

Chagrin Falls Steam and Interurban Railways

Steam Railways

In 1877 there were 79,000 miles of railroad track across the US, but Chagrin Falls had none. Residents and business owners traveled to Solon to use its railroad for travel and shipping purposes. This inconvenience put a strain on local businesses. They did not have the same easy access to necessary raw materials that their counterparts in other regions had. Envious of neighboring towns' superior transport and services, members of the community began calling for a railroad. In 1873 a vote was held on whether or not to build a railroad in Chagrin. The vote was affirmative.

The Cleveland and Mahoning Valley Railroad agreed to build a new line between Solon and Chagrin Falls, but an economic panic ended their plans. Economic depressions, bankruptcies, multiple railway mergers, and railway labor strikes and riots further stalled construction.

The Painesville, Canton, and Bridgeport Narrow Gauge Railroad started construction a few years later, and on December 15, 1877, town residents William "Boss" Hutchings and Washington Gates drove in the final spike to complete construction of the railroad (figs. 1 & 2). The route ran from Solon to Chagrin Falls. It passed beside the current post office and ended at a station just east of the Philomethian Street School, now occupied by the Bell Tower condominiums (fig. 3), The station was ideally suited to serve the numerous factories and mills on the Chagrin River.

The PC&B Railroad was unable to pay back construction bonds, and in 1880 Chagrin residents repossessed the company. The railroad was renamed the Chagrin Falls and Southern Railroad.

The narrow gauge of the track limited the total cargo hold of the line, and made it incompatible with other lines in the state. In 1890 the CF&S Railroad merged with several other railroads to become the Cleveland, Canton, and Southern Railroad. The new company made the railroad standard gauge. Passengers no longer had to change trains in Solon to travel to Cleveland, and products made in Chagrin could be shipped directly to buyers.

The development of the electric dynamo and motors resulted in the electric railways in the late 1880s. An electric rail line from Cleveland to Chagrin Falls began operations in 1897 and served the town as a more modern alternative to the original railroad. This new competition soon ended the steam railroad's passenger business in 1898. The steam railroad continued to haul freight until 1983, and its tracks were abandoned in 1989.

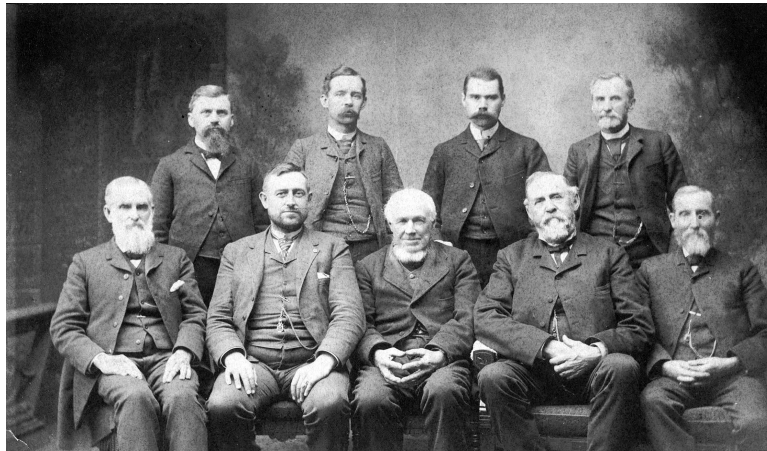


Figure 1. Founders of the original steam railroad. William "Boss" Hutchings is front and center.

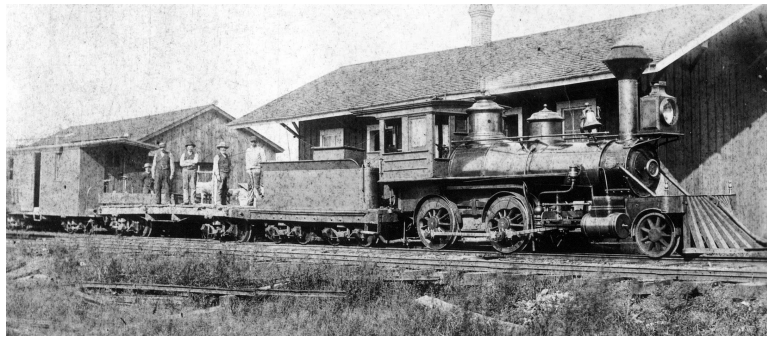


Figure 2. First run of the Chagrin Falls and Southern Narrow Gauge Train Between Chagrin Falls and Solon, Ohio, 1877.



Figure 3. View of the steam railway yard from the top of the Philomethian Street School.

Electric Interurban Railway

In 1893 *The Exponent* announced the imminent arrival of the electric railway in Chagrin Falls. A prominent electric rail company, the Everett and Moore Syndicate, built the line. The project involved laying track and overhead power lines between Cleveland and Chagrin Falls, construction of a coal-fired powerhouse on Fenkell Road (now Miles Road) about ½ mile West of Solon Road (fig. 4,) and construction of two bridges across the Chagrin River.

The Cleveland and Chagrin Falls Electric Railway started operations in 1897. It carried passengers, mail, produce, and freight. The interurban railway was an important part of many residents' lives. Commuters, tourists, farmers, and many others relied on this transportation for work and relaxation. The train could reach Cleveland in around 30 minutes. Tracks were later laid to Hiram and Garrettsville. The railway spurred development and created much activity throughout Northeast Ohio (fig. 5).

The C&CFER Railway had several mishaps, including a head-on collision between trains, collisions with pedestrians, long delays due to bad weather, and trains jumping the track (fig. 6).

Improved highways and increasing popularity of cars, trucks, and busses severely cut into the railway's business. The C&CFER Railway stopped operations in 1925. At midnight on March 31st the route's electricity was shut off for good, ending the 27-year era of the line. The barns that once held the trolley cars were razed in the late 1930s.

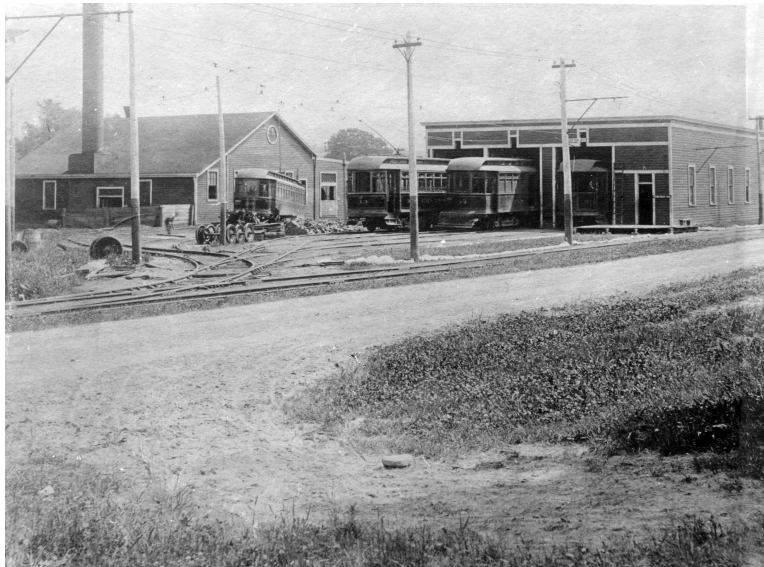


Figure 4. Interurban car barns and powerhouse on Fenkell Road (now Miles) about ½ mile West of Solon Road.

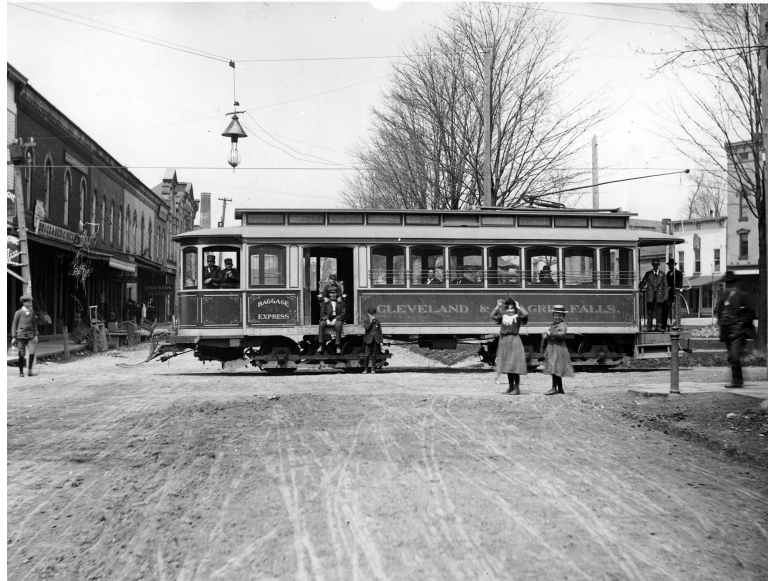


Figure 5. Interurban car at Washington and Main Streets.



Figure 6. Interurban train wreck at Pearl and Walnut Streets, Feb. 14, 1904.

Bibliography

Barriball, Don. Cleveland and Chagrin Falls Electric Railway Company 1897-1925: The History of the Interurban Line in Chagrin Falls. Chagrin Falls Historical Society, 2009.

Gorretta, Laura J. Editor, Chagrin Falls: An Ohio Village History. 2nd edition. Chagrin Falls Historical Society, 2014.

Grant, H. Roger. "Interurbans." The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History, Case Western Reserve University, 27 Mar. 1998, <https://case.edu/ech/articles/i/interurbans/>