

MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM



Streetcar CURRENTS



Mar-Apr 2014

Minneapolis & Excelsior, Minnesota



Bill the Motorman Says:

- Encourage a friend or neighbor to volunteer with our Museum
- The work in our shops at ESL and CHSL never stops. If you're interested in helping with the very important work of maintaining our streetcars drop by the Isaacs car barn any Saturday morning

Streetcar CURRENTS

Winter Publication Schedule

This is the last issue of the Streetcar CURRENTS following the winter publication schedule. We will publish monthly until next November.

Inside This Issue

From the Front Platform	2
Shop Update	3
Historian's Update	4
ESL Update	5
Upcoming Events	6
MSM News and Views	6

Masthead. MSM member **Dutton Foster** was inspired to do a color painting based on the cover of the winter 2014 issue of *Twin City Lines*, our Museum's quarterly history magazine. See page 5 for more on Dutton's painting.
(painting by Dutton Foster)

We've Been Busy This Winter

Bill Arends—General Supt.

In my last article for the *Currents* I commented on the depths of snow on the tracks and that we may not see a streetcar on the line for another two months. Oh how optimistic I was! It's now two months later; the last week of March. As I walked along the tracks today there were a few places that I saw a glimmer of rail peeking out of the snow. But there's a whole lot more peeking out than a little rail. The hard work of a lot of volunteers is showing through much more clearly than just a little rail.

On March 28th, thanks to **Charles Barthold**, **Ben Franske** and **Rod Eaton**, a new Point-of-Sale system was installed in the Linden Hills station. If you're wondering what a Point-of-Sale system is, we are moving into the twenty-first century in the depot. While some of our streetcars got their start in the very early twentieth century, it's time to upgrade the technology in the depot. No longer will we have to tell potential riders who hand us a plastic card that we only accept cash or checks. Our new POS system will allow us to accommodate everyone who wants to enjoy a ride on our streetcars at our CHSL. New technology. Easy to use. Accepts credit cards. Wow! So 21st century.

But a new POS system doesn't just magically enable us to accept credit cards. There's still the need for a data link. Something our current phone system was not set up to handle. Thanks to **Ben Franske**, another obstacle has been crossed off the list. We have contracted with a new telephone service that will allow us to process credit card transactions over the internet. I hope Ben asked if it will still allow us to use the rotary phone that is in the car barn.

And that's not the end to our technology upgrades. **Karl Jones** has been working with our security provider, Silent Knight, to upgrade the security system at the Excelsior Streetcar Line (ESL). The new system will provide greater security and also allow Karl to remotely access it to better trouble-shoot problems.

Have you ever wondered about how the money that is taken in at the depot gets deposited in our bank account? Well, it's handled by our cashiers. A small number of volunteers pick up the money from the safes in the carbarns, reconcile the money to the cash register tape, prepare a report for Treasurer **Keith Anderson** and deliver it to the bank to be deposited. Head Cashier **John Prestholdt**, at the beginning of the year, prepares a schedule rotating each of the cashiers throughout the season. This year, with the addition of two new cashiers, **Steve Eberly** and **Ben Franske**, the workload will be lightened for all the cashiers.

Even though we cannot yet see the rails doesn't mean people are not signing up to ride with us. Charter Agent **Muriel Olsen** has been busy scheduling charters. We already have 20 charters scheduled for the upcoming season, several of which are

(Continued on page 6)



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 inter-urban 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

The museum's business address and telephone number is:

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

Streetcar CURRENTS
 March-April 2014

Jim Vaitkunas—Editor
 Bill Graham—Distribution

Streetcar CURRENTS is a 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 April 20, 2014.

Please send items to the editor Jim Vaitkunas at the following address:

13326 Huntington Lane
 Apple Valley, MN 55124-9481

You can send input or enquiries by e-mail to: jvaitkunas@msn.com


From the Front Platform—Thoughts on Our Museum

Dave French — Board Chair

Hi Everyone! Last Saturday we had a great MSM Annual Meeting. We presented a summary of the 2013 financial results and the 2014 budget to the membership, elected two new Directors (**Holly Wetzel** and **John Dillery**), thanked our two outgoing Directors (**Chris Heck** and **Todd Bender**), announced the appointment of **Kathy Endres** as a new Class 2 Director, and heard a variety of reports on what happened last year and what we look forward to this year. I am again impressed with the creative suggestions we heard from our Members. There were several suggestions regarding marketing charters to groups such as preschools, autistic children and their families, senior groups and homes, and high school reunions. Also, a member suggested that we find ways to get spouses of our active volunteers more active. I regret that when I review ideas discussed at past Annual Meetings some have languished. They are not forgotten but no substantive action has been taken to put them into effect. As you know, all volunteer organizations like MSM can do almost anything if a member or members will pick up the ball and run with it. When we look at our success stories such as the growth in our charter business and the creation of new and creative special events, one commonality is the volunteer who stepped up, recruited other members, and took it upon themselves to make it happen. And they did it without being told to do it, they are true self-starting volunteers. It is up to MSM's leaders to make sure our working environment encourages and facilitates volunteers who want to work to grow our business!



As always, the meeting highlight was **Aaron Isaac's** presentation of Minnesota electric railway history. This year he gave us a whirlwind tour of the smaller trolley and electric railway operations in Minnesota, with a short trip to the Dakotas and Wisconsin. He then showed us digitized 8mm silent color film taken of TCRT operations at the end of service in 1954. Wow, if we cannot build a time machine, this is the next best thing. Thanks Aaron!

Attendance at the meeting was about 38, which I think is a good turnout for an organization with around 300 members, but it is about the same as the last few years. It seems like our attendance is stagnant, kind of like our ridership over the past few years. If you can think of a way to increase attendance, let us know, and if you have not been attending, you really are

missing an enjoyable time!

One big change for MSM this year, at least at CHSL, is we will now accept credit cards. Anyone who has worked during regular operations over the past few years knows that an increasing number of our customers have no cash, no checkbook, and expect to pay for their rides using a credit or debit card. As an old fashioned guy who still carries cash, I would be almost embarrassed to have to use plastic to buy a \$1.89 cup of coffee but that's the way the world is. Change is sometimes surprising, not always welcome, and difficult to adjust to, isn't it? Well, let's get with the 21st century and take those cards, remembering that we must make it easy for people to give us their business. My understanding is there will be a \$10 minimum for a credit card purchase. We will have our first training session to meet the new system on March 30th. As a Station Agent, I hope I can master this process so I can process a credit sale as quickly as a cash transaction! Thanks to **Charles Barthold**, **Rod Eaton**, and **Ben Franske** for their work to get this set up for us.

(Continued on bottom of page 6)



Shop Update — News from our George K. Isaacs and Excelsior Car barns

John Prestholdt — MSM Shop Foreman

As reported in the last issue of the *Currents*, the George Isaacs car barn Tuesday and Saturday work crews have been working on Duluth Street Railway No. 265. This is not just a cosmetic job, either. After we found a lot of dry rot last year in the front bumper, and a lot of chipping paint above the windows, **Karl Jones** and others began looking into problems along the “pole” side of the car. (The pole side is the side of the streetcar opposite the boarding doors.) As more and more paint was sanded off, we found a lot of cracked and rotting wood giving us a clue how much work was ahead of us. **Dennis Stephens** did a lot of looking for replacement wood and molding and was able to get us good deals for both the wood and molding, along with some special molding.

Once we got the lumber and moldings in house and figured out how to form all the pieces around the circular front on the car, we started to put everything back together. We have most of the replacement woodwork attached, completed all the priming of the wood surfaces, and applied most of the finished yellow paint. With Karl, Dennis, **Jim Willmore**, **Matt Liebel**, **Joel Schuweiler**, and **Bob Smith** forming the wood pieces and painting, the rest of the Tuesday crew has been re applying cane to ripped seats and repainting all the seats. During all this, **Mark Digre** has been doing some of the yearly maintenance on No. 265's controls. Once the exterior work is completed, No. 265 should be ready for both Operator training and regular service. ⊕



(Above left) Here's DSR No. 265's front showing good progress on the repairs. (Above right) The rear of No. 265 also required a lot of repair to rotting wood and window sash. Now we're masking off areas to be painted. (Dennis Stephens photos)



(Above) No. 265's interior is a mess at the moment. Rattan seat cushions and backs are being refurbished and painted. Why are we painting the seats the buff color? Because that's what TCRT and DSR did starting in the 1920s to prevent lady's silk stockings from being snagged by small fibers from the rattan. (Jim Vaitkunas photo)



(Above) Here you see **Russ Isbrandt** (left) and **Bob Smith** applying the buff paint to one of No. 265's seat cushions. (Jim Vaitkunas photo)


MSM Historian's Update — We make Minnesota's Electric Railway History Come Alive!
Aaron Isaacs — MSM Historian and Photo Archivist

New acquisitions. MSM member **Greer Nielsen**, a Twin Cities native who lives in Washington state, has donated a good collection of TCRT photos and other items. Included are 73 photos that are new to the MSM collection, all by photographer **Bob Selle**, who visited the Twin Cities in 1952 and 1953. Also in the collection is an ancient Minneapolis Street Railway horse car ticket from the 1880s with Thomas Lowry's signature printed on it.

The North St. Paul Historical Society has shared copies of several photos of the Mahtomedi line passing through North St. Paul. In the last nine months, 540 more items have been catalogued into the collection, including schedules, company forms and photos.

When **Bill Olsen** passed away last year, his family donated his remaining models and photos to MSM. Thanks to **Dick Stoner** for serving as the contact between the family and MSM. Bill modeled on O-scale. The 30 models, mostly trolleys, included four of TCRT prototypes, including a standard steel-sided streetcar, a wood single truck closed car, a double-truck open car and one of the Snelling Shops shifter cars made from an old cable car. Those are being retained and will be displayed. The rest are being sold. There were also about 15 color slides circa 1949 that were new to the photo collection.

Duluth streetcar movies. Thanks to a tip from **Bill Graham**, last year we were able to obtain a short video that mostly shows the last day of the Duluth Incline in 1939, but also includes three brief streetcar run-bys. It's even in color. We already had a 2-minute black and white home movie of the Incline. I'm pleased to say that another Duluth streetcar movie, this one in good black and white, has been located at the Minnesota Historical Society. It was taken in 1937 by Monroe P. Killy, a photographer who specialized in documenting native Americans. About 14 minutes long, the movie is entirely about, of all things, winter street traffic in Duluth. Perhaps a third of the film has streetcars in it. A copy is being purchased for the MSM archive.

Bill Cordes movies to NRHS. Several years ago we received a large number of home movies taken by longtime and late member **Bill Cordes**. They date from the mid-1950s through the 1980s. Except for a couple of minutes of vintage TCRT footage from 1954, the subjects are railroads (especially Minnesota Railfan Association fan trips), non-Minnesota

electric lines, and the early days of the Minnesota Transportation Museum. Each reel contains a mix of subjects. I wanted to preserve the MTM footage, because most of it shows the development of our Como-Harriet line. However, that's a small minority of the footage. Recently I decided the best option was to donate the films to the local Northstar Chapter of the National Railroad Historical Society. I had previously donated Cordes' slides to them. We've always had a good relationship with them and there is overlapping membership between our two organization. More importantly, NRHS is actively cataloguing material for its library, so the films will get proper attention, including digitizing, much sooner than we could ever do it.

Miscellaneous info requests. **Bill Arends** monitors the MSM email box and forwards questions and info requests to me. Here are a few from the last few months.

The City of Minnetonka recently purchased an old farmstead next to Purgatory Creek and just south of Excelsior Boulevard. The Lake Minnetonka suburban line went through the property, which includes a still-standing streetcar bridge abutment. The City contacted us to get more info about the location. We were able to provide a color postcard of the location and a right-of-way map. We're also supplying several photos and vintage video for a pictorial history of Robbinsdale.

Katie Flann of Tonka Bay wanted to know the location of the Wildhurst steamboat dock and the streetcar branch that served it. Turns out the Wildhurst branch went through her back yard. When the snow goes away, she'll trace it to the old dock site, and I plan to drop by and see it for myself.

We regularly get requests to use photos from our collection. MnDOT recently asked to use one of our St. Paul Southern photos for a history display at the new Hastings bridge. The American Society of Civil Engineers is using one of our Mesaba Electric photos on their centennial meeting program. We provided a couple of photos of Nicollet Ball Park for an upcoming book on old Twin Cities ballparks.

With the recent dispersal of most of the remaining Newark Subway ex-Twin City PCC cars to museums, the Baltimore Streetcar Museum now has ex-TCRT No. 415, and we've sent them photos of it while in TCRT service. 🍪



Excelsior Streetcar Line Update

Bruce Kobs — Superintendent & Todd Bender — Assistant Superintendent

Recognition. Success of the ESL operations would not be possible without the many hours of dedication and loyalty of our volunteers. I need to single out, however, **Todd Bender** and his leadership and attention to details during the 2013 Halloween and Santa Trolleys. His “The Show Must Go On” motivation rallied ESL to a new level allowing 2,468 riders to enjoy a great time. Thank you Todd.

Year 2013 in Summary. Ridership in 2013 increased by 917 to 6,542. Here’s a quick run-down: Thursday +224; Santa Trolley +180; Halloween +168; Charters +112; Crazy Days +85; Trick r Treat +53; Sunday +7; Saturday +5. Apple Day operations and Story Time trolley carried 74 and 5 fewer riders respectively.

Income increased to \$ 13,912.00 with increases in fares of \$ 2,271; donations +\$ 335; and, merchandise + \$ 47.

Because of mechanical problems to TCRT gate car No. 1239, our standard service car for 2014 will be DSR No. 78. If anyone knows of days which will require the use of a larger car to accommodate a larger number of riders, please let **Marv Krafve** know at least a week ahead so our repair crew of **Karl Jones**, **Todd Bender** and **Don Neilsen**, who work on Sunday, can make No. 1239 ready for operation.

The start of the season is one month away. Thursday, May 1st will be our first day operating in 2014. Volunteer early on *ShiftPlanning*. ☺



(Above left) The interior of Winona No. 10 is coming along nicely as shown in this photo. Much of the interior woodwork is finished and installed. (Above right) **Scott Heiderich** (left) and **Mike Miller** are working on the interior wiring. Here Scott is pointing to a panel above the platform entrance behind which will be mounted the fuses for the lighting and other circuits. (Bill Graham photos)



Here’s the photo that inspired MSM member **Dutton Foster** to paint the picture on the right. He writes to Aaron Isaacs: “I’m a supporter of MSM, [and] I enjoy contributing a bit and keeping up on the news. Among other subjects, I like to paint railroad scenes. With historic subjects, I have to rely on photos in many cases, some of which are my own, some from friends, and some from published material. I often change the setting if I’m using a published photo, but in the case of the attached painting, [your] cover photo by Stan Griffith was so perfectly composed and evocative of TCRT’s N.St.Paul/Mahtomedi line that I pretty much just painted what I saw....I hope you enjoy the image. I enjoyed making it.”

What's Happening?

April	Recertification of operating personnel begins. A separate notice will be sent out in April.
April & May	New Operator training —schedule to be determined. You can start recruiting your friends now.
May 1	Start of Thursday afternoon operations at ESL.
May 3	Start of weekend operations at CHSL and ESL
May 26	Special Memorial Day operations at both ESL and CHSL

**MSM News & Views — News of our Museum's Administration and Membership**

Aaron Isaacs — MSM Car barn Expansion Project Manager

Isaacs Car barn Expansion Update. It's taken a long time, but we've finally received project approval from the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, the last regulatory hurdle to overcome short of the actual construction permit. Now we move into the final design/construction phase. This is a complicated project, requiring grading, a foundation, concrete flooring, a metal building, HVAC, electrical, storm water mitigation, fire suppression, fencing, landscaping and relocation of an overhead wire pole. While we're at it, we want to fix the existing building's leaky roof.

We are lucky to have an experienced general contractor, **Glen Sandness**, who has volunteered to run the construction project. Glen lives in Linden Hills a couple of blocks from the car barn and is in the process of retiring after 35 years in construction, building everything from houses to gas stations to churches. If you see him around the car barn, be sure to thank him.

Special thanks go to **Dennis Stephens**, who has done much of the detailed planning for the car barn addition. He has made numerous computer drawings of the building's dimensions, and has spent a lot of time working on the layout of the spaces within the addition. ☺

Sneak Peek!

What is this thing on the right, you ask? Well it's a symbol of MSM coming into the 21st century. As most of us know, there are folks out there who don't carry cash. At CHSL, when they tried to pay for streetcar rides or merchandise with a credit card we had to turn them away. We also felt that not accepting credit cards has hurt our merchandise sales. So, starting this season, we will accept credit cards at CHSL's Linden Hills Station. To implement this major change, we had to get a new "point of sale" cash register. The shot on the right (sorry that it's small) is the "home screen" for the new machine. It's a touch-screen system and is a snap to use. No more lock-ups with this machine as it's very user friendly. But, as with anything else that's new, you have to get used to it and a little training scheduled for April and May will help a lot as the season starts.

**(We've Been Busy This Winter** *Continued from page 1)*

for an hour or more. One optimistic party has scheduled a charter for April 17. Stay near your phone; Jerry may be calling you soon for this one.

So now we just need to have the sun shine, the temperatures rise, the snow melt, the annual maintenance on the streetcars finished, the Foremen and Operators recertified, train all Foremen, Operators and Station Agents on the new POS system, rails greased, depot cleaned up, merchandise back on the shelves and we'll be ready to roll. See you soon out on the line. ☺

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

I close this month's column by announcing that this will be my last year as your Chair of the Museum's Board of Directors, and I will be stepping down in March, 2015. No, I am not leaving MSM and will continue to be as active as I can in the museum, but for many reasons it is time for me to hand over the reins to someone else. I've always said that organizations such as ours thrive when there is turnover in leadership positions to give us new ideas and new energy, and we suffer when people feel "stuck" in their position because no one else can or will do what they do. Well, I am confident that a new Board Chair will be better than me in many ways and I have close to a year to find my successor. If you are interested, give me a call or e-mail. You do not have to be a current Director to become Chairman, so don't let that stop you!

Wow, what a winter this has been. More than most years, I cannot wait to ride the streetcar and feel a warm breeze through that open window. I hope you will be there to ride with me! ☺