted in 1931.¹³

Omaha and Lincoln Railway and Light Company

When Lincoln's interurban (Omaha, Lincoln and Beatrice Railway) was being promoted in 1904, Ralston and Papillion on the edge of Omaha were agog with interurban and boom talk.¹⁴ But as has been related in a preceding article, the Lincoln company built no trackage into Omaha. In 1908, however, the Nebraska Traction and Power Company incorporated and projected a line from South Omaha out West Q to Seymour Park and Ralston.¹⁵ The necessary franchise was granted,¹⁶ viaduct rights were arranged,¹⁷ and a blanket mortgage was filed.¹⁸ Some stocks were sold, the line was built (1910),¹⁹ and in three short years the line accumulated \$10,000 of liens and \$65,000 of receivers certificates before it was sold at auction for \$110,000.²⁰

¹⁰*Omaha World Herald*, June 3, 1911.

¹¹*Omaha Daily Bee*, September 24, 1919; *Lincoln Daily Star*, March 13, 1924.

¹²*Omaha Daily News*, June 20, 1921.

¹³*Omaha Daily Bee*, August 19, 1931; *Lincoln Evening Journal*, September 19, 1931.

¹⁴*Omaha World Herald*, April 2, 8, 1904.

¹⁵*Omaha World Herald*, August 1, 1907, July 27, 1908; *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 1, 1907; *Lincoln Daily Star*, September 26, 1908.

¹⁶*Omaha Daily Bee*, July 29, 1908.

¹⁷*Omaha World Herald*, November 12, 1907.

¹⁸*Omaha World Herald*, November 22, 1908.

¹⁹*Omaha Daily News*, January 27, 1910.

²⁰*Omaha World Herald*, June 20, 1913.

The McKinley Syndicate (William B. McKinley, former congressman from Illinois who controlled the Illinois Traction System) bought the Nebraska Traction and Power Company. McKinley put \$20,000 of new capital into the corporation and left the \$154,000 bond structure undisturbed.²¹ Then the McKinley syndicate incorporated the Omaha and Lincoln Railway and Light Company which proceeded to absorb the properties of the Nebraska Traction and Power Company.²² And a three million dollar line to Lincoln was announced as the new company's immediate objective.²³

There were three years of doubt whether the Lincoln interurban (O. L. & B.) controlled by the Moore interests of Detroit or the Omaha-Ralston interurban (O. & L. R. & L.) controlled by the McKinley syndicate, would eventually connect the two Nebraska cities by an electric rail line.²⁴ The Omaha company did extend its line beyond Ralston to Papillion (1914) after the Nebraska Railway Commission allowed a security issue of \$200,000 which was \$14,000 in excess of construction costs.²⁵

For a number of years, the big black cars of the Omaha and Lincoln Railway and Light Company operated from Sixteenth and Capitol avenue in downtown Omaha to a "Y" in Papillion nearly eighteen miles distant.²⁶ The company's freight revenue of \$35,000 during the first half of 1915 and its passenger revenue of \$3,486 reveals the relative unimportance of the enterprise.²⁷ The eighty-three percent operating ratio (total earnings \$36,083; total operating expense \$31,212) left little to satisfy the holders of the company's quarter million dollars of securities.²⁸ By

²¹*Omaha World Herald*, June 20, 21, 1913; *Omaha Daily Bee*, June 20, 1913.

²²*Omaha Daily Bee*, July 15, 1913.

²³*Omaha World Herald*, July 3, 1913; *Omaha Daily Bee*, July 15, 1913.

²⁴*Omaha Daily News*, July 15, 1913.

²⁵*Omaha Daily Bee*, August 20, 1913, February 7, 1915; *Omaha World Herald*, March 30, July 23, 1914; February 8, 1915.

²⁶*Omaha World Herald*, April 22, 1919.

²⁷*Ibid.*, August 6, 1915.

²⁸*Ibid.*, September 29, 1921.

1921 the company faced bus competition.²⁹ The management complained of an actual deficit of \$12,000 since 1913 or a theoretical deficit of \$109,000 assuming a seven per cent return on invested capital.³⁰ One man cars were inaugurated. Passengers were transferred in South Omaha to save lease costs which the O. & L. R. & L. Co. had previously paid to the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway. In 1921 the interurban invoked the aid of the Nebraska Railway Commission to squelch bus competition between Omaha and Ralston.³¹ But five years later passenger traffic had nearly vanished; and freight revenues were declining. That year (1926) the company operated its own buses and found them to be profitable. It kept two street cars on the line for a time to retain its franchise rights, then it substituted buses for cars from Ralston to Papillion, and finally it abandoned its rail line entirely to avoid paving costs in South Omaha.³² How fortunate it was that the line had not been completed all the way to Lincoln.

*Council Bluffs, Tabor and Southern Electric
Railway Company*

Of the many interurban schemes involving Omaha, several were projected to the east and southeast. These companies most often named Council Bluffs as their terminus. But in reality, their terminus was greater Omaha, hence they deserve space in this account.

For several years after the turn of the century, it was reported that an electric railway would leave Council Bluffs for Tarkio, Missouri, seventy miles south and east of Omaha.³³ St. Joseph, Kansas City and Des Moines were

²⁹*Omaha Daily News*, July 7, 1921; *Omaha World Herald*, September 29, 1921.

³⁰*Omaha World Herald*, September 29, 1921.

³¹*Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), October 7, 1921, November 26, 1921; *Lincoln Daily Star*, October 7, November 26, 1921.

³²*Nebraska State Journal*, October 5, 19, 1926.

³³*Omaha Daily Bee*, February 20, 1900, October 22, 1902; *Omaha World Herald*, July 8, 1902, October 16, 1903; *Omaha Daily News*, November 1, 1902.

mentioned as probable destinations for such a line. Then late in 1903, the Council Bluffs, Tabor and Southern Electric Railway Company was launched. At first it planned to use the tracks of the Lake Manawa Motor Line.³⁴ The company requested and received franchise rights (popular vote 1,472 to 123) for its own trackage in Council Bluffs.³⁵ Since the Tabor interurban would provide competitive street car service along its one line in Council Bluffs, the franchise request met with opposition from some councilmen, certain newspapers, and the Commercial Club, in Council Bluffs; and the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway.³⁶ President W. J. Dobbs of the Tabor interurban sought rights for his projected line through the School for Feeble-minded Children at Glenwood and the School for the Deaf near Council Bluffs.³⁷ With a vague reference to some Boston financiers, he announced the route (Council Bluffs, Glenwood, Sidney, Rockport, Tarkio), and a three-million dollar issue of five percent bonds.³⁸ An old mill site at Main Street and Washington Avenue was acquired for Council Bluffs terminal facilities.³⁹ Then it was reported that the bonds were not selling well, and it was denied that the company had sold out to the Burlington Railway.⁴⁰ The Boston capitalists were visited again, but the company passed its deadline (July 1, 1905) with no trackage to the School for the Deaf and thereby its rights in Council Bluffs were forfeited.⁴¹ A year later President Dobbs said, "The prospects were never brighter for the ultimate completion of the road."⁴² But other men had talked like that, too, and nothing had happened.

³⁴*Omaha Daily Bee*, November 21, 1903.

³⁵*Ibid.*, December 1, 1903; *Omaha World Herald*, December 22, 1903, January 3, 12, March 1, 1904.

³⁶*Omaha World Herald*, December 23, 1903, January 9, 1904; *Omaha Daily Bee*, January 13, 1904.

³⁷*Omaha Daily Bee*, February 19, 29, March 1, 1904.

³⁸*Omaha World Herald*, February 6, 1904; *Omaha Daily Bee*, March 25, 1904.

³⁹*Omaha World Herald*, April 29, 1904.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, June 22, July 4, 1904; *Omaha Daily Bee*, July 6, 1904.

⁴¹*Omaha Daily Bee*, July 13, August 13, 1904, July 1, 1905; *Omaha World Herald*, July 1, 1905.

⁴²*Omaha Daily News*, December 24, 1906.

In 1913 some surveys were taken for an interurban between Council Bluffs and St. Joseph. Delegates from various towns joined with the Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce in boosting the enterprise.⁴³ But that one fell by the wayside also. Since the Tabor line had failed of realization, Council Bluffs was about to lose its School for the Deaf to Des Moines (1906) unless it could arrange for better transportation to the institution.⁴⁴ To the rescue came the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway which built a line (Pierce Street, McPherson Avenue, Benson Avenue) to the School for the Deaf and operated cars thereon after 1908.⁴⁵

*Des Moines, Council Bluffs and Omaha
Electric Railroad*

A three million dollar electric line from Des Moines to Omaha was projected in 1904. The route was to include Winterset, Greenfield, Grant, Griswold, Treynor, and Council Bluffs in Iowa. A new "central bridge" was to span the river at Omaha to accommodate the cars of the Des Moines interurban.⁴⁶ Citizens at Carson and Treynor were particularly interested in the Des Moines, Council Bluffs and Omaha line, and to urge it on, they chartered a local company to subscribe a quarter million of the company's stock.⁴⁷ There were four years of silence; then some London capitalists were mentioned, and then no more was said of the venture.⁴⁸

⁴³*Omaha Daily Bee*, June 27, 1913.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, October 12, 1906.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, December 30, 1906, February 7, 1907; *Omaha World Herald*, August 28, November 22, 1907; *Omaha Daily Bee*, September 25, November 24, 1907.

⁴⁶*Omaha Daily Bee*, July 29, November 23, 1904; *Omaha World Herald*, July 29, 1904.

⁴⁷*Omaha Daily Bee*, November 18, 1904; *Omaha World Herald*, November 24, 1904.

⁴⁸*Nebraska State Journal*, "Thirty Years Ago Today," August 9, 1938; *Omaha World Herald*, December 12, 1908.

For several years, the steam railroads operating out of Omaha stifled interurban projects with frequent operation of gasoline motor cars.⁴⁹ Some promoters in Treynor, Iowa, having failed to put their town on the projected Des Moines to Omaha interurban induced the Iowa and Omaha Short Line to build into Treynor (about thirty miles northeast of Council Bluffs) and for a time it looked like the line might be electrified.⁵⁰ This company was variously identified with London capitalists, with the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway, and with sundry bridge projects near Omaha.⁵¹ It went into receivership a few months after its tracks reached Treynor.⁵² Then it was absorbed by steam railroads nearby, and one more projected interurban had failed to materialize.

Fremont-Omaha Interurban Railway Projects

Fremont is a city of 11,862 persons (1940 census), just thirty-seven miles northwest of Omaha. Even though two steam railways traverse this distance, the local passenger accommodations were such that an interurban seemed feasible. Fremont once had a horse railway and there had been talk of electrifying it and building an interurban to Omaha.⁵³ Again in 1895 and 1900, interurban talk was rife.⁵⁴ A route was selected and franchise terms were discussed in 1901.⁵⁵ Two companies, *i. e.*, Omaha and Fremont Electric Railroad; and the Omaha and Suburban Railway and Traction Company, seem to have been organ-

⁴⁹*Omaha World Herald*, March 5, April 17, 1905, December 8, 1907.

⁵⁰*Omaha Daily Bee*, April 8, 1911; *Omaha World Herald*, July 1, November 19, 1911.

⁵¹*Omaha World Herald*, January 14, 24, 1912.

⁵²*Ibid.*, July 12, 1913.

⁵³*Fremont Daily Herald*, April 14, 1887.

⁵⁴*Omaha Daily Bee*, March 17, 1895, December 14, 1900; *Omaha World Herald*, December 14, 1900.

⁵⁵*Omaha World Herald*, December 30, 1900, January 23, 1901; *Omaha Daily Bee*, February 6, 20, 1901.

ized.⁵⁶ The latter company was associated with the management of the Omaha Street Railway (predecessor of the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway), and seemed certain to overshadow the Omaha and Fremont Electric Railroad.⁵⁷ The promoters of neither company were readily identifiable. Each claimed connections with the Fremont Canal and Power Company from which it expected to generate its electricity.⁵⁸ Douglas County commissioners when they sought to pass a general franchise law, rejected the franchise proposals of each company and enjoined the commission from favoring the other.⁵⁹ The Omaha and Suburban Railway and Traction Company seemed about to align itself with eastern capital and with the Fremont Canal and Power Company in 1903, then nothing happened.⁶⁰ This company and its parent, the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway, contemplated lines from Omaha to Fremont, Lincoln, Plattsmouth, Blair, and Griswold, Iowa, in 1902.⁶¹ But all that ever came of these projects was the aforementioned Omaha and Southern Interurban Railroad's line from South Omaha to Fort Crook.

A little company, the West Shore Electric Railway, was incorporated for \$150,000 in 1909 to develop land up north of Florence (northern Omaha suburb).⁶² A route was announced and a franchise was sought from the Florence city council, but no more came of that one either.

Omaha and Nebraska Central Railway

The Omaha and Nebraska Central was a project centering around Hastings; it had little to do with Omaha.

⁵⁶*Omaha Daily Bee*, May 15, 1901; *Omaha World Herald*, February 20, 1901.

⁵⁷*Omaha World Herald*, May 24, 1901.

⁵⁸*Omaha Daily Bee*, February 20, 1901; *Omaha World Herald*, June 19, 1901.

⁵⁹*Omaha World Herald*, July 18, 1901, January 5, 1902.

⁶⁰*Omaha Daily News*, September 11, 1902; *Omaha World Herald*, December 24, 1903.

⁶¹*Omaha World Herald*, December 23, 1902.

⁶²*Ibid.*, March 17, 1909.

Hastings had been a boom town in 1887 which had supported two horse railways and had projected many an electric line. The Citizens Railway horse cars ceased operations in Hastings during 1897. Then for a time no mention of street cars appeared in the Hastings press.

After a silence of more than eight years, a Hastings newspaper dared to speak out on the subject of street cars again. A third of a column on the first page of a local paper expressed an editorial desire for an electric street car line in Hastings. Power was already available, it was suggested. And several institutions on the edge of town would justify such a car line.⁶³ Later that year there was a brief notice that the Omaha and Nebraska Central Railway Company had incorporated for one and a half million dollars and proposed to construct an interurban line from Omaha through Douglas and Saunders counties to Hastings.⁶⁴ Mr. J. Charles Baker, representing the company, was in Hastings making contacts. It was expected that freight and passenger rates could be cut 50 or 60 per cent.⁶⁵ A week later, the *Tribune* commented that interurban lines were becoming very common in the east.⁶⁶

The year 1904 brought an election, and Hastings had many interests such as the new post office, a new library, a new high school building and a \$50,000 endowment for the college. But the interurban project began to take form in August when the company filed its articles of incorporation in Hastings and announced that its route would be via Trumbull, Giltner, Aurora, Stromsburg, Osceola, David City, and Wahoo.⁶⁷ The incorporators were Charles J. Helm, Anthony Texter (former Chicago street car motor-man), Charles Deter, A. G. Burks, J. C. Baker of Hastings and Frank J. Helm.⁶⁸ The attorney for the company, W.

⁶³*Hastings Daily Tribune*, March 13, 1903.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, December 18, 1903.

⁶⁵*Idem.*

⁶⁶*Hastings Daily Tribune*, December 25, 1903.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, August 12, 1904.

⁶⁸*Hastings Daily Tribune*, August 6, 1909; *Omaha Daily News*, August 25, 1904; *Omaha World Herald*, August 26, 1904.

S. Page of Omaha asked the Hastings city council on September 15th for a franchise which would permit the company to use streets within the city. It was argued that not only the route selected but the region generally, was suitable for such a project. The question was postponed a week by the city council. In the meantime the Hastings Commercial Club had passed a resolution in support of the proposition.⁶⁹ The franchise was voted unanimously (Councilman Zinn and Mayor Miles absent, out of town) at midnight on September 26th and the company was given the right to enter town on East Seventh Street and to use Colorado Avenue to First Street; then west to Lexington Avenue where the line would jog over to Second Street and west to the city limits. The lines in the city were required to be in operation within four years of the franchise date, and contracts with responsible contractors were to be let for the whole road to Omaha or the franchise would be forfeited.⁷⁰ The usual forfeiture clause stated also that if the road became inoperative for one year, the franchise was thereby forfeited.

Surveys along the line were made late in 1904 and a news item certified that the company had "faith in this region."⁷¹ But no further notice was given the project for nearly two years. Finally, it was related that one of the directors, "Joe" Baker, was promoting the interurban line again. He planned a canal and power plant for the line at Columbus, and he was in Trumbull seeking aid for the project.⁷² Mr. A. M. Brooking, curator of the Hastings Museum for many years, related that this interurban was to have cut through one of two lots which he owned in Trumbull in 1906. He stated also that Mike Pressler of Trumbull was one of those influential persons along the line who bought stock in the company.⁷³

⁶⁹*Hastings Daily Tribune*, September 16, 1904.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, September 30, 1904.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, November 18, 1904.

⁷²*Hastings Daily Tribune*, August 31, September 21, 1906; *Omaha Daily Bee*, January 6, 1906; *Omaha World Herald*, June 11, 1907.

⁷³Interview, A. M. Brooking, Hastings, October 9, 1937.

This renewed interest in the interurban in 1906 gave vent to a degree of boom talk not uncommon in the annals of Hastings. There was a news item from Mr. Moses H. Sydenham of Kearney suggesting that the line be extended on through Hastings to Kearney and use the Kearney canal for power. He mentioned that interurbans were making 75 miles per hour schedules between Chicago and New York.⁷⁴ (The Burlington's streamlined Zephyr was scheduled at only 74 miles per hour from Chicago to Denver in 1937.) There also was a report in 1906 of a new "airline" railroad from Omaha to Denver.⁷⁵ There was the customary wishful census prediction that "Hastings will have 20,000 population by 1910." This prediction was made by C. J. Miles, Mayor and President of the Commercial Club.⁷⁶ (The official census for Hastings in 1910 was 9,338). In 1906, Hastings claimed a registry of thirty automobiles and boasted that it "led the state for automobiles—according to population."⁷⁷ Even this boast, however, reveals the scarcity of cars and might have justified interurban and street car projects.

The Omaha and Nebraska Central Railway was re-organized late in 1906 with an increase in its capitalization from one and a half million dollars to eight and a half million dollars. Mr. J. C. Baker, who assumed the aspect of promoter, intended to spend his time "along the line" where he frequently spoke to business men in the towns on the proposed route. Mr. H. C. Long, representing the "eastern capitalists," accompanied Mr. Baker at most of these meetings. Favorable sentiment was reported from leading men along the line, and bonds were placed on the market. Contracts were let for grading to be done in 1907, while surveys and franchise arrangements were being completed. The offices of the company were located at Omaha where J. C. Kinsler of Omaha acted as president

⁷⁴*Hastings Daily Tribune*, October 19, 1906.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, July 6, 1906.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, January 25, 1907.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, May 28, 1906.

of the company and attorney; W. F. Button of Hastings was vice president and assistant general attorney; J. H. Rogers was the secretary. Perhaps it is just as well that the company had no treasurer.⁷⁸

For some time there had been no real enthusiasm for street cars in Hastings. In fact, a pamphlet with "Dooms-day-book" characteristics, published in 1906, made no mention whatsoever of street cars or interurbans in Hastings, past, present, or future.⁷⁹ The Interurban Company intended to operate some street cars in Hastings, however, as part of its project. Mr. J. C. Baker talked of a line out to the Chatauqua grounds in 1907, if a suitable franchise were given.⁸⁰ The chief engineer, W. H. Fuller, suggested more than one line within the city and indicated that the company should have a new charter to permit such local business. By midsummer, however, it was announced that autos would transport persons to the Chatauqua grounds for twenty-five cents. The cars were routed west on Fifth Street and back on Fourth Street to provide "safe streets for horses" on all other thoroughfares.⁸¹

A half million dollar power project was planned by the Interurban Company in 1907. This project was to be located near Columbus where the Loup river was reported to have a fall of seven feet per mile for fifteen miles. Power could be supplied for the interurban line, as well as to consumers as far away as Omaha, Sioux City, and Lincoln. A New York syndicate seemed favorable to this project. A twelve million dollar corporation was formed later to develop this power site with anticipated plant capacity of 50,000 horse power twelve hours a day.⁸²

Further evidence of serious intentions was displayed when the interurban company actually began grading for its line at Blaine siding, just east of Hastings. Contractor C. D. Conover of Omaha had a gang of men at work and

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, October 26, 1906.

⁷⁹The Book of Hastings (Hastings: Tribune Print), 1906.

⁸⁰*Hastings Daily Tribune*, January 11, 1907.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, January 25, July 12, 1907.

⁸²*Ibid.*, March 15, December 13, 1907.

"a number of people went out to see the progress in grading." Two months later, it was reported that a half mile of grade had been completed and that "surveyor Ferguson and his assistants were setting the final grade stakes as far as Giltner."⁸³ The interurban company hastened its stock selling activities, now that actual construction had begun. A prospectus was issued by David J. Lewis of Hastings in which the general characteristics of the project were heralded to those who might care to invest. Huge advertisements showing the route of the interurban line and proclaiming its virtues, appeared in each issue of the *Hastings Tribune* for over a year. Stocks alleged to be worth \$100 at par were offered for \$25 at first, "but you will have to hurry." Ten dollars worth of free transportation was offered as an inducement to prospective stock buyers, also. Later the advertisements reminded that "thousands of cubic feet of dirt have been removed" and when the shares went up to \$26 at midnight on July 6th, the man in the advertisement was pictured as saying "I'm sorry I did not invest a month ago." Shares could be purchased on 10 per cent installments if one would but clip a coupon and send it in to the offices at 320 First National Bank Building, in Omaha. The price of these shares was to reach \$27 on August the twentieth.⁸⁴

Perhaps other stock schemes were combing the same list, for the interurban company evidently didn't meet with the response it needed to finance its project. In any event, the company was again reorganized. The Folts Company of Minneapolis took over the interurban for a time with Phil L. Barter of Kansas City and R. B. Hughes of Omaha as its local representatives.⁸⁵ Hard times set in late in 1907 and the interurban project was permitted to languish. Late in 1908 the interurban was forced into receivership.⁸⁶ The suit which resulted in this receivership was brought

⁸³*Ibid.*, May 17, July 28, 1907.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, March 29, April 21, July 5, August 9, 1907.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, August 2, October 18, 1907.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, August 6, 1909.

by John W. Egge of Omaha who had bought four shares of stock for a consideration of \$104. He represented some farmers who had bought as much as \$3,000 worth of the stock and said that the \$65,000 realized from total stock sales had been spent in promotion and in salaries. Salesmen were charged to have misrepresented their goods, too, when they claimed that a new railroad grade out of South Omaha was that of the Omaha and Nebraska Central Railway.⁸⁷

As if the interurban company hadn't already enough troubles, there developed some internal dissension and a financial scandal. J. C. Baker had been given 500 shares of promotional stock for his services. When he and his cofounder, Anthony Textther, tried to vote their shares at a meeting held in the Merchant's Hotel in Omaha, their votes were contested due to a shortage of \$1,600 in the accounts. A committee on credentials ruled that they could not vote, so they withdrew. At that same meeting, it was revealed that only \$6,000 of \$60,000 realized from the sale of shares had been accounted for. The other \$54,000 was presumed to have been spent in promotional work and for trips to Boston to interest eastern investors. Many discounts had been given to share purchasers, also.⁸⁸ Needless to say, a new board of directors was elected that night.

The Omaha and Nebraska Central Railway was truly in a bad way. Its franchise in Hastings had lapsed, it had passed through three reorganizations, its shares found no market, and its directors no longer trusted each other. The only assets it could claim were a few miles of grade just east of Hastings, some surveys, some right-of-way titles, and its stock subscription list. On the east steps of the Adams County court house one day, all of these assets sold at auction for just \$216. One bid of \$7.50 for the right-of-way and the surveys was ignored. Mr. F. E. Schaaf of Lincoln bid \$100 and secured this part of the assets.⁸⁹ Mr. T. E. Brady paid \$116 for the stock subscrip-

⁸⁷*Nebraska State Journal*, "Thirty Years Ago Today," June 21, 1938; *Hastings Daily Tribune*, January 8, 1909.

⁸⁸*Hastings Daily Tribune*, January 8, 1909.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, August 6, 1909.

tion list supposedly worth \$6,000. "Not a little fun was poked at the proposition," though a court ruling in 1915 held the installment paying shareholders of this company liable for an additional \$8,000 to meet claims of the company.⁹⁰ Perhaps Mr. Brady recovered his \$116 after all. It was reported that Mr. Schaaf might "try to put the breath of life anew into the enterprise," but that he was more likely to try to sell the right-of-way back to the farmers.⁹¹

Even before the Omaha and Nebraska Central Railway Company was sold on the court house steps, another interurban scheme was afloat. An advertisement which took one-fifth of a page in a local paper, proposed the Adams County Traction Company which was to operate northwest to Kenesaw and Prosser, southwest to Holstein, Roseland, Blue Hill and Red Cloud, east to Harvard and Sutton, and northeast to Trumbull and Aurora. It seems quite likely that this new company might have found use for the right-of-way and grade of the defunct Omaha and Nebraska Central Railway on the route between Hastings and Trumbull. The advertisement in the newspaper asked for 500 Hastings boosters to put up \$1,000 each to finance this and other ventures about to be launched. A picture of a rather awkward looking single-trunk car was shown in most of the advertisements. The slogan "Not yet, but soon," appeared frequently, and the question "Will you be one of the 500?" was also inserted. A car to "Engleside" (it should have been spelled Ingleside) was promised, as was a local electric street car system for Hastings.⁹² A search of the files of a rival newspaper reveals no advertisements and no mention of the Adams County Traction Company or of any other street car project during the last half of the year 1908.⁹³ This would seem to indicate that one of

⁹⁰*Omaha Daily Bee*, January 15, 1915; *Hastings Daily Tribune*, August 6, 1909.

⁹¹*Hastings Daily Tribune*, August 6, 1909.

⁹²*Ibid.*, July 31, August 21, 1908, February 12, 1909.

⁹³*Hastings Daily Republican*, July-December, 1908.

the promoters of the Adams County Traction Company was Adam Breede, editor of the *Tribune*. In any event, the scheme fell through.

Later another street car project created a stir in Hastings. Three investors from Dayton, Ohio, were shown about Hastings by Mayor Miles. They expressed surprise that there were no street cars in the town. Two of the men in the syndicate, Albert Emanuel and W. R. Sullivan, left for the west, but their engineer, F. O. Breame, remained to complete his surveys. Engineer Breame talked with City Engineer Heartwell and with the city council in an informal manner. Six miles of electric line were proposed. The lines were to extend to the northeast, to Prospect Park, and to the south side. At that very moment there was talk of abandoning the fair grounds on North Burlington Avenue, but now that street cars seemed probable, the fair officials planned a new, enlarged "Central District Fair."⁹⁴

The syndicate, which seemed interested in a street car system for Hastings, operated several similar properties in Kansas. The gentlemen from Dayton would ask only for a franchise; they sought no local financial aid.⁹⁵ An editorial in the *Tribune* favored outside capital since "that seems to be the only way" to provide street cars for Hastings. An exclusive franchise should not be granted of course, but a franchise should be given within a month and cars should be in service the following summer. An occupation tax of one percent might be charged after a certain time, too. The *Tribune* editor did more than editorialize upon this subject. He wrote to two newspaper men in Kansas towns wherein this Dayton syndicate operated street cars. From Editor J. L. Bradly at Lawrence, Adam Breede received word that the street car system there was "partly in operation now," and that it was "better than they promised." From Editor T. A. Cordy of the *Parsons Sun*, Mr. Breede was told that "the line had been in

⁹⁴*Hastings Daily Tribune*, October 1, 1909.

⁹⁵*Idem*.

operation a month now and that it was better than had been promised."⁹⁶ Both Kansas editors praised the three Dayton men highly. To off-set this evidence, a local man, David J. Lewis,⁹⁷ asked in an open forum manner: "If these men can do it, why not keep the project at home?" Mr. Lewis suggested municipal ownership, but judging from the lack of response to his suggestion, one must conclude that this was not to be considered. The Dayton syndicate never formally asked for a franchise and no more was heard from them. A cartoon a few weeks later portrayed an "air-plane" and a street car then raised the question, "Hastingsites: which will get here first?"⁹⁸

Omaha, Western and Lincoln Interurban Railway

The Omaha, Western, and Lincoln Interurban line was the next interurban project which was to receive its primary support in Hastings, though it bore Omaha's name. This company, which had created only a mild stir in Lincoln and Omaha, planned a line somewhat similar to that of the former Omaha and Nebraska Central Railway, except that a thirty mile branch line would connect Lincoln. No branch line was projected to Grand Island as had been vaguely mentioned in the case of the earlier project. A 400 page typed report had been issued at a cost of \$3,000 to explain this proposed line to European capitalists. The report was issued by a leading railway engineer assisted by Mr. W. H. Fuller of Hastings, who had been chief engineer for the Omaha and Nebraska Central Railway. The report estimated the cost of the line at \$27,000 per mile. Forty year franchises were to be secured and forty year bonds issued. Interurban cars were to enter Omaha and Lincoln on the tracks of street car companies already in business.⁹⁹

⁹⁶*Hastings Daily Tribune*, October 8, 15, 1909.

⁹⁷This is the same David J. Lewis who put out the prospectus for the Omaha and Nebraska Central Railway in 1907.

⁹⁸*Hastings Daily Tribune*, October 15, 22, 1909.

⁹⁹*Hastings Daily Tribune*, April 5, 1910; *Lincoln Daily Star*, July 12, 1910.

This interurban company asked for a franchise to use streets in Hastings for interurban, freight, and city street cars. The line was to enter at the northeast on High Street thence to Colorado Avenue, west on Third Street to Burlington, north to High Street and east out of town. Another line was projected out west Third Street to the city limits. A freight line was to enter town at the east side and parallel along south of the C. B. and Q tracks into town. There was some opposition to permitting freight cars on the streets, but the use of a special freight line within the city limits seems to have squelched fears on this count. City Attorney Ragan adopted a strong stand on several issues, but the councilmen present, including A. L. Clarke, W. M. Loman, and W. H. Lanning, seem to have agreed to grant the franchise. There was no mention of a special election on the subject, but Mr. F. E. Schaaf was reported to have shown the Hastings franchise in other towns in an effort to secure such permits elsewhere.¹⁰⁰ This same Mr. Schaaf, of Lincoln, is the man who had purchased the right-of-way and the grade of the old Omaha and Nebraska Central for \$100 at an auction sale a year earlier.

But once again, the rapid transit fans in Hastings were due for disappointment. Later in 1910, the so-called Greater Hastings Association was advocating an endowment for the college, removal of the capital from Lincoln to Hastings, and an interurban line.¹⁰¹ In an editorial a year later, the *Tribune*, ever loyal to street railway projects, advanced this idea: "Give Hastings an electric railway system and the interurbans will spring up like mushrooms."¹⁰² But the nearest approach to this goal which can be reported here was an advertisement in a current magazine in 1911, in which the various plants of the Blue Valley Creamery were pictured, and in the picture of the Hastings plant was shown a trolley car so

¹⁰⁰*Hastings Daily Tribune*, April 5, May 6, June 3, 1910.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, November 4, 1910.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, November 17, 1911.

life-like that a *Tribune* scribe wrote as follows: "It makes you feel like hunting up one of the cars right away to take a ride over the city."¹⁰³

Sioux City, Crystal Lake, and Homer Railroad

Directly across the Missouri river from Sioux City, Iowa, lay South Sioux City in Nebraska. A street car line had connected the two places since 1887.¹⁰⁴ Three miles beyond South Sioux City was Crystal Lake with its park, and a few miles further to the south was the county seat town of Dakota City. It was just a question of time until some form of rapid transit should be extended to Crystal Lake from South Sioux City. It was also a question whether the local street railway would be extended; or whether a new company, perhaps an interurban to Crystal Lake, Dakota City and beyond, should be incorporated to fill the need.

Dakota City was to have been the terminus of a proposed South Sioux City and Dakota City Railway Company as early as 1887.¹⁰⁵ But nothing came of this proposal. Also, while the "short line" bridge was being built (for steam railroads), Crystal Lake was to have been the terminus of several projected car lines. But the customers journeyed there by hack or by "short line" train, until the park declined in popularity in 1897 (sold at foreclosure sale). The city council actually met in a special ses-

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, September 28, 1911.

¹⁰⁴M. M. Warner, *History of Dakota County, Nebraska* (Dakota City: Lyons Mirror Print, 1893), p. 93; *North Nebraska Eagle* (South Sioux City) Golden Jubilee Edition, July 29, 1937; E. N. Swett, "The South Sioux City Story," *South Sioux City Directory* 1948, pp. 3-7; Phillips *op. cit.*, pp. 212-220.

¹⁰⁵Two accounts, one probably copied from the other, indicate that the original Covington and South Sioux City Street Railroad Company was being absorbed by the South Sioux City and Dakota City Street Railway Company. The *North Nebraska Eagle*, July 29, 1937, in an item entitled "Fifty Years Ago," quoted from its story of July 28, 1887. The *Omaha Daily Bee*, August 2, 1887 seems to have repeated the story.

sion once for the purpose of granting a franchise for a car line to Crystal Lake Park, but the "street car people were not present," and no action was taken.¹⁰⁶

The president of the Sioux City Traction Company, however, did show interest in an interurban line to Jackson and Homer by way of Dakota City. Such a line was calculated to cost \$10,000 a mile, and with a new coal discovery at Jackson, profitable operation was predicted.¹⁰⁷ There was talk of a line to Fremont, one hundred miles distant, and finally a South Sioux City and North Nebraska Railway Company was incorporated by a number of men who were also directors of the Sioux City Traction Company. A belt line taking in many of the adjacent towns was projected. Sugar beets and coal mines were to give rise to a new dense rural population in the region to be served.¹⁰⁸ The Sioux City Traction Company took steps to secure the necessary permission from the county commissioners, and right-of-way in towns as far away as Decatur and Tekamah was being sought; then another company, the Sioux City, Homer, and Southern Electric Railway, was formed. This "Homer line" as it was called, filed for a ninety-nine year franchise in Dakota City, and bought ten acres of land adjoining Crystal Lake.¹⁰⁹

The projected "Homer line" assumed giant proportions when in 1904 it openly planned to operate to Omaha via Homer, and Decatur. The chief promoter, "Captain" R. A. Talbot divided his time between rally meetings along the line, and his "eastern moneyed friends."¹¹⁰ A proposed township bond issue for \$20,000 in Decatur, led one editor to query whether the whole proposition might not be a "shell game;"¹¹¹ especially since the line had no permis-

¹⁰⁶*The Argus* (South Sioux City), May 14, 28, June 11, 1897; *South Sioux City Press*, August 26, 1897.

¹⁰⁷*Dakota County Record*, December 28, 1901, April 10, 1902.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, April 19, May 3, 1902.

¹⁰⁹*North Nebraska Eagle*, June 4, November 12, 1903, February 25, 1904.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, March 3, 1904.

¹¹¹*Decatur Herald*, March 4, 1904; *North Nebraska Eagle*, March 10, 1904.

sion to cross the Omaha and Winnebago Indian reservations between Decatur and Homer.¹¹² Decatur voted (395 to 13) the necessary right-of-way, however, and rumors of immediate construction were abroad in the land.¹¹³

At the annual meeting of the "Homer line" stockholders, a decision was reached to complete the line to Dakota City first, and to operate it with power purchased from the Sioux City Traction Company. Later extensions could be supplied by the company's own power plant which was to be built.¹¹⁴ Just as this seemed likely, one of the stockholders, Robert E. Evans, sued the directors of the corporation for letting contracts to the Western Electric Company unknown to most of the stockholders, at fraudulent prices. In reality Western Electric would have furnished \$90,000 worth of supplies for \$100,000 of the company's bonds, which was not a bargain for Western Electric. But the contracts were immediately repudiated, and mortgage arrangements were completed so that materials could be purchased in local markets.¹¹⁵ Rails were laid as far as Dakota City and a gasoline car was purchased for immediate operation on the line.¹¹⁶ The route followed the present highway out of South Sioux City. A "Y" shaped spur led into Crystal Lake Park. The line led into Dakota City along the north side of the present highway paving. A "Y" in front of the Court House was the terminus. A spur connected with the Burlington tracks near the depot in Dakota City.¹¹⁷ The new "gasomotor" arrived a month

¹¹²*North Nebraska Eagle*, March 17, 1904; *Tekamah Journal*, April 14, 1904; *Decatur Herald*, April 22, May 12, 1904.

¹¹³*North Nebraska Eagle*, May 5, 12, 19, 1904.

¹¹⁴The officers at this time were: L. A. Jennings, New Castle, Indiana, president; Joseph Crow, Omaha, vice president; R. A. Talbot, Sioux City, general manager; H. C. Aiken, Omaha, secretary. Other directors present at this meeting were W. D. Jennings, New Castle, Indiana; Edgar B. Williams, Omaha; and C. J. O'Connor, Homer. (*North Nebraska Eagle*, May 19, 1904).

¹¹⁵*North Nebraska Eagle*, June 9, 16, September 15, 1904.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, October 6, 1904; *Omaha World Herald*, October 30, 1904.

¹¹⁷Interview, Raymond H. Ream, editor of the *Dakota County Herald*, November 29, 1938. These facts were also verified by John Hileman who, with Mr. Ream was a youth in Dakota City during the street car era.

later and regular service every two hours from Dakota City to South Sioux City was scheduled. A heavier motor (120 H. P.) was bought for the gaso-motor car and a line was graded for track through South Sioux City two blocks to the west of the street car line, all the way to the combination bridge. The "Homer line" thus expected to run its "gaso-motor" all the way to Fourth and Pierce streets in Sioux City, Iowa.¹¹⁸

But despite earlier predictions, the gaso-motor was not a success. After several interruptions in the service, "Captain" Talbot announced that two steam "dummy" locomotives and two coaches would be secured for the line until "gasoline efficiency is established."¹¹⁹ The "Homer line" was also embarrassed financially (indebtedness, \$56,566.24) and there were rumors of a deal with a packing house firm for money to complete the line. These packers were reported to be the owners of street railway and interurban properties in Omaha, St. Joseph and Kansas City.¹²⁰ There were also the Everett brothers in Lyons who would invest if the line were extended through their town toward Fremont.¹²¹ This plan left the enthusiastic Decatur crowd out in the cold so they backed the projected Omaha, Decatur, and Northern Electric Railway for the next few years. To complicate the situation, the Great Northern Railway chose to build a line toward Lincoln, through the Indian reservations south of Homer. James J. Hill of the Great Northern fought Senator Ezra Millard and the Union Pacific forces for this grant from the Interior Department in Washington, and won when the "Homer line" officials surrendered their rights to traverse the reservation.¹²² The Great Northern then transferred this line to the Burlington Railroad (present Sioux City to Lincoln branch line), and the "Homer line" was thereby

¹¹⁸*North Nebraska Eagle*, November 3, 24, December 1, 1904.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, January 19, 1905.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, May 19, 1904, April 27, 1905.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, March 23, 1905.

¹²²*Decatur Herald*, May 5, 1905; *North Nebraska Eagle*, May 11, July 6, 27, 1905.

cut off from all possibilities of construction further south than Homer. The Omaha, Decatur, and Northern Electric Railroad project which also failed to get an outlet to Sioux City through the Indian reservations, eventually became a steam railroad (the C., St. P. and O.), now operated by the Northwestern.¹²³ Interurban projects from Decatur to Onawa, Iowa, or to Fremont, or to nowhere in particular, still flourished for a time in Decatur, then all was quiet on that front.¹²⁴

In the meantime, the inactive "Homer line" saved its franchise by a thirty day extension of time. Then, though it had sold \$200,000 worth of 6 per cent ten year bonds to the National Bonding Guarantee Company of Topeka, it announced that it would purchase a new gaso-motor car in time to renew operation before the franchise expired.¹²⁵ But these plans failed to mature and the "two streaks of rust and a well developed string of liabilities"¹²⁶ were sold at auction to W. R. Burch of Chicago, who was interested in developing Crystal Lake. The company was thenceforth known as the Sioux City, Crystal Lake, and Homer Railroad Company, and since it was under the presidency of Joseph A. Faye for some time, it was called the "Faye line" by the natives in those parts. A spur line was built into "Faye's Park" at Crystal Lake and two twenty-one foot street cars were purchased.¹²⁷ Since arrangements could not be made for electricity, Manager Faye purchased two gaso cars (manufactured at Harvey, Illinois), and hourly service was effective to Faye's Park, with a car about every other hour to Dakota City.¹²⁸ Twenty-four thousand passengers paid their fares on the Faye line in 1907.¹²⁹ But the Sioux City Traction Company, which had an exclusive franchise, asked \$100 a month for the use of

¹²³*Decatur Herald*, August 4, 1905.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, August 11, 1905; *Omaha World Herald*, April 20, 1905.

¹²⁵*North Nebraska Eagle*, October 5, 26, 1905.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, December 21, 1905.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, August 16, October 18, 1906.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, May 9, July 18, August 1, 1907.

¹²⁹U. S. Census, *Street and Electric Railways*, 1907, p. 352.

four blocks of its line in South Sioux City, or \$300 a month for the use of one mile, and since the Homer line had lost its franchise rights in South Sioux City, Mr. Faye was forced to pay the price.¹³⁰ To add to the troubles heaped upon the unfortunate Mr. Faye, two of his gaso motor cars collided, and continued motor trouble caused frequent interruptions in the service.¹³¹

In 1910, Mr. Faye sought franchise rights for a track of his own on Randolph Street in South Sioux City to the bridge (a five cent fare to Sioux City was promised), but a compromise was arranged whereby Faye electrified his line to Crystal Park and operated it in connection with the Sioux City Traction Line all the way to Sioux City. The "dream of many years" was realized when the Traction Company cars (80 passenger open cars, with as many as two trailers sometimes), operated to the park on a fifteen minute schedule. The line was then electrified to Dakota City¹³² and President Faye now boasted sixteen miles of track and nine cars.¹³³

But operating deficits constantly plagued the Faye line. Patronage was reported at the extremely low figure of one passenger per car mile of operation, and there was no mail contract to balance the deficit.¹³⁴ The fare which the company charged for years (fifteen cents from Dakota City to South Sioux City, plus an additional ten cent fare on the Traction line to Sioux City)¹³⁵ seems to have been all the traffic would bear, though inadequate for the company's needs. So the "Homer line" was forced to reorganize once more.¹³⁶ There were plans whereby the Sioux City Service Company (successor to the Sioux City Traction Company) would build a line of its own along the Burlington right-of-way to Crystal Lake, then it was re-

¹³⁰*North Nebraska Eagle*, April 25, 1908.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, December 6, 1907, June 12, 1908.

¹³²*Dakota County Record*, March 19, April 16, 1910.

¹³³*Poor's Manual of Railroads*, 1910, p. 2017.

¹³⁴U. S. Census, *Street and Electric Railways*, *op. cit.*

¹³⁵Interviews, Ream and Hileman.

¹³⁶*Dakota County Record*, September 8, 1910.

ported that the Service Company was negotiating for the purchase of the "Homer line." The Bank of Dakota City began to sell its holdings of "Homer line" stock to the "highest bidder" and took steps to secure its remaining claims against the property.¹³⁷ The president of this bank, M. O. Ayres, then sold his interest to E. P. Howell of Sioux City who now held all but five hundred shares outstanding. One stockholder, John M. Coe, tried to contest the sale, but the Howell-Ayres faction won their point and the line was virtually under new management. The extension of the line to Homer was once more anticipated. A spark of new life was enjoyed on the "Homer line" for a time in 1911. The track was repaired and plans were laid for reestablishing through service to Sioux City. Again there were schemes to continue the line south toward Omaha.¹³⁸

Six foot snow drifts may have crippled the line for a while early in 1912, but President Howell reportedly "showed the books" to prove that the line was making money. But Faye's Park in Crystal Lake passed into other hands, and claims against the car line by the Gateway Improvement Company (unpaid bridge tolls) and by the C. St. P. M. and O. Railroad (unpaid trackage rent) proved most embarrassing.¹³⁹ The company reported a net operating revenue of a thousand dollars in 1914 (operating revenue \$8,199; operating expenses \$7,188), but that same year the Burlington railroad operated suburban trains to Crystal Lake to care for the holiday crowds. Cars continued intermittently on the "Homer line" until 1918 at which time the trolley wire and rails were sold for junk at fancy (World War I) prices. Rails which had originally cost twenty-eight dollars a ton brought fifty-seven dollars and fifty cents in the market.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷*North Nebraska Eagle*, May 26, June 23, July 14, 21, 1911.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, September 1, 8, October 6, 27, November 17, 1911.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, January 13, 19, July 12, November 8, 15, 1912.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, July 24, December 18, 1914, January 3, 1913, June 13, 1918.

The Omaha, Sioux City, and Northern

When the "Homer line" was in its heyday, another interurban was projected from South Sioux City through Martinsburg, Hartington, and Bloomfield, toward Niobrara. Business men along the line made financial pledges and some advocates suggested a tax of twenty-five cents an acre on all land within four miles of the line.¹⁴¹ A huge dam at Niobrara was to furnish power,¹⁴² and the line was incorporated for a quarter of a million dollars as the Omaha, Sioux City, and Northern.¹⁴³ Plans were made to use the "Homer line" tracks, and right-of-way was secured in other places. Interest in the line was especially great at Decatur, Tekamah, Jackson, and Hartington. Promoters W. E. King, and C. W. Baker raised enough money to pay themselves \$6,000 for trying to get several capitalists interested in the project.¹⁴⁴ Mr. King reported that the project was receiving "special attention in the European money market." C. W. Baker announced that the funds had been "arranged for." The company's blue-prints showed lines to Fremont, Norfolk, Ord, O'Neill, besides the Omaha and Niobrara lines originally announced. Promoter Baker turned up with a construction company of his own and plans for a power plant which would make electricity for the Omaha branch of the line.¹⁴⁵

The Baker Construction Company commenced work on the Niobrara power plant, and with the supposed backing of London capitalists, interurban line construction (called the Niobrara, Sioux City, and Omaha Railway in one account) was promised within a month.¹⁴⁶ The \$16,-

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, March 19, 1909.

¹⁴²*Dakota County Record*, May 21, 1910.

¹⁴³The incorporators were A. King, J. W. Van Horn, E. A. Tennis, B. M. McCue, and J. A. Singhaus. (*North Nebraska Eagle*, August 4, 1914.)

¹⁴⁴*North Nebraska Eagle*, September 29, November 24, December 15, 1911.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, March 8, July 5, November 1, 1912.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, June 13, August 8, 1913; *Omaha World Herald*, June 28, 1913.

500,000 Niobrara Water Power Railway was organized with C. W. Baker as its head,¹⁴⁷ but Chairman Hall of the State Railway Commission asked to see the contract which Mr. Baker claimed he had with London capitalists, and limited the company to a total capitalization of \$400,000.¹⁴⁸ One steam shovel arrived in Niobrara to begin work on the power canal,¹⁴⁹ then nothing more was reported about this project.

Another corporation, the Nebraska Central Railway Company, filed articles of incorporation in South Dakota. This was to have involved a \$750,000 interurban from Ainsworth, Nebraska to Pierre, South Dakota.¹⁵⁰ But this scheme, like most of the others, seems to have been dropped.

A number of factors account adequately enough for the decline of interurban promotions after 1914. World War I with its shortages and its high prices may explain the lapse of promotion for a few years at least. The general decline of patronage, and the attractive price offered for scrap iron (rails) was enough to finish off the interurban at South Sioux City, for example. And after the war, interurban promoters could gain little comfort from the few struggling suburban lines in Omaha and Lincoln which were masquerading as interurban companies. Quite possibly, the decline of land values and of general farm prosperity in Nebraska was a bad omen for some promoters who found business men, bankers, and "eastern capitalists," unresponsive to further interurban schemes; and who sensed the futility of a further combing over of lists of farmers for purposes of purveying to them some choice securities. And if these reasons were not enough, there remains the most significant of all, namely the advent of the automobile and of good roads. For by these devices,

¹⁴⁷*North Nebraska Eagle*, October 10, 1913; *Omaha World Herald*, June 28, 1913; *Omaha Daily Bee*, January 3, 1914; *Omaha Daily News*, January 3, 1914.

¹⁴⁸*North Nebraska Eagle*, December 12, 1913, January 9, 1914.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, May 1, 1914.

¹⁵⁰*Lincoln Daily News*, November 19, 1913.

nearly every farmer became a suburbanite. Many routes, not just one, were available to those who wished to travel between nearby cities. And every man who owned his own automobile, could be his own motorman and operate on his own schedule.

Interurban empires came tumbling down most everywhere during the twenties and thirties. Nebraska, which had been marginal territory for interurban promoters during the heyday of this means of intercity travel, was spared the bankruptcies, the obsolescence, and the unemployment which characterized this industry in the more populous states. A few dozen boom-time enthusiasts in Hastings, Decatur, or Omaha, might recall the greatness which had so narrowly slipped their grasp—the cities, the industries, and the interurban railways that might have been. That sort of daydream seems very distant and very unimportant now. Very distant, and very unimportant, indeed. Yet it occurred just a generation or two ago.