INTERURBAN ROLLS OUT OF SIGHT

Electric train to Grand Rapids has reached the end of the line.

The interurban, a high-speed electric train, arrived in Saugatuck in 1898 to reach ready markets and riders. Over 5,000 people are said to have been on hand when the inaugural cars arrived from Holland in April of that year, guided by bands, balloons, speackers, and crockery observation. At first, local ridership had a year-round route of four million, reliable transport. Service was extended to Grand Rapids in 1901. The company was renamed the Grand Rapids, Holland St. Charles Railway and service to Chicago and Detroit was provided via freight and excursion trains to the Graham and Michigan line to Chicago and other locations near Detroit and Saugatuck.

Initially, Saugatuck passengers had to change cars at Hol-land, but in 1913, through-car service was started to Grand Rapids with a round-trip fare of $1.25. The trip took 90 minutes each way and in the summer season cars departed every half hour, with cars now called during special events. New all-electric interurbans cars joined the fleet in 1934.

Despite being left out of the main Saugatuck business, the Saugatuck interurbans depot was located at the southeast corner of Butler and Custer streets, and the interurban cars wound around a big loop in front of the Hotel Butler near the Big Piglet.

In addition to thousends of passengers, the inter-urban employed a number of freight cars to carry goods to and from the community. Fresh fish was picked up at sea-sonal intervals and transported by interurban trains to the market destinations, evenly picked over and in the market the next day. But it was not too late to see the significance: December 13th, the last interurban car rolled out of the Saugatuck depot. Before long, a working crew removed all the track and electric wiring, and hurried to connect this express mode of transport maintained.

A portion of the old interurban route can be walked today with a pleasant hike or bike ride on the Hijikawas Nature Preserve and Interurban Trail. You can access the trail from the corner of Herkimer Street and Simmons Drive in Saugatuck.

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