



Besides riding trolleys, Radway pursues his interest by building models that duplicate the many cars he has seen on fan excursions.

By trolley, Ray Radway knows transportation lore

By Maria McGee
staff writer

Ray Radway jokingly admits he goes off his trolley whenever the subject of streetcars comes up. In fact, he says, he would have "loved to spend my life" just riding those vintage conveyances and poking around old car barns looking at and taking photographs of discarded parts from the antiquated people-movers of a by-gone era. Even so, he has done well pursuing a hobby that looked like it was dying out but is suddenly making a comeback. Radway, a Livonia resident who works for Michigan Bell Telephone Co., is a walking encyclopedia on just about any trolley line in the U.S. and many in Europe. He is particularly knowledgeable about the old Detroit United Railway (DUR) that served this area in the early 1900s as well as the Detroit Streets and Railways (DSR).

A LOT of the information he has gathered over the past three decades is in capsule form in a special display at Hill House Museum at Greenmead, Livonia's historical site. The exhibit traces the early history of the DUR until its demise around 1934. The display is of special significance since one of the last remaining DUR waiting rooms is one of the buildings being restored in the Greenmead historical village. The project is the undertaking of the Livonia Historical Society, which has been raising the restoration funds by holding an annual Heritage Fair. Radway says he's one of a group of about 50 persons in the metropolitan Detroit who are "trolley nuts." Several live in Livonia, including Howard Ziegel, who has a model trolley track that covers three walls of his basement. Ziegel, who works for the railroad, also has a flag pole in his yard

that was once a Detroit trolley bus pole. BUT THERE WAS a time when Radway felt he was the only one in the world who was in love with the carriages that get their power from an overhead wire which is then transmitted to the car's motor. By chance, he found out differently. Back in 1950, he was in the Army stationed at Fort Carson, Colo. and was walking around town one cold and snowy night. Nothing was open except for a book store. He went in to get warm and there he came across a magazine called "Railroad" with a column entitled "Car Barn Comments." That got him started on a hobby that now includes writing for the trolley fan magazine called "Traction and Models." It also led him to help co-found the DUR Club once it became evident that there were others who were interested

in the history of Detroit's early transportation system. Radway admits to a fascination with the whole spectrum of rapid transit "as far back as I can recall. Wherever we went, I was always looking for car tracks and following them." A LOT OF HIS spare time as a youth was spent riding the trolley lines around Detroit "to see where they went." One memory sticks out because it brought an unexpected reward. "When I was about 15, I took a ride on the old Fort-Peters-Electric line and rode it to the end. When I got off, I paid my fare and the conductor gave me some change. It was a rare 1894 Indian Head nickel. At the time, I was collecting rare coins, so I was doubly pleased," he chuckled. Radway figures he's ridden thousands of miles on trolleys all over the U.S. and Europe. He doesn't have any

favorites because "I've seen too many" and they are all unique in some way. However, the neglect and disrepair that many of the lines have fallen into is a sad footnote to history, he says. He's taken thousands of black and white photos, several hundred slides and collected hundreds of timetables during his many excursions and now uses them to illustrate articles he writes for "Traction and Models" magazines. In addition to that writing, he is also assisting author Jack E. Schramm in the third version of Schramm's "Detroit Street Railways," a three-volume chronology of the history of the DSR and DUR. Radway's assignment is to do the research and write the chapter on the DUR Orchard Lake division that began in downtown Detroit, went out to Farmington via Eight Mile (in front of Greenmead, incidentally) and stopped in Northville. The book should be out sometime next year, Radway believes.

"THE SCHRAMM books," he said, "are more than a history of a rail system. They're also an excellent source on the history of Detroit. The pictures are incredible." Radway believes that a trolley renaissance may be in the offing and he'll be among the first to say, "welcome back." He and other DUR club members have already enjoyed a bit of that feeling of renaissance when Detroit installed a trolley line on Washington Blvd. He says it's also happening in other parts of the country but on a much larger scale and now the old trolleys are referred to as light rail vehicles. Boston, for instance, has just installed a line, as has San Francisco and Philadelphia. Toronto, of course, is most glowing example, he said.

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If you can't be there, the next best thing is to look at a picture, and memories of those trolley rides come back in a snap.



To get some idea of the scale, Ray Radway holds a model trolley in the palm of his hand.

Staff photos by Art Emanuele



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