



WEBFOOTER EXTRA

NOVEMBER 2015

HORSE-DRAWN STREETCARS



WEBFOOTERS POST CARD CLUB

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Portland OR 97217-0240



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◆ Horse-Drawn Streetcars – see page 3.

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HORSE-DRAWN STREETCARS



Willamette Bridge Railway horsecars assemble before starting their daily schedules. This view from 1888 shows the busy streetcar operation which kept fresh horses rotating with cars lined up at the car barn at what is now SE Morrison and Grand streets.

Electric streetcars have been operating for many years, but the first streetcars were pulled by horses. The first tram services in the world were believed to have been started by the Swansea and Mumbles Railway in Wales, using specially designed carriages on an existing tramline built for horse-drawn freight dandies. Fare-paying passengers were carried on a line between Oystermouth, Mumbles and Swansea Docks beginning in 1807. The Gloucester and Cheltenham Tramroad began carrying passengers in 1809, although its main purpose was freight.

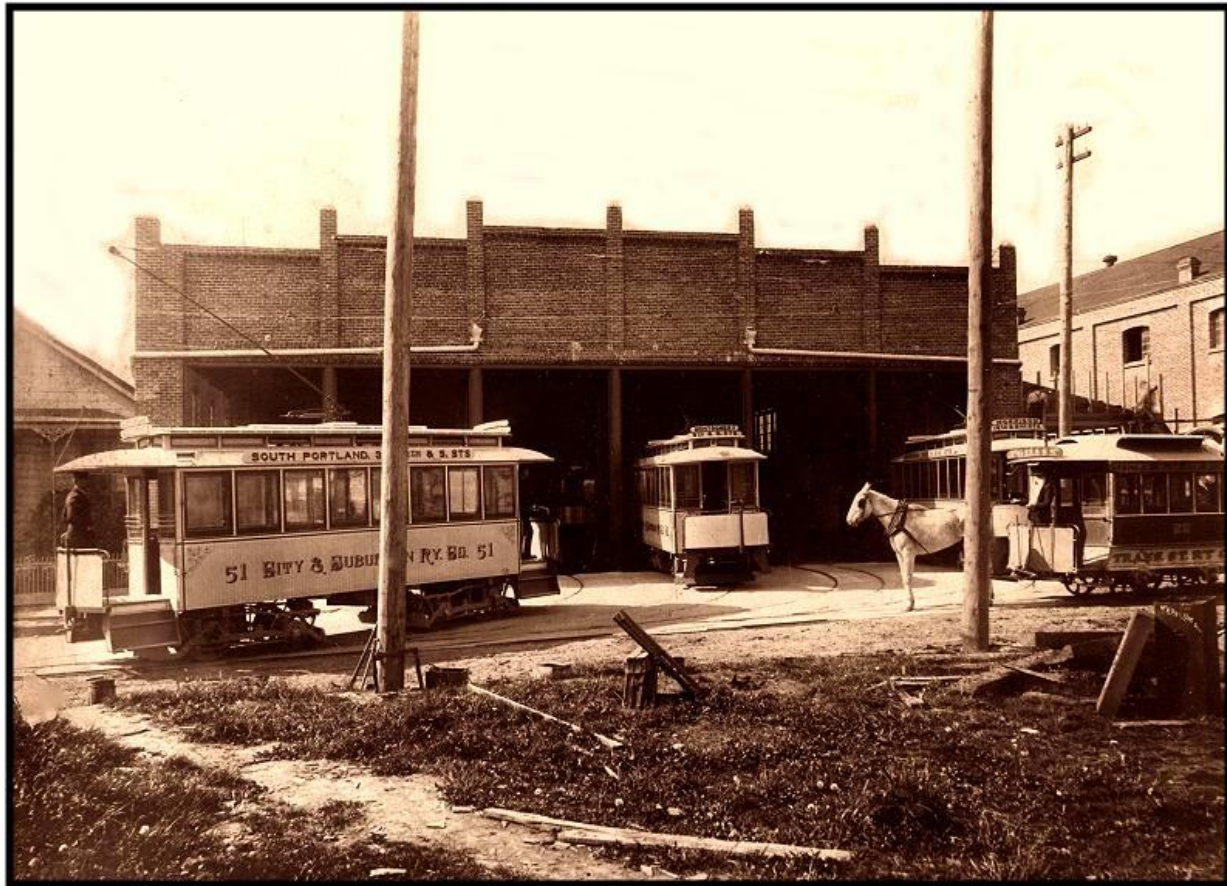
In the United States the very first streetcar appeared on November 26, 1832, on the New York and Harlem Railroad in New York City. The cars were designed by John Stephenson of New Rochelle, New York and constructed at his company in New York City. The earliest streetcars used horses and sometimes mules, usually two as a team, to haul the cars. By the mid-1880s, there were 415 street railway companies in the USA operating over 6,000 miles of track and carrying 188 million passengers per year using horsecars.



Multnomah Street Railway car no. 1 is ready to depart the car barn on Southwest 16th and Washington Streets for a run to the Slabtown area in November 1882.

Problems with horsecars included the fact that any given animal could only work so many hours on a given day, had to be housed, groomed, fed and cared for day in and day out, and produced prodigious amounts of manure, which the streetcar company was charged with storing and then disposing of. Since a typical horse pulled a streetcar for about a dozen miles a day and worked for four or five hours, many systems needed ten or more horses in the stable for each horsecar.

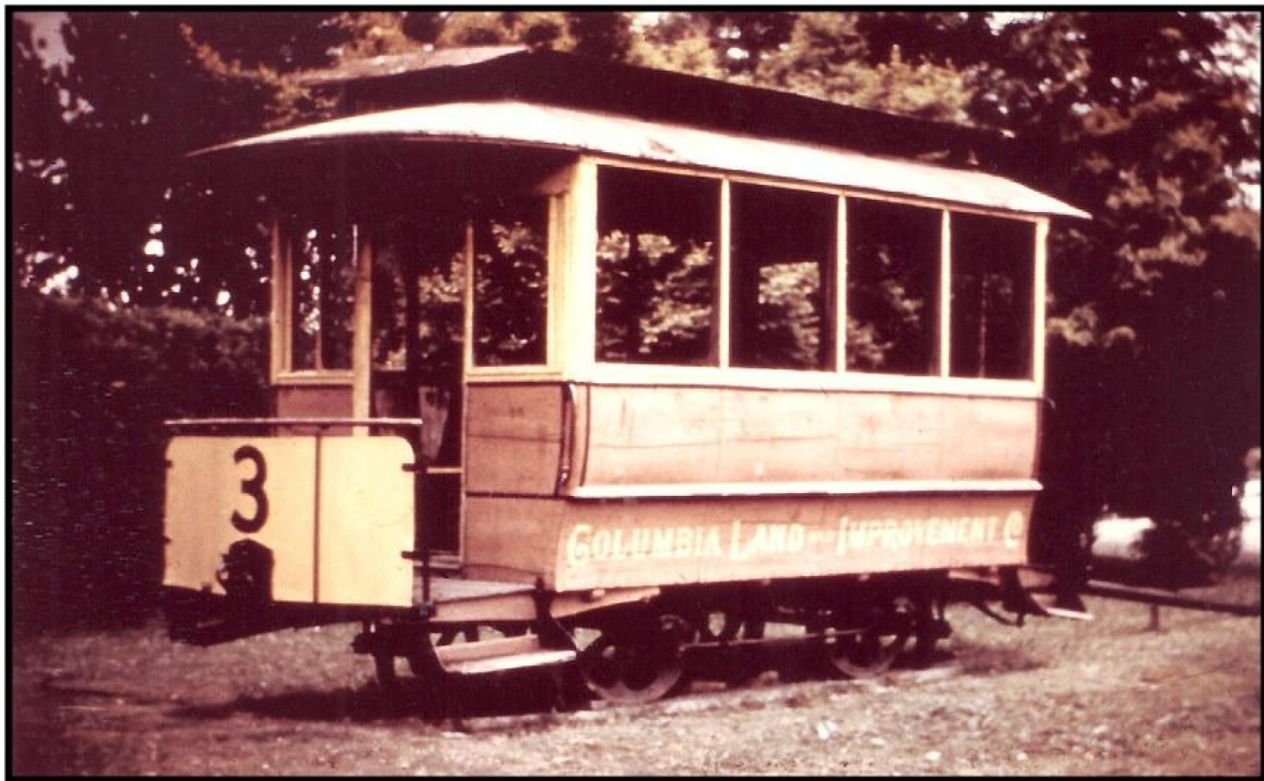
Horsecars were largely replaced by electric-powered streetcars following the invention by Frank J. Sprague of an overhead trolley system on streetcars for collecting electricity from overhead wires. His spring-loaded trolley pole used a wheel to travel along the wire. In late 1887 and early 1888, using his trolley system, Sprague installed the first successful large electric street railway system in Richmond, Virginia. Long a transportation obstacle, the hills of Richmond included grades of over 10%, and they were an excellent proving ground for acceptance of the new technology in other cities. Within a year, the economy of electric power had replaced more costly horsecars in many cities.



Pictured on the right is Car No. 22 on June 20, 1892, the final day that horsecars were used on the Transcontinental Street Railway in Portland.

Portland's first street transit system was franchised in 1871 by railroad magnate Ben Holladay and Associates. The actual applicant for the franchise was Holladay's partner Levi Estes who along with D. Stimson operated a sawmill. They joined Holladay and J.H. Mitchell who were the principal stockholders. On Sept. 6, 1871, the Portland Street Railway Company was granted a 25-year franchise to operate the length of First Street. After several setbacks, construction was finally completed and the first horse-drawn streetcar in Portland began operating on Dec. 7, 1872. The road was finished at a cost of \$10,000. The cars ran on iron rails which were originally purchased for use on the Oregon Central Railroad. Many of the rails were damaged in transit, so they were all laid bottom side up. Four new bobtail cars were purchased from Kimball & Co. of San Francisco for about \$1,100 each and with 10 horses and two miles of track the line opened.

Expansion was necessary in 1883 when eight double-ended cars were ordered and additional passing tracks were added for more frequent service. At the height of its operations, the Portland Street Railway Company operated eleven horsecars with a total of 35 horses. Each car was drawn with a single horse, but on steep grades, two horses were sometimes used. The second horse was called a "Hill Horse." The first lines in Portland were operated on First Street, Fifth Street, Burnside, Davis Street and Washington Street, all on the west side.



Old Number 3 in Milwaukie after a fresh coat of paint.

Beginning about 1880, competitors to the Portland Street Railway Co. began operating in Portland. Several different lines were formed and many of the newer lines offered service to East Portland. Much of the original equipment was sold back and forth between the companies due to forced sales by receivers. When Ben Holladay passed away in 1887, assets of the Portland Street Railway Co. became entangled in litigation involving the Holladay estate.

In December 1888, a portion of the original assets of the Portland Street Railway Co. were sold to a company in Vancouver, Washington, the Columbia Land & Improvement Co. Three of the first horse drawn cars to operate in Portland were sold to this company. Originally, the Columbia Land & Improvement Co. was franchised to install and operate a water system for the city of Vancouver, but managed as part of their real estate operations to branch into the transit business. They operated a 30-block line from the ferry terminal to Vancouver Heights. In 1893, Columbia was absorbed by Portland interests and eventually the line was electrified.

The early horse-drawn streetcars were soon joined by and replaced by steam trains and eventually electric trolleys. Portland's first electric streetcar took to the rails in 1889 and it carried passengers across the first Steel Bridge to the town of Albina.

Portland Streetcar Historian and Author Richard Thompson says, "Portland's first street railway company was the first to use horses and it was also the last." The Portland Street Railway Co. continued to operate on a "shoestring budget" until they became insolvent about 1899.



Old Number 3 on display in Milwaukie in the late 1940's.

The original Ankeny car barn was built in 1892 by the City & Suburban Railway Co. and it was located at 24th and East Burnside. After a fire destroyed it in 1984, the Ankeny car barn was rebuilt at 28th and East Burnside on the east side of 28th. When fire destroyed the original Ankeny car barn, it has been said that up to five of Portland's early horsecars were leveled to ashes. Only three of the early horsecars remained in operation in Vancouver, and two were subsequently scrapped. When operations of Columbia Land and Improvement Co. were absorbed by Portland interests, the only remaining horsecar that had operated in Portland found its way back home and it was named "Old Number 3."

Over the years, the car moved from car barn to car barn and it was used for exhibits and parades. After ending up taking up precious space at the Piedmont Division car barn, Superintendent of Equipment, Earl Richardson took an interest in the car and he bought it from Portland Traction Co. in 1948. Title of the car was transferred to Richardson and he moved the car to his residence at Oak Grove where he gave it a fresh coat of paint and varnish. Richardson reported that his place swarmed with people young and old on weekends who wanted to see Old Number 3.

Interest in the car waned, and in 1949 the car was presented to the Milwaukie Historical Society. Exposure to the elements and vandalism soon took a toll and Old Number 3 fell into a stage of ruin and disrepair. After being on display in Milwaukie for five years, the car was put into "drydock" at the shops of Albina Engine & Machine Works where expert craftsmen were assigned to the restoration project. After a complete restoration, the car soon returned to Milwaukie where it remains today.



A view of First Street in Portland in 1890 showing the advantages of paved streets and horsecars.

Passengers could ride the horsecars for five cents and they could board at either end of the car. However, the fare box was located near the operator. Each fare was acknowledged by the ringing of a bell, signifying that the fare had been collected. A metal trough was used to assist the operator in the collection of fares. Passengers who boarded the car from the opposite end of the operator were expected to deposit the fare in the inclined trough which ran to the fare box. The trough was mounted on a pivot which allowed it to be used from either end. Coins would tend to get stuck in the trough and newsboys who boarded to sell newspapers were said to pocket a stray nickel or two that may have become stuck in the trough.

Horses were more highly regarded than the workmen. Operators worked 12 to 14 hours a day while horses put in a four-hour day. The original cars were designed to carry 12 seated passengers, but it was common to have 25 or more passengers ride at a time. Seats were mere wooden benches which ran lengthwise in the cars. The benches were made of slats and were not upholstered in any way and there was no heat, even in winter months. Although the operator stood out in front, many passengers swore that the inside of the car was colder than the outer platform. With electrification came lights, heat and later, air conditioning.