

STREETCAR

CURRENTS

January-February 2026



MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM



From the Front Platform—Report on Our Museum

Aaron Isaacs — MSM Board Chair

Long range planning session results. The January 3 Long Range Planning session was the first in many years. In attendance were 20 Board members, managers and key staff. The goal was to reach consensus on several long-term projects that will shape the future of our museum. I want to thank **Dennis Stephens, Jerry Draeger** and **Dick Zawacki** for researching the issues and presenting option choices to the group.

The future of Mesaba Rwy No. 10. Over the last few years, the ESL shop crew has cleaned junk out of the car, made the trucks usable and installed them under the car, which can now be towed. The decision was made to begin the restoration of Mesaba No. 10's car body after Winona No. 10 is approved for operation later this year. The first priority is to rebuild the platform and steps and get the interior to the point where the public can walk through and view the restoration in progress. It was also agreed to make one power truck operable so the car can move around the carbarn under its own power.



Where does the Birney go? Fargo & Moorhead St Rwy Birney No. 28 (American Car Co. 1923) has been in dead storage in Watertown, Minnesota. Whenever TCRT No. 1239's new trucks are finished, that will create room in the George Isaacs Carbarn for a single truck streetcar. The decision was made to move the Birney to Lake Harriet. That way there will a restoration underway at both carbarns.

Excelsior carbarn roof and solar. We know the Excelsior carbarn roof needs replacement. It was decided to install a new metal standing seam roof in 2027. Solar will not be installed, although it could be installed in the future if the economics of it become more favorable. In the meantime, several trees overhanging the roof have to be removed.

Isaacs carbarn improvements and repairs. After No. 1239's truck project is complete, but before the Birney can be moved in, we decided to make the following improvements to the Isaacs Carbarn.

- Move some of the stored streetcar parts and other “stuff” out of the rear of the ready barn into a new storage building behind the shop. This would be a larger replacement for the current small garage.
- Create a new heated work area in the ready barn. This includes removing the existing brick floor, digging a second maintenance pit, insulating and heating the space, and installing a movable soft barrier to contain the heat.

The meeting approved a series of short-term repairs and improvements:

- Lengthen the existing pit so the rear truck of a streetcar can be over the pit with the doors closed.
- Repair roof leaks.
- Extend the trap rock apron in front of the carbarn.

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- Refurbish the carbarn doors.
- Divert the storm water runoff from Queen Avenue to eliminate flooding into the carbarn.
- Extend roof gutter on the Queen Avenue side.
- Lower the rear shop door threshold to floor height.

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(From The Front Platform *Continued from page 1*)

- Repair the walls of the original 1970 carbarn, now the rear of the ready barn.
- Paint a streetcar mural on the carbarn doors to deter graffiti.
- Install new maintenance pit covers that don't weigh as much as the ones we have now.
- Bring in a dumpster and do a major carbarn cleanout.

Project managers needed. We need volunteer project managers for the short term Isaacs Carbarn projects listed above. If you're interested, contact **Keith Anderson** keith.j.anderson@gmail.com or **Aaron Isaacs** aaronmona@aol.com.

Website and social media volunteers needed. This winter we want to revive our social media presence and better manage our website. We need volunteers to regularly do posts and update website material. If you're interested, contact **Katie Barron** kbarron989@gmail.com or Aaron Isaacs.

Commemorating the Duluth Incline. The Duluth Incline closed in 1939. Although never forgotten, there was nothing to tell the public where it had been and why it was an iconic feature of the city. That has now changed. The incline was located in the platted but vacant right of way of 7th Avenue West. Sidewalks and stairs that occupied the edges of the nonexistent street had become overgrown with brush and covered in places with dirt slides. The Friends of the Incline Steps and Duluth Preservation Alliance, working with the Duluth Parks Department, raised money and its volunteers cleared brush and cleaned up the sidewalks and steps. They also installed four interpretive signs that tell the incline's history. The result is the Incline Stairway Trail. It extends from 3rd Street to Skyline Parkway, about half of the original incline and a climb of 219 feet on a 15 percent grade. ☺



Folks braved the cold to enjoy visiting and a potluck dinner at the rescheduled MSM holiday party. Watch for the notice for the 2026 Summer family picnic to be held at ESL! (Leah Harp photo)

From the MSM Training Department

Plans for MSM's 2026 Operator training class are underway. If you have friends or family members who are interested in becoming a streetcar Operator, please have them complete a 'Become a Volunteer' form (under 'About the Museum') at www.trolleyride.org. Training begins at the end of March! For more info contact Training Superintendent **Bill Pekarna** at: bpkarna@gmail.com

How MSM Got Trucks for Duluth No. 265

Reminiscence by Bill Graham

The trucks under a streetcar are what makes it go and what makes it stop. The trucks can make the car ride smoothly and quietly, or they can make it ride rough and slow, like a noisy wheelbarrow. Without trucks, a streetcar is just a summer cabin by the lake or maybe just a shed for storing old junk. There used to be thousands of streetcar trucks in America, but today there are almost none to be found. Back in the 1970's, when we needed trucks for our No. 265, we could either search the world for trucks, or we could build them ourselves. Neither choice was very good, but it was all we had.

Chicago was selling trucks from old junked-out "EL" cars, but they had no motors. We had two trucks from an old TCRT electric locomotive that had very big, antique motors. The trick was to fit together some of the parts from both kinds of trucks and make a pair for No. 265. But, the different parts didn't fit together, so **George Isaacs** and **Keith Anderson** began cutting and grinding to make them fit.

The Chicago wheels were too small, so George bought some bigger ones from San Francisco MUNI. The motors were way too big to fit in the Chicago "EL" trucks, so George and Keith cut out some parts to make room for them. The brake rods didn't work, so **Jim Wilmore** got brake parts from a wrecked Burlington Northern freight car. Those worked just fine. The springs from Chicago were very stiff, so Keith took some of them out to make a softer ride.

When they were finished, the motors groaned and turned quite slowly. The brakes clanked, but they worked. The springs still were too stiff, but they weren't too bad. All together, the rebuilt trucks weren't all that great, but they worked. George and Keith had given us the trucks we needed to finish No. 265.

Years later, we learned that a streetcar company in Japan was junking old streetcars built long ago in America. They would give the trucks to us free if we could pay the cost of shipping them across the Pacific Ocean from Japan. **Mike Miller** asked for three pairs of these trucks, and then hustled around to find \$27,000 to pay for ocean shipping. The Japanese trucks arrived in a shipping box, and one pair for No. 265 was sent to the carbarn at Lake Harriet.

The Tuesday crew began taking them apart and found they were in excellent mechanical condition. They had a copper builder's plate written in Japanese characters. It said "Harbin City Railway." Harbin is a city in China. So it seems the trucks were built in Philadelphia around 1910 by the Brill Company; then were sent to Harbin, China, later going to Japan. Finally, they arrived back to Minneapolis to run under No. 265.

Today, these American-Japanese-American Brill Company trucks, ride beautifully, quietly and smoothly under our No. 265. If only they could talk, their stories would be wild, indeed.



Here are two photos of the work on DSR No. 265 taken in 1973 and 1974 at the ex-NPRR Como Shops. The photo of the left shows No. 265 and the temporary shop truck in front that came off the TCRT electric locomotive. The rear truck is one of the Chicago "EL" trucks and it still has the 3d rail shoe on it! On the right No. 265 is nearly ready to go to CHSL. The guys on the right are doing some work on one of the Chicago "EL" trucks.

BILL THE MOTORMAN



Bill

TCRT Was Prepared for Winter

Hi folks. Since last fall, thoughts turned to one thing in the TCRT's operating and maintenance departments—getting ready for winter operations. And, by golly, the company certainly was prepared for what lay ahead of it. There were a lot of things that the operating, station and Snelling Shop folks did to get ready for the winter season. Of course, all the coal stoves in the streetcars were cleaned and repaired and made ready. The supply cars also made the rounds to all the stations and other locations on the lines throughout the system stocking the coal and sand bins with their supply to start off the winter. Of course, major preparations were made with the company's fleet of snow plows.

Now while I have spent many an hour operating snow plows, I was curious as to the history of TCRT's snow plowing so I went to visit an old friend of mine at the Snelling Shops, Ole Johnson, who has worked for the company since the mid-1890s. Ole went into the shop's equipment files and here's what he came up with.

As of January 1893 Minneapolis and St. Paul had 37 snow plows and 2 snow sweepers. As of September 1904 TCRT owned 1 double-truck conveyor plow, 19 regular double-truck snow plows and 1 single-truck sweeper (built by the McGuire-Cummings Company). The 19 plows originally did not have a cab for the crew; the controls were out in the open. Brrr! That must have been cold! After some complaints from crews, a large cab was built on the front end to house the controls and crew. Later TCRT-built the steel underframe plows. Some of the original 19 plows remained as plows, but some were converted to work cars.

From 1906 thru 1910 the TCRT shops built 10 large steel-underframe snow plows. Four were conventional single end snow plows, but six were combination snow plow-sweepers. Ole showed me an article in a 1909 *Electric Railway Journal* that had a photo and description of No. 30. Major items mentioned—steel broom 52" in diameter, wing plows on both sides of the car. The plow is normally the forward end. The plow and wings remove most of the snow and the broom removes the remainder. With side wings extended the car removes snow from a strip 19 ft. wide including the strip between the tracks, and throws snow out 12 ft. from the outside rail. If heavy drifts are encountered, the car is operated from the broom end and the steel broom cuts through them. The broom assemblies and "pole side" wing assemblies were removed in 1942.

During the winter of 1917-1918 eight additional regular snow plows were built in the company shops. This brought the total number of snow plows in service to 18. These were used until the end of streetcar operations in 1953-1954. The trucks, motors and controls from 18 of the 42 high-speed suburban cars were removed and installed on the 18 snow plows each winter and removed each spring. (Reduced winter traffic required less cars on the Lake Minnetonka line.) After the Lake Minnetonka and Stillwater lines were abandoned in 1932 the high-speed trucks, motors and controls remained on the snow plows all year. The 18 snow plows were assigned to the various car stations. As of 1921 East Side Station had four (one for the Lake Minnetonka line), Nicollet Station had three, Lake St. Station had two, North Side Station had two, Snelling Station had four, Duluth Ave. Station had two, and Owen St. Station (Stillwater) had one. There were fixed snow plow routes at each station but we know details of only three routes and I won't go into those details here.

The regular motormen operated the snow plows although the company's rule books only hints at this. The TCRT's rulebook effective 11-1-1921, states: "52—Trainmen engaged in the operation of work cars or any other special equipment shall be under the same supervision and governed by all rules the same as in passenger service."

Another friend of mine, and one of your old-time MSM members, Kirt Blewett, who was a regular motorman, told me he also operated snow plows. "All of the snow plows that I worked out of Nicollet Station were of the 75-82 series (probably 77 and 78). On the plows I worked, and probably on all of them, both the plow and wing blades were air raised and gravity lowered. The wing was pulled out by a motorized winch and chains, pulled in by a rope block and tackle. Due to the short truck centers on the plows all of the normal underbody equipment was placed inside the carbody. Therefore if the reverser failed to throw from the controller, you would just go back in the car and throw it with the manual lever on the reverser. Plows had a three-man crew, consisting of motorman, wingman and trolleyman." Kirt also mentioned: "There was a lever (operated by the motorman) that controlled the slides on the bottom of the salt bunkers to drop salt on the track switches when going over them. The linkage was under the raised motorman's platform."

At the end of Twin City streetcar service 12 Snow Plows were dismantled and burned in 1953. The bodies of the remaining six snow plows were sold in 1954.



Did you ever dream about being a Motorman? Not in the 1890s, that's for sure! Here's a photo of Minneapolis single-truck No. 393 taken in 1892, which is much like our Duluth No. 78. See the Motorman on the open platform who's dressed for the weather! I'll bet you he was still cold with all those clothes on. Note the lack of houses in the background. They'll get built soon enough.



This photo came from the collection of Everett Jones, a TCRT employee who is shown operating the snow plow. This photo was taken in 1905 on Nicollet Avenue just south of 31st Street. As a condition of its city franchise, TCRT was required to plow the streets on which it operated. A few years later, the company built a fleet of more powerful snow plows, capable of cleaning a street in two passes.



Here's one of the Snelling Shops built plows that lasted until the end of streetcar service. Looks like a dump truck is backed-up to the car to load more salt into the plow. Taken on 3/24/1952 Fairview & St. Clair in St. Paul.



A rare color photo of a snow plow in Phalen Park, St. Paul.



Here's seven corners in St. Paul. Boy, has this scene changed, eh? I'd wager operating a PCC car in such slush and muck was very challenging given that PCCs had four 55-hp motors powering a relatively light 17-ton streetcar. Slippery starting and stopping, I'll bet!



Occasionally Duluth gets snow too! Taken on West Superior Street, in the background are the overhead railroad tracks to two of Duluth's ore unloading docks. With snow this deep, snow plows were not effective. Undoubtedly, this section was dug out by a lot of men who were temporary hires using mostly picks and shovels.

March 26 ----- MSM Annual member's meeting using the Zoom application
 March-May ----- CHSL & ESL new operator recruiting and training program
 May 2 ----- ESL's & CHSL's weekend operations for the 2026 operating season begin



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

Jim Vaitkunas — MSM Corporate Secretary & Assistant Ops Chief

MSM's Annual Meeting. Our annual meeting of the Museum's members will be held on Thursday, March 26, 2026 starting at 7:00 PM. For this annual meeting we'll be using the Zoom application as in the past few years. We are holding the meeting using Zoom because we found that doing so allows more of our members to attend the meeting and gives members who live outside of the Twin Cities and out of Minnesota a chance to see and hear what's going on in our museum. A link to the Zoom meeting will be sent by e-mail about a week prior to the annual meeting with a further reminder a few days prior to the meeting. We hope you can find the time to join the meeting and participate.

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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Streetcar CURRENTS January-February—2026

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 March 20, 2026.

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



↑A very unusual sight—Mississippi Valley Public Service (Winona lines) No. 10 is out in the snow during a move from track 2 in the cold barn to the warm barn. **Tom Heimer** is at the switch, **Howie Melco** is operating No. 10.

(Jerry Draeger photo)

←There's always a project that needs doing. Example: building stairs into the ESL warm barn's maintenance pit. The stairs replaced a short ladder which wasn't the safest way to get in and out of the pit. From front to rear: **Scott Wardrobe**, **Howie Melco**, **Carl Floren** and **Dave Buckman**. (John McElmurry photo)

