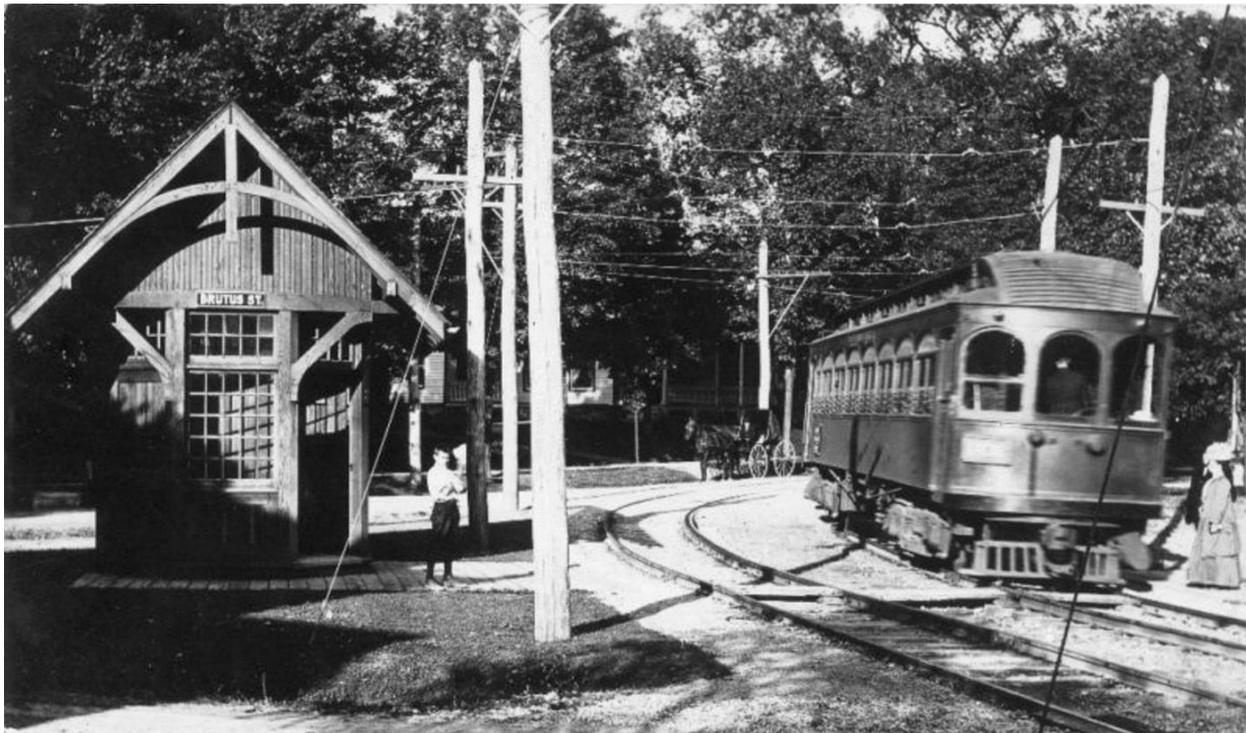


Shocking Pedestrian Death Toll – Struck by the Trolley

The Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern Railroad operated its electric trolley through Perinton from 1906 to 1931. Ten trolley stops were established, including the station at 23 North Main Street. The trolley provided fast and convenient transportation to the communities on the line. But the introduction of the high speed electric railway brought with it serious safety problems. Newspaper reports during the years the R.S.& E. was in operation have revealed the deaths of at least 25 pedestrians between 1906 and 1927. All were struck and killed in Perinton or within three miles east or west of town.

The first death occurred soon after the trolley cars started running in 1906. Herbert Skinkle was driving a horse and buggy on the R.S.& E. tracks when he was struck during a heavy rainstorm. Both he and his horse were killed instantly. From 1909 to 1910 five people were killed in separate accidents in little more than a year. In many cases, the victims were waiting for the arrival of the electric train when they were struck and killed. Cars classified as “Limited” picked up passengers only at the bigger stations, not the small country stops. Many of those killed probably didn’t recognize that the approaching car was a Limited, and believed it was slowing to pick them up as they crossed the tracks. The would-be passengers were often hit while crossing the tracks to reach the loading platform.



R.S.& E. trolley at a rural station. Passengers had to cross the dual tracks in order to board the car on the far set of tracks.

Several factors combined to make for a perilous situation for pedestrians. The cars were fast, often reaching 64 miles per hour, and they were relatively quiet. In addition, because the trolley cars travelled independently, they were more difficult to see than a traditional train. Finally, the route included fairly sharp curves, so an approaching car might not be seen soon enough to avoid a tragedy.

As the death toll continued to rise, an essay was published in the local newspaper, painting the problem as entirely due to the negligence of the general public. It began with the following statement:

“Disturbed by the increasing recklessness shown by people attempting to cross its tracks ahead of its fast Limited trains which has recently resulted in several losses of life, the management of the Rochester, Syracuse & Eastern Railroad has begun an educational campaign intended to impress the public with the great danger that accompanies such an act. Within a comparatively short time no less than three women have met instant death while endeavoring to cross the company’s double tracked railroad ahead of the approaching limited trains. In each case these accidents occurred at rural stops where the limited cars make no stops and in each case the testimony of disinterested witnesses has demonstrated beyond all question that the accident was solely due to the gross negligence of the person killed.”

To Be Continued

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