May 2019

Do You Recognize-

Last Month’s Do You Recognize -

The Nevada Transit Company had a somewhat slow start in that it had been showing in the “coming soon” lines on local promoter’s maps. Then in 1902 the Southern Pacific Railroad announced it was moving its company shops about 30 miles from Wadsworth, Nevada to a newly founded community of Harriman some four miles from the county seat of Reno, Nevada. The SP provided a clear deed to a 50’ x 140’ lot for payment of $1. For people from the former railroad shop town of Wadsworth, they also offered to pick up and move any house in the former community and reassemble it in this new town. This new town was first named after the railroad’s president Harriman but later was changed to that of the state’s governor John Sparks. With that development as an enticement a group of local businessmen formed the Nevada Transit Company and constructed the four-mile line from the county seat to the new community in about four months. Reno, the county seat, established in 1868, had a financial basis centered on the mining and agricultural businesses. The transcontinental railroad had reached there in April of 1868 with the transcontinental link actually completed at Promontory Summit, Utah Territory on May 10, 1869. The “divorce business” also flourished in the early
1900s although it isn’t clear how much this would have helped the trolley. On Thanksgiving Day of 1904 the Nevada Transit Company opened as the state’s first electric railway.

The startup was described as follows in a 1904 issue of The Street Railway Review. “Having witnessed one failure the people of (the county seat) were very skeptical when the new company entered the field and for this and other reasons it was determined to push construction work as rapidly as possible and with this end in view materials were ordered the latter part of August for immediate shipment and by the middle of September sufficient material was on hand to commence construction work. Ground was broken about September 20th, and the work has been pushed as rapidly as possible since. After leaving the city the road runs over private right of way for a short distance, thence along a county road for about a mile, ten again over private right of way for over half a mile into (the new community). The road is standard gage, single track line and is constructed with 30 ft. 40 lb. T rails of A. S. C. E. section, resting on yellow pine sawed ties 6 x 8 in. x 8 ft. Within (the city) and for a short distance outside span construction is used and the remainder of the distance is bracket construction. The company will purchase its power from one of the power companies now in the field.”

In 1906 the transit company was purchased from the area Power, Light, and Water Company and renamed as the Reno Traction Company. The line was used extensively by residents of the newly developed areas along the route for commuting and shopping trips as well as outings to a park located on the line. The 4-mile “main line” was the heaviest patronized. In 1907 a separate Nevada Interurban Railroad of about 3 miles was established to run southerly from Reno to the Moana Springs resort located on a hot springs.

The short route never required a large fleet of cars. The operation operated with at least some second hand cars from the John Hammond Car Company of San Francisco. One car built by Hammond in 1900 came to the Nevada Transit Company in 1906 and another circa 1914. The interurban appears to have been operated by a couple of Jackson & Sharp cars delivered at the start of service in 1907.
The squeeze between maintenance costs and declining traffic made itself felt quite soon and in 1919 all service but the 4-mile main was eliminated and by the early 1920s the fleet was quoted as consisting of five one-man cars. Competing bus service paralleling the main line began in June 1927 and in September the Reno Traction Company ceased operation. The interurban to the hot springs ended at about the same time although the resort at the springs carried on in some form or other into the 1950s.

As happens to retired streetcars - in 1931 one of the former cars became a hamburger stand near the site of the park on the former main line and another as a chicken coop in the railroad town at the traction company’s eastern terminus.

Too late to help either the trolley or the interurban the state legalized gambling in 1931 and this became a major business in both communities.

This Month’s Do You Recognize -

Our railroad this month connected its state capital, also the county seat, to a county seat 40 miles north plus serving the towns of an intermediate county. The line actually was proposed in 1891 as a steam road connecting the two cities and named for them. Construction went slowly with the named endpoints not connected until 1908. During the railroad’s somewhat brief steam-powered period the core of the locomotive fleet were four of the ubiquitous 4-4-0 (Americans). As the somewhat plodding construction moved along, a competing electric railway had been proposed. In reaction to the threat of electrified competition It was decided to electrify and this was achieved in May 1910, with 750-volt DC. Some steam power was kept until 1914 for freight work. In 1917 the line was renamed as an Electric Railroad and included the surname of the coal mine owner who had initially proposed the railroad. The
naming got a little flexible as the railroad adopted “electric railway” so some cars were lettered railroad and some railway, and for good measure much of the public referred to the road simply using the owner’s surname. Entering a receivership in 1933 that lasted to 1939 the road dropped electric from its name.

In 1923 the company built a joint terminal in the state capital with another electric interurban that ran almost south from the capital city for some 48 miles. The southern system operated on 1,500-volt DC. Our line outlasted its southern neighbor by six years.

There was also a connection at the northern endpoint through a similar joint terminal arrangement with a railway that operated some 90 miles north.

A note on the car numbering - Between serious fires, rebuilds, and miscellaneous renumbering the numbering sequence is a bit difficult to track. I think I have the pictures labeled correctly but be warned.

Our line initially acquired a fleet of heavy interurbans from the Jewett Car Company in 1910 (10 motors) and from the Niles Car and Manufacturing Company in 1910 (6 trailers) and again in 1913 (8 motors).

The owner of our line had purchased most of the buildings of an existing pleasure park belonging to a neighboring steam road and moved them about three miles to establish a park on his railway. The park generated enough traffic that by 1916 the line ordered six large (approximately 61.5 ft. x 9.5 ft. x 12.5 ft.) open trailers from Jewett Car Company for use servicing the pleasure park. These trailers were also used two systems adjoining the railway to the north and south. In 1907 Niles Car and Manufacturing built 19

#403 Trailer (Jewett Car Co. - 1910)
Originally No. #305 one of the initial ten motors - rebuilt and renumbered in 1929

#301 (Niles Car and Manufacturing Company - 1913)
Originally No. #316 one of eight Niles motors ordered in 1913 - Rebuilt and renumbered in 1928

#350 (Jewett Car Co. - 1916)
Originally No. #426, rebuilt and renumbered as #428 in 1918, and again in 1921 to #350 - 2nd car is #406 (Niles Car and Manufacturing Company - 1913)
Originally No. #317 - Rebuilt and renumbered as #303 in 1919, and again in 1928 to #406
high speed 3,000-6,000-volt AC-powered interurbans for an eastern railroad. They proved too long and too heavy for that road. Our line acquired three of these cars in around 1910. Obviously 3,000-volt AC motors didn’t mix with our lines 750-volt DC supplies and they were utilized as trailers.

In May of 1918 the seemingly almost inescapable electric railway curse struck our line with a huge fire destroying the carbarn and substation located at the northern endpoint of the line along with over 50 percent of the fleet. Because power from the substation was lost almost immediately it was not possible to move any of the cars stored overnight in the carbarn. Twenty one cars were destroyed including all six of the special built open trailers, ten out of eighteen motor cars, and a locomotive. The six trailers were rebuilt as motors using trucks, controls, and such from destroyed cars. Because of the ongoing WWI it was impossible to get steel to rebuild these cars.

Ultimately the railway owner stripped steel from one of his coal mines to rebuild the cars. The loss of such a large portion of the fleet curtailed improvement plans and hampered service for several years.

The southern shops near the capital city immediately were pressed into an emergency rebuild program for the less damaged cars. Cars with a higher steel content in their construction had generally fared better than mostly wooden cars. A decision was also made to not rebuild the facility at the northern endpoint but to concentrate all maintenance and rebuilding at the capital city facility. To this end some
maintenance buildings not damaged in the conflagration were actually moved to the southern facility.

Until 1914 all freight was still moved with steam locomotives but over the years thereafter the road acquired some 11 electric locomotives - some homebuilt, and second hand products of Baldwin, McGuire-Cummings, GE, and a 1943 Alco-GE diesel-electric. Some of the homebuilt used parts from interurbans destroyed in the 1918 fire mentioned above. A small fleet of box cars, gondolas, and flats were on the company’s roster.

However, the majority of freight traffic was handled on interlined cars. The nearby steam roads had initially resisted through rates with our line and arrangements were earlier made with other electrics. Through traffic arrangements and interline freight terminals with the roads north and south of our line gave a roughly 200 mile interline system.

The road operated hourly passenger service for many years. Beginning in 1927 a practice was adopted that was common among railroads of the time and a parallel bus service operated by a “Transportation Company”, also name after the owner, was established along its route. However, for a number of years the patrons seemed to prefer to stay with the comfort of the somewhat aging interurbans. There was considerable through travel between the end point cities and in conjunction with the connecting railways at those points as well as heavy summer traffic to the pleasure park,

The onset of the Great Depression in the late 1920s and the inevitable diversion of passenger traffic by automobile competition led to declines in traffic resulting in the elimination of a great deal of double track facilitated by the introduction automatic block signals. The line was forced into receivership in 1933 and finally emerged in 1939. In 1938 in an attempt to retain passenger traffic the line acquired five almost new lightweight cars originally built for another eastern operator. These “bullet cars” had been built by J.G. Brill in 1932 and were returned to Brill after the eastern line ended passenger service in 1938. A
tremendous volume of business was handled during World War II, but traffic fell steadily after 1945, although it was still substantial even as late as 1950. Lightening, figuratively, struck again in 1952 when the combined shops established after the 1918 fire were destroyed in yet another conflagration. This resulted in the immediate severe reduction in service and all passenger service ended on 6 September 1952.

In the freight business there was general growth over the years other than in the early depression with receivership during the late 1930s. World War II brought significant growth in traffic volume and profits. Following the end of passenger service and the destruction of the shops the entire system was dieselized. In 1956 the original owner’s family sold the system to Texas interests. In early 1959 the system was abandoned with some pieces sold to neighboring railroads.

The parallel bus line was operated by the company until 1953. In fact as late as February and November of 1951 the firm purchased seven new suburban motor coaches from General Motors. In 1953 a new firm was operating the line and this service continued until 1974. A public transit agency took over the line. Interestingly in 2002 the transit agency purchased an underused rail freight corridor that basically served the old interurban’s route. Passenger service began in 2008 and more recently was extended over the route of our interurban’s southern connecting railway as well.
Wason Collection progress reported by Amber Tatnall -

The Wason Company Builder’s Photo Negative Collection

This collection consists of 2920 negatives and their prints, documenting the cars built by Wason for railways around the country and the world. The collection dates from 1906 to 1932 and has sample photographs from every order completed during that time period. Some orders are shown up to 1938 and may represent orders completed at other Brill facilities after the 1932 closure of the Wason plant. After 1 February 1931, the company actually reorganized as J.G. Brill of Massachusetts.

Library volunteers, and an intrepid work-study student from York County Community College, have completed the quality assurance portion of the Wason Company builder’s photos negative collection. All images in the collection, totaling 2920, have been scanned, preserved, and housed in archival storage. The images are now in the process of being slowly uploaded to the Digital Public Library of America. As of this publication date, 1000 of the images are accessible online.
The next step in this project will be to scan the index pages of the negative storage booklets, along with the “master codex” that documents all of the various orders of cars over the years. Watch the Seashore Trolley Museum Library’s Facebook page and the NEERHS Library & Archive blog for sneak peeks.

Thanks again to James Van Bokkelen who generously made this important archival project possible.

Links:
1000 of the images are accessible online = https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_images/
Facebook page = https://www.facebook.com/groups/44932548777/
Blog = http://www.neerhslibrary.org/

Library Report By Karen Dooks, Chair

Much progress has been made over the last two months in making the Library into a functioning facility. Amber Tatnall cleaned, painted, and organized the space available. Equipment approved for purchase in March has been installed, including a scanner which will accept 36 inch wide blueprints. Amber has recruited several more volunteers from both members of Seashore and the community to help with cataloguing of material. She has also a student at York County Community College on work study assigned to help with the completion of work on the Wason collection.

Productive workshops are being held. The Committee decided to reduce business meetings to every other month followed by a workshop and to add a full work session on the alternate months. These sessions will continue to be held on the second Saturday of the month. A workshop will also be held on Wednesday evenings (except for the last Wednesday of the month) from 5:00-8:00 PM. Please contact Amber Tatnall if you are interested.

The Library Committee held a sale of used books at the Annual Meeting on April 27, 2019 yielded over $200.

Herb Pence organized a short remembrance service for Norman Down. His three sisters and fiancé were in attendance. They were very appreciative of what the Museum had meant to Norm over the years. They made donations to the Library. They are also donating Norm’s collection of materials to the Museum.
The Library Committee most recent meeting was on April 13, 2019.

Committee Meetings & Workshops (CM 10AM -12 Noon & Workshop 12PM - 2PM)

July 13, Sept. 14 and Nov. 9

Workshop only (10AM - 2 PM)

June 8, August 10, October 12, and December 14

After the committee meeting a workshop was held from Noon until 2PM. The afternoon’s project was identifying photographs from a recently donated collection as to company, type of trolley, car builder, location and whatever else could be determined and entering the information into computerized data sheets to be used when the photos are scanned.

A new workshop activity is scheduled on Wednesday evenings.

Wednesday evening (5 - 8 p.m.) workshops will meet on:

June 5, June 12

Tentative July dates (pending vacation planning)

July 3. July 10, July 17, July 24

Folks can just drop in. Amber plans to be there on those nights doing stuff. She will be sure to announce them all on Facebook and on the blog.

Please remember when sending donations for the library to note that it is for Library Development – Fund 951.

Seashore Library On-Line Resources -

A library resources page originally developed by Amber Tatnall dealing with useful and interesting resource material including among other things links to some three decades of the Street Railway Journal and the Electric Railway Journal on line is located at:

http://virtual.yccc.edu/seashoreTrolley

or this handy tinyurl works as well:  http://tinyurl.com/zwhndoe
The Main Line - Availability

If you are not on our direct distribution list and would like to be please drop a note to TheMainLine@ramsdell.com.

Also, all back issues of The Main Line are now available online at: https://www.neerhslibrary.org/p/the-main-line.html

Ed Ramsdell, Editor
The Main Line
TheMainLine@ramsdell.com
http://www.trolleymuseum.org

Events

Check https://trolleymuseum.org/events/ for updated information and events throughout the year.
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- **June Events**

- **27th**: Open 10AM-5PM
- **28th**: Open 10AM-5PM
- **29th**: Open 10AM-5PM
- **30th**: Open 10AM-5PM
- **31st**: Open 10AM-5PM
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- **29th**: Open 10AM-5PM
- **30th**: Open 10AM-5PM
- **1st**: Open 10AM-5PM
- **2nd**: Open 10AM-5PM

- **27th** - Memorial Day Weekend at Seashore!
- **30th** - Business Member Appreciation Day
- **3rd** - Superhero and Royalty Day!
- **10th** - Father's Day!
- **17th** - Something's Fishy Father's Day Fun!
- **24th** - Special Trolley Ride! (1PM)
- **27th** - Special Trolley Ride! (1PM)
- **30th** - First Responder Day!