

**The author of this article lives and works on unceded territory of the Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, bands of Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla and many other Tribes who made their homes along the Columbia River.**

# Trains, Trolleys, Streetcars

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## Introduction

The Piedmont neighborhood is primarily a place for homes, but it has some major thoroughfares, these days known in planner-speak as “civic corridors”. Running from east to west there are Columbia, Lombard, Rosa Parks, and Ainsworth. And running from north to south there are Martin Luther King, Vancouver, and Albina. It is logical that public transportation is and was limited to those corridors. In as far as they existed at the time, of course. In 1889, when the Piedmont, Saratoga, and Lochinvar additions were platted there was basically only Vancouver Avenue, a dirt road which was not even graded. Union Avenue (now MLK, then Fourth Street) was not graded and stopped at the northeast corner of Piedmont, and it was only graded until Prescott. Portland Boulevard (Rosa Parks) did not exist. But matters changed rather quickly after 1890.

Especially early on the streetcar situation was complicated. The main distinction, of course, is horse vs steam vs electricity. But there is also single track and double track, and there is narrow gauge, standard gauge, and broad gauge. There have been more than 40 streetcar companies competing for franchises, and sometimes a dozen of them were active at the same time. Not all of the ones that incorporated or got franchises from the city actually laid tracts and went into business. The financial panics of 1893 and 1896 did a great deal of damage, because there was no capital available and many of the corporations went bankrupt or simply out of business. Our chapter starts around 1890, because before that the Peninsula was not really developed and there was no public transportation. Thus the period from 1870 until 1890, in which Portland already had horse-drawn street cars, is not really relevant for us. We start with the steam service on the St. Johns and Vancouver lines, where the power came from “dummies”, locomotives wrapped in a streetcar disguise.

In keeping with the spirit of this project, I will discuss the streetcars that ran both in and close to Piedmont. The idea is that even if the tracts were on the Peninsula, but not exactly in Piedmont, they still were important for the people living in Piedmont.

Much of the material in this chapter is taken directly from the wonderful little Arcadia books by Richard Thompson (2006, 2010, 2012) and the comprehensive work by Labbe (1982). There are also some great web pages mentioned in the reference section. The rest, as usual, comes from the Historic Oregonian, the city archives, and the Oregon Historical Society.



The map above, a cut out from the 1918 Pittmon map of Portland in the city archive, shows the streetcar system at a time close to its zenith. For us the most interesting lines are the St. Johns line, the Mississippi line, then Kenton Line, and the Vancouver line. The St. Johns line runs from Williams to Killingsworth, then to Greeley, and then to Lombard. It does not really intersect the Piedmont neighborhood, but it does touch the Piedmont subdivision at Killingsworth. The Mississippi line ends at the corner of Albina and Ainsworth, the southwest corner of Peninsula Park, on the Piedmont neighborhood border. The Kenton line runs through Piedmont over Albina to Lombard, and then to Derby (Denver). And the Vancouver line runs all the way over Union (MLK) until it crosses the Piedmont boundary at the slough.

The St Johns Line

The Vancouver Line



Portland Archives, A2011-007.271

The Williams Line

The Mississippi Line

The Heusner Franchise

## The Piedmont Carbarns

The Piedmont Carbarns were built in 1906 for the Portland Railway Company, to replace similar carbarns in Woodlawn. They were used as parking structures for the streetcars that were not in use at the time, for instance overnight. We should emphasize, however, that they were not in the modern Piedmont neighborhood, and not even in the original Piedmont subdivision. They were on the north side of Killingsworth, between Mississippi and Michigan, extending north to Jessup (and later extended to Simpson). From the St. John's Review of November 2, 1906:

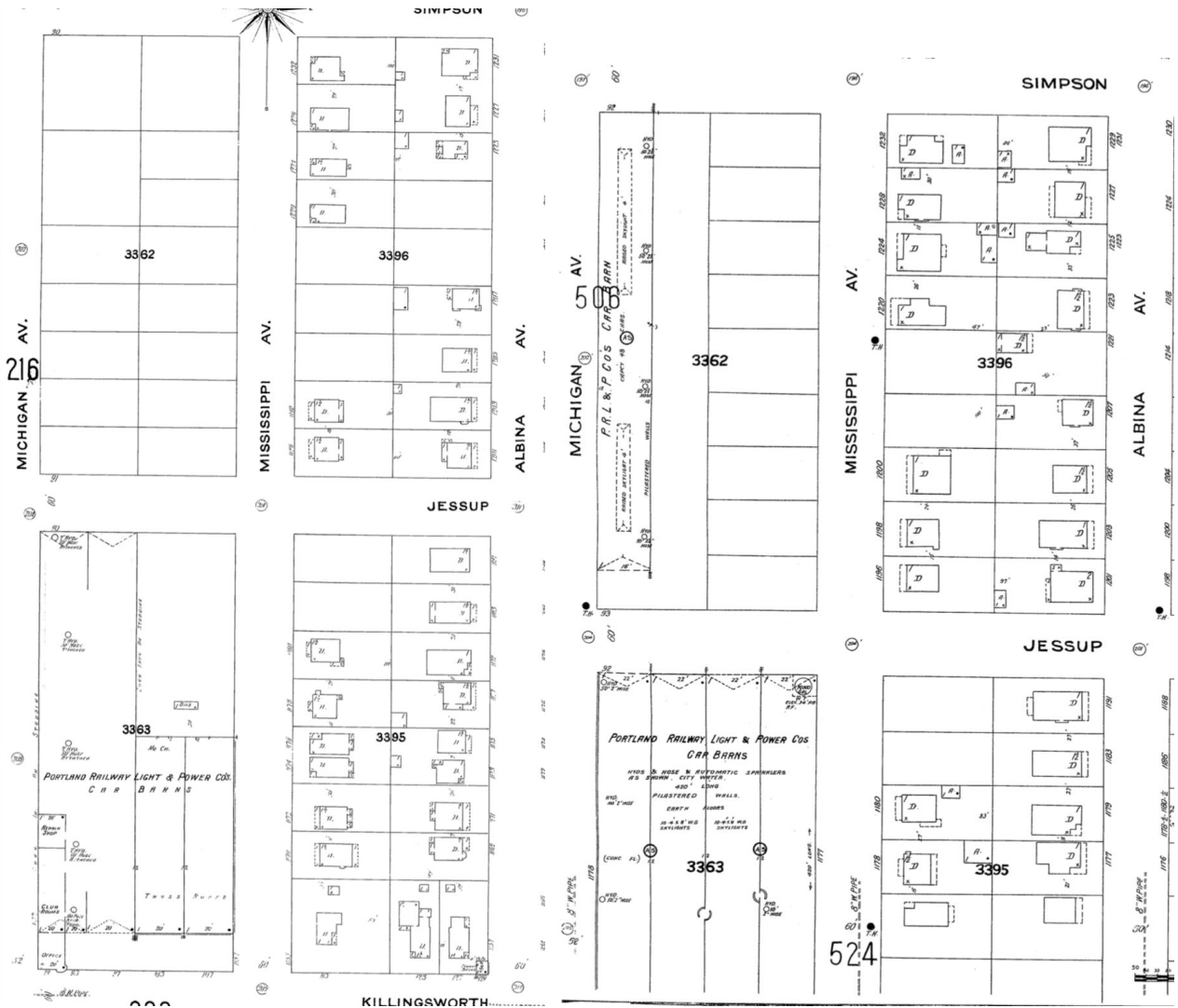
Since the completion of the new brick Piedmont carbarn, cars of the Portland Railway Company formerly stabled at the Woodlawn barn are turned in at the new Piedmont barn. All cars operating in the northeast part of the city are now taken to Piedmont at the end of a day's run and the men report there in the morning instead of at Woodlawn as heretofore

The buildings were quite impressive, as this picture (from maybe around 1925) illustrates. The street name on the post is Mississippi, by the way, which means the photographer is standing on the southeast corner of Killingsworth and Mississippi, looking northwest.





The following picture has, side to side, pieces of the Sanborn maps 1908-217 and 1924-507. The second one, from 1924, shows the extension of the car barns to the north all the way to Simpson Street. On the corner of Mississippi and Jessup we see a 70,000 gallon water tower, 34 feet high, which was not there in 1908. We had already seen that in the photograph of the barns.



## The OWRN

### References

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Website <http://vintagetrolleys.com>

PdxHistory.com: *Portland Trolleys & Streetcars*

Webpage <http://www.pdxhistory.com/html/streetcars.html>