

## BY THE WAY with BILL HENRY

It's really too bad that Lucius Beebe, a career-man professional mourner at the passing of the good old days of rail-roading, can't be present today for the final trip down the Airline run of the Pacific Electric. Lucius would love it.

**NOSTALGIA** — A lot of us who don't make a business of bemoaning the ruthless course of progress will stop today for a quiet mixture of laughter and tears over the final run of this Toonerville Trolley which, until today, defied the streamlining process as it meandered through back yards and byways one round trip a day between downtown Los Angeles and Santa Monica. The Airline run was established in 1875 when there was open country for miles from the center of this pueblo of not too many thousand inhabitants to the Pacific shore. In those days Santa Monica was considered the most likely site for a harbor serving Southern California and the Airline run was considered the most direct route. But the "short line" to Venice and the run via Beverly Hills took over most of the business and for many years one trolley a day has made the Airline trip and maintained the franchise.

**SCHEDULE**—One clubby little band of passengers has stuck with the Airline, riding it in to work in the morning and back home in the evening and the demise of the life seems like the passing of an old friend to them. After today Motorman Lane will no longer toot his whistle for "regulars" who lingered too long over their coffee and Conductor Cookie Koch will not have to scramble off the rear platform into little telephone booths at various stops to telephone ahead to see if the line is clear. It was a handy little trip if you happened to be able to fit yourself to its schedule and among the mourners at the passing of the Airline they'll have to include some like Donald Douglas and myself whose connection with the Airline was brief, and a long time back.

**HISTORY**—There was a period, back in the early 20s, when the now-mighty Douglas Aircraft Co. consisted of a handful of people sweating away on a three-plane government contract in what had been a construction shed on the grounds of the newly built Goodyear Tire factory out Florence Ave. way. Douglas, with half a dozen helpers, had built the first plane for his embryo company in a loft in downtown Los Angeles and had taken The Cloudster out to the now completely built-up area which was the site of the Goodyear blimp hangar. He got a contract for three planes for the United States Navy and built them in the Goodyear construction shed and, meanwhile, commuted back and forth between his "factory" and his home in Santa Monica on the old PE Airline.

**AVIATION**—The airplane business didn't amount to much in those days and there just wasn't any such thing as an airplane in the modern sense, even though a little mail was being carried between some cities. Doug and I, as we rode down to the beach on the perhaps prophetically named Airline those late afternoons, used to speculate about the possibilities of commercial aviation and contrast our dreams with the go-as-you-please operation of the earth-bound transportation which was taking us home. Our use of the PE's Airline didn't last very long. Another contract called for a bigger factory and Douglas found an old abandoned movie studio down on Wilshire Blvd. in Santa Monica, now the site of a park, and for a few years—beginning with the Douglas Round-the-World planes of 1924—the company grew there before moving to its present site at Clover Field.

**OPPORTUNITY**—Anyhow, inexorable progress has eliminated the Santa Monica Airline and a Lucius Beebe might wax very indignant over the substitution of motor busses for the traditional trolleys if he were only here to extol the glories of the old interurban. Lucius has a very low boiling point on such matters. Anyone who could denounce the diesel locomotive as "unspeakable" and "an automotive nastiness breathing foulness while steamed in a tin can" ought to be able to work up a pretty ferocious outburst over the sad fate which has befallen the colorful, clanging, casual Santa Monica Airline.

Hear Bill Henry Monday  
through Friday. KFI. 6:55 p.m.