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Zippy commuter trains linked suburbs in old days

The Louisville & Eastern (L&E) Electric Railroad entered Oldham County in the early 1900s. By 1906, a person in La Grange could travel to downtown Louisville on the electric "interurban" with stops at Buckner, Crestwood, Pewee Valley, Anchorage, Lyndon, St. Mathews and Crescent Hill.



Courtesy of the Oldham County History Center

The Interurban: Oldham County's Trolley

In fact, interurban companies had branches from downtown Louisville that reached to Jeffersonville, New Albany and Charlestown, Ind., Okolona, Fern Creek and Shelbyville, Ky. One of the other companies was the Louisville & Interurban Railroad Co. (L&I), which took over the L&E in 1911.

Their lines functioned largely as commuter trains, running every hour at speeds ranging from 65 to 89 mph. A ticket cost around \$1.

The train also could pull a small freight car for livestock so that local farmers could ship their cattle, pigs or sheep to the Louisville stockyards. In addition, the baggage car could be loaded with milk and cream bound for Louisville.

Although people still traveled on trains to Louisville, the electric trolleys were faster. Louisville and Nashville (L&N) Railroad, in an effort to compete with the interurban, created a passenger service called "The Loop."

The interurban ran parallel to the rails and this competition was often not so friendly. L&N claimed to have the only valid deed to the land that its track crossed in Buckner. After the interurban track had been laid parallel to the L&N tracks, the railroad claimed to have acquired the Buckner land from John Buckner 35 years before the interurban's development.

Oldham County native Al Klingenfus recalls a story from his father about an incident resulting from the dispute.

"Originally the interurban ran from Louisville to Crestwood, and the company decided it was so profitable they would extend the line to La Grange. That made L&N Railroad mad because a lot of people rode railroad cars in those days [and they were afraid to lose business]. So they complained about the inner urban going in.

"So they (the interurban) thought the best way to do it was to lay the tracks at night. So the L&N railroad men — shot steam on the workers that were laying the inner urban tracks.

So, the L&I company put electric on the railroad line, the rail, and the whole bunch just fell down. It didn't kill them, but shocked it shocked them so. My Dad told me that he remembered that.

"You can see why they would do it — they were trying to come to La Grange and L&N would try to stop them. Dad actually was there — after shooting that hot water on them, they got them back."

The dispute between L&N and L&E went to court. Judge R. F. Peak at Shelbyville ruled that L&E must remove all obstructions placed on the lots at Buckner and restore them to the conditions they were in at the time the court injunction was served. But eventually an agreement was reached that allowed the line to be extended.

Unfortunately, the Great Depression and the rise of the automobile brought the decline of the interurban's use in the community. Bus lines eventually replaced the streetcars, and the interurban lines were gradually phased out. According to "The Louisville Encyclopedia," the last run to La Grange was Aug. 24, 1935.
