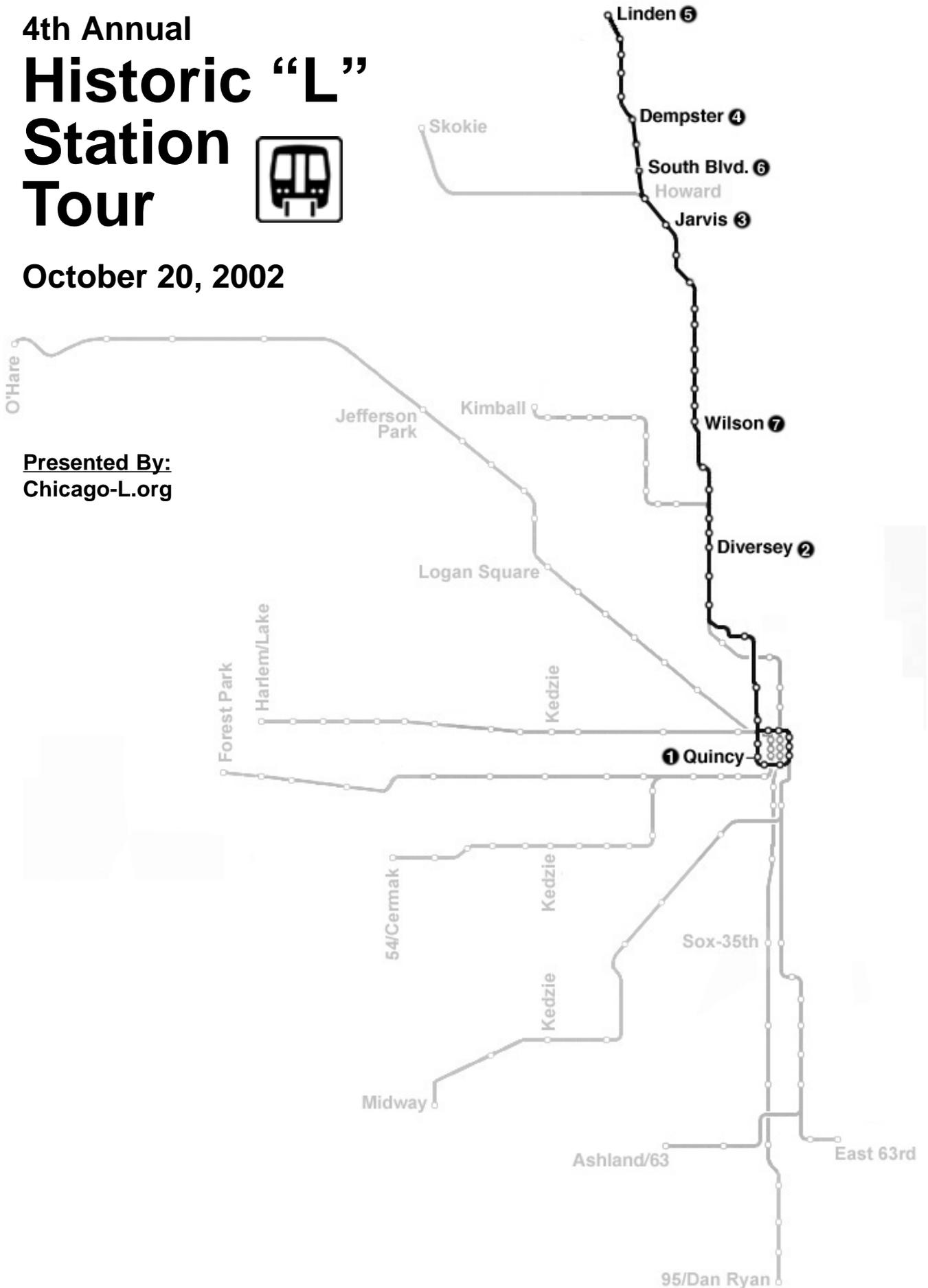


4th Annual Historic "L" Station Tour



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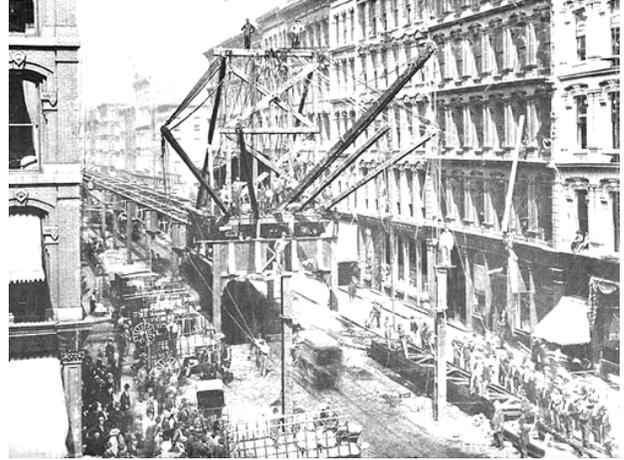




4th Annual Historic "L" Station Tour Guide

Union Loop

When the tour begins at Quincy station downtown, you will find yourself on the old Union Elevated Railroad, commonly known as "the Loop." The only man who could accomplish the difficult task of bringing a common downtown terminal to the Chicago elevated rapid transit system, which used to end at a separate terminal for each company, was Charles Tyson Yerkes. He had enough political deftness and power to convince store owners to sign consent forms allowing construction of the overhead structures on their streets (although alley routes were briefly contemplated). Though it was difficult — two segments had to be obtained under the names of existing "L" companies while for the two other legs, two companies, the Union Elevated Railroad and the Union Consolidated Elevated Railroad, had to be created — Yerkes managed to coordinate it all. As can be imagined from its piecemeal method of obtaining of leases, the Union Loop (referred to simply as "the Loop" today) opened in pieces, starting in 1895, with the Lake Street "L" making the first full circuit in 1897.



The construction of the Loop through downtown, seen here looking west at Lake and Wabash circa 1894, was a major construction project. In spite of the disruption, the project brought innumerable benefits to the central business district. *(Photo from the Krambles-Peterson Archive)*

North Side Main Line/Ravenswood Line

After leaving the Loop through Tower 18 (at Lake & Wells), once the busiest railroad junction in the world, you will be on what is today the Brown (Ravenswood) Line. Before the construction of the subways, the section between the Loop and Armitage was the only elevated connection to downtown from the North Side. This route was the last leg of the elevated structure to be built, constructed by the Northwestern Elevated Railroad Company. The company, backed by transit magnate Yerkes, was incorporated in 1893, but didn't begin full service until 1900 due to more financial and legal difficulties than any other company had experienced. When opened, the Northwestern "L" wound northward from Tower 18 to a terminal at Wilson Avenue.

The route went through a number of growing communities with many potential "L" passengers, though the area



The Sedgwick station, seen here in May 1955, is typical of the Northwestern Elevated's original dual-island platform express/local stations. This view looks east on the inbound platform. The station is still in use, although the outside tracks are out of service, so it functions more or less as a local stop. *(Photo from the Chicago Transit Authority Collection)*

by Wilson station and northward was still largely open prairie. From Tower 18 to Chicago Avenue, the route has only two tracks, but north of Chicago Avenue widens to four tracks. This four track main line allowed the Northwestern to be the only elevated in Chicago to offer true express/local service. As the route ran over city streets south of Chicago Avenue, the city would only allow two tracks, a situation that would create a serious bottleneck.

After the State Street Subway was opened in 1943, the section of the North Side Main Line between the subway portal at Armitage and Tower 18 was downgraded to far fewer trains. After the CTA reorganized service in 1949, only Ravenswood trains used the line with any regularity, along with Evanston

Expresses at rush hour and North Shore Line interurbans until 1963. The four-track section north of Armitage remained as busy as ever, however, and with the CTA's increases in Brown Line service over the last few years, the section south of Armitage has seen a resurrection in usage.

North Side Main Line/Howard Line

As noted above, when the North Side Main Line entered service in 1900 under the Northwestern Elevated Railroad, it was able to operate separated express and local service. This is evident north of Armitage, where some stations have dual side platforms on the outside of the outer two tracks, while others have dual island platforms between the inner and outer tracks. Originally, the former served the locals (which ran on the outside tracks) and the latter served expresses. Today, the formers serve the Brown Line (south of Clark Junction), while the Red Line has taken the place of the expresses. The headhouses in this stretch were all largely the same, designed by architect William Gibb in an Italianate-influenced Neoclassical style, while the platforms had hipped-roof canopies with intricate latticed ironwork typical of the Victorian industrial construction of the period. The Diversey stop is representative of these stations.



A southbound Jackson Park train of 1200-series wooden cars passes through Granville Interlocking in this view looking north from Granville station. The section of the North Side Main Line between Wilson and Howard was expanded into a four-track line when it was elevated onto a solid-fill embankment. *(Photo from the Bruce Moffat Collection)*

When the Northwestern Elevated entered service in 1900, the line extended only as far north as Wilson Avenue. The Wilson terminal was originally an impressive two-level complex. To maximize storage space, a four-track shop building and yard were constructed on the elevated structure, with another yard tucked away underneath and two long ramps connecting the “upper” and “lower” yards. At the beginning, the station platforms were on the upper level and two of these platforms remain today (only one is in service). As early as 1902, plans were developed to terminate some rush hour trains at an auxiliary station facility in the lower yard. This plan was not implemented until 1907, when a small stucco station house was built. “Lower Wilson” opened on March 5, 1907. The Lower Wilson station was closed in 1949 and the Wilson shops fell pray to a spectacular fire on October 26, 1996. The station remains, however, with two of the three the original platforms and an ornate Beaux-Arts station house designed by Arthur Gerber and built in 1923 for both the “L” and the North Shore Line interurban. In 1959-60, the facility was reconfigured to relieve congestion, with a platform constructed an industrial spur to the west, for which a connection back to main line south of Wilson was constructed. The west track of the former-four track line through the station, last used by North Shore Line trains, was removed. When completed, there were four tracks through Wilson served by four platforms, allowing for smoother operation without switching delays. We will return to this station later in the tour.

Shortly following the construction of the Ravenswood branch in 1907, the Northwestern looked to another of its franchise extension options, continuation of the main line north to the city limits at Howard. The Northwestern’s original 50-year franchise, granted by the Chicago City Council in January 1894, had included the stipulation that service to Howard was to be started within ten years or stiff financial penalties would be levied against the company. Clearly by 1904, no Howard extension existed, though the company had apparently dodged the penalties. Still, that franchise stipulation loomed over the company. So, in 1908, the Northwestern extended north not only to Howard but clear through to the north side of suburban Evanston at Central Avenue by electrifying the tracks of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway, a steam-powered commuter line that had never seen very profitable commuter traffic.

Service was extended north of Wilson to Central Avenue on May 16, 1908 over the electrified St. Paul tracks. New high-level platforms and small wooden station houses were built to replace the St. Paul’s stations at Argyle, Edgewater (Bryn Mawr), North Edgewater (Granville), Hayes (Loyola), Rogers Park (Morse), Birchwood (Jarvis), Calvary, Main, Dempster, Davis, Noyes, and Central. Additional stations were added over time, including Howard

on the city limits shortly after on August 23, 1908, Foster Street in Evanston on January 6, 1909, Thorndale Avenue in 1915 and Edgewater Beach (Berwyn) circa 1918.

Chicago authorized the electrification of the steam railroad tracks from Irving Park Road to Howard, but unlike Evanston did not require grade-separation (more on this later). They did, however, prohibit the use of third rail on the surface-level trackage (even though it was used on the ground elsewhere in the city, including on the Northwestern's own Ravenswood branch). Work quickly began to realign the tracks and string up overhead for the Northwestern, who had to retrofit all of their trains with trolley poles for the new service.

In the mid-1910s, the Northwestern began to elevate the tracks north of Wilson. Work was slow due to the city's refusal to close intersecting streets and the narrow width of the right-of-way. In early 1916, trains were moved onto a temporary trestle, but construction of a permanent embankment had to wait until the end of World War I due to a materials shortage. By early 1922, the new four track mainline was completed, allowing full express service to the city limits. It was during this elevation process that the current stations north of Wilson on the Red Line were built. All stations in this stretch were designed to be local stations, with expresses zipping all the way non-stop to Howard on the outside tracks. (Note that this is a reverse of how the locals and expresses were arranged on the four tracks south of Wilson, one of several causes of a severe bottleneck at Wilson station.) The station houses were designed in a Prairie School-influenced style, designed by architect Charles P. Rawson. It is constructed of concrete, brick and stone and is typical of a number of stations designed by Rawson for the elevated.

Evanston Line

In March 1907, the Evanston City Council approved the electrification of the St. Paul's tracks through their city, but also stipulated that that the ground-level tracks had to be elevated between the city limits at Howard and University Place, just north of downtown, by the end of 1910. Construction of the embankment between Howard Street and University Place required by the City of Evanston's franchise began at the end of October 1908 and was largely completed by the end of 1910, as required. Concurrent with the elevation, new, permanent stations were built at Calvary, Main, Dempster, and Davis. These all consisted of dual side platforms on the embankment and brick, Georgian Revival-influenced station houses at street level.

By 1912, the Northwestern had outgrown its terminal at Central Street, Evanston. There were also new riders to be had in the nearby suburb to the north, Wilmette. In February 1912, Northwestern President Britton I. Budd notified Wilmette officials of his extension intentions and opposition quickly developed. On the night of April 1st, a construction crew entered the site of the proposed Linden Avenue terminal under the cover of darkness and built a half car-long platform east of 4th Avenue. Wilmette residents awoke to rapid transit service. The "L" quickly became popular and somehow, legal challenges failed to halt service. A permanent Linden Avenue station was opened on November 8, 1913.

The rest of the Evanston Line from downtown to Central Avenue was also eventually elevated starting in the late 1920s. Work was slow and was not completed until 1931. A permanent station house and platform was built at this time at Central, though Noyes and Foster got only permanent platforms with temporary station houses. Although station houses were designed, they have yet to be built. In the same year, a new station opened at South Boulevard, executed in the same Beaux-Arts style designed by Arthur Gerber at Central on the same line, replacing the station at Calvary.



This view looking north from Dempster station after a spring rain on May 1, 1964 shows the typical environment of the Evanston Line in south Evanston, which was elevated in 1908-10. The city has a relatively high density here, but the openness still conveys a bucolic suburban setting. *(Photo from the Chicago Transit Authority Collection)*



4th Annual

Historic “L” Station Roster



Quincy ①

Location: 220 S. Wells Street

Date in Service: 1897

Built By: Union Elevated Railroad

Current Line: Orange Line (Midway), Brown Line (Ravenswood), Purple Line (Evanston Express)



Diversey ②

Location: 940-44 W. Diversey Avenue

Date in Service: 1900

Built By: Northwestern Elevated Railroad

Current Line: Brown Line (Ravenswood), Purple Line (Evanston Express)



Jarvis ③

Location: 1523-25 W. Jarvis Street

Date in Service: 1921 (stop established in 1908)

Built By: Northwestern Elevated Railroad

Current Line: Red Line (Howard)



Dempster ④

Location: 1316 Sherman Avenue

Date in Service: 1910 (stop established in 1908)

Built By: Northwestern Elevated Railroad

Current Line: Purple Line (Evanston)



Linden 5

Location: 349 Linden Avenue

Date in Service: 1913, added to in 1917,
replaced by new facility in 1993

(stop established in 1912)

Built By: Northwestern Elevated Railroad

Current Line: Purple Line (Evanston)



South Boulevard 6

Location: 349 Linden Avenue

Date in Service: 1931

Built By: Chicago Rapid Transit Co.

Current Line: Purple Line (Evanston)



Wilson 7

Location: 4620 N. Broadway

Date in Service: 1923 (stop established in 1900)

Built By: Northwestern Elevated Railroad

Current Line: Red Line (Howard)

For more information about the “L”, visit <http://www.Chicago-L.org>

All photos by Graham Garfield, except as follows:

Photos of Dempster and South Boulevard, Courtesy of the Chicago Transit Authority