

# Strolling Through the Past Fox Cities Streetcars

As told by  
Jason R Weber

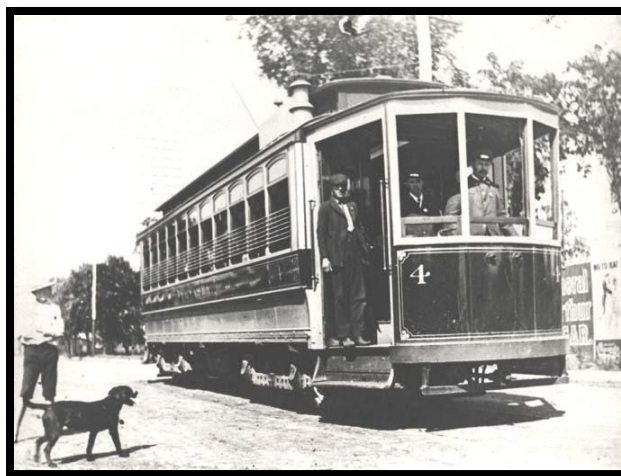
The Fox Valley had great success with the lighting of several homes which led to the idea of implementing a streetcar system in Appleton. A group of businessmen, led by the honorable Judge J.E. Harriman had observed a demonstration of a streetcar in Alabama and started to raise funding for a system in Appleton in 1855.

The streetcar became operational in August 1886. The original route began on Oneida St. in an area still referred to as 'the flats'. The route went up Oneida St. to College Ave. Eastward it went to Rankin St., turning north ending at Riverside Cemetary. Back on College Ave., it went west to State St, turning south on State St. to W. Prospect Ave. and westward towards Mason St., finally heading north on Mason St. back towards College Ave. an downtown once again. This was generally referred to as the 'cemetary route'.



College Ave, Appleton, circa 1886

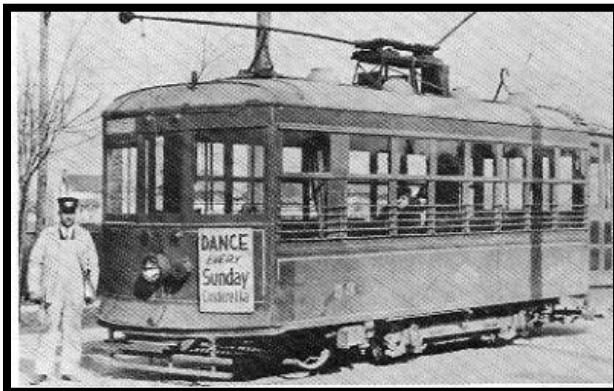
The streetcar system was expanded in 1896 to include the areas of Neenah, Menasha, and Kaukauna on its routes. The system, then became known as the Fox River Valley Electric Railway Company. The December 24, 1896 edition of the "Menasha Evening Breeze" reported the prospects of the proposed interurban railway system of the Fox Valley. It reports "The route that will be covered by the new road will include the old Neenah and Menasha horse car line. The route will extend south from the city limits of Appleton to the lakeshore and pass through certain streets in the Fourth Ward.



Streetcar in Neenah, circa 1920.

While it is intended to connect with Kaukauna ultimately, nothing will be attempted in this direction until possily later in the year." The route to

Menasha from Appleton went along Oneida St. through nothing but farmland in the Town of Menasha. This was a direct route out to the lake where the Waverly Beach and Brighton Beach resorts stood. The same issue of the "Menasha Evening Breeze" reported, "The advantage that will accrue to the residents of Appleton and Neenah and Menasha during the summer season in opening the lake resorts to them can hardly be estimated. Waverly Beach is the natural summer resort, play and picnic ground for the residents of the entire valley, and there is no doubt whatever, but what the road will be liberally patronized by pleasure seekers during the summer season in going to and from a resort that will unquestionably become very popular."



**Streetcar with advertisement for Cinderella ballroom. Unknown year**

The streetcar was very important to local businesses who built along the line. Ed Maloney, whose father operated the Cinderella Ballroom for six decades, recalls that there was talk of moving the streetcar line from S. Oneida St. to the busier Memorial Dr.

area. Ed's father had contemplated moving his entire building through the field, at the time, to Memorial Dr. to remain on the streetcar line. The line never changed routes and the automobile started to become more common and the Cinderella Ballroom remained on S. Oneida St.



**Car 202 on the last interurban run goes past the Cinderella Ballroom on Oneida St. in 1928.**

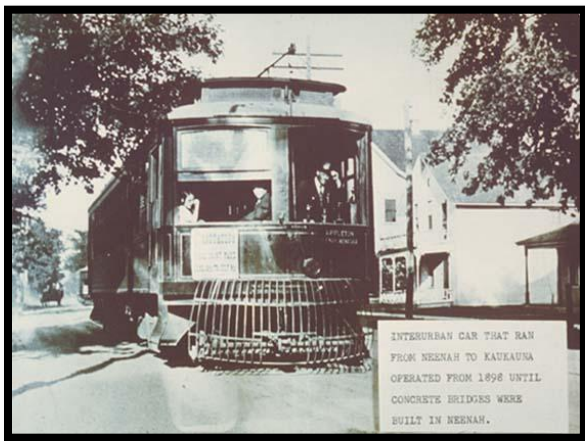
At the time, a trip from Neenah to Appleton lasted 39 minutes. Fees for streetcar rides were:

- Neenah to Menasha           5 cents
- Neenah to Waverly Beach   10 cents
- Neenah to Appleton         15 cents

Bus and automobile competition was causing a downward trend in revenue and in 1928 the streetcar stopped operating to the Kaukauna and Neenah/Menasha area. Streetcar service ended with a last ride on Sunday May 6, 1930 in Appleton, ironically on the same original 'cemetery route'.

# Streetcar Adventures

Many town residents that I have spoken to have fond memories of the streetcar. Rosemary Bruehl recalls riding the streetcar quite often from her home in Appleton to meet her relatives at Waverly Beach for summer picnics. She vividly remembers one particular conductor, Mr. Hughes, as being a nice man and seemed to be always working the streetcars when Rosemary rode.



Streetcar on Appleton street. Unknown year

Betty Goss remembers riding the streetcars every Sunday to visit her mother's family in Kaukauna. On one occasion when Betty was a young child, she was wearing a new petticoat and had a new slip on with crocheted lace. Betty lifted her dress, showing her slip singing "lace for show, lace for show", as she paraded up and down the aisle, which greatly upset her mother at the time!

Alice Weber recalls riding the streetcar as a child. Alice grew up on the Gear Farm on Plank Rd. and would ride the streetcar with her sisters each day to

school and back. One day, Alice, a kindergartner at the time, was waiting for the streetcar after school; however her sister Sybil was late. The streetcar arrived and Alice boarded without her sister.

The Gear Farm was located out on Plank Rd., and Alice knew that she had to get off the streetcar at 'Finnegan's corner'. Finnegan's Tavern was located on this intersection. When Alice boarded the streetcar, the conductor had difficulty understanding her. Alice ended up missing her stop and rode the streetcar "all over town".

While Alice's sister and mother grew worried, Alice states that she had a wonderful time riding the streetcar. When the streetcar stopped for the conductor change, the off-going conductor was explaining to his counterpart that he didn't know where the young girl belonged and that she had been riding all afternoon. The oncoming conductor knew Alice's father and replied, "That's Charlie Gear's daughter", and was able to drop young Alice off at 'Finnegan's corner'.



Streetcar "Menasha", circa 1915.