

# Streetcars

## Construction

Converted to electricity when power plant was completed in 1889  
1890 - 68 miles of wire have been used for electric lights and the electric road serving Kearney.

Cost \$27,000

Track for electric streetcars being laid in June 1890

## Route

Route went from the courthouse to the Midway Hotel

West on 25th to the lake

East on 25th to Ave E, then north to old fairgrounds

1888 – GAR Reunion – For street transportation visitors rode the horse-drawn trolley cars from downtown to the lake pavilion

(Murch) Many were day students who rode to and from school on an electric streetcar, a system which covered the city at that time

After closing the cars possibly went to Boulder, CO

## Mentioned in radio programs

July 12, 1890 – Streetcar tracks had been extended to the courthouse

### A. Street Car

(as remembered by him in 1915) A H Boltin and some other businessmen organized a tram line – the horse drawn streetcar – in 1887

Route went from the courthouse to the Midway Hotel

West on 25th to the lake

East on 25th to Ave E, then north to old fairgrounds

A contract was signed during the year 1890 to extend the electric streetcar road to run through this fine addition

Cost \$27,000

4 cars

Converted to electricity when power plant was completed in 1889

## Buffalo Tales

### 1890 in Kearney by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell, Jan. 1991

Kenwood in 1890 was considered one of the most desirable residential districts in the city with about one hundred houses, a fine park and nineteen miles of graded streets. Water mains and sewer mains were extended to accommodate households; electric arc lights furnished good light at night, and many Kenwood houses were also lighted by electricity. 10,000 feet of plank walks and 1200 feet of

stone walks were laid in front of the homes. A contract was signed during the year to extend the electric streetcar road to run through this fine addition....

Excerpts from the Hub of October 19, 1890 note additional accomplishments of the townbuilders:

68 miles of wire have been used for electric lights and the electric road serving Kearney. The electric road has revolutionized travel in the city. Under the old (horse-drawn) streetcar service, most people preferred to walk.

### **CAMP HENRY A. MORROW; The G.A.R. Reunion of 1888 by Alice Shaneyfelt Howell, Nov-Dec 1995**

Crowds for the week were estimated at 40,000 to 45,000 visitors. They came by special and regular trains and by horse and buggy or wagons. Many slept in their wagons. All local hotels were filled and 1,400 tents were set up west of the lake and on the flat ground south of present Highway 30, not far from the lake area. For street transportation visitors rode the horse-drawn<sup>(4)</sup> trolley cars from downtown to the lake pavilion.

Footnote # 4. Kearney's much publicized electric streetcar system was not put into operation until 1889.

## **Where the Buffalo Roamed**

### **Kearney, "The Gem of the Prairie" by Mrs. William (Ruth) Jordan**

Quoted from autobiography of Clarence Murch, ..."The second year, 147 pupils were enrolled. Many were day students who rode to and from school on an electric streetcar, a system which covered the city at that time. In addition to being principal, Clarence Murch taught Higher English and Literature. Marcia Murch was both art instructor and matron...."

### **At Trails Museum** (as of 5-2010)

Against the north side of the depot are smaller rails. These are streetcar rails taken from the streets of Kearney after they took the streetcars away

## **Kearney Hub**

### **Jun 6, 1889 – Building Improvements**

[Describes construction of dwellings in Nursery & Maryland additions in the eastern part of the city] "The street line runs through these additions...."

### **July 3, 1889 – The Electric Road**

[Replacing the present slow method of travel. Ten miles of track will connect East Lawn, Kenwood, and West Kearney to downtown. New electric cars will be able to go 12 mph. There will be six cars to start with. Will be able to make a complete round in an hour including stops. Will run near enough to Kearney Lake to accommodate summer activities there. The southeast part of town is not included so far even though it is the oldest and thickest settled part of town.]

### **July 29, 1889 – The Motor Line**

[Two men were out surveying the streets for the proposed motor line.]

## **July 30, 1889 – Electric Transit**

[The present Kearney Street railway and franchise transferred to the Thompson-Houston company who will build ten miles of track. George W. Frank owns the majority of stock in the present company and has contracted with T-H to build and equip the road with a Jan 21, 1890 deadline for completion. T-H has a three year contract.

The cars will be Pullman and will have electric lights and heating. Track will be standard gauge so freight cars can be removed from the railroad and bring freight to any part of the city. The route would be almost the same as previously announced “making a beltline extending to East Lawn, South Kearney, Kenwood, West Kearney, and accommodating the business and principal residence sections.”

Work would begin as soon as possible. Orders have been sent for supplies such as ties and iron.]

**Aug 12, 1889** – [GAR reunion, horse drawn] Street cars within two blocks of the camp....

## **Aug 21, 1889 – The Motor Line---Keep to the Middle of the Road---A Lively Squabble**

### **Aug 22, 1889 – Mr. Frank Explains**

[Referring to the previous evening’s article – It was reported that the company building the line on 25th St. want to place it on the south side of the street near the row of trees, then make a sharp turn at the sidewalk near the office of Ingrahm and Steele. Then follow the old streetcar line down the center of Central Ave. to the south part of town. The paper ended the article by saying the company appears to believe they can put the route wherever they wish without council approval and that several council members do not approve of the described plan so there might be quite a squabble.

Frank responds by saying this is misinformation. They know they need council approval and a route has not been determined yet. His experience in running the street cars in the last month and a half has shown that at the rate of 5¢ per fare, except during the GAR reunion, there was no profit. He did not believe that for the first few years the electric streetcar would be a paying investment.]

## **Nov 25, 1889 – Methodist Sociable**

The ladies of Trinity M.E. church will give a supper from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Tuesday night in the store building three lots west of the street car barn on Central-ave. The proceeds will be used in the building fund for the new church.

## **Dec 5, 1889 – The Rails Arrive**

Work Will Now Commence on the Electric Street Railway.

At 4 o’clock this afternoon four cars of rails for the Kearney Electric Street railway arrived in the city. Work will now commence on its construction and it will be in running order by January if the street cars already ordered reach the city in time.

## **Dec 6, 1889 – Get a candle and look**

[Referencing the news in the *Hub* and *Enterprise* that the rails had arrived, the *Journal* wondered where they were, that they were “most assuredly” not in Kearney yet. He called on the papers to print the truth.

In response the Hub suggested that a tallow candle be lit and go to the southeast corner of Downing’s elevator.] “Then take 172 paces, 24” in length, west, in a straight line, then you will find a flat-car painted a dark red, No. 293 marked ‘T. & S. L. & K.C.R.R.’ capacity 50,000..... On the car are 100 rails, a number of bolts and ‘fish-plates.’ The other cars are similar in appearance, which can be easily ascertained by the aid of the aforesaid taper.”

### **May 19, 1890- Local Notes**

---We will soon see the electric motor cars running on Twenty-fifth-st.

---The poles for the motor line electric wire have been distributed along the route.

### **May 20, 1890 – [City Council meeting]**

[Two representatives of the telephone company explained the difficulty of using the street to run its wires and where the phone and electric motor wires would conflict. The council’s ordinance committee agreed to meet with the two the next day to work out the conflicting interests.

The speed of the electric motor cars was set at 8 mph on central & 13mph on side streets.]

### **July 9, 1890 – Electric Cars are Coming.**

The work of laying track down Central avenue for the electric street cars goes forward at a rate surprising to the onlooker. The span wiring is following up the laying of the ties and rails and within a day or two the line will be complete as far as the railroad. The tracklaying will go below the U. P. track to-morrow. The sooner the better in such a thing as this.

### **July 11, 1890 – Down the Ave**

#### The Initial Trip of a Motor Car on Central Avenue

[First trip at 3:20 in the afternoon from the old Midway site to the railroad. People lined the street and greeted the car with cheers and waving hats. Horses were startled by the commotion and tried to get away.]

### **July 21, 1890 Material Lacking**

....The car tracks are to be planked inside and out, and then filled in with cinders and brick. Just now however the bolts for the rails and the oak planks are not on hand....The street car company understand that they must level the street as soon as possible....

### **July 26, 1890 – Citizens are Kicking**

[The opera house was being constructed and a board fence had been erected on the north and east sides. Outside this there was a narrow sidewalk. The complaints were twofold. 1) because the sidewalk was so

narrow, pedestrians frequently collided. 2) The space between the walk and the street car track was so narrow that barely 3 feet was left between the street car and the horse of a passing wagon. The drivers had to jump down and hold the horses to calm them.]

### **Aug 8, 1890 – Local Notes**

---The electric cars ran to the court house last night.

---The street car conductors have been provided with bell punches.

---It is thought that the motor track where it crosses the main line of the U. P. will have to be covered, as the brake-rods of the passing trains strike on it. One “shoe” and another good sized casting have already broken off in going over.

### **Sept 9, 1890 – Eastern Suburbs**

#### Electric Connection with the City Nearly Established

[People are now accustomed to the jingle and gong of the street car on Central and west to the power house. The route east was delayed because of a dispute between residents on two competing streets. Two weeks ago the dispute was settled. The route will run east on 27<sup>th</sup> street to Grand Ave. where it turns northeast along the avenue, described as the center artery of East Lawn. It runs out to 35<sup>th</sup> & Y where it turns west to Central. Today the first trial run was made. It was all done up to the K & BHRR track at Ave R.]

### **Oct 26, 1890 – Electric Road Extended**

Saturday afternoon workman completed the work for an extension of the electric road west as far as Geo. W. Frank’s residence. Monday cars will be run over the new line. From the present terminus of the road south of the power house cars will run west across the bridge and then southward on a curve to Twenty-fourth-st. The length of the present extension is about half a mile. On Twenty-fourth-st. the trolley wire is suspended from brackets the same as on the East Lawn branch. The new line carries the road half way to West Kearney.

### **Jan 16, 1891 – Fun on the Ice**

[in “zero atmosphere” yesterday evening a crowd of young people were skating on Kearney Lake. They had a bonfire on the shore for warmth.] “The electric cars did quite a good business carrying skaters to and from the ice and were a great convenience.”

Feb ---, 1891

### **May 21, 1891 – Killed by the Motor.**

[First collusion since the electric cars started running. A delivery man was going north on Central ave. The motor came up from behind. When they were about even the horse suddenly startled and lunged, going in front of the street car. The drayman tried to back up but the wagon shaft caught in the brake dragging the horse under the wheels. One foreleg was crushed and the other one badly cut. “a shot in the head put an end to its misery.”]

### **Aug 1, 1891 – Local Notes**

---Base ball makes street car business lively, and the electric cars have completely knocked out the ten cent hacks that used to do such a thriving business.

### **Sept 7, 1891 – Labor Holiday Observed**

[Labor Day parade started at the court house with three electric cars holding Prof. Draper's band and electric company employees. When the parade reached 24<sup>th</sup> street it turned west to the school grounds where the speeches were held. No mention if the street cars made the turn.]

### **Nov 13, 1891 – The Electric Railroad**

Kearney's electric railroad adds to its greatness...[visitors] admire the pluck and energy of the people who have electric cars in a town that is but a few years old. When we have a population of 50,000 it will be no wonder....

### **Nov 17, 1891 – Electric Heating Scheme**

[George Frank, Jr. had taken over management of the Kearney Electric Company. First4 he adjusted the payment scale for electricity.] "The second radical change in the management is the new pass system which enables every citizen of Kearney to ride on the electric cars as many times as he likes for 3 ½ cents per day or \$1.00 per month....An improvement is being made in the way of electric car heating which is quite a novelty, and only suggested by the characteristic push and energy of Kearney. The west side car is now furnished with a heating apparatus run by electricity, the heat being actually produced by a current of electricity. The apparatus is about two and one-half feet long, six inches wide and two thick, made of cast iron, hollow, and filled with some fibrous substance like asbestos. The car is furnished with four of these contrivances, which are placed under the seats. Should these prove successful they will be placed on every car."

### **Jan 9, 1892 – Local Odds and Ends**

---The electric cars had a hard time of it today, owing to the snow.

### **May 18, 1892 – Played on the Street Car.**

Theo. Miller's band practiced several pieces and drilled at the power house last night, after they had finished, the street car man offered to haul them to the court house and back to the Midway hotel again if they would agree to furnish music all the way. The boys accepted the proposition, and discoursed some very fine music, which awakened many persons who had retired for the night from their peaceful slumbers.

### **Aug 6, 1892 – Kearney's Electric Power**

[Describes the many ways in which electrical power is used by Kearney businesses.] "Our electric railway is run by the same power, and the same cars which glide so swiftly along our streets are propelled by electricity from the power house."

### **Aug 9, 1892 – Almost Fatally Injured**

Michael Emmel, a farmer residing some fourteen miles south of Kearney, was driving toward home yesterday afternoon, when near the court house on Central avenue his horses took fright at the electric cars and ran away frantically. Emmel was thrown out of his wagon and becoming entangled in the lines was dragged a considerable distance and frightfully mangled. His head and face were bruised, several teeth knocked out and one ear torn off so that it hung by the skin. He was also injured internally. He was taken to the Metropolitan hotel and Dr. B. F. Jones was called in attendance. The doctor pronounces his injuries very serious but not necessarily fatal.

### **Jan 6, 1893 – A Narrow Escape**

F. M. Hallowell had a narrow escape yesterday from serious if not fatal injury. He was riding in a buggy when the horse became frightened at the street car. He jumped out to hold the animal and slipped, falling across the rails. Before he could recover himself the car was upon him. It stopped, however, before the wheels struck him, and aside from giving him a good scare no harm was done. Mr. Hallowell doesn't care about repeating the performance right away.

**June 14, 1893** – Commencing with next Saturday the Street Car company will dispense with the services of a conductor and adopt the system of collection fares in a box. This will dispense with the services of four men who are now employed....The hours of running will also be changed from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on the east line and from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. on the west line....

### **Aug 5, 1893 - A Fatal Fall**

Thrown From a Horse and Died in an Hour and a Half

Neal Richardson, a horse trader, lost his life today in a manner both startling and unexpected. He was astride a pony which he was watering at the drinking fountain in front of the Beckett House when an electric car that was passing frightened the horse. It started to run, slipped on a rail of the street car track threw the rider, and fell on him. Richardson's head struck the ground with terrible force and sustained a concussion of the brain. He was carried to the Wyoming hotel. Dr. Duckworth was called, but the injured man was past medical aid, and at twelve o'clock he died.

Little is known of Richardson, further than he was a horse trader and had been living for a short time in a tent near the lake.

### **June 11, 1894 – Street Car Service Assured**

The street car company guarantees regular service on the East Lawn line on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday to accommodate residents of the city desiring to attend commencement exercises at Kearney Hall on those dates. Exercises each evening will commence at eight o'clock, hence no visitors should fail to secure the 7:30 car at the latest.

### **Sept. 19, 1894 –**

Mr. Charles Gow, who resides on West 27<sup>th</sup> St. waited in front of his residence 3 hours this morning for an approaching street car that he had sighted out at the end of the line. [He usually walked

to work but today his corns hurt so he thought he would take the street car.] At the end of three hours it suddenly occurred to him that he had seen the same car in the identically same place for about thirty consecutive days... [with several words his pastor would not approve of, he headed out walking to work. He arrived just as the noon whistle blew.]

### **Dec 17, 1894 – To Move a Heavy Building**

The iron structure which has stood in the yard of the defunct Kearney Stone company is to be moved to a site adjoining the power house of the Kearney Electric company. It will be placed over the wheel pit. Tracks will be laid so that the electric cars may be run in under cover during the winter storms. As the cars have been left exposed to the weather ever since they stopped running the public will appreciate this improvement. The building to be moved is about 30x70 feet, quite heavy, and will be quite an undertaking to move.

### **May 6, 1895 – An Ordinance**

Section II. It shall be unlawful for children or boys under eighteen years of age to get on or off a moving train car or street car in the city of Kearney.

### **June 5, 1895 – Spice of Local Life**

---The electric cars will carry passengers to base ball park tomorrow afternoon.

### **June 7, 1897 – Had a Runaway**

While out driving Sunday, W. D. Oldham met with a serious accident. On Central avenue near Seventeenth street the horse made a quick turn. The buggy struck the street car track and turned throwing Mr. Oldham to the ground with great force. [He was bruised but not seriously injured.].... After throwing Mr. Oldham out the horse ran to Wadsworth's barn, and entered, bringing behind him a large part of the wreck.