Guide to the Chicago Surface Lines Drawings

NMAH.AC.0212
David A. Stevens and Robert S. Harding
August 1986
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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title: Chicago Surface Lines Drawings
Identifier: NMAH.AC.0212
Date: 1880-1948
Extent: 4.6 Cubic feet (13 oversized folders)
Creator: Chicago City Railway Company.
West Chicago Street Railroad Company.
Transportation, Division of, NMAH, SI.
Pennsylvania & West Virginia Railway.
Chicago Transit Authority.
Chicago Surface Lines.
Language: English

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information
Gift of the Chicago Transit Authority.

Provenance
Transferred to the Archives Center from the Division of Transportation on July 2, 1996.

Related Materials

Materials at Other Organizations
The Chicago Historical Society
Holds approximately 13 cubic feet of materials documenting the Chicago Surface Lines, 1857-1951. The materials include minute books, corporate records, account books, agreements, correspondence, contracts, ordinances, patents, memoranda, stock certificates, bank statements, and blueprints.

Processing Information
Collection processed by David Stevens and Robert Harding, August 1986

Preferred Citation
Restrictions
Collection is open for research.

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Biographical / Historical

The first street cars in Chicago were horse cars run by the Chicago City railway Company and the North Chicago City railway Company around 1858-1861. This method, however, was slow and expensive, and the companies began substituting cable cars in the 1880s. Chicago City was the first railway company in 1881, with the addition of the Chicago Passenger Railway in 1883, and the West Chicago Street Railroad Company in 1887. Chicago had the largest cable railway system in the world.

In the 1880s, electric powered trolleys first became practical. The Chicago companies hesitated at first to install these faster and more efficient systems because of their heavy investment in cable cars. Smaller Illinois cities and the Calumet Electric Street Railway of the South Side of the city built successful systems, causing the Chicago companies to feel themselves dropping behind. By the mid 1890s most companies began the conversion to electricity.

The 1890s saw the consolidation of many of the Chicago companies and through this reorganization continued into the next century. In 1905 the city voted that the surface railways should come under municipal ownership but not operation, provided the companies rehabilitate their systems, and give the city the right to buy the property at a fixed value. In addition, new construction was to be approved by a new bureau, the Board of Traction Supervising Engineers.

The continuous reorganization was finally completed by the Unification Ordinance of 1913 which stipulated that all lines would come under the management of a single operating company called the Chicago Surface Lines (CSL). Four companies made up the CSL-the Chicago Railways Company, Chicago City Railway, Calumet and South Chicago Railway, and Southern Street Railway. At this time Chicago had the largest street railway system, the longest one-fare ride, the longest average ride, and the most liberal transfer privileges in the world.

The 1920s saw continued growth despite the increasing competition from the automobile, but the Depression dealt a heavy blow to traffic. By 1948 the Chicago Transit Authority, which took over the Chicago Surface Lines in 1927, had abandoned all but four lines in favor of buses. By 1958 the remaining lines were “bustituted.”

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of blueprints, working drawings, line drawings, tracings, and plans of the Chicago Surface Railway system from 1896-1926; 1948. The majority of the drawings are on linen and are 24" x 36" or larger. Some of the drawings are annotated. The drawing number, title of drawing and the date are provided for each sheet.
Arrangement

The collection is divided into seven series:

- Series 1: West Chicago Street Railroad Company
- Series 2: Chicago Board of Traction Supervising Engineers/Chicago Railway Company
- Series 3: Chicago Traction System (Car Drawings)
- Series 4: Chicago Cable Blueprints
- Series 5: Chicago Union Traction Company
- Series 6: Pennsylvania & West Virginia Railway
- Series 7: Miscellaneous

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:
- Cable railroads
- Civil engineering
- Civil engineers
- Engineering and technology
- Railroad engineers
- Railroads
- Railroads -- Buildings and structures
- Railroads -- Equipment and facilities
- Railroads -- Rolling-stock

Types of Materials:
- Blueprints
- Drawings
- Tracings

Names:
- Chicago Board of Traction Supervising Engineers.
- Chicago Consolidated Traction Company.
- Chicago Railways Company.
- Chicago Union Traction Company.
- D.T. Steelwork Company.
- Garden City Construction Company.
- Gilbert Car Manufacturing Company.
- Lake Street Elevated Railroad (Chicago, Ill.).
- North Chicago Street Railroad Company.
- Transportation, Division of, NMAH, SI.
- United States Construction Company.

Geographic Names:
- Chicago (Ill.)
Container Listing

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