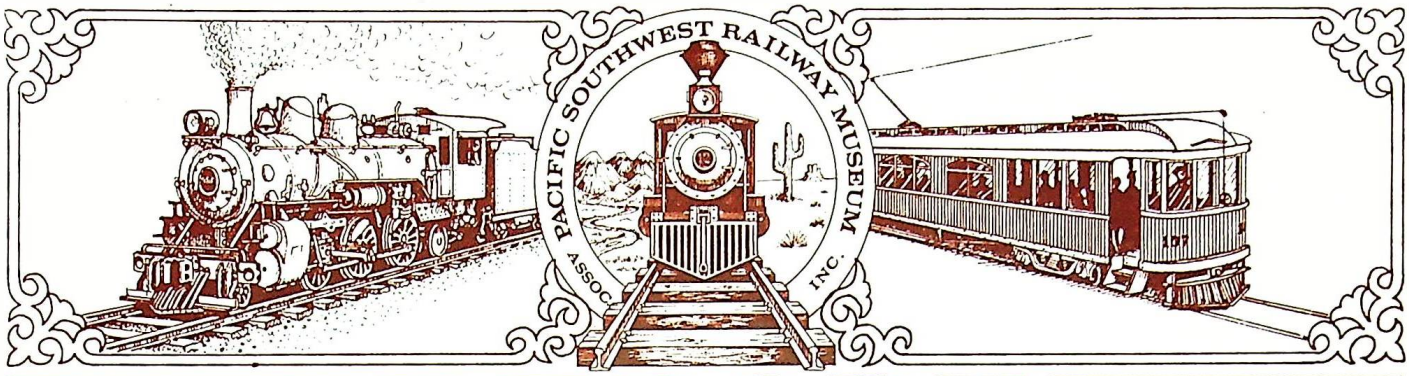
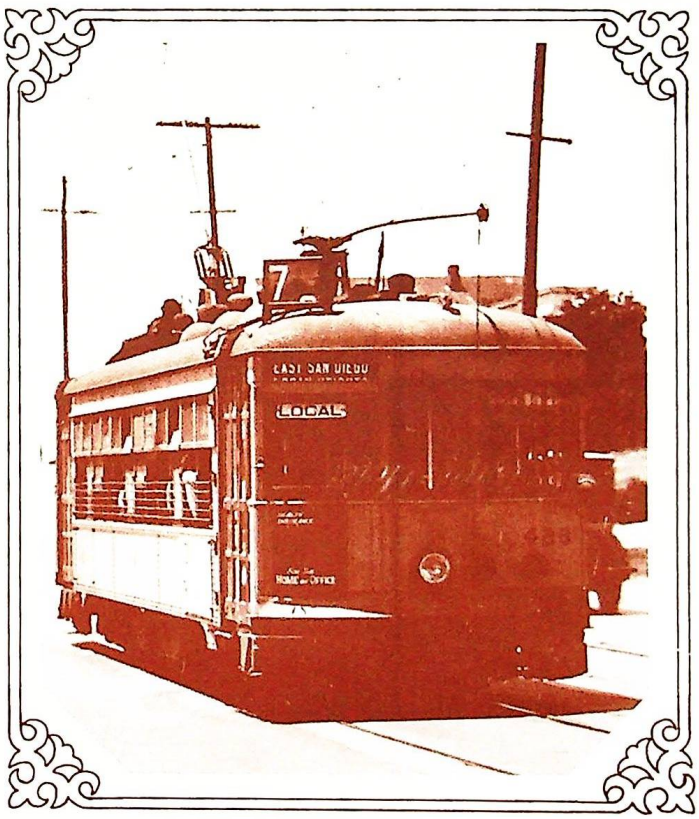


June 1981 **REPORT** No. 174

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION of the PACIFIC SOUTHWEST RAILWAY MUSEUM ASSOCIATION, Inc.

SPECIAL COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE

SAN DIEGO TROLLEY OPENS !



NOW & **THEN**

SAN DIEGO TROLLEY
FIRST RUN
JULY 26, 1981

SAN DIEGO ELECTRIC RY.
LAST RUN
APRIL 24, 1949

The opening of a new rail transit system is a most unusual event, especially in freeway clogged California, and PSRMA is celebrating this milestone with cheers for San Diego Trolley and a special issue of the association newsletter. We could not resist this opportunity to ponder and compare the transit system we lost in 1949 with the one we gained in 1981. PSRMA's library director P. Allen Copeland has put together a most informative look back at the way things were while we all look ahead enthusiastically as San Diego leads the way in the return to transit sanity with MTDB's San Diego Trolley under budget and on time! Museum news will resume as usual in the next issue.

RAIL TRANSIT RETURNS

by P. Allen Copeland

The inaguration of the San Diego Trolley is an innovation to the San Diego Metropolitan area in which our political leaders and the staff of the Metropolitan Transit Development Board can take pride. Considerable efforts by a few enlightened leaders were involved on the political, financial and engineering fronts to complete this project on schedule and it is hoped that these efforts will continue so that modern rail transit can be someday extended to the east and north.

The completion of the light rail line from downtown to San Ysidro should prove to have multiple benefits. Transit riders, of course, will be the first to taste the effects of this service, but other fronts will benefit as well. Commercial activity along the route will grow, as business strives to service the large concentration of potential customers who ride the trolley. Downtown redevelopment will benefit as transit patrons can now reach the downtown area much easier than before. If suitable residences can be provided downtown, perhaps people will desire to move downtown once again, increasing the need for commercial and support services. Downtown workers should benefit, as fewer automobiles and diesel buses will spew carbon monoxide and suspended particulates, improving air quality. If enough people start using mass transit again, scarce downtown space can be devoted to commercial and possibly residential construction, as reduced automobile use lessens the demand for parking spaces. The possibilities and benefits are endless.

With the inaguration of this modern transport service, which was built using methods and technology that are of major importance to transit in the U.S., as well as San Diego, it was thought appropriate to remind readers that not so many years ago, the city also operated a modern street railway system. San Diego was the first city on the Pacific Coast and among the first anywhere to employ electricity to power streetcars. As the company developed, new technology was applied to serve the needs of transit patrons, and the San Diego Electric Ry. remained in the forefront of modern street railways in the United States until the end of electric railway service in April, 1949.

The demise of this modern street railway was caused by numerous factors. Absentee ownership (the controlling Spreckles estate was headquartered in San Francisco) was not particularly responsive to San Diego needs. As the city grew, rail lines were not extended to new areas, and route mileage declined after the mid-1920's. The political leaders of the city encouraged "modernization" of the rail system with buses. Declining traffic levels due to the depression contributed to reduced earnings, further pressuring the company to abandon rail service piecemeal. World War Two postponed conversions, but by the end of that conflict, much of the rail system was battered and worn out. Increased earnings that could have been used for repairs and modernization were used instead for inflated dividends and buses. It must be said that the political reality of the mid-1940's encouraged conversion from rail to rubber. The company paid property taxes on all rights of way, tracks, overhead wires and facilities as well as being required to maintain them. Conversion to buses using a right of way (city streets) already paid for and maintained by the taxpayer eliminated this cost. The value of scrap realized from conversions could go a long way toward payment for new buses, and that is exactly what happened.

REPORT
Official Publication of the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum Association, Inc. P.O. Box 12096, San Diego, Ca 92112.
EDITOR - - - Larry L Rose ASSOCIATE EDITOR - - - - Tanya Rose
Published monthly by the Association. PSRMA is a California chartered non-profit, tax-exempt organization of persons who share an interest in railroad operations, travel, and history.
Opinions expressed in unsigned articles are of the editorial staff; such opinions do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the PSRMA, or its officers or directors. Opinions which are expressed in signed articles are those of the author only.
The officers and the Directors of PSRMA, at present, are
James J. Lundquist . . . President
Larry L. Rose . . . Vice President
Eric Sanders . . . Secretary
Brenda Bailey . . . Treasurer
H. C. Kerr Jr. . . . Board Chairman
Norman R. Hill . . . Director
Richard E. Pennick . . . Director
Ann McVeagh . . . Director

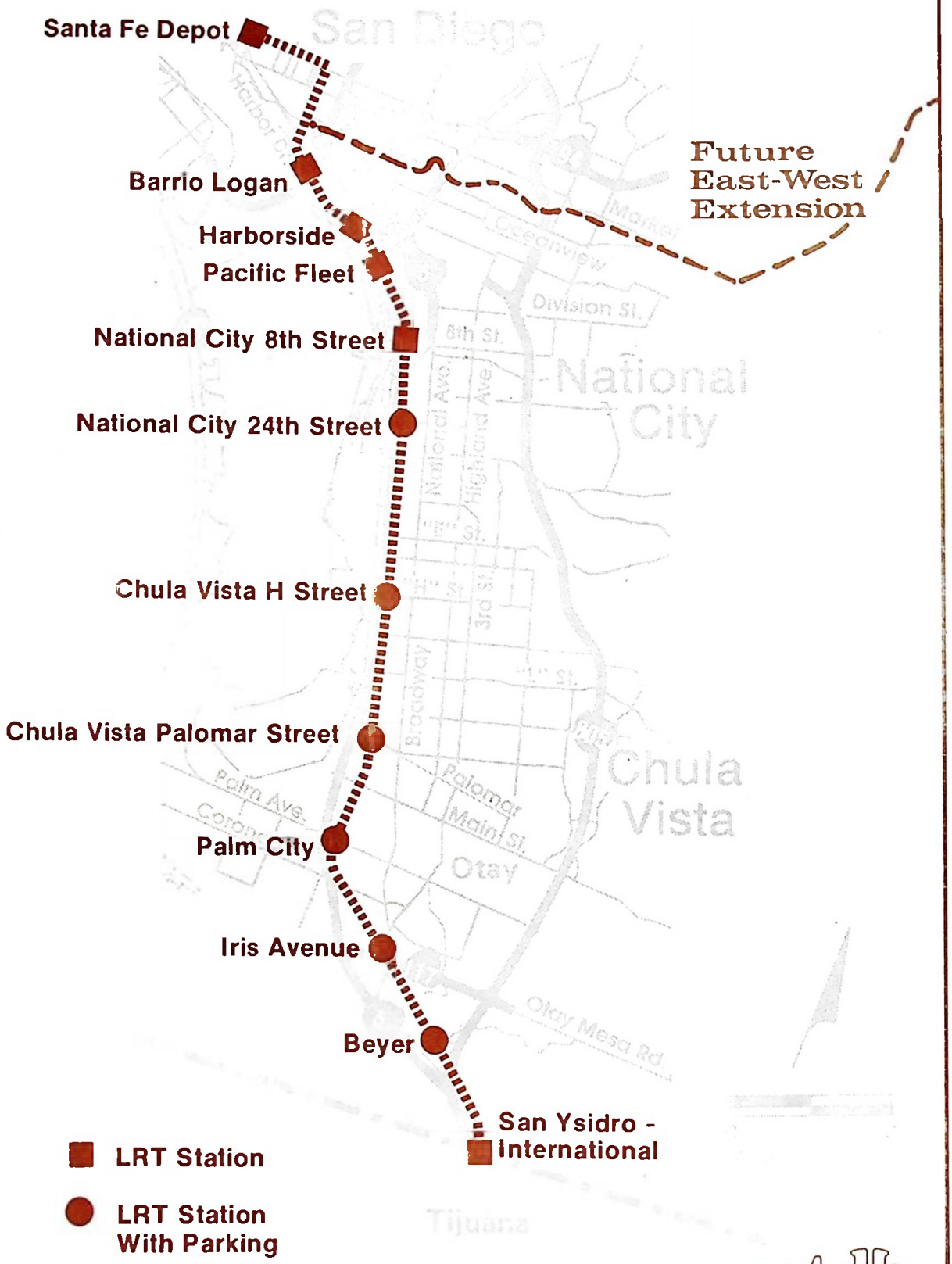
While the old streetcars are an object of affection and nostalgia, they were only a part of an enterprise providing transit service to the patrons of San Diego for a return on invested capital. That they could still move people as efficiently in 1949 as the day they were built was no longer a valid consideration. So it is with the new trolleys. They will not survive on nostalgia and affection, but with the service that they can provide under the political and economic conditions existing today. The increasing cost of energy and other scarce resources should make all public transit attractive, not just the trolleys. Everyone would prefer to drive their automobiles everywhere, but the economic and social cost is becoming too high not to change to alternative methods of transport where they are available and convenient.

If any single thought can be gleaned from the research involved in the preparation of this monograph, it would be the old saw that there is absolutely nothing new under the sun. For the 1915 Exposition in Balboa Park, the San Diego Electric Ry. purchased streetcars capable of being operated in trains, just like the new trolley cars. The fifty cars purchased in 1923 for the new lines to Ocean Beach, Mission Beach and La Jolla were also equipped to run in trains and had pantographs to collect current from overhead wires. Trolley service was operated to the South Bay, through National City, Chula Vista and Otay for many years, paralleling the route of the present trolley line, but the indirect route of the original line and large amounts of street running made the service an early conversion to bus.

This writer would like to conclude by wishing the new San Diego Trolley every success and congratulations to the staff and members of MTDB who made it all possible.

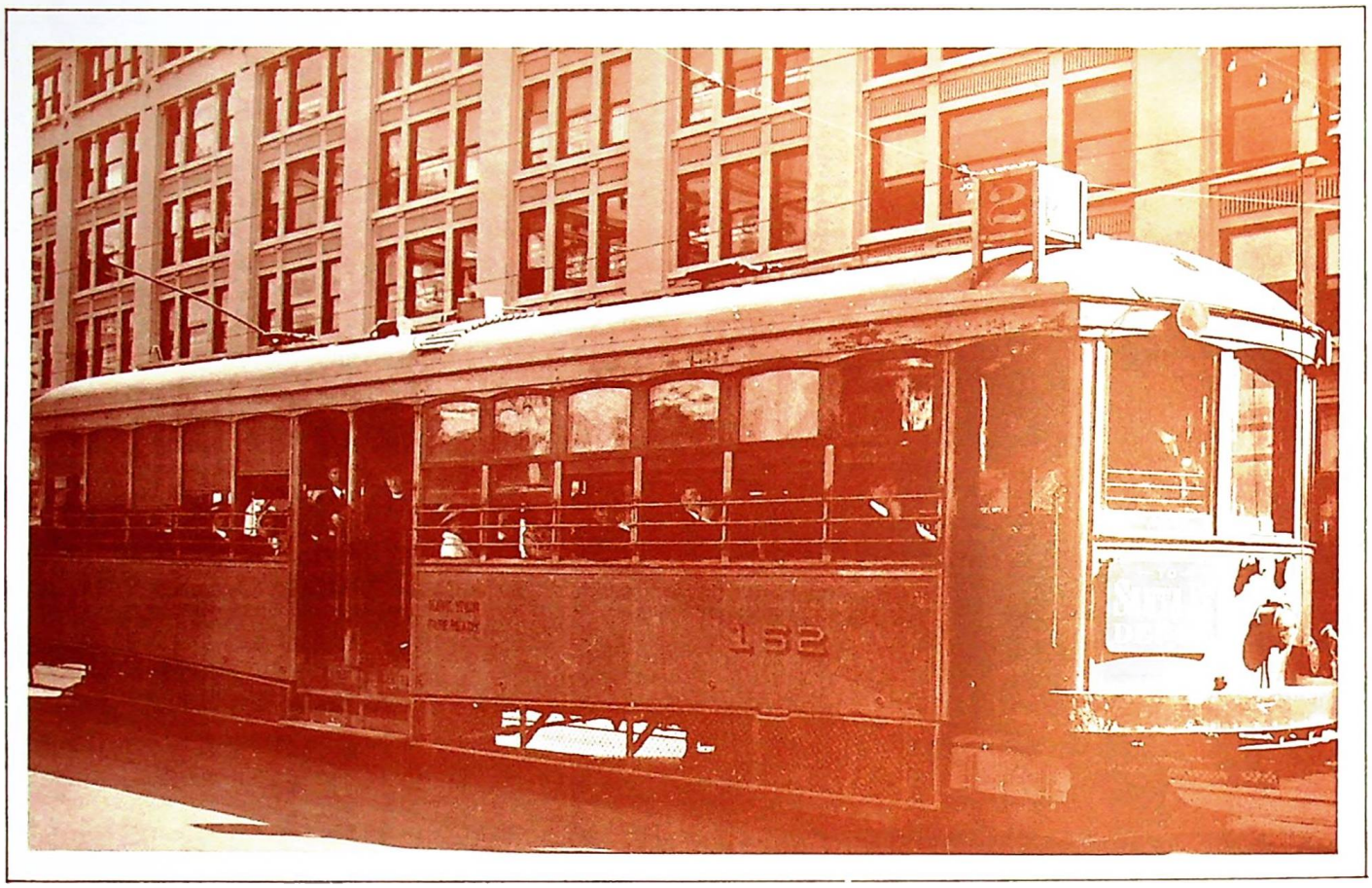
At a time when the downtown area of San Diego was THE focus of commercial and social activity, the street railway provided the means to transport people into the area from the outlying communities where they lived. At a time when the revitalization of the downtown area is being accomplished, it is hoped that the new trolley will contribute to this notable goal, and return the Center City into the cultural and economic center it once was. On a cold, drizzly Sunday in 1940, two streamlined streetcars pass on Fifth avenue. Note the people walking around at this early hour. No. 505 is the closest car, waiting for the traffic signal to change so that it can proceed across B Street, almost at the end of its trip to 5th and Market from Hillcrest. (Union Title Insurance Company Historical Collection)

THE TROLLEY LINE

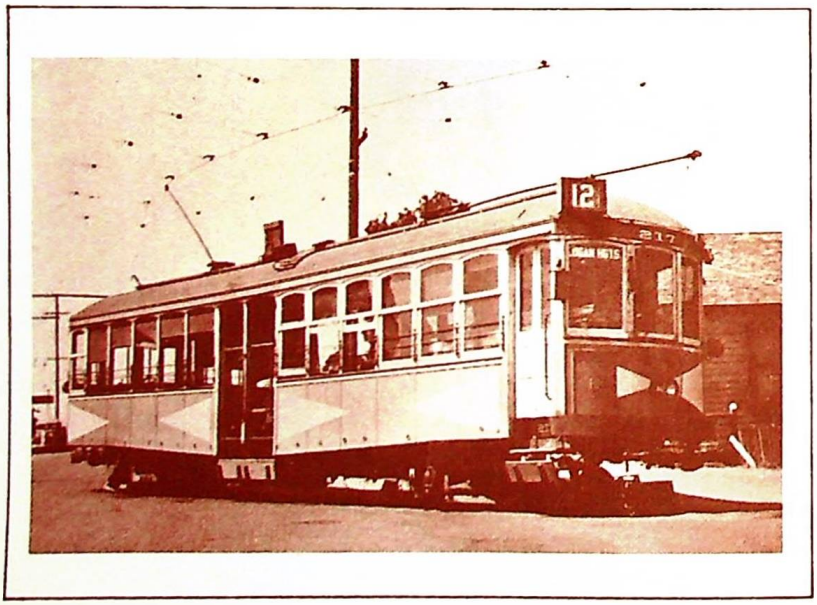


February, 1981 mtdb

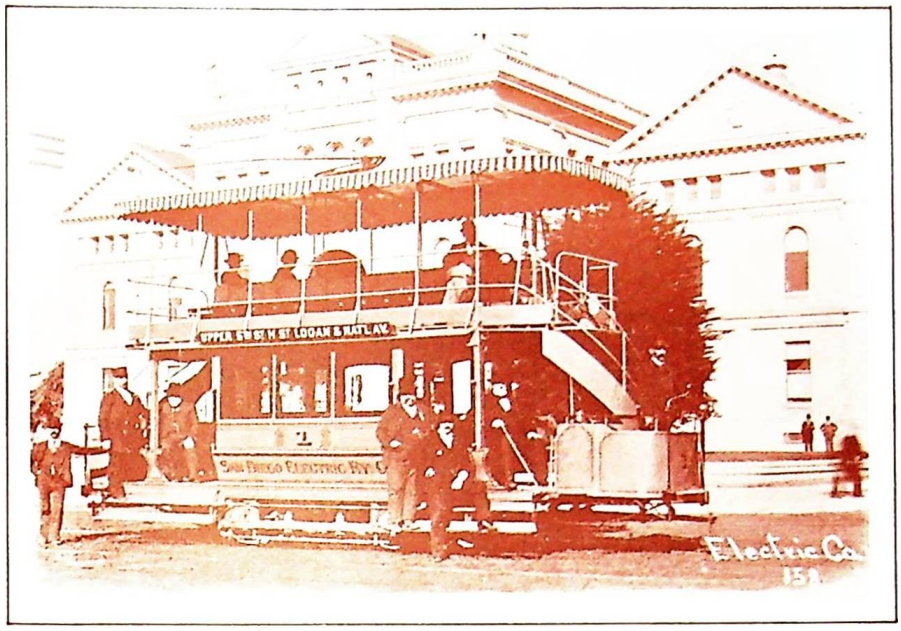
The new light rail line from downtown to San Ysidro is not the first electric railway to operate in that area. Back in the teens, the San Diego Southern Ry. electrified their existing steam railroad tracks and provided fast and frequent service from downtown to National City, Chula Vista and Otay, on a route slightly different from the present line. The railroad was reorganized as the San Diego & Southeastern, and that in turn was merged into the San Diego & Arizona. The interurban line was opened using very impressive cars, capable of pulling trailers (as shown here), complete with uniformed crews, baggage compartments and a sense of dignity that is difficult to find today. Shown here on Broadway and Third Ave. (in front of the Spreckles Building) in 1915, the interurban train overwhelms all other downtown traffic. The service was turned over to the San Diego Electric Ry. in 1917, and these cars were replaced with more mundane streecars. Streetcar service to Chula Vista ended in 1925 and to National City in 1930, as the communities could be served more directly by buses. (PSRMA Collection)



The streetcars which replaced the interurban cars to the south bay areas was of the type shown here. This type of car was built for service to the Exposition of 1915, and was capable of being operated in train service. Note the front section is enclosed with windows and the rear, only with curtains. The cars were built to this design as an aid to fashion, as the hobble skirts of the time caused difficulties in entering and exiting from conventional streetcars. No. 152 is shown here at Third and Broadway on the No. 2 line in a view taken about 1919. (Union Title Insurance and Trust Company Historical Collection)

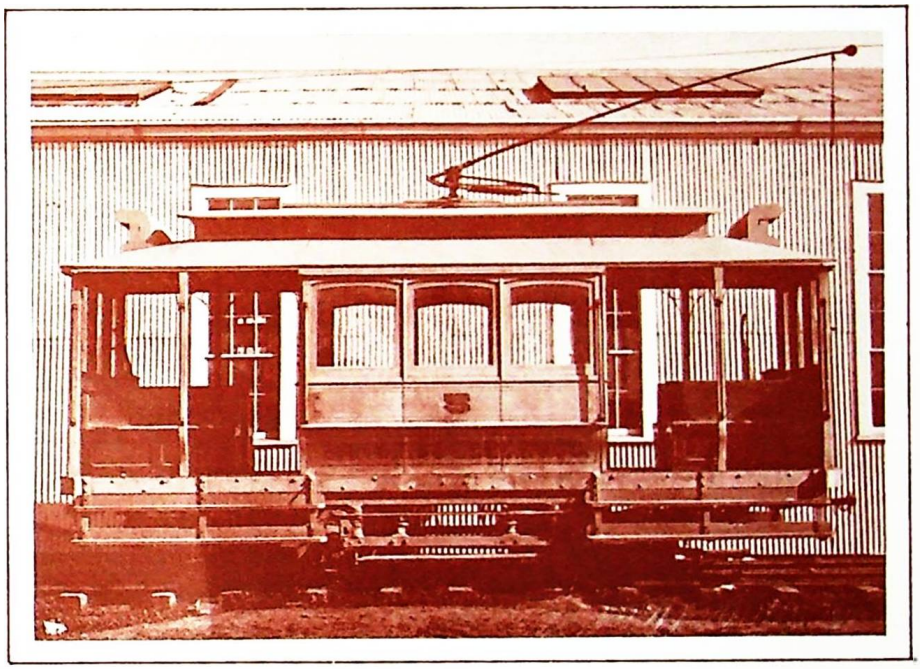


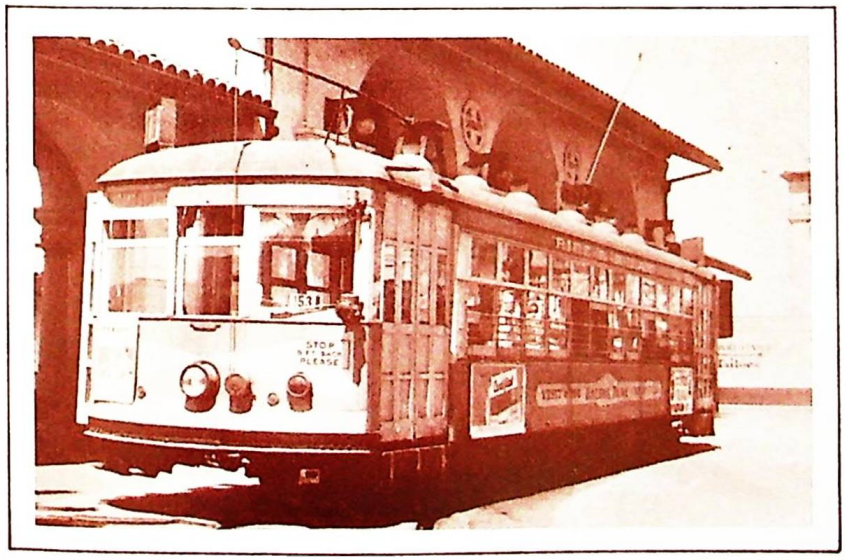
The center entrance and sagging appearing of the Exposition streetcars led to them being nicknamed "sowbellys". As new cars were purchased in the 1920's and 1930's, and traffic levels declined during the depression, most were scrapped, but a few forgotten in the recesses of the Coronado and Adams Ave. carbarns, were restored to service during peak hours. All were sold for use as dwellings as soon as possible after the war ended. No. 217 is shown turning into the Logan Heights terminal of the No. 12 line at 32nd and Newton in May, 1942. (John L. Whitmeyer)



Streetcar Number 1 of the San Diego Electric Ry. opened service in San Diego in 1894. While not the first electric car to operate here, the success of this primitive car and its sisters allowed the early system to expand with the population and demands for service into new areas. The double decker is shown here on what is now Broadway at Front Street, in front of the old county courthouse. (PSRMA Collection)

While Cars 1-2 were double deckers, the rest of the cars opening electric railway service in San Diego in 1892 were like car No. 5, shown here. The car was photographed outside the old carbarn which was located at Broadway and Kettner, where the San Diego Gas & Electric power station is now located. This little car, which is similar in appearance to the cable cars still running in San Francisco was retired in 1912 and scrapped. (Union Title Insurance & Trust Company Historical Collection)

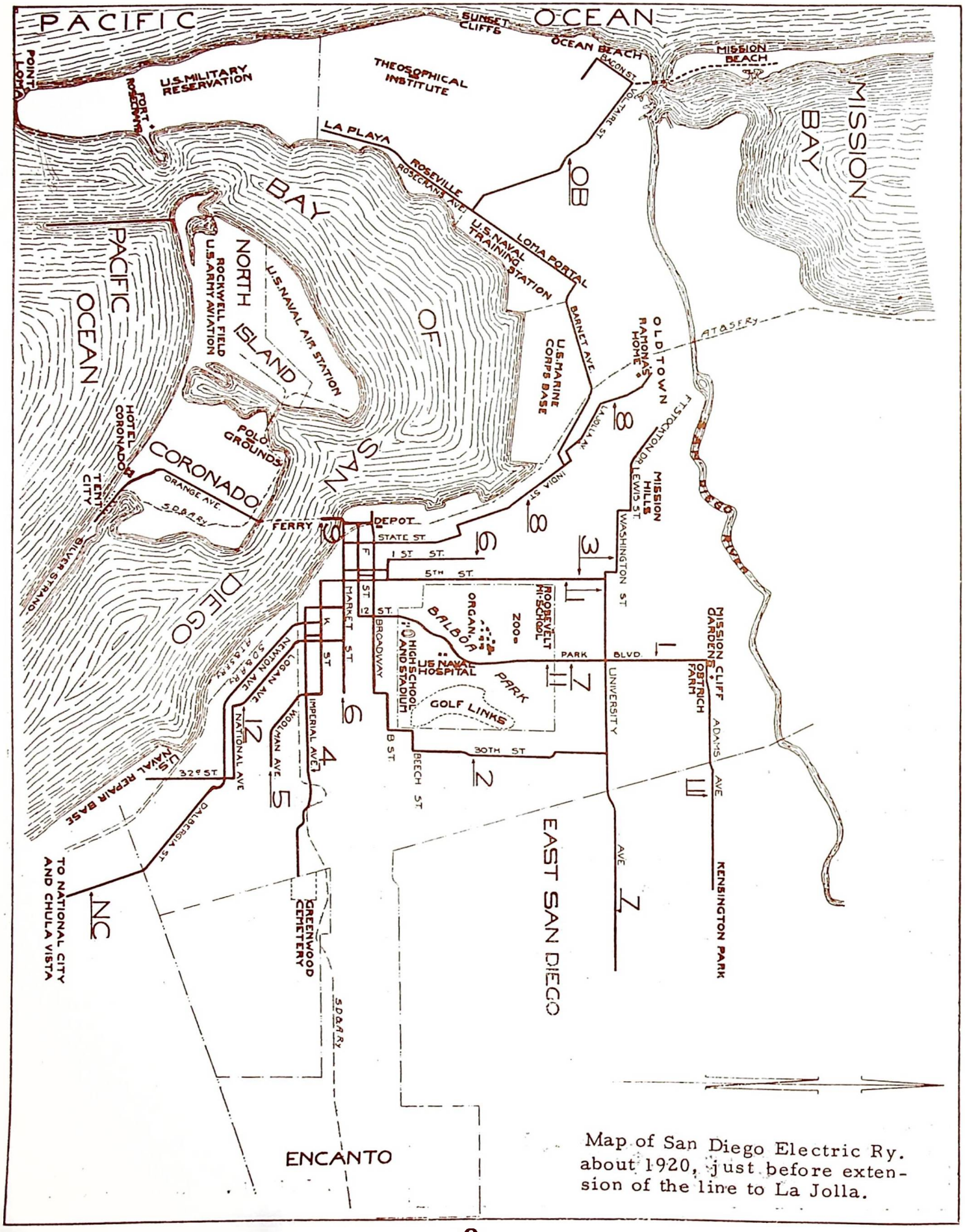




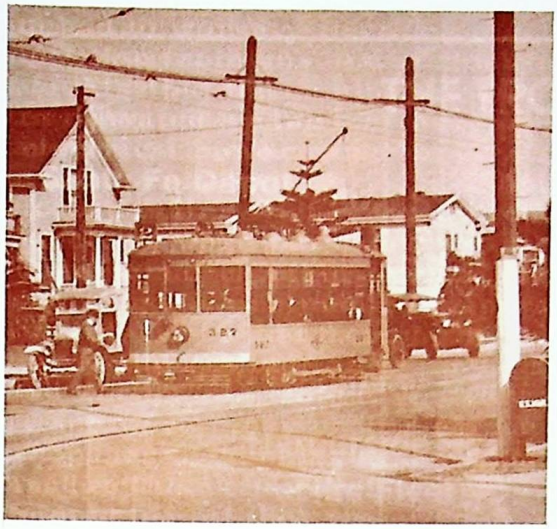
The best remembered cars of the old electric railway were the fifty cars of the 400-series. Built in 1923, all lasted until the end of the last three streetcars lines in April, 1949. No. 405 is shown here in 1949, shortly before the end, at the Union Depot terminal loop, ready to start another trip on the No. 11 line up Broadway, through Balboa Park and on Adams Avenue to Kensington. (PSRMA)

"RIDE & RELAX"

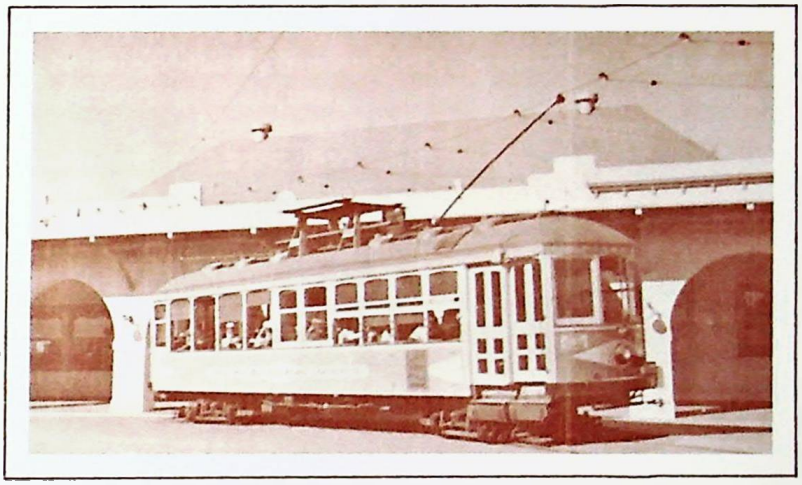
Logo once on the side of all S. D. E. Ry. Co. streetcars



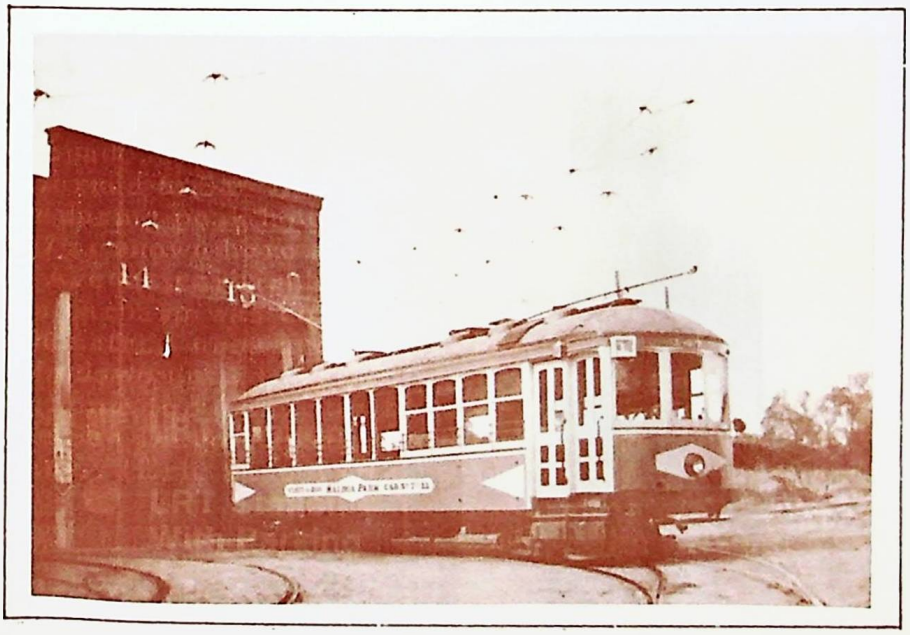
Map of San Diego Electric Ry. about 1920, just before extension of the line to La Jolla.



After World War One, the financial condition of the electric railway went from bad to worse. Declining traffic levels and competition from unregulated "jitneys" contributed to this, but the company also used cars that were operated by two men and used large amounts of electrical power to move them. At the order of the California Railroad Commission, 35 tiny streetcars, called Birney cars (after the man who developed them) were purchased. Not much bigger than the original electric cars of 1892, the cars could be operated by one man and were placed in service on lines 2, 4, 6, and 8. Because of the single truck, the cars didn't ride well, were slow and had very hard wooden slat seats. The cars became very unpopular and were nicknamed by San Diegans as "grasshoppers", "dinkies", "puddle jumpers" and "cootie cars". The cars were quickly sold off, all but two of them being off the property by 1925. No. 327 is shown here stopped to take on a passenger on the No. 2 line, probably about 1921. (Union Title Insurance Company Historical Collection)

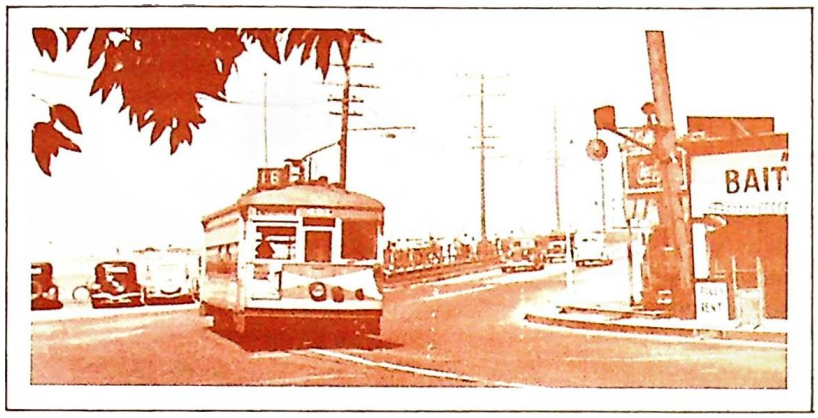


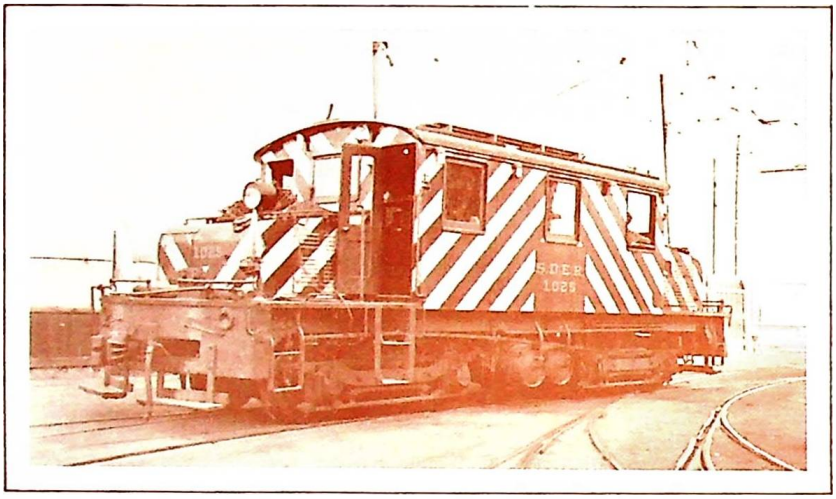
Although the Birney cars were not particularly successful, many of their features were, including the ability to reduce labor costs by having them operated by a one man crew. Older San Diego Electric cars were built to this feature, including the Class One cars, which were originally built in 1912 as center entrance cars. After the rebuilding, the cars appeared like No. 145, shown here at the Coronado Ferry terminal of the line operating in that city. Note the tower on the roof, used by crews during off-peak periods to perform work on the trolley wires. (Ira Swett)



Although many of the Class One cars were scrapped before World War Two, four of them were retained for service in Coronado. Several were transferred to San Diego for service during peak hours, and No. 147 is shown here at the Adams Avenue carbarn in 1944. This carbarn was converted to industrial uses and was not torn down until 1980 after being home for many years of the San Diego Paper Box Company. (Eric Sanders)

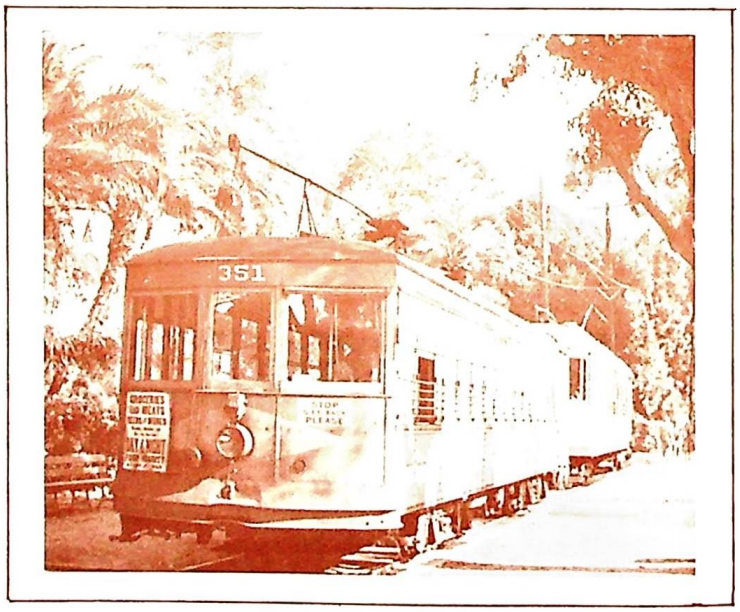
Not well known today is the fact that streetcars once operated to Ocean Beach, Mission Beach, Pacific Beach and La Jolla. The lines were opened with great fanfare in 1924, and were replaced by buses a short 16 years later, in 1940. Virtually the entire right of way has been changed by new construction, channel improvements and the like. Car No. 401 is shown in 1940 turning off the Mission Bay Bridge (carrying Mission Blvd. into Ocean Beach) on the way downtown to the terminal at Fourth and Broadway. Still ahead is a fast ride over the right of way paralleling West Point Loma Blvd. and through the area on which the Sports Arena now sits. (William A. Kingston Collection)





With the construction of the electric railway to La Jolla in 1924, the company solicited freight service to points along the route, and serviced numerous industries requiring direct railroad service. Between the years of 1924 and 1929, freight was also hauled to East San Diego, using the tracks through Balboa Park and University. The sight of freight trains in La Jolla and East San Diego seems hard to imagine today. To pull these trains, an electric locomotive was purchased. Shown here at the Adams Ave. carbarn, the 50-ton locomotive is suitably decorated with "zebra stripes" for visibility, and enough lights, cables, flags and other devices to provoke anyone's curiosity. (R. C. Fullerton Photo---Ira Swett Collection)

On the Coronado side of San Di ego Bay, the electric railway operated an isolated streetcar line operating from the ferry terminal to the Hotel del Coronado. This line operated on a private right of way that was covered with grass for much of its route. Car No. 351 is shown here in the sylvan setting of the Hotel Coronado terminus, shortly before the line was abandoned in 1947 and replaced with a bus route running directly from downtown San Diego to Coronado over the ferry. (R. E. Younghans photo)

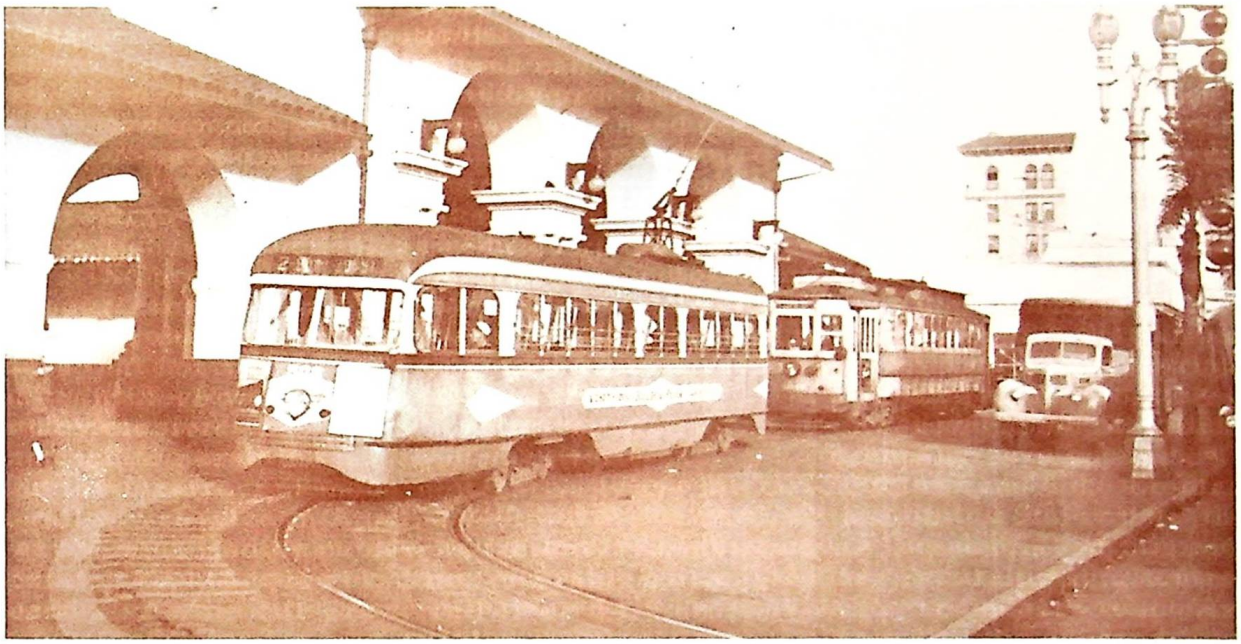


GET BACK ON THE TRACK

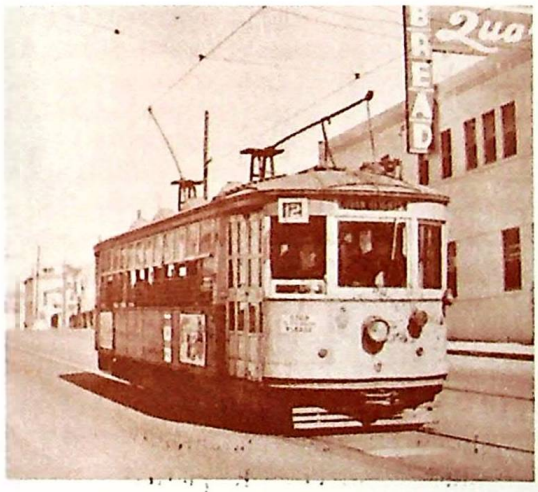
RIDE THE TROLLEY

In an effort to modernize the street railway system in San Diego, 25 new streamlined streetcars known as the "P. C. C. Car" (for the President's Conference Committee of street railway presidents which developed the car) were purchased in 1937, enough it was thought, to provide all service on two lines under the traffic levels existing at that time. It was soon ascertained that the new cars could provide service on other lines, and three more were purchased in 1938 to allow service on Routes 1, 2 and 3. Facilities were built to allow the cars to be used on the 7 and 11 lines as well, but the development of the diesel bus turned the company away from any more new streetcars.

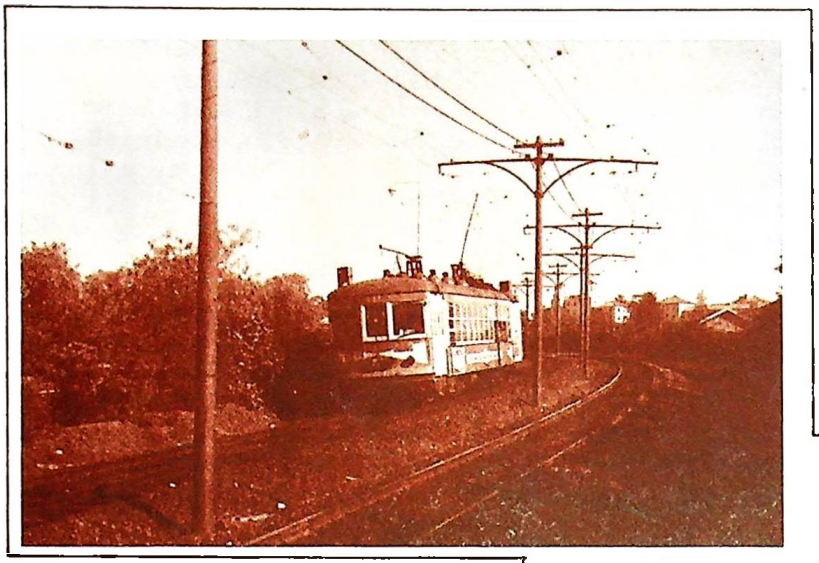
The 300% increase in traffic levels caused by World War Two (one of the largest increases anywhere in the U. S.) demanded that additional rolling stock for the street railway system be acquired. Many cars were obtained from Salt Lake City, Wilkes-Barre and New York City. The New York cars were truly ancient arks, built of wood in 1908 and veterans of many miles of service in Manhattan and the Bronx. In a photo that may be titled The Alpha and Omega, one of these former Third Avenue Ry. cars is shown below following behind one of San Diego's most modern streetcars P. C. C. No. 506 at the Union Depot Loop. (M. D. McCarter Collection)



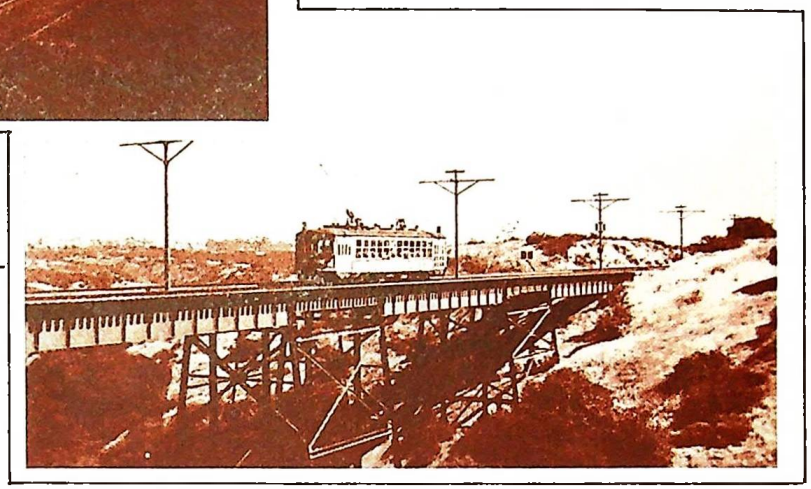
Not all the used streetcars acquired during World War Two were ancient hulks. Those purchased from Wilkes-Barre were modern, if spartan cars, built in the 1920's. These cars were somewhat lighter than the similar 400-series, and were used on the Mission Hills route (No. 3) as well as the "south of Broadway" lines, Nos. 4, 9 and 12. No. 1035 is shown here, coasting to a stop to let off a passenger on 16th Street in front of the Sunbeam Bakery, on the last day of service for the line, December 7, 1946. (PSRMA)



SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL RAILROAD MUSEUM



Much of the No. 7 and 11 lines operated on their own private right of way through Balboa Park, a route that was both fast and scenic. Car No. 411 is shown here headed downtown, approaching the San Diego High School stop. Note the Naval Hospital in the background. (R.E. Younghans photo)



The Balboa Park right of way included three very large trestles north of the park station. A number 7 car is shown here roaring over one of them on its way downtown. (Donald Duke Photo graph---PSRMA Collection)

For further reading see "Rails of The Silver Gate" by Richard V. Dodge, published by Golden West Books, San Marino, CA. 1960.

PACIFIC SOUTHWEST RAILWAY MUSEUM ASSOCIATION INC.

P.O. BOX 12096 SAN DIEGO, CA 92112

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
La Mesa, CA
Permit No. 205

PACIFIC SOUTHWEST RAILWAY MUSEUM ASSOC. INC.

Return Postage Guaranteed
Address Correction Requested

Postmaster: Dated material, please do not delay