



Episode 005- "Red Cars" arrive in Burbank (transcript)

Introduction

You're listening to rememBURBANK, a podcast featuring stories from the history of Burbank, California, produced by the Burbank Public Library. Check out our digital collection of historical Burbank photos at BurbankinFocus.org.

Announcements

Do you know an adult who needs reading help? The library offers FREE one-on-one tutoring for people over the age of 16 who are not enrolled in high school and who speak and understand English, but read and write below 8th grade level. For more information, please call the Literacy Office at 818-238-5577.

The Department of Public Social Services will be at the Burbank Central Library, from 12:30 – 4:30 pm on Thursday, August 22, 2019 to assist with CalFresh and Medi-Cal enrollment. For more information, contact the DPSS Customer Service Center at (866) 613-3777.

Story

And now for today's story:

Henry Huntington was the nephew of railroad magnate Collis Huntington, who mentored Henry and taught him the family business. When Collis died in 1900, Henry expected that he would inherit his uncle's company, Southern Pacific Railroad. But Southern Pacific's board didn't want another Huntington in charge. They forced him out, but gave him a \$15 million payout (about \$400 million in today's money). So, Henry Huntington took his money and headed for Los Angeles where he purchased the biggest transportation system in the city, The Los Angeles Railway, and then incorporated it into a new company called the Pacific Electric Railway. The Pacific Electric was a system of interurban electric railroad lines serving Los Angeles and the surrounding communities with trolleys nicknamed "Big Red Cars".

When the City of Burbank was incorporated in 1911, there were very few cars in the town and many people rode bicycles or horses, or used horse and buggy. Even Dr. Thompson, the town doctor and founder of the first hospital in Burbank, pedaled around on a bicycle to see his patients, until it was stolen and he switched to riding horses as they were more efficient on gullied trails. He finally got a secondhand Mitchell automobile in 1908 and his chauffeur put a mattress in the backseat so the doctor could sleep on long trips in between seeing patients. The roads in the area were neither extensive nor very good. For the first few years of the century, only San Fernando Road was passable with its decomposed granite surface. But in 1911 it was paved with macadam, which was an improvement.

Burbankers had few options for getting to Los Angeles at that time. There were two Southern Pacific trains each day, and an automobile stage that made five round trips daily from the corner of San Fernando Road and Olive Avenue to the corner of Broadway and Brand Boulevard in the neighboring town of Glendale. From Glendale, one could connect to the Pacific Electric line to Los Angeles. Many people found it more convenient to use a horse and buggy for the trip to Los Angeles.

When the Pacific Electric arrived in Glendale, that city experienced accelerated growth. Burbank knew that in order to experience the same growth it also needed a Pacific Electric line. A civic group approached the company in 1908 to extend its Glendale line to Burbank. But company officials were reluctant because Burbank had very few residents. After some convincing, the company agreed to extend the line if the citizens of Burbank paid a subsidy and secured a right-of-way. In other words, the company demanded incentive to venture out to the rural town of Burbank. And Burbankers agreed to pay the bribe and to do the work of securing a path for the trolley line. Sources give two different numbers for the amount required by Pacific Electric. Burbank history books list the amount as \$48,000, but news articles of the time say the amount was only \$40,000. Regardless of the exact number, it still equates to over \$1 million in today's money.

Burbank struggled to fulfill the demand and efforts were abandoned, to be picked up and abandoned again several times, over the course of a couple years. In 1910, Southern Pacific, the same railroad company that pushed him out, purchased Huntington's interest in Pacific Electric making the company the new owners of the electric trolley line. Once again, a group of Burbank citizens approached the new owners of Pacific Electric to extend the Glendale line to Burbank. More hesitant than the previous company leadership, the new owners gave the Burbank citizens six months to raise the subsidy and secure the right-of-way.

To push the endeavor along, a committee formed to raise the funds and secure the right-of-way. The committee advertised in newspapers: "If you want to realize what real progress and prosperity are, you should take advantage of the opportunity offered by Burbank to identify yourself with her men of merit and means. Be a Burbank Booster." Despite these efforts, at the end of six months the committee had only raised part of the money. They asked Pacific Electric for an extension, and were granted an extra 60 days.

A mocking article appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* calling those who had not contributed to the fund "tightwads" and "short-sighted" and "afraid of both electricity and progress" among other insults. In the middle of a school day, the students and teachers of Burbank High School paraded lively through the streets waving the flag that usually flew over the school building. The school band marched in front of a miniature street car while a long line of students followed with banners inscribed with sentiments such as "Boost for the car line, do you want to walk." At the end of the motley procession was a group in costumes of country bumpkins under a standard saying "The Past". These play-actors carried cob pipes and passed remarks with people lining the streets like, "Been raising alfalfa twenty years and got along without a car line."

Here is where sources diverge again. Newspaper articles of the time say the committee was short \$3,000 but that the money was raised successfully during the extension period. History books say that two days before the new deadline the committee was still short \$10,000. The books say that two committee members, Ralph O. Church and Charles B. Fischer, drove down to San Diego where they visited Oliver J. Stough. You might remember from the episode on the start of the Starlight Bowl that

Stough owned 6,000 acres of land in Burbank though his main residence was in San Diego. They convinced him to contribute \$8,000 to the fund and on their way back to Burbank, Church and Fischer stopped in Riverside where they coerced the remaining \$2,000 from an unnamed Burbank landowner by threatening to remain in his home until he gave the money.

Not everyone wanted the Pacific Electric in Burbank. A major opponent to the public fundraising was Joseph Wesley Fawkes. Fawkes had patented the first monorail car in the United States and wanted to run his monorail from Burbank to Tropic (now south Glendale). In 1911, he built a prototype of a 56-passenger monorail car and a quarter mile-long line on his ranch on Olive Avenue between Lake and Flower Streets. Fawkes called his invention the Aerial Swallow, City officials, however, called it "Fawkes' Folly". Needless to say, the proposed monorail system never materialized as Fawkes was not able to secure the right to build his line, though he made a second attempt at it in Santa Monica in 1912.

In the end, the demanded subsidy was raised and the right-of-way secured from the end of the Glendale line to Fourth Street (now called Glenoaks Boulevard) and along Fourth Street to Cypress Street. The line eventually extended to Scott Road in 1924. The first Big Red Car rolled into town on September 6, 1911 at 7:10 a.m. A crowd of 1,000 people gathered on that day all wanting to be the first to ride the trolley. A large group of people boarded the first car and rode to Glendale with D.E. Fletcher as conductor and J.E. Carlisle as motorman. At Glendale, the group changed to the second car coming from Los Angeles and rode home again.

Exuberance was high on that day and some citizens expressed their joy by discharging firearms, and anvils were loaded with gunpowder and exploded. Mrs. Mathilda Beall Murphy, the first woman to deliver mail in Burbank, transformed her mail carrying Mitchell automobile into an ambulance for the occasion, though, thankfully, her services went unneeded. The Burbank Chamber of Commerce adopted a new slogan, "Burbank – 45 minutes from Broadway."

Two weeks later a massive celebration was held. Nearly 10,000 people from all over the San Fernando Valley turned out to enjoy a barbecue, participate in athletic events, view an exhibit of products of Burbank, and listen to music and speeches. Governor Hiram Johnson was advertised as one of the speakers, but on the day of the event, he did not appear claiming to be suffering from a sore throat. (Although could it really be expected that the governor elected to office the previous year on an anti-Southern Pacific platform would attend an event celebrating a trolley line owned by the Southern Pacific?)

While the Pacific Electric was important to Burbank's growth, it did not stimulate the rapid population growth that Glendale experienced. It dominated local transportation until the mid-1920s, but was challenged by the automobile as more roads were paved throughout the region. By the 1930s, the increased number of street intersections obliged the trolleys to slow down to no more than twenty miles an hour, which greatly increased their running time making them much less efficient than driving. The trolleys were heavily used during the gasoline-rationed World War II years, but the company kept losing money. The Burbank line eventually closed down in 1955 and the rails removed in 1956. You can still see evidence of its existence in the landscaped median that runs down the middle of Glenoaks Boulevard from Providencia Avenue in Burbank all the way to Brand Boulevard in Glendale.

[News from Burbank](#)

And now for the news from Burbank.

Today's news comes from the May 19, 1910 edition of the Los Angeles Times.

J.A. Small, carrier on rural mail route No. 1, has purchased an automobile and is now serving his patrons with the machine. Mrs. Beal on route No. 2 has been serving her patrons for some time in the same manner. Much time is saved in using the automobiles as heretofore it took the greater part of the day to deliver mail, while now both carriers return and are at the office by noon, giving ample time for outgoing mail to get away for all points: leaving the office at 1:30 o'clock p.m. Burbank is said to be the only rural district in California that enjoys such rural service.

And that's the news from Burbank on May 19, 1910.

End Credits

rememBURBANK is researched, written, edited, and hosted, by Janae Kambestad, Local History Librarian at the Burbank Public Library. Funding for the podcast came from the Friends of the Burbank Public Library, a nonprofit group dedicated to promoting books and the library to the Burbank community. The proceeds from their fundraising efforts help fund Library programming and purchase special equipment for the library.

The music you hear now, and at the beginning of the podcast, is Burbank's 1924 official song "In Burbank" by Code Morgan.

You can find shownotes for this episode, learn more about the show, and view historical photos of Burbank at BurbankinFocus.org

Thank you for listening.