

**Burlington Traction Company
Records, 1883-1929
MSA 523-527, Doc 600, XMSC 102**

Introduction

This collection contains the records of the Burlington Traction Company and its predecessor companies, the Winooski and Burlington Horse Railroad Company and the Military Post Street Railway Company. The collection was given to the Vermont Historical Society in September 2008 by William P. Thompson along with the records of the Burlington Rapid Transit Company (ms. acc. no. 2008.10). The collection, which is composed almost entirely of account books, is housed in five flip-top boxes, one document box, and includes seven larger volumes (two of which are folio size) that are shelved separately; it consumes 3.5 linear feet of shelf space.

Company History

In 1872, the Winooski and Burlington Horse Railroad Company (WBHRRC), a company which provided horse-drawn cars for running on rails, emerged as a practical and economical solution for suburban and urban Vermonters needing to travel relatively short distances in their local areas. In 1872, it was the first horse-drawn railroad to be chartered in Vermont, yet only became fully operational thirteen years later, on November 15, 1885. Its rails sprawled between the cities of Winooski and Burlington, beginning at the Central Vermont Railroad Depot at the intersection of College and Lake Streets, running all the way across the Winooski River. Its cars were double platform cars, three-quarters size, with a capacity of fourteen people. The inclusion of additional routes, such as one on Shelburne Road, allowed for even greater mobility.

By the 1890s, the United States witnessed the advent of the electric trolley system, the latest trend in municipal transportation. Following with the times, the directors of the company believed that the conversion would not only yield a quicker means of transportation, but would also be more economically profitable. Bonds to finance the project were sold without difficulty, and the work began without delay. The adoption of the latest developments in urban mass transportation had begun in Vermont.

The change of the horse-rail line went hand in hand with a change in company name. The trolleys system's name was changed to the Burlington Traction Company (BTC) in November 1896. In the next few decades, lines were expanded. The cities of Winooski, Burlington, and Essex Junction became inter-connected. The last expansion was made in 1922. The entire line totaled approximately twelve miles—its peak.

Meanwhile, another horse-drawn line called the Military Post Street Railway Company (MPSRC) began operation in early 1895, organized and conceived by the same individuals that owned the BTC. The line began in Upper Main Street in Winooski and ran two miles to Fort Ethan Allen. The company was leased to and operated by the WBHRRC on July 27, 1896, and was ultimately absorbed by the BTC on July 27, 1926.

The early 20th century saw great prosperity for the BTC, as the trolleys operated on quick schedules (usually 20-minute routes) and fast speeds (25 to 30 miles per hour) and served a key economical purpose for merchants and industries of surrounding cities. It was, for its time, the fastest and least expensive way to travel around the area. The statistic of three million passengers who rode the trains from July 1st, 1909 to June 30, 1910 attests to the impact the system had in the Burlington area. However, gradually, ridership declined as a new, alternative mode of transportation was introduced: the automobile.

In February 1926, the first local bus route was established by William S. Appleyard, who received permission by the Public Service Commission (PSC) to operate a non-competitive route in the Hill Section of Burlington. The BTC had received an order from the Public Service Commission to terminate its service between Shelburne Road and Queen City Park, and to expand its lines. When the BTC refused, the PSC granted Appleyard permission to operate his buses in places directly in competition with the BTC. The final blow to the BTC was the devastating flood which hit Vermont in November of 1927. Among the staggering losses was the collapse of the Winooski Bridge, a main route of BTC. Although the bridge was rebuilt and a new trolley line established, it was clear by that time that the trolley era had come to an end.

In 1929, Appleyard's Burlington Rapid Transit Company bought the BTC in order to acquire its routes and eliminate competition. The last trolleys operated on August 4, 1929. On this day, a crowd had gathered at City Hall Park to witness the torching of a trolley car. The interior of Car 5 (the oldest car owned by the BTC) was soaked with gasoline and lit on fire, symbolic of the end of the 44 year history left by the trolley system.

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains the business records of the Burlington Traction Company and its predecessor companies, Winooski and Burlington Horse Railroad Company and Military Post Street Railway Company. The collection also includes a few scattered records of related electric companies and from the successor company, Burlington Rapid Transit.

The collection is arranged by record type then by date covering the period 1883-1929. Record types include accounts, cash vouchers, general expenses, cash books, tally books, examinations by accountants, inventories and appraisals of property, operating reports, stock ledgers, capitol stock books, ledger sheets, and annual reports. There are not necessarily all record types for all time periods. These records document the financial health of the company and the popularity of its services. The collection does not contain any correspondence.

The inventory and appraisal conducted in 1926 (MSA 526:01) creates a snapshot of the company just as its arch-rival Burlington Rapid Transit was being formed. The report contains photographs of trolley cars, buildings, and one Studebaker bus.

The collection includes early bus financial and ridership records (MSA 523:05 and MSA 525:05).

There is one folder of records related to the Peoples Hydro Electric Vermont Corporation, the Peoples Light and Power Corporation, and the Vergennes Electric Company, all from 1926. Generally, trolley companies were formed by electric companies as an outlet for the power that they were producing.

Related Collections

The VHS library contains extensive records of the successor companies to BTC: Burlington Rapid Transit and Vermont Transit Company (Doc 610).

Inventory

- XMSC 102:01 “Burlington Traction Company Matters, Military Post Street Railway Company, Vergennes Power Company Matters,” 1883-1920
- MSA 523:01 _____, loose papers removed from volume
 02 Accounts, BTC and WBHRRRC, 1884-1911
Includes capital stock, advertising, construction & equipment, profit and loss, dividends
- 03 _____, BTC, 1910-1911
Includes expenses allocated across individuals, as well as general expenses for construction
- 04 _____, BTC, 1919-1922
Includes legal expenses, notes of accidents, truck & line repairs
- 05 _____, BTC and BRT, 1926- 1929
Includes managers fund, legal expenses, and cash fares for individual stops on the transit line
- 06 Cash Voucher, BTC, 1926- 1927
Includes the transfer vouchers issued in favor of The Peoples Light & Power Corporation on Chittenden County Trust Company
- fXMSC102:02 _____, _____, 1927-1928
Includes cash book, voucher record, fixed capital, payroll summary, automobile summary, balance sheet, general ledger, etc.
- 03 _____, _____, 1928-1929
Includes cash and adjusted voucher
- 04 General expenses, BTC, 1919-1926
Includes costs for equipment, construction, maintenance
- 05 _____, _____, 1924-1926
- MSA 524:01 Cashbook, BTC, 1889-1898

- Includes balances for construction, expenses, tickets and fares*
- 02 ____ , ____ , 1901-1905
- 03 ____ , ____ , 1910-1912
- 04 ____ , ____ , 1920-1926
- Includes advertising, payroll, salaries*
- MSA 525:01 ____ , ____ , 1922-1925
- 02 ____ , BTC and MPSRC, April 1926- August 1926
- 03 Tally book, BTC, 1914-1919
- Includes number of passengers and cash made from individual lines*
- 04 ____ , ____ , 1922-1925
- 05 ____ , BTC and BRT, 1927- 1929
- Includes tallies after the conversion to the Burlington Transit Report on Examination by Arthur Young & Company, BTC, MPSRC, and Vergennes Electric Company (VEC), 1924- 1926*
- 06 *Includes an examination of the capital assets, dividends, funds, stocks, etc. of all three companies*
- 07 ____ , ____ , June 1926
- Includes the appraisals of property*
- 08 ____ , ____ , July 1926- August 1926
- Includes a preliminary report on the assets of the BTC*
- MSA 526:01 Inventory and appraisal, BTC, 1926
- Includes a report on the assets of the company as of August 2nd, 1926, as well as photographs of trolleys, sheds, passenger stops, and sub-stations*
- 02 Operating Reports, BTC, September 1926- January 1927
- Includes assets and liabilities, fixed capital, current and other assets*
- 03 ____ , ____ , February 1927- June 1927
- 04 ____ , ____ , July 1927- November 1927
- 05 Stock Ledger, BTC and WBHRRC, ca. 1889- 1917
- fXMSC 102:06 Invoice Book, BTC and WBHRRC, ca. 1890-1915
- Includes bonds from the above noted period*
- 07 ____ , BTC, 1913-1926
- MSA 527:01 Capitol Stocks, BTC, 1898- 1905
- 02 ____ , ____ , 1906- 1920
- 03 ____ , ____ , 1921- 1929
- 04 Ledger Sheets, BTC, 1926
- Includes capital surplus, profit and loss, earned surplus, investments, etc.*
- 05 ____ , People's Hydro Electric Vermont Corporation (PHEVC) and People's Light & Power Corporation, 1926
- Doc 600:01-25 *Annual Reports of Burlington Traction Company/ Military Post Street Railway Company to the Commissioner of State Taxes /Public Service Commission of the State of Vermont, 1909-1923, 1928*

- 26-29 BTC, *Indenture*, April 1, 1926 (four copies)
33 *City of Burlington vs. The Burlington Traction Company et al.*,
Defendants' Evidence, 1898

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