

# MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM



# Streetcar CURRENTS



August 2009

Minneapolis & Excelsior, Minnesota

## Summer is Half Over! Can You Believe it?

- Give our new Operators a warm welcome when they work on your shift, and help them as much as you can.
- Stay cool. We're now into the warmest part of the year. Wear loose clothing while you volunteer and drink plenty of water.
- Mark Your calendars to attend our annual Family picnic on Sunday, September 27th at CHSL



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**Masthead Photo:** Twin City Rapid Transit No. 1239 (left) and Duluth Street Railway No. 78 are at rest in front of MSM's Excelsior Streetcar Line car barn. No. 1239 was built in 1907 by TCRT at the company's 31st Street shops in south Minneapolis, and ran in the Twin Cities until 1953. No. 78 was built in 1893 by the LaCledde Car Company in St. Louis and was retired in 1911. They make a lovely couple, eh? (Jim Vaitkunas photo)

## A Perfect Shift

Rod Eaton—General Superintendent

About an hour into my Saturday shift a few weeks back, I realized it was shaping up to become one of the nicest evenings I had ever spent at Como-Harriet. We had a great crew. The weather was absolutely perfect—that rare balance of mild temperature and modest humidity many days promise, but few deliver. And everyone, it seemed, had come to the lake that evening to enjoy the orchestra concert, treat themselves to an ice cream cone, and ride the streetcar. Even the last run of the shift was an almost full car. When the final trip counts were tallied, we had carried more than 700 passengers.

It's a privilege to run our historic cars, always nice to work with other museum volunteers, and interesting to interact with our passengers. On that perfect Saturday shift, I met visitors from Korea, England, France, and several far-flung U.S. cities. As is often the case, a few older riders reminisced about their streetcar-riding youth. And some younger riders told streetcar stories passed down from parents and grandparents. They checked the route maps on display in the station to confirm that, yes, streetcars did run down the street where grandpa lived. Children fidgeted impatiently, avoiding the yellow safety zone while watching for the returning trolley, and tried not to drop their tokens through the gaps between the platform planks. Does it matter that some of the kids thought they were waiting for a train?

That Saturday I had also signed on for the Moonlight Ride. Running the line at night, with only the ditch lights illuminating the rails, is a special treat. As you drift quietly down grade from the car barn, the sailboats and nighttime reflections on Lake Harriet glimpsed through the trees is a uniquely beautiful sight.

Not every shift is as nice as that Saturday's. But to paraphrase a familiar bumper sticker, a bad day operating streetcars beats a good day at the office. Most shifts aren't perfect. I get tired, my feet sometimes hurt, it's too warm or a bit chilly. There are the children you're glad belong to someone else, and the occasional adult who acts like a child. But even on those days, when I'm looking at my watch anticipating the end of the shift, hearing "Thank you for volunteering" from a departing

passenger can quickly change my perspective.

In his end of line talks, **John Dillery** sometimes says that, as museum volunteers: "We pay to do this." I'll gladly pay for the chance to have another perfect shift, even if I have to wait through a whole lot of pretty darn good shifts to get there. ☺



Sundown at Lake Calhoun

## MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM



*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**

For more information on our Museum, our collection of historic streetcars and our demonstration railways, visit our website:

[www.trolleyride.org](http://www.trolleyride.org)

The museum's business address and telephone number is:

P.O. Box 14467, University Station  
 Minneapolis, MN 55414-0467  
 952-922-1096

**Streetcar *CURRENTS***  
**August 2009**

Jim Vaitkunas—Editor  
 Bill Graham—Distribution

**Streetcar *CURRENTS*** is a periodic newsletter published for the members and friends of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum.

Deadline for submitting items for the next issue of the **Streetcar *CURRENTS*** is August 20, 2009.

Please send items to editor Jim Vaitkunas at the following address:  
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Apple Valley, MN 55124-9774  
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**From the Front Platform**
*Dave French—Board Chair*

**H**i everyone! In the last issue I talked a bit about safety at MSM and I'd like to add a couple of points this month.

**A** member told me recently that all of our volunteers are humans, and as such, are prone to make human errors. Thus, there really isn't anything we can do about human errors that cause accidents because they will happen anyway. While I respect this member very much, I have to say I disagree with him on this point. Yes, we all make human errors. I know I am just as susceptible as any of you, maybe more so. But am I to just shrug my shoulders and say, "Oh well, nothing I can do about it" when I screw up and cause an accident at MSM? I say no! I have the power to find the cause of my accident and take steps to greatly reduce the chance of it happening again. Plus, I have other MSM members to help me identify causes and suggest fixes. Those of you familiar with safety in the workplace know that human error is the single most common cause of accidents and injuries. Let's be honest with ourselves when we make a mistake and try to make sure it won't happen again, not only to us but our fellow volunteers. And please don't be offended if you are involved in an accident or injury at MSM and one of our museum officers asks you some questions about what happened. The idea is not to embarrass or punish you but to find cause and see what we can do next time so it is less likely to happen again. All of us accept that responsibility as part of volunteering, and I hope you will take it to heart and hold yourself to the highest standard of safety each and every time you are on the property.



**W**e have several new Operators this summer and I hope you'll have a chance to work with them soon. I'm sure we all remember our first few shifts when we were perhaps feeling a bit nervous, wanting to do everything right but not entirely confident of our ability yet. Please get to know our new people and offer encouraging words and advice on correct and safe operating practices. They need and expect your help; will you give it to them? I'm sure our Training Department would remind you not to assume that a new Operator knows everything. The trainers do a great job in bringing a new person's skills up to a minimum level, in a short period of time, so they can move on to revenue training. Their revenue training and first several shifts in regular service is just a continuation of the training process. It

might be said that even our most senior volunteers never really "graduate" because there is always more to learn and skills to improve. The folks I've helped train so far this year are a great bunch, and you're going to like them a lot, so help them as much as you can.

**I** have a copy of the Twin City Rapid Transit Annual Report from 1947. I will be using this to give you little historical highlights from time to time. Balance sheets are usually pretty dry reading, but one interesting item here is "Unredeemed tickets and tokens" listed under Deferred Liabilities. In 1946 this amount was over \$397,000 and in '47 it was \$414,000. It appears that they kept track of all the tokens they sold over the years compared to how many tokens were collected in the fare box. In '47 they sold 5 tokens for 45 cents, or 8 cents each. At that price the 1947 liability represented over 5,000,000 tokens! Of course they knew that many of those

*(Continued on bottom on next page)*

## Historian & Archives News & Notes

Aaron Isaacs —Historian

**More photos added to Minnesota Reflections website.** Shortly after you read this, an additional 333 Minnesota streetcar photos from the MSM collection will be added to the Minnesota Reflections website (<http://reflections.mndigital.org/>). You can also access the photos from MSM's website—click on Historic Photos. This addition brings the total number of MSM photos online to 1136. They can be searched by keyword.

**John Stern photos added to MSM archive.** Over the years, the MSM archive has added the Minnesota streetcar photos of almost every local and visiting trolley fan, but there was one I could never locate. Interurbans Special #14, written in 1953, was the first major work on TCRT. It contained two dozen beautifully composed photos by a trolley fan named John Stern. Back then, trolley fans frequently shared their photos, but Stern's never seemed to surface. Then in 2007 the Electric Railroader's Association (ERA) from New York City prepared a Twin Cities issue of its Headlights magazine, and it contained several of Stern's photos. His negatives were in their collection, over 50 in all. I contacted **Frank Pfuehler** and **Frank Miklos** of ERA, and they agreed to loan MSM the negatives for copying. In exchange, I'm identifying the photo locations for them (the negatives are uncaptioned). The first group of 13 (divided into four batches to minimize mail loss) just arrived. **Dick Stoner** has volunteered to make custom prints. Look for them in future issues of *Twin City Lines*.

**Donate your old stuff.** Do you have old railroad or trolley books? How about railroad scale

models? Slides or photos? If you don't need them anymore, donate them to MSM. We'll sell them online, at railroad flea markets and in the Linden Hills depot, and raise much needed revenue. We can also sell rail magazines, but not any magazine. Everyone has *TRAINS* and *Model Railroader*, so there's no market for them. Instead, we like to sell the specialty periodicals such as *First and Fastest*, or the magazines from the individual railroad historical societies.

Recently **Jim Vaitkunas** cleaned house and donated numerous copies of the *Keystone*, published by the Pennsylvania RR Technical and Historical Society and *Railroad History*, the scholarly journal of the Railroad & Locomotive Historical Society. Those will sell.

In the last year I've also thinned my library and donated over 40 books that were taking up space, and I wasn't going to read them again. Recently **Terry Warner** also donated a number of books. Your old stuff means cash for the museum. And remember, donations are tax deductible.

**Photos on sale in depot.** On the Linden Hills depot bookshelf you'll find four three-ring binders. Three of them are full of vintage Minnesota streetcar photos. They are surplus photos from the MSM photo collection, and there are about 500 different views in all. We've retained at least two copies of each of the photos and these are the duplicates. Most are TCRT company photos, some dating back to almost 1900. We're selling them for the bargain price of \$1 each. There is also a binder of streetcar postcards, most from other trolley museums. They're colorful and fun to collect, and they only cost a dime each. ☺

(From the **Front Platform** Continued from page 2)

tokens were lost or otherwise not going to be redeemed for a ride. No wonder the transit industry loved selling tokens. It's like the Post Office selling stamps for a future service, knowing that some of them will never be used. I wonder if Metro Transit still carried that liability on their books when they stopped accepting tokens for bus rides in 2004, and donated their stock to MSM? Have fun, be safe, and I'll see you on the line! ☺

### New Postal Service Rules for Bulk Mail Requires Good Addresses

The US Postal Service has established new rules for bulk mailing of newsletters, magazines, advertisements and so forth. Without going into a lot of minutiae, the new rules now require MSM to physically verify the mailing address of each member at least annually, and in some instances quarterly, and be able to demonstrate that we have done this upon request from the Postal Service. This address verification process can be done in several ways by commercial firms but it would cost us a significant amount of money to contract with them for such a small mailing. (We typically mail around 300 copies of *Twin City Lines* every three months.) However, there is a way to get around this expense. We can put on our mailing labels below your name the phrase "or current resident." Doing this eliminates the expense of periodically verifying your mailing addresses. There are several "problems" when we put that phrase below your name, however. The main one is that the post office will not forward your copy of the *Twin City Lines* if you move but don't give us your new address. In addition some of our members have commented that they don't like the "or current resident" notation on the label when they've given us a correct address. We sympathize with you. That's why we ask that you let us know right away when you move and your mailing address changes. It also helps us a lot if you would return the renewal slip that you get from us along with your check for your dues when you renew your MSM membership. We use these slips to verify your mailing address, e-mail address, etc.

**What's Happening?**

August 1	Streetcar cleaning at CHSL, 9 AM to 11 AM. Juice and cookies/rolls will be provided
August 8	Moonlight Trolley at CHSL starts at 10 PM
August 20	PJ Party Trolley at CHSL, 6:30 PM & 7:30 PM
Sept 7	Special CHSL <i>Early Bird</i> service start at 9:30 AM. ESL runs from 1 PM until 4 PM.
Sept 12	Excelsior <i>Apple Days</i> festival. ESL runs from 9 AM to 4 PM
Sept 27	MSM annual family picnic at CHSL

**Shop Update***John Prestholdt—Shop Foreman*

**C**ompressor woes. During June and July, work picked up at the George Isaacs car barn when the General Electric CP-27 air compressor on Duluth Street Railway “standard car” No. 265 failed. When we finally got the car into the maintenance barn and inspected the compressor we found that at least one of the motor brushes had gotten too short to make contact with the compressor motor’s commutator and had caused a ground fault (short circuit). This caused some copper to melt across the windings. We tried to see if we could scrape this melted copper from between the commutator’s segments to avoid an expensive reworking of the motor’s armature. This apparently worked, at least for awhile. We blew another fuse on July 18th and we then decided to swap out the compressor with a spare we had on hand. It looks like the compressor motor armature will have to go to an electrical shop for repairs. Meanwhile, the spare compressor installed in No. 265 is working fine and the car has been returned to service. Because of the compressor problem we had on No. 265, we checked and found that No. 1300’s compressor needed new brushes as well. A big thanks to **Neil Howes**, **Walt Strobel**, **Mark Digre**, and others who spent several hours checking these brush problems.

**B**e gentle with those interior bell cords. Operators please take note that you don't need to yank hard on the interior bell cords in No. 1300, No. 1239, or No. 78. Yes, you do need to pull a little to ring the bell at the other end of the streetcar. But when you do, simply pull the leather rope towards you and the bell at the other end will ring just fine. Right now we are replacing the bell cord on No. 1300 because it is worn out. The replacement leather cord now cost us \$1.25 per foot which means we'll spend \$60 to replace the bell cord in No. 1300. Remember that the next time you are operating one of the cars with interior bells and pull gently. ☺

**On a Lighter Note — Charters Can Be Fun!**

**(Above Left)** Charters are a good source of revenue for our Museum. And some of the charters can be downright fun! As an example, how about a lengthy charter involving a car-load of clowns? (I know—some people have a phobia about clowns.) Actually, they are fun and friendly people just like you and me (mostly) who like to dress up to look silly. In the case of this unusual charter which occurred in September of 2008, the charter lasted longer than usual, about 3 hours. What our streetcar was being used for was as a prop for an independently produced movie. It turned out to be a very interesting day to say the least. (*Rod Eaton photo*)

**(Above Right)** The Red Hat Ladies group chartered No. 1300 on Saturday, April 25th, our first revenue trip of 2009. MSM family member **Nancy Fairbairn**, who is a member of this group, is at the extreme left in this photo. It turned out to be a beautiful day! After their ride, the group went on to Famous Dave's in Linden Hills for their lunch. Quite a few of these ladies had ridden streetcars in service when they were very young girls, and they were very happy with the charter and very complimentary. (*Photo by Vonnie Vandenberg, the Queen Mother of the Red Hat Ladies group*)