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2018 NAPC Preservation Excellence Awards

Submission deadline: February 23, 2018

Project Illinois Prairie Path Historic Railroad Sign Project
 Commission The Lombard Historic Preservation Commission
 Commission Address 25 E. Maple Street
 City, State, Zip Lombard, IL 60148
 Community population 44,000 No. of designated properties 5
 Certified local government: Yes No Year landmarks ordinance adopted 1969
 No. of commission staff persons: None Part-time 1 Full-time 1 part time staff, 11 volunteers
 Commission Contact Person/Title Lyn Myers, Commission Secretary
 Phone Number 630-267-4464 Email Myersschiewe@sbcglobal.net

Award Category (choose one: 'Best Practices' or 'Commission of the Year'):

- Best Practices (choose subcategory):
- Identification/Registration
 - Protection
 - Public Outreach/Advocacy
 - Technology
- Commission of the Year

Nominated by Lyn Myers
 Address 25 E. Maple St.
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Payment (\$25.00): Check (payable to NAPC) Credit card no. 5117862011761550
 Cardholder Lynette A Myers
 Visa Mastercard Expiration 11/19
 Signature [Signature]

Release Authorization: The undersigned hereby acknowledges and accepts the terms and conditions of this Call for Nomination for the NAPC Commission Excellence Awards.

Signature of Nominator: [Signature] Date Feb 15, 2018

2018 NAPC Commission Excellence Award Nomination
Best Practices - Public Outreach
The Lombard Historic Preservation Commission, Lombard Illinois

The Illinois Prairie Path Historic Railroad Sign Project

The arrival of the railroad in 1848 cemented the future of the Village of Lombard. Currently, its 44,000 residents live twenty miles due west of Chicago. Eventually, three different sets of tracks would traverse the Village. One of those, the Chicago Aurora and Elgin was an electric commuter and light freight line.

The Illinois Railway Museum likens the development of yesterday's railroads to the introduction of today's personal computer. The pace of change brought about by the train and its impact on the daily routines of life advanced at a breakneck speed, transforming open prairie and independent farming communities into suburban landscapes.

When service began in 1902, the Chicago Aurora & Elgin electric line was considered the single most progressive and innovative interurban railway in the history of the industry. It served the western suburbs of Chicago for over 5 decades and could carry 100,000 passengers a day. On July 3, 1957, all train service on the line permanently ended without prior notice to the public. In Sept of 1963, author and naturalist May Theilgaard Watts wrote to the Chicago Tribune advocating that the abandoned Chicago Aurora & Elgin right of way be turned into a public path. The Illinois Prairie path, now a 61-mile public nature trail, lies on the former right of way for the Chicago Aurora & Elgin electric railroad.

The Lombard Historic Preservation Commission worked for four years to create and install 4 educational signs along a 1.5-mile section of the Prairie Path in Lombard. Each sign corresponds to the location of a train stop in Lombard. The history of the CA&E rail line gives readers a chance to see the importance of connecting people, homes and businesses through innovation, determination and hard work. The four new signs along the Path are excellent examples of Best Practices in Public Outreach as they tell that story.

Originality and Innovation (Unique Strategies/activities)

- The project added a new location of historic focus outside the downtown area, increasing geographic and demographic reach.
- The use of QR codes on the signs gives moving readers a chance to photograph the sign with a smartphone and consume the information later.

- QR codes allow for supporting interpretive information to be refreshed at any time.
- The signs brand the section of the trail as part of the Village of Lombard.

Transferability as a model for other commissions (Serves as a model)

- Utilizing smart phone applications and social media help attract newer, younger audiences and in this case, an audience that may be moving running or biking. QR codes can be used in almost any interpretive setting.
- Illinois Prairie Path Board member Ken McClurg wrote “Because of the high use, these strategic signs acknowledging the historical significance of the Aurora & Elgin system, provide a desirable, initial framework for other communities to follow. In fact, members of the Illinois Prairie Path Board are currently reviewing elements of these signs for the development of 4 generic yet historically significant path sites for other sections of the 61-mile Illinois Prairie Path.”
- Signage is an option in almost every interpretive situation. This well-designed signage is a standout and a template for others.

Comprehensiveness, excellence and degree of difficulty (Challenges)

- Research for station specific content and photographs was difficult, taking almost 2 ½ years to complete.
- Creating high quality digital reproductions of old photographs for signage was a technical challenge.
- Village of Lombard staff worked to obtain permits and permissions required from the County Division of Transportation. This effort involved aerial photos, photographing potential sign locations, detailed measurements, right of way assessments, correspondence and months of follow up. New signage permits from the County were obtained. Communication with the Illinois Prairie Path board was also crucial as work with the county proceeded.
- Large, colorful signs with engaging images draw attention and offer alternatives for absorption to a crowd that can be out for a leisurely stroll or moving at a good clip.

Impact and Results: (Impact)

- The Prairie Path provides an opportunity to reach new non-Lombard audiences and share history information in areas of town that are not typically thought of as having interesting history.
- According to the Illinois Prairie Path Corporation there is no busier section of the Path and 2002 data indicates the path is used by 122,000 individuals every year.
- The use of QR codes provides usage metrics for future planning.
- The new signs along the one and half mile section of trail distinguish Lombard from other towns that Prairie Path users travel through.



January 19, 2018

National Alliance of Preservation Commissions
PO Box 1011
Virginia Beach, VA 2345

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure that we write this letter in support of the Lombard Historic Preservation Commission's Illinois Prairie Path Historic Railroad Sign Project.

Illinois Prairie Path Background

Heralded as the first successful rail-trail conversion in the United States, the 62-mile Illinois Prairie Path laid a national blueprint for other rail conversions. The closure of the former Chicago, Aurora, and Elgin Railway, which ended operations in 1961, provides the foundation of much of the current Illinois Prairie Path system. The Illinois Prairie Path spans Cook, DuPage and Kane Counties in the western Chicago metropolitan area. Further, the Lombard Historic Preservation Commission's sign project underscores our mission:

To preserve, enhance, and advocate on behalf of the Illinois Prairie Path for current and future generations.

These signs not only document historically significant events related to the Aurora and Elgin Railway presence in Lombard, but they also provide a fascinating historical reminder to the estimated 122,000 Prairie Path users.

Transferability

Interestingly, there are few signs on this 62 mile stretch that document the Rails-to-Trails history as the 4 signs developed by the Lombard Historic Preservation Commission have done. In fact, recently the Illinois Prairie Path has initiated similar signage documenting dynamic volunteer involvement in the "rail to trail" conversion over 40 years ago. The Lombard Commission signs are being used as a model for this project.

The following elements of the Lombard Historic Preservation Commission's signs serve as exemplars for other communities:

1. The signs provide a clear, historical context for this most traveled section of the Illinois Prairie Path.
2. They are spaced in a way that actually invites path users to read them.
3. They inform Lombard residents and other path users of relevant historical information about the earlier railroad system.

4. And, indirectly, these signs could engender community pride, and perhaps the desire to highlight other historically significant sites in neighboring communities.

Advocacy on behalf of local historic preservation/historic resource

These strategic signs, acknowledging the historical significance of the Aurora and Elgin rail system, also provide a desirable, initial framework for other communities to follow based on the following:

1. Sign locations are directly related to their geographic and historical prominence.
2. Sign design is consistent and well thought out.
3. Common sign elements are easily recognizable including:
 - Carefully selected era-specific photos (1-2 maximum)
 - Graphics (e.g. sample train tickets & schedules)
4. Sign text is limited, yet very specific
5. Sign size is large enough to attract path users plus text is not too dense and chosen length is very appropriate considering varied path use.

Again, we acknowledge the Lombard Historic Commission's exceptional work in documenting the historical significance of our local rail-to-trail movement. Plus, we support its work in providing a viable model for other communities to follow especially within the Illinois Prairie Path community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "E Spande". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Erik Spande, President
Illinois Prairie Path Corporation

February 7, 2018

Dear National Alliance of Preservation Commissions:

We strongly support the Lombard Historical Preservation Commission's application for the NAPC Best Practices-Public Outreach and Advocacy award.

The Preservation Commission's four-year-long dedication to the signage project demonstrates a commitment to bring historic context and fascinating details directly to the public. Alongside descriptive text, the photographs on each sign make our village history even more tangible. Lombard is the only stretch of the 61-mile Prairie Path to have informational signage.

The four new panels along the Illinois Prairie Path bring unique history to the more than 120,000 bikers, walkers, and runners who use the path annually. The information brings back fond memories for the residents born while the electric Chicago Aurora & Elgin (CA&E) train was transporting commuters to Chicago. For younger trail users, it provides context and excitement about our shared past.

The well-planned placement of the four signs adds weight to the information – each sign is placed at the location of a former CA&E train stop in Lombard. The new panels include photos of each station and surrounding areas, bringing history even closer to us. We frequently notice people stopping to read the signs to learn more about our community. For example, a photo on the Stewart Station panel shows a house that still stands. Because of the clever sign placement, a viewer can read the sign, look up, and see that exact house!

Regarding transferability, the concept of historic signage along the Prairie Path can be duplicated in any town, allowing other communities to further engage residents and path users. Why stop at the Prairie Path? Historic signage can be added to any rails-to-trails or canal trails around the country.

Part of the Lombard Historical Society's mission is to promote Lombard's history. The Lombard Historical Preservation Commission's signage project meets that goal in a unique, exciting, and highly visible way.

We are thrilled with the signage project, and strongly support the Commission's application for the Public Outreach and Advocacy award.

Sincerely,



Leslie Sulla, President
Lombard Historical Society



Sarah Richardt, Executive Director
Lombard Historical Society



**LOMBARD
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

23 West Maple Street
Lombard, Illinois 60148

630.629.1885

www.LombardHistory.org

*The Lombard Historical Society
is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization.*



Jane Charmelo

out & about

Honoring the legacy of former CA&E Railroad

Jack Jones remembers when train fare was around a dime, and that the Chicago Aurora & Elgin train went all the way to Wells Street in Chicago, where one could then take an el train to the Loop.

The era of that third-rail train sprouting from the far west and tunneling in Wheaton to carry travelers to Chicago is long gone, but the Lombard Historic Preservation Commission is giving it some new life.

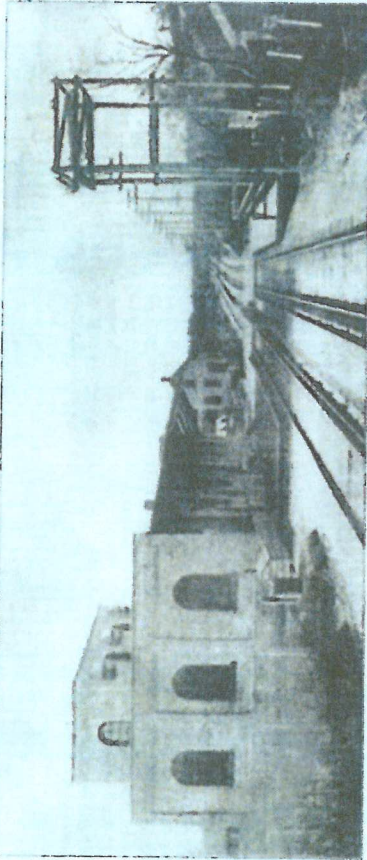
That CA&E line is now the Illinois Prairie Path, and the commission has been working for a number of years to get some recognition for its local significance, according to commission President Rita Schneider.

She credits Jones for coming up with the idea to place signs along the train stops. He said simply how he thought it would be a nice idea "to tell them [path users] why it came about."

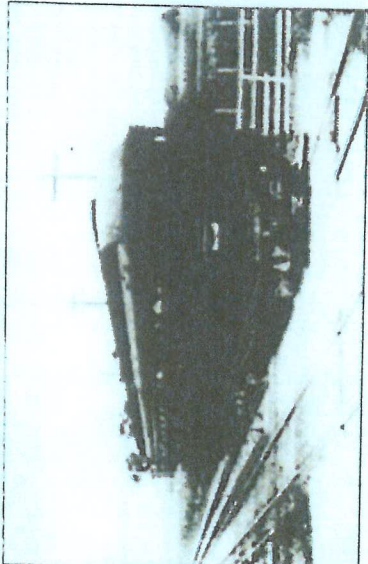
Greatthrdrail.org, which is dedicated to the now-defunct railroad line, shows that a "syndicate" called Everett-Moore incorporated the Aurora and Chicago Railway Company and the Elgin and Chicago Railway Company in 1899, after which the Chicago, Wheaton and Aurora Railroad Company was incorporated by a competing syndicate named Poncey-Mandefraum.

Not long after, the Aurora, Wheaton and Chicago Railway Company was incorporated into the Everett-Moore syndicate.

In the early 1900s, municipalities east of Wheaton began granting franchises to the various railway companies that had formed, and trains began running in the early 1900s.



IMAGES COURTESY OF RITA SCHNEIDER, LOMBARDIAN/VILLA PARK REVIEW
The Lombard Historic Preservation Commission has worked for a few years now to get signage along Lombard's section of the Illinois Prairie Path, in honor of its former life as part of the Chicago Aurora and Elgin Railroad. In the top photo is the Main Street Station, facing west. The bottom photo shows a train at the Stewart Avenue stop. On Friday, April 28, a recognition ceremony will be held at Main Street



wanted to get on the train. In the early days, though, there were no gates to stop vehicles from crossing the tracks, such as on Main Street, although he remembers there being a stoplight there.

Jones and others who lived in Lombard in 1943 also remember how dangerous the third rail could be, saying, "It was kind of a knowledge you shouldn't touch it."

A young boy named Harvey Rechssteiner was crossing the tracks near Brewster and slipped.

A slightly older boy, Jerry Curtis, came to his rescue by grabbing onto the back of Rechssteiner's jacket, yanking him away from certain electrocution. Rechssteiner suffered burns

outside of Lombard, actually," such as to the Illinois Railway Museum in Union, and the Villa Park Historical Society, she mentioned.

"There were all kinds of obstacles," Schneider recalled, from getting permission to use materials to locating the owner of a "great photo" of the CA&E.

Eileen Mueller, head of the Local Landmarks Committee, echoed Schneider in saying that the process took a number of years to complete—researching and looking for photos to include on the signs.

"It took as a long time," she said with a chuckle, adding that the researchers faced some challenges, including getting permission to reprint items for the signs.

She commended Carl Lantz from the Strayhorn Library at the Illinois Railway Museum for providing information for the research, adding that the Village of Lombard was also very helpful.

Members of the Local Landmarks Committee who also worked on the project include Tom Fetters, Jones, Marcy Novak and Jennifer Henaghan.

Preservation commission members include Richard Anstee, Lyn Myers, Brigitte O'Brien, Patricia Postocil, Stephanie Zabela and village staff liaison Tami Urish.

Other contributors to the sign project include Jean Cooper and Sarah Richard from the Lombard Historical Society; the Illinois Prairie Path Board; Carl Goldsmith from public works; the village's division of planning service and department of community development; and

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road Company was incorporated by a competing syndicate named Pomeroy-Mandelbaum.

Not long after, the Aurora, Wheaton and Chicago Railway Company was incorporated into the Everett-Moore syndicate.

In the early 1900s, municipalities east of Wheaton began granting franchises to the various railway companies that had formed, and trains began running in the early 1900s—such as the Batavia branch in 1902 and the Elgin branch in 1903.

According to *greatthailand.org*, Lombard's Main Street, Westmore Avenue and Stewart Avenue stops opened in 1902, while Green Valley (originally called the West Lombard Station near Brewster) opened in 1904.

Eventually a number of train lines were consolidated until in 1922 the Third Rail Division of the Aurora Elgin & Chicago Railroad was reorganized as the Chicago Aurora & Elgin railroad.

According to information from the Lombard Historic Preservation Commission, the railroad had 33 miles of track, powered by an electrified third rail, and service to the Loop opened in 1905.

The Main Street Station contained one of the railroad's first electrical substations that powered the third rail.

The Westmore Station was a "flag stop" and a wooden station was built



during the 1930s when Lombard's population began to expand. There was no ticket agent but a nearby hardware store owner became an authorized ticket agent.

The Green Valley Station was so named after a book written by Lombard author Katherine Reynolds. It had two small wooden shelters on either side of Brewster Avenue. This stop had no ticket agent and was also a flag stop, served by local trains.

The CA&E could transport as many as 100,000 passengers each day, according to the commission, but was losing \$2,000 a day.

Passenger service came to an end on July 3, 1957; freight service was suspended June 10, 1959; and July 6, 1961, the CA&E was abandoned at 5 p.m., according to *greatthailand.org*.

The historic preservation commission notes that the DuPage County Highway Commission purchased the abandoned track bed in 1965, giving Lombard a 2.75-mile strip of the Illinois Prairie Path.

Lombard in 1943 also remember how dangerous the third rail could be, saying, "It was kind of a knowledge you shouldn't touch it."

A young boy named Harvey Rechsneider was crossing the tracks near Brewster and slipped.

A slightly older boy, Jerry Curtis, came to his rescue by grabbing onto the back of Rechsneider's jacket, yanking him away from certain electrocution. Rechsneider suffered burns and was hospitalized for his injuries. Schneider said the idea of commemorating Lombard's portion of the CA&E was brought about because "The Chicago Aurora and Elgin was really a vital part of Lombard."

The signs are based on the historical significance of the Chicago Aurora and Elgin. There's quite a bit to say about the railroad itself," she added.

When Jones planted the seeds of an idea to place signage at the four stops, the commission president reminded said, "Boy, that's really a good idea."

"We started researching what we would have to do... laws and regulations we'd have to put up with," she continued.

That meant also working with the DuPage County Prairie Path Authority and looking into sign businesses, Schneider added.

As it turned out, "We had to go

Myers, Brigitte O'Brien, Patricia Poskocil, Stephanie Zabala and village staff liaison Tami Urish.

Other contributors to the sign project include Jean Cooper and Sarah Richard from the Lombard Historical Society; the Illinois Prairie Path Board; Carl Goldsmith from public works; the village's division of planning service and department of community development; and Serge Ruffolo, Western Romac Inc.

Schneider and Mueller also commended Randall Bullen of Randall Bullen Photography in Lombard, who worked to enhance the photo images.

"He cleaned up the pictures. They really came out nice," Mueller praised.

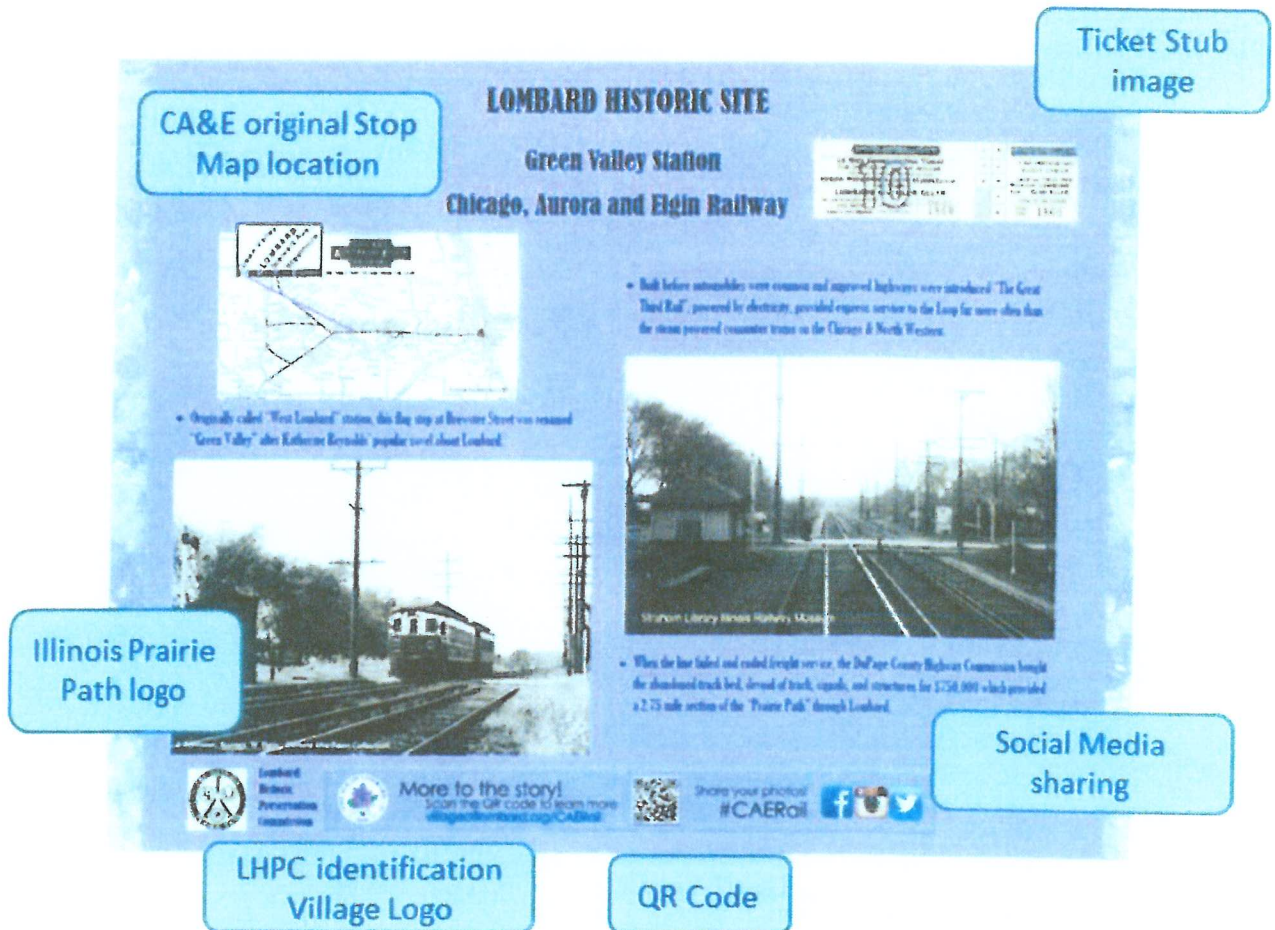
Now that the work is behind them and having signage installed is on the horizon, "It's just a thrill to know we have this done," Mueller said. "I'm delighted we have accomplished it."

"I love anything that keeps history in Lombard," Mueller emphasized. "The fact that it [CA&E] went through Lombard..."

The Local Landmarks Committee will hold a recognition ceremony Friday, April 28, at 10 a.m. at the southeast corner of Main Street and the Illinois Prairie Path, followed by light refreshments at the Carriage House behind the Victorian Cottage.


For more information about the CA&E Railway, visit www.villageoflombard.org/CAERail.

The Illinois Prairie Path Historic Sign Project - Supporting Images




Green Valley Station Sign: Each of the four signs were formatted using the elements highlighted in the blue boxes to provide continuity.

LOMBARD HISTORIC SITE

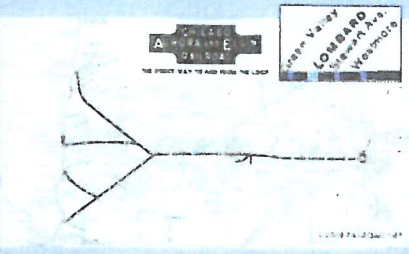


Main Street Station Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railway





Lombard Historical Society

- The first service began on August 25, 1902 and ended on July 3, 1957.
- This railway was heralded by the trade press as the greatest single advance in the industry.




- The Lombard Main Street Station had a full waiting room and a ticket agent. The building also housed a substation for supplying 600 volt DC power it tapped down from the high voltage AC lines on power poles. Unlike traditional trolley lines, the mainline was powered by the third rail.





- All trains passing through Lombard stopped at Main Street, except the "Cassmohll". In the 1940's, a mid-day Limited ran the full twenty miles from Chicago to Lombard in 35 minutes with only a few stops.




Lombard Historic Preservation Commission

More to the story!


Scan the QR code to learn more

villageoflombard.org/CAERail



Share your photos

#CAERail

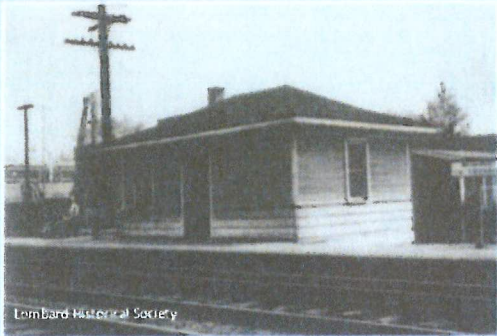
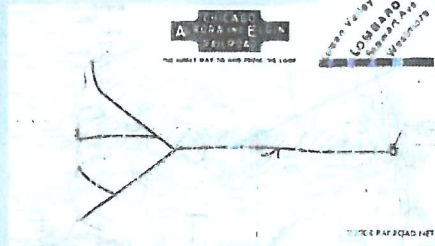


Main Street Sign image. Photograph of the sign placement to the right of the covered Illinois Prairie Path map.



LOMBARD HISTORIC SITE

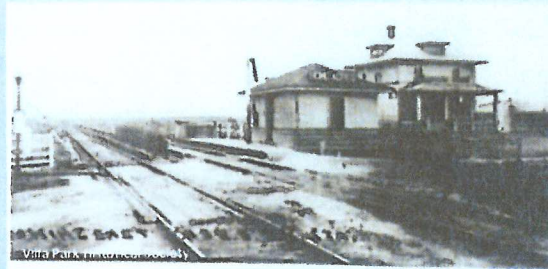
Westmore Station Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railway



Lombard Historical Society

- The Westmore Station opened here in the prairie land east of the Village of Lombard in 1902.
- The railroad in the early days had milk trains, outbound newspaper trains, and some Parlor Car service. By the 1930's, there were Express trains, Limiteds, and Locals making all stops.
- Construction of the Eisenhower Expressway caused railway patronage to rapidly decline, ending five decades of excellent service in 1957.

- About 1910, Home Acres began to sell property south of the tracks to Chicagoans looking to leave the city. Train tickets were sold by an authorized agent at the nearby hardware store.



Lombard
Historic
Preservation
Commission



More to the story!
Scan the QR code to learn more
www.lombard.org/CAERail



Share your photos!
#CAERail



Westmore Station Sign: The eastern most sign along the path looking west toward what is now the Village of Lombard.