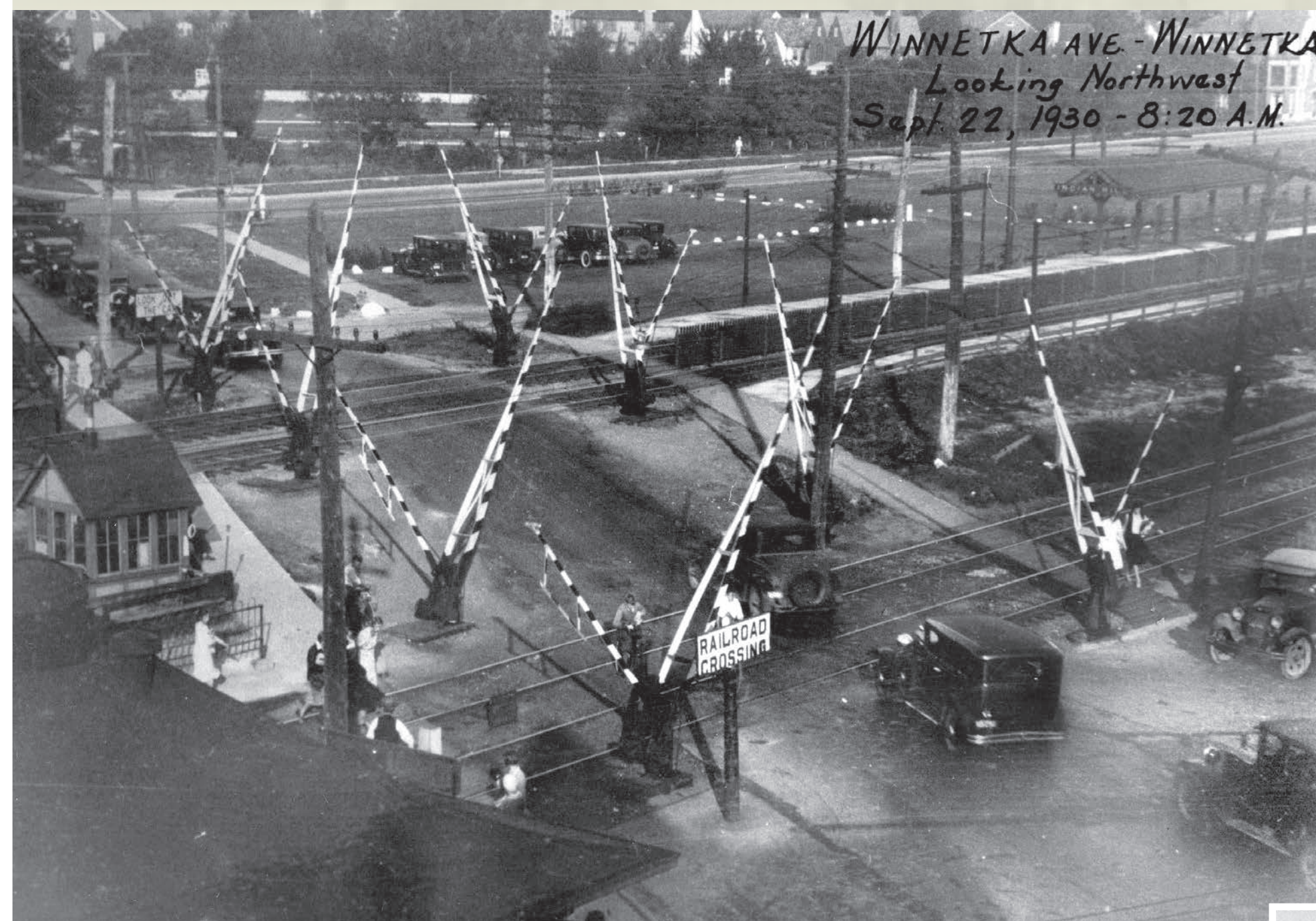


## Why Are the Train Tracks Lower in Winnetka?

**Grade crossings were a perennial danger in downtown Winnetka.**

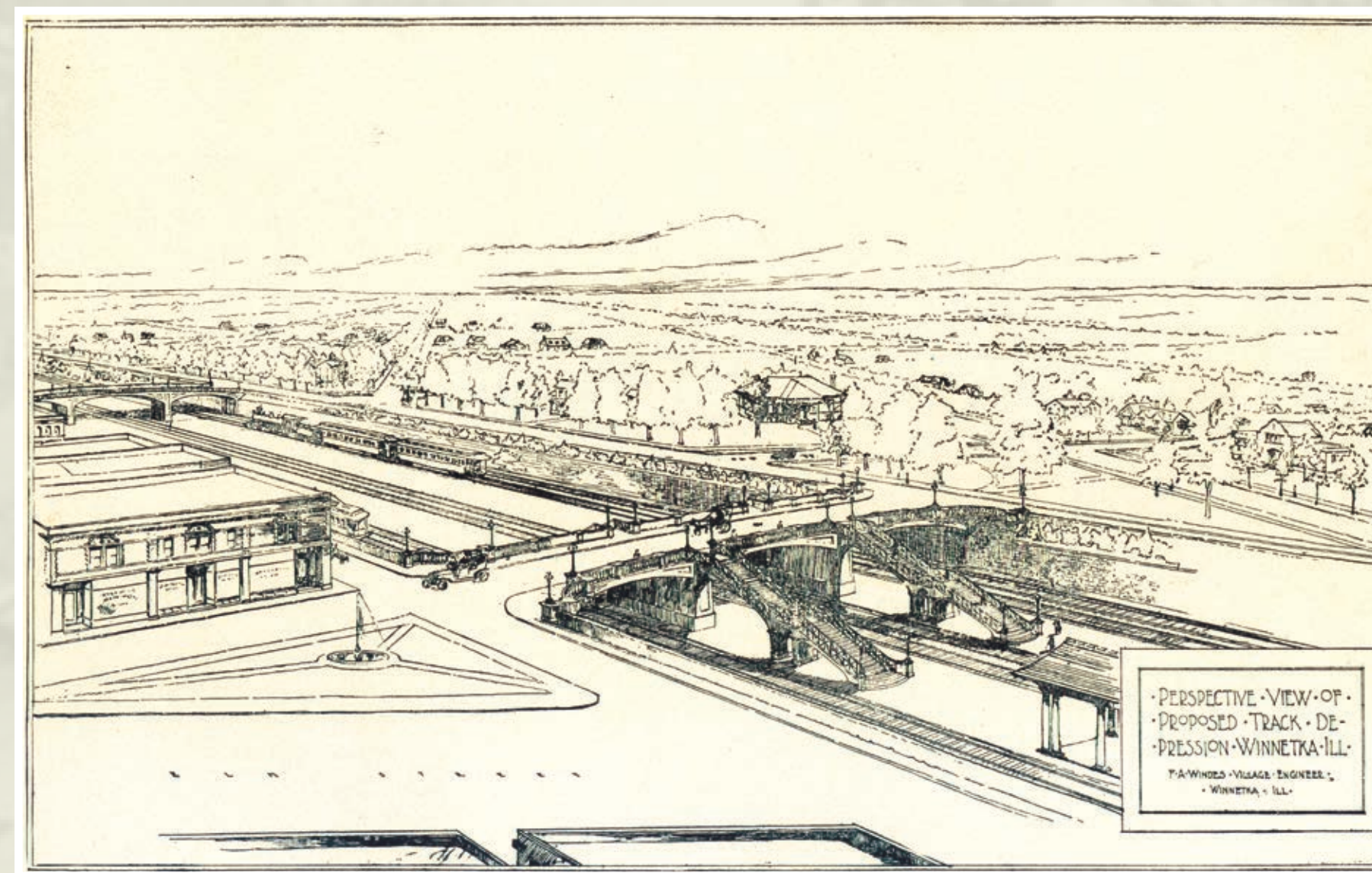
In 1854, only two tracks existed with two trains a day. The addition of the North Shore Electric Line increased the tracks to four sets. By 1909, there were 177 daily steam engine trains and frequent commuter trains passing by and stopping in Winnetka. As rail traffic increased and the population grew, so did the number of automobiles, cyclists and pedestrians. Accidents resulted in 31 deaths and numerous injuries, but proposed solutions foundered for lack of funding.



View of rail crossing at Winnetka Avenue, 1930

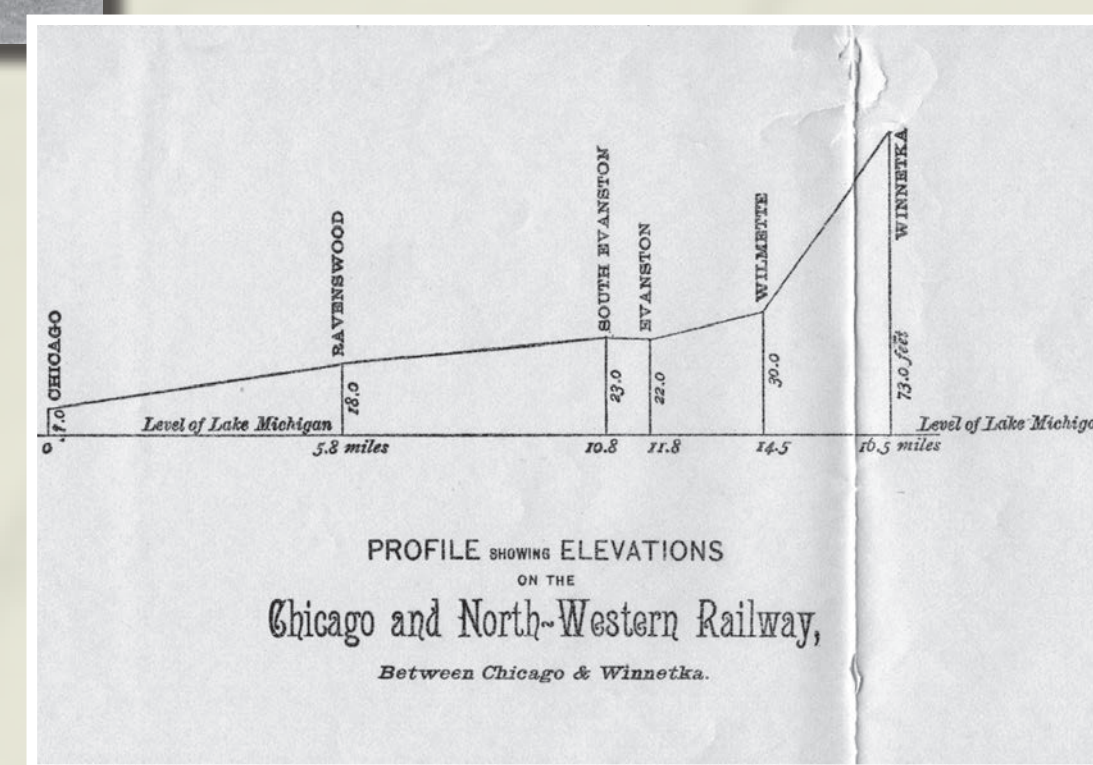
In 1906, Village Engineer Frank Windes designed a plan for depressing the tracks (remarkably similar to what was implemented decades later) but nothing was done. When the Plan of Winnetka was issued in 1921 by architect Edward Bennett, track depression was the first topic listed, and grade crossings were described as “Winnetka’s most serious and urgent problem.” Village leaders embraced the plan, but no action was taken.

The tragedy that galvanized community opinion occurred on Halloween evening of 1937. Two women leaving the Community House were killed instantly when they drove across the tracks at Pine Street and were struck by a six-car train that was operating in reverse with no lights.



Drawing of Proposed Track Depression by Village Engineer Frank A. Windes, 1906

With the community demanding action, a funding solution was finally achieved. Of critical importance was a commitment from the Public Works Administration, headed by Secretary of the Interior and Winnetkan Harold L. Ickes, to fund 45% of the project. The Village contributed 29%, and the balance was funded by the Chicago & North Western and North Shore railroad companies. The Chicago & North Western railroad was in favor of the plan, as their trains had been getting stuck on the incline between Evanston and Winnetka for decades. An additional engine was frequently sent from Evanston to push the train up the bluff into Winnetka.



Profile of the grade elevations between Chicago and Winnetka



Frank A. Windes, Village Engineer, and the shovel he used to “turn the first earth” of the Grade Separation Project, December 1938

1999.2029



Winnetka Grade Separation Project, 1939

The “Big Ditch” construction project began in 1938 and ran from Indian Hill to Hubbard Woods. It included seven bridges (two for pedestrians) and three train stations along with retaining walls. Much of the excavated soil was used as landfill in Crow Island Woods. After five years of construction, the project was completed in 1943.



View from Oak Street looking south, after completion of Cut #1, 1939



## Who Was Harold Ickes?

Harold Ickes's 14-year tenure as Secretary of the Interior makes him the longest-serving cabinet member in the history of the United States. He was appointed to the position by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, when the country was still mired in the Great Depression. Ickes helped to form and then direct the Public Works Administration (PWA), a massive New Deal construction program. During the six-year span of the PWA, he supervised almost 20,000 construction projects that included hundreds of schools, sewer systems, bridges, and hospitals.

Ickes and his wife had moved to Winnetka and built a large house on Private Road in 1916, and when he moved to Washington he did not forget his hometown. He was instrumental in providing federal funding for the two largest construction projects ever undertaken in our Village: the grade separation project, and the creation of the Skokie Lagoons. The latter project transformed an undesirable marshy swamp into a series of seven lagoons and five dams. It included the planting of over 100,000 trees, and was the largest Civilian Conservation Corps project in the nation.



Village Manager William Moulton and Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes on the steps of Village Hall



History Displayed in Partnership with The Hudson Company  
Concept & Design by Anne Bohan



## What Was the North Shore Line?



North Shore Line Indian Hill Station Car #400 loading New Trier High School Students, Motorman Mort Gilkison

The Green Bay Trail that is now popular with runners and cyclists was originally the site of the North Shore Line train tracks. This electric, interurban train line operated from 1899 to 1955. The first trains operated between Church Street in Evanston and downtown Waukegan, stopping at closely-spaced stations (sometimes only several hundred yards apart) that had simple boarding platforms.

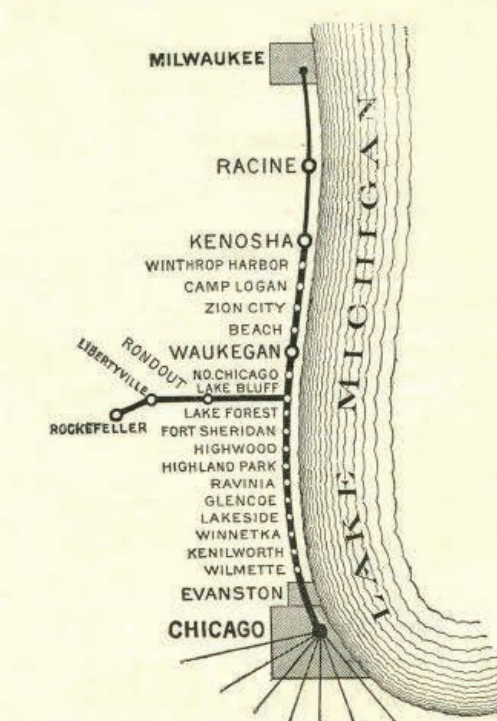
Service was extended north to Milwaukee in 1908.

That same year the railroad line went into receivership, and it was purchased in 1916 by traction magnate Samuel Insull. He made numerous improvements, and instituted direct service to Chicago (with no need to change trains) in 1919. In 1932 Insull's electrical empire collapsed, a casualty of the Depression, and the North Shore Line went into bankruptcy for the second time.

During World War II, everyone relied heavily upon the trains. Profits made during the War years permitted the North Shore Line to be reorganized and sold in 1946, but ridership soon declined. After the War, families began owning two cars. The Edens Expressway opened in 1951, and the Old Orchard and Edens Plaza shopping centers were built soon thereafter. The railroad petitioned to abandon the "Shore Line Route" through Winnetka in 1948 and again in 1954; the request was granted in 1955. Tracks were removed and the land was converted to a recreational trail later that year.

### Chicago @ Milwaukee Electric Railroad

An Ideal Line for a Delightful Day's Outing



#### HOW TO REACH THE NORTH SHORE

Take the Northwestern Elevated to its terminal, Wilson Avenue, and then take the Evanston Electric to Church Street, Evanston.  
Or, take the North Side Cable Cars to the Limits Barn, and then the Evanston Electric to Church Street, Evanston.  
At Church Street, Evanston, direct connection is made with high speed trains on the Chicago @ Milwaukee Electric Railroad to all points North.



Looking north from Indian Hill Station, October 1940