

History of the Illinois Traction System

Contributed by bryan
Wednesday, 16 August 2006
Last Updated Tuesday, 28 October 2008

Why has the "ITS Trail" been decided on as a potential name for this new trail? We are focusing on connecting the communities of Staunton, Sawyerville and Benld primarily by using the old railbed from the Illinois Traction System (ITS). The Illinois Traction System was a large trolley network that connected many communities in central Illinois. The system started in Danville and spread through central Illinois, connecting communities as far away as St. Louis, Peoria, and Springfield to towns closer to home like Staunton, Litchfield, and Gillespie.

The Illinois Traction System played a large role in the history of Staunton, Sawyerville, Benld, and all the surrounding communities. We hope that the new multi-use trail can pay homage to that memory by once again connecting the communities.

Here is an excellent short video (and sad backstory) of the "Traction" in action:

Submitted by "gothpapa" -- Although he was a truck driver, my father grew up in a railroad family and was a railroader at heart. For many years he was a road driver for Transamerican Freight Lines out of Columbus, Ohio and by 1953 he held down a regular run between Columbus and St. Louis. During the first week of June in 1954 (I got the year wrong in the movie title) he took advantage of an extended layover to ride the trolleys on the Illinois Terminal Railroad. And of course he had his trusty ol' Cine-Kodak Eight 25 movie camera with him. He mailed the film exposed that day to Kodak to be developed, and then headed back to Columbus. Near Cuba, IL he was involved in a head on collision with two other trucks. There were no survivors. A few days after the funeral the processed film arrived. It was a treasure to us. We knew that he had spent his last free day on earth doing what he loved to do. Many years later, when I showed this to my friends at the Ohio Railway Museum, I finally learned the identity of the line he rode.