

"Giddap Mules! Ding! Ding! Whooa!" That's the Way They Operated Street Cars in Dallas 25 Years Ago

BY MILDRED GLADNEY.

Every morning for the last twenty-four or five years the two oldest employees of the Dallas Street Railway Company have arisen before the sun and prepared to take out the street cars in time for even the earliest workers in the city. They were with the company when mule cars plodded along on three-inch rails, stopping in front of every door, waiting if need be for the mothers on the lines to finish dressing the babies before they started out to spend the day with friends on the other side of town. They were in the thick of the fight that wove itself about the suggestion that the cars stop only at every corner instead of at every house, and upon the introduction of the electric cars they saw the success of this movement. The present agitation over the skip-stop, they say, is not to be compared to the old fight over stopping at every house.

"Last Man In" Was Unlucky.

T. B. McKee came to Dallas twenty-four years ago. At that time the company which employed him was known as the Dallas Consolidated Street Railway Company. Mule lines extended along Akard street, McKinney avenue, San Jacinto street, Nettie street and Pearl street. He took a place as driver on a dinkey line. He operated a one-truck car with two bench seats on each side and no vestibule. The mules had to be changed at each end of the line, and at night when the cars were taken to the car barn for safekeeping until the morning there was always a race to keep from being the last car in. The last car in was the first car out every morning, as there was no provision made for switching the cars or turning them around. When the hour for starting for the barns arrived, if the car was half way to the end of the line, the conductor gave notice that he was going no farther, turned his mules about and made for the barn at full speed to get a place well at the back of the building. Mr. McKee became the first motorman on the electric cars on Pearl street in 1902. Later he was division superintendent for eighteen months and then went back to motorman. He is now motorman No. 1 on the Highland Park line.

Why Use the Rails?

Sam Pratley, the oldest employee of the company, came to Dallas in 1894 to

work on the tracks. At that time he was one of seven or eight men who were employed to keep the tracks in order. Before coming to this city he drove mule cars in Fort Worth. Sometimes



—Photo by Voorhees & Burdsal.

SAM PRATLEY.

the track force was removed from repair work and allowed to work extra on the cars. The tracks in those days were built of small ties and twenty-five-pound rails which were held to the ties by three-inch spikes. On hot evenings, according to these veterans of the street car service, the spikes would pull entirely out of the ties and leave the rails curled up along the lines. The mule cars could not stop for a minor trouble. Their drivers calmly removed the cars from the track, drove around the uprooted rails and finished the route.

When Mr. Pratley was put on the cars he ran five years on the Swiss avenue line. He knew everybody on the line and when any of his friends gave him the high sign he would pull off to the side and wait for them to get ready for the trip to town, while the other passengers cooled their heels against the sides of the car. All of the lines were single track and whenever the car which was supposed to be at the switch was late the other waiting would go on.

When the two met, one would pull off the track and pass on.

Sixteen Hours a Day.

The employees worked over sixteen hours a day when the service was new



—Photo by Voorhees & Burdsal.

T. B. MCKEE.

and the ways of a mule difficult to understand. But the progress of the day was fraught with many an adventure that the modern street car rider can never picture. The stories which are told by Mr. McKee and Mr. Pratley of those days are bound up with the history of the city itself.

Mr. McKee tells a story of the time when he was driving the Akard line. The mules upon this particular day which has come down in the history of the service in Dallas had been particularly mild and even tempered, and Mr. McKee declares that he might have been suspicious of them if he had thought very much about their unprecedented conduct. But when he reached the corner of Akard and McKinney, he gave them the reins and became engaged in a very lively argument with some compatriots of his who were always glad to swap yarns and a certain commodity which has been forbidden in modern com-

munities recently. The next thing they knew the mules were loose, and racing madly for the nearest pair of steps. The methods of the wild west were put to use here, and in a few moments Mr. McKee, like the moving picture hero we see on the screen today, flung his lariat and roped them in while the passengers surrounded them to head them off. The car, as soon as the animals were again harnessed to it, proceeded on its way undisturbed.

Thought He Was a Kidnaper.

In the repertoire of Mr. Pratley is the story of how he came near being arrested for kidnaping two children one afternoon during his regular run. He says that out in South Dallas two little children who couldn't say a word were put on the car and he was asked to put them off when they got over in North Dallas to Maple avenue. As Mr. Pratley tells it, the following incidents took place: "We rode along all right, and the children were right good and kept as quiet as could be expected. But when we got to Maple avenue there wasn't a sign of anybody to meet them. And I was scared to put two such little tots that couldn't talk off there alone. So I takes them along with me to the end of the line, thinking that when we came along back I'd set them off where they got on. But when the car passed along by the City Hall, which was up here where the Adolphus Hotel is now, a policeman rushed out and inquired what I had done with the children. There they was as peaceful as could be, sitting there in my car, and I showed them to the officer and he let me pass. I explained to him that I couldn't find anybody to take care of them, and it seemed a whole lot better to me to set them down where they came from than way over on the other side of town. He said he didn't know but what he agreed with me. I put them off like I said I was going to where they got on, and I guess their mother found them, for I thought I saw her coming down the street when I drove on."

The First Electric Cars.

Mule cars were driven on the streets of Dallas until 1902. The lines were electrified gradually, the Ervay street line being the first upon which electric cars were operated. The first electric car was little improvement upon the

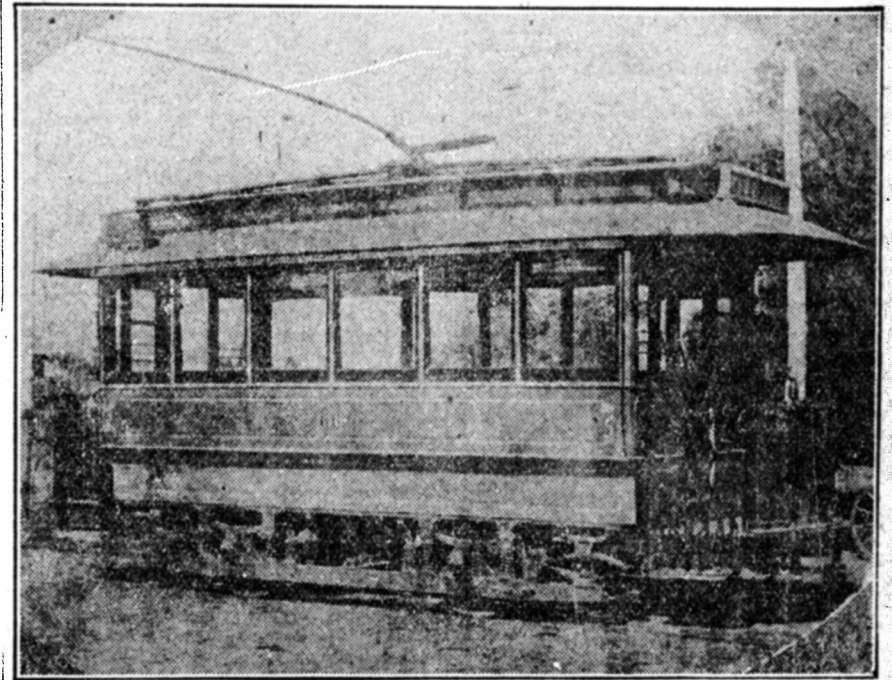
dinkey mule car. All sorts of trouble resulted with the power and with switches and other mysteries of electric control. The men who operated the cars were uncertain as to what was expected of them, but they managed to learn the new ways. However, a remedy was always left with the motorman in case the power went off. The cars were so small that he could lift one of them off the track himself and push it along until the power came on again. At the time the electric cars were put on Dallas had about sixteen miles of track.

In speaking of the place which the street car motorman who both ran the car and collected the fares played in the life of the community, Mr. McKee said: "Yes, we used to run errands for the good ladies on our lines. Sometimes we took the vegetables to town for them and paid them when we came along back. While we were waiting for some of them to get ready for the car we'd sit and talk to the women sweeping off their front walks or their lawns, or we'd stop and have a drink of lemonade at one of the houses. We waited on them a lot, but they were awful good about doing nice things for us. I remember the times when a cup of coffee tasted mighty good after you had been driving one of those pesky mule cars in the winter time till your overcoat was froze so stiff it would stand alone when you took it off. Those were the days when a fellow sure worked. Yes, me and Pratley here have been at this game a mighty long time and we know lots of things about the days that used to be

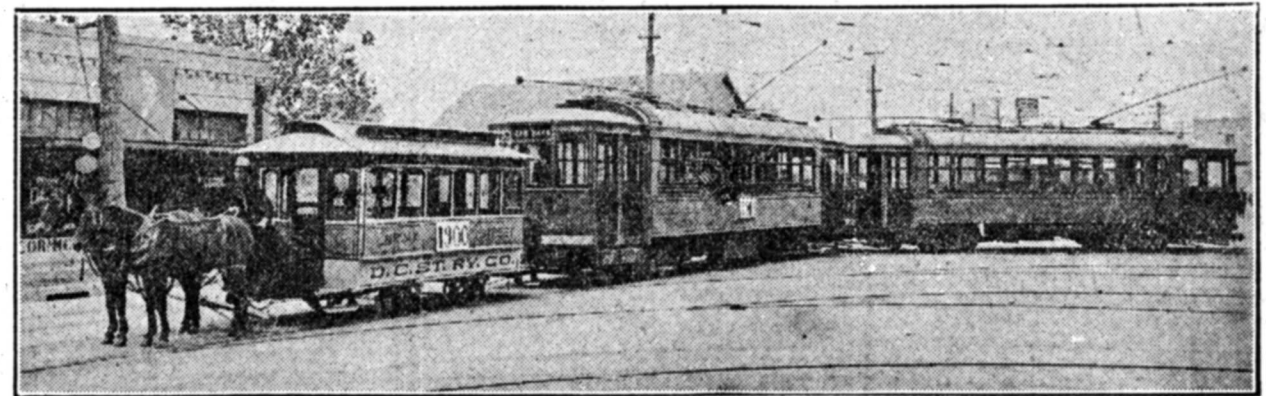
that I don't reckon many people around Dallas here ever will know."

Mr. McKee and Mr. Pratley enjoy the work of operating the big electric cars as much as they enjoyed that of the

mule car service, and they intend to remain with the company as long as they take pleasure in it. Mr. McKee resides at 4312 East Side avenue and Mr. Pratley at 4201 Willow street.



One of the Early Electric Cars.



Note the difference between the modern double-trolley electric cars and the old-time mule-drawn conveyance.