



The Switch Iron



Volume 3 Number 5 October 2009 Transit Heritage News

Inside:

Meeting Minutes2

MTHA News3

Cidovia4

Collector Photo6

The Manitoba Transit Heritage Association
P.O. Box 2388
Station Main
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3C 4A6

This newsletter is published four times per year and is distributed free to members.

Winnipeg's Streetcar System

The first and largest on the Canadian Prairies... and the last

By David A. Wyatt
MTHA Treasurer

Winnipeg's streetcar system was the first and largest on the Canadian prairies. Unlike most of its regional followers, Winnipeg's system was also distinct in being, for most of its life, a private enterprise. Albert W. Austin, twenty-five year-old son of Dominion Bank founder James Austin, established service with horsecars on October 20th, 1882. The Winnipeg Street Railway Company (WSR) went on to build the first electric line in 1891 but it was arival, the Winnipeg Electric Street Railway Company (WESR) headed by James Ross and William Mackenzie that secured a franchise. The new company's electric lines were built side-by-side with the horsecar lines creating fierce competition. Between July of 1891 when the

WESR began service, and May of 1894 when the WSR was sold to its rival Winnipeggers enjoyed low fares and competitive service, but the plodding horses were never going to match the zippy new electric cars and when the courts declined to protect the WSR's franchise Austin had little option but to sell. The horsecar lines were torn up, and the WSR electric line was converted to standard gauge. The four-track Main Street artery was reduced to two, leaving an unusually wide devil's strip between the tracks that was a reminder of the competition until the streetcar's last day.

Typical for the 1890s, service was provided by small single-truck, double-ended cars, supplemented where needed with trailers. The first double-truck cars were not purchased until 1903. Open cars were used in summer, especially on the WSR-built Park line connecting downtown with River Park (a property Austin continued to own).

The WESR expanded into nearly all quadrants of the metropolitan area. In 1903 arrangements were made with the struggling Suburban Rapid Transit Company (SRT) to complete its track and open service in the city's western suburbs. The SRT became a subsidiary of the WESR in 1905 and remained so until the end of the SRT franchise in 1940. Control of the interurban Winnipeg, Selkirk & Lake Winnipeg Railway Company (WS&LW) was acquired in 1906 and by 1908 electrification was extended all the way to Selkirk, 34 km north of Winnipeg. A branch to Stony Mountain and Stonewall was opened in 1914. Winnipeg's transit system would continue to operate to Selkirk until 1948 although buses appeared on the route in 1931 and the electric interurbans were gone from Selkirk 1937 and Stonewall in 1939.

Early cars were ordered from builders in eastern Canada: Ottawa Car, Patterson & Corbin, and Mackenzie's Toronto Railway Company.

Continued on Page 5...



GWTC 796 enters Margaret Loop off Main Street in West Kildonan.



GWTC 384 enters Hindley Loop off St. Anne's Road in St. Vital.

MTHA Board Meeting

About Us

Manitoba Transit Heritage Association Inc.

The Manitoba Transit Heritage Association Inc. is a non-profit charitable organization whose members volunteer to restore old transit vehicles for historical purposes, and provide the restored transit vehicles for public parades and displays. The MTHA also collects transit related memorabilia. If you wish to donate vintage items, please contact:

**The Manitoba Transit Heritage Association
P.O. Box 2388
Station Main
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3C 4A6**

Executive

The Manitoba Transit Heritage Association Inc. executive members are:

Alex Regiec
President

Dennis Cavanagh
1st Vice-President

David A. Wyatt
Treasurer

Ross Smith
Secretary

Wade Razella
V-P Communications

Phil Rawluk
V-P Operations

Mike Kubas
V-P Gaming

Welcome



The Manitoba Transit Heritage Association Inc. welcomes the following new members:

Andrew Grahl
New York City, New York

Ray Mercado
New York City, New York

Minutes

Wednesday, July 29th, 2009 at Fort Rouge Garage

Recorded by Dennis Cavanagh, MTHA Vice-President

Present

Ron Alexander, Dennis Cavanagh, Murray Penner, David A. Wyatt, Phil Rawluk, Manny Jacob, Peter Elwick, Joe Zizic, Ian Moore, Pat Rogoski, John Panting, John Kapusta, Ross Smith, Dick MaGuire and Tom Dudyh.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Membership

It was noted that past MTHA President Benny Konowalchuk's wife recently passed away. The MTHA has made a donation in her memory to CancerCare Manitoba.

Treasurer's Report

No Report.

Communications Report

No Report

Business

Alex Regiec reported that Director's and Officers Insurance has been purchased through Ranger Insurance. The policy is provided by Travelers Guarantee Company of Canada. Our vehicle Insurance policies remain with Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.

Alex also reported that he completed an application for a \$25,000 grant from the Government of Canada's Human Resources Department. He has spoken with a departmental officer regarding budget information for the application. The grant, if successful, will be used to hire a part-time coordinator to over see a senior's outreach program called "Trip down memory lane".

Alex presented a draft copy of a new promotional brochure for review by the board.

Dennis Cavanagh reminded members of the upcoming "Cruz' In Downtown" parade on Saturday, August 8th. Buses 111 and 28 will be used in the parade. This is the second time the MTHA has participated in the Cruz' In event.

Business continued

Patrick Rogoski also mentioned to members that buses 111 and 28 will be featured at the "House of Chrome" display of vehicles in Headingley on Saturday August 15th.

President's Report

Alex Regiec announced that he has had initial discussions with representatives of New Flyer Industries regarding the future of their vintage 1956 and 1958 highway coaches.

The two coaches have been fully restored and used by New Flyer as company show pieces at various community events. However, New Flyer is interested in having the MTHA take over care, custody and control of the two coaches both for community events and as museum artifacts.

Alex presented a draft agreement to the MTHA Board of Directors which outlined specific details highlighted as follows:

1. Ownership retained by New Flyer.
2. New Flyer provide annual grant to MTHA.
3. MTHA responsible for care, custody and control.
3. MTHA will incorporate vehicles into its community outreach and museum display programs.
4. New Flyer retains access and use for corporate events and functions.

Motion by John Kapusta: To authorize the President and his designate to enter into negotiations on behalf of the Manitoba Transit Heritage Association Inc. with New Flyer Industries ULC with the intent of securing care, custody and control of the 1956 Western Flyer T-36 2L and 1958 Western Flyer T-32 vintage motorcoaches subject to the conditions outlined in the draft agreement.

Seconded by Peter Elwick. Carried.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Ciclovía on Broadway

MTHA joins inaugural Downtown BIZ event with vintage bus display

The Manitoba Transit Heritage Association joined with the Downtown Winnipeg Business Improvement Zone to display it's vintage bus during the inaugural Ciclovía event.

Ciclovía, meaning bikeway, is an event that originated in Bogota, Columbia and is now celebrated around the world. Essentially a street is closed for a day and given back to pedestrians and bicyclists, and features displays and food.

Summer Events

Cruz' In Downtown, House of Chrome & more...

The Manitoba Transit Heritage Association entered three buses into this year's Cruz' In Downtown parade. The parade was held on August 8th and ran from Polo Park to the Pony Corral on St. Mary Avenue in the downtown.

Also, the MTHA showcased bus 111 at the annual Staff Appreciation Bar-B-Que for Winnipeg Transit employees in late August.

Finally, the MTHA displayed buses 111 and 28 at the House of Chrome truck show & shine held in Headingley, Manitoba on August 15th.

Newsletter supplement

Membership Guide

The Manitoba Transit Heritage Association is distributing it's new Membership Guide with this mailout of the Switch Iron newsletter. This guide will provide members with an overview of the organization, its governance and policies, and short-term and long-term planning goals. If you do not receive one, please contact us at:

webmaster@mtha.ca



Pictured above:
MTHA vintage Bus 111 and Winnipeg Transit 793 on display at the inaugural Ciclovía event.



From left to right:
Murray Penner, Manny Jacob, Pat Rogoski, Peter Elwick, Joe Zizic, Trevor and Doug Belcher.

Committee Report

Restoration of Streetcar 356

By Steven Stothers
Committee Co-Chair

The Streetcar committee has had a very eventful summer, starting with Danny Schur's replica Streetcar at the end of May for Strike!, and the rebuilding of it for July 1st Canada Day activities at the Forks. We were very fortunate a reporter from the Free Press became interested in the story in July, and the history of the Car Barns at Main and Assiniboine, and then the subsequent front page on a Saturday paper! It generated a lot of interest and tremendous support for the restoration of 356. A call was received about streetcar 692 north of Winnipeg, and a trip a few weeks later confirmed it is Streetcar 692 in excellent shape. Actually 2 Streetcars were taken to this location in 1955, and both were covered on the left side with a 'shed' which extended over the roof. The Streetcars are off the ground and are very well preserved with benches, windows, lighting, seat cushions, doors, and many other smaller parts.

The other streetcar is 2 lots over (was sold to a new family in the 1960's) and is in the same great condition, but I am unable to determine the Streetcar number at this point, as it's been painted a dark brown colour. It still has the GWTC metal logo 'circle' on the side. Otherwise, it has the same features as 692 and is basically just used for storage right now. I spoke to both property owners and let them know what a tremendous piece of Winnipeg transportation history they have, and please.. Don't throw anything out! Call Us! Or donate a Streetcar one day perhaps!

Also, the rural papers (Carmen, Winkler, Altona, etc) picked up the story, as one of the calls which came in after the Free Press article mentioned a Winkler businessman who bought 40 Streetcars and sold them for grain, feed, or livestock to local farmers. I've had a couple of calls and emails to follow up on from this, so there might be a few more we can find. Two Killarney Streetcars where taken down in early August, we heard out about it to late, just

One other interesting contact was made with the city gardner at Bonneycastle Park. She contacted the city reporter, and they found railway lines in a flower bed last year, and they couldnt' figure out why it would be there, until she read the article. A section was removed and thrown out of course, but she says there is a lot more underneath, they are just covered up. I hope to meet with her shortly to see if she can show me the location of the rail piece they threw out.

So the good news is Streetcar 356 is no longer the last remaining Streetcar. We now know of 2 others, plus the Trolley Sweeper car at Winnipeg Beach.

We also had a consultant visit from the Minneapolis Streetcar group, Tom Fairburn to advice us on how to proceed with Streetcar 356, what to look out for, how to get started with leveling the car for measurements, and more. Tom's visit with the Streetcar is recorded on video for reference, as well as detailed note taking.

Letters of support went out to local business owners in August, and we did receive some further donations. A project plan to level the car is being reviewed, however this will take some time. Resources are still needed-- especially volunteers-- when we start to move forward with the restoration.



Pictured on the right:

Peter Lacey of the Winnipeg Railway Museum, Cindy Tugwell of Heritage Winnipeg and Marci Markusa of CBC Radio on board Winnipeg's last streetcar # 356.

...continued from page one

Winnipeg's Streetcar System



1924 - 1953

In 1903 WESR turned out its first locally built car. Thereafter while occasional orders continued to be placed with eastern builders most of the rolling stock was built, and rebuilt, at home. A distinctive "Winnipeg car" design was developed featuring heavy construction, deck roof, and three-window front. WESR also built suburban cars for the SRT and interurbans for the WS&LW. The last cars purchased were five single-truck Birney's bought from Preston Car & Coach in 1921. They were followed only by the last streetcars the system would put in service, 29 cars rebuilt from older cars in 1923 and 1924 and two new cars constructed in 1928 and 1929. One of these, #798, at 16.2 m (53' 3") long, was one of the longest non-articulated city streetcars ever operated in Canada (Toronto's CLRV's are 15.4 m).



1953 - 1961

Corporate restructuring renamed the enterprise the Winnipeg Electric Railway Company (WER) in 1904 and the Winnipeg Electric Company (WECO) in 1924, by which time power generation was more important than transit to the corporate bottom line. The streetcar remained the heavy backbone of Winnipeg's transit system through the depression and the Second World War. Buses were first introduced by the company in 1918 but the first streetcar line closure did not take place until 1920 when the short River Avenue route (Austin's original electric line) was converted to buses. 1920 was also the year of the system's peak ridership when 65.2 million passengers were carried. Through the 1920s the track network was modified with small contractions and additions, and service was adjusted to match demand. It was not until 1930 when the impacts of the Great Depression became evident, that track expansion ended and more significant contractions and bus substitutions began. The closures were confined to suburban lines and minor urban shuttles and feeder routes until 1938 when WECO constructed the first electric trolley coach line in western Canada, replacing

the Sargent Avenue car line. It was followed the next year by two more trolley bus conversions before the Second World War brought materials shortages, Federal oversight, and a temporary end to track closures.

Heavy ridership and deferred maintenance during the War, coupled with steady ridership decline afterwards and a clear trend observable across the industry led Winnipeg to the same conclusion as almost everywhere in Canada: streetcars would be replaced with rubber-tired vehicles. Lightly trafficked lines were converted to motor buses. Busier routes got trolley buses.

One by one the trunk lines of the system, served by streetcars for half a century, became bus routes. Interested only in the Company's electricity generation and distribution operations WECO was purchased by the provincially-owned Manitoba Hydro Electric Board in late 1952. The transit operations were separated and sold off to a commission of area municipalities in 1953. The Greater Winnipeg Transit Commission (GWTC) continued the conversion away from streetcars.

Having no vested interest in electric power the GWTC converted the system's last and busiest streetcar line, Portage-Main, to motorbuses in 1955. Marked with a last-day parade (including car #798) and a track-severing ceremony at Portage and Main, the electric streetcar came to an end in Winnipeg on September 19th, 1955. The first and largest system on the Canadian prairies was also the last.

Little remains of the system today. Only the car barn and interurban station in Selkirk still stand. Just one car, #356 (WER 1909) survives. Work to restore it, led by Heritage Winnipeg, has just begun. Occasionally bits of track are exposed in the pavement at various intersections, mistaken by motorists for just another Winnipeg pothole.

From The Photo Album

If you have a photograph of a vintage transit vehicle from anywhere in Manitoba that you would like to share, please send it to the Manitoba Transit Heritage Association Inc. P.O. Box 2388 Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4A6



Pedestrians and streetcars seen during rush hour at the busy intersection of Portage & Main in the early 1950s.
Courtesy of Manitoba Transit Heritage Association Archive