

STREETCAR

CURRENTS

June 2020



MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

Bruce Gustafson—General Supt.

Our Season “On Hold”

Board Chair **Aaron Isaacs** reports on page two that the Museum Board of Directors and our Museum’s officers and superintendents are taking a very cautious approach to reopening the Museum to the public. What we are doing is:

- complying with the state of Minnesota’s guidelines regarding group gatherings as well as guidance from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;
- adopting applicable operational practices recommended by our trade organization, the HeritageRail Alliance; and,
- monitoring how other tourist railways and railway/streetcar museums are planning to open, so we can observe their progress and emulate their best practices.



Last week the Board decided to cancel all operations for June, impacting charter and regular operations at both Como-Harriet and Excelsior. The Board will meet in mid-June to decide whether to reopen in July or continue the shut-down for another month.

While operations are on hold, there are many non-operating and behind the scenes activities going on to keep moving on some planned activities and to plan for opening later this summer. These activities include:

- **Car barns to partially reopen.** **Dick Zawacki**, with input from others, has written policies and procedures for the shop maintenance crews and anyone else needing to access the car barns. If you have the need to enter the carbarns there are several safety actions you must follow. Please read the policy document (MSM Policy #11), which was sent to you a few days ago and will be placed on the Museum’s website. Volunteers will be told when they can enter the carbarns.
- **Work continues on TCRT No. 1239.** Thanks to **Karl Jones**, **Dennis Stephens**, **Jim Willmore**, **Rob Mangels** and others, progress is being made on making No. 1239 ready for regular service. Work on the ex-Toronto traction motors is almost complete which has been on-going over the last few months by a local electric motor shop.
- **Yard and grounds work continues.** As we all know grass and weeds do not stop growing. While most of us are paying more attention to our lawns than most years, **Steve McCulloch** and **Linda Ridlehuber** have been working on leaf blowing, grass mowing, and gardening at CHSL to keep the property maintained. **Ben** and **Mary Porter** are also working on the depot garden.

Detailed plans are being developed to address volunteer and guest safety to support the Museum opening in the “new normal” age of COVID-19. This effort, led by **Aaron Isaacs**, **Rod Eaton**, **Louis Hoffman**, **Karen Kertzman**, **Jim Vaitkunas**, and others includes social distancing, limiting physical contact, staffing changes, sanitation procedures, etc. A specific MSM policy and procedure is being written now and will be distributed to all operating personnel prior to the start of public operations.

We plan to send a questionnaire to all operating personnel in mid-June to get their responses for volunteering if we reopen in July or August. The responses will influence when and how we reopen.

In these times of uncertainty, **please be safe**. Thank you for your on-going interest in and support of the Museum. 🍀

Inside This Issue

From the Front Platform	2
Motorman Bill talks about TCRT and the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic	3
Coming Events	4
MSM News & Views	4



From the Front Platform—Thoughts on Our Museum

Aaron Isaacs — MSM Board Chair

It shouldn't be a surprise that things won't return to normal anytime soon. The Minnesota Streetcar Museum Board has cancelled June operations for the public. However, the shops are about to reopen. With input from others, Chief Mechanical Officer **Dick Zawacki** has drafted rules for reopening the shops with infrared thermometer checks, social distancing, face masks, hand sanitation, and the other measures needed to minimize the chance of infection. We're just waiting for the infrared thermometers to arrive. It will be good to get back to work.

Reopening for the public is a much more difficult decision. I think the earliest it could possibly happen is August and I'm skeptical about that. The computer models used by Minnesota's Governor predict that infections won't peak until around July 1. We'll probably need to see at least a month of decline and no second wave of infections before we'll consider it.

When we do reopen, it will be a very different experience. Recently **Rod Eaton** and I served on a HeritageRail Alliance task force to draft recommended practices for reopening railway museums. It was a useful learning experience and we have adapted it to fit our situation. It's too early to get into the details, but you can imagine that online fare sales, social distancing, masks and sanitizing the streetcar after every trip will be part of the regimen. Fewer days of operation will probably be the norm, at least in 2020.

Looking ahead to the fall, it seems highly unlikely that we'll run our big Halloween and Christmas special events. Full streetcars with long waiting lines and Santa talking up close to every child is simply not doable. Maybe a virtual meeting with Santa could work? We're thinking about it.

The good news is that the rebuilding of TCRT gate car No. 1239's trucks by our contractor **Rob Mangels** is moving forward, as is the repair to Winona No. 10's failed motor. **Steve McCulloch** is starting groundskeeping activities and **Ben** and **Mary Porter** are working on the depot garden.

We were planning to do the big overhead wire repair project in the Fall, assuming that our contractor would work on the weekdays, putting the overhead back together each Friday so we could run on weekends. We also were planning to work around a Minneapolis Park Board tree trimming project. Given the likelihood that we'll be closed through July and maybe later, I've asked Chief Engineer **Keith Anderson** to try and move the project to this summer. **Jim Vaitkunas** is currently shopping for the needed overhead wire components from other trolley museums.



Meanwhile, online...While we're closed, **Rod Eaton** and his crew of Facebook contributors have been adding content to keep everyone engaged and entertained. I encourage everyone to check out the May 26 Facebook post, put together by **Todd Bender** and starring **Karen** and **Jim Kertzman** and **Elaine Love**. Suffice it to say that Duluth No. 265 has found a new purpose during the virus shutdown. 🍷

Repaired Railing. An inattentive driver hit and damaged the railing at CHSL's ex-TCRT pedestrian underpass (that's Lake Harriet in the background). The car hit it and knocked the upper pipe completely off. After some consultation with the city and the Park Board, the city repaired it.

(Aaron Isaacs photo)



Motorman Bill Talks About the 1918 Spanish Flu Epidemic



UP here in TCRT's Snelling station in the sky, we old timers have heard that you folks down there are in the midst of something called the Covid-19 pandemic. Well, back in our day during the Great War, we Motormen and Conductors had the same problem to deal with. In our time it was called the Spanish flu epidemic and it really did bother the TCRT company. Ridership had been growing every year since at least 1893. It reached 199.8 million in 1916, then plateaued at 199.6 in 1917. The transit system was busy and still struggling to meet demand.

The so-called Spanish influenza started on the east coast and spread west. Here in the Twin Cities, the flu first appeared among soldiers at Fort Snelling and military cadets at the University of Minnesota. From there it spread to the general population. On October 4, 1918 there were 1000 cases, half of them soldiers. The first civilian deaths followed within days.

On October 10, doctors began to recommend banning all parades and large gatherings. That day there were 221 new cases reported and 10 deaths.

The gatherings that no one could avoid were on the streetcars, where rush hour crush standing loads were the norm. I remember reading in the October 14 Minneapolis Tribune, that Dr. Richard Beard, assistant dean of the U of M medical school, decided that better ventilation would help. He said, "Walk, rather than ride. Ride, if you must, in an open air conveyance. Button up wraps and overcoats and open wide the windows of the street car however cold it may be."

The next day the Minneapolis City Council directed the city health department to work with stores and employers to reduce the loads on the streetcars by closing on alternate days. Shoppers were advised to avoid the afternoon rush hour.

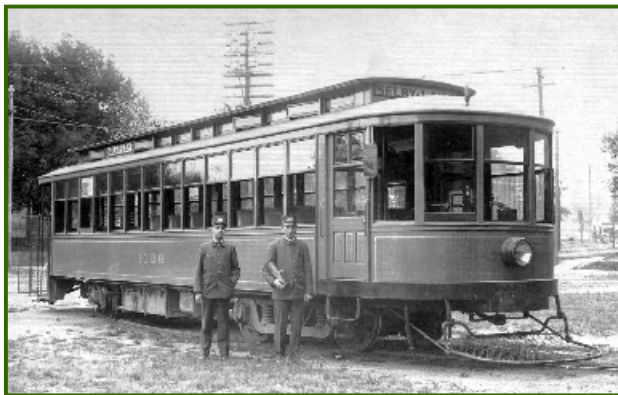
Schools were closed on October 22, which reduced ridership by high school students.

The October 26 Tribune reported that City officials had met with TCRT to propose reducing the number of passengers per streetcar. President Horace Lowry was agreeable to trying. The paper reported "Mr. Lowry declared that much of the difficulty lies in the disinclination of the public to permit cars to go by when there seemed to be room for more passengers." The city's initial idea was to add streetcars to lessen the load per car. TCRT had no financial incentive to do so, and it was probably impossible to accomplish during the rush hours anyway. Instead both Minneapolis and St. Paul officials and TCRT agreed to limited streetcar loads to 84 passengers. The cars seated about 50, so 84 was still a large standing load, just not packing them to the doors. In retrospect reducing loads to 84 would have had zero positive health impact. It didn't help that gas rationing was in effect because of World War I, which pushed more people onto the streetcar system. In fact, the government had mandated "gasless Sundays", which pushed more people onto the streetcars.

The infections continued to go up and on November 8 the city closed "all saloons, dance halls, soda fountains, cafes and restaurants, including chop suey restaurants". The TCRT Schedule Department logbook had these notes. "Account of Spanish Influenza Epidemic, theatres, etc. closed temporarily and therefore 12 minute service at night operated on both Monroe & Bryant and 4th Ave. So. & 6th Ave. No. lines effective Oct. 24, 1918.

The closure was lifted and the regular night schedules resumed on November 15. Those are the only service reductions the company had, as far as I know.

As cold weather began to arrive, the paper announced, "Street car windows will be kept open until the temperature drops to the freezing point, when they will be closed if the cars are heated and a ventilating system is installed. After conference with A. W. Warnock, general passenger agent for the Twin City Lines, it was announced that special ventilation and heating systems will be installed in all cars during the next few days." It is unclear what that ventilation and heating system would have been. Warnock may have been referring to



Here's TCRT gate car No. 1188 at the Minneapolis end of the SELBY-LAKE line with the crew. No 1188 was a Class G-6 car built by TCRT's 31st Street Shops in 1906. Taken earlier, this photo shows what a typical TCRT streetcar looked like during the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic. (MSM photo archives)

(Continued on bottom of page 4)

July 4-----U.S. Independence Day



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

Jim Vaitkunas — *MSM Corporate Secretary & Assistant Ops Chief*

Renewing you membership on-line. More of you are renewing your memberships on line and we really appreciate that. Renewing on line helps us out in several ways including savings on printing and postage. And we'd like to remind all members that you don't have to wait to send in your renewal dues. Look on the back of your member's pass and you'll see the expiration date. Then, simply go to our website and renew: <https://trolleyride.org/about/become-a-member/>

MSM's financial situation. As you can well imagine, our Museum's financial situation is taking a heavy hit during the current COVID-19 pandemic—no operations means zero income! As reported in last month's *Streetcar Currents*, our current financial reserves will allow our Museum to ride out the COVID-19 and still have funds to continue our mission of preserving Minnesota's electric railway history. But even while we're in decent financial shape, we could use your help to soften the financial blow of the current shut-down. So we ask that if you are able, please contribute to the Museum whatever amount you can. Please go to our website to donate:

<https://trolleyride.org/annual-appeal/>

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

The museum's business address and telephone number are:

P.O. Box 16509
 Minneapolis, MN 55416-0509
 952-922-1096

Streetcar CURRENTS
 June 2020

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 edition of the **Streetcar CURRENTS** is June 20, 2020.

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

13326 Huntington Lane
 Apple Valley, MN 55124-9481

E-mail: jvaitkunas@msn.com



We Start Them Young!

There are times when we all need a little help. This young man celebrated his birthday with a "Streetcar Adventure" charter on the Excelsior Streetcar Line. He and his friends learned about the streetcar and how to operate safely before taking over the controls to take the car down the line. He needed the help of a stepstool to reach the controls and see the track in front of the car. And he may also have needed a little help from the Motorman now and then. We are currently closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic but check out trolleyride.org to see when you can once again ride the streetcar.

(Story and photo by Elaine Love)

(Editor's Note: This was posted on our Museum's Facebook page. If you're interested in seeing more of these interesting posts, just type "Minnesota Streetcar Museum" in the Facebook search bar on the top and then hit the "Like" button right below it.

(Motorman Bill Continued from page 3)

the new forced air systems that replaced hot water heat, but that didn't happen until 1920-1924.

The number of new infections and deaths gradually went down in November and the by November 15 the business closures were revoked. Schools were reopened briefly in December, but the virus rebounded somewhat, causing them to be closed again.

The epidemic had an impact on the company's ridership, which dropped 10.7 million from the year before, from 199.6 million to 188.9 million. Since that drop was concentrated in the fourth quarter of 1918, that quarter was down 22 percent from what it would have been. Ridership rebounded to 222.1 million in 1919.

I also heard from my brothers up in Duluth that the TCRT and Duluth Street Railway annual reports for 1918 contained almost identical language. "During the months of October and November the Spanish Influenza epidemic, and the necessary quarantine regulations, largely reduced the Company's gross income."

(Editor's Note. The above article was actually written by Aaron Isaacs, and Motorman Bill thanks Aaron for doing the research and writing it.)