

Grand Rapids History & Special Collections

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Finding Aid for the  
Trolley Topics Collection

Collection # 035

June 2007 Version

Abstract

Trolley Topics is a periodical, published by the Grand Rapids Railroad Company, a nationally recognized leader in the street railway industry. It was designed for the use of the electric streetcar patrons of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Distributed at no cost to these patrons, the pamphlet format combined jokes, facts, entertainment news and an editorial espousing the company line. Included in the collection are scattered issues from 1904 to 1929. Rail street car service in Grand Rapids began on May 10, 1865, with horse powered lines. In 1887, the Valley City Street and Cable Co. was granted a franchise to a line from Canal to Union Streets, bringing service to the hill district. In 1888 the construction was completed and the first cable car made a run on April 18. This system continued until driven out of business by the automobiles and the buses in the 1930s.

Collection #: 035

Accession #: 00.000

Donor: Library purchase

Span dates: 1904-1929

Processor: William C. Black, March 1987; finding amended by Richard H. Harms, November 1996. Box Summary, Marcella Beck, August,23,2000

Size: 0.3 cu.ft.

Related Collections

Coll. 105, Grand Rapids Railway Collection

Coll. 197, GRPL Railroad Collection

Coll. 248, James Winslow Collection

Coll. 285, GRPL Periodical Collection

Box Summary

Box No.	Description of Contents	Box Description
1	contents	Slim legal

NOTE: Boxed in same box as Collection #36

## Biography

Rail street car service in Grand Rapids began on May 10, 1865, and ran from the Detroit & Milwaukee Railroad Depot to Canal Street. The Grand Rapids Street Railway Company was soon joined in competition with additional lines, among them the Division Street Line, Reed's Lake Line and the Scribner Avenue Line. These and other early horse powered lines were merged into the Street Railway Co. of Grand Rapids in 1883. In 1887, the Valley City Street and Cable Co. was granted a franchise to a line from Canal to Union., bringing service to the hill district. In 1888 the construction was completed and the first cable car made a run on April 18. Several new routes were soon open to the Valley City Street and Cable Co. and competition with the Street Railway Co. was soon bringing confusion and hardships to customers, as corrections between the two lines did not exist. These companies agreed to merger in 1890 as the Consolidated Street Railway Co.

The Consolidated Street Railway Co. immediately resolved a labor dispute through negotiations. The next strike against the new company was much harder to fight. The reconstruction of the systems into one upgraded system was not completed when the Panic of 1893 hit Grand Rapids. Several local industries failed, including the Nelson & Matter Co. and John Widdicomb Co. Other factories were idle. With the Grand Rapids economy at a standstill, the Consolidated Street Railway Co. was crippled. In 1900 the company was bought out by E.W. Clark & Co. of Philadelphia, PA, and reincorporated as the Grand Rapids Railway Co. Under the new management, the Grand Rapids Railway Co., with sufficient operating funds, became a model of street railway systems and won several national awards. This system continued until driven out of business by the automobiles and the buses in the 1930s.

## Scope and Content

Spanning 1904-1929, the issues document the impact of the automobile and the bus on the streetcar system. The issues of the late 1920s suggest the passing fad of the automobile and extol the street railway system. The six sided folding pamphlet generally included an editorial, jokes section, listings of local plays or shows and quick facts spread throughout. While originally serving primarily as an entertainment for the patron, it developed into a means of public relations.

Contents

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	1	Vol. I. #14, 1904. Vol. II #1, 2, 7, 9, 12, 13, 8, 18, 1905-06.
	2	Vol. III #1-20, 1906.
	3	Vol. IV #1-18, 1907.
	4	Vol. 1 #1, 14-16, 1923-24.
	5	Vol. 2 #1-5, 7, 9-11, 1924-25.
	6	Vol. 3 #4-6, 8-12, 1926.
	7	Vol. 4 #1-4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 1927.
	8	Vol. 5 #2-4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 1928.
	9	Vol. 6 #1-6, 9, 12, 1929.