



MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

COMO-HARRIET STREETCAR LINE

40 Years at Lake Harriet

Minnesota Streetcar Museum celebrates 40 years of historic streetcar operations at Lake Harriet

First Run on the Como-Harriet Streetcar Line Was 40 Years Ago

August 28, 1971 was a festive day for the volunteers of the Minnesota Transportation Museum (MTM). Streetcar No. 1300 was decked-out with colored streamers. The fulfillment of a vision, and two years of hard work and some expense by the Museum's leaders and volunteers, was about to come true.

The Museum was initially formed in 1962 with a single purpose—to preserve and restore Twin City Lines Streetcar number 1300. No. 1300 was one of only two Twin City Lines “standard” streetcars preserved with its electrical and mechanical equipment, of the over 1,200 cars that were built by the Twin City Rapid Transit Company (one other Twin City car was preserved by a Maine trolley museum). The full story on how No. 1300 was saved and how the Museum came to be located on the shore of Lake Harriet can be found on page two. A building had to be built to house No. 1300 and provide work space and track needed to be put down. This would take time, money and lots of volunteer labor.

The volunteers set their goals and began the work. Starting in 1970, the first quarter-mile of track was built and a steel building was erected to house No. 1300. The car was trucked over from St. Paul and placed in the building in early 1971. By late summer of 1971, things were falling into place. It was time for the opening day when No. 1300 would carry the public!

The momentous day was set! August 28, 1971 was a Saturday and the weather was clear and sunny. Number 1300 rolled out of the building and down the hill to the loading platform at west 42nd Street. No. 1300, getting its electricity from a gasoline-powered generator towed behind the car, was ready to take center stage. The crew of the first run down to the loading platform consisted of **Frank Sandberg** and his wife, **Judy**. At the platform a short ceremony was held and a bottle

of Lake Harriet water was broken against the front coupler of No. 1300. That first weekend of regular service resulted in almost 4,000 passengers riding the one-quarter mile run. For the rest of 1971 over 19,000 passengers rode No. 1300. The fledgling Museum was off to a great start.

Over the next few years, improvements and extensions to the track were made. The track materials were typically second-hand rails and ties salvaged from abandoned railroad sidings. The materials were not in great condition, but because the museum was new and short of funds, “make do” was the watch-word. Even with donations of some materials and the proceeds from the annual appeals for donations, most of the work was done by volunteers. By 1978, the Como-Harriet Line, at that time the Museum's only exhibit site, was completed to its current length of roughly one mile. The overhead trolley wire was put up and No. 1300 now received its 600-volt (DC) electricity from the trolley wire. Things seemed to be set now, but the Museum's volunteers were not quite finished with their work.

(Continued on page 3)



August 28, 1971 was a great day for the Museum and its volunteers. Here was see TCRT streetcar No. 1300 on one of the first runs of the day. It was a festive occasion as witnessed by the streamers decoration the front of No. 1300. (Bill Cordes photo)

It all Started 50 Years Ago!

Back in 1962 a group of railroad and streetcar historians and enthusiasts formed an organization that was dedicated to preserving a single piece of Minnesota Transportation history—an historic Twin City Rapid Transit “standard” streetcar that had been languishing in Hopkins, Minnesota for the past 8 years.

When the last Twin City Rapid Transit Company’s streetcars operated in June 1954, streetcar No. 1300 was donated to the Minnesota Railfans’ Association with the proviso that the tired, old streetcar be removed from TCRT property quickly. The car was removed and towed on its own wheels to the Minneapolis-Moline farm equipment factory in Hopkins, a western suburb of Minneapolis. Stored on an old siding and exposed to the weather, No. 1300 would be visited regularly by the rail enthusiasts who would do what they could to keep the old streetcar weather-tight and preserved. However, by the late 1950s, it was clear that the group was no longer capable of maintaining the streetcar in Hopkins for very long. Even with paint and repairs to the wood exterior, the streetcar could not withstand being stored out in the open much longer. Something had to be done with this historic transit relic; the last of its kind in Minnesota.

That something was accomplished by the now Minnesota Transportation Museum’s leaders who had a vision of getting No. 1300 under cover, repairing it and then operating it under its own power. After a search of some months, they met their first goal. The car could be stored and worked on in an unused round-house bay of the Minnesota Transfer Railway, a local switching railroad with their shop located in St. Paul’s Midway section. Now under cover, the car was repaired and put into operating condition.

Next step was to operate the car for the general public. That goal was met in the summer of 1963 when the streetcar, powered by a small gasoline powered generator, operated four weekends in July in the Minnesota Transfer’s rail yard adjacent to the round-house. The response and reaction from the public was tremendous, and No. 1300 carried over 10,000 passengers during those four weekends. After they took their ride, the common response from the passengers was: “When can we ride the car again?” That question was hard to answer as the group was not able to operate on the Minnesota Transfer’s yard tracks after those four July weekends in 1963. So, the group set their next goal which was to find a permanent home for No. 1300,

where the car could be stored under cover permanently and operated on a regular basis.

That permanent home for No. 1300 was finally found after six years of searching and on-again, off-again negotiations. In 1968, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board graciously agreed to let the Museum lease a sliver of land between Lakes Calhoun and Harriet to lay track and string the overhead trolley wire. A part of the sliver of land actually included the right-of-way where the TCRT’s **Como-Harriet**, **Oak Harriet** and **Excelsior** streetcars once ran. Between May of 1891 and June of 1954, electric streetcars had traveled over the roadbed running between lakes Calhoun and Harriet. After the last cars ran on June 18, 1954 the tracks were pulled up and the right-of-way became a walking path. In the late 1950s, there actually was a proposal to turn the right-of-way into an “express street,” but fortunately that idea was eventually rejected. The roadbed just sat there and became overgrown for the next twenty-five years. Then, from 1969 through 1971 the roadbed awoke to the sound of shovels and volunteer workmen, as a small steel building was erected to house No. 1300 and one-quarter mile of track was put down on the old streetcar right-of-way between the new car barn and west 42nd Street. Now the group could operate No. 1300 for the public on a regular basis. That first day of public operation came on August 28, 1971. It was a great day for the Museum. 🌱



TCRT No. 1300 sat on an unused siding at the Minneapolis-Moline plant in Hopkins for eight years. Here we see the car in 1962 on a low-boy trailer ready to be transported to St. Paul for restoration. (Bill Cordes photo)

(Continued from page 1)

Museum Makes Improvements and Preserves Additional Minnesota Streetcars

By 1978 most of the work to build the Como-Harriet line was finished including hanging the 600-volt overhead trolley wire. But, by the end of the 1970s, the Museum's volunteer leaders realized that if No. 1300 had a mechanical failure, the Como-Harriet line would be shut down. Someone asked the question: "Are there more streetcars out there that need preserving?" The Museum's leaders searched and found several historic electric cars that were to be destroyed as the owners no longer wanted them.

First to be found and restored was Duluth No. 265. This streetcar became the second car to operate on the Como-Harriet line's rails and the first car that the Museum had to restore from nothing more than a shell with no equipment. (No. 1300 had all its electrical and mechanical equipment intact when it was donated in 1954.) In 1990, the restoration of Duluth No. 78 was finished. No. 78 was the third car to enter service on the Como-Harriet line. Then the carbody of "interurban" coach Mesaba Railway No. 10 was saved and stored. Next Twin City Lines No. 1239 was acquired and stored for a while. In 1999 the Museum's began restoring No. 1239 and the car and made its debut five years later in its original "gate car" configuration as it was when built in 1907.

In 1992, the Museum began restoring a streamlined PCC-style streetcar built in 1946 for the Twin City Lines but sold in 1953 for service in Newark, New Jersey. Over the next eight years extensive body work, and mechanical and electrical refurbishment resulted in the inauguration of operation for No. 322, one of the finest restorations of a PCC-type streetcar accomplished by an all volunteer museum in the U.S.

In 1998 the Museum acquired the body of a small-city streetcar that operated in Winona, Minnesota from 1914 until 1938. Winona No. 10 is currently under restoration at the Museum's Excelsior car barn and shop. Finally the Museum acquired the body of a small, lightweight streetcar built in 1924 for a line extension of the Fargo and Moorhead Street Railway. No. 28 is currently in storage and plans are to restore this car in the future.

Other physical improvements were made as the historic streetcars were acquired, restored and placed in service at lake Harriet. These improvements include constructing a replica of the 1900 Linden Hills

station on the approximate site where the original station was located between 1900 and 1914 when the smaller station was replaced by the larger Harry Wild Jones designed "chalet" station. In the 1990s several car barn extensions and additions were built to accommodate the streetcars as they were finished and placed in service.

The 21st Century Features Additional Major Physical Improvements

The year 2005 witnessed a big change for the Museum as by mutual agreement, the Como-Harriet and Excelsior Streetcar Lines separated from the parent MTM to form a new organization, the Minnesota Streetcar Museum. The following year, the Como-Harriet Streetcar Line shut-down for over two and a half months in the summer as the track was completely rebuilt. This major track rebuilding project was funded by a Federal grant and very generous donations from over 200 individuals and foundations. The tired old second hand rails, some of which were rolled in the 1880s, were replaced with good quality used rails and new ballast rock was put down under new ties. The ride was much improved.

In 2009 an automatic sprinkler system was installed in the George Isaacs car barn and shop. This system, while costing the Museum about \$100,000, now ensures the preservation of the priceless collection of streetcars housed in the buildings. Again, this important improvement was funded exclusively from donations by Museum members and friends and from several private foundations.

So, what's next? The future looks bright for the Minnesota Streetcar Museum. We will continue to operate streetcars at both our railways so long as people want to come and enjoy a summer day's ride on a 100-plus year old historic Minnesota streetcar. 🌳



The current Linden Hills station is nearing completion in 1991. (George Isaacs photo)

MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

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The Minnesota Streetcar Museum is a non-profit, all-volunteer organization with the mission to preserve and communicate to the public the experience of Minnesota's electric street and interurban railway history. To accomplish this mission the Museum operates historic streetcars at two demonstration railways.

COMO-HARRIET STREETCAR LINE
Excelsior Streetcar Line

The Early Days of MSM's Como-Harriet Streetcar Line



This photo shows Museum volunteers on bare ground where eventually the Linden Hills station and siding will be built. There's no track there yet, but there will be shortly.



The Museum has always made improvements on the basis of "pay as you go." Here we see the second streetcar storage building and soon to be workshop, built to house Duluth No. 265.



*(Left) The Museum has always received generous help from members and friends like **John Larkin**. John donated time, materials and the pole setting truck from his company, Donovan Construction to help put up the overhead trolley wire. The Museum also got help from the local IBEW Union. This is a 1973 scene.*

All photos on this page are by the late Bill Cordes.



The first car barn is built and a short length of track is down. No. 1300 hasn't arrived yet. Progress was slow but steady in the years 1970-1971.



Many Thanks!

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