

## Shocking death toll – Struck by Trolley (part two)

As detailed in my previous column, safety at the street crossings of the interurban electric trolley operated by the Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern Railroad was a significant problem. At least 25 people between 1906 and 1927 were killed in Perinton or within a few miles east or west of town.



*R.S. & E. trolley at the crossing of Pittsford Palmyra Road in Egypt*

As more residents of Perinton acquired automobiles, the risk of accidents with trains and the trolley grew. Blame was placed squarely on the shoulders of motorists and pedestrians, as illustrated in this excerpt from the Fairport Herald newspaper of November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1910: "If the public would exercise the same care and caution to preserve its own life and limb that the railroad company does to save it from harm, the number of accidents of all kinds would be materially reduced each year. Almost every motorman on the road has a daily record of narrow escapes due to the foolhardy attempts of persons to drive or walk across our tracks ahead of oncoming limited trains."

Perhaps the most horrific crash between an automobile and trolley in Perinton occurred in 1915 at the rural trolley stop at Ayrault Road. Frank S. Kenyon, pastor of the Fairport First Baptist Church, invited three ladies of the church to join him for a ride in the country in his new

car. As they were returning from Egypt heading westbound on Ayrault Road, he slowed the car as it approached the double tracks of the R.S. & E. trolley. The crossing at this location was considered by many to be one of the most dangerous on the line. A sharp curve in the tracks and an apple orchard obstructed the view, making it difficult to see an approaching westbound trolley car. No safety devices such as gates or flashing lights were used at these country crossings.

The Kenyon car waited as a westbound trolley crossed Ayrault Road. The lone surviving passenger in the car would later testify that Kenyon then looked to confirm that the tracks were clear in other direction. Seeing nothing, he accelerated his car to cross the tracks. Frank Kenyon never dreamed that a second westbound trolley was fast approaching. The automobile was struck and pushed into the trolley shelter, the passengers thrown from the car. The speed of the trolley as it approached the tracks was estimated at 55 miles per hour. Two of the women, May Gray and Elizabeth Bort, were killed instantly. Anna Moore and Frank Kenyon were transported on the next westbound trolley to a hospital in Rochester, where Kenyon died.

Twelve years later, what may have been the last trolley-related death in our area was blanketed in cruel irony. George Higbie created Perinton's Midvale housing development, marketing it for its convenient proximity to stop number 11 on the R.S. & E. line. It was here in 1927 that his wife tripped and fell on the tracks, and was killed by an approaching trolley.

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