

## An Electrifying Idea in Johnson County, Texas

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At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a new mode of transportation awakened the sleepy towns of North Texas. Interurban railways spread across the area and joined country farmers with city bankers and merchants. Sleek, modern wood and metal cars, propelled by an electrified overhead wire, carried men to work, children to school, and on the weekends ferried families to city stores and theaters. A day's trip by horse and buggy took minutes or hours on the quick, stately vehicles. To the residents of a rural Texas county south of Fort Worth, the interurban delivered people, goods, and 20<sup>th</sup> Century conveniences. Extending the interurban to Cleburne took almost a decade, and yet for them the end came years before the last interurbans ran between Fort Worth, Dallas, and Waco. But for nearly nineteen years, the interurban was the pride and envy of many towns in Johnson County, Texas, shaping their development for decades afterward.

Johnson County, created by an act of the Fifth Texas Legislature on 13 February 1854 and named for legislator and Mexican War veteran Middleton Tate Johnson, rests below Tarrant County and is surrounded by Ellis to the east, Hill to the south, and portions of Somervell and Parker to the west. Cattlemen and farmers of grit and character tamed the land in the 1840s and '50s and Johnson County struggled with the rest of Texas through the horrors of the Civil War. Indian raids were frequent in the absence of men to defend the white man's frontier.<sup>1</sup> Upon the return of Johnson County's fighting men, the seat of the county moved from Buchanan to Camp Henderson, renamed Cleburne in honor of slain Confederate General Patrick R. Cleburne.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson County History Book Committee, *History of Johnson County, Texas* (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1985), 3-9.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson County History Book Committee, *History of Johnson County, Texas* (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1985), 4-9.

In contrast to Fort Worth and Dallas in the 1870s, Cleburne failed to secure the lifeblood of the late nineteenth century, a railroad. Early efforts made in 1873, 1877, and 1879 failed due to a lack of interest, investment, and sound planning, but changes were afoot.<sup>3</sup> In 1881, the Gulf, Colorado, & Santa Fe Railroad chose Cleburne as a stop on its line from Fort Worth to Galveston. In 1897, the railroad chose Cleburne over Dallas, Fort Worth, and Temple for its construction and repair shops. A water works, telephone system, and electrical power plant served Cleburne before 1900. In 1910, Cleburne distinguished itself not only in Johnson County, but in Texas when Reverend Henry Eugene Luck began the first Texas car manufacturer, the Cleburne Motor Car Company. The first airplane built in Texas had support from Cleburne. A hospital, sanitarium, Carnegie Library, and an electric street railway were well established by 1911 amongst several brick roads and modern buildings. Cleburne had the trappings of a great city waiting for her riches to be shared with the region.<sup>4</sup>

In the days of steam locomotion, railroads needed sources of fresh water and fuel at regular intervals, leading to the establishment of Rio Vista and Joshua along the G C & S F in 1881. Joshua attracted residents from the surrounding villages of Caddo Grove and Lane Prairie. Although smaller than Burleson, by 1910 Joshua featured a bank, a thriving business district, and Willie Denton College, which educated first grade through two years past high school. On a more direct path between Fort Worth and Cleburne, Joshua appeared certain to benefit from the increased exposure of an interurban stop.<sup>5</sup>

As the G C & S F built to Cleburne, the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad expanded south from Fort Worth, forming Burleson in far north Johnson County in late 1881. Robert Montgomery, son-in-law of famed Civil War General Grenville Mellen Dodge, purchased 161 acres from Reverend

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon, Dudley M, *The History of Cleburne* (Austin: The University of Texas, 1929); interlibrary loan, University of Texas at Austin, 117-119.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson County History Book Committee, *History of Johnson County, Texas* (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1985), 131-135, 139, 146-147.

<sup>5</sup> Joshua Historical Committee, *Joshua: As It Was and Is 1853 – 1976* (Cleburne, Tex.: Bennett Printing Company, 1977), 147-149.

Henry C. Renfro, a prosperous farmer and rancher, on 17 March 1881.<sup>6</sup> In turn, Dodge, the purchasing agent for the M K & T, bought the land from Montgomery and began dividing it into blocks and lots. The rocky prairies and densely-forested hills surrounding Burleson, which had been home to scattered farmers in the small villages of Marystown, Caddo Grove, Village Creek, and Brushy Mound, declined as settlers moved closer to the railroad depot in Burleson.

By 1895, Burleson boasted saw and grist mills, a newspaper named the *Burleson Banner*, a hotel, druggist, dry goods stores, and a thriving business district of wooden buildings. Situated fourteen miles from Fort Worth, Alvarado, and Cleburne, Burleson greeted farmers, businessmen, and weary travelers on their way from one town to the other. Fires in 1895 and 1902 destroyed the businesses along Front Street, but from their ashes emerged modern brick structures for the Wilson Brothers Furniture Store, Armstrong Brothers, Rudd & Son Druggists, and Continental State Bank.<sup>7</sup>

The first call from Burleson residents for an interurban came in February 1907 when the Commercial Club asked their representatives in the Texas Legislature to pass “all bills and amendments which encourage construction and operation of interurbans.”<sup>8</sup> The Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad created Burleson, but city fathers like the town’s most prominent farmer & businessman, George W. Bransom and early postmaster William “Bill” Lace understood that the interurban pointed to the future.

Regional transportation became a facet of life in North Texas early in the twentieth century. The railroads which had connected Texas with the outside world in the latter part of the nineteenth century had done little to replace the horse and buggy in rural, agrarian communities. Then in 1899 Fred Fitch of Denison contacted a local engineer, R.H. McWilley to stake out a route for an interurban railroad between the cities of Sherman and Denison. Two years later, on 1 May, 1901, the Denison and

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<sup>6</sup> Griffith, Robert A., “First Generation”, Private Papers of Robert A. Griffith, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Burleson Historical Committee, *Burleson The First One Hundred Years* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1981), 7-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 14 February 1907.

Sherman Railway inaugurated an age of mass transportation in North Texas. Businessman George T. Bishop of Cleveland, Ohio and J.F. Strickland, owner of electrical utilities in several Texas towns, took notice of the developments in Sherman and Denison. Bishop bought out the City Railway of Fort Worth in 1900 and formed the Northern Texas Traction Company (hereafter “NTTC”), which in 1902 constructed a thirty-five mile track joining Fort Worth and Dallas. Strickland’s Texas Traction Company acquired the Sherman and Denison interests and linked those two cities to Dallas in 1906. The interurban met with vast success, and the competing companies set their sights on other North Texas towns which stood to benefit from an electric interurban railway.<sup>9</sup>

The first musings of an interurban in Cleburne came not from Fort Worth but Dallas. An article in the *Dallas Morning News* lists Cleburne as a contender for an interurban on 10 October 1902<sup>10</sup>. A chorus of business and civic leaders clamored for a Dallas-Cleburne Interurban, among them Judge George W. Riddle, who commented in the 7 May 1910 edition of the *Dallas Morning News*:

The fact that we have no railroad connection with the territory between here and Cleburne should alone be a sufficient reason for building the interurban. But here is a country, cut up into highly cultivated farms and truck patches, dotted over with thriving towns and villages, and inhabited by as fine a class of people as there is in the South, clamoring for closer relations with this city, and offering to give the right of way, and to contribute in other ways toward the expenses of securing the road.

Representatives from the towns of Venus, Lillian, Alvarado, Mansfield, and Midlothian traveled to meet with the Dallas Board of Trade and organized a tour of the area in mid-1909.

Eventually, J.F. Strickland turned his focus to Waco, where he constructed an interurban line south

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<sup>9</sup> Myers, Johnnie J, *Texas Electric Railway*, ed. LeRoy O. King (Chicago: Central Electric Railfans’ Association, 1982), 9-10, 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 10 October 1902.

from Dallas through Hillsboro to Waco in 1913.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, Strickland would complete a separate line from Dallas to Corsicana, and merge all of his interests under the Texas Electric Railway Company.

Interest in Fort Worth of constructing an interurban line into Johnson County grew with the failure of Dallas interests to act. The NTTTC conducted a myriad of surveys from 1907 to 1909 between Fort Worth and Cleburne, but a nationwide economic downturn forced the company to curb its growth.

Then on 10 March 1911, the *Dallas Morning News* reported a meeting between the Cleburne Board of Trade and “committeemen from Burleson and Joshua” who agreed to secure right of way between and south of their villages. The Board of Trade had an active role in organizing the Fort Worth-Cleburne interurban, naming O.L. Bishop, Brown Douglas, and J.C. Blakeney trustees to secure stock.<sup>12</sup> On 12 March 1911, the Cleburne City Council and the NTTTC signed a contract to guarantee right of way for an interurban between Fort Worth and Cleburne.<sup>13</sup> The Stone & Webster Syndicate of Boston, managers of the NTTTC, was authorized to grade and construct the route from Fort Worth to Cleburne with assistance from the United States Corps of Engineers.

Surveys commenced on 1 April 1911 and continued throughout the month. Much to the dismay of Burleson residents, one survey built the line south from Fort Worth on the established Hemphill Streetcar Line through the towns of Crowley and Joshua to the west side of Cleburne, bypassing Burleson and Everman in favor of a shorter route and gentler grade to the west.<sup>14</sup>

Agents for the NTTTC and Stone & Webster motored into Cleburne for meetings with the Interurban Committee of the Board of Trade. The *Cleburne Daily Enterprise* contains almost daily updates on the grand electric railway during the spring and summer of 1911. On 17 May 1911, the *Cleburne Daily Enterprise* reported four new cars were on order by the NTTTC. The Tarrant County

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<sup>11</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, pagim 1908–1909, 1913.

<sup>12</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 10 March 1911.

<sup>13</sup> *Cleburne Daily Enterprise*, 17 March 1911.

<sup>14</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 2 May 1911.

Commissioners Court granted the Fort Worth Southern Traction Company, chartered by the NTTC, permission to build the Fort Worth-Cleburne Interurban Line on 31 July 1911.<sup>15</sup>

Planners abandoned the Crowley route by 1 August 1911, when the *Dallas Morning News* described the route of the Fort Worth-Cleburne Interurban:

The line will run out of Fort Worth by the East Front street line to a point on the Fort Worth-Dallas interurban near the substation on Sycamore Creek and thence south, just skirting the southeast edge of Polytechnic Heights and passing about half a mile west of the Masonic Orphans' Home through Everman, Burleson and Joshua and entering Cleburne via North Main street.

The NTTC reported the arrival of a locomotive and track laying material in February 1912. On 24 April, 2,400 tons of steel were on the ground at Burleson. Work commenced from the midpoint, Burleson, five miles north to Deer Creek. In May, General Manager George Clifford of the Fort Worth Southern Traction Company reported nineteen and one-half miles of track connected the Masonic Home in Fort Worth with Everman, Burleson, and extended two miles south of Joshua. Foundations for the two power substations to serve the line were poured north of Burleson near Oak Grove (Tye) and south of Joshua (Lightfoot). Track-laying finished in July 1912 and copper wires to carry the electrical current followed. A streetcar carrying officials from the Fort Worth Southern Traction Company traversed the line to Burleson soon thereafter. Stations decided upon in July 1912 included the Masonic Home in Fort Worth, Everman, Burleson, Joshua, and Cleburne, with additional stops every two miles.<sup>16</sup> Foreseeing the closeness interurban service would bring to their towns, the Fort Worth Board of Trade paid a social visit to Cleburne on 12 August.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Cleburne Daily Enterprise*, 2 April 1912, 15 April 1912, 17 May 1911, 1 August 1912.

<sup>16</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 7 April 1912, 4 May 1912, 4 July 1912.

<sup>17</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 12 August 1912.

The interurban boom sweeping North Texas captured the attention of Edward P. Turner, a one-time manager with the Texas & Pacific Railroad. Turner proposed five interurban roads out of Dallas to be funded, principally, by the towns they served. The first he sought to build would run from Dallas to Terrell, touching Paris before reaching Texarkana. Other lines passed through Irving on the way to Fort Worth; to Gainesville via Denton; and to Glen Rose by way of Walnut Springs, Mansfield, and Cleburne.<sup>18</sup>

The Dallas County Commissioners Court granted Turner and his associates a fifty-year interurban franchise on 14 March 1912 with the stipulation that construction begin within twelve months and be complete within another six.<sup>19</sup> Despite the construction of a line from Fort Worth to their town and the failure of J.F. Strickland's interests the previous decade, residents of Cleburne still believed a connection with Dallas to be beneficial. Turner appeared at the Cleburne Board of Trade on 29 April 1912 to announce his solicitation of right-of-way for a road from Dallas to Glen Rose.<sup>20</sup>

As Turner barnstormed for his interurbans, the NTTTC opened interurban service between Fort Worth and Cleburne at 6:30 a.m. Sunday, 1 September 1912. Mr. E.J. Campsey of Cleburne purchased the first ticket and approximately 1,200 people rode the first day.<sup>21</sup> By 27 September 1912, additional cars were added to the line to accommodate a daily 6:30 a.m. start. Cars departed Fort Worth on the hour beginning at 6:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. Two night runs left Fort Worth at 8:30 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Freight deliveries from Fort Worth arrived at 5:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m., and at 5:00 p.m. and freight cars left Cleburne at 7:00 a.m., 3:00 p.m., and 7:00 p.m. Two cars returning from Cleburne tied up in Burleson for the 6 a.m. run to Cleburne. The passenger cars of the line, older cars from the Dallas-Fort Worth

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<sup>18</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 31 March 1912.

<sup>19</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 14 March 1912.

<sup>20</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 29 April 1912.

<sup>21</sup> *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, 2 September 1912.

Interurban, were painted a distinct olive green with yellow molding, causing riders to coin it “The Pea Vine” line.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, surveying for the Dallas-Cleburne-Glen Rose Interurban commenced in earnest on 22 April 1913 when a group of eighteen men led by John T. Witt set up camp beyond Eagle Ford. Two routes were announced, a northern path from Cleburne through Keene, Lillian, Mansfield, and Grand Prairie, and a southern path from Cleburne through Keene, Alvarado, and Venus<sup>23</sup> which, coincidentally, closely mirrors the path taken by US Highway 67 on its path to Dallas today. On 14 July 1913, Turner filed a motion in Austin chartering the Dallas Southwestern Traction Company to construct the eighty-mile line from Dallas to Glen Rose. Among the directors of the company were prominent Judge William Poindexter and John L. Cleveland of Cleburne; J.C. Smyth, B.C. Kelley, P.K. Thompson, and J.P. Fielder of Venus; and B.M. Sansom and W.C. Glasgow of Alvarado.<sup>24</sup>

The widespread support the NTTC encountered in Cleburne seemed poised to repeat itself with Turner’s company, but despite the rosy outlook, the Dallas-Glen Rose Interurban never materialized. Turner asked for extensions for his interurban franchise throughout the decade<sup>25</sup>, yet the line would not be built. Ironically, his obituary in 1931 said little of his work to build interurbans<sup>26</sup>, and few remember Turner’s ambitious plans today. The Fort Worth Southern Traction Company, reorganized in 1914 as the Tarrant County Traction Company, remained the sole operator of interurban electric railway service into Cleburne.

Perhaps no other town in Johnson County benefited more from the interurban than Burleson. On 18 May 1912 as the NTTC line from Fort Worth neared completion, residents voted to

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<sup>22</sup> Johnson County History Book Committee, *History of Johnson County, Texas* (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1985), 148-150.

<sup>23</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 23 April 1913.

<sup>24</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 15 July 1913.

<sup>25</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 10 April 1915 and 8 October 1918.

<sup>26</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 30 March 1931.



incorporate.<sup>27</sup> The first concrete floor, electric lights, and ceiling fans in Burleson were in the spacious quarters the traction company built for ticket agent Albert Hendon Loyless and his father-in-law, E.F. Robbins, whose Loyless & Robbins Drug Store had long served the community. The partners installed a mahogany soda fountain, display cases, ticket booth, and confectionary tables in their new home. An elevated freight dock, turntable, motorman's house, and an electrical building at the rear of the Interurban Drugstore completed the traction company's investment and made their quarters in Burleson the finest of the entire line. Through a friendship with H.T. Pangburn of Fort Worth, A.H. Loyless brightened the smiles of Burleson's children with Pangburn's Candies and his red, white, and black ice cream, all delivered on the interurban. As the Burleson School did not offer twelfth grade in the 1910s, many students went to twelfth grade in Fort Worth. Once homes and businesses in Burleson were alight with electricity, the Interurban Drugstore became a bill payment center for the power company. Medicines to ease the Influenza Epidemic of 1919 came on the interurban express car. During World War I, volunteers from Burleson utilized the interurban to join the war effort.<sup>28</sup>

Residents from Burleson and across Johnson County rode the interurban for pleasurable as well as practical reasons. In 1901, the NTTTC constructed a large power plant at Handley and Lake Erie, a water source for the plant, seven miles east of Fort Worth. By 1912, Lake Erie had become a popular attraction, boasting elaborate dancing, picnic, and banquet accommodations, along with a marina, park grounds, and fishing<sup>29</sup>. The interurban made daily stops at Lake Erie, where the tangy aroma of barbeque and the crack of a baseball bat often filled the air<sup>30</sup>. Burlesonites even traveled to the State Fair and the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show on the interurban.

Brill Magazine, a trade journal from the world's premier electric car builder, detailed the extent of interurban operations in North Texas in July 1915:

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<sup>27</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 16 February 1912.

<sup>28</sup> Beard, Michael H, "The Interurban Drugstore", Private Papers of Michael H. Beard, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Myers, Johnnie J, *Texas Electric Railway*, ed. LeRoy O. King (Chicago: Central Electric Railfans' Association, 1982), 143.

<sup>30</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 6 August 1903.

Between Dallas and Fort Worth the number of passenger cars used in normal operation is 8, and between Fort Worth and Cleburne, 3. The total number of passenger cars available for both systems is 26 motors and 9 trailers. During the year 1914 the number of passengers carried on both lines was 2,451,293, and the car mileage, 1,729,946. For the same year the number of pieces of express matter carried was 39,911.

By 1916, the combined networks of the Texas Traction Company (Dallas to Sherman & Denison), Southern Traction Company (Dallas to Waco & Corsicana), Northern Texas Traction Company (Fort Worth to Dallas & Cleburne), and their subsidiaries encompassed a third of the state's population and thirty-eight percent of the state's farm production. A common slogan of the day declared, "A car your way any hour of the day."<sup>31</sup> Major commercial and industrial centers familiar to Texans such as Plano, McKinney, and Richardson were linked at between one-and-a-half and three-cents per mile with Ennis, Corsicana, Lancaster, Hillsboro, and even country singer Willie Nelson's hometown of Abbot.<sup>32</sup>

Newta May Pearce, daughter of T.N. Pearce, recounted several adventurous stories involving the interurban in Burleson: The First One Hundred Years. During World War I, "Many Canadian pilots came to Burleson on weekends, via interurban, and strolled about the town. People invited them in for meals and I'm sure they enjoyed the visits as much as the residents did." Later, she adds, "Probably about 1915, [her brother] Paul and I went to Cleburne on the interurban with a group to hear [Lt. John Philip] Sousa's Band."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Myers, Johnnie J, *Texas Electric Railway*, ed. LeRoy O. King (Chicago: Central Electric Railfans' Association, 1982), 47-48.

<sup>32</sup> Myers, Johnnie J, *Texas Electric Railway*, ed. LeRoy O. King (Chicago: Central Electric Railfans' Association, 1982), 49.

<sup>33</sup> Burleson Historical Committee, *Burleson The First One Hundred Years* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1981), 178-179.

The interurban took cheerful children to school and families to faraway stores in the cities, but the interurban also served a necessary public service during the Flu Epidemic that struck during the winter of 1918-1919. Mrs. W.W. Arnold recalled the epidemic in Oak Grove, three miles northeast of Burleson:

Even as the world cheered the war's end, a new, more insidious enemy was launching a world wide attack which would kill more people than the conflict it so closely followed. Sitting up with the sick and burying the dead took all the neighbors time. The fall of 1918 and early part of 1919 was very cold and rainy. Dirt roads were poor traveling. Family or neighbors would go get the caskets, brought out by the interurban, in wagons drawn by horse or mule. Roy Merrifield helped dig the grave on January 14, 1918, for Jim Hardgrove and then Roy died on January 22, 1918. We were told because of so many deaths, flowers were scarce. Lula Hardgrove Marti reports when her daddy, Gus Hardgrove, died, her husband, John, rode the interurban to Fort Worth and was able to purchase a spray of white roses.<sup>34</sup>

The first mention of an interurban in Cleburne appeared in the *Dallas Morning News* in 1902.<sup>35</sup>

On 1 September, 1912, the first cars rolled from Fort Worth to Cleburne, opening the world to the residents of each stop. During the nineteen years the interurban connected Tarrant and Johnson Counties, a World War, the Influenza Epidemic of 1919, and the stock market crash of 1929 occurred. A stunning 8,266,000 fares were sold on the Fort Worth-Cleburne Interurban, but it was not enough for

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<sup>34</sup> Burleson Historical Committee, *Burleson The First One Hundred Years* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1981), 236.

<sup>35</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 10 October 1902.

the traction company to maintain service in the midst of growing economic hardship and the availability of automobiles and buses.

Recognizing the vital link the interurban had forged between Fort Worth and Burleson, four of the town's leaders, E.M. Wilson, G.E. Bransom, A.W. Haskew, and interurban ticket agent A.H. Loyless visited Fort Worth in mid-March 1931 to convince traction officials to maintain the 6 a.m. northbound and 5:30 p.m. southbound runs of the interurban from and to Burleson for the benefit of citizens working in Fort Worth. The *Burleson News* carried a fortuitous warning from the committee, writing "If there was not enough patronage on these cars to justify them to operate them, they would be compelled to discontinue them indefinitely."<sup>36</sup>

Little more than a month later, the interurban pulled out of Johnson County. On 30 April 1931, longtime Motorman J.J. Miles ferried passengers on the "Davy Crockett" of the interurban's illustrious maroon & cream-colored Pioneer Series line of cars on its final voyage.<sup>37</sup>

Michael H. Beard, a longtime researcher into the history of Johnson County, described the passing of the interurban age in Burleson on 30 April 1931<sup>38</sup>:

Citizens along the interurban route were disenchanted to say the least at the news of the interurban's discontinued operation. [...] During that last day, as well-known interurban motorman Jesse J. Miles arrived at the Loyless Interurban Drugstore, a crowd of townspeople stood in reverence. [...] A.H. Loyless shook his old friend's hand and showed Mr. Miles the first interurban ticket ever sold in Burleson. The city's old Mayor and pioneer resident, G.W. Bransom toddled along on his walking stick down to the drugstore as he had so many times before and wished the motorman well.

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<sup>36</sup> *Burleson News*, 27 March 1931.

<sup>37</sup> Beard, Michael H, "The Interurban Drugstore", Private Papers of Michael H. Beard, 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Beard, Michael H, "The Loyless Interurban Drugstore", Private Papers of Michael H. Beard, 2008.

The same response occurred repeatedly as the train made its “Swan Song” run.

On that Swan Song run of the interurban April 30, 1931 was William Arthur Wood, Sr., ticket agent at Joshua. The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* quoted Wood as saying, “Discontinuing this service is going to hurt the towns along the line, particularly Joshua. Section laborers along the line [have] an annual payroll of about \$16,000, live in Joshua.”<sup>39</sup>

A day after the interurban’s final run in Johnson County, *Burleson News* editor Matt B. Neighbors began an acerbic appraisal of the town’s woes with, “The only thing that can kill a small town is the indifference of its citizens.”<sup>40</sup>

At the zenith of the interurban age in 1930, electric railways stretched 250 miles across North Texas, encompassing eleven counties and hundreds of thousands of people from all economic, social, and racial backgrounds. Men like J.F. Strickland envisioned lines to Austin, Abilene, Oklahoma, and Houston, but the saturation of automobiles and roads forestalled further growth. Nationwide, there were five hundred thousand automobiles in 1910; a decade later, there were more than eight million.<sup>41</sup>

The *Dallas Morning News* announced the abandonment of the Dallas-Fort Worth Interurban on 27 November 1934 after a loss of \$21,435 in ten months, a princely sum in 1934. Vultures immediately swept in to pick at the company’s holdings. One of them, Dallas County Commissioner Vernon Singleton, expressed a desire for Tarrant and Dallas Counties to acquire the interurban right-of-way to expand the highway linking the cities.<sup>42</sup> On 24 December 1934, three years after J.J. Miles piloted the final run of the Fort Worth-Cleburne Interurban, the NTTTC ended its flagship Dallas-Fort

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<sup>39</sup> Doris Jo Haas, interview by Robert Griffith, explanation of unknown *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 30 April 1931 article, 28 February 2009.

<sup>40</sup> *Burleson News*, 1 May 1931.

<sup>41</sup> Nechyba, Thomas J., and Randall P. Walsh, “Urban Sprawl”, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18.4 (2004), 182.

<sup>42</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 27 November 1934.

Worth Interurban. Five minutes after the final interurban left Dallas at midnight, buses took their place along the rest of the route.<sup>43</sup>

The Texas Electric Railway, the baby of J.F. Strickland, endured the Second World War but the encroachment of automobiles placed unneeded stress on an aging infrastructure too expensive to maintain.<sup>44</sup> “The straw that broke the camel’s back”, as Dr. John J. Myers explains it, occurred 10 April 1948 when southbound Car 365 met northbound Car 366 in a head-on collision. Although no fatalities resulted from the accident, thirty passengers and the motorman were injured. The third serious accident in less than three years led Texas Electric Railway to abandon its last interurban operations. As the NTTC had done in 1931, the Texas Electric Railway Company chartered a bus line. The final run of the interurban occurred on 31 December 1948. Motorman C.T. Dickenson of Waco piloted the final run of the interurban in Texas from Waco to Dallas. The following day a fleet of buses made each stop as the interurbans had for the preceding forty-seven years.<sup>45</sup>

By 1948, Johnson County remembered the interurban only in memory. Highways crisscrossed Johnson County; some, like State Highway 174, closely follow the old interurban route. In Joshua, the interurban depot was torn down in the name of progress. For Burleson, a visible symbol of the interurban is still standing. A.H. Loyless moved his drugstore from the small red brick interurban building in 1935. Robert Garland Knox Deering moved his newspaper, *The Burleson News* into the structure soon after, and from there the paper continued until September 1985; in 2000, the City of Burleson christened the Burleson Heritage Visitors Center on the site. North of Burleson, the Tye Power Station, so named for the farmer on whose land the station was built came tumbling down in April 2005. Though their bells have been silent for nearly eighty years, the interurban’s influence is still resounding as municipalities clamor for a light rail connection similar to the old electric railway.

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<sup>43</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 25 December 1934.

<sup>44</sup> Myers, Johnnie J, *Texas Electric Railway*, ed. LeRoy O. King (Chicago: Central Electric Railfans’ Association, 1982), 156-157.

<sup>45</sup> Myers, Johnnie J, *Texas Electric Railway*, ed. LeRoy O. King (Chicago: Central Electric Railfans’ Association, 1982), 104-110.

Until that day, Burlison and Johnson County can still ride the rusty rails of memory in search of that electrifying idea of long ago.

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