

## BSRA Entertainment Report for September 6, 2014

### LONG FORM (for historical record) Entertainment Report for September 6, 2014

**September 6, 2014.** Boston's Orange Line. Authors Andrew Elder and Jeremy Fox presented a slide show from their recently published book, *Boston's Orange Line*. The book and the show were about the social history of the Orange Line, starting with its incarnation as the Boston Elevated Railway's Main Line, and so the photos included views of the surrounding areas, and the narration included notes about the community in the surrounding areas. The show also included a sample of some of the local disasters that impacted the Orange Line and its service area, as well as contributions of information that Andrew and Jeremy solicited from BSRA members. The show began with a 1954 Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) map showing the Orange Line (although it did not receive that name until 1965) in context with the other rapid transit lines. Note that to enable printing and showing at the highest possible resolution, both the slide and the printed map in the book have North pointing right, not up. The Boston Elevated Railway's Main Line opened in 1901, borrowing the Tremont Street subway to connect the northern (Charlestown, to Sullivan Square) and southern (Washington Street, to Dudley Street) elevated structures by way of central/western downtown, and later in 1901 also opening the Atlantic Avenue Elevated structure to connect these structures by way of eastern downtown and the harbor area. In 1908, the Washington Street tunnel opened to replace the service through the Tremont Street subway, which was turned back over to streetcar service only. In 1909, the extension of the Washington Street Elevated south to Forest Hills opened, although a turnaround loop was retained at Dudley Station for short-turn trains (eventually abandoned much later when newer Orange Line cars that were too long for the curve entered service). In 1919, a very expensive 1 mile extension of the Charlestown Elevated opened to Everett Station, with part of Everett Shops reconfigured to enable service of Main Line cars, and with the Boston Elevated Railway intending to continue the extension north to Malden.

Efforts to remove the Charlestown Elevated were almost as old as the Charlestown Elevated itself, with a petition for this purpose reaching the Massachusetts General Legislature in 1907. People in Charlestown blamed the Elevated's partial covering of the streets in Charlestown for the decline of Charlestown from about 40,000 people in 1901 to about 20,000 people in the 1960s. In contrast, the Washington Street Elevated was more accepted as a needed public service and was missed after it was torn down in 1987, although the Cathedral of the Holy Cross on Washington Street (which we saw later in the show) opposed the Elevated, which ran right by it.

Andrew and Jeremy gave us a tour from north to south, starting with the old Charlestown Elevated stations. This included a view of the very ornate and expansive (and probably expensive) Sullivan Square Station, and a cut to more modern times to show us the current Sullivan Square Station, which is of very utilitarian design, but in much better condition than the old station was towards the end of its life. Next, we saw the dual elevated structures at North Station, where both the streetcar elevated structure to Lechmere and the Main Line came out from underground a short distance north of Haymarket Station. We also saw people (many returning from the Valentine's Day Sonia Henie Ice Show) stranded in North Station by a 14" snowstorm on February 14, 1940. Then the view shifted to the Atlantic Avenue Elevated, with a cut to a photo of the aftermath of the Boston molasses disaster of January 15, 1919, in which a sudden flood of molasses and an associated blast of vapors from a ruptured storage tank (owned by the United States Industrial Alcohol Company, purchased from Purity Distilling) killed 21 people and an unknown number of horses, injured 150 people, wrecked several buildings, and severely damaged the Atlantic Avenue Elevated, nearly tipping over one of the Main Line cars. As part of the First Red Scare, the company tried to claim that the accident was the work of anarchists, but was found guilty of negligence by way of faulty construction and lack of safety procedures; the blast of vapor may have been due to carbon dioxide building up in the tank due to fermentation, and then expanding as the weather warmed. After branching from the Charlestown Elevated, the Atlantic Avenue Elevated served 3 stations near Boston Harbor, which were Battery Street, State Street (a transfer point to the East Boston Tunnel, which is now the Blue Line, and not to be confused with the underground Main Line station that later gained the name State Street), and Rowe's Wharf; continuing south after this, the Atlantic Avenue Elevated went to South Station (in 1916

becoming a transfer point to the Cambridge-Dorchester Tunnel, which is now the Red Line), then through a sharp curve to Beach Street (near the underground Essex Station, which later became Chinatown Station), then through another sharp curve to a section of track that joined up with the Washington Street Elevated. The latter sharp curve was the scene of an accident in 1928 that combined with loss of ridership caused by economic hard times in the Boston Harbor area and replacement of ferry service by the Sumner Tunnel, to cause the Boston Elevated Railway to end Atlantic Avenue Elevated service south of South Station. This undoubtedly caused the ridership to decline further, along with the soon-to-follow Great Depression, and the Atlantic Avenue Elevated was closed entirely in 1938, and then torn down in 1942 to supply scrap metal for World War II.

Heading back north a bit, next we saw views of the Main Line underground stations (the Washington Street Subway), which are still in use today, although in some cases not under their original names, and rebuilt to improve passenger accessibility (including compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act). Haymarket was formerly called Union for the northbound platform and Friend for the southbound platform. State was formerly only the name for the Main Line northbound platform, and the southbound platform was called Milk Street, while the East Boston Tunnel part of the station was called Devonshire; the 3 different station names all corresponded to different levels (the Main Line platforms being unable to fit on the same level in the narrow space under Washington Street). The modern naming was adopted in 1967, along with rebuilding to improve passenger access. Downtown Crossing has been through 2 sets of name changes: The northbound Main Line platform was originally Summer Street; the southbound Main Line platform was originally Winter Street; the Red Line platforms were originally Washington, which became the name for the whole station in 1967, which got its current name in 1985. Chinatown's southbound platform was originally Boylston, while the northbound platform was originally Essex, which became the name for the whole station in 1967, which got its current name in 1985. Note that 2 of the tunnel stations are modern. The Charlestown Elevated had an elevated station at North Station (as did the streetcars), which was replaced by an underground station when the Charlestown Elevated was replaced by the modern surface line in 1975 (as was done in 2005 for the Green Line surface and elevated stations there). The modern station at Tufts Medical Center (shell built in 1972, but finished and opened for service in 1987, named New England Medical Center until 2010) does not correspond to any of the stations on the Washington Street Elevated, because it is one of the Southwest Corridor stations that were all to the west of Washington Street (although the new station at Forest Hills was directly adjacent to the old one). Note that the Orange Line itself had a name change, gaining its modern name (when the other rapid transit lines did) shortly after incorporation of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority into the MBTA. It was named after Orange Street, which was the name that downtown Washington Street had (named after William of Orange) until renamed in the aftermath of the American Revolution.

After this, the tour southwards continued along the Washington Street Elevated. One of the first of these photos was of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross (dedicated in 1875), which, as mentioned above, was right next to the Elevated on Washington Street; we saw it serving the funeral of Cardinal William Henry O'Connell in 1944. After this was Northampton Station, which was one of the least modified stations, thus putting it in demand for preservationists; the tower from the station was preserved at Seashore Trolley Museum. Dudley Station was the southern terminus until 1909, so it had an elevated turnaround loop (as mentioned above), along with streetcar turnaround loops. Its canopy was built in the "French Renaissance" style (actually an offshoot of the Beaux Arts style), thus also putting it in demand for preservation. The modern Dudley Station, which is only a bus station (including the southern terminus of the Silver Line that replaced the Washington Street Elevated), is built in part from this canopy. A nearby disaster was the W&A Bacon Store fire of January 14, 1914, which occurred in weather of -8 °F (-22 °C), so that water used to fight the fire very quickly froze into a massive farm of icicles, which included the Elevated. The Main Line and the other public transit lines needed 600 V DC power converted from high voltage AC (by rotary converters), and we got to see the Egleston Power Station used for this purpose. After removal of the Elevated in 1987, this power station sat idle for several years, and was eventually redeveloped for uses including office space. This part of the show ended up with a view of the old and new Forest Hills stations in 1986.

In the late 1960s to early 1970s, the State of Massachusetts had plans for an Inner Belt and Southwest Expressway (to be an extension of Interstate 95), and condemned razed houses for a considerable distance

to accommodate this. Fierce community opposition eventually led to cancellation of this project in 1972 (with Interstate 95 rerouted onto Massachusetts Route 128), and then the space was later used for the Southwest Corridor, which includes the new southern Orange Line, Commuter Rail, and Amtrak service, all opened in 1987. The community opposition to highway construction included some unusually professional-looking graffiti "STOP I-95 PEOPLE BEFORE HIGHWAYS". Some of the community activists who fought the highway project to a stop participated in community involvement with Southwest Corridor planning, including design of the new southern Orange Line stations.

After the show itself, Andrew Elder and Jeremy Fox held a Question and Answer session.

**SHORT FORM** (for Annual Report) Entertainment Report for September 6, 2014

**September 6, 2014.** Boston's Orange Line. Authors Andrew Elder and Jeremy Fox presented a slide show from their recently published book, *Boston's Orange Line*. Since 1901, this rail line's configuration evolved in responses to changes in the city, society, and technology.