

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Spanish Influenza in 1918:
The Year St. Paul Found
The 'Wolf' at Its Door

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Spring, 2005

Volume 40, Number 1

The Force that Shaped Neighborhoods
1890–1953: Sixty-three Years of Streetcars
And Millions of Dollars in Investments

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Selby Tunnel. A Selby-Lake car on its way downtown emerges from the east portal of the Selby Tunnel. Built to relieve the grade on Selby Hill and replace an awkward cable-counterweight system, the tunnel cost \$366,000 when it opened in 1907. The west portal of the tunnel on Selby has been covered over and sealed. The east portal is still visible, albeit in considerably deteriorated condition. Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN JULY 2003:

The Ramsey County Historical Society shall discover, collect, preserve and interpret the history of the county for the general public, recreate the historical context in which we live and work, and make available the historical resources of the county. The Society's major responsibility is its stewardship over this history.

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A Message from the Editorial Board

The completion of the light rail line between the Mall of America and downtown Minneapolis within the past year and the possible construction of additional light rail in the metropolitan area have encouraged considerable discussion of the streetcar era. Without indulging in either nostalgia or finger pointing, transportation historian John W. Diers takes us through the complex history of the electric streetcar system in St. Paul in our Spring issue. His account is based on wide research into the predecessor systems, the economic pluses and minuses of streetcars, the human side of streetcar employment, and the ever-present competition from automobiles after 1920.

The Spring issue also includes an intriguing look at the effect of Spanish influenza on the city of St. Paul in 1918, a time when there was a world-wide influenza pandemic. Susan Dowd, a devoted researcher of old newspapers, shows us how St. Paul dealt with this deadly disease and survived far better than many other cities of that time. This issue of our magazine also includes another in our ongoing series, "Growing Up in St. Paul," with a delightful piece by historian James Bell that recalls his boyhood on Hague Avenue and Fry Street in the first half of the last century. Lastly, Steve Trimble supplies a look at St. Paul history through the eyes of four contemporary novelists who use St. Paul as the backdrop for their fiction. These novelists have steeped themselves in local history and used it to enliven and enrich their stories of the human condition.

John M. Lindley, Chair, Editorial Board

The Force That Shaped Neighborhoods

1890–1953: Sixty-three Years of Streetcars in St. Paul and Millions of Dollars in Investments

John W. Diers

Few nineteenth century inventions did more to shape the growth and development of St. Paul, as well as every town and city in America, than did the electric streetcar and the automobile. Both came into general use at about the same time, and both competed for the urban travel market for more than fifty years. At first the streetcar prospered and seemed to have the advantage over its competitor. Between 1890 and 1910, millions of dollars in investment capital poured into the electric railway industry as companies built new street railway systems in American cities or converted existing horse and cable lines to the new technology.

Electric power companies saw streetcars as ready markets for their electricity and either built street railways or acquired them. The term “traction” came into common use as a synonym for electric railways. Tycoons such as Charles Tyson Yerkes, who controlled Chicago’s streetcar and elevated railway system; Jay Gould in New York; Samuel Insull and others made enormous fortunes from the “trolley craze” as it swept America.

In the Twin Cities, Thomas Lowry used an expanding streetcar system to develop his real estate holdings, which included large parts of what is now Columbia Heights, portions of south Minneapolis and parcels in the Midway District in St. Paul. But then came Henry Ford, the Model T, and the assembly line. By 1916 there were two million motor vehicles in the United States, and Ford and his competitors were turning out a million more each year. Time payments made them affordable and available to everyone, not just toys for the rich, and advertising created a mass market for them.

There were 75,000 automobiles licensed in the Twin Cities in 1920, the year the Twin City Rapid Transit Company hit its all-time peak of 238 million passengers. By 1940 there were 220,000 automobiles and TCRT had lost half its riders. Fourteen years later the streetcar was gone.

The streetcar left its mark on St. Paul and Minneapolis. The Cities didn’t have

to be a hodgepodge of factories piled on top of shops and homes. Land use could be planned and zoned with residential neighborhoods organized near open spaces—parks and lakes—and industry and manufacturing near transportation—the river or railroad lines. People could buy homes located away from commercial activities and travel to their jobs. Neighborhoods could develop unique identities and still be a part of a greater community through a common transpor-

tation system that gathered people with different ethnic backgrounds, wealth, and social standing for a common journey on all their separate errands. Board a streetcar and there would be accountants and lawyers, shop owners, bankers and stockbrokers, or laborers.

A salesman making calls might swing onto the back platform, put down his sample cases, greet the conductor, light up a cigar, and pass a flask, exchanging lies with other salesmen. Inside, gentlemen in fine suits would sit alongside workers with lunch buckets. Friends and neighbors would discuss the events of the day. Women might be on shopping trips for their families, perhaps to the produce market, the bakery, or the butcher shop, or all the way to downtown St. Paul, to Schuneman’s or the Golden Rule.

It all began on a cold, clear Febru-



Dedication. *Thomas Lowry, Archbishop John Ireland, and Thomas Cochran are joined by dozens of St. Paul’s first and finest citizens aboard the first electric streetcars to operate in St. Paul. It’s February 22, 1890, and the scene is somewhere along Grand Avenue. Minnesota Historical Society photo.*

ary 22, 1890. Several hundred people bundled up and assembled in downtown St. Paul and along Grand Avenue to welcome St. Paul's first electric streetcar. Even the nobility came down from Summit Avenue in their fancy carriages, parking them in long queues on both sides of Seventh Street. Horses shivered and snorted in the sharp wind. Small boys darted about the knees of their Victorian elders. Top hats and fur coats were everywhere. After a few short speeches Thomas Lowry, president of the St. Paul City Railway, escorted Archbishop John Ireland to his seat at the front of the lead

car. Thomas Cochran, an important St. Paul businessman, along with city officials, joined them. At a signal from Lowry, the car came to life, accelerating away from the cheering crowd. Three more followed, filled with St. Paul's first and finest citizens.

A Franchise for St. Paul

Two months earlier, on Christmas Eve, 1889, Lowry, in his other role as president of the Minneapolis Street Railway Company, had presided over a ceremony that gave Minneapolis its first electric line. However, while Minneapolis led St. Paul

in welcoming the electric era, St. Paul had been running horsecars on Wabasha Street, three years before Minneapolis put rails on Washington Avenue.

The city granted a franchise to the St. Paul Street Railway on January 8, 1872. Construction began in the spring, and the first line opened for business on July 15 with six horsecars and thirty horses. Starting at Seven Corners, tracks ran along Third Street (now Kellogg Boulevard) to Wabasha, then via Wabasha to Fourth Street to Jackson Street, to Seventh Street, to Locust Street and Locust to the intersection of Lafayette Avenue



Horsecar on Greenbriar. *If you didn't own a horse and carriage, you either walked, or rode one of these. It's 1880 and Andrew Irber drives a St. Paul City Railway horsecar along Greenbriar between Jenks and Case Streets. Some homes in this photo remain. Joe Irber, Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.*

and Westminster. Two extensions followed later that year. One stretched west along Seventh from Seven Corners to Ann Street. The other ran east from Seven Corners along Seventh Street to Jackson. The company put up a carbarn at the northeast corner of Third and Exchange Street. More cars were purchased as the system expanded. By 1888, on the eve of electrification, 159 horsecars were on the property, and the system had grown to fifty-four miles of track with six carbarns and an office-headquarters building at Fifth and St. Peter.

Original incorporators of the St. Paul Street Railway included J. W. Bass, J. C. Burbank, H. L. Carver, William Dawson, Lafayette Shaw, Horace Thompson, John Wann, and W. S. Wright. The company changed hands several times between 1872 and 1877. It defaulted on its mortgage bonds in 1877, and Thomas Cochran took over for the mortgage holders, all eastern investors, at a sheriff's sale that year.

It subsequently was reincorporated as the St. Paul City Railway. A local investor, J. R. Walsh, acted as general manager for the eastern interests until the company was sold to a St. Paul group in 1882. Although Walsh successfully put the company on a paying basis, the new owners invested heavily in improvements and expansion. Unfortunately, revenues did not meet their expectations, and the property eventually came under the control of Thomas Lowry and his associates in 1886.

'Pretty Awful'

St. Paul's horsecars offered no amenities and were, in fact, pretty awful. They were nothing more than a rolling, wooden box twelve feet long and eight feet wide. Passengers boarded through a single door at the rear of the car and sat facing each other on perimeter seats. Straw covered the floor. On cold days a small stove offered minimal heat. At night passengers stared at each other under a flickering kerosene lamp. On hot days air conditioning was available by opening a window, assuming it wasn't swollen shut. The driver had the worst of it. He stood out on an open platform at the front of the car and was expected to collect fares and handle the horses. Drivers worked twelve

to sixteen hours a day, except for a dinner break. They were required to keep the cars clean, washing them every day and tending to the needs of the horses. Wages were \$35 a month.

Service was provided every fifteen minutes from early morning until midnight. The cars plodded along at about five miles per hour, not surprising given the rolling stock and the primitive, often under-maintained, track. Occasionally, one of them would derail and the passen-

gers would have to alight to the muddy street and help the driver put the car back on the track. Complaints must have been frequent, but no doubt were ignored. There were no refunds or apologies—just basic transportation.

Citizen dissatisfaction with horsecars and horsecar service prompted city officials to look at other means of propulsion. Several large cities, Chicago and New York, among them, had adopted Andrew Halidæ's invention, the cablecar, first



Cablecar on Fourth Street. It's 1889. A cablecar and trailer are in downtown St. Paul on Fourth Street passing the old St. Paul City Hall. There were two cablecar lines in St. Paul. The Selby line opened in 1888 and was converted to electricity in 1898. The other line on East Seventh Street opened in 1889 and switched to electricity in 1893. Cable lines were extremely expensive to build and operate and were early casualties of electric power. Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.

used in San Francisco in 1873. St. Paul was growing, and its newer and prosperous residential neighborhoods along Summit and Selby Avenues needed more direct access to the business district. The hills west of downtown were impossible for horsecars, forcing the lines serving these neighborhoods to take slow, circuitous routes to avoid the steep grades. In 1887 a delegation of officials from both Minneapolis and St. Paul traveled to Cleveland, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore at the expense of the Minneapolis Street Railway and the St. Paul City Railway to study their cablecar systems.

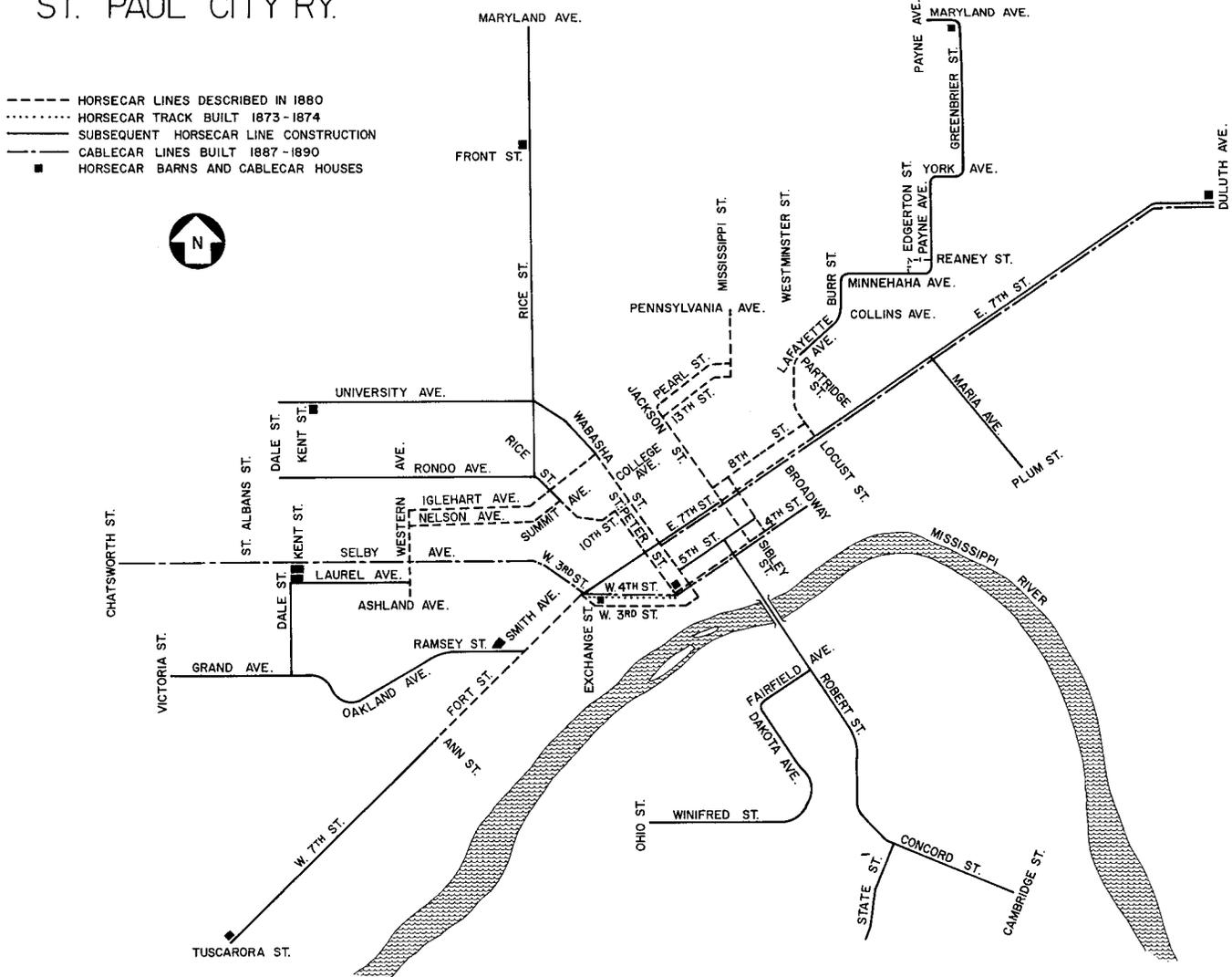
Because of the huge cost, neither company was enthusiastic about cable rail-

ways and would have preferred to wait until electric traction was perfected. That, undoubtedly, explains why this same group visited Richmond, Virginia where Frank Sprague was demonstrating and testing what would be the country's first operational electric street railway. But St. Paul was adamant, and the company, fearful that it might lose its franchise to competitors, went ahead with construction.

There were two lines. The first opened in January, 1888. It ran from Fourth and Broadway in downtown, out Fourth Street, then up the 16% grade of Selby Hill as far as St. Albans. A car barn and powerhouse were constructed at Dale and Selby. The line was extended out Selby to Fairview in August 1890.

The second line opened in June, 1889 running from Seventh and Wabasha out East Seventh Street to Duluth Avenue, site of a second car barn and powerhouse. These two lines cost the St. Paul City Railway a staggering \$3,706,000, all of it in borrowed money that wouldn't be paid off until 1947. Worse, neither line lasted more than ten years. Cable railways were expensive to build and maintain, and they also suffered severe operational problems. A break in the cable could disable the entire system. Snow and ice often accumulated in the cable slot between the running rails, an especially serious problem in northern cities like St. Paul. With its many problems and disadvantages, cable propulsion quickly lost favor and

ST. PAUL CITY RY.



Horsecar and Cable Lines. TCRT operated an extensive horse and cablecar system in St. Paul before electrification. From *The Electric Railways of Minnesota* by Russell Olson, published in 1973, and used by permission of the author.

cities began switching to electric power. St. Paul's Seventh Street line was electrified in 1893, barely four years after it opened. The Selby Avenue line was converted to electric power in 1898, although a segment was kept in operation to assist electric cars up the steep grade of Selby Hill until 1906 when the Selby Tunnel was completed.

The Great Merger

In 1887 Frank Sprague, an associate of Thomas Edison, devised a simple way to mount an electric motor on the trucks (wheel assembly) of a railcar so that the motor could drive the axle directly through a system of gears. Other inventors tried belts and chains, but they were not reliable. Sprague's invention was a major breakthrough. That, and his application of the trolley wheel to collect power from an overhead wire, made the streetcar practical.

His successful demonstration in Richmond, Virginia in 1888 attracted world-wide interest. Though much improved, today's light rail technology and Sprague's invention follow the same principles. Both take high voltage alternating current from a central power plant, and distribute it through transmissions lines to substations where it is converted to direct current which, in turn, is fed to the overhead wires. A trolley wheel or shoe, (or in the case of today's systems a device called a pantograph) travels along the overhead wire and picks up the electricity that powers the car. The tracks form the return circuit to the power plant.

Electrification of the Minneapolis and St. Paul horsecar system began in 1889 and was completed in 1891. The project cost \$6 million and involved a complete rebuilding of every line in the system. Not only did electric generating equipment and an electrical distribution system have to be purchased and installed, but new cars were needed as well.

Horsecars used a narrow gauge track built of lightweight rails. Electric cars were heavier, ran on standard gauge track and needed heavier rails and much sturdier construction. The Twin Cities were growing and as he electrified the system, Lowry pushed it into areas that were cow pastures just a few years ear-



Fourth and Wabasha. *Crossing paths. An early open car on Wabasha crosses Fourth Street as one of TCRT's newer, homebuilt cars pulls away from the camera and heads down the Fourth Street hill. The photo is not dated, but it probably was taken sometime between 1901 and 1904. Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.*

lier. From 120 miles of horsecar track in 1889 the Twin Cities system would grow to 210 miles of electric and cable track by 1893, putting considerable pressure on Lowry's financing. He approached New York banks for loans for the separate Minneapolis and St. Paul companies and was rebuffed. However, subsequently he was given the funds when he returned with a plan to merge both companies under one corporate identity, the Twin City Rapid Transit Company, which he incorporated on June 3, 1891. It, then, acquired the separate Minneapolis Street Railway Company and the St. Paul City Railway Company as wholly owned subsidiaries.

Thirty Years of Growth

St. Paul had 41,473 residents in 1880 and its western corporate limits ended at Lexington Avenue. Developed neighborhoods ended at Dale Street. Beyond lay miles of open fields and prairie all the way to the west bank of the Mississippi River. By 1900 the western city limits had reached their current boundary at Eustis Street, and development extended all the way to Cleveland Avenue. In twenty

years more than 120,000 people arrived in St. Paul. Seventy thousand more would arrive by 1920 and St. Paul would take its place as one of the leading transportation and commercial centers in the Midwest.

The streetcar system kept pace with, and more often preceded, neighborhood growth. Lowry and other real estate promoters understood the strong connection between transportation and property values. Streetcars, like roads and automobiles fifty years later, became development tools. Build a streetcar line and homes and businesses followed.

All of the following local lines were in place by 1920: Cherokee Heights, Dale-Forest, Hamline-So. Robert, St. Clair-Hope Street, Western-Jackson, Rondo-Maria, Merriam-Mississippi, Payne-Groveland (Grand Avenue Service), Snelling-East Seventh Street (Randolph Avenue Service), Rice-Stryker.

Intercity lines connecting downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul included: St-Paul Minneapolis (University Avenue) opened in 1890, Como-Harriet opened in 1902, Snelling-Minnehaha (via Ft. Snelling-Minnehaha Park-W. Seventh Street) opened in 1906, as did Selby-Lake.

The latter involved construction of a St. Paul engineering landmark, the Selby Tunnel. Before its completion in 1907, Selby Avenue streetcars were assisted up the steep grade of Selby Hill by a cable-counterweight system left over from the Selby Avenue cable car line. Upgrade, a cable car was coupled to the streetcar and pushed up the hill. Downgrade, the cable car preceded the streetcar, acting as a brake. This operation was time consuming, especially on a line with frequent service. Delays became a problem and to speed traffic TCRT resolved to construct a tunnel through Selby Hill reducing the grade from 16 to 7 percent, eliminating the need for cable assistance. Construction began in 1905 and the tunnel was completed in 1907. At 1,500 feet long and fifty feet below ground at its deepest point, the tunnel required removal of 43,200 cubic yards of dirt and 2,100 cubic yards of rock. Its concrete lining used 10,300 cubic yards of cement. The entire project cost approximately \$366,000 in 1905 dollars. (Note: The east portal of the Selby Tunnel is still visible. The west portal on Selby Avenue was sealed and covered after Selby streetcar service ended in 1953.)

By 1910 it was possible to travel by streetcar from the banks of the St. Croix River in Stillwater all the way to Excelsior, where TCRT operated a large amusement park, on Big Island in Lake Minnetonka. It owned another, Wildwood, on White Bear Lake. Both parks brought thousands of passengers to its suburban lines on summer weekends.

The Snelling Shops

TCRT's management realized that more streetcars were required to sustain its expansion. Before 1898 it bought all of its rolling stock from outside car builders and equipment suppliers. However, none of the cars then on the market met TCRT's operating requirements. It wanted a large, high capacity car that could stand up to Minnesota's harsh winters. After some experimentation, it settled on a home-made design that it would build in its own shops and would be a fixture on Twin Cities' streets for years to come. The first cars were built at the Nicollet Shops in Minneapolis. They were 42 feet long,

weighed 17 tons and could accommodate forty-nine seated passengers. Later versions came out with a steel frame and larger, more powerful electric motors. They were 46 feet long and nine feet wide. (Today's buses are 40 feet long.) Passengers boarded and alighted at the rear. Between 1898 and 1927, TCRT built a total of 1,362 passenger cars. Major updating and improvement programs occurred in the 1920s and '30s. Front exits were added to speed passenger egress, and, starting in 1932, 446 cars were rebuilt for "one man" operation, eliminating the need for conductors except on the heaviest lines. All of this work was done at TCRT's Snelling Shops, long regarded as one of the finest shop facilities in the entire electric railway industry.

The Snelling Shops were located on a forty-acre tract of land at Snelling and University Avenues. They replaced the smaller Nicollet Shops at Thirty-First and Nicollet in Minneapolis. Today, the site is occupied by the Midway Shopping

Center, and, until 2002, Metro Transit's Snelling Garage, a remnant of the Snelling Shops, stood on the southwest corner of the property. A large carbarn on University Avenue opened in 1907. On the south side of the property, over the next several years, TCRT constructed an erecting shop (1907), a machine shop (1907), a general repair shop (1912), a foundry (1908), a carpenter shop (1908) and a storehouse (1909). A transfer table was built to move streetcars undergoing repairs between the various shop buildings. Structures for use by the track and overhead departments also were located on the site. A large open storage yard that could accommodate up to 200 streetcars was placed in the middle of the property between the carbarn and the other shop buildings bordering St. Anthony Avenue.

Snelling was TCRT's main repair shop—and more. Not only did it build and maintain all of the company's streetcars, but it also built them for Duluth and, through a separate company, for Chicago;



Snelling shop worker and destination sign roll. TCRT's Snelling Shops made everything from streetcars to destination signs. Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.



Como Park. An eastbound Como-Harriet car passing through Como Park is about to stop at the Como Park Station around 1908. The Como-Harriet was one of the longest and busiest lines in the TCRT system extending from south Minneapolis all the way to downtown St. Paul. The Como Park Station and the pedestrian bridge remain: the lion and the streetcar are gone. Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.

Grand Rapids, Michigan; Nashville and Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Evansville, Indiana. At its peak, some 600 employees worked at this transportation factory. Snelling allowed TCRT to consolidate its St. Paul operations. Smaller carbarns at University and Raymond Avenues, Smith Avenue and Ramsey Street, and the former cable railway carbarn and power plant at Selby and Dale all were closed. Only the Duluth Avenue barn remained.

Other improvements were made throughout the Minneapolis-St. Paul system. A large steam generating plant was built adjoining St. Anthony Falls in Minneapolis. It along with a hydropower plant at the same location and fourteen electric substations supplied power for the entire system. Shops and carbarns were expanded and modernized in Minneapolis and office buildings went up in downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul.

The following is a list of all TCRT facilities as of 1920:

St. Paul

Repair Shops-Carbarns

- Snelling (Snelling and University Avenues)
- Duluth Avenue (Duluth and E. Seventh Street)

Office Buildings

- College and Wabasha

Electric Substations

- Snelling (In the Snelling carbarn)
- College and Wabasha (In the St. Paul office building)
- Hope Street (Hope and E. Seventh Street)
- Wildwood (provided power to Wildwood Amusement Park)
- Stillwater

Minneapolis

Repair Shops-Carbarns

- Nicollet (Thirty-First and Nicollet Avenue)
- North Side (Twenty-Fourth and Washington Avenue North)
- Lake Street (Twenty-Second Avenue and E. Lake Street)
- East Side (First Avenue NE and Second Street NE)

Office Buildings

- Eleventh and Hennepin (Company Headquarters)

Electric Substations

- Eleventh and Hennepin (In office building)
- St. Anthony Lower Dam
- University Avenue (Second Avenue SE and Fourth Street SE)

- Lake Street (Chicago and Lake Street)
- Girard Avenue (Girard Avenue and Lake Street)
- Lowry Avenue (Lowry Avenue N. and Third Street N.)
- Minnehaha (Twenty-Seventh Avenue S. and Twenty-Ninth Street)
- Hopkins (Washington-Third Street in Hopkins [provided power for the Minnetonka lines])
- Excelsior (Division Street [provided power for Big Island Park and Minnetonka lines])

TCRT became a holding company following merger of the Minneapolis Street Railway and St. Paul City Railway under the TCRT banner in 1891. Subsidiary companies were added over the years. The corporate organization at the end of the 1920s was as follows:

Minneapolis Street Railway

Operated the entire street railway system within the city limits of Minneapolis—237 miles of track.

St. Paul City Railway

Operated the St. Paul Street Railway system—171 miles of track.

Minneapolis & St. Paul Suburban Railroad Company

Operated all of the suburban services outside the city limits of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

This included the lines to Lake Minnetonka and Stillwater and other service in White Bear, Mahtomedi, the Stillwater local lines, Columbia Heights and Robbinsdale—102 miles of track.

Minnetonka and White Bear Navigation Company

Owned and operated Big Island Amusement Park on Lake Minnetonka. Owned other properties in Excelsior, which it leased to the operators of Excelsior Amusement Park following the closure of Big Island. Operated a network of steamboats on Lake Minnetonka until 1926. Owned Wildwood Park on White Bear Lake.

Rapid Transit Real Estate Corporation

Held title to properties that were not directly involved in streetcar operations.

Transit Supply Company

Acted as a fiscal agent and clearinghouse for all of the company's operations and subsidiaries. Operated the Snelling Shops.



Wildwood Park. Streetcar companies built large amusement parks to attract business to their lines on summer weekends. TCRT owned two of them. One was Big Island Park on Lake Minnetonka. The other, pictured here, was Wildwood on the south shore of White Bear Lake. Wildwood offered a spectacular swimming beach, picnic grounds, boat rentals, and dozens of amusement rides, including a truly awesome roller coaster. Wildwood closed in 1938. By then more people were arriving by automobile than by streetcar.

Twin City Motor Bus Company

Became a subsidiary for all of the bus operations acquired by TCRT.

Besides these subsidiary companies it acquired control of the Yellow Cab Corporation of Minnesota in 1927 giving it a monopoly of all public transportation in the Twin Cities.

Working for the Company

Three thousand people worked for TCRT during the 1920s making it one of the Twin Cities largest employers. Half were operating employees, conductors, and motormen, assigned to the various car-barns in St. Paul or Minneapolis. Others worked in the mechanical department, responsible for maintaining the cars, or

were employed in the track and power departments.

A large clerical workforce carried on the business of its accounting, scheduling, and payroll departments at the general offices in Minneapolis and St. Paul. There also were technical and professional personnel, electrical, mechanical, and civil engineers, and a chemist in its testing lab, as well as lawyers and accountants in its legal and executive departments. The company had its own medical department with a company physician and nurses.

Like all industrial organizations of that era, TCRTs was a top-down structure. "Work" was the only word that defined the corporate culture, and you either worked, or you were fired. TCRT issued a book of General Rules in 1916.

It ran to over 200 pages and described in considerable detail the organization and workings of each of the eleven departments in the company and the duties of their employees. It began with a simple two-sentence declaration, call it a "mission statement."

The object of these rules is the betterment of the service rendered by the Twin City Lines and the guidance of all concerned in the performance of their duties. The safe and prompt operation of cars and the comfort and convenience of patrons are of the first importance.

Success meant following the rules. Department heads were enjoined to "maintain strict discipline" and permit "no short circuiting of authority." Discipline meant



Snelling Shops. *The shops, photographed circa 1925–1927, occupied approximately forty acres of land at the intersection of Snelling and University Avenues. They were the main shops for the entire TCRT system and were recognized as one of the finest maintenance and repair facilities in the electric railway industry. This view taken from the Montgomery Ward Department Store looks west toward Snelling. The Snelling car barn is on the right, paralleling University Avenue. The heavy repair shops appear on the far left and a large streetcar storage yard is in the middle. Workers are testing the fire protection system. Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.*



Workers at the Snelling Shops. *An unidentified repair crew at the Snelling Shops removes the front truck and traction motor assembly from beneath a streetcar. Can anyone identify these men? St. Paul Dispatch and Pioneer Press photo, April 21, 1943. Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.*

immediate discharge. The Operating Department stated that “Trainmen shall not be suspended for any cause whatsoever. For continued infraction of the rules and after sufficient warning, the penalty is discharge.”

For trainmen (TCRT followed the railroad model and referred to its operating employees—motormen and conductors—as trainmen) that meant fourteen-hour days. In 1916 a motorman reporting for work at 6 a.m. could still be on duty at 8 p.m. Trainmen were paid only for the hours that they actually worked. There were no paid days off. Senior trainmen could hold down regular runs, but new employees were assigned whatever work was available and worked an “extra board,” which consisted mainly of short morning and evening rush hour runs (called trippers), or the runs of regular trainmen who were off work for some reason.

Worker dissatisfaction boiled over in September, 1917. Operating employees, primarily from St. Paul, created a workers committee and called upon other employees throughout the company to join in petitioning for higher wages and improved working conditions. When Horace Lowry, Thomas Lowry’s son and company president from 1915 to 1931, turned down their request, they turned to the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly for help in organizing a union. Learning of this, Lowry fired all involved. Anger quickly spread among the employees and an organizer was brought in from the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees. More employees were fired. On October 6, the Union called a strike. Lowry, who was a leading force in the Citizens Alliance, an anti-union Minneapolis business association, mobilized his colleagues in the Alliance and local and state officials to intimidate the strikers and suppress the strike. They were largely successful in Minneapolis where streetcars ran normally, but in St. Paul riots broke out, forcing a shutdown of the St. Paul system. Then, the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety intervened, ordering the strikers back to work and a resumption of service. As part of a general settlement the company agreed to reinstate most of the workers it had fired and

granted a 10 percent pay increase. However, it immediately organized a company union and began “encouraging” employees who were Amalgamated members to join. Tensions grew and another eruption followed when an order from President Lowry forbade the wearing of union buttons or union activity on company property. Eight hundred Amalgamated members considered themselves locked out and refused to work. Lowry fired them. The Minnesota Commission of Public Safety backed the company’s order but required it to rehire the fired employees.

Violence in the Streets

On December 2, disturbances broke out in downtown St. Paul. Rioters stoned streetcars, and fifty non-union motormen were injured, some of them dragged from their

cars by angry mobs. Company officials and law enforcement blamed the violence on socialist and IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) troublemakers. Governor Burnquist became involved and called on the Adjutant General to restore order. Home guard units were called up and 3,200 troops from Red Wing, Mankato, Winona, and Duluth arrived in St. Paul to quash the disturbances.

Because the country was at war with Germany, Secretary of War Baker on President Wilson’s authority ordered the President’s Mediation Commission to investigate the dispute. Governor Burnquist denounced the move, claiming it would only cause further troubles. Then the Union agreed to accept the order of the Commission of Public Safety and call off its strike, assuming the company would

comply and restore the 800 employees to their jobs. When it refused, arguing it had replaced the strikers and that the new employees were guaranteed their jobs, the Commission took no action and the organizing efforts collapsed.

The Amalgamated Transit Workers Union won an election to represent TCRT employees in 1934. Subsequent negotiations resulted in a three-year contract in 1936. That contract provided for a six-day work week with overtime after forty-eight hours. It also capped runs at nine and a half hours and reduced the spread of hours from fourteen to thirteen and a half. Motormen and conductors were guaranteed six hours off between night and day work. The base wage for a motorman on a “one man” car was set at 67 cents an hour—62 cents an hour with a conductor. Further



Strike. A line of men marches down Fourth Street to protest TCRT’s labor practices during the December 1917 strike. Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.

wage and hours improvements came along during and after World War II, but it would never be (and still isn't) a nine-to-five job. For motormen, conductors and bus drivers the rate of pay, the hours and lines worked, days off and vacations all were determined by seniority. You weren't an "old-timer" or a member of the club until you had twenty-five years. Then, maybe, you could pick a summer vacation or get a Saturday and Sunday off.

The Jitney Craze

The labor troubles of 1917 presaged more serious issues in later years and were a sign that the economic problems affecting the street railway industry nationally had come home to the Twin Cities and TCRT. Automobiles were becoming popular and affordable. Their greater numbers began clogging downtown streets creating traffic problems and slowing the movement of streetcars through the business district.

Under the terms of its separate charters with Minneapolis and St. Paul, TCRT agreed to pave and maintain its right-of-way on local streets between the rails and two feet on either side of them. It also was required to plow snow. It already had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on street improvements since the 1890s, but more automobiles meant more street improvements, and street maintenance, and removing snow simply made it easier for automobiles to compete for streetcar



Plowing Snow. Under the terms of its charters with the cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, TCRT was required to plow the snow on all city streets used by its streetcars. Here, one of its snowplows is pushing snow on Arlington Avenue after a February 1947 snowstorm. This additional expense made buses more and more attractive. Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.



State Fair. Thousands of visitors took the streetcar to the Minnesota State Fair. These fairgoers, sometime between 1946 and 1948, are all smiles as they head for the cotton candy, the Horticulture Building, the Grandstand, and the Royal American. Recognize anyone? Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.

passengers under difficult weather conditions. TCRT had to comply, even though the automobile seriously threatened its business.

There also were demands from the public and city governments for better service and from employees for higher wages and improved working conditions, and, of course, TCRT's shareholders wanted dividends.

Then there was the Jitney Craze. It started in Los Angeles where a few entrepreneurs turned their automobiles into ad hoc taxicabs and began driving up and down the streetcar lines picking up passengers. The novelty quickly caught on and spread across the country. Soon there were thousands of jitneys competing with the streetcar companies, including TCRT. The industry reacted, demanding that the jitneys be banned. When that failed, they persuaded cities to regulate their operation requiring licenses, uniform fares, and insurance bonds. Jitneys faded but they introduced thousands of people to the flexibility of the automobile.

As a private company, passenger fares were TCRT's only source of revenue. The cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis set those fares and determined the level of service the company was required to provide. The logic was that the company's franchise from the city granted it a monopoly to provide streetcar service and in exchange for that monopoly the company agreed to be regulated by the cities. In 1917 the streetcar fare was a nickel. It had been a nickel since 1875 and neither St. Paul nor Minneapolis was disposed to grant an increase even though inflation, particularly, during World War I, caused a sharp increase in operating expenses.

It was an ironic predicament. The Cities wanted better service, but they were unwilling to grant fare increases to pay for them. At the same time they were compelling the company to pay for street improvements for the automobiles that took away its passengers and its revenues.

TCRT wanted regulatory responsibility transferred to the State of Minnesota, believing the state would be a more ob-

jective arbiter in these matters. It succeeded, partially, with the passage of the Brooks Coleman Act in 1921. Authority over fares was given to the Minnesota Railroad and Warehouse Commission, but the Cities continued to regulate service. Under the law the Commission would determine the economic value of all of TCRT's property and its operations, and set a fare based on a reasonable rate of return on the value of the company's assets.

On paper it seemed workable, but in practice it never gave a satisfactory resolution. The issue of fares and earnings became enmeshed in Progressive politics. TCRT was tarred with the same brush that tarred all street railway companies as evil monopolies that exploited working people. Its behavior during the 1917 strike didn't help that image. Arguably, after 1925 there was no longer any good reason for regulation of fares, service, or how that service was to be provided because TCRT, thanks to the automobile, was operating in a competitive market. Still, policy makers refused to abandon their belief that it needed regulation, and that the public needed protection from its business practices, even though the public was expressing its preferences at the automobile dealership, ridership was in decline, and these same policy makers



Oops. Patrolman Grant Williams studies the aftermath of this November 25, 1946 derailment on Rondo Avenue and St. Albans. Snow, or ice, compacted in the flangeway between the pavement and the rail caused a wheel to ride up and off the track. Rondo-Stryker would be abandoned and converted to buses two years later. *St. Paul Dispatch and Pioneer Press photo, Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.*

were pouring taxpayer dollars into highway improvements.

The nickel fare went up a penny in 1921. The next increase came in 1929 when the base fare went to a dime. The Commission did not grant another adjustment until 1948 when it approved an 11-cent cash fare. There were a few interim changes involving the discounting of token sales, but these never amounted to more than a fraction of a cent. Amazingly, the Commission actually reversed itself in 1942 when it rescinded an earlier increase in the token fare, the argument being that TCRT was making too much money.

Twin Cities' automobile ownership and streetcar ridership are shown below:

Year	Automobiles Licensed	Person/Auto	TCRT Riders
1920	75,053	8.2	238,388,762
1924	115,382	7.4	209,252,949
1928	159,480	4.5	190,826,784
1932	170,495	4.2	113,032,559
1936	203,606	3.8	115,195,524
1940	220,266	3.5	104,313,619

Automobile ownership followed national trends until the middle of the 1920s, then sprinted ahead of the national averages. In St. Paul and Minneapolis there already were 4.5 persons per automobile in 1928, compared to 5.3 nationally in 1929. A study in 1940 found that only eight out of thirty cities surveyed with over 300,000 population had more automobiles per capita. This relentless growth in the number of automobiles, even during the depression years underscores TCRT's shrinking market and its poor long-term prospects. The jump in riders that came with World War II quickly turned into pent-up demand for new automobiles once the War ended.

The Long Decline

TCRT brought \$1.1 million to its bottom line in 1929. That fell to a slim \$40,000 in 1932 and it lost money in 1933. Ridership had been in a steady decline throughout the 1920s from a high of 238 million riders in 1920 to 168 million in 1929, all

because of the automobile. Between 1929 and 1933, the Depression took away another 68 million bringing total ridership to 100 million, its lowest point since 1906 and, after the World War II surge, its lowest point until 1953. TCRT took steps to cut its losses; eliminating conductors on all but the heaviest lines, cutting peak hour service, and abandoning its suburban lines to Lake Minnetonka and Stillwater in 1932, regaining profitability in 1935. However, this improvement in its financial situation was unsustainable because it came from operating economies not more riders. Passenger revenues and ridership kept right on tumbling. From \$10.6 million in 1931, revenues dropped to \$8.6 million in 1935. TCRT stopped

paying dividends on its stock, but it kept paying down its debt and continued its maintenance programs. Cars, track, and power systems were rebuilt and renewed. There were wage reductions and cutbacks in work hours, but no massive employee layoffs. As a result, the company was able to handle the wartime crowds with a physical plant and rolling stock that was in superb condition

The first streetcar lines were converted to buses during the 1930s. Previously, buses had been used as feeders to streetcar lines or to supplement streetcar service, an example being the two express bus routes that TCRT operated on University Avenue and on the Marshall Avenue-Lake Street route between St. Paul and Minneapolis. Company management remained strongly committed to the streetcar as a superior vehicle for providing transit service, but only where ridership could justify the higher cost of streetcar operations. Streetcars could move large numbers of people at a much lower labor



PCC. TCRT bought 141 of these modern streetcars between 1946 and 1949 in a futile effort to hang on to a dwindling number of riders. Unfortunately, the streetcars didn't go to the burgeoning postwar suburbs. Chevies and Fords did. This car, photographed around 1949–1951, is on the way at Smith and Annapolis on the West Side. When buses took over, the PCC's moved on to long careers at Newark, Cleveland, and Mexico City. One is preserved by the Minnesota Transportation Museum. Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.

cost because of their high unit capacity and speed. Early buses could only accommodate thirty to thirty-five people and were slower than the streetcars of that era.

On the other hand, streetcars came with a large fixed investment in track and in electric power systems. Their cost had to be spread over a large number of passengers. The more passengers they carried, the lower the cost per passenger and the more cost effective the operation. Buses didn't have these fixed costs, but their limited passenger capacity and lower overall speed made them less efficient people movers. Streetcars could hang on as long as the riders were there but became vulnerable as ridership fell off and track and power infrastructure came due for replacement.

In St. Paul the Jackson Street, South Robert Street, and Merriam Park and Western Avenue car lines were converted to buses before World War II, as were the Bryn Mawr, Kenwood, St. Louis Park, Franklin Avenue, and Sixth Avenue lines in Minneapolis.

World War II brought a temporary end to the decline in business. Passengers returned in large numbers as the demand

for workers soared and gasoline and tire rationing severely restricted automobile use. TCRT pressed every available streetcar into service. The two express bus routes between Minneapolis and St. Paul were discontinued and the buses used to provide service to the New Brighton Army Ammunition Plant. For the first time in its history the company hired women as conductors and motormen. Even high school students were recruited as conductors to fill in for men drafted into the military.

In 1944 TCRT retained a consulting firm, Gilman and Company, to study its operations and make recommendations for capital improvements at the end of the War. Gilman found the company to be in excellent shape physically and financially. It recommended modest improvements to the streetcar power system but proposed a conversion to buses over a span of approximately ten years. General Motors and other bus manufacturers were introducing large diesel buses with automatic transmissions that could do the work of a streetcar on even the heaviest lines. Other transit systems would turn to them as replacements for their aging streetcars. But TCRT management chose

a different course, ordering new PCC cars in a bid to retain riders. That decision and its commitment to the streetcar would turn out to be a terrible mistake.

PCC stood for Presidents Conference Car. Developed by a consortium of transit executives and equipment suppliers during the 1930s, the PCC was the finest streetcar yet built. It was lightweight and accelerated rapidly, with a top speed in excess of 50 miles per hour. It was quiet and smooth and offered passengers a much-improved heating and ventilation system.

Several thousand were built and sold to transit systems across the country. TCRT would buy 141 of them between 1947 and 1949. In St. Paul they appeared on the Hamline-Cherokee, St. Paul-Minneapolis, Grand-Mississippi, and St. Clair-Payne lines. Unfortunately, the new streetcars didn't go to the suburbs where people were buying new homes, nor could they compete with the pent up demand for new automobiles. TCRT lost 36 million riders between 1946 and 1949. In 1949 it lost three quarters of a million dollars on its operations.

These losses worried stockholders, and the old management was forced out. President D.J. Strouse had been with the company since 1910. He was a capable, competent transit executive who had faith in streetcars, believing they were superior to buses and had a future in TCRT's operations. He expressed those opinions in a 1945 statement coinciding with the debut of the PCC in the Twin Cities:

Believing that streetcars are and always will be the best vehicle of mass transportation in areas of dense population, we have been working, planning and digging to cut expenses, and at the same time furnish the best service our resources will permit. We are convinced that the streetcar is as necessary to most people as it ever was. The thousands who have to ride streetcars, and the other thousands who prefer to, are entitled to good cars and good service, and they are going to have them.

Strouse and other officials did not foresee and could not accept the sharp decline in riders that followed World War II. Nor were they able to bring service levels and expenses into line with the

fall off in business. Unfortunately, they were replaced by a management group with little transit experience just a desire to make money regardless of the consequences for the transit system.

A Great Conspiracy?

Charles Green became president in November 1949, and promptly made himself known to Twin Cities' streetcar riders. He halted streetcar overhaul programs at the Snelling Shops, fired employees, and cut service, completely ignoring city officials and the complaints of riders. He demanded higher fares and told the press that he would sell off the entire St. Paul operation because it wasn't making money. He also stated that he would convert the system to bus operation.

That was too much for TCRT's board of directors. The company temporarily returned to profitability, but Green's tactics proved his undoing and he was stripped of his authority to speak for TCRT. That responsibility was given to Fred Ossanna, corporate counsel. Ossanna was well connected politically and had been a candidate for mayor of Minneapolis, but there were rumors of past associations with various underworld characters. Ossanna and Green battled for control of the company, and, after several months, Ossanna

prevailed. By this time it became apparent that the rumors were true. *Collier's*, a weekly, national magazine ran a feature article on how mobsters had taken over the Twin Cities transit system, and Ossanna was locked in his own battle with the Railroad and Warehouse Commission.

TCRT's fortunes did not improve, and riders continued to turn to their automobiles. It was becoming clear that the company could no longer sustain its streetcar operations, yet its financial position was so weak that banks were unwilling to finance a conversion program. When the Ossanna management approached General Motors about purchasing buses, GM took a careful look at TCRT and concluded that the savings from buses would pay for the cost of conversion and also secure any financial commitments that General Motors Acceptance Corporation would make to TCRT to buy the buses. Ossanna went hat in hand to GM for a mere twenty-five buses and returned with an offer for 525.

The loss of the Twin Cities streetcar system has been controversial for years, especially after Ossanna and several of his colleagues were subsequently tried and convicted for fraudulently profiting personally and illegally from real estate and scrap metal sales made during the

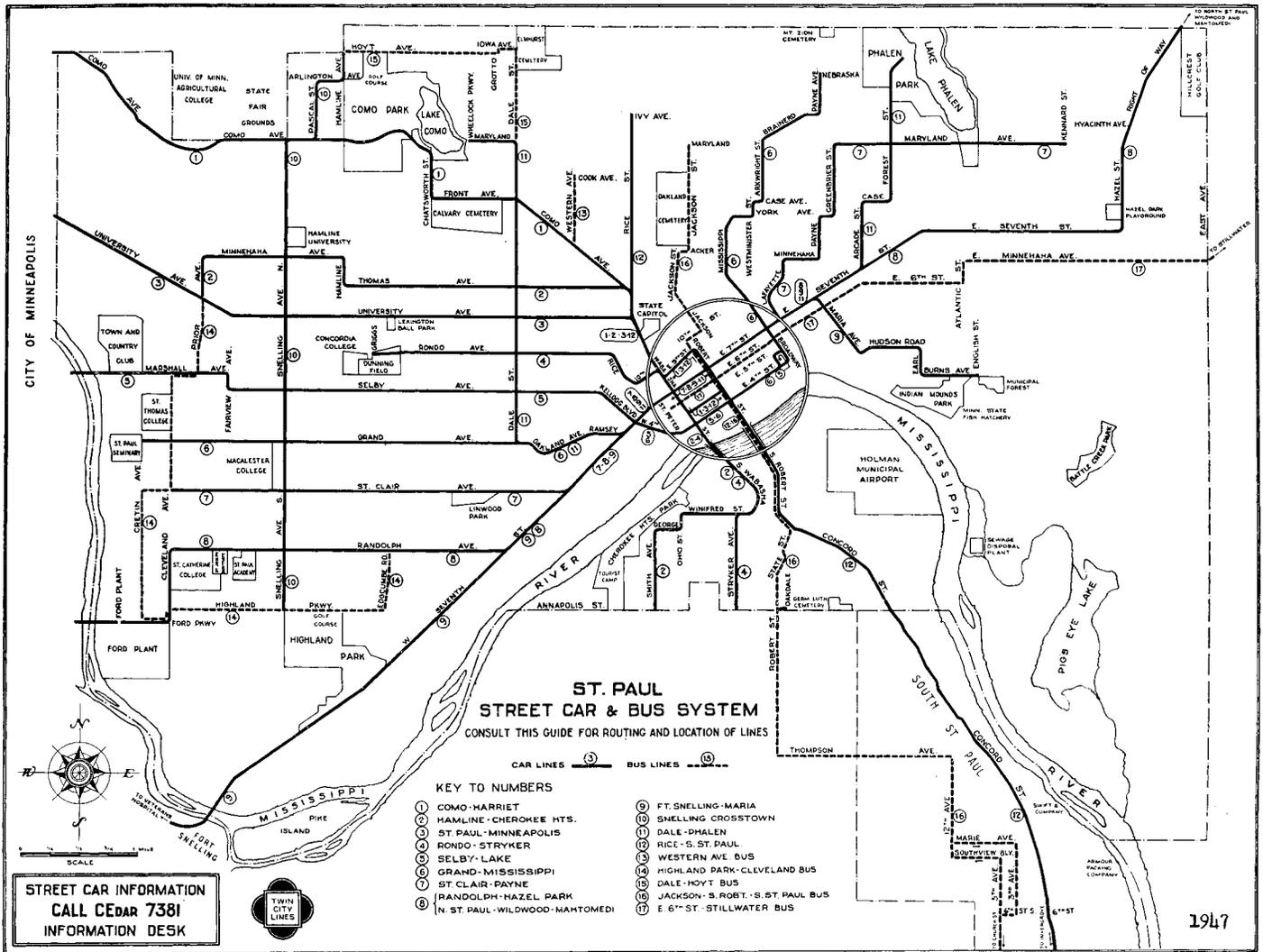
conversion. However, the demise of the streetcar was one more consequence of the social and economic changes brought about by the automobile and the suburbanization of the Twin Cities. TCRT, as a private company, received no public subsidy. It simply did not have the resources to continue operating a streetcar system that didn't go where people wanted to go, nor could it raise the capital to modernize the system or expand it to serve the developing, first ring suburbs. One way streets in downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis would have required enormous expenditures for track relocation, and, even then, there was a freeway system waiting on the drawing boards. Some have argued there was a great conspiracy involving automotive interests, corrupt company officials, and gangland figures. But if there was a conspiracy, then everyone who bought an automobile in the Twin Cities between 1920 and 1950 can be indicted as a co-conspirator. The individuals who profited dishonestly from the conversion were opportunists. As for GM, it saw an opportunity to sell more buses and did so. The activities of the Green and Ossanna management provoked indignation but little action on the part of public officials. There was no support for public ownership and operation because there was no constituency for transit and there wouldn't be for another twenty years. Everyone loved the streetcars, but no one was riding. They became a metaphor for times gone by. They had no future, and they disappeared.

Buses took over in St. Paul on the following dates:

- November 3, 1951 E. Seventh Street—
Mahtomedi
- May 3, 1952 Dale Street
- May 17, 1952 Maria Avenue, Randolph-
Ford Plant, Rice Street,
W. Seventh-Fort Snelling,
So. St. Paul-Invergrove.
- September 6, 1952 St. Clair-Payne, Snelling
Avenue
- November 1, 1952 Hamline-Cherokee,
Grand-Mississippi



Finis. It's June 1954, and it's all over. Many streetcar bodies were sold and turned into hunting cabins or chicken coops, but most, like this car and hundred of others, came to a sorry end on a funeral pyre at the Snelling Shops. Salvageable metals were removed from the ashes and sold to scrap metal dealers at below market prices. The dealers, in turn, pocketed the difference after handing over a generous kickback to crooked TCRT officials, all of whom eventually wound up in jail. Minnesota Transportation Museum Collection.



St. Paul System, 1947. This map appeared in St. Paul telephone directories. It shows the streetcar and bus system as it was just after World War II. Many of these lines are operated by Metro Transit today. Minnesota Transportation Museum.

July 10, 1953 Como Avenue, Selby-Lake

October 31, 1953 St. Paul-Minneapolis

Streetcar service in Minneapolis ended on June 19, 1954 with the closure of the Como-Harriet line.

Today, little remains of the great Twin City Rapid Transit Company. The former North Side car barn at Twenty-Fourth and Washington Avenue in Minneapolis still stands, as does the Eastside barn on First Avenue NE between University Avenue

and Fourth Street NE. The latter is owned by Superior Plating. The Lowry Avenue substation remains, and the University of Minnesota owns the former main power plant. It produces steam for the Minneapolis campus. In Como Park the former streetcar waiting station has been restored and reopened. The Minnesota Transportation Museum preserved and restored several TCRT cars and operates them during the summer months at two sites: one at Lake Harriet, the other at Excelsior. Most of TCRT's corporate records are at the Minnesota Historical Society.

John W. Diers, who was born in St. Paul was a regular rider on the Hamline-Cherokee line. He worked for the Metropolitan Transit Commission for more than twenty-five years, has been a member of the Minnesota Transportation Museum since 1968 and was its chairman from 1990 to 1995. He is now an independent consultant on transit operations. His book, The Streetcar Era in the Twin Cities, which he coauthored with Aaron Isaacs, will be published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2006.



Another view of Wildwood Amusement Park on the south shore of White Bear Lake. This postcard view was mailed to Mrs. H. Freedland of Red Wing, Minn., on August 12, 1912. From historian Robert J. Stumm's postcard collection and used with his permission.

R.C.H.S.
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