

Throughout the Lehigh Valley

Trolleys Spurred Growth

By BILL ROTH

Allentown's destiny as one of Pennsylvania's top business centers was set when the city was but a sleepy community of approximately 25,000.

The city's commercial position grew out of a dream — a dream that "all roads lead to Allentown."

Dreamer was Albert L. Johnson, who came to Allentown from Cleveland, Ohio, in 1893 with plans of a high-speed electric railway from Allentown to New York City by way of Philadelphia.

Within eight years he had controlled almost all the street railways in Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton. He died, though, while his inter-state rail empire was still a vision.

Prompted Line

It was this dream, however, that prompted the building of the Liberty Bell Line between Allentown and Philadelphia and spurred the integration of other roads into a system that enabled early - century passengers to ride trolleys all the way from Stroudsburg to the Quaker City.

This is one of the more interesting aspects of rail travel related in "The Liberty Bell Route's 700 Series Interurbans," a history of one of the most popular type vehicles to roll over the rails between the Lehigh Valley and Philadelphia.

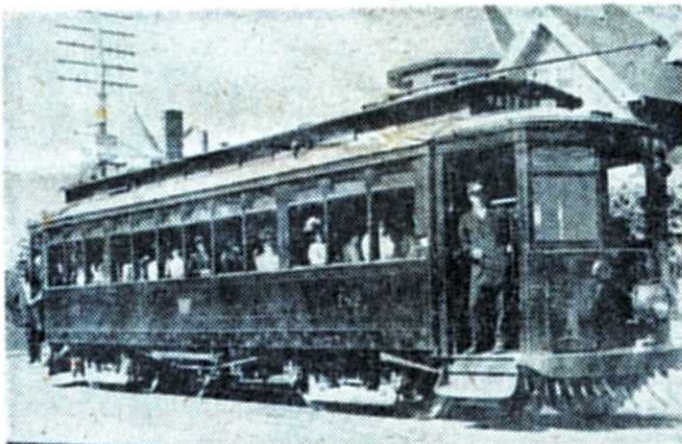
The pamphlet just published by the Lehigh Valley Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society, is the first of a series of documents projected by the rail fans under the editorship of Randolph L. Kulp.

"Liberty Bell Route" was adopted as a name, according to the Kulp history, Dec. 1, 1907, with the introduction of new schedules for the Allentown to Chestnut Hill line. The name, of course, refers to the proximity of the now ripped-up tracks to the Bethlehem Pike, over which the Liberty Bell was hauled to Allentown for safekeeping in 1777.

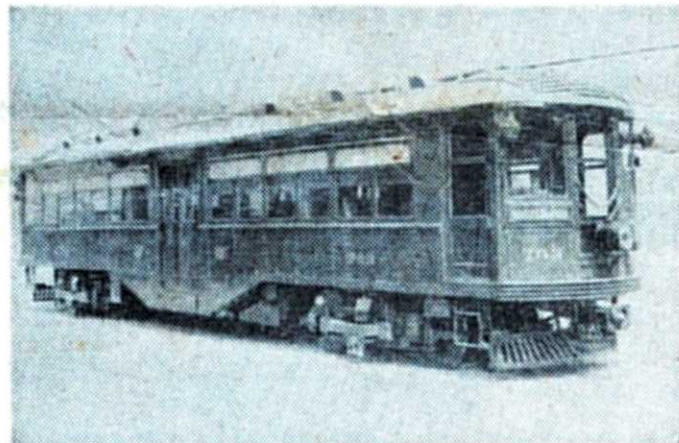
High Speed Service

The route really came into its own, though, in 1912, with the introduction of high-speed service between Allentown and 69th St. Terminal, Upper Darby, via the Philadelphia and Western's third rail line. The new Liberty Bell Route deviated from the original line at Wales Junction, with the line from the junction to Chestnut Hill becoming a local operation, and later, after a paving dispute with North Wales Borough in 1926 was switched to buses.

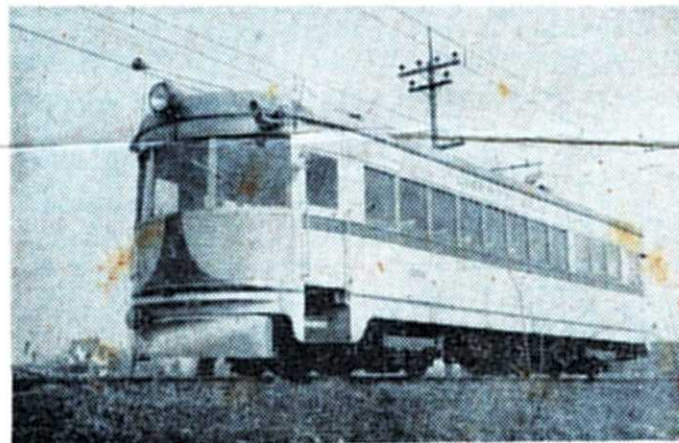
Three types of high-speed cars (they made the trip in one hour and 40 minutes at the height of their popularity) were used, principally, on the Allentown - Philadelphia run. They were the popular St. Louis type cars Allentownians remember as the heavy red vehicles with arched



OLD TIMER—This St. Louis type car was used in local service after the proposed Allentown to Philadelphia to New York line was completed as far as Chestnut Hill in suburban Philadelphia. They remained in service off and on most of the line's life.



CAR WITH A PURPOSE—These center-door, end opening cars were designed specifically for local conditions when high-speed service was inaugurated along the Liberty Bell Route between Allentown and Philadelphia's 69th Street.



LIGHTWEIGHT—During LVT's last modernization of the Liberty Bell Route car line these lightweight interurbans were placed in service after purchase from the scrap brokers who had obtained them from the Cincinnati and Lake Erie Railroad.

windows topped by green stained-glass panels and front and rear end exits and entrances; the locally - designed 700 series, middle entrance cars, and in the last few years of the line's existence, the lighter tan and red Cincinnati and Lake Erie Rail-

road light-weight interurbans remodeled for the Liberty Bell line.

It is with the middle, 700 series, cars that the rail fans group concerned itself within its initial publication. Not only were they used almost constantly throughout the line's operation as an Al-

lertown - 69th Street route, although often several times remodeled, but they were products of local imagination and local mechanical know-how.

Harrison R. Fehr, president of the Lehigh Valley Transit Co. at the time, and Supt. Harry Branson collaborated in designing a car that was suitable for both interurban and city service.

Center Entrance

They came up with the center-entrance and exit cars suitable for loading from street level, but with end doors for use at loading platforms such as those installed at 69th Street Terminal.

The strictly locally - designed product was built by the Southern Car Co. at High Point, N.C.

They often made the trips between cities as trains of two or three cars, being equipped with couplers. The versatile all-steel shells were remodeled several times — center doors were removed, parlor car seats installed in several, and later, turned into Deluxe Limiteds which made the Allentown-Philadelphia run in the one hour and 40 minute schedule.

Credit for the rebuilding of the cars from center entrance to solid side vehicles was given to LVT labor, under the direction and enthusiasm of master mechanic William Kline.

Facts

The rail society publication is filled with hard to come by facts, with a complete roster of all cars of the series used by LVT including the dates and extent of alterations and final disposition to the scrap heap.

Much of the information in this initial publication cropped up in discussions of the club during the 15 years of its monthly sessions. All was verified, though, through questioning of old-timers still employed or those retired from LVT service, through extensive perusal of street car company records, and reading of back issues of newspapers.

Kulp spent more than 100 hours alone verifying dates in Call - Chronicle Newspaper microfilm files.

The 75 members of the Lehigh Valley Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society, not content with merely meeting monthly to discuss and view pictures of rail line operations, spend a good deal of time traveling. They have gone as far as Brooklyn to view and ride certain types of rolling stock; they have gone as far as Johnstown and Atlantic City for the opportunity of "last rides" on about to be abandoned lines.

They are a forward looking group, though, too, sponsoring such jaunts as last year's trip to Scranton on the ultra - modern diesel electric self-propelled aluminum jobs hailed as "the train of tomorrow."

Persons interested in the organization or in obtaining a copy of the just - published pamphlet should contact Randolph Kulp at 602 St. John St., Allentown.