



# WEBFOOTER EXTRA

OCTOBER 2014

# PORTLAND'S CABLE RAILWAY



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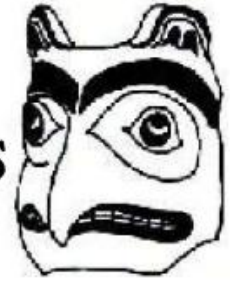
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◆ Portland's Cable Railway – see page 4.





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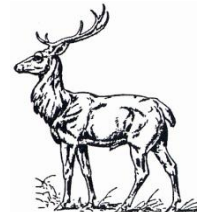
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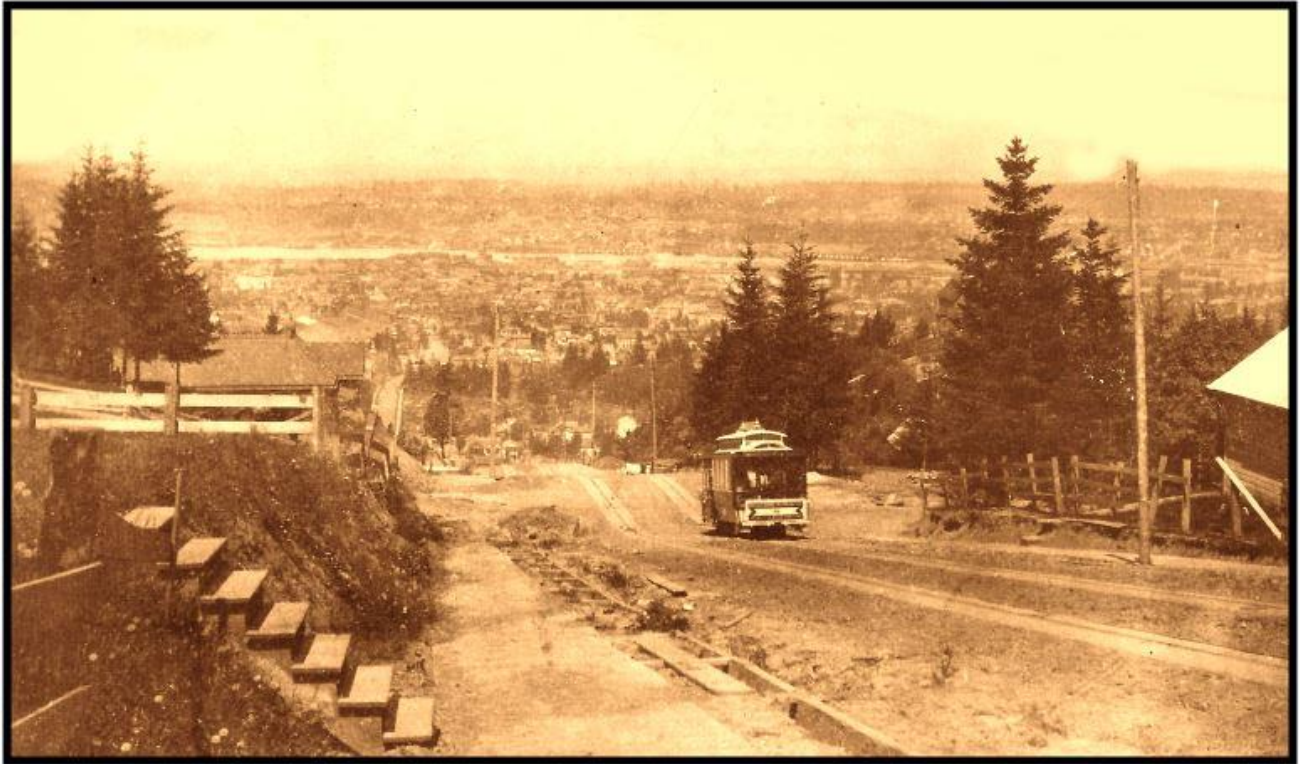
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(paid advertisement)

# PORTLAND'S CABLE RAILWAY



Portland Cable Railway car descending on Eighteenth Street two blocks above the trestle which was several blocks below the end of the line at Spring Street.

In the 1880's, as Portland's west side began to develop and grow, city leaders and developers began looking to Portland Heights as fertile ground for new growth. Portland's steep hills presented a challenge to getting residents from Portland Heights to downtown and back. In May of 1887, a group of stockholders got together and incorporated the Portland Heights Transfer Company to purchase horse-drawn coaches to run from First and Yamhill streets to Sixteenth and Spring streets on the hill. Patronage was good and this service continued until the cable road was put in operation.

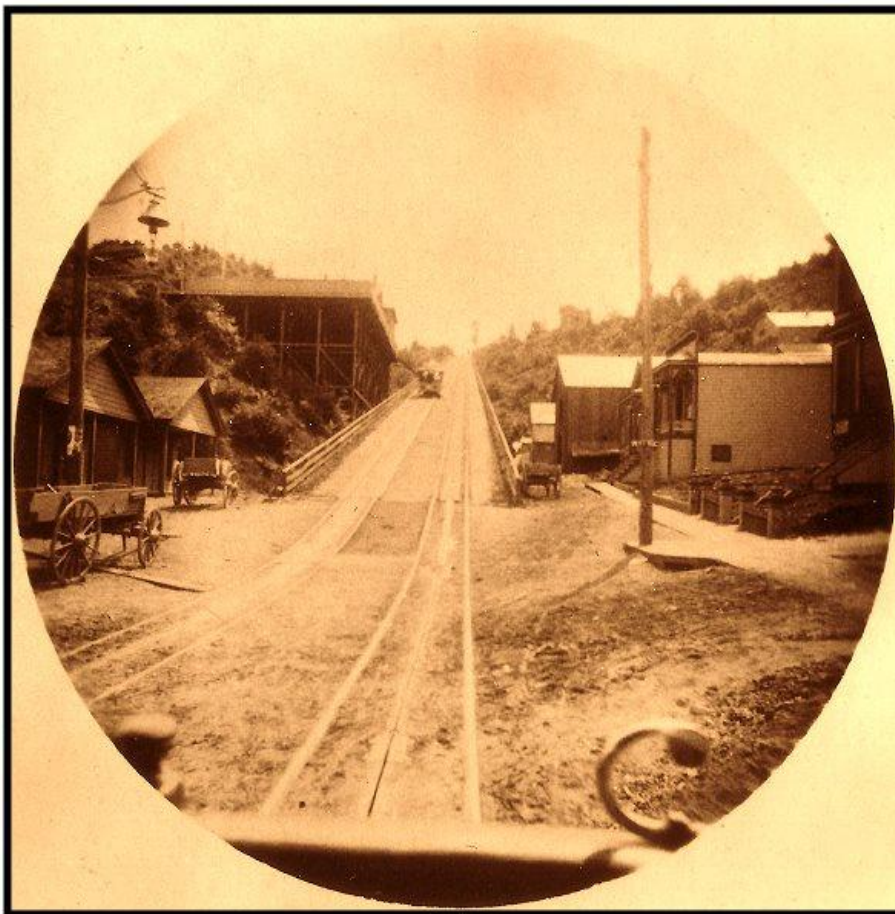
On June 23, 1887, the same group of stockholders incorporated the Portland Cable Railway Company with capital stock of \$150,000. Fourteen days later, on July 7, the Portland City Council granted a franchise to the company. Soon thereafter, the Portland Heights Transfer Company was transferred to the Portland Cable Railway Company. Construction of the trestle from Spring Street and Chapman (now Eighteenth Ave.) to Mill Street began on October 7, 1887 and it was completed less than two months later on Dec. 4.

The next step was to build a powerhouse and lay the tracks. Initially, Portland Cable Railway principals tried to hire the services of the Powell Street Railway in San Francisco to build the line, but the costs proved to be too high and money was scarce. Finally, in March of 1889, the Portland Cable Railway Company hired an engineer and proceeded to build the powerhouse and lay the track themselves. Construction on the powerhouse began a month later

and track work began in May. Construction went along fairly well until late summer when work was suspended for a lack of materials. Much of the steel and other materials had been ordered from Johnstown, Pennsylvania and it was swept away in the Johnstown Flood before they could be delivered. A new order of supplies was hastily assembled in San Francisco and work resumed by the end of September in 1889.

The original cable car route ran from the present Eighteenth and Spring streets down the hill to Jefferson to Fifth, down Fifth to Alder, and then east on Alder as far as Front Street. During January 1890, just as Portland's first electric streetcars began running along Second Street, the new cable cars arrived in Portland by boat from Stockton, California. After being unloaded, the new cars were placed on the new tracks and they were pulled to the new powerhouse by horses.

Installing the cable was a source of worry to everyone. Huge spools of cable were unfurled from Front and Alder and the cable was attached to a dray or wagon. The cable was pulled through the slot between the tracks by a team of six horses. When the dray reached Jefferson Street, the cable was threaded around the sheaves at the powerhouse and the horses started pulling the end back downtown where the two ends were spliced together. The cable was tested and it operated smoothly.



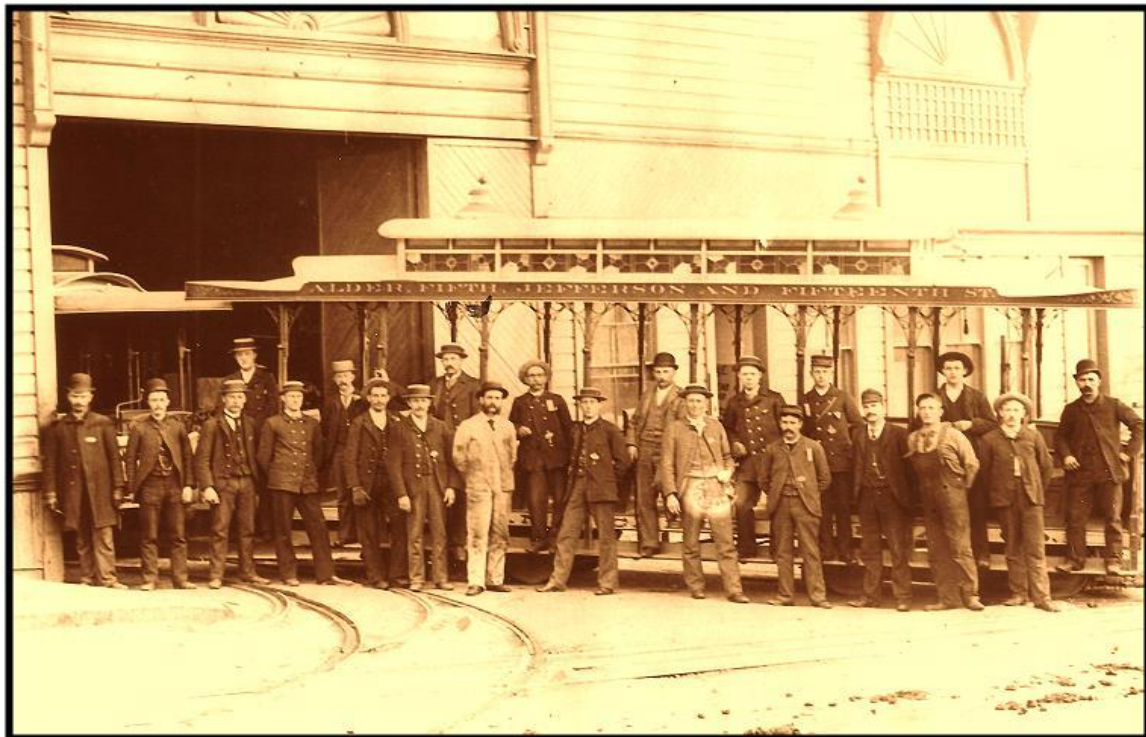
The next day, on February 17, 1889, they tested the cable by operating the first car on the line. Everything was working perfectly. The only complaint came from the wagon teamsters whose horses tended to get their shoes caught in the cable slot. A separate cable was laid up the hill and under the trestle to Spring Street where the line ended. When the turntable at the foot of Alder Street was completed, the line was virtually finished.

Taken from the back of a cable car, this photo shows the view up the trestle to Spring Street. The powerhouse and shops are to the right, out of view.

After a very brief training period and with the usual fanfare, Portland Cable Railway began offering rides on cable cars in Portland on February 22, 1890. Two days later, they had their first serious accident. The gripman failed to pick up the "rope" on leaving the turntable at Spring Street. The car began gathering momentum very rapidly and the crew panicked and jumped. The car held to the rails all the way to Jefferson Street where it turned over on the curve. Only three passengers were aboard and they escaped with only minor injuries. During the days that followed, no more serious accidents took place. Although, now and then, a mishandled grip would cause the car to stop suddenly, dislodging passengers and sending conductors flying through the car at the expense of glass and woodwork.

Over the next few months, the first major extension of the line added cars down Fifth Street from Alder to Union Station. The Alder Street line had to be altered so it could be operated separately. The turntable at the foot of Alder was removed and transferred to the end of Fifth Street. A second track was laid on Alder Street with a crossover at each end. A complete compliment of open cars arrived in time for use during the summer months. Horse cars were used until a double-ended cable car made its debut in mid-October on the Alder Street line. Another short extension was added a year later in October 1891 at the end of Spring Street west to the Portland Heights Club to avoid the dangerous descent from the turntable at Eighteenth Street.

Construction on another extension on Jefferson Street soon began west from Chapman to the City Park and nearby baseball grounds. This extension opened to traffic on April 8, 1892. At this time, all even-numbered cars climbed the hill and all odd-numbered cars ran to City Park. Original plans called for an extension westward along the hill to Canyon Road at Sylvan and ultimately to Beaverton. But the extension was never completed, even though the company had purchased land and had the right-of-way to make this happen.



Workers pose at the powerhouse and shops.



Streetcars on Jefferson Street in the background connect with the cable car on Chapman (now Eighteenth) Street.



Two cable cars stopped on the trestle near Montgomery Drive. The house behind the car on the right is still there.

Despite its steady progress, the company was in financial trouble. The line still had not reached the point of paying its own way and the heavy outlays for construction had consumed all the capital that could be raised. By July of 1892, creditors and contractors filed suit for payment and forced the company into bankruptcy. Another accident occurred on July 11, 1892 when car 13 broke loose at the powerhouse and ran down to Jefferson Street where it was thrown on its side on the curve. No sooner had the dust begun to settle when car 18 repeated the performance, running into the remains of car 13. No one was seriously injured, but the damage claims arising from the disaster were the last straw for the company.

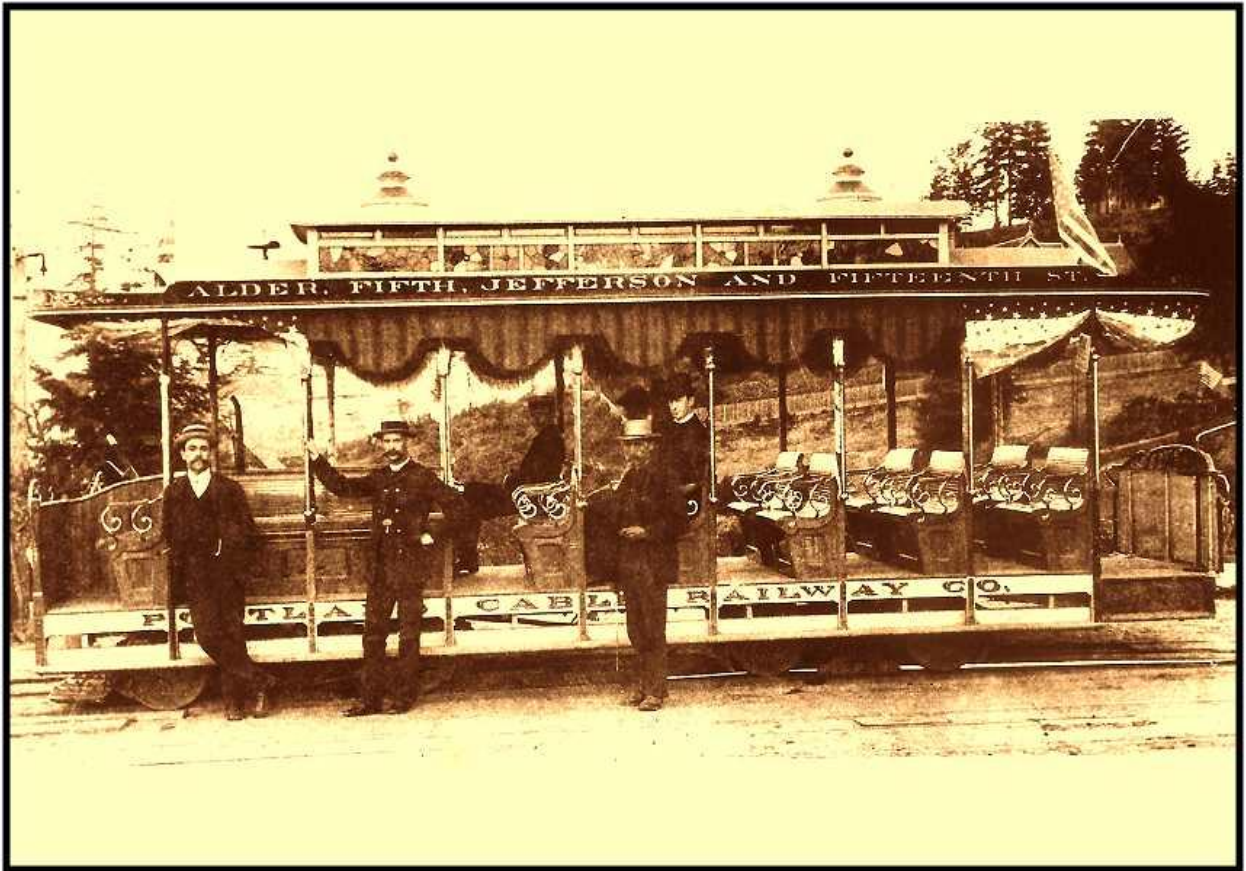
On August 31, 1892, the line was sold at a public auction and Franklin Fuller was appointed receiver. Fuller would later manage the Portland Railway Company. Another runaway occurred on the hill on December 18, 1893. The car got away at the top of the trestle and the gripman immediately applied the slot break. Due to the rickety condition of the trestle, the slot break merely spread the rails of the slot and the car continued its descent in a shower of sparks. With help from a passenger, the gripman was able to make the slot break catch hold when the car passed onto the pavement of Chapman Street and the car came to a stop. Fortunately, there was no damage to the car or passengers.

At Cable Park, at the end of the cable car line, there was something called a menagerie, which would be more like a small zoo today. Many operators put an amusement park at the end of the line to attract ridership. There was a Ferris wheel and the monkeys were popular at Cable Park. The story is told of a boy who sold a wildcat to the assistant manager of the cable railway company. The boy refused to show the animal to the assistant who bought it anyway for \$1.50 after negotiating down from \$2.50. After he had the money, the boy turned over a wounded wildcat with a bad leg. The wildcat was euthanized and the assistant caught an earful when the manager, Franklin Fuller, got back. There was a bit of a rivalry in those days with the streetcar operators. The article tells how the City & Suburban Railway had a woman called Nadje with a couple of trained lions at Mt. Tabor Park at the end of the streetcar line to attract riders.

The line experienced more legal wrangling in the following years, but it continued operating while cutting pay to its crew. In September of 1884, debts were paid and ownership passed to Portland Traction Company. Assets consisted of the powerhouse, machinery, tools, furnishings, twenty four cars and seven and one-half miles of cable railway. In January 1896, crews began electrifying the line. Electrification was completed on May 1, 1896 and the cars were converted to electric operation. A trolley pole was added to the cars and a controller was added to the platform. To accommodate the electric motors, the cars had to be raised eight inches. A few unconverted cars were retained for hill use. The cable car operation continued to operate until 1904 when the Portland Railway Company opened a new electric streetcar line to Portland Heights.

Editor's Note: Much of this information comes from the book entitled *Fares, Please! Those Portland Trolley Years* by John T. Labbe.





Two different cable cars at the Spring Street turntable at the end of the line.

