



# The Omaha Streetcar... an Overview



What do you know, or  
**THINK** you know,  
about Omaha's  
Streetcar?



# A Brief Omaha Streetcar History

Omaha was founded in 1854. In the early days, walking was the only means of transportation available to the ordinary working person. This affected the size of cities and limited it to walking distance so cities were small. During the same year that Nebraska became the 37th state in the Union, 1867, the Omaha Horse Railway Company was granted a 50-year license to build and operate a street railway for the city of Omaha. A year later, construction began on a horse-drawn railway. Omaha began to grow extending to 24th Street to the west, Cuming to the North and Leavenworth to the South, but horse-drawn streetcars were problematic. Horses were temperamental. They could only work for so many hours on a given day and costs associated with housing, grooming and feeding and disposing of the manure was expensive.



Electrified locomotion was beginning to emerge as a means of transportation. In mid-1888 it was announced Omaha would develop electric streetcars. On October 20, 1888 Omaha electric streetcars began running.

The electric streetcars started an industry that was as important to the economy as the automobile is today. The electric trolley was a revolutionary improvement in urban mobility and filled the gap between the horsecar and rapid transit. The electric trolley allowed villages to grow into cities. Between 1890 and the start of WWI, horsecars disappeared and the electric streetcar systems expanded at an astonishing rate. Suburbs like Dundee, Benson, Florence and South Omaha grew because of the reliable, all weather trolley transportation.



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SUFF RUGS R. PRESCRIPTIONS  
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DRUGS

SELL-RITE SUPER MARKET  
Coca-Cola  
FOODS - 3004

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LIQUOR

Quality GROCERY MEATS  
Coca-Cola  
Chestnutfield  
Groceries Meats

Streetcars were originally used for workers to get to and from work. To increase use of the streetcars in the evenings and weekends, trolley companies developed attractions like amusement parks. In Omaha you could ride the streetcar to Krug Park at 52nd and Maple (where Gallagher Park is today) and Lake Manawa. You would also ride the streetcar to go downtown to shop at places like Brandeis, Woolworth's or Natelson's or go to the movie at the World Theater.

Electric streetcar use grew and grew until WWI. The city streets became busier and busier with trolleys and it seemed like the trolley era would never stop. Streetcar historians site 1927 as the height of the rail system in Omaha.



Ford's assembly line and the Model T in 1908 marked the first threat to the streetcar industry. For the first time automobiles became affordable and convenient. In response to this competition, the trolley companies fought back with the return of smaller more efficient streetcars operated by one person.

With competition from the automobile and buses, use declined in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1955, Omaha's last streetcar took its ceremonial final run. There are few remnants of Omaha's streetcar system. The tracks have either been removed or are covered with asphalt and concrete. There is still one remnant, a restored streetcar on display at The Durham Museum.

Turn and talk.....

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You don't have a car. All other modes of transportation (bus, taxi, Uber) are not available to you. Most of your family and friends are without a car, as well. **HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUR LIFE?** Be specific in your thinking.

The background features a series of concentric circles in a light gray color, centered on the left side of the frame. A dashed white line forms a path that spirals outwards from the center of these circles, moving towards the right side of the image. The overall background is a dark charcoal gray.

# A Glimpse of the Omaha Streetcar History







(Photo from Richard S. Tedlow, 'Ford' 1998)

THE GUY WAS THE FOREMAN FOR THE ASSEMBLY LINE OPERATION AT THE FORD MOTOR CO. PLANT WHEN THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN IN 1925. HE MANAGED TO TURN OUT 75 FINISHED CARS PER DAY.



(Photo from the Bonacci-Ford/B. Collection owned by KSTV and on permanent loan to Western Heritage Museum)

ARCHITECT ALBERT KAHN DESIGNED THE FORD MOTOR CO. BUILDING (SHOWN HERE IN 1930) AT A COST OF \$310,000. KAHN WAS INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN FOR HIS INDUSTRIAL ARCHITECTURE. HE ALSO DESIGNED THE BRANDEIS MANSION AT 500 SO. 38th STREET.

Did you Know???

Omaha had a Ford Motor Assembly Plant at 16th and Cuming Streets.

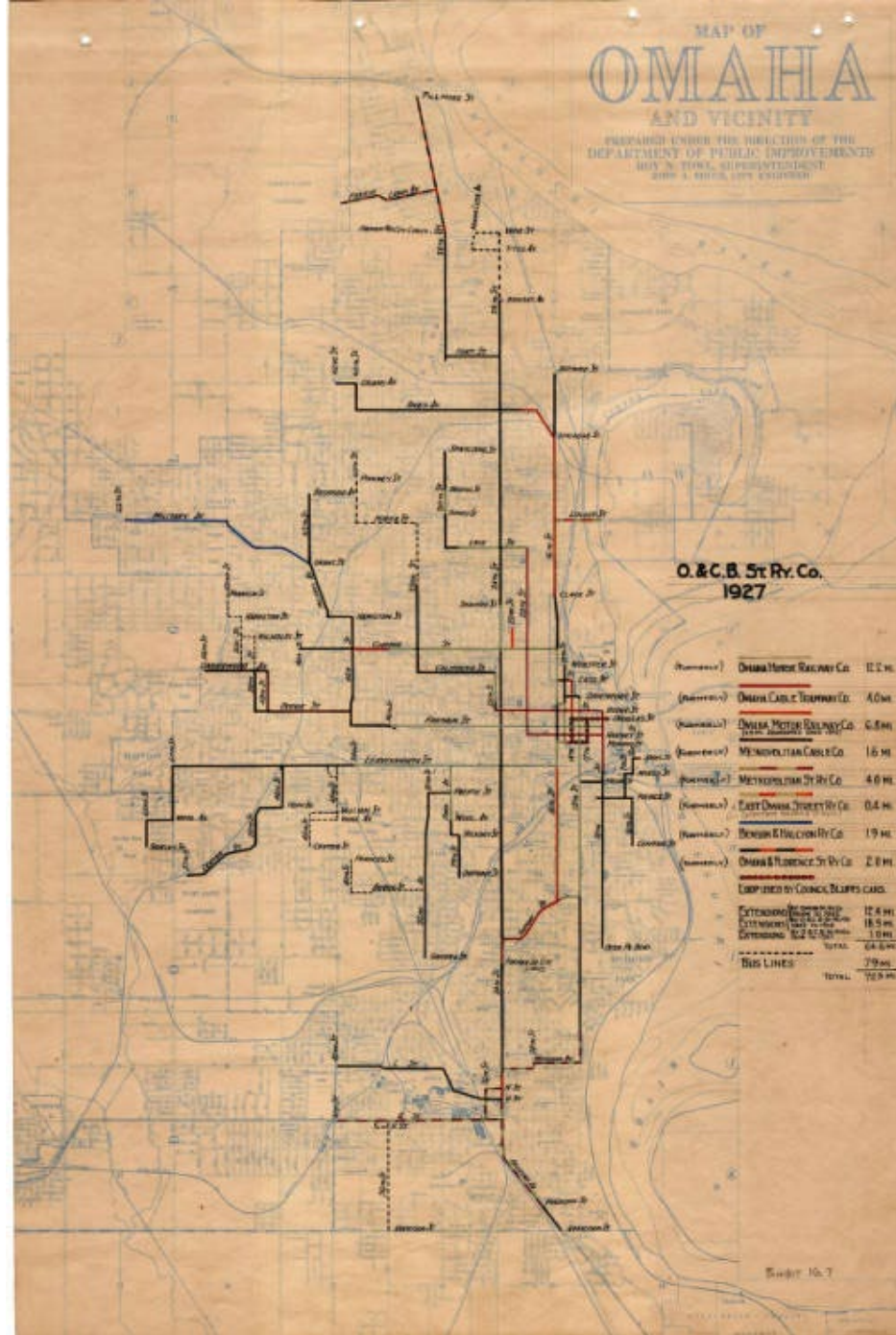
It is now the Tip Top Apartments/Alley Poyner Building.



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Then and Now...

# The Omaha Streetcar Map







Central High  
School area...



A glimpse back...

Things have  
changed....but  
some things  
stay the same!



Thoughts.

What is something you found interesting today?

What connections can you make?  
What does the Omaha Streetcar and its history make you think of?

What is a question you still have about the Omaha Streetcar and its history?