

# Grand Forks Herald

Fourth Section

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## Last wooden streetcar group works here to

By DARREL KOEHLER

Old No. 114, the last wooden streetcar which burnished the tracks of the former Grand Forks Street Railway Co., has been rescued from a slow death by rot and is undergoing refurbishment for eventual display here.

The trolley, built in 1908 by the American Car Co. for the fledgling city streetcar firm, hasn't turned a wheel since 1934, when service halted in Grand Forks.

And if it hadn't been for a Thompson, N.D., man who needed cheap housing, the trolley would now only be a rotten hulk.

The effort to restore No. 114 is being headed by the Dacotah Traction Society which began work last fall. Heading up the group is William Thomas, law professor at the University of North Dakota and railroad and streetcar buff.

Thoms said the historic car is probably the last of the wooden streetcars to be used in Grand Forks. It was purchased from American Car Co. in 1908 when the Street Railway Co., founded by local businessmen, first started operation.

He added the wooden car is probably the last such trolley in the state and it may be the only American Car wooden streetcar in the entire nation.

However, while No. 114 will be finding a home in a historical display here, another Grand Forks streetcar will leaving the area for a new home this spring.

Thoms said a steel streetcar, also used by the Grand Forks system, has been found on a farm near the city and it will be shipped to the Oregon Electric Railway Historical Society museum at Glenwood, Ore.

That car, one of the later models, will be restored and will be run over a line at the museum.

"It is a shame we can't keep that streetcar, too. But it will be well cared for in Oregon, and I have my doubts we can restore two cars and one is better than none," said Thomas.

The streetcar era came to Grand Forks comparatively late. The first effort to get a system was in 1892 when Grand Forks had a population of 5,500.



William Thoms

Thoms said the electric trolley just been proven successful, replacing older horse drawn and cable cars, those of San Francisco.

Although the city council passed streetcar franchise in July, 1892, there were delays for 16 years before construction began.

The first track was installed in the fall of 1908 with a groundbreaking ceremony held on South Third Street in front of the former Metropolitan Opera House, the Uptown Recreation Center.

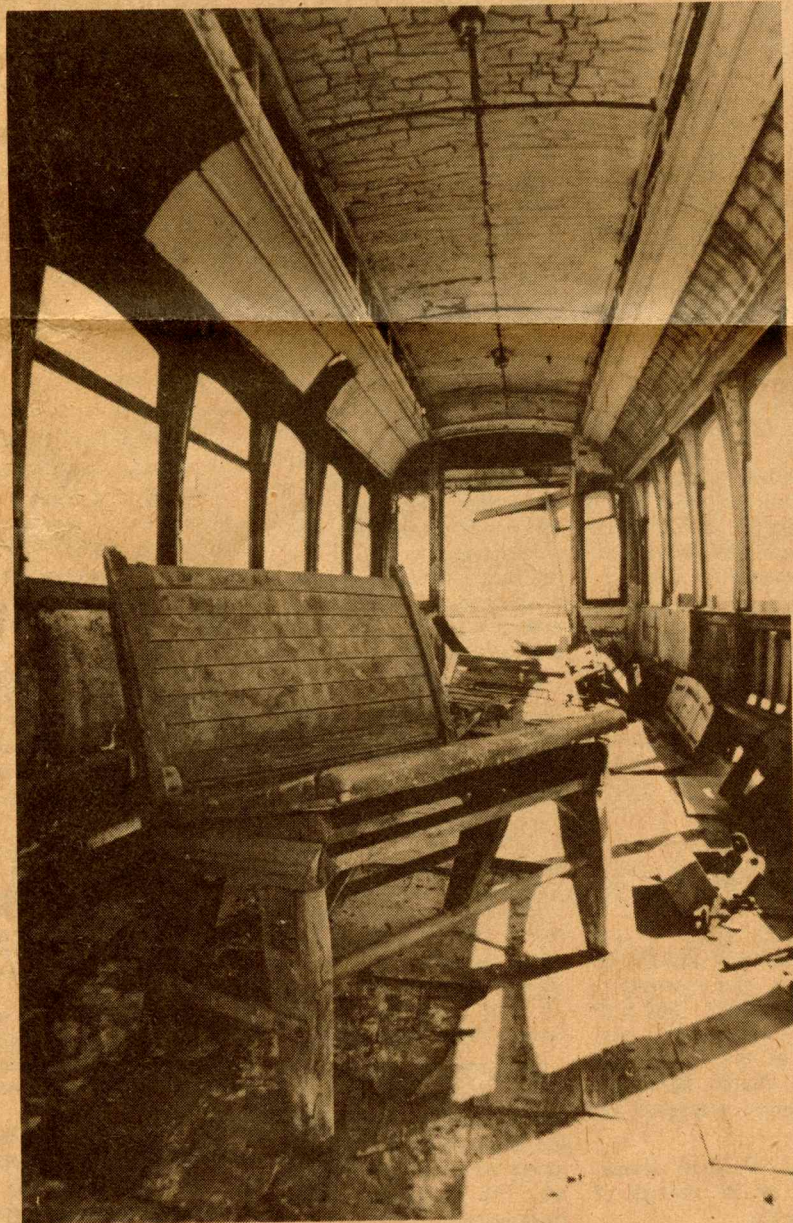
The city's population has reached 10,000 and officials thought it was large enough to support a streetcar system. Tracks were later run north and south of the downtown area, to the fairgrounds and the University of North Dakota. A line ran down DeMers Avenue to the Grand Forks.

Thoms said the first streetcars were probably all wooden. He said the steel cars did not become popular until World War I.

The Grand Forks system was a streetcar line. The rails were fastened to wooden ties, embedded in the concrete streets.

The golden age of the trolley came just before World War I. Besides Grand Forks, Fargo-Moorhead, Wahpeton, Freckenridge, Valley City and A. Smarck-Mandan all boasted streetcars.

However, with the advent of the



Interior needs extensive work



No. 114 was home for Thompson farmer for 10 years

# Wooden streetcar saved from rot; work here to restore old No. 114

WILLIAM KOEHLER

The last wooden streetcar shed the tracks of the Grand Forks Street Railway Co., rescued from a slow death by undergoing refurbishment for display here.

It, built in 1908 by the Grand Forks Street Railway Co. for the fledgling city of Grand Forks, hasn't turned a wheel since service halted in Grand Forks.

It hadn't been for a Thompson, who needed cheap housing, could now only be a rotten shell.

To restore No. 114 is being done by the Grand Forks and Dakota Traction Society work last fall. Heading up the project is William Thomas, law professor at the University of North Dakota and streetcar buff. He said the historic car is the last of the wooden streetcars in Grand Forks. It was built by the American Car Co. in Grand Forks, founded by businessmen, first started

in 1908. The wooden car is probably the last trolley in the state and it is the only American Car wooden streetcar in the entire nation.

While No. 114 will be finding a home as a historical display here, the Grand Forks streetcar will find a new home this fall.

It had a steel streetcar, also built by the Grand Forks system, has been on a farm near the city and it is being moved to the Oregon Electric Trolley Society museum at Grand Forks.

One of the later models, will be run over a line at Grand Forks.

"I wish we can't keep that car. But it will be well cared for, and I have my doubts we can't keep two cars and one is better than none," said Thomas.

The streetcar era came to Grand Forks relatively late. The first electric streetcar system was in 1892 when Grand Forks had a population of 5,500.



William Thoms

Thoms said the electric trolley had just been proven successful, replacing older horse drawn and cable cars, like those of San Francisco.

Although the city council passed a streetcar franchise in July, 1892, there were delays for 16 years before construction began.

The first track was installed in the fall of 1908 with a groundbreaking ceremony held on South Third Street in front of the former Metropolitan Opera House, now the Uptown Recreation Center.

The city's population has reached 8,000 and officials thought it was large enough to support a streetcar system. Tracks were later run north and south of the downtown area, to the fairgrounds and the University of North Dakota. A line ran down DeMers Avenue to East Grand Forks.

Thoms said the first streetcars were probably all wooden. He said the steel cars did not become popular until World War I.

The Grand Forks system was a single track line. The rails were fastened to wooden ties, embedded in the city streets.

The golden age of the trolley occurred just before World War I. Besides Grand Forks, Fargo-Moorhead, Wahpeton, Breckenridge, Valley City and Bemidji, all boasted streetcars.

However, with the advent of the tin

lizzie and the Great Depression of the 30s, streetcar systems vanished. The last to fold in North Dakota was the Fargo system in 1935.

At Valley City, the streetcar track also served as a freight connection between the former Northern Pacific Railway and Soo Line. Part of this track is still being used by the Soo, the only trolley track still in use in the state, according to Thoms.

Unlike many systems, the Grand Forks Street Railway retained its wooden cars after conversion to steel equipment. The older wooden cars were apparently kept for peak travel periods and charters.

Streetcars ended service in Grand Forks July 1, 1934, and buses were substituted. The final run to the University by city officials was made July 15, 1934, and the electric wires and equipment were scrapped.

Erwin Thompson, who farmed about two miles north of Thompson, bought No. 114 for \$25. He paid another \$25 to move it from Grand Forks to his farmstead.

Thompson boarded up some of the window, removed the ends of the car used by the motorman and conductor, built a new roof and sided with

"Housing and maintenance were a problem in the Depression. I was getting into it, he was getting into it, he also presided over it otherwise would have said Thoms.

The streetcar was used for rooms and T. The car was taken to one side. A building was lived in the old streetcar in 1944.

No. 114, protected from the elements by its wood sheathing, remained in good shape for 30 years after Thompson's death. It was then discovered in a shelterbelt on the farmstead and the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Hugo Besocke, Chicago, were contacted. They agreed to donate the trolley to the Traction group.

Last fall the roof and shed were dismantled and the siding removed. The car, in remarkably good shape and still bearing the original number and paint, was taken to the farm of Kenneth

Tweten near Reynolds, where it was stored in a shed.

Combining efforts to save the streetcar were Collin Dobrovolny, Ron Hilden, Jim Paulsen, Bill Schmidt, John Steinberger and Thoms.

This winter with the help of volunteers, members of the Grand Forks Lions Clubs and under the supervision of the Traction Society, work got under way. The group met mainly on Tuesday nights and Saturdays.

The end sections of the car are missing and they are being rebuilt, following the old plan. Some of the rotted panels will also be replaced along with the window glass. Vandals had shot out the original windows.

Electric trucks which powered the trolley were apparently removed when it was moved to Thompson. Thoms said replacement units can be purchased either at Brussels, Belgium, or Porto, Portugal. Similar streetcars are in operation in both countries and Americans have been purchasing them for refurbishing old U.S. models.

This spring the trolley was taken from the Tweten farm to a building owned by GSCO, in Grand Forks where work will continue.

The streetcar will be repainted in its original dark green and red color.

When the work is completed, the car will be turned over to the Grand Forks Historical Society for display. It is housed at Campbell House on the east end of the city.

Thoms said the trolley could also be used for tours. He said between 10 and 20 per cent of the track is still visible on city streets. On Walnut Street there is a double-track passing area.

After the streetcars were pulled off, the company was supposed to pull up the tracks according to terms of the franchise. They quickly scrapped the wires, trucks and streetcars, but they just covered the tracks with asphalt.

Over the years, the asphalt has worn away, exposing the tracks.

Besides the tracks, the only visible sign of the old streetcar era is the former car barn. The building now houses C & R Cleaners and is located at 1010 N. Fifth St.