

David D. Law (1852 – 1916)

David D. Law was born on March 30, 1852, in Lebanon City, Pennsylvania, to William and Elizabeth Carmaney Law. His family likely moved to Illinois between David's birth and the birth of his brother, Augustus, in 1857. They settled in Stephenson County, Illinois, which is located north of Rockford.

Although it's unclear whether David's family moved directly to Bloomington, we know that three of his brothers lived in town and worked in transportation jobs. David and two of his brothers worked for the Bloomington and Normal Horse Railway, a form of public transportation where a horse pulled a streetcar. David's brother John was the superintendent, while David and Augustus worked as drivers. David was the only one to stay at the horse railway, while his brothers pursued other jobs.

David is best known for his 33 years of work with the Bloomington-Normal streetcar line. He was a reliable and calm driver, well-liked by passengers. He worked hard, often driving 15 round trips a day, totaling around 558,450 miles over 17 years. That's the equivalent of traveling around the Earth 23 times!

Life as a streetcar driver was tough. Drivers worked seven days a week, with long hours starting early in the morning and ending late at night. They got a few breaks during the day but made just enough money to get by, with new drivers earning \$40 a month and experienced drivers earning \$50.

David married Sarah Pratt on March 9, 1886, and they had two children, Ethel and Richard. Life as a driver was demanding, and David often spent little time with his family. To solve this, drivers arranged to take turns off every ten days so they could spend time with their wives and children.

David worked hard in all kinds of weather, from freezing temperatures to hot sun. He once said, "We literally earn our bread by the sweat of our brow." Despite the challenges, he was proud of his work and even had some moments of recognition. In 1879, he helped prevent a crash when a runaway horse and wagon collided with his car. In 1888, when his team of mules was frightened and ran off track, he managed to bring them to safety before the car and passengers fell into a nearby creek.

One of David's most memorable moments happened on August 31, 1903. The streetcar workers decided to celebrate when the electric power was turned off for maintenance. They decorated an old horse-drawn streetcar and took a ride, singing songs. David drove the mules around town, wearing the same cap he had worn in the early days of the horse-car service.

However, not all of David's career was without difficulty. On March 17, 1893, he was involved in a tragic accident. A young man named Harry Ryburn was thrown off his horse and into the path of David's streetcar, and David could not stop in time. Harry died from his injuries. While David was initially cleared of blame, the incident led to changes in the company's policies requiring a two-man crew to be working the car at all times (at the time of the accident there had been no driver and David was both collecting fares and driving). This led to David never driving an electric streetcar again.

In 1902, streetcar workers formed a union and fought for better wages and hours. When the company refused to agree, a strike began in January 1904. David was one of the workers who walked out. The strike was intense, with violence and clashes, but after seven months, the union gave up. The strike cost a lot of money, but David did not return to the streetcar company afterward.

David worked for the Illinois Central Railroad and later tried his hand at running his own business selling gas and coal oil, though it wasn't successful. He returned to the railroad before his death on March 27, 1916, after being sick for a few days. Many of his former colleagues came to pay their respects. David was buried next to his wife, Sarah, who had passed away in 1904, in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

David's obituary described him as a kind and well-liked man who was an important part of the community for over 30 years.