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KCK, Leavenworth connected by train

(Editor's note: This is the 26th in a series of "then and now" articles on places and things of interest in Kansas City, Kan., compiled by area historian Margaret Landis in observance of the 100th birthday of KCK in 1986. Much of the information has appeared in past editions of The Kansan.)

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

An interurban electric railway -- passing "through rather hilly country presenting very picturesque and varied scenery near the Missouri River" -- operated from 1900 to 1938 from Kansas City, Kan., to Leavenworth, Kan.

Chartered cars were available for groups on trips for special celebrations, musical or athletic events or political rallies at Kansas City or Leavenworth.

At the national Soldiers Home in Wadsworth and at Shrine Park, there were band concerts and picnics. Other points of interest along the line were Fort Leavenworth, the Command and General College, the Federal Penitentiary, Kansas State Penitentiary at Lansing and St. Mary's Academy.

There were the daily commuters (job holders) who rode the trolley back and forth to work and the women shoppers from the farms and small towns going to the larger cities.

Pioneer Electric Interurban

The pioneer electric interurban railway in Kansas was chartered July 28, 1897 as the Kansas City and Leavenworth Traction Company to operate in Leavenworth and Wyandotte counties.

Four companies were consolidated to form the Kansas City to Leavenworth Interurban System: Kansas City, Leavenworth and Western, the Leavenworth Electric Railroad, the Kensington Railroad Company and the Leavenworth Traction Company.

The power house, located at Wolcott, was described as being "the finest in this part of the country." The car barn for the interurbans and the repair shops were also at Wolcott.



This 1914 picture (advertisement) offers a trip to Leavenworth on the trolley, "Along the line of the K.C.W. Ry." The line operated from 1900 to 1938, succumbing to financial woes.

The interurban line from Kansas City to Leavenworth was officially opened Jan. 16, 1900. The passenger cars were 41 feet long, weighed 21 tons and were painted a fern green. The length of the line was 26.5 miles and made the trip in 60 minutes. By November 1904, the cars ran into Kansas City, Mo. The fare from KCK to K.C., Mo., was five cents.

Kansas City, Western Railway

Nov. 1, 1905, after reorganization, the interurban line became the Kansas City, Western Railway Company. Freight hauling service was added to the line. A passenger trolley was converted to a freight trolley by having a motor at each end of the car. Box cars, flat cars and other freight equipment were purchased. shipment of milk to creameries in KCK and K.C., Mo., was the principal cargo. The freight service was also used to handle other farm products and coal from Leavenworth.

Route of the Trolley

In KCK, the route of the trolley was from Welborn to 32nd and New Jersey, east on New Jersey to 18th Street, southeast to 13th and Oakland, east on Oakland to 12th Street, south to 12th and Washington, curving southeast to 10th and Nebraska, east on Nebraska to 8th Street, south on 8th Street to State Avenue, east on State Avenue to 4th Street, then south to the depot at 4th and Minnesota Avenue.

Station Stops

There were about 40 station shops. From downtown K.C., Mo., 9th and Main to 4th and Minnesota Avenue; Chelsea Station at 25th and New Jersey, 33rd and Parallel, Quindaro, Queens Gardens, Barker, Lake Stop, Welborn, Nearman, Brenner Heights, Maloney, Vance, Washington High School, Bethel, Buchan, Marshal Creek, Loma Vista, Vinewood, Shepard, Johnson, Wolcott, Parker View, Island Creek, Maltby, Highland, Mayswood, Pope, Etterson, Hiatts, Lansing, Carr Mine, Stillings, Soldiers Home, St. Mary's Academy, Limit Street, Leavenworth Merrit, Corral and Fort Leavenworth.

Fares

Tickets were sold at Owl Drug Store, K.C., Mo.; Depot at 4th and Minnesota, KCK; Hoozier's Grocery at 33rd and Parallel, KCK; at Welborn, Wolcott, Lansing, Soldiers Home and downtown Leavenworth. Other fares were collected by the conductor on the trolley. Passenger fares were about two cents per mile. By 1923, round trip tickets from K.C., Mo. to Leavenworth were \$1.32.

Kansas City, Leavenworth and Western Railway

A second reorganization came Feb. 17, 1920 after a foreclosure suit and sale at public auction at the Wyandotte County Court House. The line was reorganized in 1920 as the Kansas City, Leavenworth and Western Railway. By the 1930s, many of the passengers

who were daily commuters bought automobiles and this seriously affected the revenue of the trolley line. Competition from buses and trucks was also a problem.

Wyandotte County Lake

The struggle for survival was reported in *The Kansan*, March 1938. The Works Progress Administration had acquired a large tract of land in northwest Wyandotte County for the site of the Wyandotte County Lake and picnic ground.

After surveying the lake, it was discovered the interurban electric line bisected the tract from the southeast to the northeast and that the Loma Vista Shelter House Station of the company would be in the exact center of the projected body of water. Wyandotte County condemned the trolley right-of-way in that area, giving three alternatives: build a bridge over part of the lake bed; acquire a new right-of-way and detour around the lake or abandon the interurban line.

Interurban Line Abandoned

Faced with the alternatives and with a financial dilemma, the company declared bankruptcy and abandoned the entire 26.5 miles of company-owned right-of-way. After 38 years of service, the last interurban trip was March 31, 1938.

Bus Line

Following the bankruptcy proceedings, a new company was formed to be known as the Kansas City & Leavenworth Transportation Company in 1938 to operate a bus line. A fleet of 24-passenger buses was purchased and the new route from Leavenworth traveled on U.S. Highway 73 and State Highway No. 5, closely following the old trolley route. It went into service April 1, 1938.

With the increase in the number of persons owning automobiles and trucks, the demise of the bus company was inevitable. The Kansas City and Leavenworth Transportation Company took bankruptcy in 1951.

Since the mid-1950s there has been no public transportation to Leavenworth from Kansas City.