



THE TROLLEY PARK NEWS



Oct. 1977

Oregon Electric Railway Historical Society Bulletin

Vol. 18, No. 10

MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

The next OERHS meeting will be held at President Walt Mason's house on Wednesday, Oct. 26th, at 7:30 p.m. The address is 11905 S.W. Belvidere Place, Beaverton. This is our first weeknight meeting, arranged by popular request, so please plan to attend if you can.



The British Columbia Electric

This article is prompted by queries from visitors to the Trolley Park who want to know something about the railway company that operated No. 1304, which we call the "BC Car." Such questions are not easily answered since little has been written about the BCE (in spite of the fact that they operated Canada's longest interurban line). So your secretary is glad to share information gleaned from a recent vacation in beautiful British Columbia.

The BCE can trace its roots back to plans laid in 1886 in Vancouver. In 1889 the Vancouver Street Railway system started with a horsecar line. It was electrified in 1890 using cars ordered from the John Stephenson Company in New York. At approximately the same time street railway systems were launched in the adjacent cities of North Vancouver and New Westminster. In 1889 service had also been inaugurated in Victoria by the National Electric Tramway & Lighting Company.

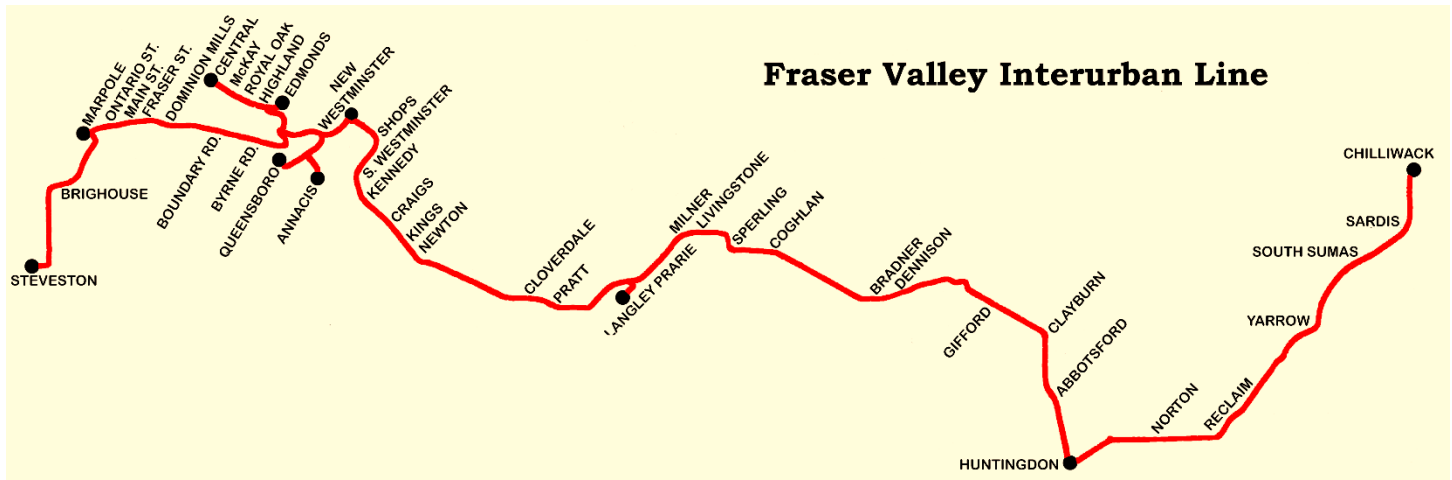
These railway companies expanded their services throughout the early 1890's, until the economic depression of 1893 hampered efforts to pay the interest on the large capitalization required for construction. Foreclosures by the bondholders of companies on both the mainland and Vancouver Island brought reorganization, and legislation, that allowed mergers.

In 1894 the Consolidated Railway & Light Company was formed on the mainland. This was followed in 1896-97 by the amalgamation of the Vancouver Electric Railway & Light Company, the North Vancouver Electric Company, the Westminster & Vancouver Tram Company and the Victoria Electric Railway & Lighting Company. The new firm was simply called the British Columbia Electric Railway Company.

The years between 1900-1914 were growth years for the BCE. New lines and rolling stock were steadily added. The 76-mile interurban line from New Westminster to Chilliwack was finished in 1910, and the 24 ½ mile service between Victoria and Saanich opened in 1914.

Times then turned rough for the railway company. During the late 1910s competition from unregulated independent taxis known as Jitneys formed a serious threat in the cities

The Trolley Park News is published monthly by the OERHS and is available through membership in the Society. Send requests for information, or items for publication, to the Corresponding Secretary, Richard Thompson, 1836 N. Emerson, Portland, OR 97217.



The British Columbia Electric Railway operated city lines in Vancouver, North Vancouver, New Westminster and Victoria as well as interurbans between Vancouver and Chilliwack, New Westminster, and Burnaby, and between Victoria and Saanich. The 76-mile Chilliwack run was the longest interurban line in Canada

of British Columbia, just as they did up and down the west coast. This was successfully overcome, as were the more formidable challenges brought on by World War I and a post-war depression.

The 1920's brought the peak years for the BCE. By mid-decade the company was operating street railway systems in Vancouver, North Vancouver, New Westminster, and Victoria, as well as six interurban lines. In addition to the famous Chilliwack line, three lines connected Vancouver and New Westminster, one ran between Vancouver and Burnaby, and another between Victoria and Saanich.

Total mileage of the BCE system was 377; 187 on city streets, and 190 interurban. It was divided into four divisions: Vancouver, Victoria, New Westminster, and Fraser Valley. The fleet grew to 315 streetcars, 71 interurbans, 66 work cars, 13 baggage cars, 16 electric locomotives (some from the Oregon Electric), and 425 freight cars. This rolling stock was painted light cream and red in later years and was standard (4 feet 8 ½ inch) gauge operating on 600 volts DC.

In addition to equipment from national manufacturers cars of all types were built in the BCE shops. These included single-truck city cars, double-truck wooden city cars, metal "lightweights," heavy wooden interurbans, trailers, and open cars. Among these were the famous open "stair-step" cars used for sightseeing.



Four of Vancouver's first six streetcars can be seen in this photograph taken at the Barnard Car Barn. They still bear the name Vancouver Electric Railway applied by builder John Stephenson in 1891.

In Vancouver the barns were located at 13th and Main streets. In Victoria they were on Constance and Store streets. The main business office (outside of the one in London) was in Vancouver's Carrall Street Depot. Passengers could transfer here from city cars to interurbans. Shops were located in Vancouver, New Westminster, and Victoria. Most car construction was carried out at the Kitsilano Shop in Vancouver.

Car orders from manufacturers increased in later years. In 1921 ten Bimey cars (the only ones in British Columbia) were ordered from Preston Car and Coach for the Victoria city lines. Between 1938 and 1945 Vancouver also added 36 modern PCC cars.



The BCE had Birneys, as can be seen in this postcard view of No. 400, which was restored by Paul Class for exhibit in front of the Provincial Museum in Victoria.

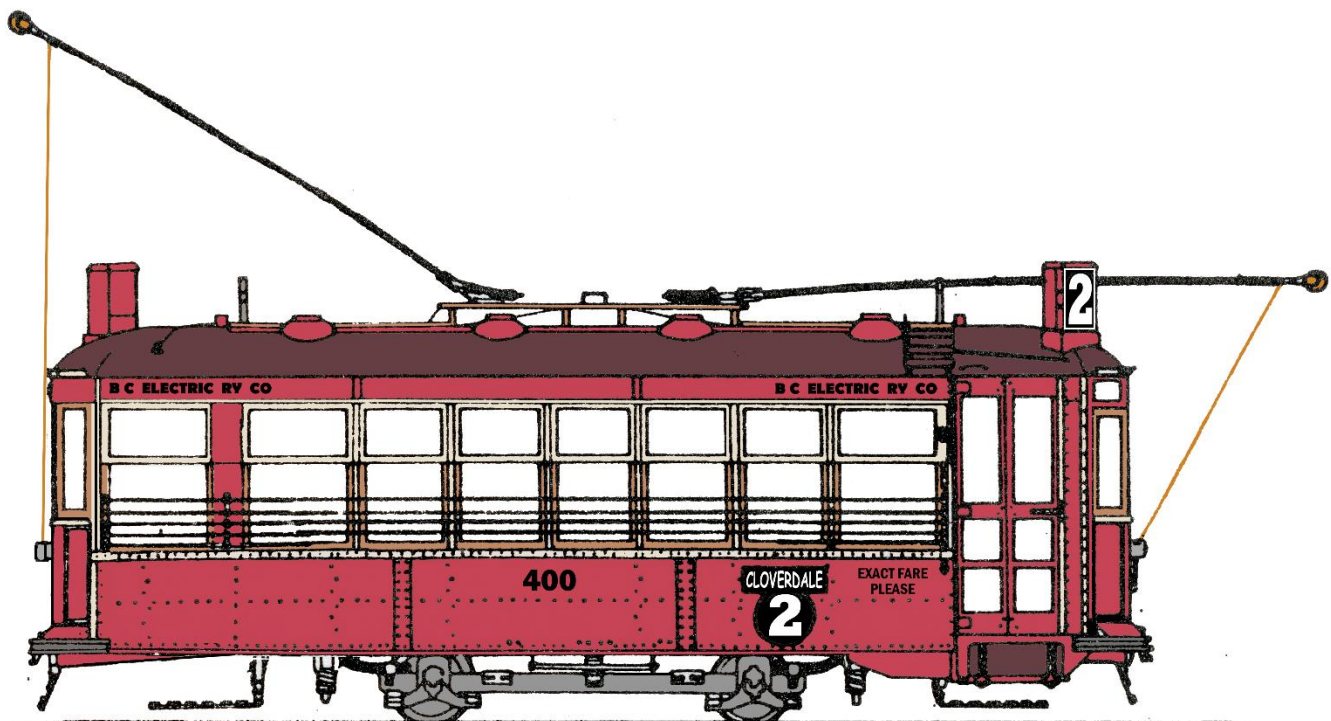


The BCE also had PCCs. Two can be seen behind No. 311 and a mate at Main and Hastings on the Vancouver city system in a picture taken in September 1953 six years before the end of service.

Although fares on the BCE remained a reasonable 6 cents in the city, and \$2.70 for a roundtrip ticket to Chilliwack, ridership began a steady decline during the Depression of the 1930s. A familiar story ensued, as the need for maintenance grew for rolling stock and track the company would phase out streetcar service in favour of buses. This process, which got under way in the late 1920s, was halted briefly during WW II fuel shortages. But as soon as the war was over abandonments came rapidly. The Chilliwack interurban was converted to bus in the late 1940s. Streetcars made their last runs in Victoria in 1948, and Vancouver ended trolley service in 1955. Today BCE successor BC Hydro, operates bus lines

throughout Vancouver and environs. Their rail division is a freight-only diesel operation. Of course, the freight service might have continued behind electric motive power. But, faced with the same need for extensive upgrading as the streetcar lines, the company found dieselization to be more economical. The steeplecabs were phased out by 1959.

Recently BC Hydro has been studying the introduction of light rail vehicles to their transportation system. A DuWag articulated car was acquired for testing two years ago. The idea has stalled, however, and all that remains for traction fans are memories of the BCE days.





Interurban No. 1212 heads a train at Marpole Station on the Steveston Line in May 1951. It is thought to have been built by BCE in 1908 and rebuilt in 1912.

This is where organizations like the OERHS play a role, since our primary task is to help keep vestiges of electric railway history alive. We do this for Canadian traction with No. 1304, which is kept running with help from not only local fans, but also our Canadian contingent. Members from Canada now make up our largest member group after Oregon. 🚃

News from the Trolley Park

Since this issue features the BCE we will begin work-in-progress news with No. 1304. The undersides of both trucks, and major portions of the car's underbody, have been cleaned of scale and rust and lead primer and black or aluminum paint applied. This, in conjunction with repairing of the interior upholstery, has given the car a fine new look (see the next newsletter for details of No. 1304's recent "call to the rescue" at a switch derailment).

The process of dismantling "double-decker" No. 48 for restoration continues. The fender and vestibule at one end have been removed (along with an enormous amount of rust), and the sill supports will soon be dropped.

The spring has been replaced on one of the hand brake rachets on "Open Breezer" No. 1187. Now volunteer John Wolff can stop worrying about safe brake application.

Tom Johnson and the line crew volunteers have made progress on installation of overhead wires on the loop despite being nearly rained out. Two bracket arms and two span wire sets are now in place. 🚃

Introducing the Winter CETA Crew

The government has at last acted on our 1975 Bicentennial grant request for a winter Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) crew. Two people have been assigned to us. Richard Lynn is a millwright and Tom Allen a carpenter's aide. The two have launched a crash program on Council Crest car No. 503 so that it can be removed from the shop. Interior varnish is being stripped and restored. Part of this job has involved removing window sash and vestibule doors. 🚃



Blackpool double-decker No. 48 is being dismantled for restoration. As can be seen, part of the vestibule has been removed at one end.



Help!

FUNDS ARE NEEDED TO PAY THE FREIGHT ON THE NEW UPHOLSTERY FOR THE "DOUBLE-DECKER" BLACKPOOL CAR. THE RARE RED AND BLACK CHECKERED MOHAIR MATERIAL WAS LOCATED FOR US BY ACTON WORKS, LONDON. IT IS OF THE OLD LONDON TRANSPORT TYPE, BUT IN MINT CONDITION. IT WILL MAKE THE PERFECT FINAL TOUCH FOR THE CAR'S RESTORATION...

SO, WON'T YOU PLEASE HELP US PAY THE BILL? CONTRIBUTIONS SHOULD BE MAILED TO: THE TROLLEY PARK, BOX 1318, GLENWOOD, OREGON 97120. AMOUNTS OF \$3.00 OR MORE WOULD CERTAINLY BE APPRECIATED.

..... CUT OUT AND SEND IN THIS FORM

UPHOLSTERY FUND DONATION

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

AMOUNT YOU WISH TO CONTRIBUTE _____

Birthday Party!
**COME
CELEBRATE**

- ## * REFRESHMENTS

* DISPLAYS

- ## “THE HISTORY OF PORTLAND’S STREETCARS”

- **THE LOCATION FOR THIS SPECIAL MEETING IS ITSELF UNIQUE. MEMBER BILL HAYES' BASEMENT IS MUSEUM-LIKE, WITH MOHAIR-COVERED HOLLYWOOD CAR SEATS, A GE K-TYPE CONTROLLER, AND DISPLAYS OF TICKETS, TRANSFERS, MAPS, ETC. IN THE BACKGROUND 1920'S MUSIC FROM BILLS' COLLECTION OF 78 RPM RECORDS WILL BE PLAYING - ALONG WITH TROLLEY SOUNDS.**
- **DIRECTIONS: GO EAST ON STARK TO 113th, THEN SOUTH ON 113th TO SALMON, EAST ONE BLOCK ON SALMON TO 114th PLACE, SOUTH ON 114th PLACE TO NO. 1336 (A GREEN HOUSE). THE MEETING STARTS AT 7:30 PM.**

