

THE GHOST TRAIN™

A brief history of the original Twin Cities 400 Express Train

A Streak of Lightning:
The Chicago & North
Western 400

Trains were not a new phenomenon to Shorewood residents in the 1930s, but nevertheless the blazing passage of the Chicago & North Western Railway's 400 across the Capitol Drive trestle was an exciting spectator event. "Shorewood, just outside Milwaukee's northern limit, posted a police car at a principal grade crossing every day to control traffic when the 401 passed. Sometimes as many as 50 automobiles were parked at the crossing, their occupants anticipating the Minneapolis-bound streak of black lightning." (*The 400 Story*, pp.25-26)

Historically, trains began traveling along the plateau east of the Milwaukee River in 1873. Freight train service made it possible for the Milwaukee Cement Company to flourish along both banks of the river from 1886 to 1909. Railroad spurs crossed the river from current Estabrook Park to service industries on both sides of the river.

From Shorewood's depot (previously called Lake Shore Junction), passengers and freight continued north to Fond du Lac (current Oak Leaf Trail) or to Sheboygan and Green Bay on tracks that split off at Capitol Drive and continued north along present day Ardmore Avenue.

By the mid-20s, it became clear that Shorewood was destined to be a residential community rather than an industrial hub. Seven acres of railroad-



owned land on the northwest side of Shorewood were sold to the village for residential development. Trains to Sheboygan were re-routed further north.

As more residents moved to Shorewood, automobile traffic increased on Capitol Drive. Originally, cars traveled over the track. To keep both the trains and automobiles moving, the current underpass and original trestle were constructed between 1926 and 1928.

Passenger service in Shorewood was discontinued in 1932. Throughout its service area, automobiles and improving highways had drained passengers from the Chicago & North Western rail lines. To remedy this situation, C&NW (along with their competitors) focused on decreasing travel time. They began experimenting with diesel-powered engines and streamlined their designs to give the perception of more speed.

The C&NW 400 debuted on January 2, 1935, covering 408.6 miles in 420 minutes. Trains left the Twin Cities (the 400) and Chicago (the 401) at 3:30 p.m. and passed each other at Adams, Wisconsin. The 400 name emphasized that the train covered approximately 400 miles in 400

minutes - By 1939, new cars were put in service with powerful engines and light weight Pullman cars. They were painted bright yellow and green, colors that would be an important part of the 400 brand.

In 1942, C&NW acquired additional streamlined cars and 400 level services were added on trains going from Chicago to Ishpeming, Michigan and Green Bay. 400 advertisements emphasized their "superb Streamline Service," parlor cars with upper and lower "see-levels," luxury lounge service and spacious, sparkling dining cars. In 1949 the Capitol Drive trestle proudly displayed an advertisement for the 400.

However, by the late 1950s, C&NW was making cutbacks in its passenger service. Potential passengers preferred their own cars and the new Interstate system for travel. On July 23, 1963 the Twin Cities 400 made its final trip. By 1969, C&NW had quietly dropped the 400 name. What had started on Jan. 2, 1935, in a brilliant burst of optimism and was a fine example of modern passenger train service, was no more.

Information about the 400 railroad was compiled by the Shorewood Historical Society from the following sources:

The 400 Story by Jim Scribbins, c.1982, University of Minnesota Press edition, 2008.

Chicago & North Western Railway, by Tom Murray, c. 2008, Voyageur Press.

Chicago & North Western's Air Line Subdivision by James Yanke, c. 2009, Chicago & North Western Historical Society.

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