



**Hunt Cabin Reopening!
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August 2021

**Take a ride into the past:
Climb Aboard the Rapid Transit!**

As Congress attempts to address the nation's infrastructure needs, including public transportation, we take a look back at the time when Hales Corners enjoyed an interurban rail system: the Rapid Transit.

The rail service was owned and operated by The Milwaukee Light, Heat and Traction Co. Later, the company was known as the The Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Co.

On June 27, 1903, the Rapid Transit made its debut in the Village. A delegation from Hales Corners traveled to Milwaukee to make the initial journey. The trip to Hales Corners took only 29 minutes. As a result, residents of Hales Corners could commute to work, school, shopping, or amusements in the city. In addition, the Rapid Transit

carried freight and also helped provide daily mail service.

With the Rapid Transit's arrival, the character of Hales Corners changed from a remote country village to a reachable suburb. New subdivisions were developed. Stores and shops sprang up along Janesville Road and on 108th Place.

The Rapid Transit's main waiting station was located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Janesville Road and 108th Street (near Walgreens' parking lot), where a commemorative sign now stands.

Passenger runs were in the morning, at mid-day, and in early evening. Freight trains ran on the shared tracks during the off-peak hours. Because the area was primarily used for farming, many cars contained



Commutation ticket

feed, oil, farm machinery, seeds, fertilizer, lumber, and vast amounts of coal.

The Rapid Transit offered three fare payment options: cash was always accepted; a pass for \$1.50 bought one week's passage from Hales Corners to anywhere within the city of Milwaukee; and a commutation booklet was also available at the transport office. The booklet had duplicate numbers on every ticket, and riders would tear off the number of tickets

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Rapid Transit Car 1106 and Bosch Hotel, 1909



Public Service Building in Milwaukee, 1936

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Rapid Transit schedule, 1938

designated for the distance they wanted to ride.

When the train arrived, the conductor opened and closed an elaborate trapdoor and platform arrangement, which had to be operated every time a passenger boarded or departed. He would then jump down and provide a “climb aboard” stool so that riders could reach the car steps.

Passengers did not pay their fare until the conductor walked

the aisle and collected. He would issue a receipt with the point of origin and destination punched into its side.

For the runs most frequented by school students, the inter-urban company scheduled its oldest and plainest equipment known as “St. Louis Type Cars.” The interurban company owned four of this type of car and the students quickly named them “cattle cars.”

The cars were double-ended and could be operated from either end. Like streetcars, they did not need to proceed to a “turn-around” loop for the return trip. Instead, the motorman moved his control levers to the opposite end of the car, and the conductor had to flip the seats over for the return trip. Half of the passenger seats were generally turned beforehand because the students would sit in groups of four facing each other.

A favorite passenger spot on the St. Louis car was at the front. Designated as a smoking area, it was separated from the rest of the car. The most prized seat was opposite the motorman, because it provided the best view of what was ahead.



Weekly passes, 1939 and 1940

In order to stop trains at night, every station had a handle that could be turned to activate a red light, which was suspended above an electric pole.

Pranksters sometimes forced the trains to make unnecessary stops. They would wedge the stop lever in an on-position by using a potato or small piece of wood.

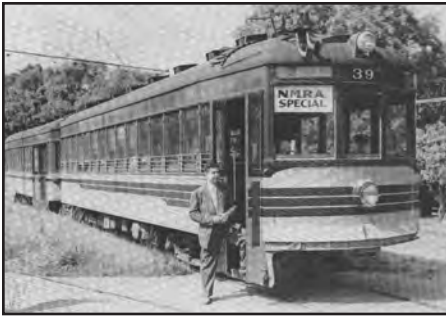
Children often placed pennies on the tracks to flatten them as the trains rode over them. They would also create daggers from large nails in the same way.



Bosch Hotel and Speedrail 301, 1950 — George Krambles



Hales Corners station, 1951 — The Trolley Dodger



Jae Maeder and Car 39-40, 1950
— George A. Gloff

Gradually, the Rapid Transit was extended to St. Martins and Muskego, and on to East Troy. Spur lines were added to accommodate certain businesses, such as the Schmidt Brothers feed store in the Village and the Cobb gravel pit near the west edge of Whitnall Park.

During World War II, with so many men in the armed forces, it was difficult to get experi-

enced workers to keep up the tracks and equipment, and the system began to decline. Buses and private cars competed with the trains and made them unprofitable.

Eventually, the line was purchased by **Jae Maeder**, a railroad buff who put on lighter-weight equipment and renamed the line “The Speed Rail.”

A “rail fan” convention was held in Milwaukee on Labor Day, September 2, 1950. Five special round-trip runs were scheduled between Milwaukee and Hales Corners. Tragically, two trains collided head-on that day. One train was an articulated lightweight; the other was an older-model, heavy-duty duplex. Ten people were killed and 46 were injured. The causes of the crash were con-



Speed Rail crash, Labor Day 1950

tentiously debated for years.

The subsequent publicity from this accident and one other resulted in the interurban’s demise. On June 30, 1951, Car 63 made the last round trip to Hales Corners, with people lining the right-of-way to bid goodbye to the once-popular transportation service.

— Sources: Hales Corners Historical Society, *Recollections of Lloyd C. Conrad*, *Live Wires Newspaper Article 2003*

The Ben Hunt Cabin sometimes can be an electrifying experience

It’s unfortunate that the Ben Hunt Cabin has been closed due to the pandemic, but we have made use of the downtime to remedy some interior problems. We discovered that rainwater had been leaking through the ceiling tiles around the fireplace in the main room.

Chris Schachtli and **Randy Sannes**, our dynamic duo, sprang into action. A coat of tar was applied around the chimney base to fill large gaps. Other holes were plugged around the main fireplace. New ceiling tiles were cut, painted, and installed along with some new insulation.

During this procedure, another problem was discovered: mice had built nests inside two electrical panels. The remains of one furry intruder were found inside the main panel. In addition, eight of eleven electric cables in that panel had been chewed through.

Those wiring issues were a

major concern and required professional help. Pace Electric, a regular Village contractor, estimated the repair costs at almost \$1,500.

Once again, our dynamic duo took action and appealed to the Hales Corners Board of Trustees for help with those

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Main panel before and after



Electrical wiring before and after

(Electrifying - continued from page 3)

expenses. They brought attention to the amount of money HCHS had recently spent on improvements to the Cabin. As a result, the Village Board agreed to fund the entire amount, for which our society is extremely grateful.

The following electrical work has been completed:

- Removal of the old wiring in the ceiling and its consolidation into one metal junction box.
- Replacement of all 11 electric cables with new ones, inside

a metal conduit to the main panel.

- Replacement of the old outlet box next to the fireplace with new boxes on each side of the chimney.
- Replacement of the old outlet in the kitchen room with a grounded outlet.
- Addition of a waterproof exterior outlet under the roof by the back door using the existing box.

For the moment, all critical electrical concerns have been addressed and the Cabin now includes a much safer, updated electrical system.

The Ben Hunt Cabin is reopening!

At last we are able to invite visitors to our Cabin. It will be open from 1-3 p.m. on: Saturday, September 4th, Saturday, October 2nd, Saturday, November 6th, and during the Christmas tree lighting on Saturday, December 4th.

TALES OF THE CORNERS

From the files of the *Tri-Town News and Hub*.

90 YEARS AGO (1931)

- Roasting corn sells for 15 cents a dozen at the Harvest Fair Day in Hales Corners.

80 YEARS AGO (1941)

- The National Foods store advertises 10 cans of sauerkraut for \$1.00, 4 lbs. of peaches for 29 cents, and 10 lbs. of red potatoes for 39 cents.

70 YEARS AGO (1951)

- The Hales Corners baseball team clinches the Land O'Lakes eastern division championship by beating Big Bend in a doubleheader.

60 YEARS AGO (1961)

- The Brach Veterinary Hospital is torn down to accommodate the widening of Highway 24. The building was erected at Forest Home Ave. and Janesville Road in 1913. (See feature article in September issue.)

Research by Katy Galewski

From the HCHS Images Collection



Pictured above are just a few floats from past 4th of July parades. Perhaps you have fond memories of working on these creations?

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