Rochester-RochesterHills**Patch** ☁ 46°

Century-Old Streetcar Tracks Uncovered Below Rochester's Main Street

The tracks were part of the Detroit United Railway, and what is now downtown Rochester was a trolley car hub 'back in the heyday.'

By **Kristin Bull** | **Email the author** | August 31, 2012

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Trolley tracks from days gone by were uncovered by Main Street Makeover workers this week in downtown Rochester. Credit David Gifford

Historians in Rochester knew it was likely. And this week, their predictions were confirmed.

Workers on the **Main Street Makeover** in downtown Rochester uncovered on Thursday what still remains of the Detroit United Railway tracks in Rochester.

The tracks were found north of University Drive near the Rochester Medical Center and Paint Creek bridge.

History, uncovered

Rochester City Manager Jaymes Vettraino **promised at the start of the Main Street Makeover in the spring that history would be uncovered**. In fact, local historians were pretty sure the tracks still existed.

According to Deborah Larsen, a member of the **Rochester Avon Historical Society** and author of *Home Town Rochester*, the tracks uncovered this week were laid in 1899. The DUR rail line stretched from Detroit to Flint and carried freight like milk for dairy farmers. It also transported people who wanted to come to the city — Detroit — to shop and dine.

This particular spot in Rochester was a hub for the DUR and also for the Michigan Central Railroad, which is now the Paint Creek Trail. The tracks crossed at this exact location of the discovery.

A power house and car barn for the railroads existed where the Atallah Heart Center is now, Larsen said. Look closely at photos of the uncovered railroad tracks taken this week; you will see that the tracks curved to allow cars to go into the car barn for repair.

'Window into the past'

The last trolley car pulled out of Rochester on this track in 1931. "In its heydey in the 20s, there were 62 cars entering and leaving Rochester every day," Larsen said.

During World War II, most of the tracks were stripped for iron. Larsen said she doesn't know for sure why these tracks on Main Street were left in place, but she is guessing that the intersection of the railroad tracks at this spot made it difficult to remove.

"This is another window into the past," Larsen said. "We were almost certain the rails were still there. But none of us can remember those days, so it's exciting to get a glimpse of what's there."

As part of the Main Street reconstruction work, the rail tracks will be removed; the city has been diligent with **preserving and displaying the historical findings**.

For more photos and to stay up-to-date with historical findings, follow the ***Rochester Avon Historical Society on Facebook***.

Mike   Flag as inappropriate
8:34 am on Saturday, September 1, 2012

What will it take for Rochester to have mass transit again? I trust our city leaders are thinking about this. A bus connecting into the regional system would be helpful.

Reply

Dee Kay   Flag as inappropriate
7:13 pm on Saturday, September 1, 2012

The problem with mass transit is that too few people use the service to make it economically viable. The MDOT bus that stopped in Rochester had so little of a paying base in this area as to not being cost efficient. When you start expanding to the suburbs, you find that mass transit only goes to certain areas that you may or may not want or need to go. An auto is more of need in these suburban areas than it is a want. How many people can honestly state that they could get by long in this area without a vehicle? The OPC bus program is about the only system in this area that could be somewhat viable, and it only runs certain hours.

Look at the people mover in Detroit, AMTRAK, or the MDOT bus system to get an idea of how hard it is to get people to use mass transit. In a highly populated area it has merit and can be a worthwhile option to owning a car. In the greater Rochester-Rochester Hills-Oakland Township area it would be little more than another expensive waste of money.

When gas reaches $25-$30 per gallon you may find more people availing themselves of mass transit. Until that time though it is little less than wanting a return to earlier and easier times fantasy. Our politicians already seem to live in an alternate fantasy world where money has little value. Why give them any more excuses to find ways to part us from our money? We currently have far more pressing needs begging for money. Let's meet some of those first.

RH Grandma   Flag as inappropriate
10:04 am on Saturday, September 1, 2012

Fun news! I'll have to get down to the display (307 Main Street?) Any idea what will happen to the discoveries after the road project is done?

Reply

Carol   Flag as inappropriate

11:02 am on Saturday, September 1, 2012

This is really cool.

Reply

Carol Lynn   Flag as inappropriate

12:17 pm on Saturday, September 1, 2012

How interesting and neat is that !!? I love all of the "old finds" !

Reply

Barb Borowiecki Buckman   Flag as inappropriate

2:05 pm on Saturday, September 1, 2012

I agree Mike...I would love, love, love to have mass transit in this area, why can't Rochester be the first one to set an example to the rest of the cities/townships! I've traveled to countries in Europe that utilize effective and eco-friendly mass transit and can never get enough of using it. Even cities here in the states have amazing mass transit, Portland and Boston are great examples. Granted these are large cities, but why can't we scale it down and have it work in this area. Even something that runs from Oakland University/Meadowbrooke to downtown Rochester. Its much more cost effective too, for less than a price of a gallon you can get an all day pass that takes you all over the city/town. I often mention to my husband how amazing it would be to have Rochester connect to Birmingham. Royal Oak, Ferndale and even Auburn Hills downtowns. If I had a choice I would get rid of my car and use mass transit!

Reply

Frank D.   Flag as inappropriate

3:55 pm on Saturday, September 1, 2012

I was born and raised in Western Europe (the Old Europe) and that country has the same population as Michigan on 1/8 the size...Makes it much easier to have public transportation, which is kept alive by the tax payers. The latter are now paying up to 50 % income taxes, to support all kind of "social goodies"..
I love it here and don't miss these social goodies at all....

David Gifford   Flag as inappropriate

11:59 pm on Saturday, September 1, 2012

I too would love to see this but the auto age is dragging its heels kicking and screaming. Someday the price of oil will cause the price of driving and home heating to rise beyond what people are willing to pay and the demand for alternative transportation will happen. Until then we can only dream of taking a train up north or a light rail to Detroit for a ball game and back.

Brian Golden   Flag as inappropriate

4:11 pm on Saturday, September 1, 2012

I'm a local trolley historian from Farmington. I wrote a book called Farmington Junction: A Trolley History. The track in the road is called a WYE. This would allow the trolley cars to turn around. There were 2 wyes in Rochester. One at the car barn facility and the other heading east to Washington on Washington Road to Imlay City. Where were these photos taken and were the tracks removed or were they covered over again like they were in the late 1920's early 1930's?

Reply

David Gifford   Flag as inappropriate

11:44 pm on Saturday, September 1, 2012

I took these photos on Thursday 8/30/12 and they are still there near where the car barn was. They will be removed soon though as the road is being redone from bridge to bridge.

Beth Scheffert   Flag as inappropriate

5:33 pm on Saturday, September 1, 2012

How cool. I figured they would find them. When we moved to Rochester in1965 my great grandmother would tell us stories about taking the trolley from Detroit to Rochester to pick apples. Little did she know that her grandchildren would build a house in that very orchard, now Knorrwood Hills off Orion Road.

Kristin Bull
8:39 pm on Monday, September 3, 2012

That is such a special story, Beth ... apple-picking via trolley train!

Patricia Kane
9:51 am on Sunday, September 2, 2012

David, your photographs are always so cool and add yet another enjoyable element to the Patch. I remember tracks and I remember the other tracks with the Bee Line coming through for mail and pick up/drop off when our train station was in use-My grandmother would come down from Bay City on it to visit with us in the summer. After being here for 57-58 years, I like taking a walk back-thanks for the memories.

Doug Brown
8:25 pm on Sunday, September 2, 2012

The tracks are cool but why did they let the flowers on the bridge die over the weekend. They were looking great. Did someone forget to water them?

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