The Linkville Trolley

By Judith Hassen, Curator, Klamath County Museum

Two events occurred this summer that make the trolley a timely topic:

The Klamath County Museums entered their trolley in the July 4th, 2000 parade, and a gentleman who is rebuilding a sister trolley visited the Klamath County Main Museum in June. These events have led to an increased appreciation of the trolley itself and its history.

On July 4th, 2000, the Klamath Falls Land and Transportation Co. trolley, otherwise known as the "Linkville Trolley" rolled down Main Street to the satisfaction of the public, staff and volunteers of the Klamath County Museums. The first time the Klamath Falls Land and Transportation Co. trolley rolled was also July 4th, but in 1907. "The street car, gaily decorated, played an important part in the parade, it being the first time a (street) car had traversed the streets of this city." (The Klamath Republican,
July 11, 1907.

This year the theme of the parade was "All Around Good Fun." Our entry proclaimed, "It's Fun to Volunteer," and many of our wonderful volunteers were available to ride the trolley: Rachel Stockwell, Dr. and Mrs. Koutsky, Susan Rambo, Sue Fortune, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Peters, Anne Peugh and her daughter and granddaughter, Bill Bowen, Carolyn Wentworth, Jonna Bolenbaugh and Tom Cooley. A truck provided and driven by Mr. and Mrs. Bob Baker towed the trolley. Honors for steering the trolley go to Pete Fortune. Towing the trolley not only prevented possible mechanical mishaps, but also provided a safe and open place for more of our volunteers to ride: Amy and Heidi Kester, Jerris Smith, Barbara Johnson, Tara Davis, Megan Miller and Maria Guzman. Amy, Jerris, Barbara and Tara spent the day before the parade making the signs for the truck and trolley.

These were not the only Fourth of July parades for the trolley: "Me for the scrap heap in sixty days. But I'll still take you from the Depot to Buena Vista addition on Upper Lake." The sign was made to decorate the trolley for a fourth of July parade. This photo shows the Linkville Trolley as it was named long after service, re-wheeled for entry into a July 4 parade.

Of course, the trolley in the 2000 parade was not the same trolley that was in the other parades. Instead it is a replica of an 1879 "Sutter Street car—exactly like one which ran in Klamath Falls between 1907 and 1911." (Herald and News, March 8, 1979) The original trolley had a four year span of use here in Klamath.
Falls. The present trolley is a replica which in turn now has a history of its own.

The idea of preserving the old trolley or a facsimile was not new. The Herald and News of April 9, 1932 ran this editorial:

"Linkville Trolley Should be Preserved"

"In a letter to this page, Austin Cox of Algoma suggests that the old Linkville trolley be removed from the vacant lot near the old Holland house on Main street and properly preserved as a relic of pioneer days. The suggestion brings from old-timers a colorful story that does, indeed, impose upon us the obligation of rescuing the old horse-car from the junk heap and giving it, with its story, to present and future generations..."

"Thus is told the story of the old Linkville trolley, now rotting away into a junk heap down by the depot, not far from the end of the line over which it used to run. We think it will be agreed that it is a good story, and one that justifies the preservation of the old trolley as a reminder of one of the most colorful chapters in the history of Klamath Falls."

And the story that came from the old-timers was indeed colorful. While the idea for streetcar service was discussed as early as 1904, things really heated up in 1905. In January 1906, the city granted a tentative franchise to the Klamath Canal Company, (William K. [Bill] Brown, and his associate, C. W. Hawkins promoting the Buena Vista Addition northwest of the city) and the Klamath Development Company (Major Charles Worden and D. B. Campbell interested in promoting the Hot Springs section of town). These competing development companies were granted franchises for an electric car in Klamath Falls. But the franchises overlapped on Main Street between Third Street and Conger Avenue. "... The council had
stipulated that the first company to lay its rails on Main Street would be able to collect usage money from the other company for the Main Street rails since they would permit only the one set of rails on Main Street.” (Klamath Echoes, Vol. 5, p. 79, published 1967.) Here the story takes on human interest with Major Worden betting Bill Brown $500 that the K. D. Company would get their rails in from Grass Valley first. Brown (KCC) dispatched a messenger, Bob Hunsaker, to mislead the KDC’s teamsters (some say there was a gallon or two of whiskey involved) into taking the worst road around Orr Lake where they became “mired down hopelessly in the spring mud”. He then hired all the available men in town and started tearing up Main Street and laying ties just after midnight on Saturday night because on Sunday no one could get an injunction to stop him. When the KCC rails arrived from Pokegama, Major Worden capitulated. This story became Radio/TV copy in a spot called “Klamath Falls Streetcar,” one of the Stories of Pacific Powerland on September 15, 1966.

In the 1967 Klamath Echoes account of the Linkville Trolley, four sources are mentioned: one by Doris Palmer Payne written in 1938 or 40; the History of Klamath County by Rachael Applegate Good, 1941; an item in the Herald and News by Edith Rutenic McLeod, March 15, 1954; and another article in the Herald and News by Floyd L. Wynne, February 24, 1963. Other accounts exist: In August of 1946 “The March of Pine” published by the Klamath Falls branch of Weyerhaeuser Timber Co., Volume 3, Number 8, p. 5, ran a story called “When a Street Car Graced Klamath Falls.” On September 29, 1946 the Oregon Journal Sunday Edition ran “Klamath Falls’ Horse Drawn Street Car”
by Mary W. Case, Free Lance Writer.

"The first streetcar in Klamath Falls arrived riding on wagon wheels as

showing in this picture. The flanged wheels for the track were fitted on before the car went into service."


Doris Palmer Payne's account, titled "Klamath's Horse Car Born of Town-Shaking Race Between Rival Development Concerns," lists her sources: "Everything concerning it would be as extinct as the dodo now, if it weren't for the records of the doings of the city dads at that time, a very few tangible reminders and the memories of such men as Bert Hall, L. Kirkpatrick and other old timers. Facts gleaned from these sources and from Rachel Applegate Good, who is hard at work on a history of Klamath county to be published in book form, dovetail together to form a story typical of the robust spirit of enterprise that characterized Klamath Falls' early history."

Edith Ruttenic McLeod's article, titled "Linkville Trolley Was Great Thing In Its Day; Battle For Control Had Whole County Betting On Outcome" refers to the information in the Payne article, and attempts to clarify certain later items: "Not long ago the Herald and News printed a picture of this early method of transportation, but actually it was not a trolley car at all, being a San Francisco cable car converted to be drawn by horses." Payne included Applegate Good's material in her research. The Wynne article, too, includes the material from Payne and Applegate Good with additional references to some newspaper articles from the period.

In Vol. 16 of the Klamath Echoes, published in 1979, author Devere
Helfrich (author of the item in the 1967 *Echoes* also) wrote another history of the "Linkville Trolley" which only concerned "itself with correcting former stories written about the 'trolley's founding.'" (P. 33.) In the interval between histories, Helfrich had located microfilm copies of *Republican* newspapers from April 1 through October 31 of 1906 at the University of Oregon Library in Eugene, Oregon. These articles "shed a somewhat different light on the history of Klamath Falls' 'electric railway.'" And they do, but while many of the details differ, mostly centering around the machinations of the development companies and the construction of a double line, the "robust spirit of enterprise" that Payne writes about is still the defining element.

This photograph from the January 31, 1953 *Herald and News* shows the old trolley when it was new to Klamath Falls: "A Horse Drawn Trolley was a feature of Linkville when this photo was snapped by Baldwin on July 4, 1907 to commemorate start of the service. The picture was subsequently made into a post card and was bought by W. H. Wynant, now a resident of Merrill, while he was staying at the Baldwin Hotel. The card bears the postmark of White Lake, which was a stop on the old lake. Photo from Gordon Wynant."

The Klamath Canal Company's subdivision, Buena Vista, and their streetcar (which was purchased in San Francisco and brought to Klamath Falls), were operated under the name of the Klamath Falls Land and Transportation Company. Charlie Adams served as the sole operator, mechanic and repairman during the entire length of service the streetcar was used. The trolley as implemented was pulled by horses, two (Sealam and Buck) or four as weather and road conditions dictated. When they reached the end of the line, the horses were unhitched and then hitched to the other end of the car so the
car could be pulled in the opposite direction. It was never used as an electric trolley. The line ran from Spring and Main Streets to Conger; out Conger and California to the Upper Lake; with the line ending near the present-day Pelican Marina. After four years of service, the city passed an ordinance to repeal all ordinances granting railway franchises to private enterprises. The trolley was then parked, apparently in "the vacant lot near the old Holland house (hotel) on Main street." The rails were removed from the streets in 1911.

demonstrated when the U P's new streamlined aluminum train and the ancient Linkville horse trolley were lined up side by side Thursday. This was the streamline train's first Oregon stop."

From the June 27, 1935 Herald and News: "Forgotten -- and Just About Gone" "This is all that is left of the old Linkville horse-trolley, abandoned at the scene of its last moment of glory, down by the railroad tracks. When the Union Pacific's stream-lined train went through Klamath Falls a year or so ago, the old car was temporarily rescued from a back-lot and put on display. But there it was left, and there it is today. There has been talk of preserving this real relic of early days in Klamath, but nothing has been accomplished toward that end thus far."

A subsequent Herald and News article indicates a move: "In Moore park sits what remains of the horse-car, pathetically awaiting the day when a projected $400 of WPA money for its reconstruction is approved. Nearby is a section of rail, unearthed several feet
below the present surface of Main street during Copco operations in 1938. Along the old route the car followed out California avenue to Front street, embedded beneath the surface for the most part are sandstone markers about six inches square and a foot and a half long with a cross chiseled into the top. Apparently, that is all."

On March 7, 1965 the Herald and News reported: "Remnants of trolley at museum."

"Two pair of wheels and junction boxes from the old Klamath Falls Land and Transportation Company trolley, which went out of business in 1910, have been presented to the Klamath County Museum by the city Parks and Recreation Dept. The iron wheels and axles were moved Wednesday from Moore Park to the museum where they are now on display." The disposition of the wooden remnants is not mentioned.

In 1977 the wheels were still in the museum: "In 1910, the quaint and slow moving streetcar, a product better placed in another time, had become a dinosaur which prompted the city to revoke the franchise for continued service. From this action the city became the new owner and put the old car to rest and had most of the rails removed from the streets in the spring of 1911. The last remains of this early horse-drawn conveyance, which include only the wheels and axles of the early car, can be found at the Klamath County Museum." (Herald and News, February 27, 1977).

In the mid-60's, C. William Burk, Curator of the Klamath County Museum, attempted to locate a "trailer"-type cable car like the Klamath Land and Transportation Company's for the 1967 Klamath Falls centennial. In the late 70's
and early 80's, the ideas about reclaiming the trolley reached fruition: “Old streetcar will run here again” by John Elliott, February 22, 1978, reads: “A one-to-one replica of a horse-drawn streetcar which rumbled through downtown Klamath Falls shortly after the turn of the century will carry passengers again, either this summer or next. Harry Drew, curator of the Klamath County Museum, said today construction of the replica, which may be self-propelled rather than horse-drawn for some fairly obvious modern day reasons, will be possible as a result of approval by the Klamath-Lake Manpower Consortium of five Young Adult Conservation positions for the museum. At the same time, approval was granted for use of 10 YACC members by the County Parks and Recreation Dept., according to director Keith Read.”

“Drew said county commissioners have given him the go-ahead to proceed with the streetcar project, which will run from the county museum to the Baldwin Hotel and, perhaps, Favell Museum and the Klamath Art Center. Specifications for the streetcar were lost during the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. However, there is a "sister" to the streetcar which ran in Klamath Falls for a few years beginning the same year as the San Francisco disaster. It is stored in the cable car museum there and Drew has been given blanket authority by the director there to examine and measure so the local replica can be constructed. In addition, he has photographs of the streetcar operated by the Klamath Falls Land and Transportation Co., a vehicle which made the Sutter Street run in San Francisco before being relocated here.”

On March 29, 1979 the Herald and News reported: “After weeks of negotiations with San Francisco officials, Drew has obtained an 1879-vintage streetcar, like the old horse-drawn vehicle that operated in Klamath Falls between 1907-1911.... No cash was involved in the transaction with San Francisco. Two sets of double-axle wheels from the former Klamath Falls streetcar were traded for the old Sutter car to close the deal. Apparently, San Francisco needed the rare steel wheels for cable-car replacements... The car will be restored through a $2000 Pacific Northwest Regional Commission grant.
plus $7,000 for materials and labor from the YACC. Duplicate parts are being made because a lot of wood has rotted. One side of wooden ribs has been installed and other parts are ready for reassembly. The body will be 14 feet long and 7 feet 6 inches wide, and the car will be an authentic 21 feet long overall."

Mr. Bruce Kleinschmidt, Director of the Cable Car Museum, 1201 Mason Street, San Francisco, California, provided the crew with the opportunity to obtain the complete specifications and photographs of the Sutter Cable Car #54 which were used to develop blueprints to use in the building of the replica. The Klamath-Lake Consortium Manpower Messenger states in Volume 1, Issue 4, October 1979, "The body (of the old Sutter car) was acquired in the San Francisco area on a trip which included inspection by the work crew of the only complete car of its type in the world, at the Cable Car Museum." Upon receipt, the old Sutter car was found unfit for restoration, but still useful as a pattern. With Harry Drew in charge of the entire project and with the blueprints and patterns, CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act) Public Service Employment Supervisor Tony Yancy led his YACC crew to a successful creation of a replica and in the meantime developed in his crew real "skills in pin striping, lamination, plexiglass cutting, fibre glass work, plus a 'high level' of wood working and use of a variety of tools". It is believed the YACC crew also motorized the trolley.

In 1981 Harry Drew wrote, "A replica of this old streetcar is now at home at the Klamath County Museum. In 1982, an
Ricciarelli, of the Mission Peak Heritage Foundation, Fremont, California, visited the main Klamath County Museum searching for information regarding a cable car in their collection. Although Paul Crane beautifully restored their car in 1979, it has been left outdoors and has deteriorated badly. Their first step was to put their car under a roof to prevent further damage. Mr. Ricciarelli has begun disassembling the car in preparation for restoration. He is also attempting to find similar cars for information. Mr. Ricciarelli was capable of pointing out several details that are different in our replica from the original: the roof brackets are straight instead of curved, the lights and the rail with straps for standing passengers are missing. But the one thing he pointed out most definitely was how lucky we are that our trolley has had good care. It has been protected from the weather and vandals; and, while we may need to do some work to battle the vicissitudes of time; it is a beautiful thing — our trolley.

All photos courtesy of the Klamath County Museum except those denoted otherwise.

July 4, 2000 - photo courtesy of Jonna Bolenbaugh

July 4, 2000 - photo courtesy of Judith Hassen.