

## Nature Notes . . . .

# B.I.S. Traction Line

## By Charles Goslin

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**WITH FAIRFIELD** School for Boys much in the news at this time, it brought back memories of the old traction line between Lancaster and the school. At the time this line was in operation, the school five miles south of Lancaster was known as the Boys' Industrial School.

When established in 1857 it was named Ohio Reformed School. A paper published at the school in 1885 gives the name of this institution as "The Ohio Industrial School" near Lancaster. It was in the fall of that year, or soon thereafter, the name was changed to Boys' Industrial School, and it remained that until 1964 when it became Fairfield School for Boys.

**DURING THE** time the traction operated, the institution was called Boys' Industrial School, or, for short, B.I.S. Although officially known as Fairfield Traction Co. incorporated under the laws of Ohio, everyone knew it as the B.I.S. Traction.

Although a station for this electric railroad was just south of the [Lancaster] Union Depot, the traction cars left for the B.I.S. seven times each weekday from Broad Street at city hall. During the week, the first car left city hall for the school at 6 a.m. with the last car returning to Lancaster at 7 p.m.

On Saturday evenings the last car left downtown Lancaster at 9:30 p.m. and making the trip to the school in 20 minutes. This car was usually crowded with Saturday night shoppers who lived at the school or along the route.

**SUNDAY** was a big day for the traction line with 10 round trips starting at 8:30 in the morning and leaving on the last trip from the school at 9:50 p.m. Band concerts, military drills and ball games were provided at the school for the visitors. With the coming of automobiles and improvements in the roads to the school, the number of passengers declined and the passenger service was eliminated.

In 1898, Fairfield Traction Co. took over the railroad right-of-way of the Lancaster and Hamden Railroad, which was in receivership. The Lancaster and Hamden Railroad Co. was incorporated in 1886 to construct a railroad from Lancaster to Hamden. Financial difficulties stopped the work with only the bed for the railroad completed to near B.I.S.

**LATE IN** 1898 additional land was added to extend the roadbed to the state property. On Jan. 1, 1900, The Fairfield Traction Co. was organized to operate a passenger and freight line from Lancaster to the Boy's Industrial School, and work began in laying rails.

Feb. 12, 1901, the first car passed over the rails pulled by a small engine, known as the "Dicky" using gasoline as a fuel. In 1906 the traction line was electrified with an overhead trolley. The trolley cars we remember were a combination passenger and

freight car and a summer car with running boards along each side. When the Sunday crowds were large and the weather warm, this summer car was often hooked onto the combination car.

Boarding the car at city hall, with Charles Nutter the motorman, we often rode to the B.I.S. for a walk into the hills of Fairfield and Hocking Counties.

**FROM CITY HALL** the B.I.S. cars followed Broad Street south, crossed the railroads then stopped at the small station to pick up any passengers that might be waiting to go south.

From this small station the tracks were between the Pennsylvania Railroad roundhouse and the Hocking Valley Manufacturing Co., now a part of the Alten Foundry and Machine Works property, then crossed the abandoned Hocking Valley Canal (Canal Street) near the site of canal lock No. 4, known as the Ewing lock.

A trestle (still there) carried the traction car over the Hocking River where Tarhe Run, once Carpenter Run, empties into the Hocking River. From there it followed in the shadow of White's Hill, where Indian steps provided a way for the Indians of Tarhe Town to climb to the top to survey the surrounding lands.

**IT CROSSED** Logan Road (now U.S. 33) where the Giesey Mill once stood across the road from Loroco Industries. The tracks then followed the east bank of Tarhe Run, along what is now Utica Park and across B.I.S. Road just south of Hamburg Road.

The railroad bed, now minus the rails, follows the southeastern bank of Tarhe Run to Old Mill Road where the Reynolds Mill once stood. This was also the site of one of the early Carpenter mills.

It paralleled the Lancaster Country Club grounds, where, if my memory serves me right, there was a small shelter in which to wait for the trolley cars going toward Lancaster. Still following the old railroad bed of the Lancaster and Hamden Railroad, the traction line crossed what is now Country Club Road, but originally known as Borchert Mill Road.

Beyond this road crossing, with Stony Hill on the right, the tracks pointed toward Christmas Rocks. With the old railroad bed of the Lancaster and Hamden Railroad turning westward, a new bed for the tracks was made to extend the rails toward the B.I.S.

**AT THE JUNCTION OF** Country Club and Christmas Rock Roads there once stood a white spring house where one could always get a cool drink regardless of how hot the day. This was also an important stop on Sundays. Here on Sundays and holidays the Tatjies served homecooked meals. Here too was the stop for an afternoon visit to Christmas Rocks or a walk through Oil Mill Hollow and a climb up Jacob's Ladder.

Across the tracks (the east) was the Leui homestead, and from this spring house Snake Run School was in plain view. Now the spring house is gone, the Oil Mill Hollow Road is closed and the Snake Run school stands empty.

**FROM THE** spring house at Tatjies the traction line followed up a narrow valley to the powerhouse of the present Fairfield School for Boys.

To the east of the powerhouse was the B.I.S. station for this traction line. It was a steep climb with many steps to reach the grounds and building above, and the parade grounds. The climb was a good way to limber up after the ride from Lancaster.

Many were the incidents that happened during the period this traction line, with its overhead trolley, was in operation. One was in May of 1903 when the summer car broke away from the dinky (also called Dicky) on a return trip to Lancaster and ran wild for four miles before being brought in control. The summer car had broken its coupling while being pushed back to Lancaster.

Although regular passenger runs may have ceased before 1937, the traction line to the B.I.S. was abandoned in 1937 when supplies were no longer carried to the school.

**SINCE FEB. 12, 1901**, is the anniversary for the B.I.S. Traction or line Railroad, this month seems proper to tell its story.

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<sup>i</sup> The nickname "Dicky" was a crude take off on "Dinky" and was likely most used around the railroad yards and by boys in middle school. No. 1, the "Dinky", as little as it was, was a steam locomotive fueled by coal not gasoline.