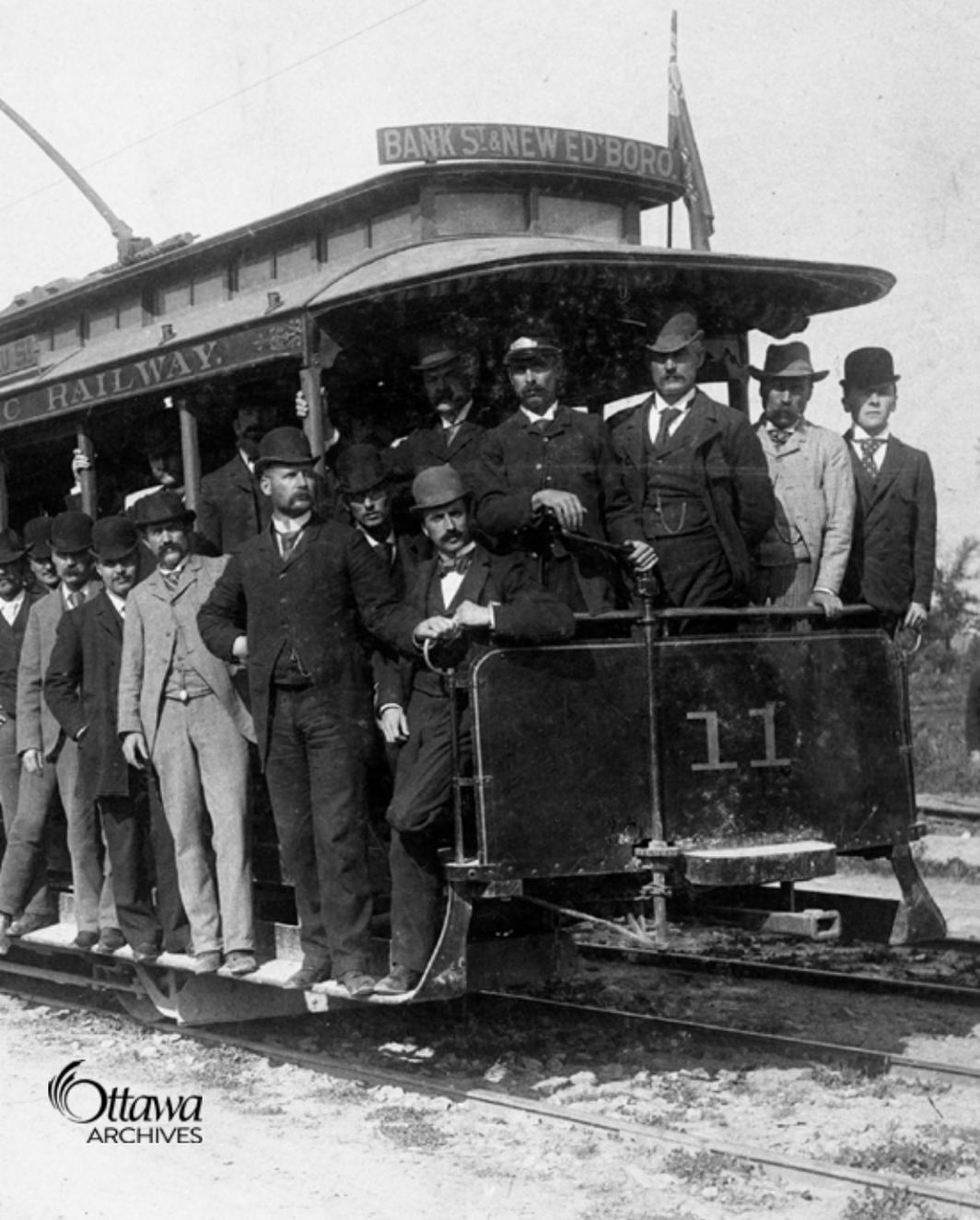


• ALL ABOARD! •

A history of rail transportation in Ottawa:
1850–2010



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Cover illustration

Open car #11

City of Ottawa Archives | 20 D 81 | OC Transpo | 1890-1900 | CA001510

All Aboard!

A history of rail transportation
in Ottawa: 1850-2010

City of Ottawa Archives

Message from the City Archivist



Paul J. Henry, City Archivist

Welcome to the first publication in a series of occasional papers on topics of interest to Archives clients. This publication follows the tradition started by the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Ottawa in 1898 – later known as the Historical Society of Ottawa – to offer lectures and publish historical research. Their Bytown Pamphlet Series has been a continuing source of well-researched and well-written monographs on Ottawa's rich and diverse history.

We hope to distinguish our series through its focus on topics derived from the collections of the Archives – both from official City records and the numerous private collections we hold. We see this as an opportunity to bring attention to the research prepared to support our exhibitions and outreach program. Our inaugural paper draws from that experience. Written by C. Robert Craig Memorial Library researchers Colin Churcher, David Jeanes, and David Knowles, and edited by Signe Jeppesen, *All Aboard!* traces the history of rail transportation in Ottawa from early beginnings till 2010. It served as the basis for the Archives 2009 exhibition *Track Changes: 150 Years of Rail Transportation in Ottawa*.

I trust you will appreciate our efforts.

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A Via Rail train at the Fallowfield Station. The station opened in November 2002, improving passenger service for residents in the west end of Ottawa. RGo27 | 04E-071 02. Photographer: Roger Lalonde



A CN steam locomotive that was built in Montreal in 1940. City of Ottawa Archives | C. Robert Craig Memorial Library | CS 5343 | 1963. Photographer: Ken Chivers

• ALL ABOARD! •

A history of rail transportation in Ottawa:
1850-2010

The railways

Railways are of vital importance to move both passengers and freight, and the economic development of Ottawa area industries was linked closely to the development of the railways. Most relied on the rail lines to bring in materials and to send their products to market.

The first railway into Ottawa – Bytown and Prescott railway

Bytown businessmen chartered the Bytown and Prescott Railway in 1850 to provide a railway connection into Ottawa with the North American railway system through Prescott, Ontario and Ogdensburg, New York. Walter Shanly, a prominent engineer, travelled on snowshoes to survey three potential routes in March 1851. On November 9, 1851, the first sod was turned on Boteler Street, near the current site of the Embassy of Saudi Arabia. On May 19, 1854, the first locomotive “Oxford” was brought into Prescott from across the St. Lawrence River at Ogdensburg, and workers began laying the track. By the middle of December that year, trains were running as far as Montreal Road. In January 1855, the bridge over the Rideau River was completed. The Bytown and Prescott Railway became the Ottawa and Prescott Railway in 1855. This railway line was used to bring in the stone to construct the Parliament Buildings. In 1867 the Ottawa and Prescott Railway was reorganized a second time and became the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Railway.

Railways to the Chaudière (LeBreton Flats)

One of the largest railway installations in Ottawa was at the Chaudière (LeBreton Flats). This area was important for the railways because it acted as a hub for passenger service and freight transportation. It provided rail access to the lumber mills, which floated logs down the Ottawa River from logging camps in the Ottawa Valley. Several small railways opened between 1870 and 1883 but, by 1884, the Canadian Pacific Railway had acquired control of all the railways on the Chaudière except for the Canada Atlantic Railway. Transcontinental passenger service began in June 1886. On April 26 and 27, 1900, the Great Fire of Ottawa nearly destroyed all the railway installations on the Chaudière. A temporary station in a tent was put up until the station could be rebuilt. The new station opened in December that year. For the first 60 years of the 20th century, the Chaudière was covered with railway tracks. Freight trains were common, supplying materials to the mills and taking away the finished products. Most freight operations on the Chaudière came to an end with the transfer of the Canadian National Railway (1965) and the Canadian Pacific Railway (1967) to the new freight rail facilities near Walkley Road.



Canadian Atlantic Railway locomotive #10 at the Elgin Street Station, Ottawa in November 1886. Library and Archives Canada | C25967

The railways of J. R. Booth

On September 13, 1882, the Canada Atlantic Railway, built by lumber baron John Rudolphus Booth, was opened from Coteau, Quebec. The line connected to the Grand Trunk Railway and Elgin Street in Ottawa. It provided a fast and reliable passenger connection with Montreal. A branch line was quickly built to the Chaudière to provide a direct outlet for lumber exports via Valleyfield, Quebec and Swanton, Vermont. As the Canada Atlantic Railway route was close to the city limits, Booth looked for a better terminal for his passenger trains. A location along the Rideau Canal and near Parliament Hill was eventually selected. The Ottawa, Arnprior, and Parry Sound Railway began operating between Ottawa and Arnprior on September 18, 1893. This was another of J.R. Booth's railways. It eventually extended to Georgian Bay via Renfrew, through what is now Algonquin Park, to Depot Harbour near Parry Sound. With these two railways, J.R. Booth moved timber from his timber limits in the Algonquin area to his mills on the Chaudière and shipped them for export to the United States.

Other rail lines in Ottawa

Besides the two main lines, the Canada Atlantic and Canadian Pacific Railways, other smaller lines ran through Ottawa. The Ottawa and New York Railway served the Ottawa area from July 1898 until the line was closed in 1957. Taken over by the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad in 1905, the line was originally intended to connect Cornwall with Sault Ste. Marie. A bridge over the St. Lawrence River at Cornwall connected the line to northern New York State. The project was scaled back, and the section from Ottawa to Sault Ste. Marie was never completed. William MacKenzie and Donald Mann built the Canadian Northern Railway as part of the Transcontinental main line. The line ran from Montreal to Ottawa via Hawkesbury and Rockland. It continued through Algonquin Park to North Bay and out to the West Coast. A branch line provided service to Toronto via Smiths Falls and Napanee.

Railway bridges

The number of railway routes that ran through Ottawa led to several bridges constructed across the Rideau River, the Ottawa River, and the Rideau Canal. Many of these bridges are still in use today. Some have been converted into recreational pathways, while others are used for cars or the O-Train route. In 1871 the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Railway opened two bridges. The Dow's Lake Swing Bridge across the Rideau Canal was built when their branch line to the Chaudière was opened in 1871. The swing bridge was removed with the opening of the Dow's Lake Tunnel in 1967. They also opened a bridge across the Rideau River near the current site of Carleton University. The wooden structure was not painted, and the government condemned the bridge ten years after it opened. A new bridge replaced it, and painted white, it became known as the White Bridge. A steel deck girder bridge replaced the White Bridge in 1914; it now forms part of the route used by the O-Train.

The Prince of Wales Bridge was built by the Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa, and Occidental Railway. Opening on January 17, 1881, it was the first railway bridge across the Ottawa River. Although the river is shallow at this point, there were significant problems during construction due to the strong current close to the Chaudière Falls. One man drowned during the work, and several scows were swept into the falls. Rebuilt by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1926-27, the City of Ottawa now owns the bridge; however, it is currently not in use.

Both the Canada Atlantic Railway and the Canadian Pacific Railway had bridges over the Rideau River near the current location of the Hurdman Transitway station. The Canada Atlantic Railway bridge opened on September 13, 1882. It was strengthened in 1905 and again in 1914. The basic structure of the bridge remained in place until the new Ottawa Station opened on July 31, 1966. The old piers can be seen when the water level of the Rideau River is low. The Canadian Pacific Railway bridge opened in 1898 and remained in use until 1966. It now serves as a pedestrian/bicycle path.

The Interprovincial or Alexandra Bridge opened on April 22, 1901. It provided access for trains from the Pontiac and Gatineau Valley to J.R. Booth's Central Depot on the Rideau Canal. During the construction, workers cut out a core sample with a diamond drill to verify the soundness of the concrete. This instance marked the first time diamond drills were used for such a purpose. In the beginning, the Alexandra Bridge also carried vehicles, pedestrians, and streetcars. In 1966, it was converted into a pedestrian and road-only bridge.



Postcard - Alexandra Bridge Ottawa
City of Ottawa Archives | MG344 | ca. 1910 | CA026190



Union Station on Wellington Street served as Ottawa's railway station from 1912 until 1966. City of Ottawa Archives | MG393 | Andrews Newton | September 1954 | CA005462



Railway lines heading into Union Station. City of Ottawa Archives | C. Robert Craig Memorial Library | F2-1570 | 1966. Photographer: John Frayne

The Grand Trunk Central Station | Union Station

Ottawa politicians pushed for a Union Station to bring all the railways into downtown Ottawa for many years. After many abandoned plans, the Grand Trunk Railway finally built the Central Station on Rideau Street. Designed by Montreal architects Ross & MacFarlane in 1908, the building was completed in 1912. The same architects also designed Toronto's Union Station and the Chateau Laurier, and a number of other hotels. By 1920, Central Station became Union Station and was shared by three other railways. Its monumental Beaux-Arts architecture was a cornerstone of Sir Wilfrid Laurier's plan for a "Washington of the North". The station was used until July 1966.

Railway relocation

During the first half of the 20th century, Ottawa looked very different from the way it does today. Railway tracks divided the expanding city. In fact, there were over 250 level crossings. Crossings over the tracks were dangerous, while underpasses and overpasses became bottlenecks for traffic. The downtown core was still very industrial, noisy, and dirty. There were large rail yards behind the train station on Wellington Street, and tracks ran along the eastern side of the Rideau Canal. After the Second World War, Mackenzie King asked a French city planner named Jacques Gréber to design a plan for Ottawa. Gréber was familiar with the city as he had travelled to Ottawa in 1936-1937 to work on the design for the War Memorial. The goals were to make Ottawa more aesthetically pleasing and to help control development. Several plans for Ottawa were completed before the war, including the Holt Report in 1915 and the Cauchon Plan in 1922. These reports made several recommendations to have fewer trains running through the heart of the city. Plans included lowering the Canadian Pacific line to the Chaudière, building a tunnel under Dow's Lake, removing the crosstown tracks and yards, and removing the Chaudière rail yards and the rail yards along the Rideau Canal.

The Gréber Report borrowed several ideas from these plans. His plans centered around cleaning up the city and accentuating the natural beauty of the region. One of the main points Gréber stressed in his report was that a national capital city should not have large industrial rail yards in the centre of the downtown core. In his opinion the rail lines had to go.

The creation of the Trans-Canada Highway also put significant pressure on the railways to relocate out of downtown. The Federal District Commission (FDC) had the authority to arrange a land exchange with both the Canadian National Railway and the Canadian Pacific Railway. The FDC would give the railways the land and new facilities for their freight yards in exchange for all the railway right-of-ways through Ottawa. This decision freed up a significant portion of the land that was needed to build the Queensway, which runs along the former CN line across Ottawa. It also drastically reduced the number of trains coming into the downtown core.

In 1959, the Federal District Commission and the federal government decided on the site for a new passenger station in Alta Vista, and the freight yards were moved to a site off Walkley Road. The new National Capital Commission undertook the design of the station. The strikingly modern building opened in 1966, in time for Canada's Centennial. The station was easily accessed from the Queensway, though no longer as convenient to reach from downtown. New facilities adjoining the station included railway telecommunications, the CN and CP railway express facilities, and the postal sorting terminal.

The decision to remove the rail lines from downtown significantly impacted the appearance of the downtown core. When the rail yards and lines were removed, 22 acres of land became available in downtown, and many industries relocated away from residential neighbourhoods to be closer to the new freight rail facilities. Colonel By Drive is located on part of the land that used to be part of rail lines and train yards. After Union Station closed in July 1966, it was used for one year in 1967 as the Centennial Centre, for visitor reception and

exhibitions. In 1968 there were plans to demolish the building, but those plans were put on hold by the federal government to allow the station to be used as a temporary conference centre. After forty years, the former railway station continues to be the Government Conference Centre, hosting over 1,200 meetings every year.

During the post-war years, passenger rail service was in decline as more people owned cars. Union Station, located in the heart of downtown, was in proximity to hotels and other destinations. After passenger service was relocated to the new station on Alta Vista in the east end, the number of people using passenger rail service continued to drop as it was less convenient for downtown travel.

The construction of the Queensway along the former rail line was controversial as it divided many downtown neighbourhoods. The amount of room required for the right of ways around a highway is much wider than that required for a rail line. In Old Ottawa East, Ballantyne Park is only one-third of its original size. The home of Robert Lees, the namesake of Lees Avenue, was demolished to build the highway. However, in New Edinburgh, the community rallied to stop the highway from being built along the former rail line. They gained New Edinburgh Park on Stanley Avenue. As a result, the Vanier Parkway does not connect to the Macdonald-Cartier Bridge, and King Edward Avenue became the route for trucks through the downtown core.

Railway accidents

Railway safety has changed significantly in the last century. With automated safety bars that block crossings as trains approach and improved signalling equipment, collisions and derailments are much less common. There have been a few accidents in the Ottawa region. There were many derailments. Collisions between trains and vehicles or livestock on the tracks were also common.

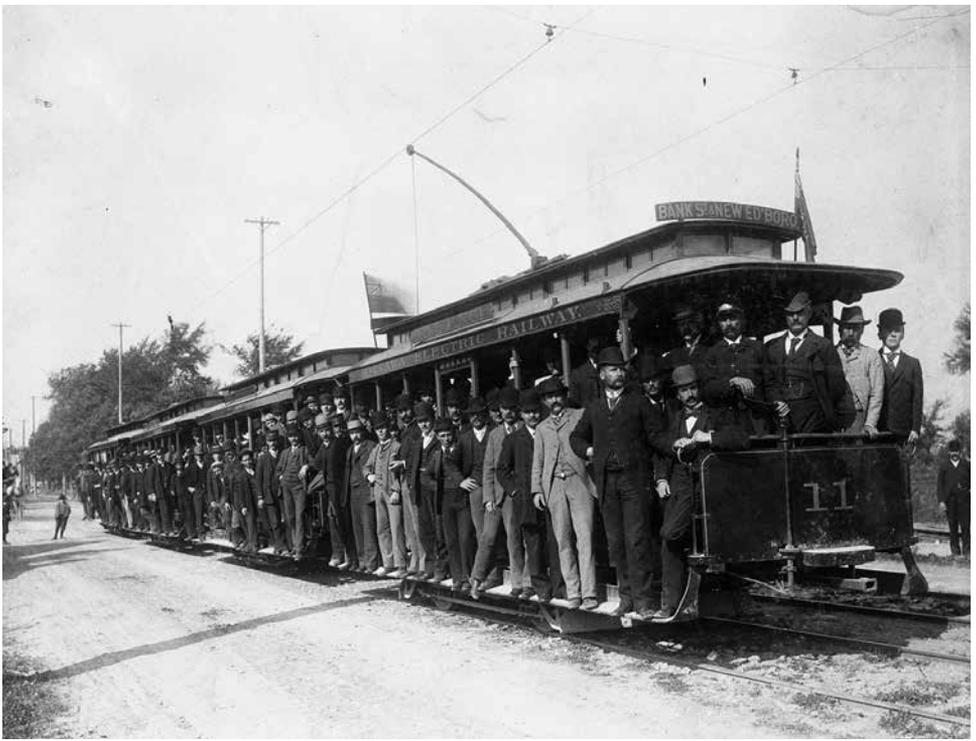
One of the most memorable incidents was the Rideau Canal Accident of 1891. A locomotive tried to cross a swing bridge over the Rideau Canal that had been opened to allow a tugboat to pass. The locomotive proceeded after ignoring the danger signal and fell into the canal along with a boxcar of lumber. The locomotive was raised with pontoons but was not retrieved from the canal until almost a month later.

Changes in recent years

There have been many changes to rail service and equipment in the last few decades. The change from steam to diesel locomotives eliminated the need for large, expensive, and labour-intensive locations in Ottawa, as steam locomotives required a great deal of maintenance and large servicing facilities. Many of the rail lines radiating out from Ottawa to outlying communities have been abandoned or had their service levels significantly reduced. Today, the future is looking brighter for passenger rail travel in Ottawa. On November 27, 2002, VIA Rail Canada opened a brand-new station at Fallowfield in the western part of the city. This has proved enormously successful to residents in the west end wishing to travel to both Montreal and Toronto.

Streetcars

Public transportation in Ottawa began with a horse railway in 1870, and by 1891 had developed into a network of electric streetcars. Streetcars were the primary form of public transportation, but in 1924 buses began to supplement the system. As Ottawa's population increased and its geographic area grew in the post-war years, the streetcar system came under increased pressure. By the late 1950s, with the Ottawa Transportation Commission facing financial pressures and a streetcar network needing significant equipment upgrades, the streetcar era came to an end on May 1, 1959.



Open car #11 was one of the earliest streetcars to be used in Ottawa. Open cars were used during the summer months. Their use was phased out over time.

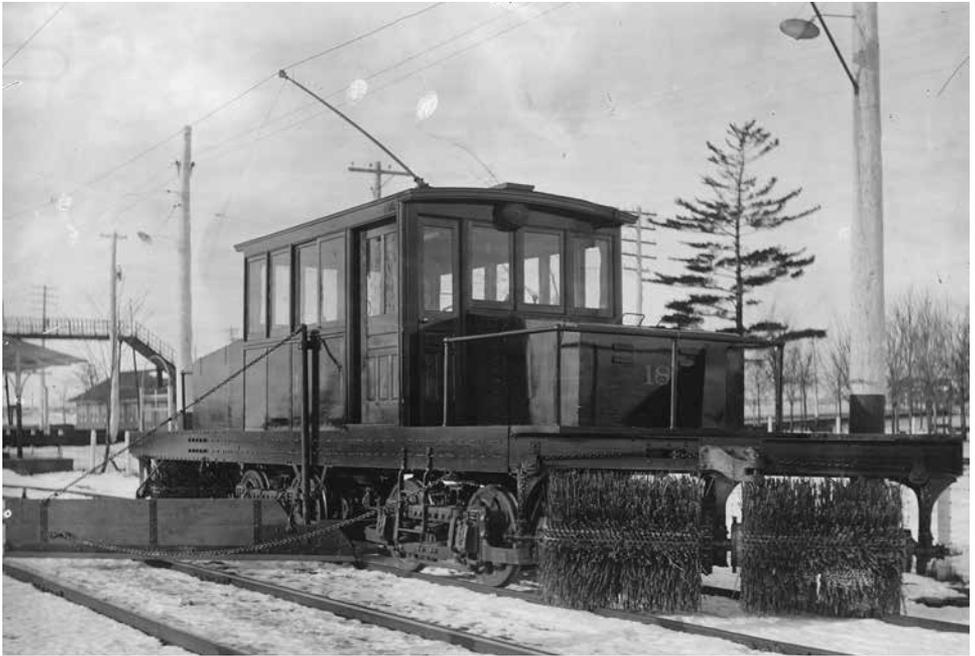
City of Ottawa Archives | 20 D 81 | OC Transpo | 1890-1900 | CA001510

The horse railway

Public transit came to Ottawa in 1870 when the Ottawa City Passenger Railway (OCPR) began operating from New Edinburgh to the suspension bridge at LeBreton Flats, by way of Sussex Drive, Wellington Street, and Pooley's Bridge. The line was approximately three miles long. The equipment consisted of four horsecars built by the John Stevenson Company of New York. The streets became muddy quagmires in spring and fall, and omnibuses with large wheels had to be used. In winter, snow covered the rails, and the streets were rolled hard and smooth to facilitate the use of sleighs. Consequently, the OCPR also used closed sleighs to serve winter routes.

The Electric railway arrives

On June 29, 1891, the initial run of the Ottawa Electric Street Railway went from the company's car barn at Albert and Kent Streets to Lansdowne Park. The Ottawa Electric Street Railway was owned by Ottawa entrepreneurs Thomas Ahearn and Warren Soper. After early careers in telegraphy and telephones in 1888, they formed a partnership to focus on the emerging field of electrical technology. In 1891, they won a concession to build an electric streetcar system. The partnership soon became involved in building and equipping streetcar systems in other Canadian cities. They then acquired Thomas McKay's interest in the Ottawa City Passenger Railway and merged the two companies in April 1893. The company was renamed the Ottawa Electric Railway.



Ottawa Electric Railway #18 sweeper car. The large brushes on the front of the car were used to clear snow and ice from the streetcar tracks. City of Ottawa Archives | 20 D 81 | OC Transpo | 1913 | CA001563

The Ottawa Car Company

Local Ottawa carriage builder W.W. Wylie built the streetcars for the Ottawa Electric Railway and subsequent systems. In 1892, Wylie was commissioned to build snow sweepers similar to the two that the electric railway had bought from Lewis and Fowler of Brooklyn. These two sweepers had shown that, contrary to widespread opinion, winter operation of electric cars was entirely feasible in Canada. In June 1893, an initiative to buy the Wylie carriage works resulted in the incorporation of the Ottawa Car Company in September that year.

Besides streetcars, the Ottawa Car Company made several other products, including horse-drawn vehicles, gun carriages during the First World War, aircraft for the Canadian military, and buses. The company also developed and built snow clearing equipment designed specifically for streetcar systems. Many items manufactured in Ottawa were shipped to cities across the country. The Ottawa Car Company was sold in 1948 and subsequently disappeared.

Two decades of growth: 1891–1911

The introduction of the electric railway had a significant impact on the City of Ottawa. For the first time, people could live in the suburbs and travel into work in a reasonable amount of time and at a reasonable price. Over the next three decades, the streetcar fleet was expanded, and the number of riders grew. They had open cars for use in the summer months and switched to closed cars for the winter. Open cars fell out of favour because of safety concerns. As ridership grew, new and larger cars were acquired to accommodate more passengers. The streetcar network was gradually extended from 22 miles to 46.6 miles during this period. The longest single extension was the five-mile stretch out to the railway's amusement park at Britannia. Service on Sundays began in 1899.

Streetcars were the daily mass transit vehicles to work, school, recreation, and worship. However, they also rose to a grander occasion from time to time. Special trips were arranged for Royal and Vice-Regal visitors to travel to and from Rideau Hall to golf courses and openings of significant buildings. In November 1893, the Ottawa Electric Railway acquired a contract to carry mail between railway stations, the Queen's Wharf on the Ottawa River, and the various post offices. The contract was cancelled in 1911 and the cars were converted to service cars.

The 1910s and 1920s

During the next two decades, the area of the city remained roughly the same, but population density increased rapidly as the city's population grew. The streetcar system grew much more slowly, from 46.56 miles to its maximum length of 58.35 miles in 1929. Ridership rose to 36.7 million passengers in the same year. Many new streetcars were built during these two decades. One of the streetcars built during this period, #696, has survived and is currently being restored.

Decades of challenge

In late October 1929, the stock market crash plunged the world into a major depression. The Ottawa Electric Railway ridership dropped from 36.7 million passengers in 1929 to 32 million passengers by 1931. The physical area of the city had not changed, but the population had risen to 130,672. As ridership declined during the 1930s, older cars were retired. The passenger fleet had shrunk to 118 cars, but the service fleet was stable at 25. Lines were being abandoned, starting with the line to the former rifle ranges in Rockcliffe in 1931. The connection to the CPR Station on Broad Street was dropped in 1932. By 1939, ridership had fallen to 24 million from the all-time high of 48.5 million in 1920.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 changed the situation drastically. By 1941, Ottawa's population had increased to 154,183, from 140,316 in 1939, primarily due to additional civilian and military personnel. Ridership soared to 39.8 million in 1941, putting severe pressure on the passenger fleet. A major event occurred in 1942 when a severe storm shut down the whole streetcar system for eight days, starting on December 29. It began with freezing rain, followed by nine inches of snow between noon and nightfall the next day.

The post-war years led to some very serious problems for the streetcar system. The Ottawa Electric Railway Company ran the system as a private enterprise, which caused the company significant financial problems after the Second World War. Under the War Income Tax Act, the company had to pay significantly more taxes to the federal government than they would have if the enterprise had been municipally owned and operated. This tax burden left the company with very little capital funds available to upgrade or expand Ottawa's streetcar network. The company was reluctant to invest in service upgrades or equipment because they felt ridership levels would not remain high enough to justify a long-term investment. Ridership did stay strong through 1947 and 1948, but complaints about the system were growing. The streetcars were too crowded, and they were never running on schedule. The City purchased the beleaguered system in 1948 for \$6,300,685.15, and the Ottawa Transportation Commission was born.

In 1950, the City annexed parts of Nepean and Gloucester, increasing the area within city limits to 55.1 square miles and the population to 190,812. Ridership reached 40.4 million.



An 838 streetcar built in 1923. This photograph was taken on George Street in April 1953. City of Ottawa Archives | C. Robert Craig Memorial Library | C1 CSN 479 | 1953. Photographer: Ken Chivers

The last streetcar

In 1949, a transit expert named Norman Wilson made a major examination of the public transportation system. He was asked to make recommendations about whether streetcar operations should be continued or if it made more sense to implement bus service. He brought forward several concerns. Installing streetcar tracks and lines in new areas of the city would be extremely expensive. Because of the lower population of outlying areas, it was not cost-effective to service those populations with streetcars. They used buses instead. It was becoming challenging to find streetcar parts, and in some cases, replacement parts had to be hand-made. Another recommendation raised the issue of cost – it cost significantly more to run streetcars than buses. There were also concerns about whether the streetcar system would even survive long enough to justify investing in improvements to the system. Wilson concluded that, as soon as the City was financially able to, the streetcar system should be abandoned.

There were also conflicts between cars and the streetcar system. In many places, cars and streetcars were sharing the same lanes. This impeded the progress of the streetcars badly enough to make them run behind schedule. With the increase in the number of cars on the road in the late 1940s and 1950s, the impacts of vehicle traffic on the streetcar system were impossible to ignore.

In 1959, the Ottawa Transportation Commission faced a huge debt that would only keep getting bigger unless there were major changes. The OTC decided to discontinue streetcar service and convert the entire transit system to buses. The last streetcar ran on May 1, 1959. There was a parade looking at the history of public transportation in Ottawa to commemorate the event. At the time, most people were happy to see them go. In the weeks following the last streetcar run, there was a significant improvement in traffic flow in downtown Ottawa.

Trying to recoup what money they could from the assets of the streetcar system, components were sold off. Poles, wires, and the tracks were sold as scrap in "as is" condition making the purchasers responsible for removing any materials they purchased. Due to the costs associated with removing them, tracks on city streets remained in place until it was time for that particular street to be repaired or rebuilt. Some tracks remained on city streets until the mid-1960s.



A Transportation Commission coach, number 2001, Bronson line.
This photograph was taken in 1951 at the Albert Street bus garage.
City of Ottawa Archives | 20 D 81 | OC Transpo | CA001687

The Trolleybus – Half streetcar, half bus

Beginning in December 1951, some routes were served by trolleybus service. The trolleybus was similar to a streetcar in that they had poles on the roof and received power from a grid of overhead wires, but the main part of the vehicle looked like a bus. The advantage to putting trolley cars into service was that they did not require tracks as they had rubber tire wheels. They were smaller than a streetcar, so they were not able to carry the same number of passengers.

Norman Wilson had made some recommendations about implementing trolleybus service on some routes, but many of these plans were not implemented due to financial costs. Only 10 of these vehicles ever went into service. Their presence in Ottawa was short-lived, as the trolleybuses were only used for seven and a half years. The final trip took place on June 26, 1959, just two months after streetcar service ended.

A brief history of bus service in Ottawa 1924-2001

Buses began to supplement streetcar service in 1924. They were also used in areas of the city that did not have streetcar lines. By 1950, when Ottawa had annexed portions of Gloucester and Nepean Townships, the city was five times larger than it had been in 1949. Public transportation to these newer areas of Ottawa was done by bus. As the city expanded, routes were added and adjusted to serve new neighbourhoods. Residents also noticed a significant improvement in traffic flow in the downtown neighbourhoods by implementing a bus-only service in 1959.

In 1972, the Ottawa Transportation Commission became the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Transportation Commission. Managed through the Regional Municipality of Ottawa Carleton, formed in 1968, the new transit commission expanded service. Hence, it was now available to Orléans, Gloucester, Vanier, Nepean, and Kanata residents. With this change, the transit commission also got a new name, one most residents would recognize today, OC Transpo.

Accessible bus service began in 1975 and was renamed Para Transpo in 1981. The first low-floor bus was purchased in 1998. The early 2000s saw the widespread introduction of low-floor buses that could kneel and had built-in ramps to improve accessibility. This bus style allows someone who uses a wheelchair or has mobility issues to take standard bus routes and improves their access to public transportation.



Buses coming out of the Transitway tunnel at St. Laurent Station, circa 1980-1989 | OC Transpo

One of the most significant changes in bus service in Ottawa was the opening of the Transitway in 1983. The rapid transit bus system allowed passengers to take their local bus to a Transitway station and transfer to a major route that could more efficiently travel across the city. The Transitway System has gradually expanded over the decades since the first seven stations opened in 1983 and now serves neighbourhoods across Ottawa. Many larger Transitway stations have Park and Ride lots. In 1987, OC Transpo gained international recognition when it received the American Public Transit Association's Outstanding Achievement Award.

In 1999 transit riders saw the introduction of the Rack and Roll program. Buses were equipped with bicycle racks in the summer months, allowing cyclists to bring their bicycles with them as they transferred from their bike to a bus.



The O-Train began operating in the fall of 2001 as a pilot project. It has become very popular with students traveling to Carleton University. OC Transpo | Photographer: Daniel Duclos, OC Transpo

The O-Train

After two decades of bus Transitway construction, much of it in former rail corridors, the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Council decided to build a light rail pilot project to complement the bus system. In 2001, the O-Train began operation on an 8 km refurbished rail line with five stations, linking to the Bayview Transitway station in the north to Greenboro in the south. It also serves Carleton University and two major suburban employment centres.

The project made maximum use of existing facilities: a rail cutting west of downtown, a bridge over the Rideau River, a tunnel under the Canal, and a small railway maintenance facility no longer used by Canadian Pacific at the Walkley Yard. Construction of the line included the complete rebuilding of a decaying wooden trestle bridge over Sawmill Creek and minor upgrading of the existing Rideau River Bridge and Canal tunnel. A passing track was constructed at the midpoint at Carleton University, and new signals were installed.

The O-Train began operating in the fall of 2001 as a pilot project. It has become very popular with students travelling to Carleton University.

The five stations were designed to be easy to navigate and fully accessible, including an elevator at Carling Station near Dow's Lake. They also have good lighting and video monitoring. The most innovative station was at Bayview, where the track was raised three metres to reduce walking distances to the connecting Transitway buses, provide better access to the community, and improve security.

Bombardier's "Talent", a German-built diesel light rail train, was selected from among three European contenders for its comfort, capacity, and low start-up cost. The trains featured computerized controls and automatic braking for safety, and dual-driver cabs and engines for quick reversal and reliability. The passenger cars had spaces for wheelchairs and bicycles, wide automatic passenger-operated doors, level boarding from the station platforms, and comfortable seating.

The City established the Capital Railway to operate the trains under federal regulations and eventually own the tracks, bridges, etc. New federal safety rules were developed to permit one-person operation with automated safety mechanisms.

Before service commenced, the train visited the Canada Science and Technology Museum for an open house over Labour Day weekend in 2001. A trip to Fallowfield in 2003 accompanied the launch of Light Rail expansion plans, and a demonstration trip to Carp followed in 2004.

Connecting with hundreds of Transitway riders and other buses every hour, the O-Train's principal destination is Carleton University. Between nine and twelve thousand riders use the two operating trains each weekday. Many riders also travel to employment in government offices at Confederation Heights or to Dow's Lake, or use the train to bypass downtown congestion.

The City of Ottawa and Capital Railway have purchased other railway facilities for the potential expansion of light rail. These include the southwest extension from the O-Train route to the edge of the airport and Leitrim Road, and the Prince of Wales railway bridge which connects to rail lines in Gatineau. Discussions have continued with plans for new routes and the creation of a light rail transit network.

About the authors

Colin Churcher

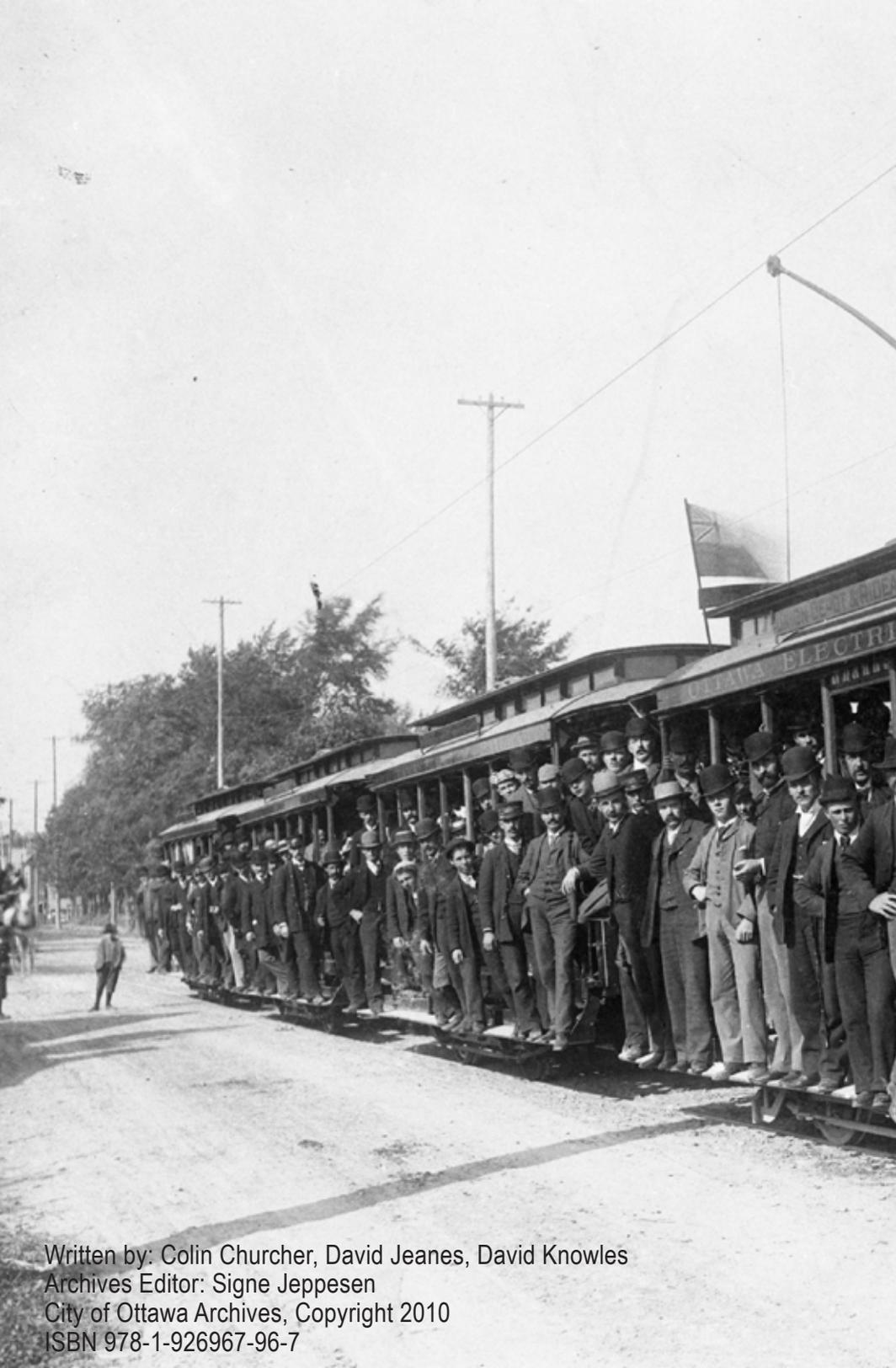
Colin Churcher worked for British Railways before coming to Canada in 1968. In Ottawa, he worked in railway regulation and policy, wrote the Railway Safety Act and became responsible for Transport Canada's Railway Safety Program until he retired in 1997. Since retirement he has worked as a railway consultant in several countries. He was one of the founding members of the Ottawa Railway History Circle, a member of the Ottawa Valley Associated Railroaders, and has made an extensive study of the history of the railways of Ottawa. He has written many articles on railways and Canadian railway history.

David Jeanes

David Jeanes is an amateur historian. He has researched Ottawa's former Union Station, its architects, and the history of Ottawa-based railways for over 20 years. He has also given tours of the building as part of the annual Doors Open event. Jeanes is involved with several associations including Heritage Ottawa, the Bytown Railway Society, the Ottawa Valley Associated Railroaders, the Ottawa Railway History Circle, and Transport 2000, a voluntary sector public transportation advocacy group.

David Knowles

David Knowles has a master's degree in Canadian History from McGill University. In 1994 he was one of the founding members of the C. Robert Craig Memorial Library, which is devoted to railway history. Knowles wrote a book about the Ottawa Car Company, a major builder of streetcars for Canadian electric railway systems. He is also a member of the Ottawa Valley Associated Railroaders, Ottawa Railway History Circle, the Canadian Railroad Historical Association, and the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society.



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