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A LOOK BACK AT A CENTURY OF BUS TRANSPORTATION: 1910-1919

By William A. Luke

<Picture>

Two early White buses operated by Mesaba Transportation Co. are shown in front of the company's Hibbing, Minn. Headquarters in 1916.

This is the second in a 10-part series looking back at bus transportation in the 20th century, with each installment focusing on the highlights of a particular decade.

A significant date in the history of the bus industry's century was 1914. This is when Carl Eric Wickman and Andy Anderson, immigrants from Sweden, started a bus line in Hibbing, Minn. The company, Mesaba Transportation Company, was incorporated in 1916 and is considered the beginning of the nationwide carrier Greyhound Lines. Ralph Bogan, Arvid Heed, Dominic Bretto, Cliff Graves, S.R. Sundstrom and Ed Ekstrom were other pioneers involved in the early Minnesota startup. Some of these men went on to become Greyhound Lines executives.

In the latter part of the decade, another enterprising entrepreneur and bus pioneer, E. Roy Fitzgerald, began Range Rapid Transit, headquartered in Eveleth, Minn., some 30 miles from Hibbing. Fitzgerald and his four brothers later built an empire in the transit bus business.

Martz Lines, founded in 1908, operated this bus in the Wilkes-Barre, Pa. area. It was acquired in 1914, and despite many years of service it was preserved and appears in mint condition today after restoration. Iron Mining Spurs a New Industry.

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Van Tassel Bus Line (below), which operated city bus service in Rochester, Minn., was established late in the century's second decade. This White bus had an Eckland body.

Minnesota became one of the leading states in the development of bus transportation in the second decade of the 20th century. A probable reason was the success throughout the area of the bus lines on the Mesaba Iron Range, which encouraged other small bus operations to begin.

California was another state with pioneer bus lines. Pickwick Stages and Star Auto Stages were two of these companies. A.L. Hayes and Herbert L. Patterson began the Pickwick Company, which later merged with a bus line founded by Charles Wren. W.E.

"Buck" Travis started Star Auto Stages. Eventually, these California companies plus a number of others, came under the Pickwick name and eventually under Greyhound.

There were many other bus lines--mostly small ones--being established in other parts of the country as suitable vehicles for carrying passengers became available.

Early bus services established stops in towns along their routes, usually at a hotel. Jefferson Highway Transportation Company, which began in 1919, stopped at the Stuart Hotel in Northfield, Minn. Buses still use this location as a stop today, making it one of the oldest in the country.

Early-Era Buses Rudimentary

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This White bus, one of Kansas City's first buses, was photographed at 12th and Main around 1915.

Buses in the 1910-1919 era were either enlarged passenger automobiles or homemade bodies on truck chassis. At first, buses had hard rubber tires, which restricted their speed and did not allow for a smooth ride. As pneumatic tires emerged, buses became more acceptable for travel.

One of the early bus builders was Eckland Brothers of Minneapolis, Minn. The company built buses for most of the early Minnesota bus companies, as well as bus lines in neighboring states. White truck chassis were the most popular frames for buses.

Streetcars continued to dominate city transport in the decade, but the Fifth Avenue Coach Company in New York City continued to flourish. In Chicago, the pioneers from New York City formed the Chicago Motor Coach Company in 1917. Jitneys, which were no more than an automobile, operated a form of transportation services in many cities.

Other Countries Also Just Beginning

Bus lines in Canada were somewhat slow in starting. One exception was Penetang-Midland Coach Lines, which actually got its start as a horse coach company in 1867. It began experimenting with motorized vehicles in 1917. The company continues to exist today. Another interesting early bus company, West Vancouver Municipal Bus Company (now known as West Vancouver Transit), began in 1913. Some Canadian cities saw bus operations begin in the century's second decade, notably Winnipeg in 1918 and Montreal in 1919.

Overseas, World War I slowed bus progress, but following the war there was considerable interest in buses. London was the scene of a big expansion of bus

transport. Other parts of England also saw bus transportation becoming more prevalent. Even in far-off India and South Africa, buses were becoming a new means of passenger transport.

The development of the bus industry in the 20th century's second decade paved the way for the great expansion of bus transportation in the 1920s.

William A. Luke, a member of the Bus Business Journal editorial advisory board and executive director and founder of the Buses International Association, has more than 50 years' experience in the bus industry, including publishing and editing an industry trade publication for more than 30 years. Luke was inducted into the American Public Transit Association Hall of Fame last year.

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