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THE WINONA RAILROAD:
An Interesting Part of Our Heritage

No
Records

William Darr
Kosciusko Leadership Academy
May 1986

Background

One can get a glimpse of the past by taking a look at the present. First, drop by the Amtrak station in Warsaw in the morning or evening when the passenger train stops to pick up or leave off passengers; and then observe the size and the style of the railroad equipment. Then drive on North Hickory Street, which has the Conrail tracks running down the middle of the street, to experience the feeling of a railroad track in a place usually reserved for motor vehicles. Both ventures used to be common, every day experiences in Warsaw and in Kosciusko County.

Railroads have played an important role in the development of Kosciusko County. All cities and towns, with the exception of North Webster, are located by, and grew up along, these ribbons of steel. Most of the railroads ran east-west and connected the industrial East with Chicago and the West. These lines were constructed after the Civil War and into the late 1800's by Eastern investors. However, one of these railroads, which no longer exists, was a local phenomenon.

A lake east of Warsaw had been called Eagle Lake, and the area around the north shore of the lake was called Spring Fountain Park. This area was described in the 1870's as being infested with bull frogs, dead trees and having an

abundance of low and marshy ground. This area had been partially developed in the 1880's by the Beyer brothers, German immigrants who used the area as a small recreational area; and used the water from the natural springs to cool the eggs and butter that they purchased from local farmers, and then shipped and sold these products to markets in such places as New York and Boston.

In the late 1880's a Presbyterian minister, whose father had been one of the founders of Wabash College, was looking for a place to locate a Chautauqua and Bible conference in the Midwest. The Chautauqua movement, which got its name from an upstate New York town of the same name, was a system of bringing culture and education to the common people. One has to remember that there were no televisions, VCR's, radios or movies at this time. Entertainment and education was live.

Sol Dickey was that Presbyterian minister, and he felt that this Spring Fountain Park area would be perfect for a Christian Chautauqua, so arrangements were made for its purchase from the Beyer brothers, and the lake and the area were renamed Winona.

Obviously, it would require more than the 5,000 citizens of Warsaw to provide the crowds to attend such gatherings. Transportation of the day was more or less limited to bicycles, horse and buggy, and the steam railroad. The main line of the Pittsburgh, Ft. Wayne and Chicago

Railroad, later the Pennsylvania, and now Conrail, ran through both Winona Lake and Warsaw. There were stations in both places. Warsaw was also served from the north and the south by the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad or the "Big Four," later the New York Central, now also part of Conrail. The Warsaw Pennsylvania station still stands between Lake and Washington streets. The "Big Four" passenger station was in the area where the offices of the Little Crow Milling Company now stand at the corner of Hickory and Market streets. The Winona Lake Pennsylvania station was located behind the mobile home park on Kings Highway. People getting off the Pennsylvania and the "Big Four" in Warsaw would board a Pennsylvania Railroad "dummy," or shuttle train, which consisted of a steam engine and several passenger cars, for the trip between Warsaw and Winona Lake, which in 1900 made 16 round trips a day. Crowds from all over Indiana and the Eastern part of the United States poured into Winona Lake for its programs, and the healthful relaxation the resort offered.

However, because of the growth of the "West" and the increase in its freight and passenger traffic, the Pennsylvania Railroad served notice in 1902 that it would be "double tracking" its line, and the track used by the shuttle train would no longer be available for local use.

The economic survival of Winona depended on the guests delivered to its gates by this shuttle, and without

the "dummy" the future of Winona Lake as a Christian Chautauqua center was in doubt. In 1902, 12 Pennsylvania and 8 "Big Four" passenger trains stopped in Warsaw each day. Imagine, for a moment, what it would be like for 10,000 people, on a busy day, to be transported the three miles between the Warsaw train stations and Winona Lake utilizing horse and buggies on unpaved streets. Winona was facing a major problem.

America, at the turn of the century, was devoting a great deal of its energies to achieving technological superiority over the rest of the world. This was the era of great inventors and inventions, and among these inventions was the electric trolley. The trolley cars were powered by electricity which was supplied to the trolley by means of an overhead wire.

Thus, the necessity of getting visitors between Warsaw and Winona Lake seemed, to the board of directors of the Winona Institutions, as a natural use of the electric trolley, and as a result the Winona and Warsaw Railroad was incorporated on October 30, 1902 to carry guests to and from Winona Lake.

The Winona and Warsaw Railroad

The Eastern border of Warsaw, in 1902, was in the vicinity of Bronson street. The land between this area and Winona Lake apparently was mostly farm ground. There was a

golf course in the area of present day OEC, Arnolt's and Armstrong Products companies. The streets of Warsaw, with the exception of the uptown area which were paved in 1903, were gravel. The trolley tracks were placed in the middle of the city streets. A local historian described the scene as "awful lines of big poles on either side of the street and with wires that were suspended from the poles." These tracks were of standard gauge, the distance between the rails, and used wooden ties. The installation looked similar to a modern railroad, with the exception of the overhead wires. The first cars were pulled by a small steam engine, because the electrical generating facility and electrical distribution equipment had not been completed. The original power house was in the red brick building that forms the south end of the present AMPI, formerly Litchfield, plant on Argonne Road. The track ran from Center to Market on Detroit, then west on Market to Lake, then on Lake to Center where it turned back East on Center street. The single track ran down the middle of Center to an area between Maple and Bronson streets where "passing" tracks were installed. The track continued east on present day Center Street to what is now McKinley street. There, at the location of a soon to be abandoned Conrail siding, the track turned south and continued south where they passed under the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks next to the power house. This underpass, the current entrance to Gatke's, was especially constructed

for use of the W & W. Today the grassy area between Gatke's parking lot and the Winona Hotel gives little evidence that the trolleys made a loop, or circle, there and stopped at a large combination railroad station, office, and entrance gate to the grounds of Winona Lake.

During the first three months of operation the W & W carried around 200,000 passengers for 5¢ a ride. Other street trolleys were springing up everywhere in the Midwest, and some were now building outside city limits to connect towns and cities. These connecting lines were being called interurban railroads. It suddenly seemed that just as every town was determined to have a steam railroad in the 1860's and 1870's, that these same towns now were determined to have an interurban railroad.

Roads, at this time in Kosciusko County, were abominable. The late George Nye described the local roads as being "terrible at times and the car lasted about two years," and "before World War I cars were seen on the roads trying to make it thru mud and sand and there was much tire trouble. The cars were open, had gas lights, and had a top speed of about 35 miles an hour. Nobody had thought of hard surfaced roads." The automobiles of 1905 were costly and extremely unreliable and as one person observed that, "only a fool would take his new automobile on an extended trip of more than 10 miles."

Eighty years of hindsight was a luxury the W & W's

Board of Directors did not have. What they foresaw was a profitable venture in interurban railroad building and a railroad that would bring thousands to the gates of Winona to enjoy, and be part of what was called "the Winona Movement." The profits from the railroad would help perpetuate the benevolent work of the Winona Institutions.

The Winona Interurban Railway was incorporated on June 12, 1905, and the articles of incorporation indicated some ambitious ideas. They were going to construct railways from a hub in Warsaw to Goshen, Peru, Wabash, Ft. Wayne, Columbia City, Plymouth, Valparaiso, Logansport, Rochester, Huntington, and Syracuse. Phase one of their construction plans called for the construction of the line between Warsaw and Goshen.

The Goshen Division

The right-of-way of the Goshen Division was fifty feet wide with a sixteen foot graded roadway. The natural topography presented few major construction problems. The Elkhart river, south of Goshen, required a 192 foot twin steel span, whose piers are still visible between the bridges of SR 15 and Conrail. The Tippecanoe River north of Warsaw was spanned with an 80 foot wooden bridge. It was reported that a 500 foot wide sink hole near Milford Junction, in the area of the present day golf course, required spliced pilings that were driven 70 feet to a firm foundation

to stabilize the road bed.

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When this 1906 project was completed, documents indicated that towns served by the Winona had the following populations: Goshen, 15,000; New Paris, 12,000; Milford, 2,000; Milford Junction, 500; Leesburg, 1,000; Warsaw, 5,000; and although it was not officially a town until 1914, Winona Lake whose population varied from 500 to 7,000. The marketing people of the day stated the railroad had an average tributary population of 1,200 people per mile living within a strip of 1.5 miles on either side of the track between Goshen and Warsaw, but not including the population of the cities listed above. The Winona was considered a real boon. An authority on Indiana interurbans stated that present day citizens would find it impossible to realize the isolation which was the lot of the typical rural resident around 1900.

The construction of the Warsaw-Goshen branch, and the possible construction outlined in its incorporation papers necessitated the construction of a much larger powerhouse than the one mentioned earlier. This new powerhouse is the building presently occupied by Gatke Corporation. The original smoke stack, which was removed in 1971, was 175 feet tall and 8 feet in diameter. Water to feed the four boilers came from an intake crib in Winona Lake 200 feet from shore. A 36 inch wooden pipe connected the crib with shore and a tile pipe. The discharge conduit was also 36 inches in diameter and emptied into Winona Lake about 150 feet from

the intake crib. It is unknown if these pipes still exist. There were four large coal fired boilers which provided a normal flow of 140 pounds of steam pressure to two Allis-Chalmers engines designed to provide a continuous load of 750 horse power, with a maximum load of 850 horse power each. Each engine, with its 20 foot in diameter flywheels, was connected to a 600 kilowatt generator producing 25 cycle three-phase alternating current at 2,300 volts. This plant was designed to serve the railroad's original 18 to 20 hour per day schedule.

The right-of-way had two separate pole lines. A high-tension transmission line connected the power house with the substations. One of the substations was at "Felger" between Leesburg and Milford. The ruins of this substation are at a farm along the east side of SR 15 just south of CR 1100 N. The other substation on this line was at Goshen. There are no visible remnants of this substation which was located on what is now the south edge of the Goshen College campus. This line utilized 35 foot poles spaced 125 feet apart and supported three wires carrying the 33,000 volt transmission circuit. The other pole line supported the bracket which held the single trolley wire which was directly above the steel track. These 30 foot chestnut poles, spaced 100 feet apart, also carried the company's telephone system. These telephones provided the means for train orders and other information to be communicated from

the dispatcher to the motormen and conductors on the cars. There were telephones in the stations as well as jack boxes mounted on the poles every half mile, for the crews to plug in their telephones to get their orders and so forth. Fences were installed along the right-of-ways.

The Winona purchased four new cars for the Warsaw-Goshen route. These combination passenger and baggage cars were, as was the custom of the day, made of steel and wood. The cars were 57 feet 8 inches long and 9 feet 4 inches wide with a baggage compartment, a smoking compartment and the main passenger compartment which included a restroom. The seats of the main compartment were upholstered in green plush, while the smoking compartment seats were done in horsehide and the exterior of the car was painted a dark "Pullman" green. Each car had four 75 horsepower motors and was equipped with airbrakes. The new Warsaw-Goshen line was considered to be "state of the art."

The Peru Division

The second phase of the Winona's interurban construction was the Warsaw to Peru division, which was completed in segments. This line headed south from Warsaw using the existing Center street line, and then on west from Lake on Center street. The line then ran through what is now Boggs Industrial Park. The Winona had a "yard" in this area which was also the location of an early county fairgrounds. The

line crossed the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks utilizing a steel bridge. The south abutment and embankment of this bridge, which was removed in 1949, can still be seen about 200 yards west of CR 225 W. The nine mile segment between Warsaw and Mentone is easy to trace, as a large NIPSCO high voltage pole line follows the former Winona right-of-way. The brick station and electrical substation at Mentone still is visible at the N.E. corner of SR 25 and Morgan street. The track then angled east behind the present day Lake City Bank and hardware store to a now filled-in underpass under the "Nickle Plate," presently Norfolk-Southern, railroad. The soft ground in this area apparently caused considerable difficulty constructing this subway. The nine mile segment between Mentone and Akron followed a route that was approximately 1/2 mile east of present day SR 19, until SR 19 makes an easterly jog in Fulton County on CR 100 S. At this jog point the Winona ran parallel on the west side of SR 19 until it reached Akron. There was a small railyard on the north side of Akron in the area of the present day stables. The line continued down the main street of Akron, which then had a population of 1,000. After going through the downtown area the line angled east to the area of the present Pike Lumber company. The line went over the now abandoned Eire Railroad, first with a timber bridge and later with a concrete and steel structure. The south abutment of the bridge is still visible.

The Winona continued through Fulton County into Miami County with an 11 mile segment to Chili where the Winona passed under the now abandoned Vandalia Railroad. This underpass, east of SR 19, is partially visible. The electrical substation at Gilead is now part of an agricultural implement dealership. The Chili to North Peru segment made use of a 9 mile right-of-way that had been abandoned by, and purchased from, a division of the Wabash Railroad and included a steel bridge over the Eel river. The electrical substation at Brownell, south of Chili, is now being utilized as a farm building. The line then passed over Peru city streets to a station that the Winona shared with the Indiana Union Traction interurban and the Chicago, Cincinnati and Louisville steam railroad.

The style of construction, and electrical distribution system was similar to that of the previously described Goshen division. The construction of the Peru division began in May 1906. There are discrepancies about completion dates of this division. It would appear that the Peru to Akron leg was completed in January of 1908. The Warsaw to Mentone segment was made operational in March of 1909. The first car to transverse the complete Warsaw to Peru line was on February 4, 1910. The completion of this link connected the two great interurban systems of Indiana, the Northern Indiana and the Indiana Union Traction systems. This division was plagued by financial problems, as construction cost

more than had been budgeted, and the Winona was having trouble raising funds and was facing bankruptcy. These problems were coupled with the fact that the United States was in an economic recession in 1907. This project was also delayed due to construction difficulties. One observed that "much difficulty was met in grading the region around Mentone because of the sinking of the grade, the ground was so soft that ox teams were used in places." Another contemporary described the grade construction as being done with wheelbarrows, mules and horses.

Effects of the Winona

The Winona became the "family car" of the day. Families went to town, visited relatives, went to fairs, band concerts, and places like Winona Lake. Individuals used the Winona to go to work, to shop and transact business. An interurban baseball league was formed. Teams from Winona Lake, Warsaw, Goshen, Milford, Leesburg and New Paris participated. The Winona was used for "courting," and for going to the doctor or the hospital. The Winona helped break up the rural isolation in the areas of Kosciusko County that it served. The Winona had stops at almost every cross road.

The Winona was originally designed as a passenger railroad. However freight service became the key factor in its economic survival. LCL, less than car load freight, was a key component of the freight business. The Winona served

the same function that truck lines and parcel delivery services do today. The line brought supplies and fresh produce to the small grocery stores along the route, and picked up farmer's milk cans for delivery to dairies.

It was the Winona that helped make Mentone famous for its egg production. Eggs were brought from farms to Mentone where they were loaded into Winona refrigerator cars located on a siding track on South Morgan Street. The Winona then interchanged the cars with the Wabash Railroad for the trip to New York for distribution. It is estimated that an average of 8-10 cars, with a peak of 20 carloads, of eggs were shipped each week.

Livestock, cattle and hogs, were loaded at places like "Doran Station," near the present day Tippecanoe Valley High School, where farmers placed their livestock for pick-up by railroad equipment and crews for the transport to the Union Stockyards in Indianapolis. The Winona also transported quantities of logs, gravel and coal and other commodities.

The Railroad's Problems

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The minutes of the railroad's board in 1915 reflected the problem of the automobile. "The more general use of the automobile has affected our earnings, especially in our local traffic and a large majority of the farmers are now owners of an automobile and use same in going to and

from the various towns instead of using our railroad as heretofore, and the reduction in the source of revenue has been very apparent." Even as early as 1910 the automobile was becoming a menace to the railroad. It was reported that "at one Winona entertainment 150 cars were counted, and 500 at the Goshen fair." They reasoned that, at the fair, the average car transported 5 persons, then that would mean 2,500 people who didn't travel by train, thus figuring the round trip at 50¢, meant a net loss of \$1250.00.

The automobile became a major means of passenger transportation. The private automobile also impacted the Winona, as it did other Indiana interurban lines, in the form of the "jitney." The "jitney," basically, was a person who would drive past the interurban stop and pick up passengers for a fee. This would be done to help him make his car payments, or when done for free just to impress friends. Regardless of the motivation, the impact on the railroads was the same, fewer passengers.

Governments also became an enemy of the interurbans. In 1917, the first year of existence for the Indiana State Highway Commission, there were 898 miles of Class I highways. In 1930 there were 5,978 miles of Class I highways. The state, thus, provided hard surface for the railroad's competitors.

Law suits are not a recent phenomenon. Law suits proved to be very costly to the Winona. Minutes in 1915,

sound as if they were written in 1986, when they stated, "We have the same experience as all the other railroads and it appears that when a person is slightly injured, they consider their fortune is made and they insist on an unreasonable amount in payment for their injury."

The automobile figured prominently in many law suits. City streets and county grade crossings became more and more dangerous with the increased number of automobiles. Crossings, by today's standards, were poorly marked. Drivers lacked training, and their automobiles seemed to have a propensity to stall on the tracks. However, regardless of reason the railroad became a target of many law suits as the result of collisions. Railroad officials always emphasized safety to its employees. Winona's speed limits were 10 mph in Mentone, 12 mph in Warsaw and 8 mph in Leesburg. Maximum speed in the open county was 70 mph; but some state that speeds of around 90 mph were occasionally reached.

Downward Trends

The interurban industry reached a peak in passengers, revenues and employees shortly after World War I. Even as early as 1924, officials noted that the Winona was carrying few local passengers between Peru, Akron and Warsaw; and so few through passengers, except during the special seasons at Winona, that the abandonment of the Peru line had been seriously considered.

The Warsaw-Winona division continued to carry the bulk of the passengers. The Winona carried 386,821 passengers in 1907; 318,054 in 1908; 531,965 at its peak in 1925; and only 92,758 in 1934. There are no automobile registration figures available for Kosciusko County; but for the State of Indiana there were 66,410 motor vehicles registered in 1914. In 1934 there were 679,578 vehicles registered, which helps explain the drop in the Winona's ridership.

The leaders of the Winona Institutions, in 1904, had envisioned the Winona to make a nice profit in the early years of its existence; but they underestimated the costs of building the electric line and the effect of the automobile on the Winona's business. They publicly stated that "we make every dollar we can honestly, and spend every dollar we make trying to do the most possible good." They thought the profits would fund the Winona Agricultural Institute, the Winona Park School for Young Women, and the Winona College, all in Winona Lake; as well as the Winona Technical Institute in Indianapolis.

The Winona Railroad was close to, or in bankruptcy or receivership during much of its history. It operated under four names: Winona and Warsaw Railway, 1902-1905; Winona Interurban Railway, 1905-1924; Winona Service Company, 1924-1926; and the Winona Railroad Company, 1926-1952.

The Demise

Ridership, in the 1930's, on the Winona was dwindling. America was in an economic depression which made it difficult for the Winona to obtain financing. Its passenger equipment, despite the efforts of an excellent shop crew, was aging and wearing out. Other interurbans in Indiana were ceasing operations or greatly reducing service. The handwriting was on the wall for the Winona. The death blow to Winona's passenger service occurred when the Northern Indiana Railroad, the Winona's connecting service to the north at Goshen, ceased their operations at Goshen. This eliminated the through passengers going to places like Indianapolis, Louisville, South Bend, and Chicago. It also affected the less-than-carload freight business that the Winona interchanged with the Northern Indiana. This development sealed the doom of the Winona's interurban passenger service. On September 1, 1934, the Winona ended passenger service between Peru and Goshen. Freight service was also discontinued between Peru and the junction of the Wabash railroad and from Goshen to New Paris. The railroad's dispatcher's office and freight station continued using part of the Widman-McDonald building at the N.W. corner of Center and Indiana. A freight spur was located on Indiana Street. The trolley continued to run from Warsaw to Winona Lake until July 4, 1938, when the railroad service ceased and bus service began. One of the last city trolleys can still be

seen at the G & G gravel pit on CR 150 W. The automobile had won the battle.

The Winona de-electrified in 1938, and until 1952 it used propane or diesel powered locomotives. The cost of operating the generating plant and the maintenance on the aging equipment had become cost prohibitive. On April 30, 1947 the Winona abandoned the line between Warsaw and the junction with the Wabash railroad north of Peru. Deferred and neglected repairs were too expensive in relationship to expected revenues. The final segment of the shrinking Winona consisted of 22 miles of track that ran between the Wabash Railroad's tracks at New Paris Junction and Warsaw. The Winona paralleled the "Big Four" down through Milford's main street. At the south edge of Milford the Winona turned west. The piers of the Winona's bridge are still visible from the bridge on old SR 15. The Winona then follows what is now SR 15 from the curves on the south edge of Milford, along the east side of the highway to Leesburg and then on to Warsaw. Much of the right-of-way is still visible. The tracks came into Warsaw along Detroit street and then into the middle of Detroit street in the vicinity of NAPA and Lewis Oil. At Center Street the line went east to McKinley where the tracks went south to the area of present day Warsaw Chemical and AMPI. The line's last car barn is now part of the Union Tool Company on North Detroit Street.

In 1948 the Winona transferred 3,900 car loads of

coal from the Pennsylvania and New York Central to the Wabash at New Paris, by 1951 the number of loads of coal had dropped to 1277. 1951 also showed 1309 cars of sand and gravel shipped from the pit at Leesburg and 400 cars for the Litchfield, now AMPI, plant. Despite this freight business, the Winona was no longer profitable. After several attempts to abandon its freight service, the state finally allowed the Winona to cease operations on May 31, 1952.

Amid fanfare, and courthouse lawn ceremonies and a ceremonial last train of open gondola cars equipped with folding chairs, the Winona made its final trip. The Winona had become part of our history.

Epilogue

Space did not permit description of many interesting facets of the Winona. It is this writer's desire to compile and preserve as much data on the Winona as possible for the use of others, and future generations of this county.

If you have information, or know someone who has experiences concerning the Winona, I would like to sit down with you and tape record your memories, or photocopy documents that you might have. Contact me, William Darr, at P. O. Box 616, Winona Lake, or call me at local phones 372-5178 or evenings at 267-4731.

I would like to thank Mr. Neal Carlson, and especially Miss Pauline Jordan of the Kosciusko County

Historical Society for opening their files and providing data for this writer. The staffs at Mentone and Warsaw Public Libraries were helpful. A heartfelt thanks to Mr. Jack Engle who spent hours sharing his 15 years of experience on the Winona where he worked over 52 years ago.