



The Milwaukee Electric Railway & Light Company (T.M.E.R.&L.) Car 978

Of more than 400 steel streetcars that operated in Milwaukee from just before World War I until the end of service in early 1958, just five still exist. All are from the 800- and 900-series of cars built by the St. Louis Car Company in the 1920s. Only one of these cars is currently operational. T.M.E.R.&L. (TM) car 846, now more than 100 years old, has been lovingly restored. It is maintained and operated by volunteers at the East Troy Railroad Museum, where the public has frequent opportunities to see the car and take it for a ride. Three of the other surviving cars were moved from Wisconsin many years ago; two are stored at a museum in Illinois and one is stored at a museum in Maine, unable to be boarded, ridden and enjoyed by the public.

Fortunately, the East Troy Railroad Museum owns the remaining car, TM car 978. It was among the last Milwaukee trolleys to operate in 1958, serving until the very end on the No. 10 Wells Street line. St. Louis Car Company built the 900-series cars in five batches from 1924 to 1929. Car 978 was part of the second-to-last order in 1928. The 900s, along with the slightly older 800-series cars, represented a major departure from Milwaukee's earlier streetcars. They were far lighter in weight than their predecessors, which cut power consumption and saved on material and maintenance costs. These "lightweight" cars weighed 35-40,000 pounds, as compared with the 54-59,000-pound weight of the 500- and 600-series cars, which were manufactured from 1911 to 1913. Sadly, none of these older-series cars have survived.

Following the end of streetcar service, car 978 was acquired by an individual who moved the car to Wauwatosa for display at the local Kiwanis Club. The buyer moved to California and interest in the car waned until 1960, when it was sold to the Mid-Continent Railroad Museum in North Freedom, Wisconsin. At the time, Mid-Continent was establishing a small collection of electric railway cars, but in 1967 the decision was made to de-accession those cars. The Wisconsin Electric Railway Historical Society (TWERHS), formed to take possession of the electric cars, assumed ownership of 978 and moved the car to North Lake, and later to East Troy. It was stored until 1982 and then sold to a new group, which became the Appleton Trolley Museum & Railway (ATM&R). That organization worked to restore the car and make it operational. It was shipped by truck to San Francisco in 1983 to participate in that city's first Historic Streetcar Festival, but an accident occurred en route and one of the car's truck bolsters gave way and came through the floor, resulting in severe frame damage. The car was shipped back to Appleton, but the frame damage was deemed too serious to repair and the car was put into dead storage. ATM&R merged with the East Troy Electric Railroad in 2002. While most of its equipment was moved to East Troy, 978 was relocated to a warehouse in Milwaukee.

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TM 978, signed for Route 13, on Clybourn near Cass and Michigan Streets (Ed Wilson photo, Herb Danneman collection).

Vital Statistics:

Length – 45' 0"
Width – 8' 8"
Height – 12' 0"
Weight – 39,020 lbs.
Construction – Steel
Gauge – Standard (4' 8.5")
Roof Type – AR
Ended – Double-Ended

Seats – 55 passengers
#Wheels/Conf. – 8 (B-B)
Trucks – St. Louis 64E1B
Brakes – SME
Compressor – DH-16
Motors – GE 265J60 (4)
Control – GE K35JJ (2)
Voltage – 600 VDC

Ownership History:

The Milwaukee Electric Railway & Light Company #978 – 1928-1938
The Milwaukee Electric Railway & Transport Company #978 – 1938-1953
Milwaukee & Suburban Transit #978 – 1953-1958
Wauwatosa Kiwanis Club – 1958-1960
Mid-Continent Railroad Museum – 1960-1967
The Wisconsin Electric Railway Historical Society – 1967-1982
Trolley 86/Appleton Trolley Museum & Railway – 1982-2002
East Troy Electric Railroad – 2002-present. Currently Located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

East Troy Railroad Museum
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