



Smithsonian
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Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Chicago Surface Lines Drawings

NMAH.AC.0212

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Collection Overview | 1 |
| Administrative Information | 1 |
| Biographical / Historical..... | 2 |
| Scope and Contents..... | 2 |
| Arrangement..... | 3 |
| Names and Subjects | 3 |
| Container Listing | 4 |
| Series 1: West Chicago Street Railroad Company, 1880-1895..... | 4 |
| Series 2: Chicago Board of Traction Supervising Engineers/Chicago City Railway Company, 1905-1916..... | 12 |
| Series 3: Chicago Traction System (car Drawings), 1908-1916..... | 13 |
| Series 4: Chicago Cable Blueprints, 1887-1891..... | 14 |
| Series 5: Chicago Union Traction Company, 1900-1908..... | 15 |
| Series 6: Pennsylvania and West Virginia Railway, 1948..... | 16 |
| Series 7: Miscellaneous, 1883-1940..... | 17 |

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

Chicago Surface Lines Drawings, 1880-1948, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

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

Series 1: West Chicago Street Railroad Company, 1880-1895

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 325 Grip chair July 30, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 327 Plan of grip August 3, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 336 Rack, lever, and grip connection in position on car September 14, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 337 Grip lever November 8, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. 342 9" shaft and idlers n.d. |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. 345 Grip September 7, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. 350 Detail 18" carrying fulley October 26, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 353 4 foot elevating and depressing wheel November 10, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 354 List of machinery used for all vaults n.d. |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 355 Grip and lever movement December 4, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 356 Engine shaft for 20" x 48" engine for auxiliary cable November 29, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 357 Foundation for 20" x 48" engine for auxiliary cable, Madison & Rockwell Streets December 12, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 358 Details for tension for vault no. 1 December 10, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. #359 Detail of oil pan under 2 & 3 groove wheels for 12" shaft in vault no. 1, November 25, 1889 |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 360 Elevating wheels, shafts, steel beam frame and journal boxes for south track of vault no. 2, n.d. |
| Map-folder 1 | Dwg. # 361 8" wheel [November 13, 1889?] |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 363 6" bearing and 8" collar for elevating and depressing wheels n.d. |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. #366 Details of caps, channel-iron, oil pan, and plate. For 12" shafts in vault no. 1 December 19, 1889 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 382 Tension carriage for station cable, Madison & Rockwell Streets Station, February 22, 1880 |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 384 Casting for tension carriage station cable, Madison & Rockwell Streets, February 22, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. #385 8 foot idler with segment rim for vault no. 9 February 25, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 386 Bracket for 4 foot elevating wheel station cable, Madison & Rockwell Streets February 26, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. #387 Chairs for yokes and horizontal boxes in elevating pits of vault no. 4, February 25, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 388 10 foot idler with segment rim for vault no. 9 February 25, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 389 Journal box for 4 feet depression wheel station cable, Madison & Rockwell Streets March 1, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. #390 Sole plate and extension piece for elevator main counter shaft station cable, Madison & Rockwell Streets March 4, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 391 Tension gear for station cable, Madison & Rockwell Streets March 12, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 392 Shafts and boxes for elevating wheels, vault no. 4 March 31, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. 393 South Box for inclined elevating wheel, south track vault no. 4 March 21, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 394 Box for stationary shaft for 4 foot elevating wheel n.d. |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 395 13 foot idler for vault no. 6 showing change required on 12 foot pattern, n.d. |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 396 Shafts for 4 foot elevating and depressing wheels for vaults nos. 6 and 7 subways on Washington Street April 15, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. # 397 42" depression wheels and shafts for west curve, Madison Street station cable April 18, 1890 |
| Map-folder 2 | Dwg. #399 Guide wheel details for renewing cable, Madison Street Station May 12, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. #400 Arrangement of wheels for taking in old cable, Madison Street Station May 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 401 Details of gear for renewing cable May 19, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 402 3 foot special sheave May 20, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 403 18" rope wheel for Madison Street Station May 22, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 404 Details of structure for reels for renewing cable, Madison Street Station May 24, 1890 |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 406 Support for guide wheel for renewing cable, Madison Street Station June 3, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 407 Details for guide wheel for taking in old cable, Madison Street Station June 5, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 408 Reels for taking in old cable, Madison Street Station June 6, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. #410 Guide wheel arrangements for renewing cable, Washington Street Station June 9, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. #411 Hanger for wheel no. 19, Washington & Jefferson Streets June 9, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 412 Tar tank for West Chicago Street Railroad power houses June 18, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 414 Vault machinery pattern list for West Chicago Street Railroad Company n.d. |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 415 18" idler for 20" x 40" engine, Madison Street Station July 10, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. #416 Tar tank for vault no. 1 July 18, 1890 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. #417 Brass collar B between 8 foot wheels in vault no. 1 July 20, 1889 |
| Map-folder 3 | Dwg. # 419 Reel and driving gear for taking in old cable at Madison & Rockwell Streets Station October 13, 1890 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 421 Details of reel and driving gear for taking in old cable at Madison & Rockwell Streets Station October 15, 1890 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 422 Details of winding drum for Madison & Rockwell Street Station October 28, 1890 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # B-422 Proposed signal tower on street railway pole, northwest corner of Harrison & Halstead Streets November 1895 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 423 Proposed change of 12 foot idler November 18, 1890 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 424 Details for 8 foot idlers of loop cable at 40th Street April 3, 1891 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 425 Extension plate for lower veering vault no. 1 n.d. |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 426 18" idler and shafts for vault no. 1 at 40th Street loop cable April 15, 1891 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 427 Details for 4 foot guide wheels at southeast corner of power station no. 4 August 18, 1891 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 428 Ticket Furnance August 20, 1891 |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 429 Details for new 12 and 13 foot wheels at vault no. 6 September 14, 1891 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 431 Machinery plan for power station no. 4 September 17, 1891 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. #432 12 and 13 foot idlers September 18, 1891 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 436 Position of Des Plaines Street cable and conduit in boiler room of Jefferson Street power house September 25, 1891 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 437 Details for 4 foot guide wheels at southeast corner of power station no. 4 September 25, 1891 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 438 Plan for setting templates for guide wheels in alley and wheels in extension of vault no. 5 September 29, 1891 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 439 Wall bracket in Jefferson Street station engine room Des Plaines Street cable November 7, 1891 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 441 Shafts for carrier wheel in Jefferson Street station for cable of power station no. 4 n.d. |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 442 Power station at 12th Street and Blue Island Avenue n.d. |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. #442 (companion sheet) Blue Island Avenue and 12th Street power station January 22, 1892 |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 442 (companion sheet) Cross section through boiler room n.d. |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 442-B Smoke stack for Blue Island Avenue & 12th Street power station n.d. |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 446 (companion sheet to dwg. 445?) Longitudinal section through tension run and street vault n.d. |
| Map-folder 4 | Dwg. # 447 (companion sheet to dwg. 445?) Cross section BB n.d. |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. #525 Grip with list of pieces n.d. |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. #526 Wheels on hand n.d. |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. # 607 Sections through manhole and conduit July 18, 1888 |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. # 609A Manhole yoke June 27, 1888 |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. # 610 Grip hatch yoke July 26, 1888 |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. #617 Grip hatch yoke for curve end August 23, 1888 |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. #623 Special manhole yoke for Washington Street tunnel February 3, 1890 |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. #624 Curved section C-R tunnel October 23, 1888 |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. #649 Details of girders for steam and railroad crossing of Rockwell & Madison Street November 19, 1889 |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. # 656 Curve casting n.d. |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. # 659 Masonry of vault at Madison & Jefferson Streets n.d. |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. # 665 Cable crossing n.d. |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. #678 Masonry of vault at Washington & Jefferson Streets n.d. |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. # 679 Masonry of vault at Milwaukee Avenue & Cleaver Street n.d. |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. #684 Vault No. 9 for auxiliary cable in alley on Madison & Rockwell Streets station December 9, 1889 |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. # 685 Details of girders for steam and cable railroad crossing of C.M. and St. Paul Railroad and Milwaukee Avenue October 23, 1889 |
| Map-folder 5 | Dwg. #694 Vault no. 3 for auxiliary cable east of Madison Street station December 27, 1889 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 700A Covering frames and plates for cables crossings on State Street loop n.d. |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 704 Subway at Madison & Rockwell Streets (proposed change) November 7, 1889 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 726 Vault no. 1, plan and elevation of auxiliary vault at 40th & Madison Streets n.d. |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 727 Vault no. 4 showing beams, yokes, and slot rail in position , also brick walls for cable conduit November 20, 1889 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 754 Vault no. 1 plan and elevation of track over auxiliary vault at 40th & Madison Streets n.d. |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 760 General plan of curve plates, corner of Washington 7 Jefferson Streets December 9, 1889 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 769 Switch details and yoke number 30, Washington & Jefferson Streets n.d. |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 862 Switch details and built up yokes over vault no. 3 to curve line February 11, 1890 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 862A Yoke no. 8 for left hand turnout on Washington & Des Plaines Streets September 24, 1890 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 863 Built up yokes over vault no. 3 to curve line February 12, 1890 |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 864 Built up yokes over vault no. 3 to curve line February 13, 1890 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 865 Built up yokes over vault no. 3 to curve line February 13, 1890 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 866 Built up yokes over vault no. 3 to curve line February 14, 1890 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 867 Section of line A.B. of drawing 726 of vault no. 1 February 15, 1890 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 868 Beam and machinery plan for station cable on Madison & Rockwell Streets February 19, 1890 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 872 Position of special yokes over vault no. 2 at Madison & Rockwell Streets December 18, 1889 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. #873 Vault no. 2 covering plates and frame over elevating wheel on south track between yokes 4 & 5 December 19, 1889 |
| Map-folder 6 | Dwg. # 880 Position of grip in conduit n.d. |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 903 Yoke no. 21, Washington & Jefferson Streets April 18, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 904 Curves of Washington & Jefferson Streets and special work between vaults nos. 6 & 7 April 19, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 905 Yoke no. 22, Washington and Jefferson Streets April 19, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 906 Paving plates for special yokes, Washington & Jefferson Streets April 24, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 907 Paving plates for special yokes, Washington & Jefferson Streets May 2, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 908 Yoke No. 43, Washington & Jefferson Streets April 21, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 909 Yoke no. 44, Washington & Jefferson Streets April 24, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 910 Yoke no. 45, Washington & Jefferson Streets April 24, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 911 Plans and elevations of vaults nos. 6 and 7 and subways between Washington & Jefferson Streets April 26, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 912 Column for supporting curve plate B1, Washington & Jefferson Streets April 29, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 913 Paving plates for special yokes, Washington & Jefferson Streets April 29, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. #915 Transfer table December 30, 1890 |
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 918 Madison Street turnout May 5, 1890 |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Map-folder 7 | Dwg. # 919 Elevation drawing to no. 918 May 6, 1890 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. #920 Elevating gear for examining pit, Madison Street Station May 6, 1890 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 940 List of duplicate wearing parts for West Chicago Street Railroad Company n.d. |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 947 Subways of vaults 6 & 7, Washington & Jefferson Streets October 23, 1889 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 975 Elevating wheel pits for vault no. 4 showing wheels, beams, and yokes in position n.d. |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 977 Built up yoke no. 23 for east curve at Madison Street Station February 25, 1890 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 986 Cable turnout at Armitage Avenue February 21, 1890 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 999 Vault no. 2 n.d. |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1013 Lever pit and masonry over vault no. 3 March 25, 1890 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1027 Built up yoke no. 2 for west curve at Madison Street Station cable April 8, 1890 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1123 Cable crossing at La Salle & Washington Street for State Street loop June 9, 1892 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1194 Safety device for Van Buren Street tunnel grade May 4, 1893 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1194A Safety device for Van Buren Street Tunnel grade July 1, 1893 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1212 Arrangement of differential rack in Van Buren Street tunnel September 26, 1893 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1220 Details for ord. manhole-yoke and cover for Van Buren Street tunnel September 15, 1893 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1222 General plan and elevation of road construction in Van Buren Street tunnel n.d. |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1343 Washington Street tunnel July 25, 1888 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1344 Washington Street tunnel July 7, 1888 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1346 Washington Street tunnel, profile showing grades March 1888 |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1348 Proposed alteration in grade, Washington Street tunnel n.d. |
| Map-folder 8 | Dwg. # 1350 Proposed alteration of Washington Street tunnel December 11, 1888 |

Map-folder 8 Dwg. # 1351 Washington Street tunnel profile showing grades July 10, 1888

Map-folder 8 Dwg. # 1555 Machinery stations house on Madison Street n.d.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Chicago Board of Traction Supervising Engineers/Chicago City Railway Company , 1905-1916

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-D-28 Car diagrams for St. Louis Car 1905 and 1907 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-2 Hand operated door opening device, pay as you enter April 8, 1908 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-3 Rolling stock, 34 foot construction car n.d. |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-4 Rolled steel car wheel, 34" diameter January 27, 1909 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-5 Half section of wheel March 9, 1909 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-6 Rolling stock, sketch showing step height n.d. |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-7 Rolling stock, sketch showing step height n.d. |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-8 Rolling stock, sketch showing step height n.d. |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-9 (supercedes dwg. #2-K-4 and dwg. # 2-K-5) Rolled steel car wheel, 34" diameter January 16, 1911 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-10 Rolling stock, P.A.Y.E. 44 foot car stress diagram May 31, 1911 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-11 Diagram showing method of measuring cars May 26, 1915 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-K-12 (supercedes dwg. # 2-K-11) Diagrams showing typical method of measuring car for determining areas September 25, 1916 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 2-L-1 Rolling stock equipment, 1909 railway motor, G.E. 216A December 14, 1909 |

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Chicago Traction System (car Drawings) , 1908-1916

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 3-K-1 Rolling stock, 36 foot steel construction car n.d. |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 3-K-2 Rolling stock, 25 cubic yard air dump car n.d. |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 3-K-3 Rolling stock, 25 cubic yard air dump car n.d. |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 3-K-4 Rolling stock, 1909 P.A.Y.E car, general drawing August 31, 1909 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 3-K-5 Rolling stock, 1909 P.A.Y.E. car, general drawing August 31, 1909 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 3-K-6 Rolling stock, 1908 P.A.Y.E. car under frame n.d. |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 3-K-7 Rolling stock, 1908 P.A.Y.E. car under frame n.d. |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 3-K-8 Rolling stock, 1910 P.A.Y.E. car under frame, general plan and elevation November 20, 1910 |
| Map-folder 9 | Dwg. # 3-K-9 Rolling stock, 1910 P.A.Y.E. car under frame, detail section and side framing November 25, 1910 |
| Map-folder 10 | Dwg. # 3-K-10 Rolling stock, 1910 P.A.Y.E. car under frame November 25, 1910 |
| Map-folder 10 | Dwg. # 3-K-11 Rolling stock, 1910 P.A.Y.E. car, hand brake rigging November 25, 1910 |
| Map-folder 10 | Dwg. # 3-K-12 Rolling stock, 1910 P.A.Y.E. car, general plan and elevations n.d. |
| Map-folder 10 | Dwg. # 3-K-27 St. Louis P.A.Y.E. & Chicago City Railroad Company, 1905 |
| Map-folder 10 | Dwg. # 3-K-28 Chicago Surface Lines 1914 car October 23, 1916 |

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Chicago Cable Blueprints, 1887-1891

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Map-folder 11 | Chicago City Railway Company Plan of sheaves at intersection of State & 22nd Streets n.d. |
| Map-folder 11 | Chicago City Railway Company State & Washington Streets n.d. |
| Map-folder 11 | Chicago City Railway Company Main operating department, State & 21st Streets n.d. |
| Map-folder 11 | Chicago City Railway Company Plan of ironwork in Cottage Grove Avenue at 39th Street n.d. |
| Map-folder 11 | Chicago City Railway Company Plan of wheel pit, 55th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue June 13, 1887 |
| Map-folder 11 | Chicago City Railway Company Plan of wheel vault in Wabash Avenue near Madison Street n.d. |
| Map-folder 11 | Chicago City Railway Company Plan and section of wheel vault at intersection of Wabash Avenue & 22nd Street n.d. |
| Map-folder 11 | Chicago City Railway Company Plan and section of wheel vault at intersection of Wabash Avenue & Cottage Grove Avenue and 22nd Street n.d. |
| Map-folder 11 | Dwg. # 14-3 West Chicago Street Railway Company Blue Island Viaduct, slot rail girder and cable conduit July 22, 1891 |
| Map-folder 11 | Dwg. # 14-4 West Chicago Street Railway Company Blue Island Avenue Viaduct, plan of middle span July 22, 1891 |
| Map-folder 11 | Dwg. # 14-5 West Chicago Street Railway Company Blue Island Avenue Viaduct, plan of truss system July 22, 1891 |
| Map-folder 11 | Dwg. # 14-6 West Chicago Street Railway Company Blue Island Avenue Viaduct, plan of south span July 22, 1891 |
| Map-folder 11 | Dwg # 15-3 West Chicago Street Railway Company South Halsted Street Viaduct, truss spans n.d. |
| Map-folder 11 | Dwg. # 15-4 West Chicago Street Railway Company South Halsted Street Viaduct n.d. |
| Map-folder 11 | West Chicago Street Railway Company Blue Island Avenue Viaduct, sections n.d. |

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Chicago Union Traction Company, 1900-1908

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Map-folder 12 | Dwg. # B-18 Plan showing location of electric conduit on Lasalle & Kinzie Streets June 30, 1905 |
| Map-folder 12 | Dwg. # B-903 Fuel track layout at Western Avenue power house September 15, 1900 |
| Map-folder 12 | Dwg. # B-977 Chicago City Iron tension carriage for rope drive, Edgewater power house May 27, 1901 |
| Map-folder 12 | Dwg. # C-2328 Chicago Consolidated Traction Company Change of original pattern of bearing for 750 KW generator March 31, 1905 |
| Map-folder 12 | Dwg. # C-2552 Proposed new underground work February 15, 1904 |
| Map-folder 12 | Dwg. # C-2553 Propose new underground work February 17, 1904 |
| Map-folder 12 | Dwg. # C-4101 List of parts of hor. Tandem compound engine December 2, 1904 |
| Map-folder 12 | Dwg. # C-4220 Chicago City End bearing 465 KW generator February 4, 1908 |

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: Pennsylvania and West Virginia Railway , 1948

Map-folder 13

Dwg. # F-1629 Connellsville-Pittsburgh Junction, Type L Form 506A system
October 6, 1948

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 7: Miscellaneous, 1883-1940

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # 153 North Chicago Street Railroad Company Tension carriage and tension frame September 30, 1886 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # A-226 General plan of foundations engines and winding machinery November 1887 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # 1-P-2 D.T. Steel passenger car 1908 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # 1-P-102 Drawings of assorted cars from various companies with loads n.d. |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # 3-0-336 Floor plans of six railroad cars November 5, 1940 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # 3-C-6 Double truck double end safety car no. 3092 July 10, 1926 |
| Map-folder 13 | Patent #404,373 Car brake by W.L. Abbot & V.C. Killin June 4, 1889 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # B-552 Garden City Construction Company Detail showing cable openings in tower for electric power station September 20, 1894 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # RS-4001 Lake Street Elevated Railroad Standard passenger car July 18, 1895 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # RS-4001A Gilbert Car Manufacturing Co./Lake Street Elevated Railroad Lake Street elevated railroad passenger car November 1883 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # RS 4002 Standard passenger car July 19, 1895 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # RS 4003 Lake Street Elevated Railroad Passenger car, gas and vacuum brake, piping lettering, striping August 17, 1895 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # A-123 Cicero & Proviso Street Railway Company Proposed addition to electric power station March 22, 1895 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # A-125 Cicero & Proviso Street Railway Company Proposed electric power station March 22, 1895 |
| Map-folder 13 | Dwg. # B-849 Section of map showing distribution of current from Hawthorne Avenue power station n.d. |

[Return to Table of Contents](#)