

# HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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## Barberton Era Railroads

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Cleveland, Akron, and Columbus Railroad Station in Barberton

As early as the mid-1820s, Ohio residents, particularly those in towns without access to canals, advocated for the construction of railroad lines throughout the state. These lines would allow faster travel and shipping. The first railroad completed in Ohio was the Erie & Kalamazoo Railroad in 1836. It connected the 33 miles between Toledo and Adrian, Michigan and took three hours to travel.

Despite interest and support of railroads in Ohio, little construction had occurred by 1840 because of an economic downturn. However, as the economy grew stronger, building began; and, by 1850, the Ohio legislature had chartered 76 railroad companies. Many of these early railroads stayed within the state or only extended a short distance into neighboring states. The first railroad that truly began to connect Ohio with the rest of the nation was the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which reached Ohio in the mid-1850s.

After the Civil War, Ohio enjoyed major growth in railroad lines. Larger, multi-state railroad companies began purchasing and joining shorter lines together to

create a more integrated railroad system. By 1899, Ohio had nearly 8,800 miles of main line road and 4,600 miles of additional tracks, totaling more than 13,000 miles. At this time, 5,400 locomotives were running, consuming nearly four million tons of coal a year.

Prior to Barberton's founding, two early railroads extended southwest from Akron, parallel to the Ohio and Erie Canal, toward the new city—the New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio and the Cleveland, Akron and Columbus. At the time of Barberton's founding there were five lines operating in the city: the New York, Lake Erie, and Western (Erie); Cleveland, Akron, and Columbus (CA&C); Baltimore and Ohio (B&O); Pittsburgh and Western; and Akron and Chicago Junction. As time passed, the railroads grew and adapted to changing needs.

The Barberton Belt Line Railroad Company opened on July 12, 1892. The freight line was built to accommodate the many new factories in Barberton. The first priority of the line was to serve Barber's American Strawboard factory in New Portage.

Streetcars began running in Barberton in 1895. On the first street car's inaugural day, free trips were offered to the community. Streetcars provided a primary means of local transport and travel to neighboring cities for many Barberton residents who preferred the cleanliness of the streetcars over the dirty, sooty coal operated railroads.

The decline of the railroads began in the 1950s and 1960s when the trucking industry grew extensively. Automobiles and passenger airlines became more accessible for American people, taking passengers away from railroad lines. Today, the railroads still provide freight shipping for many industries, but passenger rails have never regained popularity.

