

STREETCAR

CURRENTS

September 2025



Minneapolis Street Railway Service Began 150 Years ago!

Article by MSM Historian Brian Long

Tuesday, September 2, 2025 marks the 150th anniversary of the beginning of revenue operation for the Minneapolis Street Railway. The Minnesota Streetcar Museum will be running two streetcars (weather permitting) between 4:00pm and 8:00pm on Tuesday, September 2 to honor the occasion.

On September 2, 1875, with the financing led by **Thomas Lowry**, the Minneapolis Street Railway first put its small fleet of horsecars into operation on its one line from 4th Avenue North & Washington Avenue in downtown to the University of Minnesota campus at 4th Street Southeast & 14th Avenue Southeast. In a 1908 newspaper article, the Minneapolis Street Railway reported that two horsecars were placed into service that first day to cover the line of 2.1 miles in length, the fare was 5 cents, and the revenue that day totaled \$21.50. The Electric Railways of Minnesota by museum member **Russ Olson** indicates full operation of the line ultimately required 5 horsecars for a 15-minute headway, and each horsecar required 6 horses to adequately cover daily operation (horses being switched out in shifts). Olson indicates there were other attempts at constructing horsecar lines in Minneapolis, as well as a horsecar operation that preceded the Minneapolis Street Railway. The September 2, 1875 date is significant in that it was the beginning of a direct lineage of transit operation extending to the current day operations of Metro Transit.

The photo on the right shows the first horsecar of the Minneapolis Street Railway. The photo was, however, taken in 1891, not 1875. By the time of the photo, both Minneapolis and Saint Paul had entered the era of the electric streetcar, with the first electric streetcar line placed in operation in Minneapolis on December 24, 1889, and in Saint Paul on February 22, 1890. Within a matter of years, horsecars in the Twin Cities would disappear entirely (and the same with the cable cars in Saint Paul), replaced by the superior technology of the electric streetcar.



This Photo shows an open horsecar somewhere on the 6th Avenue North to 27th Avenue South route. Open cars were popular in the summer, but TCRT quickly realized that having a set of cars that were used for only a few months was not good economics. The company had some open cars into the electric era but they didn't last very long and were off the roster by around 1910. Note the dirt and muddy street.



Inside This Issue

From the Front Platform	2
MSM's Photo Ops	3
Coming Events	4
MSM News & Views	4
Kid's Camps at CHSL	4



From the Front Platform—Thoughts on Our Museum

Aaron Isaacs — MSM Board Chair

Managing in an all-volunteer museum. I've been the MSM Board Chair for ten years now, which means I function as our CEO. In that time I've learned a few things about managing in an all-volunteer museum. To orient you on our management structure, take a look at the org chart. Heading the Railway Operations side is General Superintendent **Bruce Gustafson** and he runs that show. We talk, but I only get involved when we draft the annual budget and if he runs into a policy issue requiring Board action.



I'm directly responsible for the left side of the org chart. It includes finance, education and interpretation (all the history stuff), development and fund raising, marketing-community relations, administration, membership services and information technology. It also says special events, but that really functions as part of operations and should be moved there.

So, what have I learned?

(1) All-volunteer organizations work differently than places with paid employees. Arbitrary or heavy-handed decisions by top management are the wrong approach. Our place runs by consensus. Any change has to be vetted by the stakeholders and accepted before being implemented. If there's strong resistance, it's time to back off and reconsider.

(2) Leadership is still necessary, but with a gentle touch. Seeking consensus doesn't rule out making changes and creating initiatives. The job of the Board, the Chair and management is to always look for better ways to fulfill our mission. This is particularly true when it comes to operational safety, since we deal with big, dangerous equipment. Once a potential improvement is identified, it needs to be vetted (see #1 above).

(3) Stay out of the volunteers' way, unless they really screw up or create problems. They're volunteering because they're enthusiastic and care about the work. Often their knowledge and skill is very sophisticated. With few exceptions, we're very lucky they showed up. Unneeded meddling adds no value. However, behavior that is unsafe, in violation of operating rules and procedures or the Member Conduct Code must be dealt with without hesitation.

(4) Someone has to take the long view. That's the job of the Chair and the Board. We're in the perpetual preservation business and we need to think long term. That's why there will be a long term planning meeting after this year's operating season ends.

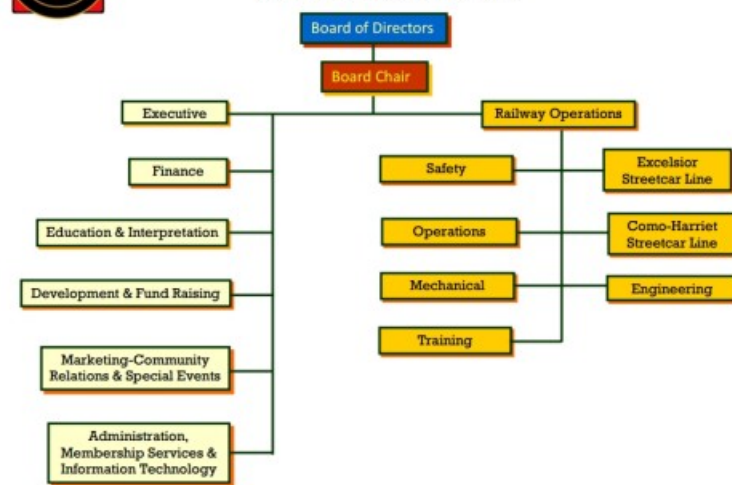
(5) You have to have an organized process for incorporating new volunteers. That's where the Volunteer Coordinator is essential. Supervisors need to be welcoming when a new person shows up. Closed cliques harm museums.

(6) Always be thinking about succession planning. Our volunteer roster constantly turns over as people age or leave for whatever reason. Good, willing volunteers should be promoted to positions of greater responsibility.



MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

ORGANIZATION DIAGRAM



MSM Organization Chart (2025-1-16)

(Continued on next page)

(From The Front Platform—Continued from page 2)

(7) Good administrative processes are your friend. Workable ways to do purchasing and deal with personnel issues (especially conflict resolution) make the organization run more smoothly. You don't want to make up procedures on the spot. Have them settled in advance.

(8) Keep the Board away from operational issues. You've heard this from me before. The Board should confine itself to approving budgets, long term plans and policy decisions. This can be challenging when the Board members also wear operating hats. You never want the Board deciding what color to paint the streetcar. That undercuts the operating management and creates a decision making bottleneck at the Board.

I believe we have a well run organization. Staying the course that I've described above will keep it that way. ☺

Around the Museum



We've made major progress on the canopy roof in August. All the roof boards are finally on, plus most of the plywood that goes on top of the boards. That's **Glen Sandness** on the ground cutting boards to size and **Scott Benson** on the roof installing them.

(Aaron Isaacs photo)



We finally have a new/old bumper for TCRT PCC car No. 322. Through the good office's of museum friend **Bill Wall** of Connecticut's Shore Line Trolley Museum, we got a good replacement. Observing the new bumper are **Jim Willmore**, **Dennis Stephens**, **Bill Wall** and **Mark Digre**. (Jim Vaitkunas photo)



David McCollum, **Howie Melco** and **Dave Buckman** examining the wear patterns on the brake shoes of Winona No. 10. It was discovered that some brake heads on which the brake shoes are mounted were improperly fabricated and misaligned causing excess wear on several brake shoes. (Jim Kertzman photo)



The ESL Motorettes having fun celebrating Motorette's Day on August 23rd: **Sarah Dibble**, **Mary Amsden**, **Karen Kertzman**, and **Elaine Love**. (Jim Kertaman photo)

September 1----- Labor Day operations at ESL and CHSL

September 2----- Special operations at CHSL celebrating the 150th anniversary of the start Minneapolis Street Railway service with its first horsecar line

September 20 & 21-----Excelsior Apple Days festival at ESL



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

Jim Vaitkunas — MSM Corporate Secretary & Assistant Ops Chief

Membership Renewal. Membership Services Manager **Barb Gacek** says: don't forget to renew your membership when you get a reminder notice! We appreciate when you send in the renewal slip soon after you receive the first notice so that we don't have to snail-mail another reminder letter. You can also save a stamp by renewing online at trolleyride.org under "Member Resources". Thanks! 📧

CHSL Hosts Youngsters at 2025 Kid's Camps

Once again, MSM hosted two Streetcar camps, based on age. The first camp, ages 6-10 had 14 campers, the largest group we've had for a camp! They learned the basics of what powers the streetcar and had a chance to operate TCRT 1300. The second camp had 6 kids ages 11-16. Because of the age, we were able to delve into more technical intricacies of streetcar technology. This group had a chance to operate the controls, including the brakes, on both TCRT 1300 and 322. The kids were enthusiastic and all had a great time (including the counselors). (Article by Ted Rich; Photos by Andy Jacob)

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 e-mail address are:

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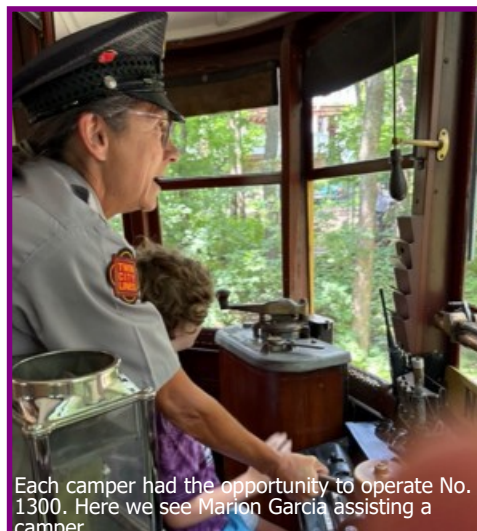
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Deadline for submitting items for the next edition of the Streetcar **CURRENTS** is September 20, 2025

Please send items for the Currents to:
Jim.vaitkunas@trolleyride.org



Pat Cosgrove and Marcus Corbin explain some of the outer workings of TCRT No. 1300.



Each camper had the opportunity to operate No. 1300. Here we see Marion Garcia assisting a camper.



Younger campers refer to their workbooks.



Anja Curiskis assists a camper in operating No. 1300's rear controls.