Comments?
Introduction

Electric Streetcars

It's hard to overstate the importance of streetcars to the urban center that was 1906 Detroit. That year, Detroiters took 148 million streetcar trips, most for daily commuting.



A Detroit workingman in 1906 could ride anywhere on the system's 184 miles of track for 6¢, 3¼¢ if he bought tickets in a book of eight. This mobility guaranteed emerging automakers a ready and reliable workforce whose work attendance would not be affected by Detroit's frequently inclement weather.



When auto manufacturing increased, and plants were built on vacant land far from residential areas, workers could move to their new plant without moving to a new home or incurring additional cost. They simply rode further out the line. As individual manufacturers' fortunes ebbed and flowed, workers carried their skills from one company to another along the streetcar lines. It was not uncommon for a laborer to work for as many as three or four shops in one year.



The cars seen here carry 20 to 34 people at average speeds of 10 to 15 MPH, top speed 35. Electric motors in the "trucks" under the wood-frame cars draw power from a 600-volt overhead trolley. Introduced in 1880 's, they replaced the horsecar system begun in 1863.

Go to page 2, Electric Streetcars