



## **BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN No. 14** **—Sheffield Celebrates 200th Birthday**

The Sheffield Bicentennial Commission will issue a *Bicentennial Bulletin* each Monday throughout 2015 that illustrates the rich heritage of our communities. **View them at — [www.sheffieldbicentennial.org](http://www.sheffieldbicentennial.org) or [sheffieldvillage.com](http://sheffieldvillage.com)**

### **SHEFFIELD'S INTERURBAN TROLLEY LINES** (operated from 1894 to 1938) *Part 1*

*Lake Shore Electric Railway trolley loading passengers  
at Cleveland en route to Lorain (1935)*

What was the difference between railroads and interurban electric railways? A railroad typically consisted of steam- or diesel-powered freight and passenger trains with multiple cars that operated on tracks that generally extended long distances, often connecting: (1) large municipal areas with one another, (2) product production facilities with distant markets, and (3) raw materials regions with processing and manufacturing locations. Whereas, an interurban electric railway typically carried passengers in a single car for relatively short distances between adjoining municipal areas. Track-mounted trolley cars were powered by electricity obtained by means of a trolley wheel attached to a pole, which collected current from an overhead electric cable. The cars were often called streetcars, trolleys, or interurbans.

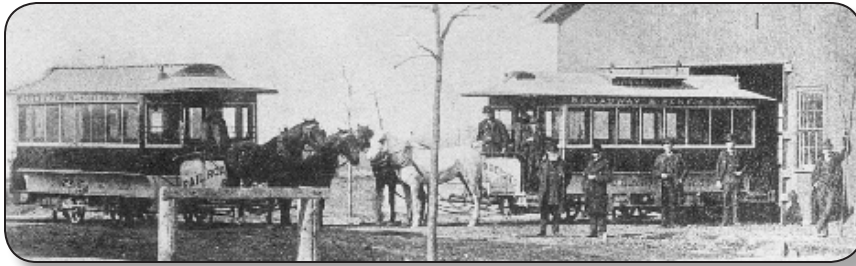


#### **Lake Shore Electric Railway**

The Lake Shore Electric Railway was an interurban passenger service that operated between Cleveland and Toledo, Ohio from 1901 to 1938. Within what was once Sheffield Township [the original 1824 township boundaries], the Lake Shore Electric System included the main line which ran along the lakeshore, and three branch lines—(1) The **Lorain Street Railway**, a 2-mile downtown line on Broadway, (2) an 8-mile Lorain-Elyria interurban (known as the **Yellow Line**) on the west side of the Black River, and (3) a 7-mile southern loop, known as the **Avon Beach & Southern**, from Beach Park in present-day Avon Lake to South Lorain (via Sheffield) where it merged with the Lorain-Elyria line at East 31<sup>st</sup> Street and Grove Avenue. In competition, the Cleveland, Southwestern & Columbus Railway (known as the *Green Line*) offered trolley service from Elyria to Lorain via Penfield Junction in Sheffield Township until 1931.

The interurban trolley cars were an imposing sight as they sped across the countryside at up to 69 mph. The car's exteriors were painted bright orange, while inside many sported deep plush seats and ornate wooden furnishings. By 1915 the Lake Shore Electric Railway had 180 miles of track, 84 closed passenger cars, 18 freight cars, 5 baggage cars, and 3 snowplows for a total estimated investment of \$16.5 million. About 5.2 million passengers were transported that year, paying a fare of 2¢ per mile.

*Horse-drawn streetcars at Penfield Junction (1887)*



*Lorain-Elyria Railway "Yellow Line" trolley near Stop 7 at Vincent (circa 1895)*



**Tragedy.** In 1923, a Lake Shore Electric Railway interurban streetcar struck a Sheffield Lake school bus traveling north from Brookside School at the Harris Road crossing, killing 4 children, including the son of the bus driver, Elmer Owen.

**Heroism.** On a brighter note, outstanding heroism was displayed aboard Car 61 of the Lake Shore Electric Railroad on August 24, 1932, when motorman William "Bill" G. Lang rescued a child from the track near Stop 86 (Lake Breeze Road) in Sheffield Lake. In the early morning light Lang was horrified to see "a baby" in the tracks not 700 feet ahead of the trolley. Traveling at 55 mph he reversed the motors, but knew he couldn't stop in time. At only 400 feet away he scrambled out of the cab and onto the car's front fender. Still moving at 25 mph, somehow he was able to twist down and snatch the 22-month-old girl before the trolley crushed her.

**Lorain Street Railroad.** The original Lorain Street Railroad was a horsecar line that served the sleepy little community of Lorain, described as a "nondescript backwater village on Lake Erie," during the period from 1885 to 1894. At its fullest extent the railway was 1.5 miles long and serviced by nine horses, two closed cars, and two open cars. The line ran down Broadway [then known as Penfield Avenue] from Erie Avenue to 19<sup>th</sup> Street and later to St. Joseph Hospital at 21<sup>st</sup> Street when the hospital opened in 1892. Everything changed when Tom Johnson decided to locate a steel mill on the Black River in Sheffield Township. He bought the railway and in June 1894 work was begun on a new powerhouse for an electrification of the street railway. The line tracks of the old Lorain Street Railroad were extended to 28<sup>th</sup> Street where the mill was under construction on 4,000 acres of undeveloped farmland.

**Yellow Line.** Next, in September 1894, came the *Yellow Line* streetcar which provided service from Lorain to Elyria, via Sheffield Township. Tom Johnson, founder of the Johnson Steel Company (forerunner of the National Tube Company of U.S. Steel), built the line principally to carry workers from Lorain and Elyria to his new steel plant in South Lorain. Incorporating the Lorain Street Railroad, the line began at *The Loop* — intersection of Broadway and Erie Avenue. The line followed Broadway south to 28<sup>th</sup> Street, turned west along the south side of the steel plant to Grove Avenue where it turned south and progressed to Elyria along what was destined to become Ohio Route 57. Some folks in the area still refer to the community of Vincent, at the intersection of North Ridge Road and Route 57, as *Stop 7*, in reference to the trolley line stop number.

In the same year, 1894, Lorain annexed 24 original lots in Sheffield Township west of the Black River. The lots were subdivided and The Johnson Steel Company bought 2,300 more acres, through its Sheffield Land and Improvement Co., south of 28<sup>th</sup> Street. This newly annexed section of Lorain was laid out in orderly, rectangular city blocks, unlike the "hodge-podge growth" that characterized the northern part of the town, and soon became known as South Lorain with 70 acres set aside as Oakwood Park. In 1901 the Lorain and Yellow lines were acquired by Lake Shore Electric Railway.