

STREETCAR

CURRENTS

August 2026



MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

The Operating Season

Bruce Gustafson—General Supt.

The operating season at the museum acts as three distinct, but clearly related phases of activity. During the first phase we perform final maintenance checks on: equipment led by **Dick Zawacki**; track infrastructure led by **Keith Anderson** and **Jerry Draeger**; and the overhead trolley wire led by **Chris Heck**. We recertify our returning operators; train and refresh others to tackle the PCC led by **Katie Barron**, and train our new operating volunteers led by **Bill Pekarna** and **Karen Kertzman**. While we provide rides early in the season (we average 12-15% of our annual guests during this time) the focus is on getting ready for the second and busiest phase of our operating season—summer.



Sometimes in Minnesota it seems that summer is too short and for the museum's operations, we only get one chance a year to make it work. Summer, as the second phase of the operating season, runs from Memorial Day to Labor Day during which time about two-thirds of our annual 30,000+ guests experience a streetcar ride. Operating effectively on the 15 or 16 weekends during that stretch of time has a large impact on the year's operational performance. Issues with weather, equipment, or other infrastructure can have a meaningful impact as the museum averages 500 to 800 guests during a typical summer weekend. This year we had a great start with good weather resulting in double digit year-over-year growth in ridership system-wide in May and June.

July has been a different story. To put it mildly, the weather has been challenging. Unlike most years the issue has not been rain, but heat and air quality. Safety of our guests and members is the museum's number one priority. To this end we created several years ago a policy addressing unsafe heat and humidity to establish what conditions would cause operations to proactively be cancelled. This year given repeated warnings of poor air quality due to forest fires, the Operating Department added a policy to suspend operations when the Air Quality Index (AQI) reaches an unhealthy level of 151 or greater. Like the heat index policy, the codification of an AQI policy removes any ambiguity and reinforces our commitment to the safety of our guests and members. Hopefully, the weather will ease up and allow operations to pick up.

The last phase of the operating season starts in October and is focused on special events for Halloween and Christmas. While these activities do not have the volume of riders we experience during the summer months, they are a vital part of the financial performance. With the close of the operating season in early December, the maintenance crews take over and perform needed work to ensure a smooth start to the next operating season.

None of this is possible without the ongoing dedication and support of our volunteers. Thank you all. Be safe.



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In The Beginning

Back in 1962, the museum began restoring TCRT No. 1300. In 1963 rides were offered to the public on a yard track of the Minnesota Connecting Railroad in St. Paul. The response from the public can be seen in this photo. Eight years later in August 1971, operations began with No. 1300 at the museum's Como-Harriet Streetcar Line in southwest Minneapolis.



From the Front Platform—Thoughts on Our Museum

Aaron Isaacs — MSM Board Chair

Why I Like Birthday Charters

Last week **Scott Benson** and I worked a two-hour birthday charter and it was great fun. It was for a four-year-old boy who is crazy about streetcars. He specifically requested PCC car No. 322. This was his second trolley party. The first one was last year for age 3 and it went 90 minutes. Most birthday charters are a half hour, so I was wondering if two hours would be too much. It wasn't.

The parents set up a snack and cupcake buffet on the platform and treated it as an open house, so more people arrived as the time went by. By my count about 70 showed up. For the first trip we did the usual stuff at the Lakewood platform. The birthday boy came up front, climbed into the motorman seat, rang the bell, honked the horn and was photographed doing so. The morning light at the Lakewood platform is perfect for group photos with the kids in the car windows, so we did that.

We ran five trips, spaced about ten minutes apart. That gave time to open the depot and we sold a few items. Lots of the attendees rode multiple times. Many of them had never ridden with us before and they liked it. I'm sure they'll tell their friends. The grandfather remembered riding streetcars as a kid. On the last trip south I had the birthday boy ride next to me so he could look out the back window and he was yelling with delight. You can't buy moments like that.

It's no secret that our core market is families with small children who tend to fixate positively on big mechanical things that move. It might be trucks, buses, earthmoving equipment or airplanes. Streetcars fill the bill nicely. Our 20-minute ride is perfect for a child's attention span. It helps that Lake Harriet has play equipment, picnic tables and ice cream.

I advise all our streetcar operators to watch Shift Planning and sign up for a birthday charter. I think you'll enjoy yourself. In the bargain we get a new generation that understands what a streetcar is. When they have kids I expect the process will repeat.

Mesaba Railway No. 10 Restoration Begins

The most recent *Streetcar Currents* showed Mesaba Railway interurban No. 10 in the Excelsior warm barn for the first time. This is a rather momentous development, and another example of how historic preservation is a long game. We acquired the body of No. 10 in 1977, 49 years ago. It has been stored inside, first at the ex-Northern Pacific Railway Como Shops in St. Paul, then at the New Brighton Arsenal, and finally at Excelsior since 2001. Had it been outdoors, restoration would have been much more difficult, if not impossible.

It's still a very big job. The first step is to assess the body's structural viability and shore it up as needed. Next comes basic accessibility, since the steps and parts of the end platforms are missing. That said, it's more complete and in much better shape than Duluth No. 78 was. It's huge that it's mounted on trucks that are very close to what it actually had in service. I can't tell you how many car bodies languish in museums because no trucks are available.

Getting back to the long game, remember that Duluth No. 265's restoration took six years, PCC No. 322 took nine years and Winona No. 10 took 15 years. We won't all live long enough to see it completed. But this is our museum's mission and future generations will thank us.



Passenger motor car 10 turning on the Virginia [Minnesota] wye. The pilot has been covered with steel plate for snow plowing purposes, and advertising revenue has been solicited from the competition.

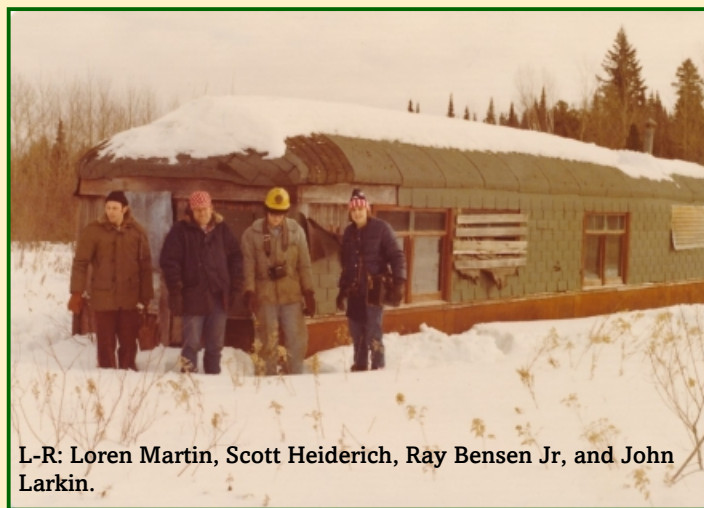
(Caption by **Russ Olson**, author of the book *The Electric Railways of Minnesota*.)

Mesaba No. 10—How We Got It In The Beginning

Story and Photos by Bill Graham

The owner of Mesaba 10 was Mr. Gregorich, who lived in the carbody from 1928 until around 1971 or '72 when he passed away. His son, who lived nearby, contacted the museum to ask if we wanted the carbody. We said yes. Museum volunteer **John Larkin** had contacts and arranged a crane to load the car on a flatbed. **Scott Heiderich** arranged for timbers, cables, moving stuff, and the rest of us went along to wave our arms and shout encouragement. The actual move happened 2-3 weeks after I took the below picture. I believe that Mr. Gregorich had worked for the Mesaba Railway and obtained the carbody that way.

We all were thrilled to get this artifact. At the time, we were embroiled in restoring car 265, but fully intended to begin on Mesaba 10 as soon as 265 was done. Fifty-five years went by, and finally we're starting to pick away at M-10.



L-R: Loren Martin, Scott Heiderich, Ray Bensen Jr, and John Larkin.



The overhead line crew replaced the second bent bracket arm. On the tower car from left are: **Chris Heck**, **Scott Benson** and **Scott Brar**. (Photo by Jerry Betz)



We reached a critical juncture in the No. 1239 truck project: fitting both bronze suspension bearings (aka, "brasses") to the motor journals and axles. A number of folks participated in wrestling the traction motor into position relative to the wheelset. Standing, from left are **Jerry Betz**, **John Prestholdt** and **Tom Schramm**. **Rob Mangels** has his back turned as he checks fitment. (Dennis Stephens photo)

August 11 -PJ Party Trolley at CHSL—6 PM and 7 PM
 August 13 -Streetcar Camp I for kids at CHSL—9 AM to 12-Noon
 August 16- *Nearest & Dearest* at ESL—One special adult rides free with a regular fare child or family
 August 18-Story Time Trolley at ESL—5 PM and 6 PM
 August 20-Streetcar Camp II for kids at CHSL—9 AM to 12-Noon
 August 25-**ALL ABOARD!** At CHSL A time for neurodiverse folks, families, and friends—4:00 to 7:00 PM
 September 7-Labor Day operations at ESL & CHSL

Motorman **Gregg Thomas** returning to Water Street on Duluth Street Railway No. 78 with a carload of riders following a carbarn tour. Note how nice the new fence looks as the streetcar approaches the platform. (Karen Kertzman 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

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Jim Vaitkunas—Editor
 Bill Graham—Distribution

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

Restoration on Mesaba 10's carbody has begun. Here **Tom Heimer** and **John McElmurry** are clearing out the front windows! (Karen Kertzman photo)



JERRY OLSEN

Longtime MSM volunteer, Jerry Olsen, died on Saturday, July 4. Jerry started work with the museum in 1996. Over the course of his tenure, he was a Foreman, worked on the CHSL Tuesday shop crew, and was the long time charter crew caller. Jerry's love of streetcars began at an early age growing up on the Plymouth-E. 25th St line in south Minneapolis. Anyone who spent any length of time with Jerry heard many stories of his early years riding the TCRT system. As much as Jerry loved operating, he was a natural "people person" and enjoyed interacting with riders. He most enjoyed working charters, of which he did several hundred. He especially loved working birthday parties and field trips for young

kids and the imaginative questions and thoughts they would bring with them. Jerry's greatest joy on the car came while working alongside his grandson, Andy Jacob. Together, they are part of a five consecutive generation family tradition of serving as motormen for TCRT/MSM.

Jerry with grandson Andy Jacob, August 2021.

