



## **BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN No. 15** **—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 2*

*Bicentennial Bulletin* No. 14 introduced the topic of interurban trolley railways that ran through Sheffield, concentrating on the Lake Shore Electric Railway and this Bulletin will complete the discussion.

#### **Avon Beach & Southern**

Also known as the Beach Park-South Lorain line, the Avon Beach & Southern interurban was built in 1905 and branched off the main Cleveland-Toledo line at Beach Park in Avon Lake (near the future Cleveland Electric Illuminating power plant). It rambled through Avon and Sheffield, crossing the Black River to South Lorain at 31<sup>st</sup> Street, and finally joined the Lorain-Elyria line at Grove Avenue. One could transfer here to the Yellow Line for a connection to Elyria or board the Lorain Street Railway to complete a 12-mile loop to the lakeshore at the foot of Broadway—a place once known as *The Loop*, where streetcars would circle and reverse direction.

Heading south from the lake at Beach Park the line roughly followed present-day Walker Road, crossing Colorado Avenue where the City of Avon recently constructed a recreational park. Just south of French Creek Road, the tracks turned abruptly west into Sheffield and crossed the Black River about 100 feet upstream of the present 31<sup>st</sup> Street Bridge. The river crossing was accomplished with a 1,200-foot-long viaduct-type trestle bridge that extended across the 60-foot deep ravine with steep shale cliffs. From here the line followed 31<sup>st</sup> Street to the Grove Avenue junction.

Part of the Lake Shore Electric System, but separately incorporated, the Avon Beach & Southern followed a peculiar route that seemed to avoid any population centers. However, its purpose was not to service communities along the route, but to provide an alternative Cleveland-Elyria route in competition with the Cleveland, Southwestern & Columbus Railway, which already had a direct line between these two cities.

On Saturday afternoon, June 28, 1924, a devastating tornado struck northern Lorain County, killing 78 people and injuring some 1,000 more. The City of Lorain was in shambles and at least 15 homes and barns were destroyed in Sheffield, as well as damaging the newly constructed Brookside School. Two Lake Shore Electric Railway cars were overturned by the fierce winds and the freight station roof was blown toward the lake. Most of the poles, trolley wires, high-tension supports, and transmission lines were uprooted—sparking and sizzling on the ground. Half of the

*Interurban stop at Beach Park in Avon Lake (circa 1920)*



*Beach Park Station 1936*



Lorain segments of the rail line were destroyed, including the Beach Park-South Lorain line that passed through Sheffield. About two weeks later service was restored, but the damage financially crippled the railway. Thus, the marginally profitable Beach Park-South Lorain segment of the Lake Shore Electric System was officially abandoned on April 1, 1925.

### **Cleveland, Southwestern & Columbus Railway**

**Green Line.** Green was the color of the trolley cars of the sprawling Cleveland, Southwestern & Columbus Railway—known by the nicknames, *Green Line* or simply *Southwestern*. Because the cars blended into the field and forests through which they sped, in 1927 the entire fleet was painted orange to reduce grade crossing accidents. This line provided interurban service from Cleveland to Elyria starting in December 1895. The journey only required two hours rather than a half-day stagecoach ride. Later a connection to Lorain was completed that followed Lake Avenue, crossed into southwestern Sheffield Township, and progressed northwest to Penfield Junction near present-day Clearview High School. At the junction a spur line ran southwest to North Amherst along North Ridge Road to a downtown wye—a “Y-shaped” or triangular portion of track used for turning the trolleys to run in the reverse direction. From Penfield Junction the main line ran north into downtown Lorain, via Reid Avenue. During World War I the interurban lines reached their peak. Norman Muller, who was a maintenance engineer for one of CSC’s electric substations at that time, recalls passengers hanging on the steps, the back ledge of cars, and even some on the roof, as the interurbans had difficulty getting new cars during wartime. The 1929 Depression hit this railway hard, causing abandonment of the line in 1931.

*Cleveland, Southwestern & Railway station at Penfield Junction (circa 1900)*



Cleveland, Southwestern & Columbus Railway operated a lavender colored funeral car known as *The Dolores*. The deceased’s relatives sat in the front of the car and friends in the back. There was room for two caskets in the back of the motorman’s vestibule. The funeral car would depart from downtown Lorain, travel south along Reid Avenue to Penfield Junction, then west on North Ridge Road to stops at either Elmwood or Calvary Cemeteries. Special winches were used to unload the caskets. During the World War I flu epidemic, *The Dolores* serviced two or three funerals a day and it is said *the church bells never stopped tolling*.

*Cleveland, Southwestern & Railway funeral car “The Dolores” (1916)*



**End of an Era.** The Lake Shore Electric Railway ceased operation in May 1938. The Cleveland-Lorain section of the system and Lorain Street Railway were quickly dismantled and by the end of 1939 virtually all the tracks and electric lines were gone. All that remains today are elevated railway grades that mark the once vibrant lines and abandoned bridge abutments at former stream crossings. A number of factors conspired to end interurban service in northern Ohio. The Great Depression of the 1930s created an almost insurmountable financial strain. But the real death knell was the advent of private automobiles and passenger bus service along the same routes traveled by the interurbans.