

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

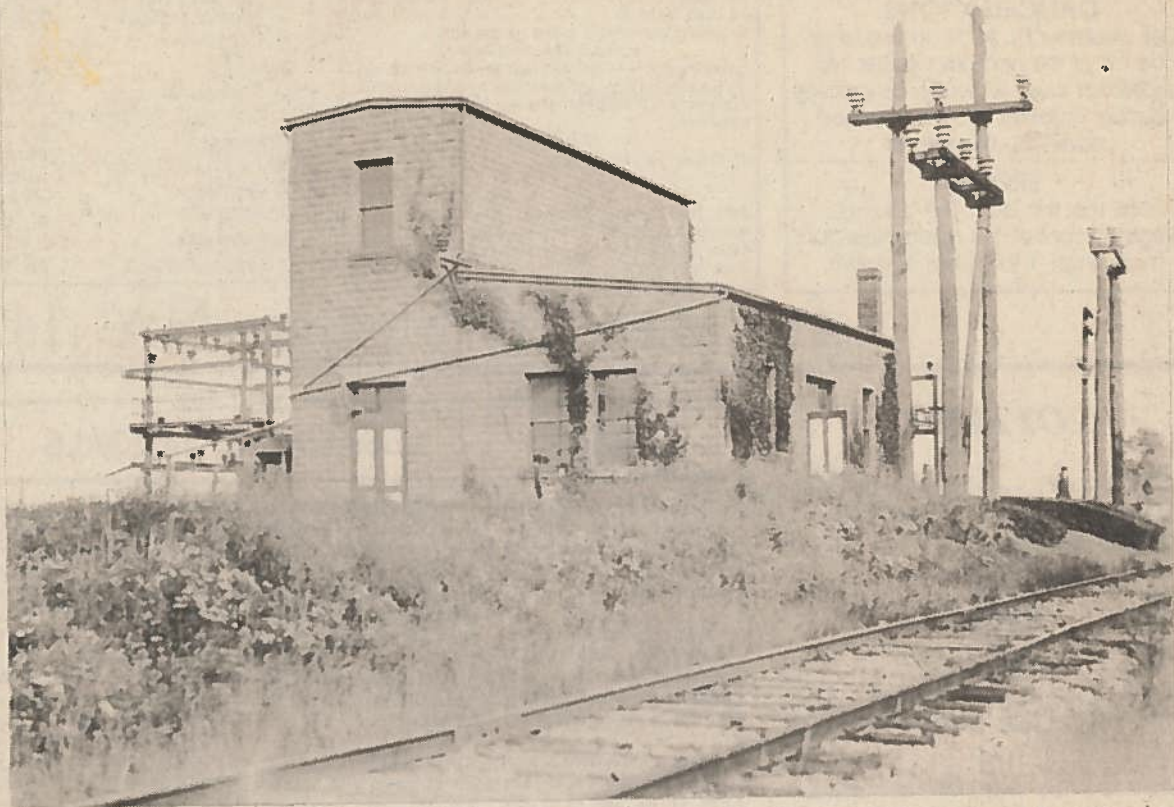
C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XV

11-12-93

No. 41

## WHAT REMAINS OF THE BL & R?



On Saturday, November 13 Dr. Neil Johnson, Village of Albion Historian will give an illustrated talk about the BL & R Trolley system. It will particularly emphasize what remains of this 85-year-old defunct electric railway which ran through our county. The talk will be given as the featured program for the Cobblestone Society Annual Meeting being held at the Gaines Congregational Church with a 12:30 luncheon. For further details call 589-9510. The public is welcome.

After subsequent failures by short lived RR companies going back locally to 1901, the work of laying rails began in September 1906. By July 1908 it was expected the Buffalo, Lockport and Rochester Electric Railway would be in operation within a few weeks. The first trolley however, did not run until Thursday, September 2, 1908 from Rochester to Albion. The road officially opened to the public on September 4, 1908 but it was not until November 17, 1908 that it was completely opened between Rochester and Buffalo.

The first cars included a stock of 15 coaches and two express cars which were built by the Niles Car Co. Each passenger car had a seating capacity of 50 and was divided into a smoking compartment upholstered in leather and the regular day coach compartment upholstered in green plush to match the color of the car, which was the standard Pullman dark green. A toilet compartment was also provided in each car. The fare from Buffalo to Rochester was \$1.10 one way or \$2.20 round trip.

The cars were mounted on Baldwin trucks with 4 GE 75 HP motors type M control. Cars were also equipped with Westinghouse air brakes and Climax electric headlights. In 1909 the BL & R Co. ordered six more cars of a larger series to be operated in two-car trains when traffic was heavy. These were coupled together with vestibules in between and could travel at 80 miles per hour.

Our photo displayed here, shows the substation on East State Street in Albion as it appeared in the late 1920's. This is one of the BL & R buildings which is still in existence.

In the early days of trolleys, most all electric power was generally transmitted and used as DC. Because of the high costs and losses associated with the transmission of low voltage DC, trolleys were limited to short suburban runs. The subsequent development of the transformer and high voltage AC transmission line and rotary conversion — a type of motor generator using a common armature for the AC motor and DC generator windings made it economically feasible to build long distance electric railways. Substations were spaced five to 10 miles apart. The other one in Orleans County was located near the intersection of Route 31 and Culvert Road in the Town of Ridgeway. From the 1913 Orleans County Atlas we see the Albion substation denoted as Power House and a track leading back into it. That same tract shows in the foreground of the photo.

By the depth of the Depression, more use of the automobile and financial problems, the trolley system met its demise. The last car passed through Orleans County on April 30, 1931. However, there remain a few mute reminders of this once modern transportation system. The BL & R depot, now a residence, still stands behind the Swan Library and car 200 rests silently on Main Street in Knowlesville. Other than some of these obvious reminders, the innumerable little depots at crossroad stations are all gone along with Medina Depot which was located just east of St. John's Church on East Center Street.

Neil Johnson in his presentation on Saturday, will give us a visual tour of the old BL & R roadbed and some other landmarks along its route which still remain with us.