

*History of the  
South Western Traction  
Company  
and the*



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**Local History at the St.  
Thomas Public Library**



**Early 1902:** The London Railway Company is formed to obtain a charter to construct an electric railway out of London, Ontario. Plans include building west to the village of Strathroy, east to Ingersoll, and also to Brantford, Woodstock, and Hamilton. It is intended to be mainly a passenger carrier.

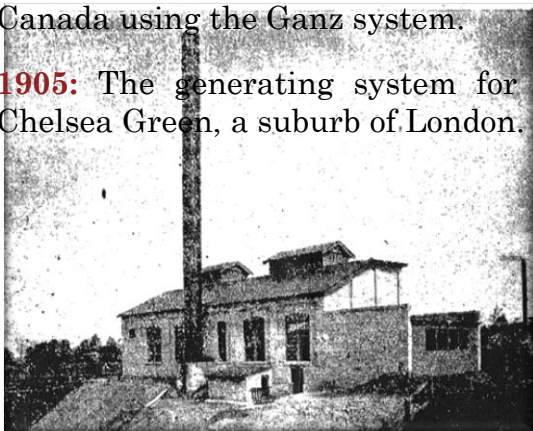
**August 1902:** The Company changes its name to the South Western Traction Company and a charter is granted by the Ontario legislature.

**June 1903:** The South Western Traction Company takes over the 1902 charter of the Middlesex and Elgin Interurban railway. The charter is revised to include a line from London through St. Thomas to Port Stanley.

**1903:** Construction begins from London southward to Lambeth.

**1904:** The tracks reach Lambeth but the money runs out. Construction halts while the company directors travel to England in an attempt to gain funding. The Bruce Peebles Company of Edinburgh, Scotland, an electric engineering firm, has just secured a license with the Ganz Company of Hungary to develop and market their three-phase AC electric traction system. Peebles & Co., along with other investors, form the Canadian Electric Traction Company to fund railway projects in Canada using the Ganz system.

**1905:** The generating system for the line is built in Chelsea Green, a suburb of London.



*The South Western Traction Company's power house at Chelsea Green in London, Ontario.*

dance hall.

**1915:** Meetings are held to discuss extensions of the Traction Line to Aylmer and Port Burwell. However, nothing comes of them. The line does not connect to any major railway, and is therefore not very desirable.

**1917:** The L&LE is greatly affected by World War I, as electricity is often cut off to conserve power. Coal supplies diminish, which are needed to keep the cars warm in the winter.

**1917:** The company plans to sell the line. Adam Beck makes an offer to buy it out, but his proposal is too low to cover the company's debts and he is turned down.

**15 October 1918:** The L&LE interurban service is discontinued. The line is dismantled, as the demand for



*L&LE tracks in Union while the line was still in operation.*



*A present-day picture of the same curve.*



**1912:** Samuel Mower resigns as manager and William Nelson Waburton takes his place. Waburton is the previous Superintendent of the Grand Trunk and has many years of electric railway experience. He immediately eliminates 40 of the 100 stops on the line, making travel time from London to Port Stanley faster than the L&PS, which is currently managed by the Pere Marquette.

**1912:** The Pere Marquette's lease of the London & Port Stanley Railway ends and the city takes control of the company. The next year, plans emerge to electrify the L&PS. Sir Adam Beck, founder of the Hydro Electric Power Commission in London, is the main proponent for these plans.



*The Casino on the Port Stanley beach, circa 1910.*

**1 July 1915:** The electrified London & Port Stanley Railway begins offering passenger service. It is much

**1 June 1906:** The line between London and St. Thomas opens. The London terminal is on Horton Street, and the tracks follow Highway 2 and 4 and then borrow the St. Thomas Street Railway's tracks through St. Thomas. Bruce Peebles is not aware of this until after the contracts are signed. Since the Street Railway uses DC power, which is incompatible with the AC system, Peebles acquires the newly developed Ganz motor that switches between AC and DC operation.



*A Traction Line train headed south over the Thames River trestle with a large school*

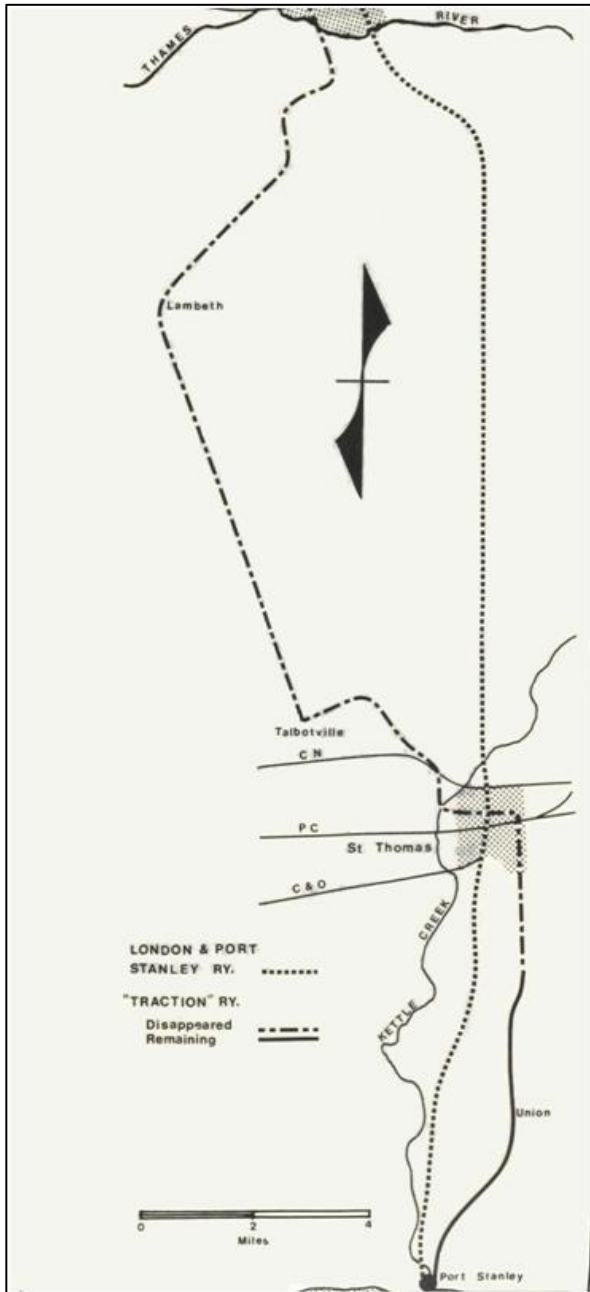
**January 1907:** Despite the new technology enabling the AC to DC transfer, the Board of Directors approves a change to full DC power to avoid complications.

**June 1907:** New passenger cars that have been ordered from Ottawa begin to arrive, but funds are not available to equip them with motors or hardware, so they sit in the company's barns in St. Thomas.

**June 1907:** Grading to Port Stanley is completed.

**10 August 1907:** A fire caused by a short circuit breaks out in the Traction Company's car barns in London, destroying the rolling stock, motors, equipment, and part of the track. The losses are estimated to be over

**30 October 1907:** The first car reaches Port Stanley on the Traction Line. The winding route is 28 miles and takes much more time than the company's main competition, the London & Port Stanley Railway. However, for the time being, the Traction Line is



the central business district of the town. It will not ever have extensive freight operations due to the curves of the line and the use of the Street Railway in St. Thomas.

**1908:** The company enters receivership.

**1909:** The South Western Traction Company is reorganized into the London and Lake Erie and Navigation Company (L&LE), managed by Samuel W. Mower. The line begins to make a profit. It includes twelve passenger cars, two express cars, two boxcars, six flatcars, one line car, and one locomotive.

**1 April 1911:** The L&LE is sued by a group called the Lord's Day Alliance for operating cars on a Sunday. The company is under a provincial charter, not federal, and therefore subject to the 1906 Lord's Day Act, which states that any company cannot engage in the business of "conveying passengers for hire if such travel is related to amusement or pleasure." The company is legally forced to respect the Sabbath and stop running cars on

## SUNDAY LAWS

In Force in the Province of Ontario

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### PROHIBIT

1. **LABOR.** With certain exceptions this includes:
  - (a) **THE WORK OF LABORERS, MECHANICS and MANUFACTURERS.**
  - (b) **ALL FARM WORK,** such as SEEDING, HARVESTING, FENCING, DITCHING.
  - (c) **WORK ON RAILWAYS,** such as BUILDING and CONSTRUCTION, and also REPAIR WORK, except in emergencies, and TRAFFIC, excepting the forwarding of PASSENGER AND CERTAIN FREIGHT TRAINS.
  - (d) **ALL BUILDING, TEAMING, DRIVING for BUSINESS PURPOSES, THE WORK OF BAKERS and BARBERS, Etc.**
  - (e) **THE WORK OF MUSICIANS and PAID PERFORMERS of ANY KIND.** Works of necessity and mercy excepted.
2. **BUSINESS.** It is unlawful to MAKE CONTRACTS or to BUY, SELL or DELIVER ANYTHING on Sunday, including LIQUORS, CIGARS, NEWSPAPERS, Etc. Generally speaking the only exceptions are DELIVERING PASSENGERS' BAGGAGE, MILK for domestic use, and SUPPLYING MEALS and MEDICINES.
3. **ALL GAMES, RACES or OTHER SPORTS FOR MONEY OR PRIZES,** or which are noisy, or at which a fee is charged, and the business of AMUSEMENT or ENTERTAINMENT.
4. **ALL EXCURSIONS** for hire and with the object of pleasure, by TRAIN, STEAMER or OTHER CONVEYANCE.
5. **ADVERTISING** in Canada, unlawful things to take place on Sunday, either in Canada or across the line.
6. **IMPORTING, SELLING or DISTRIBUTING FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS** on Sunday.
7. **ALL GAMBLING, TIPPLING, USING PROFANE LANGUAGE,** and all other acts which disturb the public quiet.
8. **ALL PUBLIC MEETINGS,** except in Churches.
9. **HUNTING, SHOOTING, FISHING;** also **BATHING** in any public place or in sight of a place of public worship, or private residence.

**THE PENALTY IS FROM \$1.00 TO \$500.00**