A winter view of a Consolidated Street Railway car in downtown Cottonwood Falls during the pre-auto days. Notice the heavily bundled driver and the unprotected horse.

Looking north along Broadway street in Cottonwood Falls from the second story of the Chase county courthouse. This photo, probably taken in the late 1890’s, shows a horse car at its southern terminal. The long shadows of the summer afternoon prove that the horse is still there, as he is about to begin the two-mile trip to the Catholic church in Strong City.
COTTONWOOD FALLS

The two-mile north and south route of the Consolidated Street Railway which operated in Chase county from 1887 to 1919.
The Horse-car Interurban From Cottonwood Falls to Strong City

ALLISON CHANDLER

ONE of the strangest stories in Kansas interurban annals concerns the Consolidated Street Railway of Cottonwood Falls and Strong City. This line rightfully laid claim to being one of Kansas' first inter-town street railways. It was never an electric railway system; it was established as a horse-car line and survived more than three decades without substantial change. Then it proudly converted to a modern car line and collapsed within 18 months! Consolidated was Kansas' shortest interurban—two miles long, but it was steeped in Kansas history.

In July, 1870, the Atchison & Topeka railroad reached Emporia 20 miles to the east, in its push westward. Immediately there was speculation as to which side of the Cottonwood river the new rail line would extend. The company was having difficulty in financing the westward extension, and time was running short in which to reach the western line of Kansas, to earn the grant of lands across the state. It was important that the line be extended to the Arkansas river as quickly as possible to get full benefit of the cattle business which was going northward to Abilene and the Kansas Pacific.

For these reasons, the new rails were laid north of the river, and Cottonwood Falls, just south of the stream, lost out. Cottonwood Station was established in 1872, just one and one-half miles north of Cottonwood Falls. The town which immediately began grow-

ALLISON CHANDLER, who is employed in the advertising department of the Salina Journal, has prepared a book-length manuscript entitled "Trolley Through the Countryside." The portion reproduced here is part of that manuscript.


(385)
ing up around the station was in 1881. Named Strong, after a president of the Santa Fe, and became popularly known as Strong City.

By late 1887 the Chicago, Kansas and Western line, which had been taken over by the Santa Fe, had completed its 150-mile northwest branch from Strong through Concordia, and on to Superior, Neb., with a subbranch running from Abilene to Salina. Strong City accordingly became an important junction for passengers, mail, and freight on the line. The need for transportation from the Strong City Santa Fe depot into downtown Cottonwood Falls grew as the railroad prospered. Citizens of the twin cities organized late in 1886 and obtained a charter for the operation of a horse-car interurban rail line to be known as the Consolidated Street Railway Company. The first board of directors included J. W. McWilliams, W. H. Holsinger, J. M. Tuttle, and W. P. Martin, all of Cottonwood Falls; together with C. J. Lantry, E. A. Hildebrand, and Wit Adair, all of Strong City. The road was capitalized at $10,000, divided into $10 shares. It was announced that actual work on the line would commence as soon as the stock was subscribed. Chase county commissioners gave permission to the company to secure a right of way, as well as to use the steel bridge over the Cottonwood.

On February 19, 1887, a meeting of the stockholders was called to adopt bylaws. By that time nearly all of the stock had been subscribed and a preliminary survey of the right-of-way completed. On April 7 it was announced that 4,500 Arkansas white oak ties had been ordered, the ties measuring four and one-half feet long by six inches wide and four high, and costing $27.00 per hundred. By mid-April grading was under way, and by June 2 workmen were laying ties. On July 28 the newspaper announced that mules for the railway had been purchased and the drivers engaged. Finally, on August 20, the street cars arrived and on Monday, August 22, 1887, the road was in business.

A large car-and-horse barn was built along the route just north of the river. The three-foot six-inch narrow gauge, lightweight 36-pound rails ran down the center of Cottonwood’s main street.

5. Ibid.
7. Chase County Leader, Cottonwood Falls, November 3, 1887, January 5, 1888.
8. Ibid, December 16, 1886.
9. Ibid, February 17, 1887.
10. Ibid, April 7, 1887.
11. Ibid, April 14, 1887.
12. Ibid, July 28, 1887.
called "Broadway." Its route was from the courthouse square in Cottonwood Falls, three blocks north to the bridge, then diagonally two blocks before straightening out to head due north into Strong City on that town's main street, called "Cottonwood Avenue." At first the line stopped at the Santa Fe tracks. But by December 8, 1887, it had been continued north the remaining two blocks of the Strong City business district and up the next two blocks to the Catholic church. The total distance from courthouse to church measured two miles.  

The railway used horse power in the literal sense of the word. At first a single mule and later a single horse, wearing bridle, collar and abbreviated harness, was attached to a singletree by means of a pair of one-inch rope traces. The singletree in turn was hooked onto the front of the interurban car at two points. Leather lines were hitched from bridle to the edge of an overhead canopy at the front of the car. At the end of the two-mile run the mule or horse was unhitched from one end of the vehicle and rehitched at the opposite end. There was no turntable, no "Y," no "V." Only the horse turned around!  

The cozy-looking interurbans themselves, of which the company kept two in operation constantly, were of the all-metal street car variety with simple open platforms at each end, protected from the elements only by a canopy and a three-foot-high buckboard. A single stirrup-like steel step assisted the passengers at each of the four corners. The driver remained outside of the car proper, on the platform, either standing or sitting propped up on a high stool. This meant heavy clothing in the winter months, with overcoat, mittens and earmuffs as standard uniform. The horse was left to endure the elements as best he could. The five square windows on either side of the car gave vision to 12 passengers inside, all facing the middle of the car. However, standing room often permitted the car to double that capacity. In addition to "vision windows" there were ventilators in the roof. Also, two short vents in the roof were outlets for monkey-stove pipes used in the colder months.

The 14-foot-long cars were mounted on four iron spoke wheels, and at each end of the car on the platform was a brake crank. This had a gear on the lower end which worked the steel brake shoes. The driver's chief duty was not so much that of urging on the horse as of constantly loosening and tightening the brake to prevent

---

15. Chase County Leader, December 8, 1887.  
17. Interview January 16, 1954, with Clint A. Baldwin, secretary of Chase County Historical Society, Cottonwood Falls.
the car from rolling wild on a grade and injuring both horse and passengers.\textsuperscript{18} While most of the line was relatively flat, the two northernmost blocks were up a steep hill and the brake proved a valuable piece of equipment at that point. While these were midget cars compared with the regular electric interurbans of probably 50,000 pounds in weight, the horse cars did weigh several tons and represented surprisingly heavy vehicles to be pulled by single horses. The equipment was copied from that of steam railroads and consisted of well-oiled journals rolling on bearings at each of the four wheels.\textsuperscript{19} When it is considered that a man with a crowbar can move a standard railroad freight car, it is understandable that a 1,000-pound horse could pull several tons of steel on the modest grades of the Consolidated line. Even so, the practice of pulling loaded cars with horses was considered inhumane by many and undoubtedly the lives of the Consolidated horses were shorter than the average.\textsuperscript{20}

Signs on the car neatly proclaimed: "Consolidated Street Railway Co." One later car bore the banner: "Main Street and Union Depot," signifying that one of the chief values of the line was to transport steam train passengers to and from the Santa Fe station in Strong City.\textsuperscript{21} While the distance from the courthouse to the station was one and one-half miles and to the Catholic church two miles, a standard fare of five cents prevailed for men, women, and children, regardless of age and regardless of distance traveled.\textsuperscript{22} There were no tickets, no tokens, just nickel-collecting by the driver as the passengers entered the car.

The daily schedule began about seven o'clock each morning, seven days a week.\textsuperscript{23} A half-hour schedule was maintained until dark by use of two cars. The car starting from the courthouse at noon would make its two-mile run to the Catholic church with frequent stops and would be ready to start the return trip at 12:30. The other car would leave the church at noon and would be back at the courthouse ready for its next northerly run at 12:30, the cars passing midway on a passing track. This half-hour daylight schedule was maintained almost without interruption for three decades. The horses and mules were required to pull the interurbans between five and six miles an hour to preserve this schedule.

---

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Interview March, 1954, with Douglas Coates, Santa Fe railway, Salina, a boyhood resident of Cottonwood Falls during horse-car days.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Postcard borrowed from Clint Baldwin, November 23, 1953.

\textsuperscript{22} Interview with Fred G. Sifer, Cottonwood Falls, real estate broker, January 16, 1954.

\textsuperscript{23} Interview with Clint Baldwin, January 16, 1954.
and it proved a satisfactory arrangement over the years, until the
dawn of the auto age, when more speed was demanded. There
were, of course, no reports of "hot boxes" suffered by the Consol-
dated in all its 30 years.

While passenger revenue was almost the sole source of income,
the line did have a contract with the United States government to
haul mail from Strong City to the Cottonwood Falls post office.24
The mail pouches were carried inside the car whenever possible,
but oftentimes were of necessity piled on the rear platform for the
trip. Only personal baggage of passengers could be squeezed into
the car, for which there was no charge.25

The Consolidated did not attempt to haul express or freight
between the towns. Baggage drays, horse driven, could be hired.26
One of these vehicles was the old Union Hotel hack with which was
associated one of the illustrious names in Santa Fe railroad history,
James E. Hurley. Hurley, who later became an outstanding gen-
eral manager of the Santa Fe, came to Cottonwood Falls as a boy
and at one time drove the hotel hack.27

In its horse-car days the Consolidated employed a maximum of
ten men, possibly fewer.28 And as late as 1910 the company owned
four cars and eight horses.29 There were always two drivers on
duty during daylight hours, as well as attendants and helpers for
the spare horses quartered in the car barn. One Cottonwood Falls
man likes to recount the occasion decades ago when a local young-
ster told him: "Mister, when I grow up I want to be a horse taker!"
To which he replied: "Son, they'll string you up in Texas for
taking horses." The boy was undaunted, and explained: "But,
Mister, you don't understand. I mean taking a horse from the
horse car into the barn and taking another horse out of the barn
to the car."30

Among the drivers remembered by residents of the towns were
John Mailen, Billy Reifsnyder, Ed Gauvey, and Charley Fish.31
Although the company attempted to keep a strict schedule, there
was one unidentified driver who was reluctant to leave the court-
house or the church at the appointed half hour unless he had a
passenger or two. He was the friendly type and would pile a few

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Santa Fe Employee's Magazine, Chicago, September, 1910, p. 41.
28. Interview with Clint Baldwin, January 16, 1954.
31. Interview with Clint Baldwin, January 16, 1954.
youngsters into his car for a free ride if there were no paying passengers. Citizens who remember say, "He got lonesome on that long drive by himself." 32

Many adults have humorous recollections of the little railroad. The wheels of the Consolidated were set rather close to the center of the car, making it somewhat precarious for passengers to congregate at one end. Some of the more mischievous boys of the towns would often clamber aboard, pay their fares, and when the car was in motion, suddenly move to the rear seats. This would tilt the little vehicle backward enough to make the front wheels leave the rails. The driver would protest and threaten, to little avail, and the citizenry were frequently treated to the spectacle of the Consolidated being pulled along on two wheels by a surprised nag in front of an oath-hurling driver. 33

Train connections and matters of business gave the railway its chief lifeblood in nickels. But there were other occasions as well. Many families of Catholic faith lived in Cottonwood Falls, two miles or more from the church on the hill in Strong City. 34 Not only on Sunday but at various time in the week were church goers transported to services in the old stone edifice. As the towns developed, Strong City became a center for road shows, plays, and other public entertainment, first in the old opera house, then, from 1900 on, in the city auditorium, still standing two blocks south of the Catholic church. On these occasions, both Consolidated cars would pull in from Cottonwood Falls, loaded to the platforms with entertainment seekers. There were no headlights on the cars, but the drivers arranged kerosene lanterns on the sides to assist passengers and to aid the horses in picking their way down the darkened street. 35

Sundays sometimes provided another opportunity for service. In that era, before even the days of Sunday movies, young blades from Strong City would ride the horse cars over to Cottonwood Falls for dates. Then they would take their girls into the old stone courthouse where it was warm and cozy. That inevitably meant a climb to the lofty cupola for a breath-taking view of the town and countryside. However, woe be it if Cottonwood Falls swains caught up with them pursuing such social activities on foreign soil!

32. Ibid.
34. Interview with Clint Baklwin, January 16, 1954.
35. Ibid.
At times, it is said, they could not wait for the leisurely-moving interurban to take them home.\textsuperscript{36}

There are records of at least four major Cottonwood river floods during the horse-car days. The mammoth flood of 1903 covered the old steel bridge and the lowlands sufficiently to cut Cottonwood Falls off from Strong City for days. In 1904, 1906, and 1908 high water again interrupted service. In 1914 a new Marsh archtype concrete bridge was built at a cost of $13,700.\textsuperscript{37}

There are no recorded major wrecks, nor collisions of the cars with hacks, drays, or early-day autos. Notable was the fact that there was never a collision with a speeding Santa Fe passenger, baggage, or freight train at the Strong City crossing. Considering that the Santa Fe eventually stepped up its eight trains a day to well over 20 fast passenger trains through the crossing every 24 hours, it is remarkable that some miscalculating horse-car driver didn’t get one of the old interurbans in their path. The cars had to cross five separate tracks, two of which were high-speed tracks of the main line, possibly 20 times a day. One safety factor was the Santa Fe’s installation of crossing bars after the passenger schedule had been increased past the 20-trains-per-day mark; they swung down and blocked the horse cars and other vehicles whenever a main line train was approaching.\textsuperscript{38}

After the advent of motion pictures in the early 1910’s, the horse cars became moving advertisements of the current or next cinema billing at local theaters in Strong City and Cottonwood Falls. Cars posing on the two Cottonwood river bridges in December, 1914 [see cover picture this issue], contained banners indicating that patrons were admitted for a flat charge of five cents per head.\textsuperscript{39}

One banner proclaimed: “Matinee Saturday, Gem Theatre, 2 reels, doors open 2:30, 5c.” Another announced: “The Trey O’Hearts, Wednesdays, 2 shows, Doors open 7:15.” A third said: “The Master Key, Saturdays, Gem Theatre.” Another 1914 horse-car photo in downtown Strong City revealed a car-length banner directing would-be interurban riders to the “Bank Hotel” in Strong City.\textsuperscript{40}

It was in late 1916 and early 1917 that progress could be no longer stayed and agitation grew for more modern transportation. The

\textsuperscript{36} Interview with Douglas Coates, March, 1954.

\textsuperscript{37} Chase County Leader, August 13, December 24, 1914.

\textsuperscript{38} Photo in Chase County Leader, May 28, 1914.

\textsuperscript{39} Photo taken December, 1914, by Riggs Studio, Cottonwood Falls.

\textsuperscript{40} Photo in Chase County Leader, May 28, 1914.
Model T Ford was making its appearance in increasing numbers and speed was becoming more important in public transit. On November 23, 1917, the *Chase County Leader* proudly announced:

The cars of the Consolidated Street Railway . . . probably the last horse cars in the entire country have been taken off by the company who will now replace them with a motor car and more up-to-date equipment. For . . . thirty years . . . the horse car line has made regular trips every half hour. . . . The track is now being widened and repaired. . . .

In November, 1917, John Mailen made the last run as driver of a horse car and the twin-town horse interurban became history. 41 Although citizens of both towns had learned to love the old horse cars, the majority were jubilant. It meant no more manure on the streets, no more inhuman treatment of horses by exposure to the bitter winter weather, no more passengers jumping out of the car to push it up the Strong City hill, no more slow speed transportation between towns. To the company it meant no more buying and feeding oats and hay, no more watching over sick horses and paying veterinarian’s bills, no more overstraining of their nags by overloads of passengers.

Prior to the start of motor service the company issued the following instruction through the local press:

**THE STREET CAR COMPANY GIVES NOTICE TO PATRONS**

Patrons . . . must always be on the right side of the car, and on crossing, and where there is a double crossing going either to the north or south, must always be on the first crossing as there will be only one stop made on a double crossing. When packages are received by the car man, they must be paid for, as the motorman won’t have time to get off and hunt the money, and the party who receives the package must either meet the car or state on package where to leave it. This may be a little unhandy to start with, but we must have some system or we won’t make any time. 42

January 22, 1918, was a great day in the two towns when the new motor car arrived on the street, started its gasoline motor, and began its first run. 43 The single motor interurban continued to maintain the original one-half hour schedule of the old horse cars. But it ran twice as fast, so the company needed only one piece of equipment. Mr. Davis of Wichita became the first motorman of the new interurban, with John Mailen and Sylvester Miller as helpers. 44 On January 24, 1918, the Consolidated had its regular annual meeting

---

41. *Interview with Clint Baldwin, January 16, 1954.*
42. *Chase County Leader,* January 8, 1918.
44. *Interview with Clint Baldwin, January 16, 1954.*
of the now motorized company in Strong City. Directors chosen for the year were W. C. Harvey, George W. Crum, and Walter Hassan, all of Strong City; George McNee and W. W. Austin of Cottonwood Falls, and H. L. Baker of LaCrosse.\footnote{45}

The year 1918 soon revealed that motorized progress had played the stockholders a cruel trick. The car’s gasoline engine was extremely noisy and there were numerous complaints from citizens in both towns. The company inaugurated a parcel-delivery service in an effort to drum up more revenue.

The complaints were only annoying; the real appalling fact, realized after it was too late, was that the light 36-pound rails suitable for the slow-moving horse cars, would not stand the speeded-up schedule of the motor car. With disgusting regularity the new interurban jumped the track.\footnote{46}

There were other troubles, and rumors that the company wanted to quit. On February 11, 1919, C. K. Cummins of Hutchinson visited Cottonwood Falls to confer about improving the railway; that is, by refitting the entire two-mile line with new and much heavier rails that could withstand the speeded-up car operations.\footnote{47} Then on June 30, 1919, the \textit{Chase County Leader} reported:

The stockholders of the Consolidated have made application to the Public Utilities commission to discontinue business \ldots because of its [the line’s] inability to longer be operated at a profit, and it is likely that the equipment will be disposed of and the two miles of track taken up. What was very likely the last car to make a trip occurred at 5:30 last Friday evening, June 27.

On July 21 the \textit{Leader} reported that permission had been granted to junk the line, and the Consolidated, which had already stopped operating, died an official death after 32 years of service, 30\frac{1}{2} as a horse-car interurban and a year and a half as a motorized car line. Walter Hassan, one of the directors, was granted permission to start a bus line between the two towns and by July 23 had a large new yellow-painted Reo bus in operation\footnote{48} at a fare of 10 cents, the same price that had been charged by the motor car on the street railway. But that, too, died within a few years and today one must provide his own transportation between the cities.

\footnotesize{45. \textit{Chase County Leader}, January 29, 1918.} \\
\footnotesize{46. Interview with Clint Baldwin, January 16, 1954.} \\
\footnotesize{47. \textit{Chase County Leader}, January 16, 1919.} \\
\footnotesize{48. \textit{Ibid.}, July 23, 1919.}