

Tucked deep in the heart of Maryland is an electric railway--- it just misses being a true interurban---which for picturesque countryside traversed, charming old cars and generally bucolic air just can't be excelled. The Hagerstown & Frederick (now officially Potomac Edison) Is loved by all eastern railfans and few of them have failed to cover the highly interesting little system not once, but many times.

It was your editor's privilege to visit on a hot Sunday in 1944, making the trip up from Washington, D.C., with Felix Reifschneider. The forty-mile drive thru the beautiful Maryland back-country was enlivened by frequent glimpses of the right-of-way and even the still-concrete-entombed rails of the electric railway that once ran between Washington and Rockville. Arriving at Frederick about eleven, we began one of the most enjoyable rail tours the editor has yet experienced.

Frederick is known to all school children as the scene of Barbara Frietchie's memorable Civil War heroics; today the town appears little changed from those far-off days. In common with most of the Maryland scene, Frederick is much more eighteenth century in flavor than are towns of other sections of the nation which the author has visited. And right down the center of old-fashioned streets, with blank faced brick houses abutting almost onto the right-of-way, meander the tracks of the Hagerstown & Frederick.

We picked up the H&F's Myersville line on South St. in Frederick and followed the light rail to the station on Patrick St. (How strange it is that the sight of trolley wire makes one feel at home, regardless of the scene.) We were prepared for a rather delapidated building but were agreeably surprised to come upon a two-story brick structure of generous proportions, fairly modern in appearance and located in the center of a wye formed by two lines on city streets and a third connecting spur through the station grounds. Three cars were standing near the station and one of them, old 167, was already comfortably filled with passengers (mostly youngsters) who evidently were headed for a day of fun at the Braddock Heights Park swimming pool. (During 1944 the editor encountered this swimming pool traffic of youngsters on Sundays at such widely-separated electric lines as PEPCO, Tampa Electric, Lehigh Valley Transit, and now H&F) Quickly we boarded the 167 and were lucky to find seats on a plank bench in the baggage compartment. Even this tiny space was crowded when our motorman boarded, rang the bell and slowly turned the handle of the venerable controller. Up the street we rumbled, to the tune of friendly squeaks and mutters from the 167's ancient woodwork.

Slowly we rattle up to South St. and turn right, then with great dignity roll through the canyon of brick buildings. The approach of the 167 is heralded by groups of people appearing from within the houses, gathering to witness even such minor excitement as the passing of the big old car. Children stop their play to wave and shout at the green-and-cream vehicle, and our younger passengers enliven the morning with responses to the various greetings.

Soon we leave the street and enter upon private right-of-way, passing on the left a huge government junkyard, the Frederick Salvage Depot of the Army; here are hauled numerous ponderous gondolas loaded to the gunwales with all sorts of battlefield junk: tanks, half-tracks, trucks, jeeps---all of them more or less scarred by their battlefield experience. This Depot alone kept H&F in good financial condition during the height of the war, only being exceeded in volume of freight handled by one other project, a secret Army installation we think was connected with the atomic bomb.

Onward we roll, curving to the right, crossing the highway at an oblique angle, passing the town ball park. Our track now leads upward through green fields, far from roads and with few dwellings in close proximity. Below us begins to spread the town of Frederick; as we continue to climb, more and more of the lower countryside appears in full relief. Old 167's pace is slow now, her old motors and the power supply almost meeting their match in the grade. To the metallic noise of laboring motors and gears, we ascend CM and within a few minutes the park itself appears up to the left. We do not head for the Park, however, but curve to the right and make a junction with what once was the five-mile branch line along the top of the ridge into Jefferson. Our operator changes trolleys, worse to the other end of the car, and we back up a stiff grade on curving, shaded track to the station at the park. Quickly our passengers alight and we find ourselves in an almost-empty car with most of the journey to Middletown and Myersville yet ahead.

While the operator is inside the station telephoning, we look around the Braddock Heights area. Our car has headed in on one leg of a tiny wye. To our left lie the cool shaded acres of the park itself, with the shouts of swimmers coming from the distance. Hard up alongside the right side of our car is the brick station building; H&F has a substation here to aid cars make the climb of Catoctin Mountain. There was one more substation on this part of the system but war's demands for more power on the Thurmont division caused the removal of the converter from Myersville to Frederick. Since freight up here is now almost non-existent and passenger cars do not run too frequently, the power supply is sufficient even with the loss of

the Myersville substation. On the far side of the station the line to Jefferson takes off----although Jefferson now is far from H&F rails; the few miles of this highly scenic line still used take one to the Vindabona Hotel. If we are lucky, our operator will receive instructions to run out to the Hotel for passengers; sure enough, the orders come through and we switch onto the Jefferson line. We curve left, leave the station and roll out onto the top of the ridge for a ride that affords one of the most spectacular views to be seen from an interurban. Below to the right is the beautiful and fertile Middletown Valley, while far across it rise the Imposing Blue Ridge Mountains, over whose wooded flanks the HAP once climbed. To the left can be seen more miles of low country with occasional glimpses of the outskirts of Frederick, far below. 167 rumbles along the uneven track at top speed----about 25---and soon we see a low rambling building ahead on the right of the dusty road which parallels the track. Abruptly we stop, and ahead where once was track are now only ties and poles, stretching away into the distance; a pair of crossed ties bare us from further ventures out the ridge and down its side into Jefferson.

Quickly we change ends and back we roll to Braddock Heights, then down the short grade to the junction. This time we continue straight ahead and begin the descent into Middletown Valley. A hard-surfaced highway appears to the left and follows us closely. Quick to feel the downward pull, old 167 begins to show us some fast stepping. Although track is not good, the seventy-pound rails bear our weight easily and soon we are making an estimated speed of about forty. Now we leave the descending shelf cut into the side of the mountain and enter the floor of the valley. Prosperous-appearing farms are everywhere, and here and there we see a short spur leave the main line---reminding us of the days when H&F enjoyed a prosperous freight business. Today, however, the spurs without exception are very rusty and covered with lush weeds; freight now comes to the H&F from other sources and this line is used for passenger service only. Ahead of us now we see the village of Middletown and here we stop; this particular schedule will not go through to Myersville, terminus of the line at this time. (Since then the Middletown-Myersville segment has been abandoned.) Even Myersville was just one more station on the line when H&F was in its prime, for the cars only paused briefly there before beginning their groaning ascent over South Mountain into Hagerstown.

Within five minutes we leave the cluster of frame houses that is Middletown and begin the return trip to Frederick. The climb to Braddock Heights is quickly negotiated, the brief detour up the spur to the station at the park where a goodly crowd is

gathered awaiting our arrival---then the return to the junction and the descent to Frederick begins. The curving track falls steeply, and old 167 gingerly feels her way downward. The mountainside greenery presses in familiarly on the veteran car and her friendly bell melodically salutes the mood. Now here's something very interesting because it's so unusual: we emerge onto a flat meadow whereon several little houses stand; each house has an individual landing platform hard up against the track. Two ruts in the dust alongside are the only indication that other means of transport are available to the residents. Truly it would seem that the interurban is king of this domain.

Ahead is a turnout and we head in, awaiting a meet with a special car making an extra run to handle today's heavy crowds; in a few moments we hear her growling up the mountain and soon she is in sight---it's car 48, a low-level steel car, the only car of even slightly modern appearance on the H&F. 48 passes us with a greet display of bell and whistle, and we pull out onto the main line at once, our progress down the hill into Frederick now unobstructed. Off we go, and roll into Frederick a few moments later.

It's time for lunch now, so Felix and I make our way to the Francis Scott Key Hotel where we enjoy an excellent meal in the clean sunlit dining room. While dining, we look back through the history of the H&F. In order to understand the development of the system, we find it necessary to consider it in three parts. Let's look at each one, see how it began, and how it fits into the other parts of the system.

First, we'll consider the Hagerstown end--- the part now cut off from the body of the H&F due to the severing of the line over South Mountain several years ago. The Hagerstown Railway, consisting of two lines (to Williamsport, 6.1 miles, and to Funkstown, with city tracks 6.05 miles) was opened August 8th, 1896. Constructed of 56 and 68 pound rail, Hagerstown Railway owned nine motor and three trail cars. On July 1st, 1902, it began service over an extension of 9.9 miles to Boonesboro as "Hagerstown & Boonesboro Railway." In December of 1904 South Mountain was conquered when a 7.5 mile extension to Myersville was opened as "The Hagerstown & Myersville Railway." Once the rails reached Myersville, through service to Frederick was possible, as the Myersville-Frederick segment had already been constructed by another company, as we will see. Still another extension from Hagerstown was opened in the latter part of 1906; this was the "Hagerstown & Northern Railroad" which ran to Shady Grove, ten miles. At Shady Grove this branch connected with cars of the Chambersburg, Greencastle & Waynesboro Electric Railway which afforded a delightful ride up to the famous summer resort of Pen-Mar on the summit of the Blue Ridge Mountains and on the

border of Pennsylvania and Maryland. (There is conflicting information as to whether or not the CG&W ever went east of Pen-Yar; some sources claim the line actually got as far as Blue Ridge Summit, 2.7 miles beyond Pen-Mar—while others claim it entered Highfield, Maryland, some two miles east of Pen-Mar,) At any rate, almost all the CG&W stock was purchased by the H&F in 1917; there may always have been a community of interest between the two companies but the CG&W apparently was allowed to go its own separate way so we will not be concerned with it in this article. In June, 1908, the Boonsboro, Shady Grove and Myersville lines were merged with the Hagerstown Railway; indeed, they seem to have been merely dummy companies organized for the purpose of extending the parent company's lines. On March 22, 1913, they were merged with lines at the Frederick end and the Hagerstown & Frederick Railway was formed.

Now let's look at the Frederick end; here the system may be conveniently divided into two sections—the lines to the west, and the lines to the north. First we will consider the lines to the west.

The Frederick & Middletown Electric Railway Company was opened August 18, 1895; it was nine miles in length, was constructed of 60 pound rail and owned twelve motor and eight trail cars. In early 1899 the line was extended 5.5 miles to Myersville (with 60 pound rail) as "The Myersville & Catoctin Railway". This company was leased to the F&P in August, 1901. In 1903 the Frederick City Suburban Railway was purchased; this company had built a line to the Fair Grounds and to a large lime works. Also in 1902 we see the company purchasing the Braddock Heights Park. The Jefferson & Braddock Heights Railroad, five miles long and built with 60 pound rail, was leased about 1907. On December 7, 1909, these companies were consolidated with others to form "The Frederick Railroad" which assumed the leases of the subsidiaries. On March 22, 1913, The Frederick Railroad became part of the H&F.

Looking at that part of the system which lies to the north of Frederick, we at once encounter the name of The Washington, Frederick & Gettysburg Railroad, built from Frederick to Catoctin, 14 miles, in early 1908. The Monocacy Valley Railroad was a leased subsidiary, extending four miles into Thurmont, which was reached about July 1 1908. Extensions were planned through Emmittsburg to Gettysburg and south to the nation's capitol but were never constructed. The WF&G was built of 70 pound rail and had three locomotives, and four passenger cars. From its very beginning this line was planned as an electric railway, but street operation was resorted to as a temporary measure until overhead could be constructed and the necessary electric cars secured. On December 7, 1909, the WF&G became part

of the Frederick Railroad, which as noted in the previous paragraph was a consolidation of all the lines to Thurmont and Middletown from Frederick, with the line from Middletown to Myersville leased track mileage at that time was as follows:

Thurmont-Frederick	17.3 miles
Frederick-Middletown	6.0
Braddock Hts-Jefferson	5.0
City of Frederick	2.0
Frederick-Schleysville	1.0
Middletown-Myersville	5.5

In 1910 the Thurmont line was electrified for passenger service, with electrically operated freight service following thereafter.

From its inception the Hagerstown Railway always did an electric light and power business. In 1916 the H&F purchased the Potomac Light & Power Company and on April 24, 1922, the H&F became part of a merged company, The Potomac Public Service Company. In December 31, 1923, the name was changed to The Potomac Edison Company. By a strange chance of fate, the railway which had brought the power company had lost its own identity thereby!

But let's leave the past and return to the present. Our lunch finished, we spend a few moments retracing the long-abandoned city street car routes in Frederick. Yes, H&F at one time operated city service here with two little cars. Easily traced are the routes: over Fifth St. on the present Thurmont line, down Market through the heart of town to South St., thence to the junction of South and Patrick Sts. and back downtown on the latter street. Continuing past the carbarn on Patrick St., the city cars finally ended their run out at the Fair Grounds. One of the city cars is still to be seen---it is being used as a shed north of town.

Our next objective is the barn. A short drive brings us to an attractive brick structure of generous dimensions, used now not only to keep the electric cars and locomotives rolling but also to maintain H&F's large fleet of blue busses, familiar sights on all highways in this region, even going down to Washington itself. The barn is set back a considerable distance from the street and the yard in front is full of a number of old wooden cars---all relics but capable of turning in an honest day's work even yet. Within the structure are the locomotives---including some unique steel single-truck jobs by Baldwin-Westinghouse which are really unique. Here too we see #1, a great wooden express car with monitor roof, secured from Capital Transit which in turn got it from the old Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis. (We had seen shortly before this #1's blood brother,

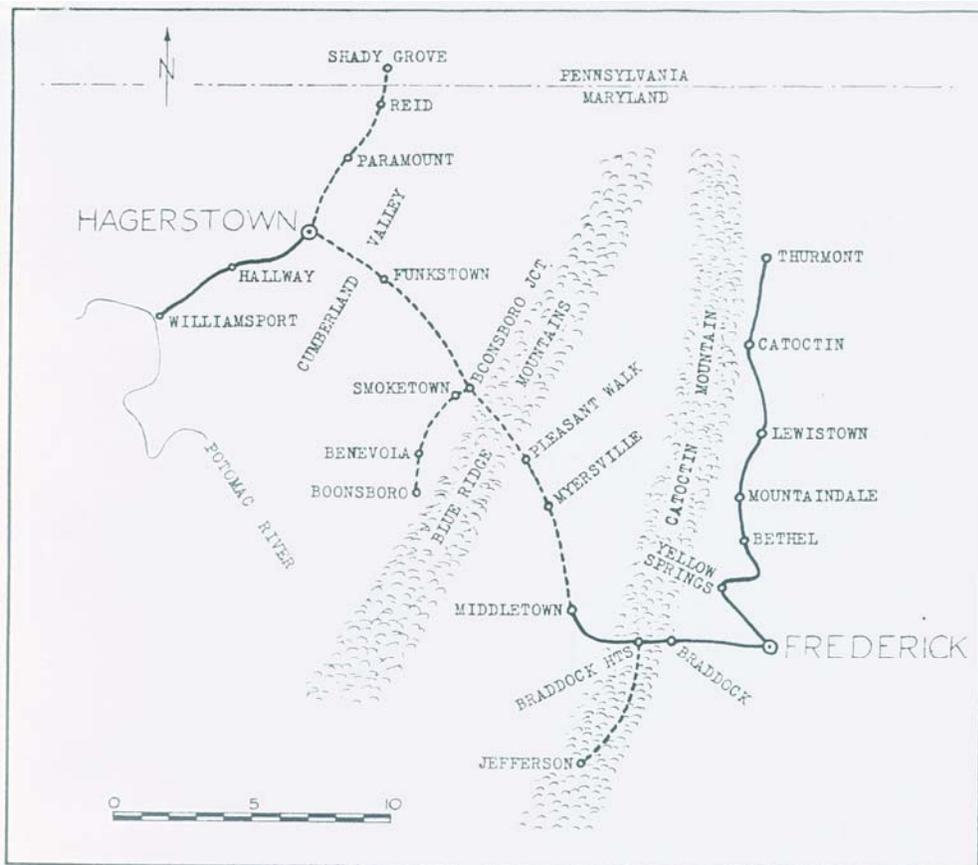
Central California Traction's #7, also a WB&A car.) Also here, and getting a bright green coat of paint, is ex-Washington & Old Dominion's home-made #26 with its high square wooden body and curious oval windows; why H&F purchased this W&OD car instead of W&OD #50, a 50-ton Baldwin-Westinghouse steel locomotive, is perplexing. We are shown thru all parts of the shops by the veteran employees who apparently are eager to prove that Maryland hospitality is not another war casualty. Out in back of the building are piles of very interesting junk---truck frames, couplers, steps---which inevitably lead one into a maze of intriguing conjecture; which cars once had these parts, why were they junked? Many freight cars are in the yard and a distant whistle heralds the approach of a Thurmont freight train. H&F is doing a terrific freight business now, the road's revenue from freight far outstripping its healthy returns from passenger hauling. The Thurmont line, the large war-time customers headed by the government, and electrified spur tracks into every nook and cranny of Frederick's industrial district, all account for the steady stream of nourishing revenue which originates with those clumsy, slow boxes and gondolas.

Already the afternoon is drawing to a close; not enough time remains to ride to Thurmont or to drive over to Hagerstown and ride the sole remaining line there. We are indeed sorry to miss the Thurmont line for it is in better shape and has better service than does the Braddock Heights-Myersville part of the system. It is regrettable that we also must postpone riding the Hagerstown line to Williamsport, six miles. Cars on this line operate every half hour weekdays and Sundays and are very well patronized; the cars give a slow ride due to weak power. Felix tells me that when he first rode this particular line, cars made good speed---but now, with only two cars serving the line, power is woefully lacking, due probably to deterioration of the rail bonds.

Probably some readers wondered at our statement that H&F is not a true Interurban. To set their minds at ease, we hasten to explain; H&F took 110 minutes to cover the 28 miles between Hagerstown and Frederick, thus putting it in a class with cross-country trolley lines. H&F cars could not reach a sufficiently high top speed to be classified as interurban cars; their fair schedule speed almost 15 miles per hour, was primarily due to long stretches of uninhabited country where stops were few and far between. Had the cars been equipped with more powerful motors (and more power in the trolley wire) much better time could have been attained due to increase speed over the two mountains. However, high speed operation on the H&F would certainly require almost complete rebuilding of trackag.

The chief impressions that remain of the editor's day on the REP are first of all the spectacular scenery and, of course, the cars themselves. The beautiful climb up Catoctin Mountain, the thrilling ride out along the ridge, the descent into Middletown Valley—these will be remembered. How much more impressive could the through route over South Mountain have been---? Yes, we are returning to the old H&F some day soon and will get us another batch of pleasant memories.

(This is Chapter Five of "Riding America's Interurbans," written by Ira L. Swett. Previous chapters were "Riding Up To Gresham (PEPCO)" which appeared in our October 1943 issue, "Christmas On The Chilliwack Train (BCER)" in April 1944 "The Charleroi Interurban (Pittsburgh) in January 1945, and 'Liberty bell Limited (LVT)" in October 1945.)



OFFICIAL ROSTER
THE HAGERSTOWN & FREDERICK RY.
(POTOMAC EDISON CO.)

Car No.	YEAR BOUGHT	TYPE	BUILDER	WEIGHT	SEATS	MOTORS	HP	GEAR RATIO	CONTROL	REMARKS
48	1924	Pass	Brill		40	4 GE 64	30		Safety	Steel, arch roof
164	1910	Pass	Brill	54,600	48	4 WH 306	40	20:64	K35G2	Wood, monitor roof
167	1914	Pass	Brill	50,000	48	4 WH 101B2	40	18:66	K35G	Wood, monitor roof
168*	1917	Pass	Brill	51,000	48	4 WH 101B2	40	18:66	K35G2	Wood, monitor roof
169*	1917	Pass	Brill	51,500	48	4 GE 201H	50	20:66	K35G2	Wood, monitor roof
170	1917	Pass	Brill	51,500	48	4 GE 201A	50	20:66	K35G2	Wood, monitor roof
171	1919	Pass	Brill	51,500	48	4 GE 201A	50	17:69	K35G2	Wood, monitor roof
172*	1921	Pass	Brill	51,500	48	4 WH 101B2	40	18:66	K35G2	Wood, monitor roof
1	1918	Exp	So. Ry.	91,400	--	4 WH 577WB	140	17:60	HL	Ex-CT and WB&A car
2	1910	Loco	Baldwin	62,000	--	2 WH 308B2	120	16:57	HL	
3	1914	Loco	Baldwin	50,000	--	2 GE 55H	90	17:60	HL	Steel, single truck
4	1914	Loco	Baldwin	50,000	--	2 GE 55H	90	17:60	HL	Steel, single truck
5	1920	Exp	Company		--	4 WH 547A6	80		HL	
7	1927	Snow		47,500	--	4 WH 101B2	40		K6	
8	1902	Work		51,300	--	4 GE 88B	40	17:69	K6	Wood, monitor roof
9	1918	Exp	W&OD	70,000	--	4 WH 93A2	60	17:60	HL	Ex-W&OD
15	1917	Line	CG&W		--	2 WH 68	40	14:68	K10	Wood, monitor roof

* - Used in Hagerstown. (Note that date of purchase is not necessarily date built)
Exp - Express car (CT - Capitol Transit) CG&W - Chambersburg, Greencastle & Waynesboro Ry.
So. Ry. - Southern Railway (WH - Westinghouse; Wheel Sizes - 48, 27"; 164-172, 34"; 2, 3, 4, 36";
W&OD - Washington & Old Dominion Ry. (GE - General Electric; 1, 9, 15, 33"; 5, 7, 8, 34".
Company - Hagerstown & Frederick Ry. Possible Error - Car 48, GE 264 motors?
(All cars not designated by asterisk work out of Frederick as of October, 1944.)
This is the official H&F roster, forwarded to INL through F. E. Reifschneider of Washington, D.C.
Further information on H&F cars will be welcomed and published by INL.



LEFT:
FREDERICK
STATION.
CAR 171
READY TO
LEAVE FOR
THURMONT.

Ira L. Swett

ELECTRIC TRACTION RULED SUPREME IN THE Southland when Ira L. Swett was born in 1913 in Los Angeles. The [Pacific Electric Railway](#), the largest interurban railway in the world, was at its zenith, dispatching more than 1,000 trains a day. Equally as impressive was the operation of the narrow-gauged [Los Angeles Railway](#), the yellow streetcar system owned by the Huntington interests. And out in Glendale were the red and white cars of the [Glendale & Montrose](#). One of Swett's cherished memories was seeing Henry Huntington's famous private car, the *Alabama*, rolling through downtown Los Angeles on PE rails. This traction world fascinated Swett and by 1940, (when he was only 27 years old), he was acknowledged by his peers as being the foremost authority on electric railways in Los Angeles.

Some of Swett's earliest works both in *Interurbans News-Letter* and in *Interurbans Specials*, and in *Wheel Clicks*, published by Railroad Boosters, carry the byline "Cpl. Ira Swett." He wrote those articles while a member of the United States Army during World War II, and his military career was one reason he entered the publishing field.

Swett was lucky in being stationed close to home during much of the war. Most railfans, however, were assigned to bases far removed from the electric railways they had known as civilians. Swett's early *News-Letters* were intended to tell fans overseas about traction happenings in the United States. Soon he had dozens of readers whom also were correspondents, reporting on electric railway activities in the areas where they were assigned.

Swett's wartime duty at the University of Washington at Seattle led to his *Specials* on Puget Sound Electric and Pacific Northwest Traction. Seattle's trolley buses were brand new upon Swett's arrival and, years later, when it appeared the city would scrap the system, he published his first non-electric railway book, *Seattle Trolley Coaches*, in 1971.

Following World War II, Swett championed modern electric railway technology and offered free copies of *Interurbans* to readers who would use the magazine to promote installation of PCC streetcars in their communities. But electric traction was declining in the United States and Canada and, after printing news of dozens of systems being abandoned, Swett terminated *Interurbans* as a periodic magazine in December 1948. He then concentrated on the histories he issued as 'Specials.'

Swett wrote about 50 books, with many of his topics being in some way related to the Pacific Electric Railway. Nearly all of his publications used typewritten text and they have an amateur look today. But Swett had little choice; photo typesetting was unheard of during most of Swett's publishing days and hot metal typesetting was far too expensive. Swett's market was limited; if he sold more than 1,500 copies of most of his works he was astonished. So, rather than putting out books that were attractive to the eye but too expensive for many rail history students, Swett published volumes packed with information at a price practically anyone could afford.

And Swett's standards were high, both for himself and the authors he published. At first, Swett published only his own works and, reflecting his never-satisfied curiosity, they were filled with details. One rarely had to ask a question after reading a Special by Swett. That level of detail set a high standard in the electric railway publishing field that most publishers adhere to today.

Readers of Swett's prose often were caught up in the drama of electric railroading, because Swett wrote enthusiastically and colorfully about his topics. Here are his opening words in the Introduction in Special 26:

The more you think about it, the more the interurban world lost when Sacramento Northern abandoned passenger service. Think it over: One ride - 183 miles long, world's longest interurban - brought you more diverse operation than you could buy anywhere else in the U.S. - probably in the world.

A caption under a photograph on Page 76 of Special 16 gave the view of an approaching PE interurban car a certain presence. Swett wrote:

Where else in western America can you wait in a safety zone and see a behemoth such as this approach?

The March 1946 issue of *Interurbans* carried the news of the approaching abandonment of the Salt Lake & Utah and Swett wrote gently:

As the time neared for the last car to pull out, old-timers recalled their interesting experiences of the third of a century the Salt Lake & Utah has been operating. Only in their memories will traditions and experiences of the Orem Line's golden years remain. All these, the days when snow stopped the trains, when accidents marred the cars' records, when vaudeville actors hired

special trains, and much more occupied their thoughts during the final hours of the SL&U.

Swett's fine writing was no accident. He lived at a time when the written word was an essential of a good education. Also, Ira was not as good a still photographer as some of his contemporaries and this probably was a factor in his books being less dramatic pictorially than they might have been had he been more skilled with a camera, or interested in the medium.

As the years went on, Swett branched out and made some of his color slides and movies available. He formed Interurban Films, which was separated from the book publishing after Swett died in 1975, but returned to Interurban Press in 1985.

An accomplished theater and studio organist, Swett made his living as a musician on early-day radio shows and several of his concerts were recorded. During most of his working career he was a publicist and administrator at the Salvation Army in Los Angeles. His traction books were mostly a hobby and he typically used the revenues from one volume to finance another.

Like many persons who deal with history, Swett knew he was saving something for the future. Swett never married and had no offspring to inherit Interurbans. However, he was intent on continuing the mechanism he so successfully devised to preserve history and made arrangements for Mac Sebree to continue the business, which Sebree and Jim Walker reorganized as Interurban Press. The Glendale-based firm continued publishing Specials until the company was sold outright to Pentrex, a video publisher.

-Harre W. Demoro