Built in 1936 by the St. Louis Car Company, Chicago Surface Lines trolley bus #184 heads eastbound via Diversey to Western. Trolley bus service was first introduced in Chicago on the #76 Diversey route in 1930. Other trolley bus routes were soon added, some as extensions of existing streetcar lines and later as conversions of streetcar lines to trolley bus service. Trolley bus extensions to existing streetcar lines were an economical way to serve new neighborhoods that were established in outlying parts of the city.
Car #1643 was an example of Chicago’s first electric streetcars. The car was originally built for the Chicago City Railway, a predecessor of the Chicago Surface Lines. The introduction of electric streetcars launched significant improvements in the quality and efficiency of transportation to and from Downtown, helping to promote the establishment and growth of new neighborhoods. The streetcar system was absorbed into the Chicago Transit Authority in 1947.
A Loop-bound Lake Street train consisting of 4000-series cars, led by a “Plushie” type car (built by the Cincinnati Car Company between 1922 and 1924), travels east. Pictured above it are the original Logan Square ‘L’ tracks and the Lake Street Transfer station, no longer in use at the time of the photo. Under construction is the connection between the two routes to form what would eventually become known as the Paulina Connector. The Connector allowed Douglas Park trains to reach the Loop during the 1954-58 period when its old route to the Loop was demolished to allow for construction of the Eisenhower Expressway and the Congress rapid transit line. Today, the connector is used by Pink Line trains to and from the Loop.
CTA #5959, manufactured by the Flxible Company in 1955, on its way northbound to downtown boards a passenger on Wentworth at Cermak in Chinatown in 1961. The bus was part of a fleet of 1,700 propane buses delivered from several manufacturers between 1950 and 1962. Aside from the addition of the Chinatown gateway arch, the Chinatown streetscape remains much the same today. The Won Kow Restaurant on the east side of the street continues to serve the community today.
CTA trolley bus #535 (built by the Marmon-Harrington Company in 1951 and later renumbered #9535) had just recently been delivered and was assigned to the #81 Lawrence route. Three-hundred and forty-nine trolley buses of this type were delivered between 1951 and 1952, and operated on various routes until the end of trolley bus service in March of 1973. A number of these buses were sold to Guadalajara, Mexico, where they remained in service until 1993.
Chicago Surface Lines “Blue Goose” streetcar #7003, one of 83 built in 1936 by the St. Louis Car Company, heads toward the Loop along Madison near Cicero. The #20 Madison route was the first to receive these cars, nicknamed PCC cars for the Presidents Conference Committee. The Committee, comprised of the heads of the various street railways in North America, developed a standardized state-of-the-art streetcar design to provide a modern vehicle that would appeal to the public and be economical to produce. PCCs saw service in many American cities, including Chicago, Brooklyn, Baltimore, Boston and Pittsburgh.
A mid-1940's view of the Lake Street Elevated Halsted station looking north on Halsted at Lake. The station was demolished in 1994 during the Green Line renovation. Similar stations remain in service today on the Green Line at Ashland/Lake and Conservatory-Central Park Drive.
Chicago Surface Lines Birney Safety Car #2902 was part of an order for 10 cars that were acquired by the CSL from the J.G. Brill Company of Philadelphia in 1921. The were divided into two groups, with five cars numbered #2000-2005 and the other five numbered #2900-2903. These steel, double-ended cars, each with single trucks, did not provide the most comfortable riding experience. They were the first one-man cars operated by the Surface Lines and given their small size, they operated on the lighter routes in the city such as the West Division, 71st and 87th lines. All ten cars were retired by 1937.
CTA #106 is pictured next to the original McCormick Place, which opened in November 1960. Manufactured by General Motors in 1961, this “New Look” bus included a number of progressive features such as large, double windows, fluorescent lighting and bright interiors. The bus is working the “Green Pennant Special,” a special event route that operated between McCormick Place and the Loop during the 1960’s. At the time, there was no direct bus service from the Loop to McCormick Place, so for some conventions and trade shows this special express route was operated via Lake Shore Drive. The buses were marked with green pennants on the front that said “SPECIAL.”
An inbound Ravenswood train is crossing Lake and Wells junction as a Garfield Park train turns south onto Wells Street while a northbound Ravenswood train rounds the curve heading to Kimball. For decades all trains operated in a counterclockwise direction on the Loop. In 1969 the tower was moved from the center of the junction to a new structure in the northwest corner of the intersection. A more modern structure in the same location as the 1969 tower was built in 2009. Today, the junction governs Green and Pink Line trains entering and exiting the Loop from the west, Brown and Purple Line Express trains entering and exiting from the north, and Orange Line trains circling around the Loop and returning to the Southwest Side and Midway Airport.
CTA Flxible Twin Coach bus #5615, manufactured by the Flxible Company in 1953, is posed on State Street at Wacker Drive. These buses were fueled by liquefied petroleum gas (propane). Chicago was one of the largest users of propane buses, with a fleet of 1,700, built by such companies as Fageol Twin Coach, Flxible, Mack, and ACF-Brill between 1950 and 1962. No doubt photographed to promote the modernization of CTA’s fleet, the staged nature of the photo is revealed by the bus’s destination signs – route #8A is a south extension of the Halsted Street bus and begins about 10 miles south of State and Wacker! The route designation #8A also didn’t come into use until more than 20 years after the photo was taken; the route was designated #42B at the time.
In 1992, CTA marked the 100th anniversary of Chicago's first elevated railway by painting a two-car set of Pullman 2000-series cars in the colors of the cars originally built for the South Side Rapid Transit in 1892. The commemorative cars traveled throughout the system during the anniversary. In this photo, cars #1892 (#2007) and #1992 (#2008) are leading a southbound, four-car train on Wells at Quincy station. Delivered to CTA in 1964, the 2000-series cars were the last rapid transit cars built by the Chicago-based Pullman-Standard Company for the “L” and were the first cars equipped with air conditioning. All were retired in 1994.