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SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA
FEATURE STORY

STREET RAILWAYS OF SOUTH DAKOTA
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In the recording of our state history one interesting area seems to have been overlooked. Transportation has been a vital feature in the state development. In the field of transportation the street railway had a big part. It is curious, however, that so very little has been written about them in the many state histories which have been published. The small cars which moved about several of our cities in the early nineteen hundreds were largely instrumental in the expansion programs. The types of cars and variety of motive power was equally interesting.

The so called trolley cars were to be seen in Sioux Falls, Aberdeen, Rapid City, and between Lead and Deadwood. These cars were propelled by electric motors which received their power from an overhead wire. This wire was suspended so as to be directly over the middle of the tracks and were about twelve feet above the street. In the case of Sioux Falls, Aberdeen, and Rapid City the cars were about twenty feet long, ran on four wheels and would carry twenty to twenty-five passengers. In most cases they were operated by a motorman and a conductor handled the passengers and collected the fares. The line from Lead to Deadwood featured a double truck type of car which means two sets of four wheels. This permitted a larger car which would carry up to fifty passengers. A motorman and conductor also made up the crew of these cars. In all cases the cars moved along the middle of the streets with frequent

passing areas so that several cars could be going in each direction. In every case the cities had some sort of park areas outside the city limits to which many persons went during the summer months. Usually the regular cars hauled what was called an open car along behind in the summer. These cars did not have any sides, just some railings to keep the passengers from falling out. Many were the gay crowds which went to the parks in those days.

Previous to the street cars (electric) some cities had horse car transportation. As early as before 1900 Sioux Falls had a line which ran from the Milwaukee Depot to the South Sioux Falls area. Rapid City had a horse car line and so did Pierre. Great interest was expressed in the opening of the Pierre line. The story has it that to create real interest an auction would be conducted for the first ticket. As the result of this auction, \$105.00 was raised for the first ride and one E. H. Roche obtained the first ticket for \$65.00. The official ride got under way at one minute past four on the afternoon of Wednesday, September 23, 1885. With somewhat similar excitement, but no auction, the Sioux Falls horse cars started running on November 3, 1887. Rapid City started proceedings at about the same time.

A more intriguing operation was in Mitchell. In the interests of opening and promoting a subdivision, a line was laid along one of the main streets for eight or ten blocks. On this perfectly straight section of track, one car moved to and from the subdivision. This was in operation for about three years from 1916. It would have continued but for a stroke of fate whereby the owner could not appear at the city council to renew

his franchise. Some disinterested members of the council voted him out. The line was abandoned, the car hauled out into a convenient vacant lot where children used it for a play house many years. The car was propelled by a gasoline engine and would carry fifteen to twenty persons.

The line between Lead and Deadwood out in the hills was most unique. Where all the other operations were known as standard gauge, meaning four feet and eight inches between the rails, the one out there was only three feet. This meant it was better possible for the cars to negotiate the narrow ravines between the two towns. This was the only interurban operation in the state. The big forty foot cars with green plush covered seats were rather wonderful in their splendor. One of them can still be seen in each town as lunch counters. This line carried out its duties from 1902 until 1924.

Probably the most surprising information gained in the study of this type of transportation in our state is the fact that Scotland, South Dakota at one time had a street railway system. It compared favorably with many of the other lines. One old timer was heard to say, "Maybe our line isn't as long as some of the others but it sure is just as wide."

The rattle and the clatter of the city trolley cars has faded from the daily routine but many persons can remember being "Jolly on the Trolley" when they were younger.