

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Lafayette, IN 47901

October 22, 2003

Brian Lamb
C-Span
400 N. Capitol NW, Suite 650
Washington, DC 20007

Dear Brian,

I hope all is going well with you. I have a project I'm working on and I could use your help. Each year I do the toy train exhibit for the Tippecanoe County Historical Museum at the Fowler House. This year, the museum is doing a permanent exhibit on the history of transportation in Lafayette from 1820 to 1920. In conjunction with this, I am doing a permanent layout of the Lafayette Street Railway system. [REDACTED] is helping with the project. I have enclosed a copy of the script I am using in the exhibit room. I would like for you to narrate this. Could you put this on tape or cd for me? [REDACTED] can copy it as needed.

Sincerely,
[REDACTED]

The Lafayette Street Railway

On behalf of the Tippecanoe County Historical Association, I welcome you to the Lafayette Street Railway exhibit. My name is Brian Lamb. I was born and raised in Lafayette and I am the founder and CEO of C-Span in Washington, D.C.

The old street cars, like the city buses of today, were a convenience usually taken for granted. Nearly every citizen in town rode the street cars at some time or another.

This exhibit is unique in design. What you see are parts of Lafayette in the early 1900's along the streets used by the early streetcars. The old structures are designed from actual archival photos of buildings in old Lafayette. The streetcar system is built from three-rail track used for toy trains. The streetcars are custom-built using old Marx train parts. Marx was a major supplier of inexpensive toy trains for many years.

This exhibit is intended to take you on a journey from the intersection of 9th and Main Streets to destinations along the streetcar lines. Lafayette was one of the first cities in the United States to have electric cars.

One of the oldest structures on the system was the Powerhouse at the foot of South Street near the Wabash River. It was built in 1892 and began operation on August 26, 1893. Electricity was generated here to operate the streetcars.

In 1893, a large car barn was specially designed for electric cars and was located between 9th and 10th Streets on Ferry Street. It could hold about eighteen streetcars. Can you locate the building?

Next to the Car Barn sits the Interurban station which also housed a restaurant. This was a convenient location to transfer from Interurbans to streetcars or from streetcars to Interurbans. From here, you could travel to Ft. Wayne or Indianapolis. The Interurbans used the city streetcar tracks from the Main Street city limits to the station and from Schuyler Avenue to the station.

“9th and Main.” This was one busy intersection. This was a transfer place when changing lines to various destinations in town. Also, the southbound Interurban rounded the corner here for Indianapolis, and returned on the same track. Lafayette had an extensive system of track that was expanded year after year.

Two important lines included the Monon Shops and the Soldiers Home. From 9th and Main Streets, the track meandered out to the Monon Shops via 9th, 10th, 13th, 18th, Salisbury, Hartford and Greenbush. This was a very profitable line as it shuttled railroad employees to and from the Shops. Please observe the wonderful model of the Maintenance Building at the Shops.

The Soldiers Home Line was also very popular and profitable. In 1902, the Soldiers Home Line was located along the North River Road. Tecumseh Trail Park was located near the river, across from the Soldiers Home grounds. In June 1896, the park was purchased by the Lafayette Street Railway, and was developed as an amusement park enterprise to stimulate streetcar travel. This custom was prevalent among street railways throughout the nation. The Soldiers Home Line was popular with the people of Lafayette and West Lafayette who patronized the large dance and refreshment pavilion located at the Trail Park. A big dance was held on June 3, 1897 to celebrate the opening of the new pavilion. Fishing, swimming, horseshoe pitching, boating, canoeing, picnicking, nature hikes and band concerts were among the numerous attractions at the Trail Park. Look around and see if you can locate the pavilion.

Other destinations included Purdue, South 9th Street and Columbian Park, not to forget the Square. Look for the streetcar circling the Square.

On May 11th, 1940, the last streetcar made its final trip and this era of transportation had ended.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit and we hope to see you again. Thank you.