

## More Franklin Park Stories

By Debby Rabold

Franklin Park Borough Historian

### 100 YEARS AGO

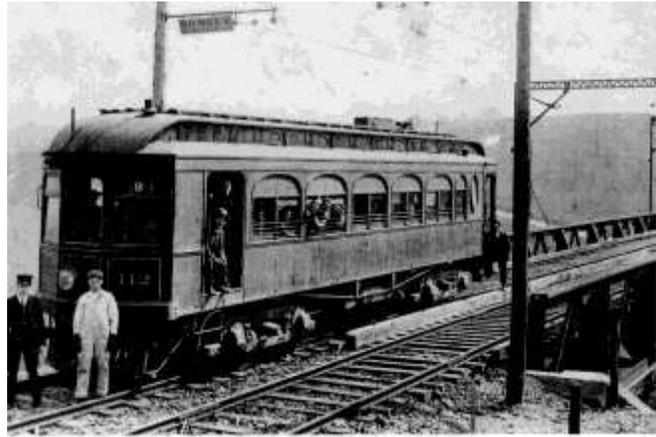
## Harmony Line Trolleys Our Area's First Public Transportation

Fast reliable affordable mass transit from the northern suburbs into downtown Pittsburgh seven days a week may only be a dream for thousands of North Hills commuters, but a century ago, electric trolleys travelling up to 60 mph crisscrossed the countryside between Pittsburgh, Butler and New Castle. Grandma and Grandpa could simply step onto a maroon and gold colored trolley and settle themselves into a plush upholstered seat for a shopping trip to Pittsburgh or a visit to relatives. Seated with them in the mahogany paneled car might be businessmen commuting to city offices, high school students on their way to classes or farm wives carrying fresh fruits and vegetables to the North Side Market House. At a time when automobiles were still a novelty, the electric street car was the only form of public transportation available to North Hills residents and was pivotal in opening the area to residential development.

Growing up in rural Evans City, PA, Russell Boggs (1844-1922) worked in his father's mercantile until moving to Allegheny City (Pittsburgh's North Side) where in 1869, he and his brother-in-law Henry Buhl opened the Boggs and Buhl department store on Federal Street. Boggs was quick to realize how electric trolley cars, which were becoming popular in other parts of the country, would not only bring customers and farm products into the city, but also enable businessmen to ship goods to customers in outlying communities.

Giving one dollar and a promise to build a stop on each property, the Butler County native used his hometown connections to begin acquiring the right of way to build a trolley line that would connect farmlands and towns in northern Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Lawrence counties. Using the trolley line as a marketing tool, Boggs and his North Pittsburgh Realty Company opened much of the North Hills to residential development.

The Pittsburgh, Harmony, Butler & New Castle Railway, known simply as the Harmony Line, ran fifty-one miles from downtown Pittsburgh to New Castle in about two hours. The thirty-seven and a half mile trip to Butler took an hour and forty minutes. Double tracks ran between Pittsburgh and Bradford Woods with single track throughout the rest of the system. Planning for the mass transit system began in 1905 with the first section of track opening in June 1908 between New Castle and Elwood City. The first trolley arrived in Pittsburgh five months later. Express trains stopped only at larger stations while local trolleys serviced smaller stops, as Boggs had promised.



Keown (left) and Warrendale (above) stations

Connected to overhead electric lines, the cars crossed the Sixth Street Bridge from downtown Pittsburgh as they made their way northward toward the Butler County town of Evans City where lines branched northeast to Butler and northwest to Ellwood City and New Castle. In 1915, track was opened between Ellwood City and Beaver Falls, allowing travel into Beaver County. Along the way were freight and passenger stations at Keown, Ingomar, Wexford, Bradford Woods and Warrendale in the North Hills with smaller stops between. In 1917, the Harmony Line acquired another electric railway company, the Butler Short Line that connected Pittsburgh with Butler via Etna, Shaler, Hampton, Valencia and Mars. This line roughly paralleled Route 8.



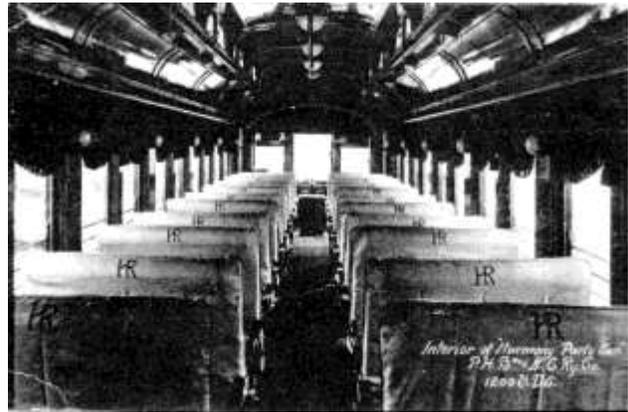
View of the Harmony Line junction in Evans City, Butler County, PA.

For twenty-three years, the Harmony Line provided reliable trolley service to communities north of Pittsburgh. It reached a peak ridership of four million passengers in 1920, earning \$1.3 million, but the numbers soon began to fall. By 1925, ridership fell to 3.2 million and revenues dropped. At a time when roads were being improved and more families could afford the cost of an automobile, fewer riders meant service cutbacks and a rise in fares. Financial problems were furthered worsened by the 1929 stock market crash and the onset of the Great Depression. There was no longer money to maintain the bridges, roadbeds and cars or to pay for the electricity needed to power the system. In its last year of operation, revenue was less than the payroll. Communities banded together in an attempt to purchase the line, but after insurance companies refused coverage, the Butler Short Line ceased operation in the spring of 1931, followed by the Harmony Line in August 1931. Buses replaced the trolley cars, bringing an end to the brief era of electric rail travel in the North Hills.



After serving North Hills residents for twenty-three years, the electric trolleys were replaced with buses.

Seating 44 passengers, a motorman and conductor; the 47 foot car featured luggage and smoking compartments along with a water cooler. A coal burning stove provided heat in the winter months. Cars could travel up to 75mph. The Harmony Line's Party Car (right) could be rented for special events. It featured tables for card parties and a screen for motion pictures.



In addition to 25 passenger cars, the Harmony Line had several freight cars used to haul lumber, mail, newspapers, and equipment for the region's oil and gas industry. One car was specially fitted with racks to hold milk cans that farmers would leave at stops each morning. Empty cans were returned later in the day after the milk had been delivered to Pittsburgh dairies.

In a 1980 interview by volunteers from Northland Public Library, Philip Brunn, Jr. (1910-1991) told this story about his parents' general store that stood next to the Harmony Line tracks at the Ingomar station in McCandless Township, Allegheny County, PA. His father was also Ingomar's stationmaster.

"The store had everything. They had high button shoes and we had a little corner in the store with ladies' under things. When a lady came into the store and would talk about matters of that type, my mother immediately took over and my father left the store because he wasn't to be involved."

A potbelly stove stood in the center of the store. To protect the wood floor from heat, sand surrounded by bricks was packed under the stove.

Mr. Brunn relied on the Harmony Line for shipments of supplies to his businesses. Ice cream for the store's soda fountain arrived by train, as did a daily shipment of bread and pastries, still warm from a Pittsburgh bakery. Many of the newer Ingomar residents did not bake, which was why Mr. Brunn provided baked goods.

At first, Mr. Brunn delivered lumber that was shipped from a lumberyard in Evans City via the Harmony Line to Ingomar customers, but with the large number of oil and gas wells being drilled in the area and their need for rough hemlock, Mr. Brunn built his own lumberyard next to the railway tracks in Ingomar.

Philip also recalled how his mother complained about the well drillers who came to the store on Saturday nights and sat on the porch eating cold watermelon, spitting the seeds onto her freshly scrubbed floor. On Sundays, the door into the store was left unlocked and folks could walk in and take what they needed, leaving a note on the counter and paying later. Whenever customers paid off their bills, the men were given a plug of their favorite chewing tobacco and the women were presented with a small bottle of scented water.

Mr. Brunn delivered groceries to his customers. One woman made a habit of carrying a basket of groceries home with her from Pittsburgh on the Harmony Line before depositing it in the Brunns' store where she would purchase a small item, expecting Mr. Brunn to deliver the entire

basket to her home. He became perturbed by her behavior and soon put an end to it. One day, she arrived in Ingomar with her Pittsburgh purchases and deposited them as usual in Brunn's store where she purchased a package of yeast. She again told Mr. Brunn to deliver her purchases, which he did, the package of yeast. When asked about her other groceries, he replied that she had only purchased the yeast and that anything else was most likely where she had left it.

[Excerpt from **Franklin Park Stories** (2006)]



Frank Finley was a summer resident of Bradford Woods and a member of the local baseball team. One evening, as he rode the Harmony Line trolley into Pittsburgh, he struck up a conversation with former president William Howard Taft who was travelling from Ellwood City, where he had given a speech.

[Ann Jenkins' **History of Bradford Woods** (1985)]

When the Leopold family moved from Sewickley to Perrysville circa 1910, the girls attended school on Pittsburgh's North Side. Every day, their brother Fritz drove them to the Keown station, located at what is now the intersection of Three Degree Road and Babcock Boulevard in Ross Township. Helen Leopold Harmany recalled how in dry weather, the girls were driven to the station in the family's buggy, but on snowy days, Fritz drove them in a horse drawn sleigh that he would sometimes flip as they rounded the bend shown in the upper right corner of the photo.

Shown in the photo are the Oaks Hotel in the upper right corner and the original Keown station in the bottom right corner. The brick building on the left generated power to run the trolleys and is the only one of the buildings remaining.



Pine Township's Wexford station stood on Wexford-Bayne Road at the corner of what is now Brennan Road. Behind the freight and passenger station was a livery. On the wooded hillside above the station was Brooker's picnic grove and dance hall, a popular weekend destination. The station has since been relocated to the intersection of Wexford-Bayne and Church roads where it houses a delicatessen.

## Incidents and Accidents on the Harmony Line



Babcock Boulevard, formerly Evergreen Road, facing north in Ross Township, Allegheny County, PA. In the center of the photo is the Harmony Line's Evergreen stop. Double tracks ran along the row of utility poles on the far left.

**New Castle News** August 11, 1911 reported:

### **Attempt to Wreck Trolley**

Pittsburg - Following an explosion of nitroglycerin beneath an inbound Harmony trolley car near Evergreen Station at 5:55 o'clock yesterday afternoon, two other bottles, said to have been filled with the same deadly liquid, were found nearby by county detectives a few minutes later on the tracks used by the outbound cars.

According to the detectives, there was more than enough nitroglycerin within 50 yards of where the explosion under the inbound car occurred to blow both cars into splinters and kill all the passengers. A rope thoroughly saturated with the fluid extended from the neck of one of the bottles across the car rails. It is presumed the other bottle slipped from the rail on the inbound track before the car reached that point.

Only the high rate of speed at which it was going saved the inbound car, according to those aboard, from being shattered by the force of the explosion. All of one side of the car and the front end were hurled along the right-of-way, the broken glass being thrown for a distance of 100 feet. There were 47 persons on the car, none of whom was severely hurt.

Among the passengers were county detectives Earl B. Roach and A. J. Sidenstrilster. They had in custody Charley Ball, whom they had arrested at Ingomar and whom they were bringing to the county jail on a charge of larceny. As soon as the explosion occurred they began an investigation.

Going back to the point where the explosion had occurred, they found beside the track a bottle, which Detective Roach thought contained nitroglycerin. Fifty yards further back, at a point where the inbound and the outbound Harmony cars usually pass at a high rate of speed, they found another bottle containing a similar liquid.

Each bottle held a pint of the fluid. It was into the second bottle, lying on the outbound track, that the rope, said to have been saturated with nitroglycerin, was injected. The bottle was removed, and the place where the rope had been laid across one rail was wiped dry. In spite of this, when the outbound car passed the spot 30 minutes later, Detective Roach declared there was an explosion that could be heard for a long distance.

On the outbound car were more than 100 passengers, all of them returning home at the day's close. Detectives are of the opinion last night the spot had been well chosen by those alleged to have attempted the wreck, since the inbound and outbound cars seldom fail to pass at this point. Last night, however, the heavy traffic delayed the outbound car nearly half an hour.

From Butler, where the head offices of the Harmony Line are located, statements were issued at a late hour last night that the company was in possession of information that would lead to the identity of the persons undertaking the wreck. Several search warrants were applied for last night by the officials.

**Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

January 17, 1931 reported:

**Three Score Escape Car Crash  
Near Ingomar, Interurban Trolley  
Jumps Rails, Tears Down Four  
Poles; Many Towns Left in  
Darkness for Hours**

Nearly 50 school children and other passengers, bound for home on a Harmony Line street car, struggled in screaming confusion early last night when the car leaped the rails, half a mile from Ingomar, shattering windows and splintering four poles along the track.



None of the children or other passengers was injured, though it was reported that the motorman suffered a slight injury to his hand.

Ingomar and other towns in the district were in darkness after the accident, as the result of the destruction of light poles in the crash. The poles carried electric lines, which supply towns of the district with light.

Traffic on the line had been tied up nearly two hours last night while wrecking crews sped to the scene to replace the car on the rails. The impact of the wreck threw the car at right angles across both tracks and prevented passage of other cars.

Several schoolgirls fainted in the wreck, which occurred on Pine Creek Hill, between Ingomar and Pine Creek. Lights went out as the car ran off the rails and splintered, the screams of the frightened school children augmented the din of shattered glass and grinding trucks.

The body of the car was almost torn from the trucks, examination revealed. Only a few bolts that continued to hold prevented the wreck from ending in a list of casualties.

Ingomar Volunteer Fire Company No.2 rushed to the scene a few minutes after the wreck, but fire did not break out in the car.

The car is that known as the "schoolcar" and every night carries a score or more of children attending Perry High School, Perrysville Avenue, to their homes.

Even the weekly motion picture program presented in the Ingomar School was disrupted through the break in the electric system by the wrecked car. The program had to be postponed late last night, when light company linesmen were still working to restore service to the pitch-dark towns.

**New Castle News** January 27, 1931 reported:

**Youths Arrested In Derailement Of Harmony Car Line**

Two Ingomar boys, one 13 and the other 14, were at liberty today on \$2,500 bond following their arrest last night in connection with the derailment of the Butler bound interurban car of the [Harmony Line] which plunged Ingomar into darkness and imperiled the lives of 50 passengers January 16.

The two boys were arrested by State Trooper George E. Abbott and were brought to the office of Alderman Martin J. Griffin, where bond pending a hearing Thursday afternoon was posted. They were charged with malicious injury to a railroad.

The younger boy, according to Abbott and Thomas Quigley, inspector for the company, admitted placing the stones on the tracks, while the older lad was with him at the time, they said.

The Harmony Line crossing on West Ingomar Road (facing west) at what is now the Harmony Drive intersection. Harmony Drive follows the trolley right of way through this section of McCandless Township, Allegheny County, PA.



The Ingomar crossing in McCandless Township was the scene of at least two fatal accidents involving Harmony Line trolleys. In January 1920, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court heard an appeal from the railway company, which had been ordered to pay damages to Ingomar resident Sarah Knobeloch for the death of her husband. It was on a clear day at 1 o'clock in the afternoon that according to witnesses, Mr. Knobeloch stopped his automobile before proceeding across the double tracks at the Ingomar crossing. Having nearly cleared the second track, his vehicle was hit by a trolley being driven, according to witnesses, at a higher than normal speed. The court upheld the judgment against the railway company.

A second Ingomar resident also died at the same crossing. In May 1928, thirty-year old Fred Knapp was instantly killed and his wife injured as a result of a collision between their auto and a trolley. Unfortunately, accidents involving automobiles, livestock and trolleys occurred throughout the system.



Brunn's general store stood opposite the Harmony Line's Ingomar station in McCandless Township. The family's lumberyard stood next to the station. A livery stood on the far left of the photo. Today, this is the intersection of West Ingomar Road and Harmony Drive facing south.

Philip Brunn, Jr.:

"Mrs. Mason had a telephone switchboard in the front room of her house in Perrysville. She could alert anyone at any time. So if we had a fire, she plugged in all the telephone lines and cranked them, saying "There's a fire at so and so's." She kept doing this and everyone would assemble. We had water tanks at the lumberyard for fires and would load them onto the lumber truck and drive to the fire. The same thing would happen if there was another problem.

"A lady who lived on Ingomar Heights Road was robbed and I remember as a child how he came to the ticket office. He used the pay station there to call downtown and [Mrs. Mason] intercepted the call. He said, "I have been there, but I think I'm surrounded." Within minutes, everyone was alerted. So, I sat in the store with a 22 rifle on the counter and my brother was sent to the station to protect the ticket office with a shotgun. My father went out to look for the burglar along with all the other people. Someone had a pitchfork and someone had an ax.

"Dad started to walk toward Wexford on the Harmony Line and was walking through a cut when this fellow was walking on the high ground with Dad down on the tracks. He said to this fellow "Where are you going? or "Where do you live?" "Well, I live right down there. I just got a call and they said Mrs. Baker was robbed." Dad knew [this wasn't true], so he pulled out his gun and said, "Put up your hands," but the fellow shot at him. He wasn't hit. He shot this fellow, but didn't kill him and he got away.

"The guy crawled under an oilrig at the end of Brandt Avenue. Mr. Knobloch lived at the end of Brandt Avenue and was a big fellow, six foot six and very strong. He crawled under the rig and pulled the guy out who was shot in the arm. The police came out from Pittsburgh on the train and arrested him. He went to jail."  
[Excerpt from **Franklin Park Stories** (2006)]



Harmony Line bridge over Sloop Road as seen from Highland Road in McCandless Township. The late Earl Winner of Ross Township recalled being stranded on one such a bridge during a thunderstorm. "There was no power whatever and we were stranded in the middle of the bridge...lightning played around the car and steel bridge and the rain was terrible. One woman began to scream, she wanted to get off, but there was no way to walk."



Brunn family and their Ingomar store.

## POINTS of INTEREST on the HARMONY ROUTE

"...thence to East Street and city limits, where the traveler is immediately ushered into the beauties of the far-away country and the ruggedness of the mountains. Gliding across from hill to hill, by way of what is certain to become Pittsburgh's future suburb, we reach Ingomar - a delightful spot, at an elevation of more than 600 feet above Pittsburgh's dust, dirt and grime, and away from the ceaseless grind and buzz of the ponderous machinery of the greatest manufacturing city in the world. Then on to Bradford Woods, on Bradford Heights, one of the most beautiful locations for country homes in Western Pennsylvania; while a gently undulating country affords an ever-changing view to the lover of nature, which lulls the careworn mind into a state of ease and rest, which no medicine can give."

[Excerpt from the Harmony Line's 1915 Time Table]



The Eichner family's farm on Richard Road stood next to the Harmony Line tracks between Ingomar and Wexford. There was a trolley stop near the end of their driveway.

### **A World of Opportunity to Purchaser**

Home sites in new town of North Perrysville, Ingomar Station on the Harmony Route.

"Don't put it off any longer for we are selling them fast."

1-5 acre homesites \$400 to \$800 / acre

Why live in the crowded city when you can buy an acre or more at these remarkably low prices and live where the sun always shines and have plenty of pure air. This property lies more than 500' above the city - miles from the dirt, dust, smoke and noise of city, rivers and crowded valleys.

North Perrysville has all the city conveniences, such as water, natural gas, Bell telephone service, etc. Roads are being laid out and graded and every acre will have a road frontage.

North Perrysville is located in McCandless Township, on the high ground a short distance beyond Perrysville - just where the road comes up out of the valley and attains the highlands. The topography of the land is such that every foot of it is available for country home purposes and from it a fine view of the surrounding country can be had in all directions. This land is better for country home sites than Sewickley Heights (which is now the highest priced rural land in Western PA), because it is nearer the city and higher in elevation. There is no more beautiful price of land in Allegheny County.

### **North Perrysville Land Company**

26 trains daily and Sunday each way. Single fare 15 cents.

Those coming in Automobiles, take Perrysville Plank Road to the new Ingomar Road at top of Pine Creek Hill, turn left  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile to Ingomar station on the Pittsburgh & Harmony Line. Representatives on Plan all day Sunday and weekdays.

[Pittsburgh Press May 29, 1910]

## **Bradford Woods on the Harmony Route**

An Acre of Freedom An Acre of Health An Acre of Happiness  
Country life plus city comforts make ideal living.

Bradford Woods is 12 miles from Pittsburgh, on the beautiful Harmony Route.

It is a place for lovers of country life, for permanent or summer homes.

Pure country air and bracing breezes make Bradford Woods the ideal place to bring up children, the restful spot for the tired business man to spend his vacation, the one best place for every member of the family.

It just takes 50 minutes to and from Pittsburg on the big fast running Harmony cars.

The Harmony Route bears the reputation of operating one of the finest electric lines in the world. The service could not be improved upon; schedules are strictly maintained, and the luxurious Pullman Parlor Cars make riding a genuine pleasure.

The famous old Perrysville Road [Route 19] passes within 300 yards of Bradford Woods. This noted thoroughfare has for many years been the main cross-country channel connecting Pittsburg with Mercer, Cambridge Springs, Buffalo and many other towns and cities, and is today the most popular road in Western Pennsylvania for motoring and driving. Much of it has already been macadamized, - much more will be finished the coming summer and when completed in the near future will be one of the finest highways in the country.

Bradford Woods has been used as a picnic resort for generations. It possesses a natural charm that makes it an ideal spot for a home. It is soon going to be a beautiful little suburb, peopled by a home loving, nature loving, comfortable and prosperous class of citizens. You must see Bradford Woods to appreciate it.

### **North Pittsburgh Realty Company**

[Excerpts of advertisement appearing in Ann Jenkins' **History of Bradford Woods** (1985)]

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A Beautiful Country Estate at **Bradford Woods Addition** from \$200 to \$500 Per Acre  
On the Harmony Route

The first section of Bradford Woods sold out in six weeks. The "Addition" will go likewise.

You will suffer none of the discomforts sometime associated with life in the country. The car line runs right through the property and is easily reached from all sections. Cool, sparkling water bubbles up from two fine springs, while delicious well water can be found anywhere. Lighting and heating are provided by two large natural gas mains. All the advantages of a town are within a short walk at Warrendale and Wexford. Here are stores, churches, hotels, public schools, etc.

### **North Pittsburgh Realty Company**

[Excerpts from company brochure.]