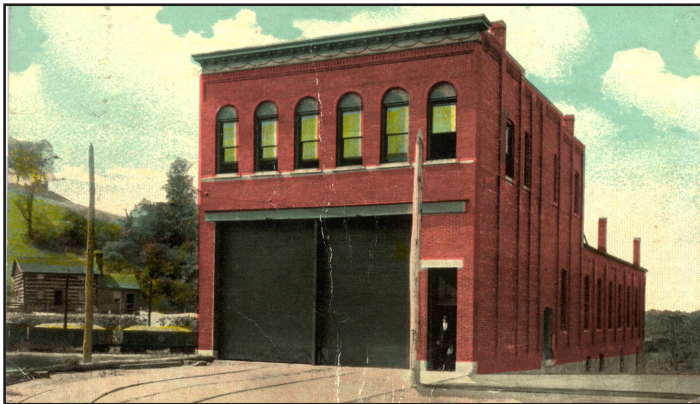


Irwin-Herminie Traction Company

by Bob Cupp



Irwin Herminie Car Barn: Irwin-Herminie Traction Company's Streetcar Barn - Pennsylvania Avenue, Irwin (Courtesy of James K. Steffey)



This old post card of the streetcar barn shows a log cabin on the left. (Jean Soyke collection)



Irwin was certainly a busy place during the peak of trolley operations! (Miller Library, Pennsylvania Trolley Museum)

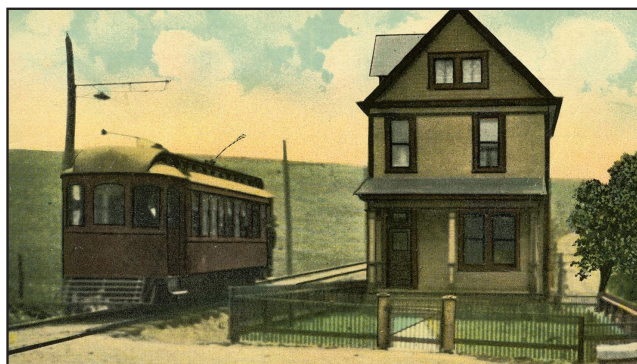
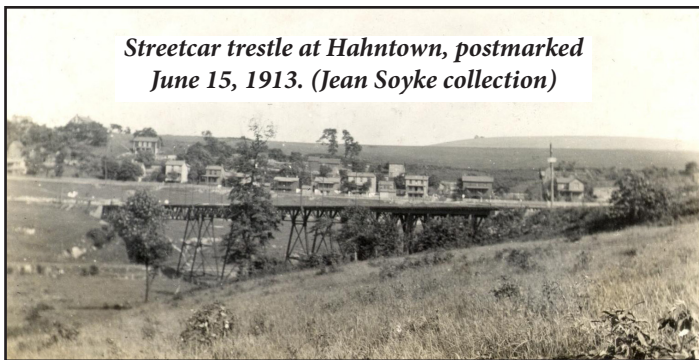
During the early part of the twentieth century, for people living in Hahntown, Rillton, Herminie and other nearby villages, Irwin was the favorite place to shop. That would not have been possible without the Irwin-Herminie Traction Company, an electric railway line that provided trolley service between those towns for over 21 years. Unlike so many other area trolley companies, it remained independent and never affiliated with the West Penn Railway System.

Irwin-Herminie Traction Company signed a contract with the Greene and Reed Construction Company of Pittsburgh to build the line, with the streetcar company providing the material. By mid-October 1909, the line was operating from Hahntown to Herminie, but there were problems at both ends. There was a disagreement with the Pittsburgh and Westmoreland Railway about using the P&W line from Hahntown to Irwin, and with the Pittsburgh, McKeesport and Greensburg Railway, regarding the use of tracks in Irwin. At the other end of the line, the trestle over Sewickly Creek into Herminie was not completed until April 1, 1910, so that, initially, streetcars could only go as far as the creek.

Irwin business owners were pleased by the news reported in the Republican Standard on October 15, 1909. "The new line from Hahntown to Herminie is in operation. It works like clockwork and bids to become one of the most paying investments that has yet come to local light. The track is down, the wires strung, the power turned on, and a brand new baggage or express car has been operating for the past week. The express has not jumped the track nor is it likely to. The management is greatly pleased with the condition of things and will have three big new cars running with lightning rapidity within the next three days. This will be great news to the people of Irwin, Chambers, Rillton, Herminie and other points who are waiting for the passenger cars."

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Streetcar trestle at Hahntown, postmarked June 15, 1913. (Jean Soyke collection)



The Irwin-Herminie line ran through Rillton, parallel to the Irwin-Herminie Road (Clay Pike). (Jean Soyke collection)



In the middle of this vintage post card, you can see the Irwin-Herminie streetcar trestle carrying the trolley line into Herminie. (Jean Soyke collection)

In the summer, open cars could be boarded from steps on the sides, to enjoy rides on hot summer evenings.



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Numerous shoppers rode the trolley to Irwin from Herminie and points in between, and the baggage car hauled a large amount of freight, particularly from Irwin to Herminie. An old shipping ticket, dated Jan. 1, 1916, showed that a five-gallon container of ice cream shipped from Irwin to C&B Drug Company in Herminie cost 25 cents in freight charges.

The line was well patronized for years. In July 1920, the fare between Irwin and Herminie was raised from 18 to 25 cents. At the peak of service, the first trolley left Herminie every hour on the hour from 6:00 a. m. through midnight. On Saturdays, half-hour service was necessary to accommodate the large number of passengers. Herminie resident, Teresa Campfield, recalled riding the trolley as a young girl. "We would visit my aunt and uncle who lived in Hahntown. My aunt took us to Irwin in the trolley to go shopping and buy ice cream."

Financial success of the line inspired plans to extend the tracks from Herminie to West Newton by way of Lowber, and from Herminie through Madison and Yukon and on to connect with other lines, but those plans never materialized.

Students from Sewickly Township, whose high school was not yet operating, could purchase a monthly school ticket and ride the trolley to Norwin High on Pennsylvania Avenue across from the Irwin-Herminie streetcar barn. Passengers arriving at Irwin could transfer to other lines, such as West Penn Railways, and travel to McKeesport, Trafford and Pittsburgh to the west, or Jeannette and Greensburg to the east. At Greensburg, additional connections also made travel possible to other towns.

In its busiest years, the company used "summer" cars. An open car, which had no aisles, could be boarded from steps on the sides. Oakford Park, near Jeannette, was a popular summer destination for holiday or Sunday outings. In case of rain, the car had curtains which could be dropped. Many people went for joy rides on hot summer evenings. The open-sided summer car resembled the famous San Francisco cable cars.

Of course, the trolley line also had its share of accidents. On November 12, 1909, James J. Davis of the Rillton area was struck and killed by a trolley car. This was the first

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Herminie resident, Nelson Walak, pointed-out where the trolley came into Herminie on a high trestle that crossed over Sewickley Creek and the railroad tracks. All that remains of the trestle today are a few pieces of the concrete support pillars.



The Irwin-Herminie Bus Line was formed in 1931, substituting buses for trolleys.



After Irwin-Herminie trolley operations ended, other trolley lines continued to operate in the Irwin area for another two decades.

The streetcar barn on Pennsylvania Avenue in Irwin today, across from Queen of Angels School.



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serious accident on the new line. On June 6, 1919, ten people were injured when a trolley went over an embankment near Herminie and rolled over three times. Heat expansion of the rails was identified as the cause.

Herminie resident, Nelson Walak, pointed out where the trolley came into Herminie on a high trestle that crossed over Sewickly Creek and the railroad tracks, and then proceeded up Second Street to Sewickly Avenue where it ended. It was common practice for pedestrians to take a short-cut across the trestle. There have been several stories of those who were caught in mid-trestle by an approaching trolley and had to either hang off the side or jump into the creek below. All that remains of the trestle today are a few pieces of the concrete support pillars.

At the end of the trolley line, there was a lunch counter and waiting room. A taxi stand was also located there. The taxi stand was operated for many years by James Alquire and was convenient for passengers to continue their travel via cab. Teresa Campfield and Nelson Walak both remembered the taxi stand; it was located where the parking lot is now beside Herminie Hardware Feed & Supply Co. Perhaps an indication of the prominence of the trolley was an ad for Louis Averbach's Old Reliable Store which stated, "End of the Car Line, Herminie."

Initially, the streetcars were operated by both a conductor and a motorman. Later, decreasing revenues forced the elimination of one man. Construction of the Irwin-Herminie Road, which was begun in 1922, as well as increasing use of private automobiles, resulted in a steady loss of riders for the trolley line. The end of the trolley operations between Irwin and Herminie came March 15, 1931 when the franchise to operate the Irwin-Herminie Traction Company was sold to the Cantoni Brothers of Monessen. The Irwin-Herminie Bus Line was formed, substituting buses for trolleys, but continuing to operate on the trolley's schedule.

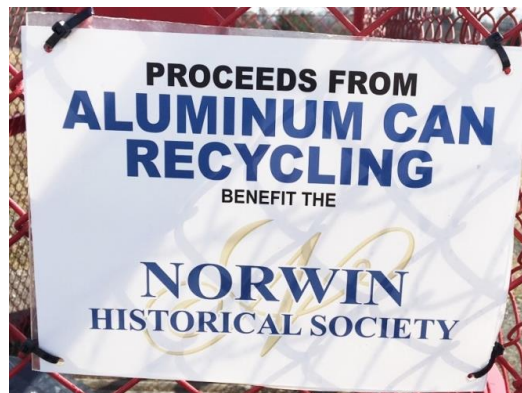
The Irwin-Herminie streetcar barn still stands along Pennsylvania Avenue, across from the Queen of Angels School, serving as a reminder of that nostalgic bygone era. Other trolley lines continued to operate in the Irwin area for another two decades. The Greensburg route was finally discontinued in 1952. Prior to its shutdown, free trolley rides were offered so that patrons could experience one final trolley ride before this chapter of local transportation history came to a close.

NORWIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Now you CAN Recycle Aluminum Cans!

**Please help the environment and
support us at the same time
by recycling your aluminum cans
at our 4 recycling bins:**

- **St. Agnes Church Parking Lot**
- **Rear of Straw Pump Fire Dept.**
- **Irwin Playground Parking Lot**
- **L&L Fleatique in Adamsburg**



2022 Downtown Irwin Events

FREE TO ATTEND!

SATURDAY, JUNE 11
Spring Craft & Vendor Show
with Ethnic Food
9:00 am-3:00 pm
www.facebook.com/ibpacrafts

THURSDAY, JUNE 16
Music in the Streets #1
5:00 pm-Late
Live bands at several locations.
Gail (412)8772141

SATURDAY, JUNE 25
Norwin Area First Responders
Public Safety Event
1:00 pm-6:00 pm
Various demonstrations, speakers.
Organized by the Friends of Our First Re-
sponders Committee.

SUNDAY, JULY 10
C.A.R.L. CON*
12:00 noon-4:00 pm at the Masonic Hall.
Collectibles on display & for sale.
Irwin1864@gmail.com

THURSDAY, JULY 21
Music in the Streets #2
5:00 pm-Late.
Live bands at several locations.
Gail (412) 877-2141

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3
90th Norwin Community Picnic at Irwin Park
Afternoon-Evening.
Organized by the
Norwin Chamber of Commerce
(724) 863-0888

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6
Summer Craft & Vendor Show
with Sidewalk Flea Market
8:00 am-3:00 pm
www.facebook.com/ibpacrafts

THURSDAY, AUGUST 18
Music in the Streets #3
5:00 pm-Late
Live bands at several locations.
Gail (412) 877-2141





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Irwin, PA 15642
724-309-1161

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2022 SUMMER NEWSLETTER



*Your gift to the
Norwin Historical Society
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