

THE COLORFUL EIGHTIES IN NASHVILLE

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No. 6.

***Rapid Transit and Old Dummy Lines—New Buildings
Spring Up—Places of Interest—A Balloon Ascension.***

Nashville Banner, *October 26, 1930*

Suburban and municipal rapid transit came with a rush in the late eighties. The dummy lines, which were suburban railroads, with little engines, called "dummies," came first, but were quickly followed by electrification. The Glendale dummy line was the pioneer in 1887. James E. Caldwell was the driving force in this enterprise, associated with Oscar Noel, Sr.

Then in rapid succession came the Nashville & West Nashville dummy line, of which Volney James was president and the Lischey Park dummy line, promoted by E. R. Richardson and associates. In 1889 the street railway system was electrified, and the first line was formally opened for business April 20 of that year. Soon afterwards the Glendale line was electrified; The Nashville & West Nashville line was sold to the N. C. & St. L. Railway, and a trolley line was constructed out the Charlotte Pike beyond the old tollgate to West Nashville. When electricity was put on the street railways, the Lischey Park dummy line, being no longer needed, was discontinued. This dummy line is now almost forgotten, but it was quite an important project. It extended from Woodland Street, near First, across the bottom, with a bridge over the L. & N. Railroad to Northeast Nashville. An amusement park was opened in a beautiful grove a short distance south of where Joy's floral gardens are located. This park was subsequently cut into lots for residences. A horse-drawn herdic met the dummy line on Woodland Street and brought passengers to the Square free of charge.

THE TROLLEY

The electrification of the street railways was a great occasion. Nashville was among the first cities in the country to adopt the trolley. While the wires were being put up everybody was speculating on how the trolley could run on the main wire without being obstructed by the supporting cross wires. John W.

Thomas had seen an electric line and attempted to explain this difficulty with more or less success — principally less. He called the trolley a “troller,” and he may have been correct at that. When the great day came and the first electric car, handsomely finished with plush upholstery appeared, the streets were crammed and jammed with a curious crowd to see the lightning harnessed. Everybody was afraid of these half-tamed thunderbolts of Jove. Some feared that the wires swung all over town would bring down the lightning from the clouds during thunderstorms and burn everything up; and were reassured with the statement that the wires were really a protection against lightning. Then the wires, just having been put up, and none too securely, would sometimes fall into the streets and create great excitement. One old gentleman on Church Street poked a live wire with his umbrella and got a shock.

In those days most of the street sprinkling was done privately by the property owners along the streets. The sprinkling was the task of the boys of the family. These were warned through the press not to squirt a stream of water on the trolley wire, as the electricity would run down the stream and strike them. It is safe to say all these young sprinklers tried the experiment at least once. Then everybody was told that the electricity in the cars would interfere with the time-keeping qualities of the watches, and that the only preventive was to be very careful and also to have a non-conductor plate put in the watches. The jewelers did a thriving business for a while.

Inauguration of electric streetcar service, 1889. These cars are at the corner of Broadway and 16th Street (*Tennessee State Library and Archives*)



NEGROES FEARED THE WIRES.

The colored people were much exercised. It was said it took less electricity to kill a horse than to kill a Negro, and more to kill a white man than to kill a black man. The black man thought this unjust, but was none-the-less careful.

Horses looked on the new contraptions with terror, and it was said every time a horse came up behind a car at a certain spot on Church Street he got a shock. The late Dan Baird, who was a live wire himself in those days, explained this phenomenon to everybody's satisfaction. It was published, but has since been forgotten in the "rush of matter and the crash of worlds."

But the horses could not get used to seeing cars running around without little mules, with their tinkling bells, attached. They were always wondering what made them move, and when they saw a horseless car coming, they left. They were even more greatly surprised than when, later on, the automobiles appeared running around by themselves.

The late M. J. C. Wrenne, superintendent of the N. C. & St. L. Railway, wanted to buy a family horse, so a friend who had a beautiful, blood bay mare, 16 hands high and "gentle as a dog," took him for a drive out Broadway, so that he could observe the mare's fine qualities. On Broadway, in front of the place where the Union Station now stands, they met an electric car. The mare stood on her hind feet, and then on her fore, twisted around and tried to tell about it, when the driver applied strength to the curbed bit.

"Hold on," said Mr. Wrenne, "let me out of here. I would not have my wife drive behind this wild animal for \$100,000."

The trade was off, though the mare really was gentle and tractable.

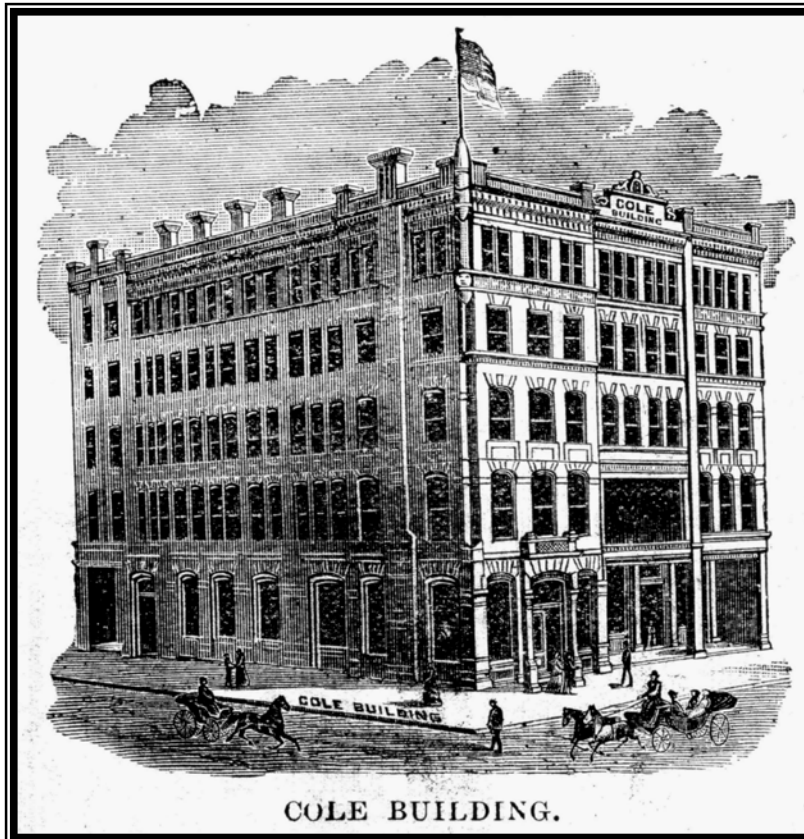
About this time the saying: "Don't monkey with the trolley" came into being, and had a great run, which lasted for years.

And now the trolley cars are in the sear and yellow leaf. The trolleyless cars are after them. Boys and girls now living will see trolley cars in the museums.

NEW BUILDINGS

A building boom struck Nashville during the eighties, along with the real estate boom. Among the new structures was the Cole building at Fourth Avenue and Union Street where the Fourth and First National Bank now stands; the Baxter Court was built, burned and rebuilt; the Noel office building came into existence where the Noel garage now stands, at the corner of Church Street and Third Avenue.

The Cole building was the consummation of Col. E. W. Cole's dream of what Nashville was destined to be. He was a forward-looking man, and possessed of good judgment and common sense; but when he had this building constructed on the site of the old Bank of Tennessee, many thought he was losing his mind. They called it "Cole's folly," and said no such office building in Nashville could ever be filled with tenants. But it



was filled, and was a prosperous business venture for many years, until it was finally superseded by the present skyscraper.

Col. Cole established a bank in his new building, over which Col. P. P. Pickard, who had been state comptroller, presided. He was an elegant, old-time gentleman, wearing a silk hat and faultless

attire. He had lost an arm in the Confederate army.

He was, by the way, the father of Obey Pickard, head of “the Pickard Family,” you hear sing and play their old-time songs and tunes over the radio. Isn’t it remarkable how much music Obey gets out of that jewsharp?

The same kind of side remarks were made about Mr. Oscar Noel when he built the Noel building, as had been heard about Col. Cole, but he found success just the same. These Coles and Noels, either of past or present generations, never were born to be “sneezed at.”

The Baxter Court was also a departure in building. It was built by Col. Jere Baxter, young and full of vigor, a most magnetic man who “dreamed dreams and saw visions.” It was to be a swell hotel with Parisian cafe, some swell offices for business and professional men, with Turkish baths for men and women. When finished it was a thing of beauty, with elegant furnishings, in which the pictures were an attractive feature. One picture the Colonel admired, and never tired of discussing, was of Pauline Bonaparte. He was an admirer of the Bonaparte family.

On each side of the front entrance was and is the sculptured head of a boy. These are the likenesses of his two sons, who were then little children.

The Colonel had his heart set on popularizing the Turkish baths for women, but in this he failed, for the ladies of that day had not progressed far enough to make a public bathing emporium for them popular. The Turkish bath for ladies was at last sadly closed, and after the Baxter Court passed out of the Colonel’s hands it was used for other purposes than for those

intended by its enthusiastic proprietor, and lost much of its pristine glory.

WILLIAM DUNCAN'S PROJECT

William Duncan projected and built the Duncan Hotel at the southwest corner of Cedar Street and Fourth Avenue. Mr. Duncan said he wanted a hotel so that a man could get a good meal without going to Linck's Hotel, down in the edge of the red-light district. It flourished for a while as a swell hotel, but the sons of Africa were moving in that direction, and finally claimed it for their own. It is now occupied by the Colored Y. M. C. A. and a number of business enterprises, and has become a cultural center for the Negroes.

Buildings for numerous other lines of business and manufacture sprang up; and new and architecturally beautiful private residences appeared in every section.

The great industrial development in the West Nashville suburb has already been noted. It soon became one of the leading points for the manufacture of fertilizer in the United States. Great development in the residential section of West End and Belmont took place. Three residences stood out as show places, the John P. Williams residence on Seventh Avenue, afterwards the Governor's Mansion, until it was torn down to make room for the War Memorial building; the A. V. S. Lindsley residence, on Broadway, recently removed by Lyon Childress, its owner, to make room for an automobile sales yard, and the Dallas residence, on West End, now the club room of the Knights of Columbus.²⁹

PLACES OF INTEREST

During the eighties the four principal points of interest to visitors were the Hermitage, President James K. Polk's tomb and residence, where the Polk Apartments now stand, Belle Meade stock farm and the State Capitol. The descendants of Andrew Jackson, Jr., General Jackson's adopted son, still occupied the Hermitage, and old Alfred, who had been the General's body servant, was the visitors' guide. Mrs. Polk was occupying the old Polk mansion, enjoying a placid old age. Belle Meade stock farm, the great home of the thoroughbred horse, was conducted with baronial splendor by Gen. W. H. Jackson. In one pasture of several hundred acres were 300 or 400 deer. Every visitor wanted to see Belle Meade. On one occasion, when Gov. Roswell P. Flower of New York visited this place in company with Ex Norton, president of the L. & N. Railway, Andrew Carnegie, Perry Belmont and others, he said: "I have seen all the great thoroughbred breeding establishments of this country and Europe, and in many respects Belle Meade surpasses them all."

There were no flying machines nor dirigibles in the eighties, but there was a balloon ascension on the Square that attracted much attention. Prof. King, a raw-boned, elderly man, was the aeronaut. Billy Fisher, a well-known saloon keeper, was sole passenger. It was said the passenger paid \$100.00 for the privilege. A great crowd gathered to witness the event. A

²⁹ The latter location, 1800 West End Ave., is the site of a Days Inn Hotel as of 2005.

gas main was opened and the silk bag was filled. Then Prof. King and his passenger climbed into the wicker basket and they were off. They narrowly missed a tragedy as the basket scraped against the top of the Courthouse as the great bag ascended. They landed, however, without a mishap that afternoon near Cookeville.³⁰


To be continued next Sunday.

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FOURTH NATIONAL BANK

³⁰ "Prof. W. R. King made a balloon ascension from Nashville, Tenn., yesterday. He was accompanied by Mr. William Fisher, a resident of that city. The balloon floated away at 4 P.M., attained an enormous altitude, and without mishap landed at Cookeville, in Putnam County, seventy miles east of Nashville, between 7 and 8 P.M." *The New York Times*, April 25, 1889.