

Nexus of the Great Third Rail

Few interurbans had as many nicknames as the Chicago Aurora & Elgin: Great Third Rail, for its method of power distribution (apart from some short segments of trolley wire); Sunset Lines, for what the trains faced as they carried commuters home; and Roarin' Elgin, for the road's fast running. Opened in 1902, CA&E gained access to Chicago's Loop via rapid-transit lines in 1905. Utilities magnate Samuel Insull assumed control in 1925 and, as he did with the North Shore Line and South Shore Line, improved the property. Totalling 66 route-miles at its peak, CA&E was double track 25 miles to Wheaton, from where single-track lines reached the

Fox River cities of Elgin, St. Charles (abandoned in 1937), Batavia, and Aurora. Ridership peaked in 1947, but plummeted after expressway construction severed the Loop connection in 1953. Infamously, CA&E suspended passenger service at midday on Wednesday, July 3, 1957, stranding patrons who had ridden that morning. The road's meager freight service ended June 10, 1959, and today recreational trails occupy most of the right of way.

In this mid-1950s view, a Chicago local formed of car 400 (Pullman, 1923) and a 451-series curved-side car (St. Louis, 1945) pulls out of the yard at Wheaton. CA&E's 10-track shop building is in the background.

Photo: Frank and Todd Novak collection





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