

METAMORA ASSOCIATION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

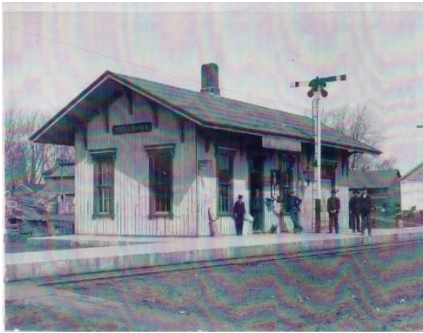
NEWSLETTER

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December 2011



TRAINS! One of our favorite MAHP members, Larry, has asked what we know about the history of trains in Metamora. What we found was fascinating and, in many respects, mirrors the history of the railway industry in America. Here's what we found...!



The Beginning

The promise of a railroad rippled through Metamora around 1856 when a route was surveyed for the Tonica & Petersburg Line. Some grading was done but the project was never completed. Fourteen years passed before the first train chugged in town on the St. Louis, Jacksonville, & Chicago Railroad.

It was October 27, 1870 and a large crowd was on hand. The line was being built in a rather colorful fashion with the locomotive and a few cars following along as the track was laid.

BANDS PLAYED AND CANNONS ROARED. As the track-layers and spike drivers drove into view followed by the old six-pounder locomotive belching out smoke and fire, a brass band whipped into action, cannons roared and the crowd cheered lustily. According to a contemporary account in the Woodford Sentinel, "Metamora is now a railroad town, ready to take place among the great business marts of the country."

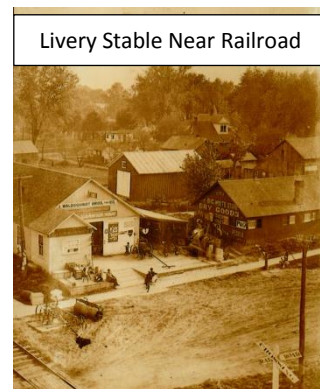
A ROUND TRIP TICKET TO PEORIA. As late as 1923, there were 15 trains a day through Metamora, including six passenger trains and a sleeper and dining car running from Peoria to Chicago. During the booming days of rail traffic, station master Bill Williams can remember selling between \$900 to \$1,000 in passenger tickets a month from the little depot. At times, he was forced to lock the doors to his office to keep the people crowded on the platform from coming in. In those days, a ticket to Peoria via Washington was 65¢, with a discount of \$1.32 for going round-trip.

MAIL BAG PICKUP. There were four mail trains a day through town. The mail was hung in a cloth bag on a crane outside the depot and was collected by the mail car of the passing train, which was often traveling at 45 to 50 miles per hour.

The Metamora depot was kept busy at one time with a good deal of cattle and produce going out and coming in. Coal and grain used to be a big item. Williams, who began work with the "Chicago and Alton in Garfield in 1911 and came to Metamora in 1923, said there were no vacations, no holidays, and few pay raises. The station master sold tickets, took and sent telegrams, hoisted mail and moved freight seven days a week.

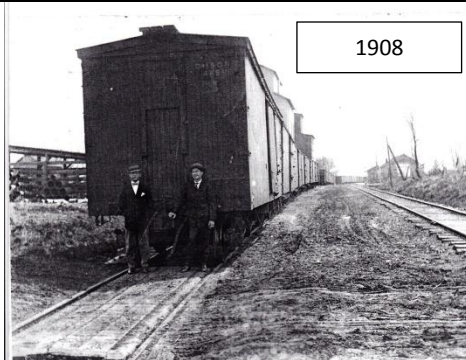
THE ONLY WRECK. The only real accident near Metamora occurred when a freight train derailed a mile north of town, twisting the tracks like pretzels. There were 11 cars involved in the derailment.

During this period, trains ran under the Chicago & Alton Railroad emblem, but it had formerly been the St. Louis, Jacksonville and Chicago line. A timetable published in a Metamora Herald of 1894 indicated trains going north at 8:04 a.m. and 8:35 p.m. with trains from Metamora south at 7 p.m. and 12:01 p.m. Excerpt from "In Lincoln's Path" 1964 (pages 10 and 11)



1928 BASKETBALL TEAM TRAVELS BY TRAIN TO WASHBURN. The MTHS basketball team played the Washburn high school team at Washburn last Friday night, the local boys losing 9 to 41. The evening passenger train, on which the boys expected to return home, did not reach Washburn until 3 a.m. and was from four until 6 o'clock coming from Washburn to Metamora on account of the locomotive being unable to keep steam. *From the Metamora Herald, Friday, January 25, 1928*

Station Master Bill Williams came to Metamora in 1923



THE END OF TRAIN SERVICE Metamora had railroad service from 1870 until about 1979. In 1923 fifteen trains a day came through including 6 passenger trains with sleep and dining cars to Chicago. For many it was possible to take the 6 p.m. train to Peoria and return on the midnight train to Metamora. Finally only an occasional freight train came through. The train track were removed about 1983-84. The depot was disassembled in 1980 and is in private storage.

What's Old...

But new at the Stevenson House...

- 1928 Parrot (Metamora High School yearbook)
- World War memorabilia
- Abattoir Meat recipe book
- St. Mary's 50th Jubilee Anniversary badge (1864-1914)
- Olga Sommer rug (thanks for Kris Bernhardy)

Work Continues on the Window Restoration

Restorers are busy replacing the upper and lower level windows on the northwest corner. This was sorely needed due to water leakage.

Contact Us

Questions, ideas...

We would love to hear from you. Laure Adams, President, 369-2353 or jrfarmer@mtco.com; Kenneth Willman, Vice President, 367-4426; Shirley Adams, Secretary, 367-2289; Jack Weddle, Treasurer, 367-4017 or 645-0963 or jweddle@mtco.com; Board members: Barbie Perry, 678-8402, barbperry@mchsi.com, Dave Pohlman, 369-3290; pohlman46@hotmail.com; Lee Summer, 367-4059, 635-0259, lsummer@mtco.com