

STREETCAR

CURRENTS

September-October 2020



MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

New Railroad Ties Installed at CHSL and Wire Work at ESL *Aaron Isaacs—Board Chair*

We hired Railroad Specialties, Inc. to replace 200 rotted ties at our Como-Harriet Streetcar Line and they did so on August 26-28. It's an interesting process, with several specialized machines doing much of the work. All have gasoline engines and employ hydraulics to do what they do. Our volunteers marked with yellow paint all the ties to be removed.

Removing the bad ties starts with the mechanical spike puller. It reaches down with a pair of pincers, clamps onto the spike head and pulls.

Next comes the tie plate remover. It grips both rails, then a hydraulic foot pushes down on the middle of the tie hard enough to lift both rails a couple of inches. The operator manually removes the tie plate from under the rail. It often takes a blow or two with a spike maul to knock them loose enough to remove.

The next machine is the tie inserter, designed to grab the end of the tie and pull it out from under the rail. That only works if the tie is still reasonably solid. If it's rotten, the end often breaks off and they have to extract the remaining pieces by hand. Close clearances next to our two boarding platforms prevented the tie inserter from working there and those had to be completely removed manually.

Other members of the crew load new ties on a skid steer and drop them next to the track where needed. The contractor supplied most of them, but we contributed the last 11 good ones from our tie pile, which saved a few hundred dollars.

Some hand shoveling is needed to form a deep enough trench for the tie inserter to slide a new one into place. Ballast is then shoveled around the tie. The tie plate remover lifts the rails again so the tie plates can be shoved under.

Next comes tamping to compact the loose ballast tight around and under the tie. The big tamping machine punches repeatedly down into the ballast with steel fingers. Afterward a pneumatic spike driver, essentially a jackhammer, drives in the spike. The final step is smoothing out the ballast with a skid steer.

This tie job replaced only 2/3 of the rotted ties, which was all we could afford at this time. However, all the bad ties replaced were under rail joints, the most important locations. There are no longer consecutive bad ties. Our axle loadings are only one-fifth of what a freight railroad experiences, so this job buys us several years before more track work will be needed. We can run at our regular speeds with confidence.

At Excelsior, the project to install trolley wire pull-offs on two curves started on September 9th and is now complete. Killmer Electric Company did the work and it took five days to install backbone wires and the pull-offs on the two curves. The object of this project was to correct a design error and get the trolley wire back towards the center-line of the track, but offset to the inside the curve by a small amount. This work will help reduce the trolley wheel squeal that occurred on these curves. ⊕



Streetcar CURRENTS Covid-19 and Winter Publication Schedule

In a departure from our Museum's usual newsletter publication schedule, this is a combined September-October issue of the Streetcar CURRENTS for this most unusual year of 2020. After this combined issue, the CURRENTS will be sent to you following our usual winter schedule which is every other month on or about these dates: December 1st, February 1st, and April 1st. Monthly publication resumes on May 1st. If you don't receive your issue on or shortly after those dates please contact me at: jvaitkunas@msn.com



Air compressor gets railroad wheels. (Photo by Ben Porter)



Railroad tie extractor and new tie inserter at work. (Photo by Aaron Isaacs)



Driving new spikes into installed railroad tie. (Photo by Aaron Isaacs)



Tamper gets the ballast stone under the tie. (Photo by Aaron Isaacs)



(Above) Linda Ridlehuber (L) and Mary (R) and Ben Porter have been working hard keeping the garden in front of the Linden Hills station looking great. (Right) the Linden Hill Station's benches have been painted. (Ben Porter photos)





Killmer's crew started their work on 9/9/2020 on the west end of ESL. Here, the crew is installing a backbone wire. Two pull-offs will be installed between each pair of support poles. *(Jim Vaitkunas photo)*



After the backbones were installed, the crew pre-assembled the pull-off insulators, wire and clamps. The crew Foreman was **Jeff Tuccitto** (L) and **Graham Harding** (R). *(Jim Vaitkunas photo)*



The Killmer crew started installing the pull-offs at the east end of ESL. *(Jim Vaitkunas photo)*



The first pull-off is clamped to the trolley wire. The wire to the backbone will then be tightened to pull the trolley wire closer to the center of the track, but about six inches off the center-line. *(Jim Vaitkunas photo)*



Volunteer **Pete Cahill** (L) chartered Duluth No. 265 for a family outing. It was the first ESL charter of the season. On this beautiful sunny day, Pete's grandson enjoyed his first streetcar ride. He was thrilled with the moving car as well as the gongs, whistle and noisy parts. The whole family had an enjoyable time. *(Karen Kertzman photo)*



Since we're not operating, our volunteers have been doing a few "catch-up" projects such as cleaning up the carbarns, bench seat painting, and collecting scrap materials to get some much-needed income. At ESL, **Dave** (R) and **Dick McCollum** are stripping insulation off scrap copper wire. *(Karen Kertzman photo)*



TCRT gate car No. 1239 now has a Baker heater on its front platform (right photo). The volunteers in the George Isaacs carbarn and shop painted the heater recently and it was installed by **Karl Jones** on 9/16/2020. Karl and the shop guys will continue the work to install the flue and smoke jack through the roof over the coming weeks. Our Museum got the Baker heater from the Strasburg Railroad in Pennsylvania. We'll never build a fire in the heater but it sure will make No. 1239 more authentic looking. *(Karl Jones photo)*

In the photo on the left you can see a Baker heater installed on an unknown TCRT car sometime prior to 1910. Note the short "peanut whistle" on the left side of the front platform roof.



We may not be operating but we still need to keep our right-of-way clear of trees and bushes. Here's (L to R) **Luca Gunther, Ben Allyn and Steve McCulloch** after a recent brush cutting session at CHSL. **John Flynn & Ben Porter** were also on the crew. *(Ben Porter photo)*

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:

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Streetcar CURRENTS
September-October 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 November 20, 2020.

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

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OK, what's a trolley pole doing on the front end of a TCRT standard car? This is TCRT No. 1583 built by TCRT's Snelling Shops in April-May 1913. The car was later sold and moved to Wisconsin and used as a cabin. The East Troy Electric Railroad restored it for double-end operation with a second controller in the rear and a trolley pole on the front end. This was necessary because the seven-mile long main line of the East Troy Museum has no turning loop or wye at either end. The seats are not TCRT standard seats but are able to flip over so passengers can face the direction the car is going.

The East Troy Electric Railway is operating now and is located in East Troy, Wisconsin about 20 miles southwest of Milwaukee. The car in the background is a beautiful and classic wood interurban car No. 26 from the Sheboygan Light Power and Railway Co.