

THOUGHTS ON METRO AND ITS PREDECESSOR, THE WASHINGTON AND VIRGINIA RAILWAY

By

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BALLSTON'S METRO SUBWAY TRAINS AND STATION IN VIRGINIA

The trains, the trains, have you seen them? -- (at Ballston)

How silently, smoothly and majestically they glide in and out of the station.

What a marvelous engineering feat, a thing of great beauty!

How astonished I was when I travelled by escalator two or three flights underground and for the first time viewed the trains and the station's magnificently arched ceiling with its many indirect lights.

I was overwhelmed, I felt that I could not speak. Finally, I asked myself, is this really Ballston?

Immediately my parents came to mind. They had been early settlers here in 1897 and had lived just a short block away. How I wished that they could see this gigantic transformation.

NOTES ABOUT THE WASHINGTON AND VIRGINIA RAILWAY

1. To Georgetown, D. C.

My mother used to tell a story about how she and my older brother (14 years old in 1904) borrowed a neighbor's old horse and open wagon to drive into Georgetown, D. C. to buy a spool of cotton thread. There were no stores carrying notions in the area in those days.

The railway was in service at that time but they wanted to go directly into Georgetown. Upon arriving in Rosslyn, Virginia, by our trolley line one had to transfer (two cents) to a small bouncing trolley at the Virginia end of the bridge in order to cross the Aqueduct Bridge and Potomac River and get into Georgetown.

This trolley, I believe, was part of the old Capital Traction Company. There was only one trolley which travelled back and forth over the bridge.

If one missed the trolley one had to wait for the car to return or walk the bridge.

2. The Transfer Trolley

Upon returning from a visit with my mother's three aunts in Georgetown one evening, we were distressed to find the transfer trolley nowhere in sight!

It was windy and cold and not a pleasant thought to have to walk the bridge.

Disappointed, my mother and I stepped into the old and popular Koosters Restaurant nearby, where one could order a box of hot fried oysters, with pickles and oysterettes. We returned to the bridge with our purchase of delicious food which we ate while walking. It was so enjoyable, that we were almost unaware of the wind and cold air surrounding us.

As we approached the Virginia side of the bridge we could see our trolley waiting. We heard the conductor call "All aboard!", just as we reached the station. We

hurried inside to the warm and comfortable car.

How wonderful it was to have this transportation, we thought as we rode back to our home in Ballston, Virginia.

3. To the Cemetery at Falls Church, Virginia

My father suddenly passed away in the year 1909. He was laid to rest at Oakwood Cemetery, a lovely place in Falls Church, Virginia.

The railroad's last stop was at Fairfax, Virginia -- this was quite a distance beyond Falls Church.

When my younger brother and I became old enough, my mother one Decoration Day cut a large bouquet of deep pink peonies from our yard and my mother, her sister, my brother and I took the trolley at Ballston to a stop not far from Oakwood Cemetery. It seemed a long walk on a dirt road through a wooded area with many pine trees. My brother picked and ate wild strawberries which grew alongside the road. One could see dainty blue forget-me-nots and other wild flowers growing profusely both inside and outside of the Cemetery.

It was truly a lovely peaceful place. We took this trip together for many years thereafter. We were fortunate to have had the trolleys as we had no other way to reach the Cemetery.

4. We Loved to Ride the Trolleys

As children my brother and I loved to ride the electric trolley cars in Virginia.

The conductor loudly called out the names of the streets or stations where there were stops as we rode joyously along.

When the motorman picked up speed in some areas and was approaching a crossing, he really blew the train's whistle while slowing the car a bit.

Sometimes, the car "stopped dead" on the track! Many persons sat upright, startled and puzzled. It was the overhead trolley line which had jumped the electric power line. The conductor quickly (from the rear window) maneuvered it back into place; the trolley continued on its way.

We eyed the motorman all the while, behind his wheel with his numerous instruments.

This was exciting and fun for children.

We loved the trolleys.

5. Transported to the Parades

In later years the Washington and Virginia Railway travelled to Fort Myer, to Arlington Amphitheatre and to Mount Vernon. Also, there was a downtown Washington, D. C. station at 12th and Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W.

We saw many inaugural parades from this station and from the steps of the old Post Office Building nearby.

There were many parades in those days; long ones with caged animals, strolling elephants and many young men in military uniform, many bands with huge horns and all kinds of musical instruments.

When the Armistice was signed November 11, 1918 I was in the area near the railroad station to meet my mother who was then a government employee, a war worker.

There was truck after truck loaded with people blowing noise-makers, playing drums and other loud gadgets all passing on Pennsylvania Avenue heading towards the White House. We wondered what the excitement was about, when we saw a truck with a huge sign reading "Armistice signed"! Many persons stood and stared

astounded, almost unbelieving.

6. The Old Center Market and the Trolleys

It was from this station at 12th and Pennsylvania Avenue that we went to the Old Center Market to buy our freshly killed Thanksgiving and Christmas turkeys. It was located where the National Archives Building is presently located.

The out-door part of the market was fabulous with all kinds of poultry and produce on display, all from farms not far away. It was a busy and interesting market.

Once when I was a child I bought a live white-feathered yellow billed duck priced at \$1.00. It was given to me in a brown paper bag, with its head looking about questioningly. I brought it home on the trolley; it was a wonderful bird and pet. Each night it laid a large white egg.

The trolleys were great! How could we have lived in Virginia without this Railway?

7. The In-Coming and Out-Going U. S. Mail and the Trolleys

The Railroad delivered the U. S. mail to Ballston's early 4th class post office. It was on Fairfax Drive directly across from the present Metro subway station. Later there was a 3rd class office in a new and larger building on the same site.

The trolleys carried the in-coming and out-going mail three times daily. The postmistress hired a dependable and trustworthy man to handle the mail from the train to the post office across Fairfax Drive. It was very heavy at times especially at Christmas. When the mail was light (possibly one canvas locked bag) the conductor tossed the bag from the moving car, if there was no passenger to expel!

Sometimes there were metal boxes containing eggs from some farm. These had to be hand-carried (by the strong metal handle) from the train into the post office.

The Washington and Virginia Railway gave wonderful service for many years.

I saw the trains and the mail come and go for two and a half years when I worked there as a part-time clerk along with others (1931-34)

8. It Was Sad to See the Trolleys End

Not many years later, the Auto-Rail Car appeared. It was equipped to ride the trails or lower four rubber-tired wheels and ride on soil or macadam. A unique model indeed!

This was the beginning of the end for the trolleys. Everything was changing!

A road was built to accommodate the many automobile drivers of the day. It was sad to see the trolleys go -- the end of an era.

Note: Mrs. De Bevoise was born 1906 in Arlington, near the present Ballston Metro Station.