In 1855, the railroad that would become the Chicago and North Western Railway (later Union Pacific) was brand new. Five men set out on a journey along this railroad to find a suitable location for a new Presbyterian university. The wood-burning locomotive ground to a halt near the present-day Ryan Place (Farwell Crossing) in Lake Forest. There was no station—just a well-worn deer path through the dense forest to the lake.

“God willing, this is where we shall found the university,” explained one of the men. He pondered what the name would be for the place. “What is this before us?” asked another of the men. “A lake,” was the response. “And what is behind us?” “A forest,” they all agreed. “What better name can we have than Lake Forest.” And so the basis for an educational institution and later, a city was formed.
A station established in what is now Lake Bluff was one of the original official stops on the Chicago and North Western Railway line. Walter S. Gurnee, mayor of Chicago, was president of the railroad and participated in much land speculation in communities along the North Shore, including Lake Bluff. There was to be only one station between Highland Park and Waukegan. Local resident Henry Ostrander offered his land for the depot if the station could be called Rockland. Gurnee, who was a native of Rockland County in New York, accepted. Rockland became the Village of Lake Bluff in 1895.
The North Shore Interurban

The North Shore Line was an electric interurban railway between Chicago and Milwaukee. Interurban railways made more frequent stops and were usually less expensive than railroad lines such as the Chicago and North Western. This made them ideal for shorter trips to a greater variety of destinations.

Formally known as the Chicago, North Shore and Milwaukee Railroad, the North Shore began as the Bluff City Electric Street Railway in Waukegan in 1895. The tracks expanded south to Evanston in 1899. Service into Wisconsin started in 1905 reaching Milwaukee in 1908.

The North Shore ran two routes. The Shore Line Route paralleled the Chicago and North Western railroad line. Locally, the Skokie Valley Route (which opened in 1926) paralleled Route 41 turning east in Lake Bluff. A spur from Lake Bluff to Libertyville opened in 1903 and to Mundelein two years after.

Automobile competition, aging equipment and rising costs forced the abandonment of the Shore Line route in 1955. The high-speed Skokie Valley route operated until 1963.
The first private coach on a suburban line was started in 1929 by a group of Lake Foresters. The club car, called “The Deerpath,” was attached to an existing Chicago and North Western train. It left Lake Forest at 8:00 a.m. and returned in the afternoon. Newspapers of the day described the interior as containing 54 comfortable chairs, all covered in plush blue fabric, and two bridge tables. A private porter, Lester Green, dispensed service in a specially designed kitchen and buffet. He stayed with the car during the day to receive packages for the riders. The reported fee in 1929 for the privilege of membership was $15,000 plus the cost of a regular ticket.

The train car, which is owned by the members, has been replaced over the years. At one time, “The Deerpath” was joined by “The Cowpath,” and a third car. The club car continues its run today, arriving in Lake Forest at 5:49 p.m.
On June 12, 1924, one of the largest train robberies in United States history occurred near Rondout. Benevolent bandits, the Newton Boys, forced postal clerks to surrender sacks containing three million dollars in cash, securities and jewelry from a Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul mail train. More interested in the money than hostages, the Newton Boys tried to console witnesses by giving the impression of modern-day “Robin Hoods.”

The local police apprehended the thieves within days of the robbery and discovered one of the masterminds behind the operation was an employee of the United States Postal Inspection Service. All but $100,000 of the stolen items were returned to the police in exchange for lighter sentencing.

Discussion of the railroad in Lake Forest can scarcely be made without a debt to Elliot Donnelley (1903-1976). A life-long devotee of railroads, Mr. Donnelley constructed a small gauge railroad on the property of his home on Melody Road. He hosted numerous charity events with his railroad, most notably for the Chicago Youth Centers.

Elliot Donnelley’s important collection of train photographs and books were donated to Lake Forest College, where he was on the board for 33 years and served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees. Donnelley Library at the College was named in his honor. Among his many civic contributions was a term as mayor of Lake Forest. Mr. Donnelley was Vice-Chairman of the Board of R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company.

Elliot Donnelley was a trustee and founding member of many railroad historical groups and museums. His book *The Tracks to Town* is based on a talk he gave to the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society.
Architects Charles Sumner Frost and Alfred Hoyt Granger designed the train stations in east Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. Prior to their partnership, Frost and Granger led similar lives. Both attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and began their careers under the guidance of prominent architects; Frost with Peabody and Sterns of Boston and Granger with Charles McKim. Charles Frost, with his partner Henry Ives Cobb, designed the First Presbyterian Church in Lake Forest and many buildings for Lake Forest College, notably Durand Hall.

In 1898, Frost and Granger began collaborating on numerous projects in Lake Forest. They designed the Lake Forest City Hall and the Fire and Police Department, now Southgate Restaurant. Their designs drew from traditional styles and Beaux-Arts planning. The English designs of these buildings likely had an influence over the later development of Howard Van Doren Shaw’s Market Square.

Although designed by the “railroad architects”, the Lake Forest City Hall (1898) was built with a right-of-way fee paid by the North Shore interurban.
The Frost and Granger stations in east Lake Forest and Lake Bluff were built in 1900 and 1904, respectively. The Lake Forest station was reported to be the most expensive (and beautiful) station along the Chicago and North Western line.

Frost and Granger were responsible for all of the Chicago and North Western Railroad stations (over 80 in total) while the company was under the control of their father-in-law Marvin Hughitt. Frost’s experience with railway terminal planning combined with Granger’s design ideas created beautiful, yet functional, structures. The firm designed the Chicago and North Western main terminal in Chicago (1908, demolished 1982), described by Granger as the “first of the monumental [Chicago] terminals.”
Prior to working together, Frost and Granger became connected by their marriage to sisters. Charles Frost married Mary Hughitt in 1885. Alfred Granger married Belle Hughitt eight years later. Mary and Belle’s father was Marvin Hughitt, president and chairman of the Chicago and North Western Railroad. A third sister, Martha, was married to Hugh R. McCullogh, who worked for the railroad.

All three families had homes next to each other in Lake Forest. Alfred Granger’s home, Woodleigh, located at 907 North Sheridan, was designed by the architect in 1897. Charles Frost’s Eastover (1897) was located at 880 Elm Tree. Charles Frost also designed Westover (1897) at 600 East Westminster for his sister-in-law. All three homes were interconnected by gardens.