

The Thirty-Year War: A History of Detroit's Streetcars, 1892–1922

By Neil J. Lehto

(East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2017. Pp. 327. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95.)

In 2018, urban mass transit is a one-hundred-percent public-sector responsibility in U.S. and Canadian cities. Disagreements about transit service often occur, involving public officials, transit agency managements, organized labor, and customers. But no person will seriously suggest moving urban transit back to the private sector. A century ago urban transit disagreements were more basic—should system ownership remain private or become a public-sector responsibility? Detroit was an early venue of such controversy.

Neil Lehto's *The Thirty-Year War: A History of Detroit's Streetcars, 1892–1922* is a fascinating tale chronicling three decades of public ownership debate, which culminated when the city government bought the private, franchised streetcar operators. Lehto skillfully weaves together a tangled web of political disputes, local elections, technology breakthroughs, corporate intrigues, and labor issues. Transportation aficionados, urban and political historians, and anyone interested in Detroit's overall history will find this work entertaining and enlightening.

The book's theme is how the struggle to control Detroit's valuable streetcar franchises pitted proponents of low fares and public ownership against private interests that owned the streetcar companies. Reliable and

affordable urban mobility became an important need as the city grew greatly by both natural increase and geographic expansion.

Lehto, a public utilities lawyer, demonstrates his excellent writing and research skills throughout. He begins with Judge Augustus Woodward, who guided the nascent settlement after an 1805 fire destroyed it and authored the first comprehensive street plan for the rebuilt city. Moving to the later nineteenth century, Lehto recounts the technological and social forces that turned Detroit into an industrial powerhouse. Electric-powered trolleys appeared in the early 1890s, replacing horse-drawn cars and their many obvious disadvantages. Detroit's streetcar workers also began to organize, resulting in a strike in 1891, an event that Lehto ably chronicles.

The book also profiles a veritable Who's Who of prominent Detroit political and business leaders, who formed ever-changing alliances that led to frequent mayoral changes, and debates about streetcar service quality and quantity. Two such leaders stand out: Hazen Pingree and James Couzens. Pingree made a fortune as a shoe manufacturer and then served as mayor from 1890 to 1897. An early Progressive Republican in the Theodore Roosevelt mold, he fought to keep streetcar fares at three cents and created competition for Detroit

Citizens' Street Railway Company by allowing new investors to build additional streetcar lines charging the lower fare.

Pingree set the stage for ultimate municipal ownership. He locked horns with many opponents, most notably James McMillan and George Hendrie. Both were entrepreneurs whose initial business was horse-drawn freight wagons between Detroit's two railroad stations in the 1860s, a business which expanded into streetcars because it already used horse power. McMillan later was a U.S. Senator representing Michigan and a key Republican Party power broker. Hendrie remained connected to Detroit transportation into the early twentieth century.

James Couzens served as mayor from 1919 to 1922 and was the first municipal chief after Detroit adapted a new city charter that streamlined its government apparatus. Under his leadership, municipal streetcar ownership finally occurred, taking advantage of a new state constitution that permitted municipal home rule and expressly allowed cities to own public utilities. Prior to politics, Couzens was a Ford Motor Company investor and executive, becoming wealthy after he sold his company stock. During Couzens's mayoral term, Henry Ford tried to capture the transit vehicle market with an experimental, but unsuccessful, gasoline-powered streetcar.

Between Pingree and Couzens, a revolving door of Detroit mayors served between 1897 and 1919, from both sides of the political aisle. All tried but could not resolve Detroit's streetcar

issues for multitudes of reasons that Lehto explains in riveting details.

Lehto also profiles important industrial and business leaders, including Thomas Johnson, who controlled the Detroit Citizens' Street Railway and later expanded his holdings to control virtually all Detroit's streetcar companies. He and Pingree, originally opponents, gradually overcame their differences and started the path to eventual municipal purchase. Jere C. Hutchins was another innovative Detroit transportation figure. Beginning his career working for railroads, after 1894 he was associated with Detroit streetcars for many years. As vice president of the Detroit Citizens' Street Railway under Johnson, he played a key role in the conversion of routes from horse to electric power. He developed a unique funeral streetcar to carry family members and the deceased's coffin directly to any Detroit cemetery. Hutchins's influence continued up to the beginning of public ownership in 1922.

This reviewer sees the very brief Chapter 12 as the only, and minor, flaw. It leads a casual reader to conclude that Detroit's entire mass transit system was abandoned in 1956. A better epilogue would have been to note that Detroit's Department of Street Railways (DSR), the system moniker after the 1922 takeover, gradually morphed into an all-bus network after World War II. Streetcar use indeed stopped in 1956, consistent with the anti-streetcar/pro-bus pattern common in most U. S. cities. The DSR name persisted, as an all-bus fleet, for another eighteen years when it became Detroit

Department of Transportation (DDOT) in 1974, still the system's name today.

In closing, a recent development deserves mention. In 2017, the year *The Thirty-Year War* was published, Detroit debuted a brand-new 3.3-mile streetcar line along Judge Woodward's namesake avenue between downtown and Grand Boulevard. The city's transportation history has now come full circle. *The Thirty-Year War* is a highly recommended history of a forgotten chapter in U.S. urban mass transportation.

ANDREW J. SPARBERG has worked, written, and taught in and about the transportation field for over forty years. He started at the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission, spent a quarter-century at MTA-Long Island Rail Road, and after retirement has worked in the academic area, most notably at City University of New York.

doi: 10.2979/indimaghist.114.3.06



Ku Klux Kulture: America and the Klan in the 1920s

By Felix Harcourt

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pp. 272. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.)

Although the Southern Poverty Law Center reports a marked decline in the number of local Klan chapters in the United States over the past year, the remarkable proliferation of other various "hate groups" since the last presidential election has reawakened interest in what during the 1920s became the largest, most widespread nativist, racist movement this nation has ever witnessed. The Ku Klux Klan attracted millions of members from coast to coast, exercising significant political power in a number of states, particularly Indiana. Felix Harcourt makes a worthwhile contribution to our understanding of the movement, providing an analysis thought-provoking in what it explicitly states

and in its possible contemporary implications.

Instead of focusing on the Klan as an organization with specific political and social agendas, Harcourt examines it as a broader cultural phenomenon which, despite its fighting, factionalism and decentralization, created a unifying "imagined community" for its membership and exerted considerable influence on mainstream American culture as well. He questions previous assertions that the Klan was culturally reactionary and anti-modernist, and instead sees it as ambivalent and conflicted in its response to the innovations associated with the Jazz Age, yet willing to use the newest media to its own advantage. He portrays those who joined the Klan not