

THE YEAR 1951 IS THE CENTENNIAL YEAR OF THE ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD. In Champaign-Urbana, only one reminder of the earliest days of the railroad still exists. Hundreds of persons pass it every day, just north of Springfield Avenue, on the west side of Second Street in Champaign; few even notice it and almost none recognizes it for its historical interest. It is the graceful little stone arch bridge over the north branch of the Boneyard, hidden by weeds, vines, and a scrawny peach tree—backed by a dying lombardy poplar and a crooked evergreen, and used only as a neighborhood foot bridge.

The bridge was built in the late 1850s, exactly when the records do not show, by the Urbana Railroad Company for its horse car line from the Court House in Urbana to the Illinois Central Depot in West Urbana (West Urbana became Champaign by legislative act in 1861). Officially, the plat for the right of way of the horse car line, including the bridge over "Silver Creek" was recorded on March 31, 1860, and it is known that the bridge had been built by that date.

The Urbana Railroad Company operated the horse cars over the old right of way from 1860 to 1893, when electric cars began to operate over a new route.

The old horse car line used narrow gauge, light weight rails. Ed Ireland was the horse or mule driver; he sat on a stool at the front end of the car, exposed to the weather. The horses or mules were changed from one end of the car to the other at the terminals. Dan Lehman was the Conductor. Fare was ten cents from the Court House to the Station, five cents from either terminal to the Illinois Industrial University, half way between, with its own Station, the "Half Way House," moved now to Green Street in front of the Illini Union. The two mile trip required about an hour and ten minutes, including all stops and derailments. Passengers sat on the lengthwise benches in the car, or stood in the aisle; if they smoked they joined Ed on the front platform, or Dan on the back.

The western terminal of the Urbana Railroad Company was the shed depot at West Urbana (the first Illinois Central Train arrived there on May 13, 1854). The original station stood east of the tracks near Main Street, and was replaced in the early 1860s by the resplendent "Doane House," one of the Illinois Central's combined stations and hotels which were built and operated at major cities along the new railroad. The Doane House burned to the ground in 1898.

The original stations are gone; the right of way has been taken over; the Urbana Railroad Company is an amusing bit of transportation history; Silver Creek is the Boneyard; only the sturdy little stone arch remains.

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Do not be concerned over the elaborate display of type. All of these styles plus five more were used in a full page advertisement in the St. Louis Pictorial Advertiser, in 1856. The advertisement announced through sleeper service between St. Louis and Chicago on the Illinois Central Railroad, "Through to Chicago without change in splendid State Room Cars."

FRED AND BETTY TURNER

Urbana
Christmas
1951