

El Paso & Southwestern Flyer

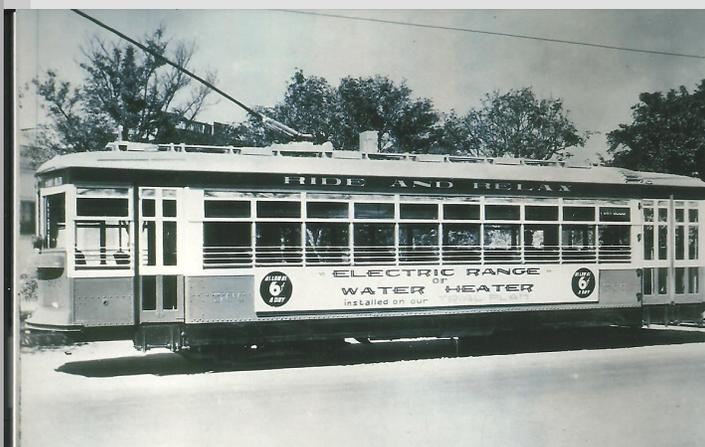
JUNE 2013

The next meeting of the Southwest chapter will be Wed. , June 12, 2013, at Avila's Restaurant, 6032 N. Mesa St., at 6 pm. Visitors welcome.

El Paso's Fort Bliss Streetcars

By Ron Dawson

Built in 1906, four years after the first electric cars ran, the Fort Bliss line was always a moneymaker for the El Paso Electric Railway. A number of different cars were used early on, and in the teens the Stone & Webster "turtle roof" types were often seen on the line. These came to El Paso in 1912 and 1914 from the St. Louis Car Company. The 1912 cars, 85-90, were four motored double enders. The 1914 cars, 91-96, were similar in construction, except they had two motors and maximum traction trucks. In 1927, the El Paso Electric company,



No. 506, shortly after arriving in El Paso , gave free introductory rides to the public. 506 would later be destroyed in a train-trolley collision in 1941.

Transportation Division, bought seven new streetcars from the St. Louis Car Company. These were the last new cars ordered by the company and were numbered 500 to 506. . They were handsome single enders with deep, comfortable leather seats and were intended for the Fort Bliss line, which had a loop at the end of the line. They rode on Brill 177-E-1-X trucks , used Westinghouse air brakes and

a K-75 controller. They seated 49. The cars were very popular with the public. At nine miles, it was the longest line of the company following the demise of the interurban to Ysleta. With EPE, they were painted a patriotic color scheme of a red body, white window sash, and blue roof line. In 1944, when El Paso City Lines took over, they were painted in the familiar "fruit salad" scheme of yellow, green, and white.

Although El Paso boasted, at one time, a system that had 17 different routes, 65 miles of track and over one hundred electric cars, by 1940 bus conversions had cut the streetcars down to only three lines: Fort Bliss, Park, and Juarez. With the increase in troops at Fort Bliss and increased cross-border business, El Paso Electric found itself short of cars, having sold off or scrapped retired cars. This is when they bought ten cars from Houston Electric, double truck, double end, safety cars built by American Car Company in 1922. These cars were re-

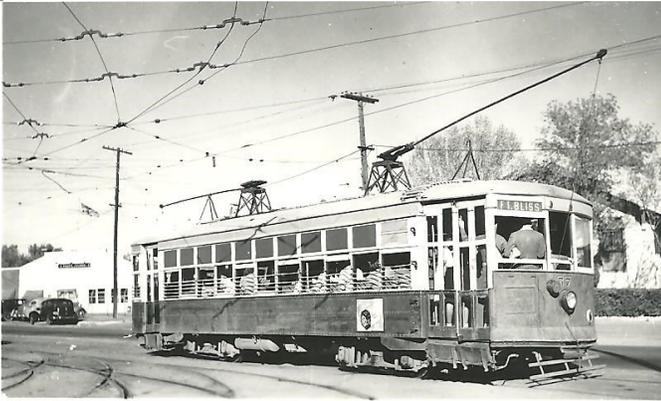


Page 1-2: The Fort Bliss streetcars

Page 3: Museum News

Page 4: Chapter News

numbered 50-59 in El Paso; they tended to be popular with motormen on the Fort Bliss line, because, during the war, cars were often parked on the loop. If so, with the 50 series cars, the motorman could just reverse ends, and return to town.



Car 57, loaded with servicemen, passes the Cotton St. car barn during WWII.

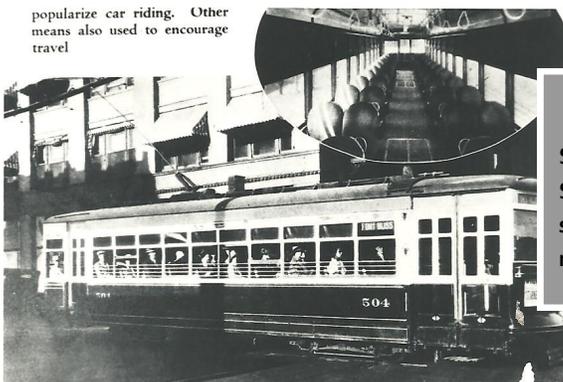
Car 506 was lost in October of 1941 in a grade crossing accident on Piedras Street. There were four railroad tracks used by the T&P and the T&NO, crossed by two streetcar tracks on Piedras Street above Alameda St. 506 was outbound to Ft. Bliss when it pulled up to a stop at the grade crossing as the warning lights were flashing. There was no gate at the crossing. A T&NO switcher was moving cars in the area and a railroad flagman motioned for 506 to go ahead and cross. Neither the crewman nor the motorman noticed a Texas & Pacific passenger train rounding the corner at the same time. There ensued a grinding collision as the motorman tried to accelerate out of the way. Luckily, there were no fatalities, but the car was destroyed. Another of the 500's was destroyed at the same grade crossing in 1938. It was Christmas Eve and this was an owl car coming back to town at one a.m. with just the motorman and

one passenger. At the same Piedras grade crossing it was hit and destroyed by a T&P freight. It is a little hard to imagine how the motorman, with little or no traffic at this time of night, could miss the warning lights and whistle, unless he had dozed off.

The remaining cars were reportedly sold to Mexico, however, investigation revealed that the car bodies were sold about 1950 to a farmer near Las Cruces who used them for bracero housing. After he went broke, he sold them to another farmer in Columbus, NM, where they still serve as cotton trailers on a farm, mounted on truck wheels and with the tops and platforms cut off. It is speculated that the reason the PCC cars, bought in 1950 from San Diego, were renumbered in the 1500's rather than the 500 series numbers they had in San Diego, is that the Fort Bliss 500's were still on the El Paso property, not having been disposed of.

The Fort Bliss line, prior to 1937 came into town on Yandell Blvd., then south on Stanton, west on Mills past the Post Office and the Hilton Hotel, made the short loop around Pioneer Plaza, then headed north on Oregon and back east on Yandell. This changed in 1937 when the conversion to buses of the Manhattan Heights, Government Hill, Arizona St., and Highland Park lines resulted in the dismantling of Yandell St. double tracks (only recently re-

furbished in 1936.) After that the Fort Bliss cars entered town on Piedras,



popularize car riding. Other means also used to encourage travel

No. 504 passing the S.P. building on Stanton St. Note skirting to reduce noise.

Alameda, and Myrtle Ave., and back out on San Antonio to Cotton to Myrtle. In 1943, to reduce downtown war-time congestion, a turnback was put in at Myrtle and San Antonio streets, next to City Hall and the County Courthouse, keeping the cars out of the very center of town. The route from Five Points to Fort Bliss was Piedras, right on Tularosa, left on Luna, right on Hueco. At

Alta Vista (Hueco and Copia), the Government Hill line went straight and the Fort Bliss line turned north on Copia. It went under the railroad underpass on Copia near Memorial Park, eventually turned right on Fort Blvd., left on Tompkins, over a grade crossing with the Southern Pacific and into Fort Bliss on Club Road. One oldtimer remarked that he split a switch at Alta Vista, the front truck taking the Fort Bliss line and the rear truck taking the Government Hill line. Few remnants of the line remain, however, if you look closely at the intersection of Hueco and Luna, the location of the tracks is fairly clearly delineated by cracks in the pavement. Each time the street is repaved, the cracks reappear in about six months.

From the Railroad & Transportation Museum of El Paso

By Prince McKenzie

RAILROAD MUSEUM HISTORY

The Railroad & Transportation Museum of El Paso was founded in 2001 by a group of individuals and organizations acting to preserve the extensive rail & transportation history of the city. After a two year run Downtown on the Plaza, the City invited the Museum to move into the Union Plaza Transit Terminal in 2004 to care for and exhibit EP&SW Locomotive No.1 One of the most important of those founding partners was the Southwest Chapter, R&LHS. Several members of the Chapter provided important support during the design and installation phase. Ron Dawson Museum Historian, and Prince McKenzie Curator, researched and wrote the exhibition text, which has been on exhibit for almost ten years.

RAILROAD MUSEUM CHANGES:

When the Museum opened, Sun Metro denied the request to exhibit the historic Mule Car in the area west of Locomotive No.1. That space, designated "for retail use" was never rented and has been used on a temporary basis by the Museum, for most of the last five years. Last Fall, city management wanted to reclaim the West Gallery of the Museum, and lease it out as "retail space." Then after appealing the decision to City Representative, Courtney Niland, Jerry Morris president of the S W Chapter wrote a letter of protest to the Mayor & Council. Then the Museum staff was told that the area would be leased to the Museum for \$1 per year. Ron Dawson was working with the City Contracting Officer on details for a contract last Fall.

CITY POLICY CONTRADICTIONS:

After months of moving chaos as city offices relocated, the new Contracting Officer delivered a contract last month, which allowed the Museum use of the West Gallery at \$1. per year. He then took it back and asked the Museum to move out of the West Gallery. The Museum staff and several support organizations wrote letters of protest to the mayor and city council. Last week the City Council decided to evict the Museum from the West Gallery. The Museum moved out of the West Gallery on May 26th, giving up about half of the program space. Attorney Terry Hammond is representing the Museum Board in deliberations over the future contract with the City.

MUSEUM PROGRAM LIMITATIONS:

The West Gallery was used as an educational facility with tables for children's art, meetings, and dinners, chairs for lectures, and films. One of the most educational areas were the model train layouts of the Railroad Model & Historical Association, Ron Dawson's Circus Train in O-scale and Streetcar Line in HO-scale and others. The area also included important exhibits on the regional railroads, Harvey House, Harvey Girls and the Union Station, El Paso industry, etc.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT:

Over the last month several organizations wrote letters of support to the Mayor and City Council. They came in from the Paso del Norte Streetcar Preservation Society, Discover El Paso, the National Association of Retired & Veteran Railroad Employees (El Paso Unit), West Side Neighborhood Association, Harvey Girls of El Paso, and the El Paso County Historical Society.

One letter from State Senator Jose Rodriguez, proposed that the City work with the County and historic organizations to develop a plan over the next three years to consolidate all historic rail equipment and other historic vehicles at a historic site where the public and tourists could visit. This letter which mentions S P Locomotive No. 3420 was also signed by the Senator's Advisory Board on Heritage Tourism. A committee of representatives of supporting organizations, including Steve Heetland, has been meeting with Terry Hammond, attorney.

EXHIBIT CHANGES:

The Museum is closed until the middle of June while storage space is located and exhibit furniture is moved. New exhibits have been planned for the Museum. If you are interested in assisting with storage facilities, moving exhibits, expenses, or staff work please contact the Museum. For more information or to help, contact Prince McKenzie at (915) 256-4409 or Stephen Heetland.



Southwest Chapter
Railway & Locomotive Historical Society

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EP&SW Flyer
June 2013



MEETING:

Southwest Chapter News

The meeting was held at Avilas Restaurant on Wednesday May 8th. Chairman, Stephen Heetland announced that the Chapter was interested in planning to visit and develop work projects for the James Watt Pullman Car. He got the attention of everyone present with a model kit of an A T & S F Pullman Car in H O Scale. Rick Brightman, an experienced model builder, opened the kit and found the James Watt decals included. He will be assembling the car for exhibition. Prince McKenzie described the safety requirements for visiting the Freeport McMoran Copper & Gold plant where the historic El Paso rolling stock is stored.

PROGRAM:

Vice Chairman, Phil Wiborg, presented an interesting program on the Alamogordo & Sacramento Railway, of New Mexico, called the "Cloud Climbing Railroad" by many regional historians and residents. After explaining Charles Eddy's business practices he described the evolution of the sawmill at Alamogordo from its beginnings to the Southwest Lumber Co. Along with high quality period photographs, Phil discussed the historic photo collections in the area. Dr. Richard Worthington, mentioned that he had collected some photographs and donated them to the Railroad Museum. Everyone present was impressed with the extensive research shared by Phil and the excellent photo illustrations.

For the June 12th meeting of the R&LHS, Ric and Lynn Brightman will present a program entitled:

CALIFORNIA OR BUST: RIDING AMTRAK FOR FUN AND ?PROFIT. There will be AMTRAK souvenirs for all attending.

New Mexico Rail Trip: Check with Stephen Heetland regarding a planned New Mexico Rail Trip to Belen, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Lamy for June 19-24.

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