

Dispatcher

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RAILWAY

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

JUNE 27, 1958

SAN DIEGO'S WHEELS ON STEEL

by ERIC SANDERS assisted by RICHARD V. DODGE and FREDERICK W. REIF

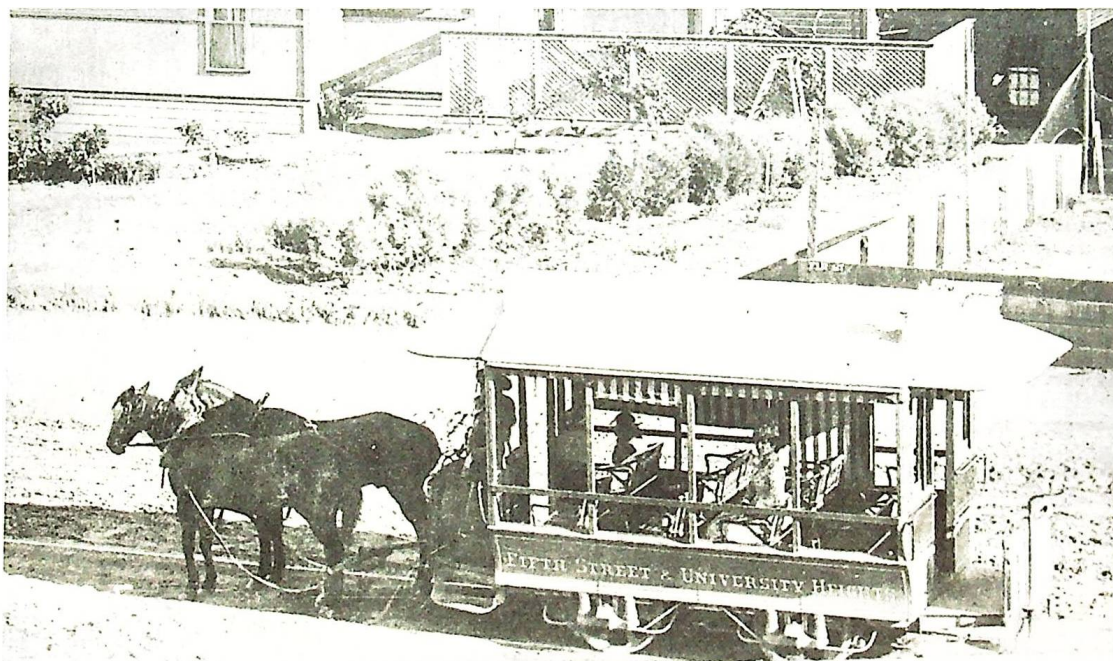
Horse cars - cable cars - steam dummies - double-decker trolleys - interurbans - gas-electrics! For mass means of transportation, San Diego had them all. And it also had the customary company-owned amusement parks and picnic grounds.

San Diegans of 1958, who depend upon the internal combustion engine and the macadamized highway for their transit needs, sometimes forget that citizens of yesteryears relied upon conveyances which rode the twin ribbons of steel which crisscrossed the city and reached out into the suburbs.

Early day city residents who for the most part were without their own private vehicles made good use of public transit. Suburbanites also depended upon the

on First, Fifth,¹ D (Broadway), F and H (Market)² Streets, served the business section and the nearby residential area.³ Cars on Fifth St. were pulled by two horses.⁴ Car barns and stables were located at H and Seventh Sts. and at Arctic (Kettner) and D Streets.

Other horse car enterprises were the National City crosstown line of the National City Street Railway Company (1888) and the Seventh Street shuttle of the National City and Otay Railway Company in San Diego. In the north county town of Escondido a post office clerk loaded mail on a flat car and pushed the car between the California Central's depot and the post office over track which had been intended for a horse car line. As early as 1873 horsepower was also used to haul small



Fitch
Photo

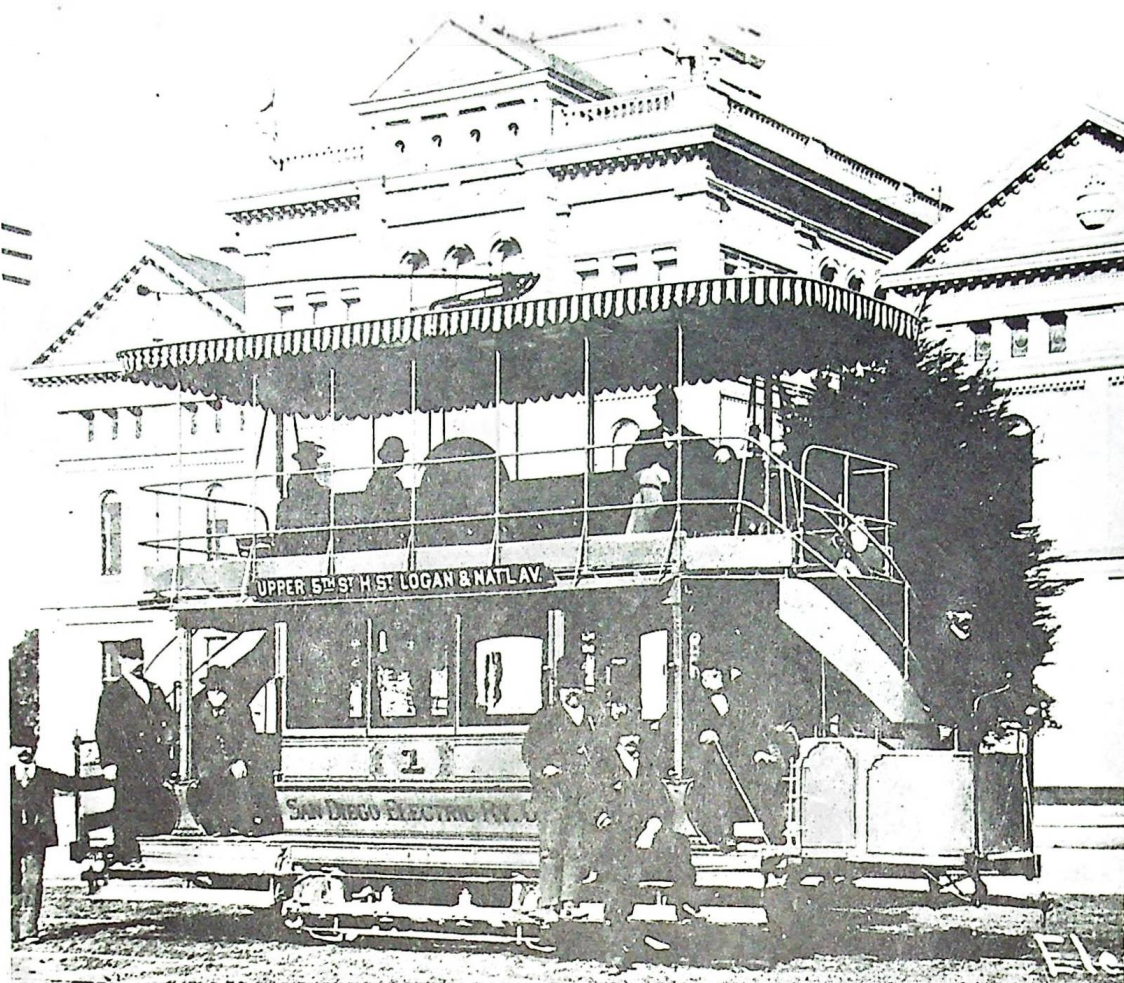
Horse car of the San Diego Street Car Company on Fir Street between Third and Fourth Streets near the Florence Hotel. About 1888. Horse car lines operated on First, Fifth, Broadway, F and Market.

railroads for many of their transit needs. In this pre-automobile era public transit was all important. And San Diego had it.

Horse cars were the first to do the job. In 1886 rails were laid by the San Diego Street Car Company, mostly single track with occasional turnouts, in San Diego's dirt streets. Five horse car lines, operating

coal cars from ship to shore on the wharf of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company at the foot of Fifth Street. Pacific Coast Steamship Company purchased the properties in 1875.

Then came the steam motor lines which were constructed both on suburban routes and on city streets. Motive power, known as steam dummies, were small four



San Diego Electric Railway Co. #1 on Broadway in front of the Court House. About 1892. Street car as seen here is not on its correct run. (From Union Title Insurance and Trust Company Historical Collection)

The second electric railway was one that in time would dominate the San Diego transit scene. In 1891 the San Diego Electric Railway Company was organized to construct, purchase and maintain an electric railway. First came the purchase of the San Diego Street Car Co., the company which operated the horse car lines. In 1898 SDERY purchased the Citizens Traction Co. before continuing with the story of the SDERY, however, let's look at some of the other electric operations.

Other lines included the Orange Avenue (Coronado) line (converted from steam dummy) of the Coronado Railroad Co. and the South Park and East Side Railway Co. which operated its "Green Line" cars from C St. on 4th, F, 25th, B 28th, Beech, and 30th to Cedar. This latter line was part of the Bartlett-Webster real estate operation which developed the South Park area. Both of these companies were purchased by the SDERY, the CRR electric line in 1908 and the SP&ES line in 1909.

Electric cars were also operated in the downtown area by the Los Angeles and San Diego Beach Railway (the final corporate name of the system which began as the San Diego and Old Town Railway). These cars operated between the La Jolla depot at Kettner near Broadway and the N.C. & O. depot at 6th and L and the Cuyamaca depot at 10th and N Streets. Cars were routed over C, 6th and Tidelands.

Imperial Beach boasted a line served, at first, by an open car with a gasoline engine drive which operated from the ferry landing at South San Diego to the town of Imperial Beach. Later two storage battery powered cars ran from the Beach to South San Diego,

thence over Coronado Belt Line tracks to N.C. & O. Junction (La Punta).

Three other electric lines will be covered in the section dealing with the SDERY.

Three steam dummy railroads were slowly transformed into orthodox steam railroad operations. On the La Jolla line (known variously as the San Diego, Old Town and Pacific Beach in 1888; San Diego, Pacific Beach and La Jolla in 1894; and the Los Angeles and San Diego Beach Railway in 1906) service was provided by steam trains pulled by small type steam locomotives and by two McKeen gasoline cars plus one other gasoline rail coach made from a Mack truck. The Coronado Railroad was also upgraded with heavier equipment.

In 1907 an electric division was created on the National City and Otay Railway. Interurbans were placed in service on the run between San Diego, National City, Chula Vista and Otay. Other portions of the line and all the freight service continued to be handled by steam. Heavier equipment was purchased. This line was merged with the Coronado Railroad as the San Diego Southern (1908) and then with the San Diego and Cuyamaca as the San Diego & South Eastern (1912). Finally it became part of the San Diego and Arizona Railway Company in 1917.

Another line not previously discussed was the San Diego, Cuyamaca & Eastern, built by Governor Waterman in 1888 and 1889. Passenger and freight trains operated between San Diego and Encanto, Lemon Grove, La Mesa, El Cajon, Santee, Lakeside and Foster. At Foster, connections were made with horse-drawn stage coaches to

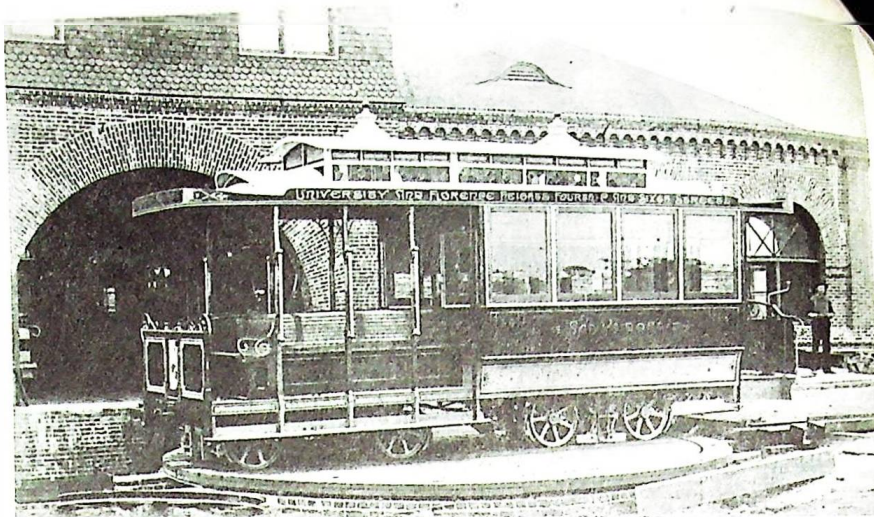
or six wheel steam locomotives with simulated street car construction. Each dummy pulled one or more passenger cars. The most extensive steam motor operation was that of the National City and Otay Railway Company which in 1887 began building from San Diego to National City, Chula Vista, Sweetwater Dam, La Presa, Otay, Oneonta and Tia Juana.

Motor trains, in a sense, were steam street cars. Examples were the wharf to shore line of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company in the early eighties and the Park Belt Motor Line which in July, 1888 began operating over a "U" shaped route from 18th & A Sts. via present-day Balboa Park (east toward the vicinity of the old 30th St. bridge), along canyon sides to the south end of Marlborough, Marlborough, University and Fifth to Fir. At both ends of the "U" the trains connected with the horse cars. Uptown San Diego at that time was undeveloped land. Much of the roadbed of this line is still in evidence on canyon slopes south of University. Another motor line was the San Diego & Old Town Railroad (1887).

In September, 1886 The Coronado Railroad Company began operating steam dummy trains (a horse car was used until the first dummy arrived) on Orange Avenue, Coronado, between the ferry landing and the site of the Hotel del Coronado. On June 14, 1888 the company began steam dummy operation over the around-the-bay Coronado Belt Line. For a short time that same year, San Diegans were traveling by launch to Roseville and thence by the Roseville and Ocean Beach Railroad motor train to Ocean Beach, many of them planning a stay at the "Cliff House," a resort overlooking the beach and the ocean. Motive power for this line was a dummy leased from the Pacific Coast Steamship Company. The latter company's locomotives, incidentally, bore the names of "Senator Perkins," "William McKinley," and "Captain Goodall." The Oceanside Coast Motor Road planned but did not complete a line between Oceanside and Carlsbad.

Motor routes were usually lines with light rail and slow speed operation. The light "puffing" of the diminutive locomotives and the pungent smell of burning coal was of enduring fascination to many riders.

Cable cars, too, made a brief appearance in San Diego when on June 7, 1890 the San Diego Cable Railway Co. began operating its twelve named cars from 6th and I Streets via 6th, C, 4th, University, Normal and Park Boulevard to Adams (present day street names) where was located the company-owned Pavilion and picnic ground.



San Diego Cable Railway "San Ysidora" on turntable at cable car house, 4th and Spruce Sts., San Diego. About 1890. (Collection of Frederick Reiff)

Two separate cables pulled the cars; an eight m.p.h. downtown cable from the power house at Spruce St. and a 10 m.p.h. uptown cable north of that point. The company was unique in that the inbound and outbound cables were located in the same slot for single track operation. San Diego's cable cars, which were similar to those of San Francisco's Powell Street line, had kerosene dome lights, stained glass windows and battery operated buzzers.

Because of a depression and a resulting bank failure the line folded in late 1892. A few years later the Citizens Traction Company purchased and electrified the line and cars.

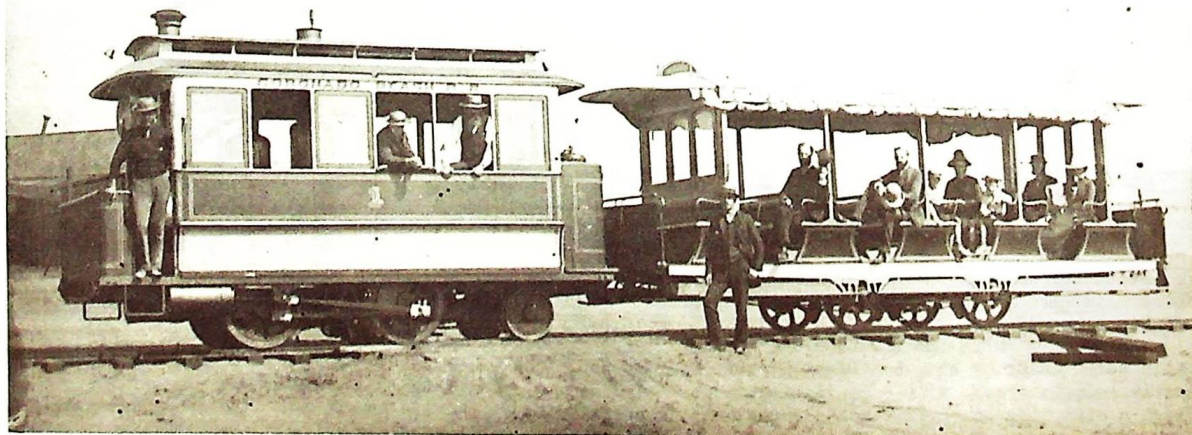
Electric railways came early to San Diego. Reputed to be the Pacific Coast's first and the United States' second electric railway was the Electric Rapid Transit Company which went into business in 1887 using the San Diego to Old Town line. Almost immediately, however, the overhead was torn down and rebuilt on Fourth Ave. Instead of a trolley pickup a 4-wheel "troller," attached by a flexible conductor to the roof of the car, was pulled along the overhead. The "troller" transmitted the power to the car which in turn pulled the trolley. Electric circuits and controls were not really perfected so the line lasted only a short time. Readers should note that this primitive electric line antedated the cable car line.

A2

Coronado
Beach
Railroad
steam
dummy
#1 plus
trailer

Coronado
About 1886

(Union Title
Collection)

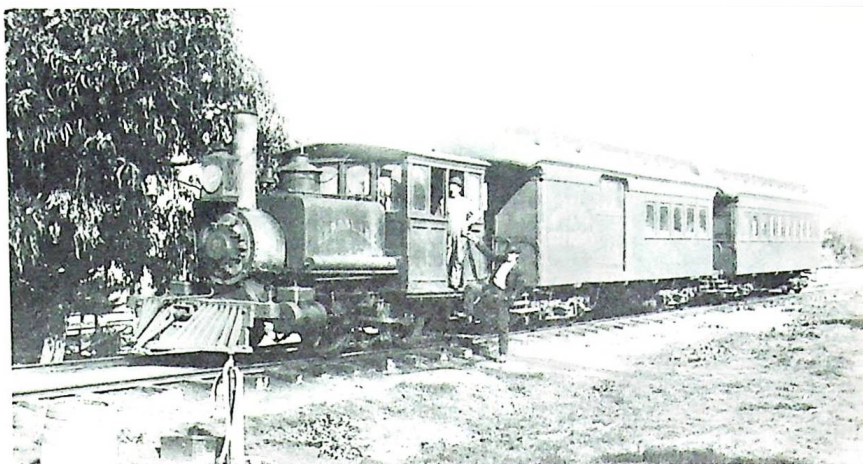


Ramona, Julian and other "back country" points. Passenger service variously included steam trains and gasoline direct drive cars, one being a McKeen car. In 1909 the company was reorganized under John D. and Adolph B. Spreckels' ownership as the San Diego and Cuyamaca. In 1912 it was consolidated with the San Diego Southern as the San Diego & South Eastern.

The San Diego & South Eastern soon sold the McKeen car. In a desperate effort to regain passenger traffic which was being lost on the Eastern or Cuyamaca Division to the ever-increasing number of automotive vehicles, three used gasoline-electric combination cars were acquired and a Hewitt auto-car was purchased and outfitted. These cars were taken over by the San Diego and Arizona (which company absorbed the SD&SE in 1917) and the gas-electrics were continued in operation until passenger service on the Cuyamaca route finally folded (1928). The same gas-electrics put in their final days of service on the SD&A's main line, providing local transportation to Tijuana and the Agua Caliente resort and supplementing the steam race track trains. Soon after the San Diego & Arizona Eastern was formed ("Eastern" was added in 1933 when the Spreckels' heirs sold their half interest in the SD&A to Southern Pacific Company, who owned the other half) the motors were withdrawn from service. Today, the remnants of the original Cuyamaca, the Coronado Belt Line and the National City & Otay systems have become freight-only branches of the SD&AE, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Southern Pacific, which climbs to the mountain heights and descends below the level of the sea into Imperial Valley.

Mention should be made also of some railroads that were only partially built. One of the earliest hoped-for transcontinental connection was The Texas & Pacific Railway. The grading of ten miles of roadbed was finished through San Diego and Old Town in 1874. Ties were received. Deliveries of rail and locomotives

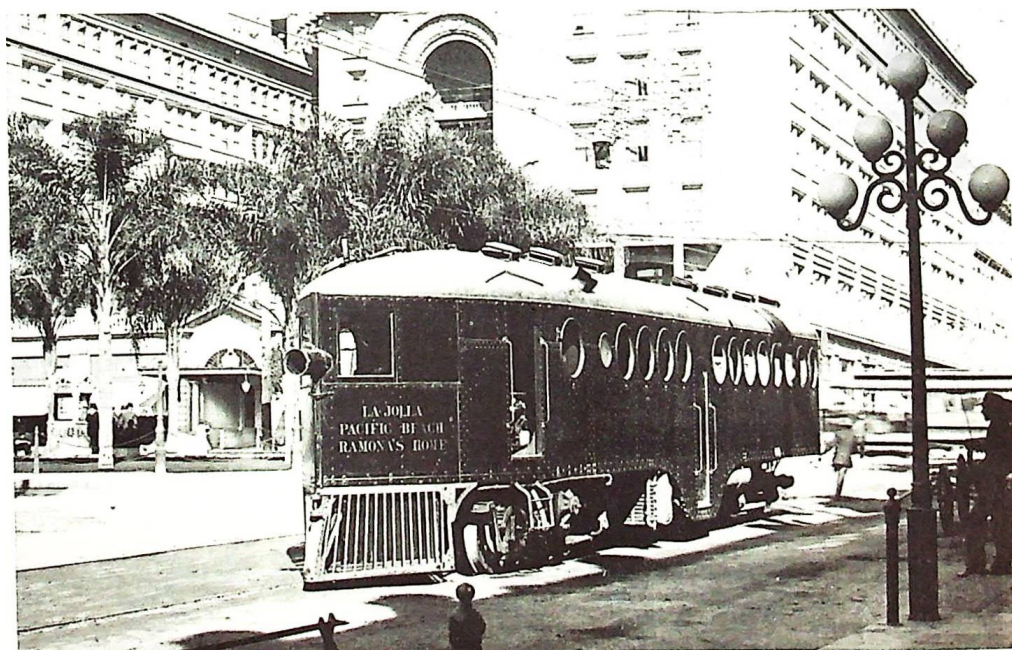
were expected but failed to materialize. The California Central Railway planned to connect San Diego with Oceanside via La Mesa, El Cajon, Poway, Escondido and Vista. The Oceanside-Escondido portion was constructed in 1887 and is now a branch of the Santa Fe. The San Diego-La Mesa segment was partially constructed (1887). Among Billy Carlson's visionary schemes for railroads east to Phoenix, Arizona, and north to Del Mar (and Los Angeles) were: the San Diego Union Depot & Terminal or the San Diego & Eastern Terminal (apparently including the previously organized and partly constructed Roseville & Old Town Railroad) which graded a road bed from San Diego around the bay to Roseville, built three



San Diego, Pacific Beach and La Jolla #2 and train. About 1904. Locomotive once operated on elevated railways of New York. (R. P. Middlebrook)

bridges, laid some track on Atlantic St., now Pacific Highway, in San Diego and obtained two very old steam locomotives and four coaches in 1889; the San Diego & Phoenix Railway, which graded and constructed a few miles of track in the Otay Valley area in 1893. His Roseville-Ocean Beach railway was to be utilized in these projects. The Keller-Kerckhoff Company also graded north from San Diego to beyond Old Town for an electric line to Del Mar (and Los Angeles) and distributed some 80 pound rail along the roadbed (1906-1910). G. W. Pursell organized the San Diego, El Cajon & Escondido Railway to build an electric interurban line and considerable grading was done between San Diego and La Mesa (1909). For a brief period a small gasoline car operated from the International Border into downtown Tijuana. And the "paper" railroads were legion.

The story of San Diego's "Impossible" railroad, the mainline San Diego & Arizona Eastern, was told in



Los Angeles and San Diego Beach Railway McKeen gasoline direct-drive car on Fourth Street at the Plaza, San Diego. About 1912. (Herbert R. Fitch photograph)

Issue #6 of the Dispatcher. Copies are still available. The history of San Diego's other mainline railroad, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (and predecessors California Southern and Southern California) will be related in a future issue.

Our story closes with a summary of the operations of the San Diego Electric Railway Company. This Spreckels-owned concern electrified the horse car lines, extended them, and constructed additional lines. As mentioned previously the company purchased the Citizens Traction and the South Park and East Side. The Coronado division was created when the SDERY purchased the electric division of the Coronado Railroad (1908). Two lines, the crosstown Orange Ave. and the Fifth St. line, were operated on this division. At the

south end of the Orange Ave. line were the popular attractions, Hotel del Coronado, the Coronado Tent City and the amusement center. Connecting the Coronado division with the San Diego system was the Spreckels owned San Diego and Coronado Ferry Company.

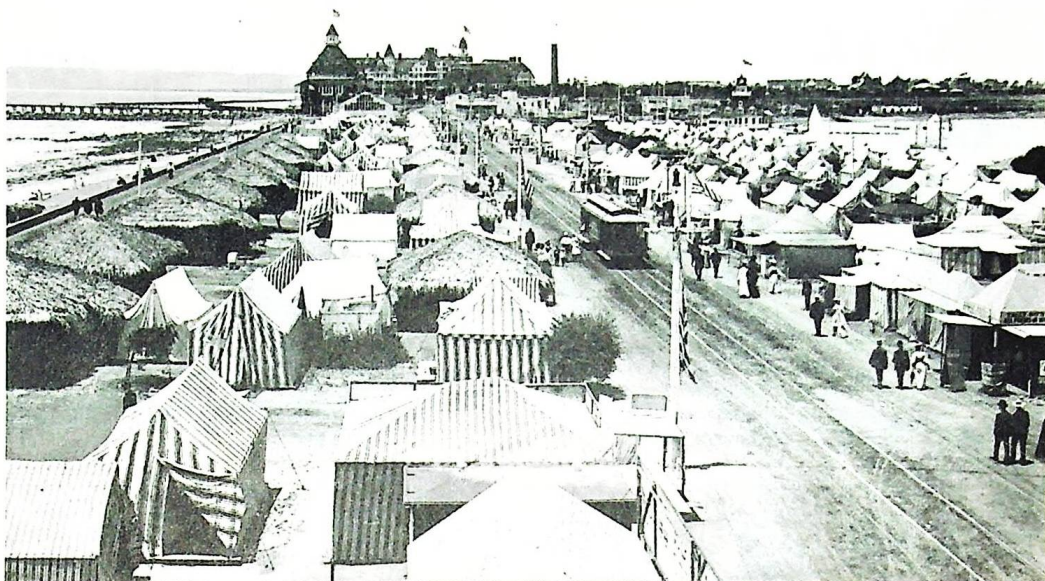
Interurban operation began when the company in 1916 acquired a tenure upon the electric division of the San Diego & South Eastern Railway, which was also Spreckels owned. SDERY cars replaced the SD&SE interurbans but ran only as far south as Chula Vista. Operation of the SD&SE electric division came after the 1916 floods had practically bankrupted the SD&SE.

To the north the operation of the Point Loma Railroad (1909) under the same ownership and closely connected with the SDERY, was finally absorbed into the larger company. The Point Loma Niles built interurban cars, owned by SDERY and similar to those on the SD&SE, were replaced by the center entrance "Exposition" cars.

In 1924 the SDERY placed its new 400 class interurbans on the newly constructed La Jolla interurban line. Sections of the right-of-way of the Los Angeles and San Diego Beach railway, which had been replaced in 1919 by a bus line, were utilized. Portions of the Point Loma Railroad and the independent Bay Shore Railway (Ocean Beach to "Old" Mission Beach) were absorbed into the new interurban line. For a number of years fast SDERY interurbans sped to La Playa, Ocean Beach, Mission Beach, Pacific Beach, Bird Rock and La Jolla. The company increased its passenger traffic through the construction and operation of the Mission Beach Amusement Center. Stations were constructed at Mission Beach, La Jolla Hermosa and La Jolla.

The "Pavilion" at Park Boulevard and Adams became the Mission Cliff Gardens and Ostrich Farm until the depression of the Thirties. Admission was by a small charge or by free transfer from the #1, supplemented by #11 line cars. After April 1931, #11 line only passed the location.

Other attractions served by the SDERY included the "Wonderland" amusement park at Ocean Beach and the many attractions in Balboa Park including the Zoo, the Pepper Grove and the Spreckels outdoor Pipe Organ. Balboa Park street cars transported thousands to the stadium, San Diego High School, Roosevelt Junior High School, and the Navy Hospital. The cars also transported thousands to the 1915-16 and 1935-36 Expositions in the Park. Still



Tent City, Coronado
Earl 1900's
Union Title Photo

more thousands were taken to baseball games in Bay View Park or in Lane Field.

The story of the many types of equipment, of the three to six car interurban trains, of the peak line operations in 1924, and of the peak traffic of World War II is a long and interesting one. Interesting, too, was the acquisition of second hand equipment used during World War II to supplement regular service and to serve as the "Convair Specials." To the railfan the operation of varied equipment on the Balboa Park trackage, the interurban lines, the 30th St. bridge and the Union Depot loop was fascinating to observe.

But the handwriting was on the wall even back in 1926 when a bus was placed in service on the National City-Chula Vista segment of the former SD&SE interurban line. Conversion to buses continued until, by 1948 only three street car lines remained. That was the year when the Spreckels companies, after completing fifty-seven years of continuous operation of the system, sold out to the San Diego Transit System, Jesse Haugh, president. On April 24, 1949 former interurban-city street car #446 held down the final revenue run and except for some dismantling work by work car #026 on Balboa Park right-of-way local rail transit service had come to an end.

Readers who would like to delve further into San Diego County's rail history are invited to subscribe to the Dispatcher. This particular issue is designed to serve as an introductory chapter to a loose-leaf type notebook of a volume of rail history. In future issues the Dispatcher will outline the history of specific lines as well as provide a record of present day railroad operations.

An historical and pictorial volume on the San Diego Electric Railway, entitled: The One-Man Town's Electric Railway, not yet in print, is recommended to all readers. It'll tell the story of all the John D. Spreckels' rail operations, tied in with pertinent events and developments in the San Diego area. Published as a special issue by the Pacific Railway Journal, Donald Duke, editor, and written by San Diego rail historian Richard V. Dodge this volume will be a must for all railfans. Write the Dispatcher for further information.

In the meantime through excursions, hikes, films, conversations, lectures and the pages of the Dispatcher, San Diego County railfans have an opportunity to relive rail adventures of the past, to become better informed about current railroad developments and to dream about the twin ribbons of steel which may yet stretch out into the future.

THE DISPATCHER

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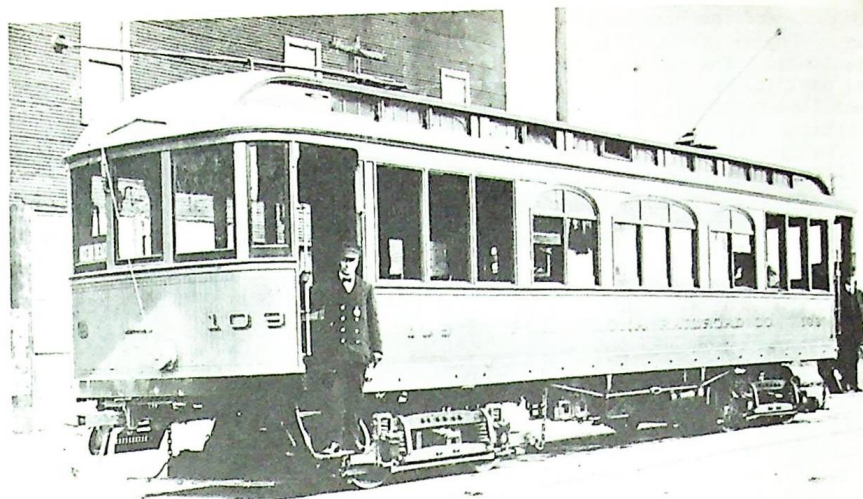
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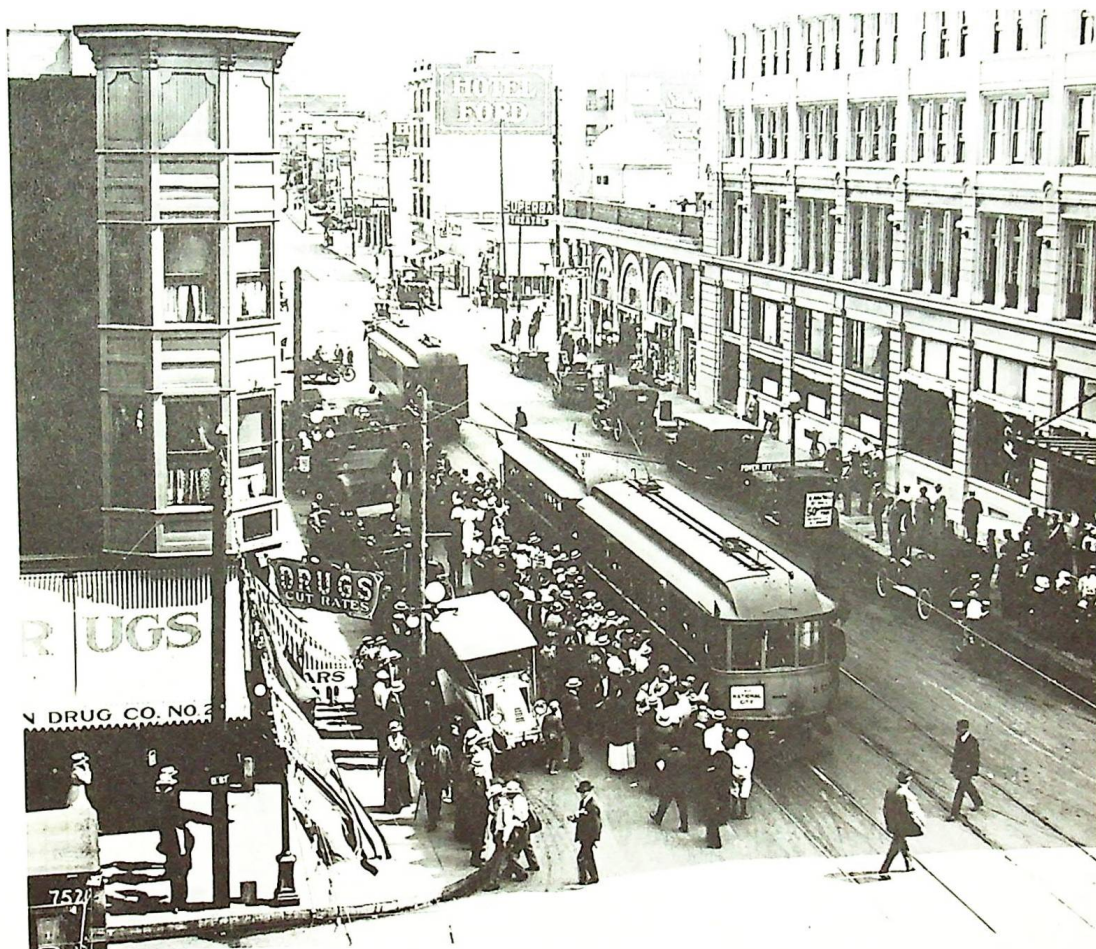
A \$2.50 active or sustaining membership includes a Dispatcher subscription.



A6

Point Loma RR #109 (owned by SDERY) on 5th St. at L, 1910. Blt. by Niles in 1908. Renumbered 402. Sold to Pacific Electric, 1918. (Richard V. Dodge)

San Diego & South Eastern #107 and trailer on 3rd St., about 1915. Second section (#101) is in the rear. Trains are destined for South Bay cities. (Union Title Collection)



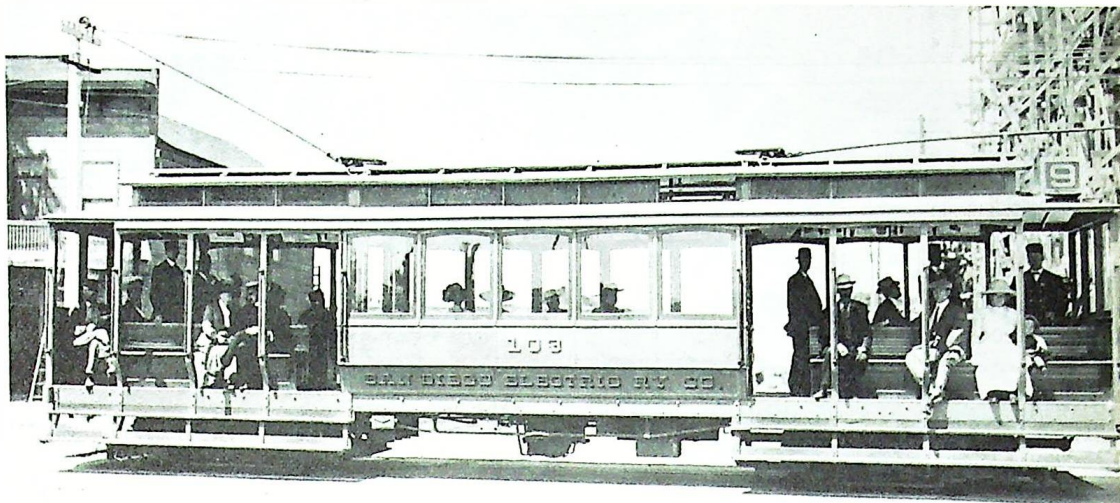
FOOTNOTES

1. 5th St. line was soon double-tracked. 5th St. line operated to Fir St., to 3rd.
2. H St. line from the West arm of the Santa Fe Wharf to H St., to 16th St., to Milton Ave., to National Ave., to 31st.
3. NC&O built and operated a horse car line on 7th St., from L to F (1888). When the Newton Ave. line was placed in

TECHNICAL ADVISER
for this issue
was Drake Sanders

service, the San Diego Street Car Co. took over the NC&O's track on Harrison Ave. and operated horse cars from 16th St. to 28th for a short time (Nov. 1888). SDStCCo. also operated on Atlantic St. (Pacific Highway) and on 22nd St. (Beardsley) to the California Southern Railroad station.

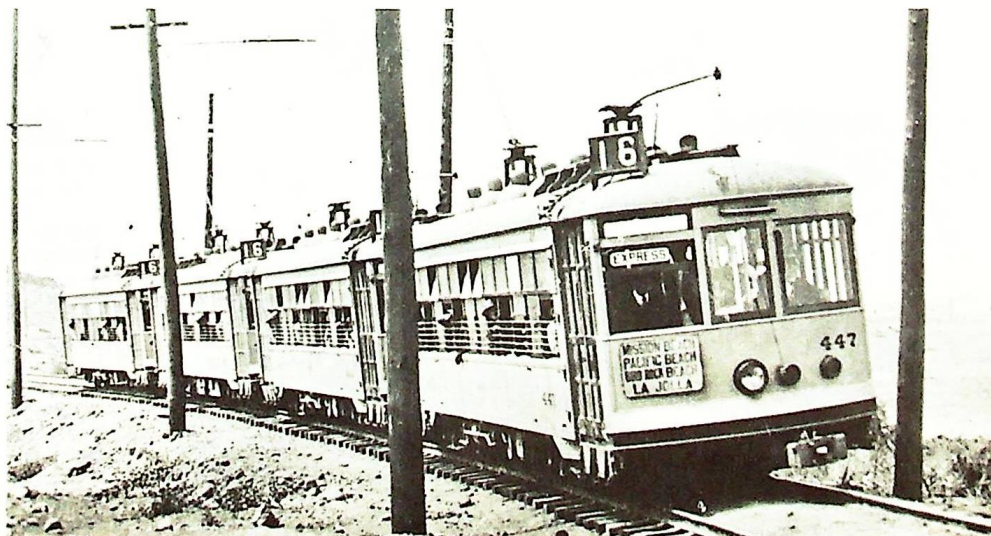
4. Two horses were used on 5th St. line with a third added at A St.



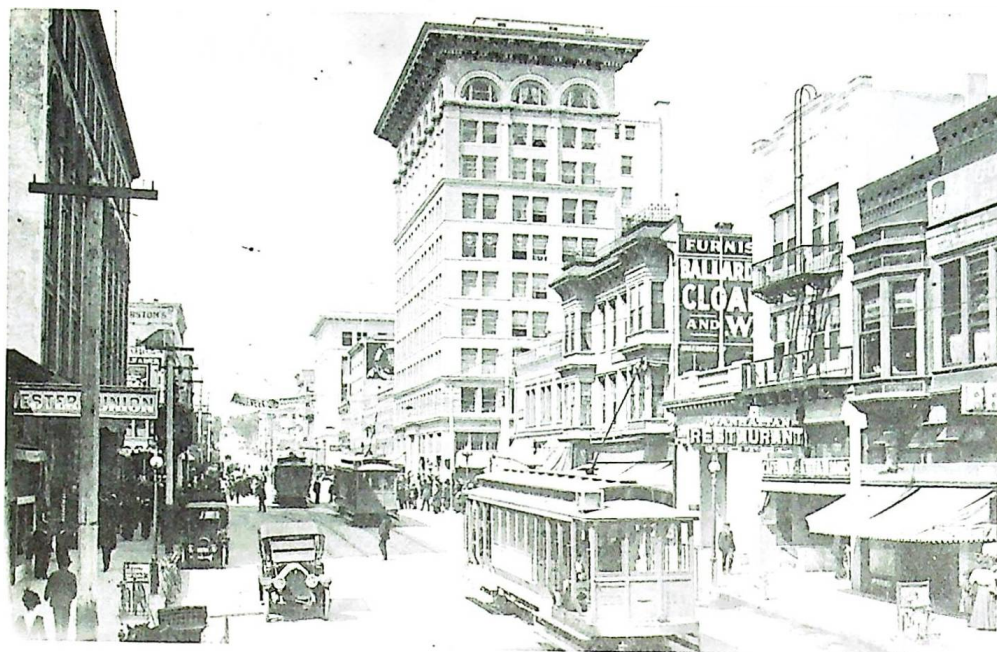
SDEry #103
Downtown San Diego
About 1911
(Herbert R. Fitch
Photograph)



SDEry #127 and 221
at turnout on #5
line near 28th &
Woolman (Ocean
View). #5 sign is
incorrect. (From
Union Title Insur-
ance and Trust
Company Historical
Collection) About 1926.



SDEry #447 head-
ing a four car in-
terurban train
near La Jolla.
After July 1, 1924.
(Stephen Maguire
and "Trolley Car
Treasury," McGraw-
Hill, 1956. P.174)



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To affiliate with the Railway Historical Society of San Diego, Inc. For further information obtain a bulletin at the Society's Del Mar exhibit, or write the Society Secretary, Box 9351, San Diego 9, Calif.

To subscribe to the Dispatcher. For current news as well as stories of the past mail your \$1 to the Dispatcher, 7861 Normal Ave., La Mesa, California. (Note that the Dispatcher is usually mimeographed.)

Top

Fifth Street, San Diego,
about 1912 (Fred Reif)

Middle

Broadway, San Diego
About 1947 (Les Hamm)

Bottom

This is #528, now on exhibit by the Society at Del Mar. Up to the close of rail service the SDERY-SDTS operated modern equipment. SDERY was one of the first companies to purchase this modern PCC street car. (Sanders)



CREDITS

Data used in this story comes largely from the personal files of Richard V. Dodge and Fred Reif and from the files and back issues of the Dispatcher. Background material was also obtained from Lauren Clapp, editor of Transit Topics, publication of the San Diego Transit System, from the picture collection of the Union Title Insurance and Trust Company and from Bulletin #71 of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society. Material in the personal files was compiled from newspaper stories, company records, personal observation, records of interviews and from publications of transit companies.

