

History Of The Michigan Air-Line Railroad Company

Michigan Air-Line Railroad Co., 1868-1875
Company Headquarters - Jackson, Michigan

Michigan Air-Line Railway Co., 1875-1884

After the Civil War, the original organizers of the **Michigan Air-Line Railroad Company** promoted a planned railroad across southern Michigan, connecting the **Canada Southern Railway** near Port Huron, to Chicago, Illinois, and hopefully sell or lease it to the Grand Trunk of Canada who needed another route into Chicago that did not involve the **New York Central Railroad**. This new "Air-Line" would link Jackson Michigan with the Michigan Central line at Niles Michigan. Within two years of its formation, the **Michigan Central Railroad** would control the Air-Line routes. Only a part of the line was ever built, and it would later be split between the **Grand Trunk Railway** and the **Michigan Central Railroad** (part of the **New York Central Railroad**, which also later acquired the **Canada Southern Railway**).

The **Michigan Air-Line Railroad Company** was a consolidation of the **Grand Trunk Railway Company of Michigan** and the **Grand Trunk Railway Company of Indiana**, with the Articles of Consolidation being dated July 14, 1868, and filed August 27, 1868. The **Canada Southern Railway** was chartered in early 1869. The **Michigan Air-Line Railroad** and the **Canada Southern Railway** now planned to form a continuous line from Buffalo, New York west to Chicago, Illinois via a train ferry across the St. Clair River. In 1871 the two railroads became involved with a much larger, planned longer line, the **Portland, Rutland, Oswego and Chicago Railroad**. This railroad was proposed as the first step of a transcontinental railroad by John Alfred Poor of Portland Maine in the 1860's, but he died in 1871 before the plans could be finalized.

The **Michigan Air-Line Railroad Company** laid rails from Richmond to Romeo in 1869, and started another section, building west from Jackson. On October 7, 1870, the **St. Joseph Valley Railroad** was merged into the **Michigan Air-Line Railroad Co.** This now provided a branch line from Niles Michigan south to South Bend, Indiana. That branch line was completed and opened in February 1871. Operated under perpetual agreement dated January 1, 1870, by which the **Michigan Central Railroad** would maintain that portion of the original line west of Jackson (towards Chicago) and pay interest on the funded debt, pay all taxes and expenses, and receive all of the revenues. Bonds of the **Michigan Central Railroad Co.** were issued for \$2,600,090, secured by mortgage on the **Michigan Air-Line Railroad's** property and were substituted for such funded debt. The **Michigan Central Railroad** owned a majority of the capital stock of the **Michigan Air-Line Railroad Co.**

The **Michigan Air-Line Railroad's** main line was completed in February 1871 from Niles Michigan east to Jackson and from Romeo east to Richmond. Well on their way to create a new route to Chicago, the promoters were stopped, as the **New York Central Railroad** bought out the local Michigan owners and investors. This line would not become competition for the NYC line to Chicago and would become just another branch line of the **Michigan Central Railroad**. Effective February 1871, the **Michigan Air-Line Railroad** was leased for 999 years to the **Michigan Central Railroad** (as part of a shorter route between Detroit and Chicago). The **Michigan Midland and Canada Railway** was chartered in 1872 to continue east from Richmond to the St. Clair River, and opened in 1873 as part of the **Canada Southern Railway**.

However, due to financial problems, the panic and depression, the part of the line between Jackson and Romeo was not built, leaving the tracks between Richmond and Romeo an isolated, dead-end branch line. The **Michigan Central Railroad** had little interest in this route. The east part of the line from Romeo to Richmond, was split off on October 2, 1872 as the **St. Clair and Chicago Air Line Railroad**, which in turn leased the unfinished **St. Clair River, Pontiac and Jackson Railroad**. That company went bankrupt in 1873 and on November 18, 1875 was sold at foreclosure and reorganized as the **Michigan Air-Line Railway Co.** The new company, **Michigan Air-Line Railway Co.**, made arrangements for operation by their stronger shareholder, **Grand Trunk Railway**, which also passed through Richmond. On January 1, 1881, the **Grand Trunk Railway** leased the company and the line was finally finished west to Jackson on September 1, 1884. The line from Pontiac to South Lyon was built on the planned right-of-way of the **Toledo, Ann Arbor and Northeastern Railroad**.

Today, the only part of these original **Michigan Air-Line Railroad** and **Michigan Air-Line Railway** lines that have not been abandoned is the east (Grand Trunk Railway) section between Wixom and West Bloomfield operated by Coe Rail Inc. (CRLE), now owned by Railmark Holdings, Inc. Original depots still exist at Walled Lake, South Lyon & Armada, MI.

History Timeline of the Michigan Air-Line Railroad

- **1869 – December 9th: Michigan Air Line Railroad opens line from (Richmond?) Ridgeway to Romeo Michigan**
- **1870 – Summer: Michigan Air Line Railroad completes line from Jackson to Homer Michigan**
- **1870 – Autumn: Michigan Air Line Railroad extends line from Homer to Three Rivers**
- **1871 – Early Year: Michigan Air Line Railroad completes line north of Jackson between late 1870 and early 1871**
- **1871 – April 17th: Michigan legislature enacted a law requiring passenger train conductors to announce the next station in all cars**
- **1872 – 1878: Panic & Depression brings most start-up railroads to their knees**
- **1877: Michigan Air Line Railroad is built from Port Huron to Romeo**
- **1878: Depression ends.**
- **1877 – 1883: Michigan Air Line Railroad is slowly built to Jackson**
- **1883: Michigan Air Line Railroad reaches Jackson Michigan from Pontiac. Line is now completed through present day operation which includes Wixom to West Bloomfield.**
- **1884 – January 1st: Grand Trunk (Michigan Air Line Railway Co.) opens line from Ridgeway to Jackson**
- **1887 – Grand Trunk builds new depot in Walled Lake Michigan. Depot is currently used for the offices of Coe Rail Inc.**
- **1887 - U.S. Congress creates Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to provide for Federal regulation of railroad rates, and ultimately railroads themselves.**
- **1923 – Grand Trunk Railway is merged into the Canadian National Railroad (CNR).**
- **1928 – CNR consolidates the five railroads that make up the Grand Trunk Railway and renames the company Grand Trunk Western Railway and is the sole US railroad subsidiary of CNR.**
- **1984 – Grand Trunk Western Railroad sells the line from Wixom to West Bloomfield to Coe Rail Inc.**
- **2006 – June 2, 2006: Coe Rail Inc. is acquired by Railmark Holdings, Inc., plans to rename the line back to its original namesake, Michigan Air-Line Railway Co.**

Michigan Air Line Railroad Co. – COMPANY OFFICIALS

Eaton, Jerome B., - President and Director, 1873-1875; Jackson, MI

McNaughton, M.A., Vice President & Treasurer, 1873-1875; Jackson, MI

Ledyard, H.B., Assistant General Superintendent, 1875; Detroit, MI

Brown, E.C., - Division Superintendent, 1875; Jackson, MI

Hadley, M.S., – Division Superintendent, 1875; Romeo, MI

Michigan Air Line Railroad Co. – DIRECTORS

- **Bancker, E.**, Director & Corporate Secretary, 1873-1875
- **Crowfoot, M.E.**, Director, 1873-1875
- **Eaton, Jerome B.**, Director & President, 1873-1875
- **French, George H.**, Director, 1873-1875
- **Haze, C.W.**, Director, 1873-1875
- **Hubbard, J.H.**, Director, 1873-1875
- **Knapp, S.O.**, Director, 1873-1875
- **Landen, R.W.**, Director, 1873-1875
- **Leonard, J.C.**, Director, 1873-1875
- **McNaughton, M.A.**, Director, Vice President, & Treasurer, 1873-1875
- **Mellon, Harry**, Director, 1873-1875
- **Pringle, Eugene**, Director, 1873-1875
- **Wolf, John F.**, Director, 1873-1875

Michigan Air Line Railroad Co., Officials and Directors

- **Bancker, E.**, - Director, Corporate Secretary, 1873-1875; Jackson, MI
- **Brown, E.C.**, - Division Superintendent, 1875; Jackson, MI
(Also Division Superintendent for the Michigan Central Railroad and the Kalamazoo & South Haven Railroad)
- **Crowfoot, M.E.**, – Director, 1873-1875; Pontiac, MI
(Also President, General Manager and Director in 1873 of the St. Clair & Chicago Air Line Railroad Co.)
- **Eaton, Jerome B.**, - President and Director, 1873-1875; Jackson, MI
- **French, George H.**, Director, 1873-1875; Homer, MI
- **Hadley, M.S.**, – Division Superintendent, 1875; Romeo, MI
(Also Director and Division Superintendent in 1873 of the St. Clair & Chicago Air Line Railroad Co.)
- **Haze, C.W.**, Director, 1873-1875; Pinckney, MI
- **Hubbard, J.H.**, Director, 1873-1875; Waterloo, MI
- **Knapp, S.O.**, Director, 1873-1875; Jackson, MI
- **Landen, R.W.**, Director, 1873-1875; Niles, MI
- **Ledyard, H.B.**, Assistant General Superintendent, 1875; Detroit, MI
(Also Assistant General Superintendent in 1875 for four other railroads: Detroit & Bay City Railroad, Michigan Central Railroad, Grand River Valley Railroad and the Jackson, Lansing & Saginaw Railroad)
- **Leonard, J.C.**, Director, 1873-1875; Union City, MI
- **McNaughton, M.A.**, Director, Vice President, Treasurer & Secretary. 1873-1875; Jackson, MI. (Also Director and Vice President for the Grand River Valley Railroad during the same years)
- **Mellon, Harry**, Director, 1873-1875; Romeo, MI
- **Pringle, Eugene**, Director, 1873-1875; Jackson, MI
(Also Secretary and Counsel, 1873-1876 for the Ft. Wayne, Jackson & Saginaw Railroad)
- **Wolf, John F.**, Director, 1873-1875; Centreville, MI

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

A.

1. **RAILROAD:** Michigan Air-Line Railroad (8/28/1868) I
2. **LINE_OF_RD:** Ridgeway to South Bend, Indiana.
3. **ORIGIN:**
4. **CURRENT:** New York Central Railroad
5. **SUCCESSORS:** St. Clair & Chicago Air-Line Railroad
6. **TEXT:** P1869-70 Port Huron, Michigan to Chicago, Illinois, 277.00 miles.
Consolidation of: Grand Trunk Railroad of Michigan. Grand Trunk Railroad of Indiana. The line, when completed, will form the shortest route from Chicago, via Camden, to the Seaboard. It is now (February, 1869) under construction, and about 50.00 miles are graded ready for iron. Between Ridgeway, on the Grand Trunk Railway and Romeo, cars are running. P1870-71 Ridgeway, Michigan to Chicago, Illinois, 300.00 miles. Branch: Romeo to Almont, Michigan, 9.00 miles. P1871-72 Portion from Jackson, Michigan to South Bend Indiana leased to Michigan Central Railroad. Purchased by Michigan Central Railroad. P1872-73 Leased to Michigan Central Railroad. P1876-77 Western Division: Jackson to Niles, Michigan, 103.60 miles. Consolidated into Michigan Air-Line Railroad II, October 11, 1870. Organized, August 25, 1868. P1877-78 Chartered, 8/25/1868. Chartered to build a road from Ridgeway to South Bend. Jackson to Niles, Michigan, 103.60 miles. Consolidated with the St. Joseph Valley Railroad, 10/11/1870. Leased to and operated by Michigan Central Railroad. Eastern Division was sold to the St. Clair & Chicago Air-Line Railroad. Western Division was leased to the Michigan Central Railroad. P1881 Ridgeway, Michigan to South Bend, Indiana. Organized, 8/28/1868. Jackson, Michigan to South Bend, Indiana operated by Michigan Central Railroad. Ridgeway to Shelby sold to St. Claire & Chicago Air-Line Railroad. P1885 Controlled by Grand Trunk Railway of Canada. To Michigan Air-Line Railway 10/11/1870 P1900 Jackson, Michigan to South Bend, Indiana, 29.98 miles. Articles for Western Section filed, August 25, 1868 and October 11, 1870. Consolidated with St. Joseph Valley Railroad, October 11, 1870. Dates of charters, July 14, 1868 and March 19, 1870. Road opened, January, 1871. Road completed, February, 1871. Leased from that date to the Michigan Central Railroad. P1910

B.

1. **RAILROAD:** Michigan Air-Line Railroad (3/19/1870) II
2. **LINE_OF_RD:** Jackson, Michigan to South Bend, Indiana.
3. **ORIGIN:** Michigan Air-Line Railway (8/28/1868) I
4. **CURRENT:** New York Central Railroad Grand Trunk Railway of Canada
5. **SUCCESSORS:** (1871) Michigan Central Railroad
6. **TEXT:** P1871-72 This company has a traffic agreement with the Michigan Central Railroad.
7. P1872-73 Western Division: Jackson, Michigan to South Bend, Indiana, 113.00 miles. Eastern Division: Jackson, Michigan to St. Clair River, 156.00 miles. The Western Division is now completed and operated under lease by the Michigan Central Railroad Company.
8. The Eastern Division is in progress, is open from Ridgeway to Washington, 20.00 miles.
9. P1876-77 Western Division: Jackson to Niles, Michigan, 103.60 miles. Branch: Niles, Michigan to South Bend, Indiana, 11.12 miles.
10. Eastern Division: Jackson to Ridgeway, Michigan, 100.00 miles.
11. Western Division is leased to Michigan Central Railroad.
12. Consolidation, October 11, 1870 of: Michigan Air-Line Railroad I. St. Joseph Valley Railroad.
13. The Eastern Division is open from Ridgeway to St. Clair, and there connects with the Great Western and the Canada Southern Railways. It is operated by the St. Clair & Chicago Air-Line Railroad Company. Ridgeway is a station on the Grand Trunk Railway. Opened to Niles, 1870.
14. Opened to St. Clair, 1872.
15. P1881 Consolidation, 10/11/1870 of: Michigan Air-Line Railroad (10/25/1868). St. Josephs Valley Railroad. Completed, 2/1871. Leased to Michigan Central Railroad from that date. P1885 Consolidated St Joseph Valley Railroad 3/19/1870. P1900 Jackson, Michigan to South Bend, Indiana, 29.98 miles. Articles for Western Section filed, August 25, 1868 and October 11, 1870. Consolidated with St. Joseph Valley Railroad, October 11, 1870. Dates of charters, July 14, 1868 and March 19, 1870.
16. Road opened, January, 1871. Road completed, February, 1871. Leased from that date to the Michigan Central Railroad. This road is a leased or a proprietary line of the Michigan Central Railroad Company. This Company is controlled by the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada.
17. P1925 Jackson, Michigan to South Bend, Indiana. 115.25 miles. M1922 Leased by Michigan Central Railroad from 2/1871. M1940 Acquired by the Michigan Central Railroad, 1871, Leased.

C.

A survey was made and a line adopted for the proposed road. Subscriptions were opened at different points, quite a large amount of stock subscribed and some work done; but in consequence of some places west of Jackson, Michigan, failing to subscribe the amount agreed with the company, work was suspended. A meeting was then called at Jackson for the purpose of amending the charter of the road and changing some of the points west. At that meeting the provision was struck out providing that the road should go the most direct route from Niles, Michigan, to Chicago. This left it in the power of the company, if it was thought advisable to run the road from the State line to South Bend. About this time the name of the company was changed from Michigan Grand Trunk Railway Company to the Michigan Air Line Company.

The latter company began now the construction of the road, but soon after became so embarrassed it could not go on with the work and therefore, in 1869, leased it to the Michigan Central Railroad Company. The latter company at once completed the road to Niles, Michigan. In order now to get it to South Bend, a company was formed at the latter place, and organized under the name of the St. Joseph Valley Railway Company. The city of South Bend subscribed \$25,000 to the capital stock of the company in order to assist in building the road. An agreement was now made between the St. Joseph Valley Railway Company, and the Michigan Air Line Company to consolidate the two companies. In consideration of the St. Joseph Valley Railway Company transferring to the Air Line the amount subscribed to its capital stock, the Air Line agreed to build, equip and run the road to South Bend. This, too, was leased to the Michigan Central Railroad Company, who yet operate it. The road was completed to South Bend in the spring of 1870, and was the second road secured to the city.

While these operations were going on the people of Michigan undertook to build a parallel line from Port Huron, Michigan, by way of Flint, Lansing, Battle Creek, to the Indiana line in the direction of South Bend, with the expectation of its being extended through Indiana, the most feasible route to Chicago. To accomplish this a company was organized, under the name of Port Huron & Lake Michigan Railway Company, for the purpose of building a road from Port Huron to Flint, Michigan. Another company was organized at the same time, called the Peninsular Railway Company, to build a road from Lansing, Michigan, by way of Battle Creek, to the Indiana State line. In Indiana a company was organized to build a road from the point where the Michigan touched the State line, through the State by way of Mishawaka, South Bend and Valparaiso to the Illinois line, where it was to be completed, by a company formed in Illinois, to Chicago. These various companies were afterward all consolidated into one company under the name of the Chicago & Lake Huron Railway Company. Under this organization the road was built through, from Port Huron to Flint, and from Lansing to Valparaiso, Indiana.

In consequence of the hard times and other adverse circumstances the railway company was unable to pay its interest on its mortgaged road, and the road was therefore put in the hands of a receiver to run it in the interest of the mortgagees. While in the receiver's hands a company was organized called the Northeastern Railway Company, which built the line from Flint to Lansing, thereby making a through line as originally intended from Port Huron to Valparaiso.

The road was in the hands of the receiver until 1879, when the Grand Trunk Railway Company, of Canada, finally came to the conclusion they must be placed in better connection with Chicago; therefore an arrangement between that company and the bondholders of the Chicago & Lake Huron railroad was made by which the mortgages on the latter road were foreclosed and the road sold, the Grand Trunk Railway Company being the purchaser. A new company was now organized by the purchasers of the road under the name of the Chicago & Northwestern Grand Trunk Railway Company. Previous to this these parties had purchased about seventeen miles of a road running out from Chicago, and the whole was now united, forming a through line from Chicago to Port Huron, and on the 26th of March, 1880, all the companies were consolidated into one, which was called the Chicago & Grand Trunk Railway Company.

IF YOU HAVE ANY HISTORY OR PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE MICHIGAN AIR-LINE RAILROAD OR RAILWAY, PLEASE CONTACT US. WE WILL CONTINUE TO STRIVE TO IMPROVE OUR COLLECTION OF HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF OUR RAILROAD.