

With the Contributions of
Garrie L. Tufford



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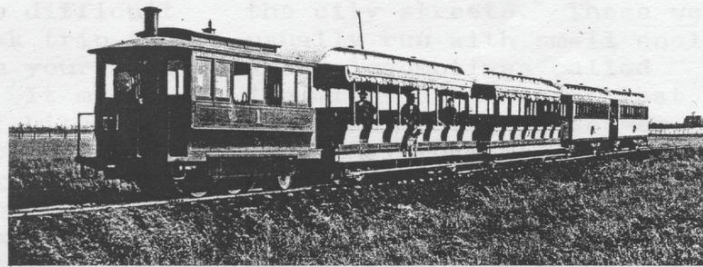
WEDGE

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by Garrie L. Tufford
Steam Train to Lake Calhoun

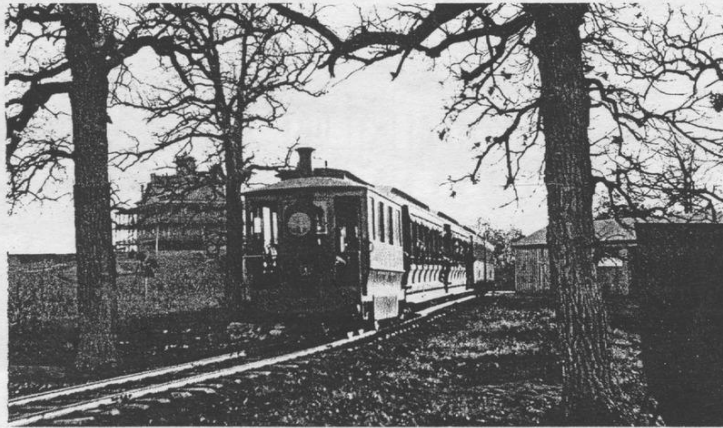
A STEAM TRAIN ON IRVING AVENUE?



STEAMBOAT ON LAKE CALHOUN



HOTEL ON THE LAKE



Steam Train to Lake Calhoun

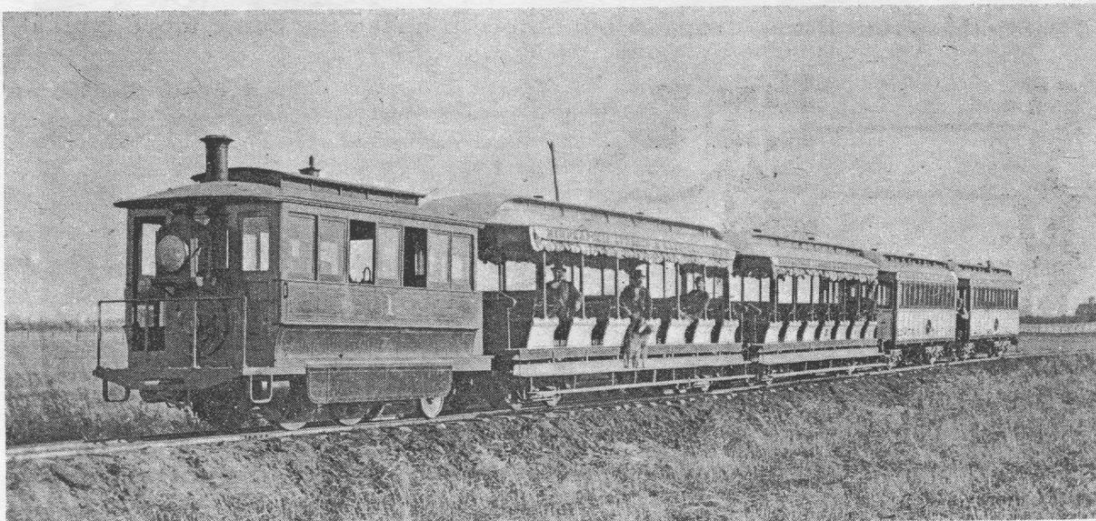
By Garrie L. Tufford

It is difficult to think of south Minneapolis as anything but a part of a large urban complex, though there was a time when the area was one of only farmlands and tiny settlements that were some of Minneapolis' earliest suburbs.

Transportation in the 1870s is probably even more difficult to visualize. A quick trip to the corner grocery in your auto? Perhaps catch a bus? It might be better to think of hitching up the team, or, if that is too much trouble, walking over what amounted to little more than dirt paths. There was also the problem of not having the corner grocery.

Minneapolis was not unlike many other urban areas of the United States with a growing industry and commerce. As the city increased in size, simply getting about became an ever greater problem. One of the answers to this urban transit problem was the horse-drawn street railway. The very earliest of what was to become today's Metropolitan Transit Commission were the "horse cars" of the Minneapolis Street Railway Company.

Another solution was the operation of steam railways on the city streets. These were usually run with small enclosed steam locomotives called "Dummies" or "Motors" that pulled ordinary passenger coaches. In some instances they operated on a narrow-gauge track which offered the advantages of smaller and less obtrusive equipment, and which were much less costly to build.



Motor Line train at 31st Street and Irving about 1880. The small steam locomotives of the railway were enclosed to be more attractive when running on the city streets and were less likely to frighten horses. Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

Such a "Motor Line" was built to serve early-day Minneapolis suburbanites living near Lake Calhoun in the late 1870s. Later the line was extended to Excelsior, and countless numbers rode the little narrow-gauge cars either home or to a day of frolic and picnic at one of the many lakes along the line.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

June 21, 1878 was probably an ordinary day for the times, but for our small railway it was the beginning as Colonel William McCrory and his associates incorporated the Lyndale Railway Company to build "from a point within the city limits of the City of Minneapolis to at or near Lake Calhoun in Hennepin County, Minnesota." The city limits at this time were 26th Street east of Nicollet and Franklin Avenue to the west.

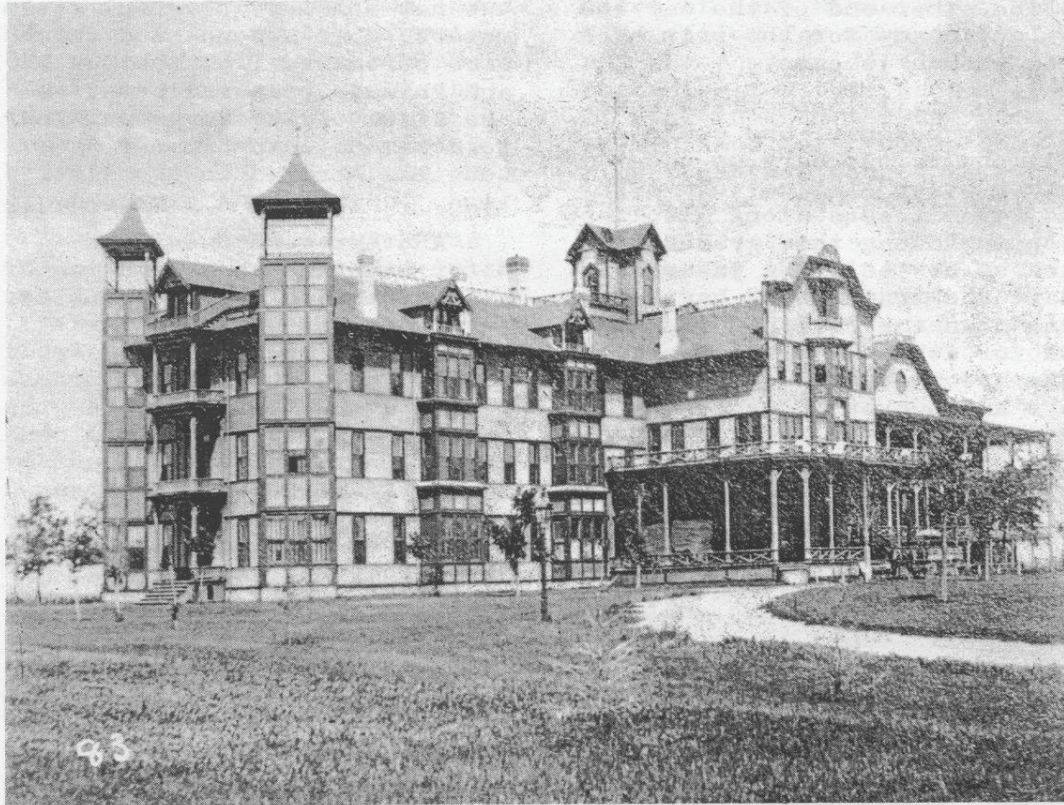
The company's name was taken from the small settlement that was developing on the east side of Lake Calhoun, and named after William S. King's Lyndale stock farms.

The first problem our little company faced was obtaining permission to build upon the city streets, a right the Minneapolis City Council had three years previously given to the Minneapolis Street Railway as an exclusive franchise. On July 3, 1878, the Street Railway Company exercised its rights to build a line from First and Nicollet (Bridge Square) to First Avenue South (now Marquette), along First to 13th Street, back to Nicollet, and then southward along Nicollet to the City limits.

After some negotiation, the Lyndale Railway leased the route from the Street Railway



End of the Line for the Lyndale Railway in 1879 was at 34th Street. Later the track was extended to Lake Harriet and finally to Excelsior on Lake Minnetonka. William S. King's Lyndale Hotel is visible in the background just to the left of the "motor". Photo courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.



William S. King's Lyndale Hotel at Lake Calhoun. Passengers of the Motor Line found this a welcome place to stay during the summer months. Today this site is occupied by the Greek Church. Courtesy of the Bromley Collection of the Minneapolis Public Library.

Company for 43 years at the very large rental of one dollar per year. One of the provisions of the lease was that at least six trains a day had to be run over the line in each direction. Another condition was that the line must be in operation by July 1, 1879.

Construction moved ahead along the prescribed route, and from the city limits the track continued southward along what was to become Nicollet Avenue until it reached 31st Street, whereupon it curved to the west. The line followed along 31st until just beyond Irving Avenue where the track again turned south until it came to a terminus on the east shore of

Lake Calhoun at about 34th Street, some 4-1/2 miles from Bridge Square. It was here too that the company erected its shops.

The line was placed in operation during early 1879 with two small steam motors and two closed passenger cars. The cars had benches along each side and would accommodate about sixty passengers. Typical operations called for a train to leave each terminal every 45 minutes and were to meet and pass each other at side tracks installed at 24th and Nicollet. Upon reaching the end of a run, the motor would be simply uncoupled from its car and "run around" it on a short track for the purpose, coupled

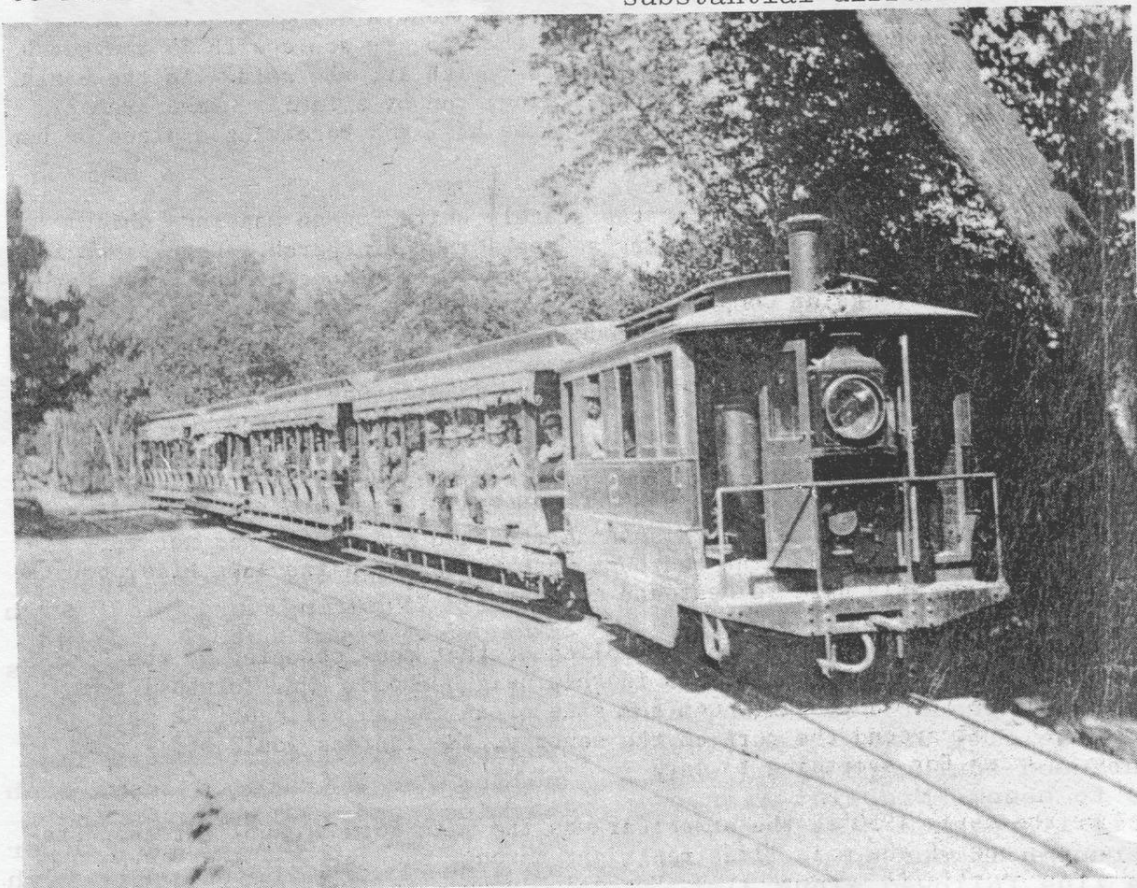
to the other end of the car and was now ready for the trip back from whence it came.

The small locomotives were not very powerful and could only pull one or two cars up the rather steep hill between 19th and 24th Streets along Nicollet. Stopping along this grade to pick up or let off a passenger meant the train would have to back down the hill and "make a run for it." Needless to say, many are the stories of young boys and buckets of grease creating havoc with the schedule and good nature of the enginemen.

In 1880, Colonel McCrory extended the line another mile to Lake Harriet and purchased

two new and more powerful steam motors. Some second-hand coaches were purchased from the New York and Philadelphia railways, and the first of the "open-air" cars to accommodate the summer tourists arrived on the little line.

Another venture of the Motor Line was the operation of a steamboat on Lake Calhoun as an attempt to attract tourist business to the railway. In March, 1879, the Legislature passed a law that permitted the Lyndale Railway to build a canal connecting Lakes Calhoun and Harriet, and to operate steamboats upon them. The canal venture came to naught when it was discovered there was a substantial difference in



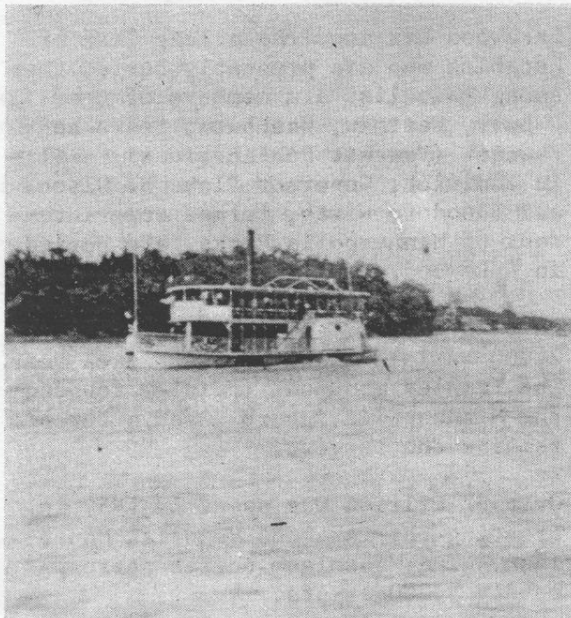
Excursion train at Lake Calhoun in the '80s. The open air cars were very popular with summer tourists. The little railway company carried capacity crowds to Lakes Calhoun and Harriet during the summer months, and later to Lake Minnetonka and Minnehaha Falls. Photo from the Bromley Collection of the Minneapolis Public Library.

elevation between the two lakes. However, for a number of years, the company did operate a small side-wheel steamer, named the "Hattie," to various points around the lake where hotels, boarding houses and picnic grounds were established.

The steamboat service was never very successful and in the early 1890s when the tourist traffic substantially declined, the boat was stripped of its machinery, and one summer night it was towed to the middle of the lake and set afire, providing a rare sight for the numerous shorside spectators.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The Motor Line was doing quite well by 1881, carrying some 250,000 passengers per year to Lakes Calhoun and Harriet, so well that Colonel McCrory and his associates decided to expand their little narrow-gauge railway empire by building westward to the great summer tourist



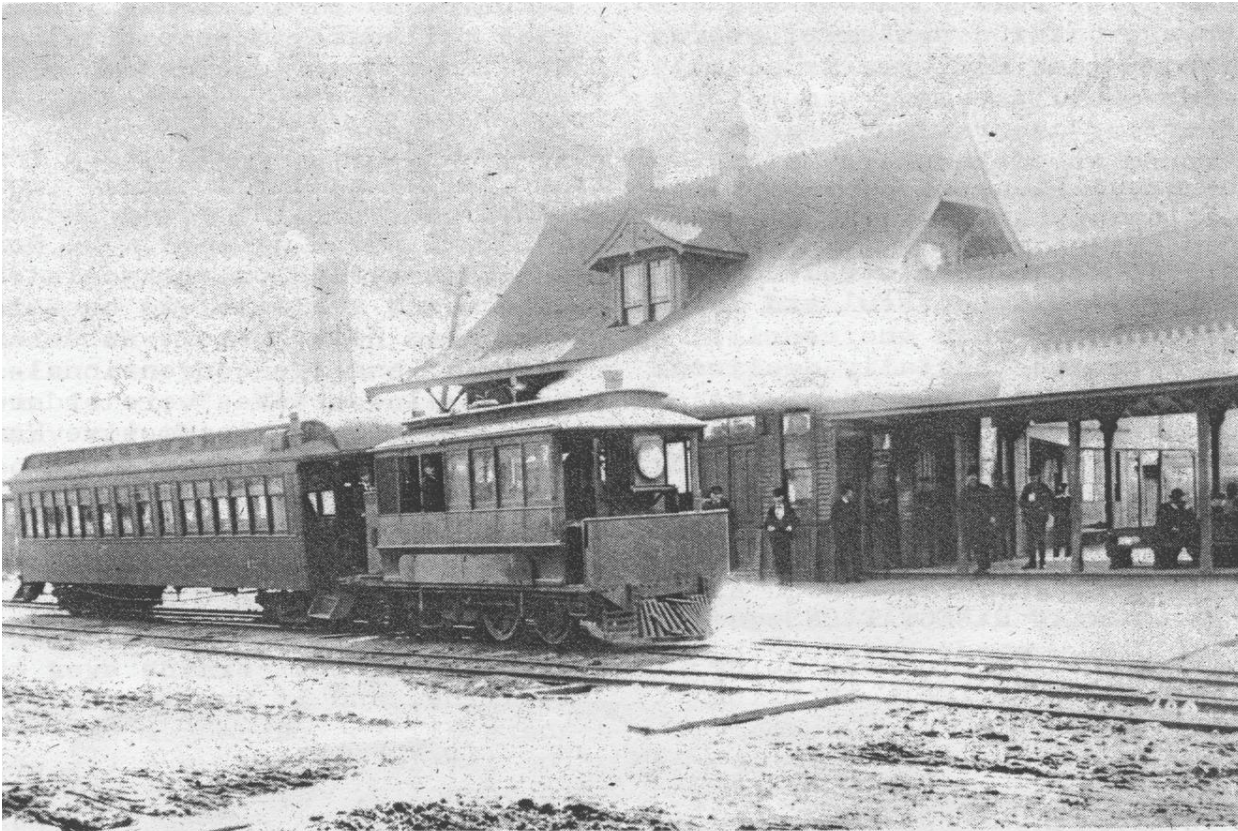
This side-wheel steamboat, the HATTIE operated on Lake Calhoun in the 1880s. Courtesy of the Bromley Collection of the Minneapolis Public Library.

haven of Lake Minnetonka. This also called for more capital and the company decided to recharter for this purpose. It also took on the new name of Minneapolis, Lyndale and Minnetonka Railway to tell the world of its new ambitions.

This extension to Excelsior also meant the line was becoming more than just a short suburban railway, and two conventional-looking locomotives were ordered from the Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia to operate on the fourteen miles of track being built. The new line was opened to regular service on July 20, 1882.

A Sunday school picnic was one of the first trains over the new line, and it was an excursion where all the passenger cars of the little railway were filled to capacity. All went well until the train reached Purgatory where the track was found to be impassable, and the passengers had to walk the last few miles to Excelsior. Repairs could not readily be made, and a special train had to be sent to retrieve the tired picnickers over the Minneapolis and St. Louis line.

The Minnetonka run was to become a very railroady operation. A motor train arriving at Lake Calhoun would have the engine replaced with one of the new Baldwin's, and the miniature train would chug off for what one account calls the "scenic wonders of passing over and through the Minnetonka Mountains, passing the celebrated Purgatory Springs, and beautiful Christmas Lake." Finally the train would arrive in Excelsior where the track terminated at the docks at the foot of Water Street. The passengers would then make their way to one of the local hotels or take one of the many steamboats to some other point on the lake. The little locomotive would be uncoupled



Motor Line train at the depot located at Nicollet Avenue and 31st Street about 1887. This was a busy place on the railroad and one could take a train from here to Minneapolis, Excelsior or Minnehaha Falls. Photo from Bromley Collection of the Minneapolis Public Library.

from its train and ceremoniously turned on a turntable to be ready for the return trip to the city.

McCrory was not happy to share the traveler's money with the steamers. He ordered a steamboat from the Dubuque Iron Works in Iowa to remedy this problem. The boat was sent up in pieces and assembled at the spot of launching on Solberg's Point. It was the only steel hull boat to have been launched on Minnetonka during the steamboat days. The "Clyde" as the new boat was named, had a look of instability about it, and actually acquired a list as it accelerated, a point the other steamer captains emphasized at any opportunity. It was not a popular boat, and the dream of

a Minnetonka fleet vanished for our little line when it was sold and moved to Yellowstone Lake where it operated rather successfully for several years.

The new track was scarcely in service when Colonel McCrory proposed that the line be extended to Hutchinson, but this would not be for a few years and after the Colonel had lost control of the Motor Line.

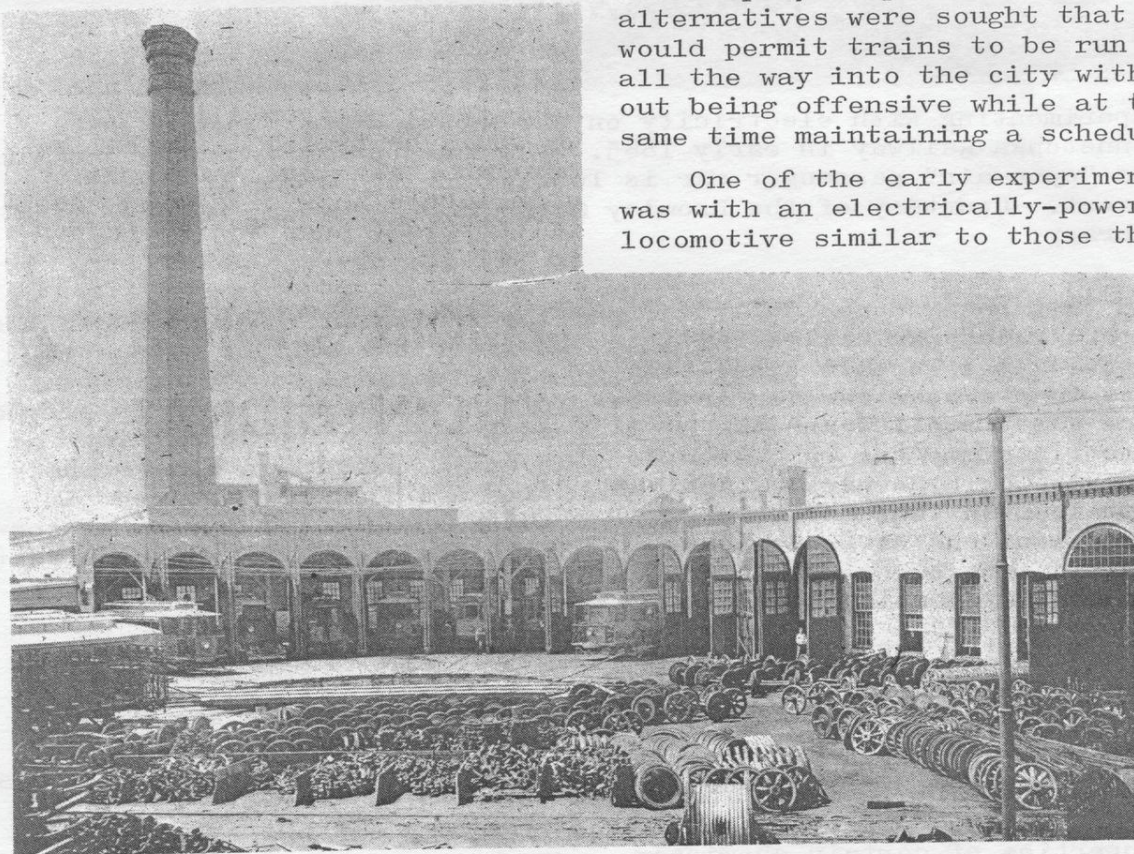
Lesser ambitions were the order of the day, though, and the following year, 1883, it was decided to build the line to Minnehaha Falls and Fort Snelling. A separate company, the Minneapolis, Minnehaha and Fort Snelling Railway, was organized to build the new branch. Construction was south along

Nicollet to 37th Street, east along 37th until the Milwaukee Railroad tracks were reached, and thence south following the broad-gauge tracks to Minnehaha Falls where the track finally ended. The completed extension was then absorbed into the parent company in November of 1884.

The main shops of the Motor Line were moved about this time from Lake Calhoun to the area of 31st and Nicollet. This was a natural center from which the operations of the railway could go in any direction. Today, this same site is the location of MTC bus garages and offices.

NEIGHBOR TROUBLES

While the Motor Line was

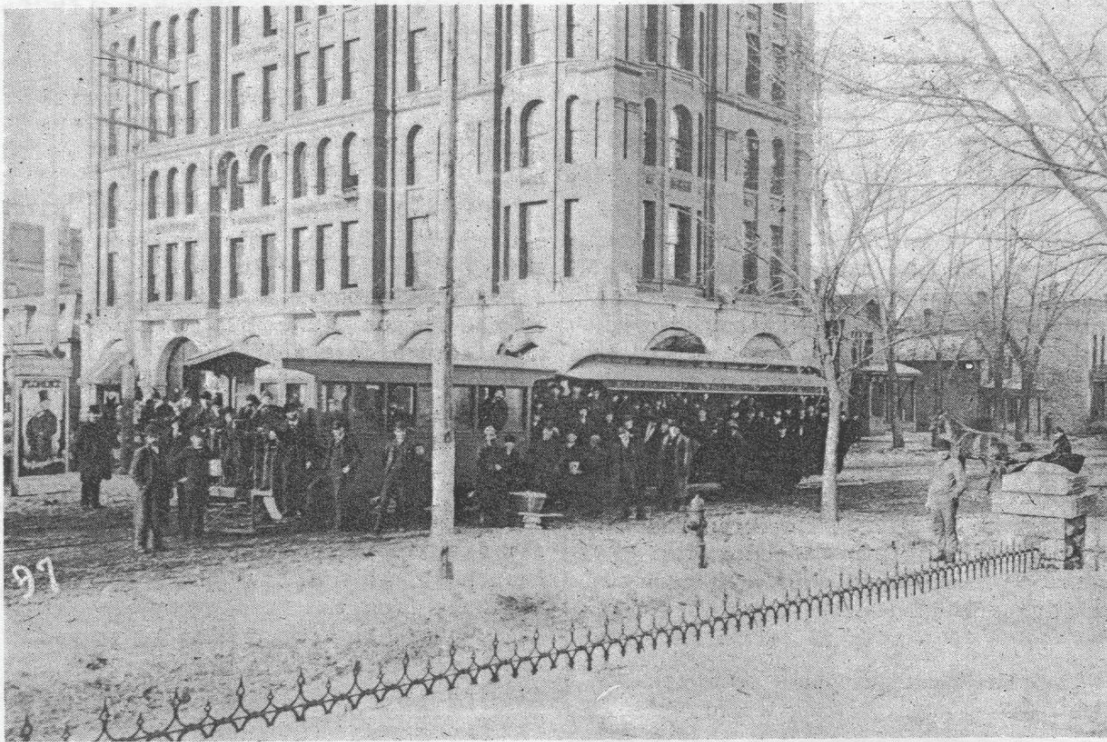


Roundhouse at 31st Street Junction about 1901. This large structure was built for the Motor Line about 1885 to house and repair the equipment. It was later used, as seen here, to service the trolley cars of the Street Railway Company. E. A. Brush photograph from the Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.

opening up south Minneapolis to settlement, those who lived along the line on lower Marquette were not entirely happy with having steam trains throwing cinders and smoking in their front yards. Many complaints were directed to the city to have the Motor Line discontinue steam train operations on the city streets.

Dissatisfaction, of course, grew with the increasing traffic of the line, and finally the city forced the railway to stop steam operations below Washington Avenue. The cars would be uncoupled from the motors at this point and then hauled by horses to the end of the line. More complaints led to the stopping of the motors farther and farther up Marquette. This became a real problem for the company's operations and alternatives were sought that would permit trains to be run all the way into the city without being offensive while at the same time maintaining a schedule.

One of the early experiments was with an electrically-powered locomotive similar to those that



Experimenting with electricity on the Minneapolis, Lyndale and Minnetonka Railway in early 1885. The Van Depoele electric engine and "open-air" passenger car is located on Marquette at Fourth Street. Courtesy of the Bromley Collection, Minneapolis Public Library.

had just been successfully demonstrated by Charles Van Depoele at a Toronto Exposition less than a year earlier in 1884. Wire was installed and one small electric dummy was purchased to haul the cars downtown. The Van Depoele motor was not very successful on the Motor Line, and the management was very soon looking for something else.

A type of steam engine that was developed in Germany became the focus of the next experiment in April of 1886. The engine did not have a fire to generate steam in the boiler, but rather relied on the heat-retaining properties of certain chemicals, especially caustic soda, to produce the necessary steam for propulsion. Four of these "soda motors" were ordered to carry

the trains into the downtown area, however the builder made some modifications to the original plans, and when placed in service, were found to perform rather poorly. In only a few months' time all four had been put in the shops for rebuilding as conventional motors, and the streets again had to suffer the effects of cinders and smoke.

END OF THE LINE

The Motor Line was by 1885 simply overextended on credit and all the anticipated revenues that expansion was supposed to bring did not materialize. The basic problem was that most of the traffic was carrying passengers during only a few short summer months, and no freight business at all. In

July, Colonel McCrory was forced to resign, and a new management took over the task of trying to make the little railway a paying venture.

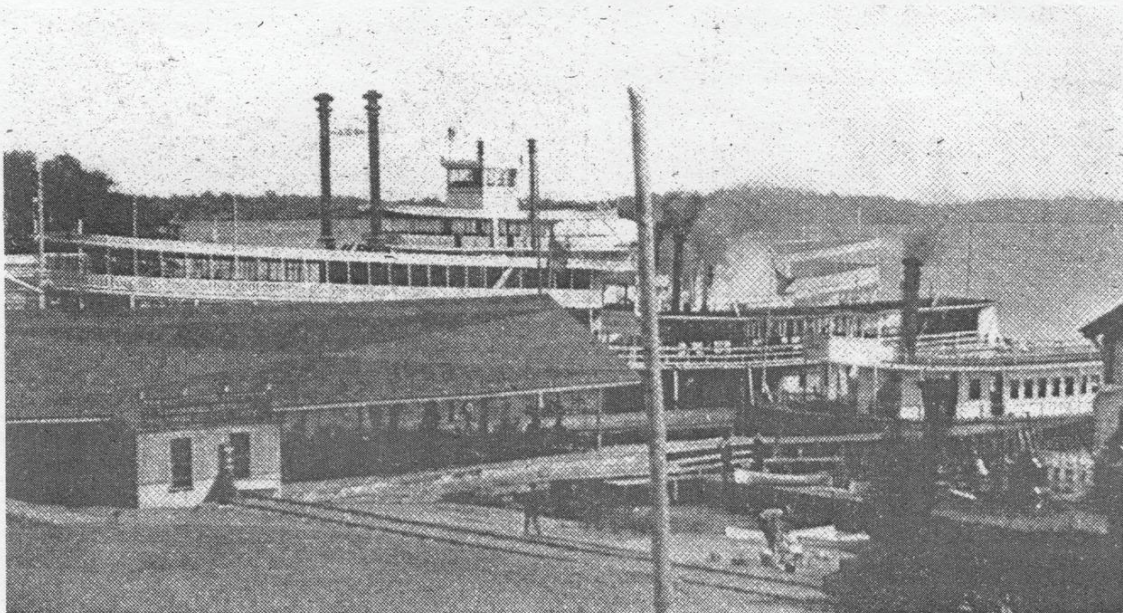
Additional troubles came when James J. Hill and his St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba wanted to build a branch line to Hutchinson. Apparently Hill was not very anxious to have it known that he was involved in building the line, and quietly bought into the Minneapolis, Lyndale and Minnetonka because it had previously announced its intentions to build to that point. In August of 1886, the narrow gauge trains stopped running beyond Hopkins, and by December the Manitoba road had changed the track to broad gauge and was now operating its own trains to Hutchinson over its "new" line.

April, 1887 saw the last of the Motor Line as a separate company when it was leased to the Minneapolis Street Railway.

The problem of cinders and smoke was still with the new operators, but new innovations were planned. One of these was the installation of cable lines similar to those that still operate in San Francisco. New experiments with the use of electricity elsewhere had also been very successful, in fact so successful that the idea of cable cars was dropped, and conversion of both the Motor Line and the horse car lines of the Street Railway Company were begun in earnest. The gauge was also widened to that of standard width at the same time.

Finally on August 19, 1890, the last steam train made its way down Marquette and Nicollet Avenues. An era of transportation had ended; a way of life was changing. The trolley car had come, and Minneapolis was growing up.

* * *



Excelsior docks in 1886 showing several of the Lake Minnetonka steamboats waiting to receive passengers from the Motor Line train that can be seen arriving at the lower right. Reprinted with permission from John C. Burton.