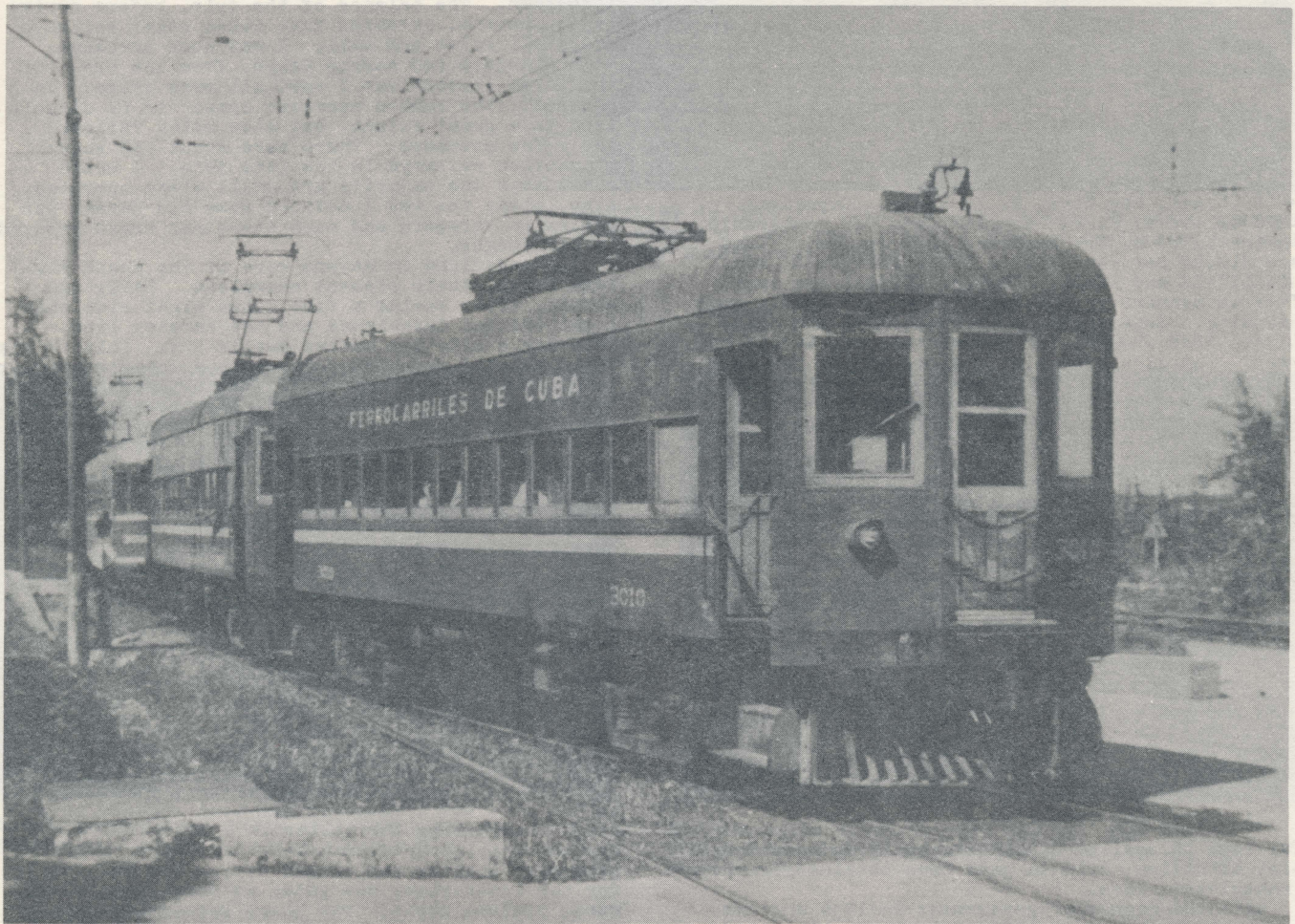




HEADLIGHTS NEWS JOURNAL



AUGUST 1978



¡CUBA!

by Earl Clark

By the mid 1950's, post-war abandonments had reduced electric railways in the United States to a small number. I began looking beyond our borders for street railways and interurbans in other countries and found that fascinating lines were operating in Cuba, closer by far than many destinations in my own country. Thus began a series of visits to Havana, Matanzas and other parts of that tropical island where, in addition to trolleys, ancient gasoline motor cars and steam locomotives were commonplace.

In those days, 12 ex-Havana single-truck street-

cars operated in Matanzas on several lines at speeds of up to 10 miles per hour! A barn full of Birneys languished since replacement from Havana in 1952. The prior few years had seen the closing of lines in Havana, Camaguey, Santiago and Cienfuegos.

The high-point of any Cuban railway adventure was the Hershey Cuban Railway, an interurban of U.S. practice and equipment, running about 56 miles between Havana (Casablanca) and Matanzas, with branches electrified to Cojimar (abandoned May 25, 1957), Bainoa, Jaruco-Cobrerá, Santa Cruz, and non-electrified trackage. It was a 1200-volt catenary line throughout, and operated by pantograph (formerly with trolley poles as well). The cars were pure Brill interurbans, coach and combine, plus powered express and mail cars. A fleet of G.E. steeple cabs hauled the freight, consisting mainly of the sugar traffic and tank cars.

Branch line passengers were treated to a beauti-

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COVER PHOTO: Classic Brill-built interurbans No. 3010 and 3006, along with newer European-style No. 3022, await departure time at Hershey, Cuba.

--Earl Clark

(CUBA, continued from Page 1)

ful ride on smaller Cincinnati-built interurbans in mint condition, said to have been obtained from a Pennsylvania line.

With the change of government in 1959 and the subsequent embargo in 1962, Cuba became isolated from most western nations, the U.S. in particular, and there was, until recently, almost no information regarding Cuba in general and its railways in particular. I tried in vain to learn if Hershey was still electric, still passenger, or indeed still operating at all.

Immediately upon the lifting of restrictions for travel to Cuba in 1977, I set about to find a way to get to the island to find out for myself. This was difficult. Only packages are offered unless one wishes to chance trying for a visa from the Cubans in Mexico and taking a chance on uncertain air and hotel accommodations on flights from there.

I opted for a 7-day package which allowed only two days in Havana, then by bus to the North Coast resort of Veradero for three days, and on to a South Coast resort near Cienfuegos for two days. American travelers' interest in these packages has been very small and only a handful have operated. I know of none scheduled at the present time, although I thought mine was an excellent value, al-

beit certainly not tailored for a railfan.

Difficulty in accomplishing my mission was anticipated, and at our orientation, I felt I might never get close to the Hershey. We were told we could not leave the area where we were staying and there would be no photography of industrial or military objects. This, I had previously learned in other communist countries, included railways. I had brought along a Minox 35mm camera, which is about the size of a cigarette pack, and I knew this was the only way I would get anything. A standard camera on my shoulder would immediately brand me a foreigner and, thus, suspect.

En route to Veradero, our first stop, we passed through Matanzas and, to my relief, the catenary was in place over the tracks along the bay. However, even though Veradero was but a few miles away, I did not attempt to ride the local bus back into town. The balance of the trip, before arriving in Havana, revealed that Cuban sugar railways are still alive and well. I saw much trackage, both standard and narrow gauge, from the bus. Of the three locomotives I saw, all were steam. In contrast, the common carriers appear to be dieselized to a great extent, but also using railcars and a few steamers. There were about 153 sugar plantation railways in the late 50's. I would guess that the majority are still steam operated. Also, along the way I noticed some old Havana car bodies in Veradero and much streetcar track exposed in Cienfuegos.

Accommodations in Havana were at the swank Riviera Hotel, their present showplace. Early the morning after seeing a fine Cuban night club show, I set out for Casablanca and the Hershey line, catching a city bus marked Muelle Luz. This is the wharf which I remembered had been a departure point to cross the bay from old Havana to the Hershey terminal. Havana landmarks are little changed, except for the fact they are not now obscured by motor traffic. (What little there is consists of trucks and pre-1959 U.S. autos.) Therefore, I found Luz easily, but with the presence of many Russian ships in the harbor, it seemed possible this could be a checkpoint where I could be turned back or questioned. Such was not the case and, as elsewhere in Cuba, I found little overt military presence. So I boarded one of the same little launches I had ridden in the 50's which discharged me at Regla, some distance from Casablanca, at the end of an industrial branch of the Hershey. Here I saw a bright red steeple cab lumbering down a narrow street.

Attempts to walk to Casablanca were thwarted by the fact that a Cuban naval base blocked the way. However I found another launch departed Regla for my destination and I arrived by water.

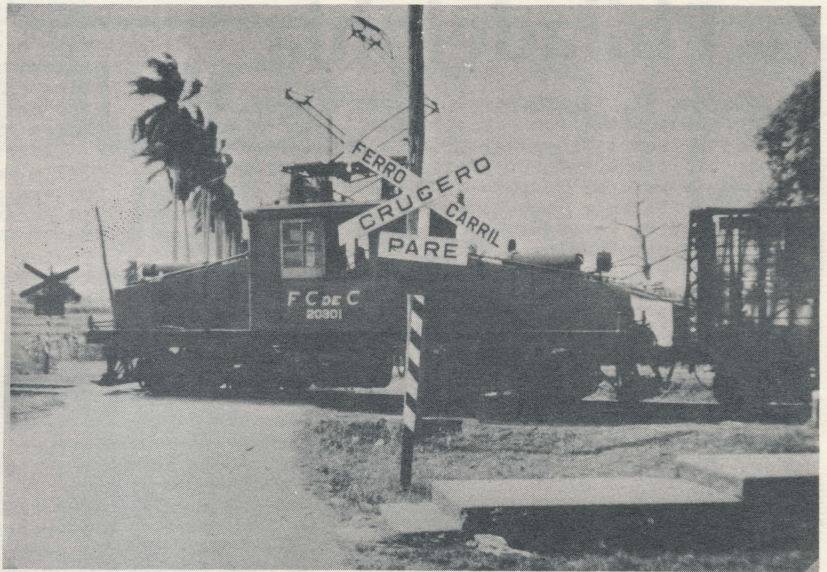
Casablanca used to be a down-at-the-heels area in the 50's but I found it had been spruced up a bit. Overlooking the harbor is a huge statue of Christ, a holdover from pre-Castro days. A modern passenger shelter and ticket office had been built for the interurban, now known as Ferrocarriles de Cuba, Sistema Oeste. The board showed six departures for Matanzas, one which would arrive shortly. I was surprised to see a large red European-style car pull in. Its capacity was double that of the old Brill cars, but upon inspection, only the body and perhaps the AEG controls seemed new. Seats, trucks and other equipment possibly were from some of the old Brill cars, or perhaps the Cincinnati. (A closer analysis of my pictures by a truck expert may reveal the secret.) I found that traffic had increased considerably, therefore larger cars were necessary and new parts were probably non-existent, leading to this compromise.

Immediately upon leaving, the train skirted the naval base and my camera remained well hidden. Oil refineries were present in this area too, and the interurban serves them, resulting in a large increase in freight. Farther out, track was being rebuilt. I observed a line car, a ballast train and three steeple cabs (one of a more recent design). The physical plant was in good shape and the countryside beautiful as the car sped toward

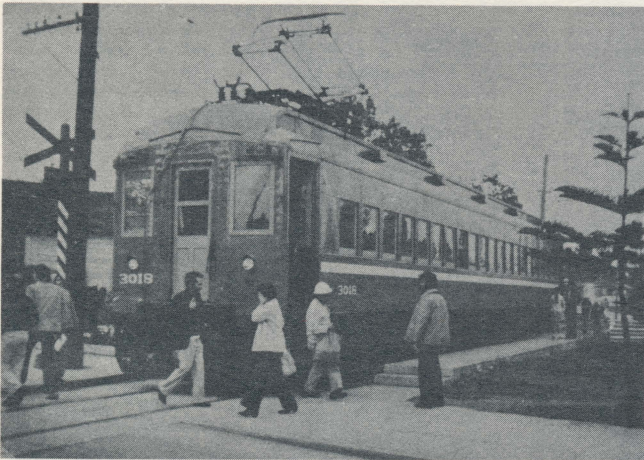
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Cuba '78

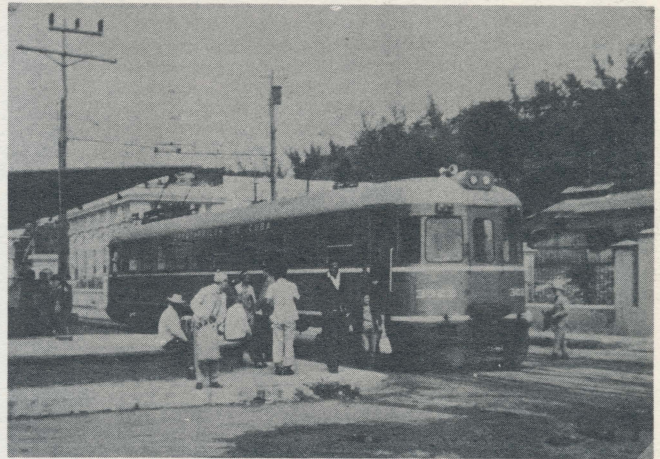
The mood of the Cuban interurbans is captured by Earl Clark in these scenes from original Kodachrome slides taken on February 22, 1978.



Ferrocarriles de Cuba No. 20801, a 1922 General Electric product, trundles across a rural road with a string of empties at San Antonio de Rio Blanco near Jaruco, Cuba.



Electrified former steam railroad coach No. 3018 pauses at Jaruco, 30 miles southwest of Havana.



European-style electric rail car No. 3022 discharges passengers at Casablanca, across the bay from Havana.

(CUBA, continued from Page 2)

the town of Hershey, the headquarters and midpoint. A meet occurred here with a two car train out of the past... beautiful Brill interurbans resplendent in red and striped with cream. I was to see other Brills that day, but no trace of the little Cincinnati's. They may have done their part in creating the new larger capacity cars or the additional locomotives.

The branch lines out of Hershey begin at the sugar refinery and all run a more frequent service than previously. Former main line railway coaches have been converted to electric for these services and they now resemble the "big red" P.E. cars without the "blimp" windows. All cars are lettered "Ferrocarriles de Cuba".

General categories of cars and locomotives follow:

Brill arch roof interurbans. Now numbered in the low 3000's. Formerly 150's. Cars ob-

served were 3006, 3010, 3016.

Electrified steam railway coaches. Numbered in upper teens of 3000's. Observed: 3018
European-body style coaches. Numbered in the 3020's. Observed: 3022, 3024, 3025.
Original steeple cab locomotives, G.E. 60 ton, built 1922. Numbered in 20800's. Formerly Hershey 20 series. Observed: 20801, 20806.
Newer style locomotives. Numbered in the 21000's. Observed: 21004

Note: At least one of the steeple cab locos which worked the Havana Terminal trackage, No. 429, has been rebuilt for the interurban. Perhaps the others have also been acquired. This involved conversion from 600 volts to 1200 volts. Two ex-Toledo and Eastern locos remained for years at Curtice, Ohio awaiting shipment to Cuba in the early 1960's, but were finally scrapped when the Cuban embargo was not lifted.

Philadelphia

On February 22, SEPTA board chairman James C. McConnon was ousted from his position in a 6-4 vote. The ouster was led by Philadelphia and Delaware County officials and apparently was in response to McConnon's refusal to fire general manager William R. Eaton. Eaton's removal was demanded when a series of studies were released showing gross inefficiency and mismanagement within the authority. In McConnon's place, the board elected John MacMurray, a 40 year old financial analyst from Haverford Township who has been on the SEPTA board since 1976, and who uses public transportation to get to work.

On June 10, general manager William R. Eaton was fired in a stormy special board meeting. No interim manager was named to replace the 55 year old Eaton, who has been general manager for the past eight years. The vote was 7-3, and James McConnon was on hand to provide considerable verbal fireworks during the proceedings. McConnon and Eaton have been long-time friends and co-workers. A search is still being made for a suitable replacement; hopefully an individual with a background in transit will be found.

An independent year-long study of SEPTA management and operations has just been released. The study has uncovered a multitude of problems and has detailed at least nine specific areas where monies totaling up to \$14-million could be saved annually. Some of the areas mentioned were:

1. Scheduling - More new schedules and more efficient adjustments in existing ones could lead to savings of up to \$12-million over the next three years.

2. Reduction of costs within the rail commuting division.

3. Better vehicle utilization - The study suggests a lot of data collection for this.

4. Speeding up of capital improvements already funded by the various governmental agencies, but bogged down by slow engineering studies and hampered by foot-dragging in the area of contract awarding.

5. Improved surface transit maintenance - "Appearance of the surface fleet is among the worst in the industry," the report said. It is also in sad mechanical shape and both riders and rail enthusiasts know that only too well. The report wants management to initiate a better system of alerting management to vehicle conditions including disciplinary actions to operators who fail to report defects, breakdowns and damage. Hopefully, the system will also include ways to tighten up on maintenance workers who don't always do their work with diligence. Ironically, most of the damage and wear on the equipment is caused by the public who uses the cars and buses, or by youthful vandals who either don't get caught or cannot be penalized for various reasons.

The report also called for a reduction in the use of outside legal services, better road supervision, better passenger security and an improved system of inventory management.

Also criticized by the report are the cash handling procedures of SEPTA. The report concludes that "SEPTA's cash handling security is among the poorest in the U.S. transit industry." The report criticizes the way in which the present fare collection equipment is utilized and deplores the fact that the old fareboxes do not have lock seals. Additionally, the study found at least nine weaknesses in the system utilized by the authority to get the money from the bus to the bank, including the length of time that fareboxes remain in the vehicle while full, and the excessive handling the money receives prior to deposit in the bank. The report also criticizes SEPTA's practice of budgeting money it does not have, and of maintaining a large unfunded pension plan.

As a result of the report on fare collection and its experience with a new fare collection system being tested on lines working out of Allegheny

Depot, SEPTA will soon open bids on new fareboxes designed to deter employee theft from the till. In the last two years a number of employees have been caught stealing, and several of these employees possessed duplicate keys to the boxes. A new fare collection and handling system has been needed for several years. No word yet on whether the new boxes will be automated.

After years of wrangling with community groups, SEPTA may soon be able to build a new carhouse and modern shop for its subway-surface lines. The site is located near Elmwood Avenue and Island Road in South Philadelphia near Upper Darby on Rt. 36 near Routes 13 and 11. Cars presently must work out of the antiquated and half destroyed Woodland Depot, a horsecar barn built over 100 years ago. This firetrap has all the potential for another disastrous conflagration such as the one which occurred in the fall of 1975 and is a poor location to carry on maintenance services. New cars for the subway-surface lines cannot be ordered until a location for the car shop is approved and construction started. Residents of the area had long protested that a carshop in the area would be unsafe, noisy and would destroy property values. The pressure, which had been heavy for years, appears to be slacking off and officials feel that a decision can be reached in a few weeks.

Route 60-Allegheny and Route 56-Erie still have uncertain futures. The lines are intact and usable but are bussed because of a car shortage. Route 53-Wayne Avenue, bus since last September returned to rail operation on June 18. An interesting feature of this line is its operation north of Wayne

Junction. A bridge has been closed to traffic on Wayne Avenue due to structural problems, but trolleys are being permitted to cross it. Swinging gates have been installed across the street which must be opened for the cars and then closed again after their passage.

More track is being installed on Woodland Avenue between 50th and 63rd Streets. Shoefly operation is expected. At present, seven cars at Woodland Depot have roof-mounted headlights for use in the subway-surface system. The decision has been made to install the light on all cars operating in the subway. A device called a "Transig" is being tested on Woodland Avenue (Rt. 11) at 42nd Street. It is an actuator installed at the intersection to manipulate the traffic signals located there and speed trolley operation. If cars enter the light area and the light cycle is on early green, the green light is extended beyond its normal time cycle to allow the car to get to and through the intersection. If cars enter and the light is on late green, the light turns red, but the green cycle for the cross street is considerably shortened. These devices may be installed at other troublesome intersections if the tests prove successful.

A large part of SEPTA's work car fleet was destroyed in the 1975 Woodland fire. SEPTA has since purchased three single-cab flatbed motors from Toronto. They have been delivered and are currently being overhauled and modified at Cortland shops. The cabs will be lowered to provide clearance under certain bridges (such as Richmond Street), and old sweeper trucks are being installed to prevent the tracking problems identified with the ex-Toronto PCC's bought earlier. SEPTA had only two sets of spare sweeper trucks on hand, so a pair was purchased from the Buckingham group. The cars will be numbered W-1, W-3 and W-5. They were built in 1922.

--George W. Gula in PRMA Trolley Fare