



Kirkwood Historical Society

At Mudd's Grove

302 West Argonne Kirkwood MO 63122

JULY 2018



**DATES TO REMEMBER
JULY 4TH – INDEPENDENCE DAY!**



CELEBRATING A NEW CENTURY



THE SMITH FAMILY - IAN, ELLEN, TOM AND EMMA

PROUDLY ACCEPT THEIR CENTURY HOME PLAQUE FOR THEIR CENTURY HOME ON NORTH TAYLOR.

CONGRATULATIONS FROM ALL OF US AT THE KIRKWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

Photo credit: Mike Holley, Vice-President Kirkwood Historical Society.

KIRKWOOD BOARD AT ODDS WITH RESIDENTS OVER 1897 STREET RAIL AGREEMENTS

In 1896, Kirkwood officials and many civic booster were anxious to obtain the St. Louis & Suburban's street railway service enjoyed by Webster Groves, their rival to the east. Prospective routes were a hot topic of discussion. In the December 11, 1896 St. Louis County Watchman, the Kirkwood correspondent reported, "Rumors have been frequent during the past week of the near approach of the Webster electric line. The president and attorney of the road were in Kirkwood trying to arrange right-of-way through Woodlawn. The route suggested was along Jackson road, and between the Forsyth and Morris homes, just back of Mrs. Laura Bodley's."

In January 1897, the Watchman reported a different route accepted by the town board which granted a permit to the St. Louis & Suburban to enter Kirkwood on Adams Avenue, go to Taylor, lay tracks on Taylor, on Jefferson Avenue to Harrison and then cross the Missouri Pacific tracks by bridge. That route, while closer to the route eventually approved, was also rejected by the city.

The proposed routes were a source of controversy. Residents of Adams Avenue were upset that they would lose their fine carriage road if a double track railroad was built down the center of their quiet street. Their opposition was noted in a piece in the St. Louis Republic in the first week of January 1897. It was stated that the street railway issue was turning Kirkwoodians against each other. The claim caused the Kirkwood Watchman correspondent on January 15, 1897 to fire off a rebuttal. "the sensational column in the "Republic" of last week, as to the animosities stirred in Kirkwood by the prospective entrance of the Webster electric railroad was a surprise to our citizens as none of them knew of, "church being arrayed against church," and, "neighbor against neighbor." On the contrary only good feelings and harmony exist – not even the Civil War could make strife here." In support of the Republic's position, a review of the minutes of the Kirkwood town board from 1897 made it very clear that the Adams Avenue route proposal was a hotly debated issue.

A route was eventually agreed upon after months of speculation and negotiation. Kirkwood ordinance 238, passed on May 21, 1897, approved operation of the St. Louis and Meramec Railroad Company, "within the town of Kirkwood for the transportation of passengers, on, along, over and upon the following route..." The route entered Kirkwood beginning in the center line of Woodlawn Avenue east of the property of Mrs. George Gill, then traveled west with a double track through Mrs. Gill's property to the east end of Adams Avenue. The tracks then ran west on Adams Avenue toward Fillmore Avenue; turned north with a single track in the center of the street to Washington Avenue where it connected the route maintained by the St. Louis and Kirkwood Railroad (Houseman Air Line.) It then ran west on Washington to Clay, south on Clay to Woodbine to the southwestern city limits (Geyer Road). Though it served Meramec Highlands Resort, that area was not yet part of Kirkwood. A new eastbound single track was constructed on Adams from Clay to Fillmore.

Before the St. Louis & Meramec River Railroad was allowed to begin construction through Kirkwood, it was required to provide town officials with a duplicate set of plats or maps of the roadway showing the course of the railway and profiles showing the grade of the roadbed. Special attention was given to construction plans on Adams Avenue. It was to be macadamized for a width of sixteen feet each way from the center of the tracks, and the line was required to "ever thereafter maintain in good condition and repair," the part of the street lying inside the rails and for two feet outside each rail. The special attention paid to Adams Avenue was due in part to the vocal opposition of its residents to the construction of the railroad down their quiet residential street.

In order to prevent the use of steam engines or horse drawn cars, the ordinance stipulated that streetcars must be operated by electricity, "either by storage battery, the conduit underground, or by overhead wire system." To insure a minimum of disruption of travel by Kirkwood's citizens during construction no more than four blocks of a street could be torn up at one time in such a way so as to be withdrawn from public use. Nor were two successive crossings on the same street to be rendered unfit for travel. A six month time limit was imposed

To encourage prompt completion of construction. The road was to be in full operation through Kirkwood by October 1897.

The fare was set a five cents for a continuous passage from any point on the line from Sutton Avenue Station in Maplewood and the southwestern limits of Kirkwood. No more than five cents could be

charged for passage from any point on the streetcar line between the eastern limits of Kirkwood and the Meramec Highlands. The total fare from any point in Kirkwood to the eastern terminus of the railroad at Sixth and Locust Streets was not to exceed ten cents.

The St. Louis & Meramec River Railroad was required by Kirkwood ordinance #238 to run its cars every day of the year at "regular intervals not greater than thirty minutes apart." Between the hours of 6 A.M. and 12 o'clock midnight. Town officials conceded that "accidental derangement of machinery" and extraordinary accidents or emergencies would not be deemed a violation of the ordinance.

When a patron in Kirkwood hailed a car, the car was to be stopped so that the rear platform would be over a crosswalk. Persons signaling in a "proper and usual way" were to stand near a crosswalk on the right side of the car. They were expected to signal in time for the car to be stopped at the crosswalk.

The streetcar's rate of speed within Kirkwood's city limits was limited to ten miles per hour with the motorman required at all times to "keep a vigilant watch along the track ahead of his car for persons (with special vigilance for children) or vehicles upon the track." The streetcars were to be equipped with "modern and approved fenders and brakes" as well as gongs and bells which were to be rung to give warning to approach of the streetcar as it neared a crossing.

After five years of operation, the St. Louis & Meramec River Railroad would be required to pay a \$250.00 per year fee to the town treasury for the privilege of operating in Kirkwood. After ten years the fee was to be increased to \$500.00. Any successor or assignee to the new line was to be held to the terms of the ordinance and to any ordinances enacted at a later date by the town of Kirkwood for the purpose of governing street railroads. (The last provision resulted in legal battles between Kirkwood and the Suburban.) Work was to begin within 60 days after the acceptance of the agreement by the company. Before the town clerk would accept the agreement, the company was required to file a bond in the sum of \$10,000 to protect the town from loss as a result of "any wrongful act, negligence, or default" in the construction, equipment, and operation of the railroad. If the Suburban or its successors "willfully and persistently" violated provisions of the streetcar ordinance, the franchise was to be forfeited and the ordinance allowing the company to operate would be considered "null and void." The ordinance was written for a duration of 50 years, unless sooner forfeited for cause. Little did Kirkwood officials dream that the automobile and motor bus would make the streetcar an endangered species in less than 50 years.

Minor adjustments to ordinance 238 were made early in June, resulting in a new ordinance, No. 240. The provisions of 240 were accepted by the St. Louis & Meramec River Railroad on June 3, 1897, were approved and were ordered filed by J. G. Hawken, the town clerk. The bond was paid that night, so construction began immediately.

The approval of the franchise was most distressing to the residents of Adams Avenue who felt betrayed by the city. They had attended town board meetings, presented their concerns to the board, and had aired their concerns in neighborhood meetings. Though they were a prominent group of citizens, Kirkwood officials elected to go with the lure of income for the town and the promise of growth and prosperity represented by the additional street rail link to St. Louis.

By mid August, Adams was closed between Taylor and Webster Avenue (Kirkwood Road) for the laying of the east bound track and a wye turnaround. By the end of August, all the wires were up, causing the Watchman Correspondent to comment, "By next week the Suburban will be making dust fly. Indeed, Suburban cars were run to Meramec Highlands on the following Sunday, though none were running during the week to allow for completion of the construction work. A crew of 26 men, "worked all day steadily in the dust and heat on the Suburban Railroad on the (Sept.) 8th finishing the roadbed." By September, 1897 most of the construction work through Kirkwood was completed. Adams Avenue up to that time had been a short street without through traffic. It ended a little past Dickson when traveling east. After the construction, even though the St. Louis & Meramec River line continued eastward, Adams Avenue was not extended. The double tracks crossed a creek on a trestle and connected with Lockwood at Park Avenue in Glendale.

As the Suburban was built through Kirkwood, some of the early enthusiasm for the project waned. The correspondent noted that Adams was "totally disfigured" by the heavy grade of the line, and residents along the route were "sore indeed."

When the cars began running on September 9th, the noise was "excessive" until the Suburban added rock to its roadbed. That was done between the 10th and 17th when "quite a force of men distributed Macadam on the track." Tempers in the Adams Avenue area were as hot as the Indian Summer weather. The Kirkwood columnist noted on September 24th, most of the property on Adams Avenue could be bought

cheap., the owners feeling that since the street is transformed into a canal and its trees killed by cutting the roots, it is no longer desirable.”

Not only were the residents of the street bombarded with clanging bells and mechanical noise from the cars, noisy high spirited passengers filled the cars, especially on normally quiet weekends. “Sunday was a big day for the new electric line. Each car was full to overflowing, and Adams Avenue resounded with noise.” Large crowds filled the cars on Sunday, September 12th, as riders came from the city through Kirkwood on their way to Meramec Highlands and the beaches of the Meramec River to escape the heat. The correspondent noted, “Adams Avenue is a noisy street of late. For 10 days the Salvation Army band was heard, two squealing pigs in pens, and the MOPAC and electric trains at all hours.” Frustrations of the residents were lessened in October when alternately muddy and dusty Adams Avenue was covered with Meramec gravel from Valley Park.

Express companies used the St. Louis & Meramec River Railroad daily to provide package and freight service. “Cheap, prompt, and reliable delivery of all goods direct to residence or stores,” was proclaimed by frequently appearing Walton-Knost Express Company ad on the front pages of the Webster Times in April of 1898. A rival express company’s advertisement, located just above Walton-Knost’s, indicated that Central Electric Express made “Two Daily Deliveries to all points on the St. Louis & Meramec & St. Louis & Suburban Ry’s. The Walton-Knost Express offered “One day delivery to St. Louis and Return Daily. Its Kirkwood Office was at Armentrout’s store. Cost of delivery was 15 or 25c depending on an item’s size.

Like most streetcar companies of the day, the St. Louis & Suburban provided a clubhouse for its employees as well as a yearly picnic at a popular resort, usually reached via the line. For several years the company picnic had been held at Ramona Park, but in 1898, the location was changed. The watchman correspondent described the late August picnic: “From 10 a.m. to 10 pm., the employees of the Suburban line made merry at Meramec Highlands Wednesday, this occasion being their sixth annual picnic. A regular program of races and amusements was carried out, and dancing was indulged in the evening.

In contrast to the light heartedness of the company’s picnic, Sub urban officials soon found themselves in conflict with more than upset residents of Adams Avenue. The company became engaged in a bitter legal dispute with Kirkwood over the town’s right to regulate the running of streetcars and express cars., a case that would end up in front of the Supreme Court of Missouri. That is another story!

It is noteworthy that conflicts between citizens and town officials over planning and zoning, building permits, etc. from 1897 look much like those in modern day Kirkwood. Upset residents eventually calmed down as they became used to the presence of the change. Fortunately, despite the occasional turmoil, Kirkwood has always regrouped and moved on.

The above article was condensed from a chapter in “King Trolley and the Suburban Queens” by Jim baker. The book is yet to be published by Meramec Highlands Books.