

Big Red Car to roll again during Country Fair 1886

Monrovia residents will be able to take a ride down memory lane when the Pacific Electric "Big Red Car" returns as a feature of Country Fair 1886 on Saturday, Sept. 27 at Recreation Park. Rides will be offered for 25 cents.

Car 1058, the largest of the series, is one of fewer than a dozen surviving Big Red Cars and was literally rescued from the scrap heap, having been partially burned and painstakingly restored to its "as new" condition through the efforts of Richard Fellows of Vernon. Fellows, whose family owned and maintained shipyards for years, used his expertise in supervising the restoration of this wooden car, a lengthy and delicate procedure which took three years. Although now modified to operate on the street, it is in every other respect identical to its 1930 appearance with all the hardware and fixtures being original.

Pacific Electric's 1000 class cars were the biggest wooden interurbans to run on the widespread system, as well as being the last wooden cars built for the railway. Once they ran virtually everywhere in Southern California, providing transportation for three generations of Californians and at one time there were 7,000 trains run daily over 12,000 miles of track, operating from Redondo to Redlands, San Fernando to Santa Ana.

Many Monrovia locals recall particular experiences relating to "The Big Red Car." Judge John Sturgeon remembers riding the car daily in the early 20s to his first job at Sixth and Spring streets in Los Angeles. He remembers the difficulty women had negotiating the high steps to enter the cars wearing the, then fashionable, long hobble skirts. At that time, he said, any exposure of women's legs above the ankle was most interesting to the male spectators.

Bill Quiggle recalls when the Monrovia fire truck ran into the side of the Big Red Car at Myrtle Ave. He remembers one time when his father, Jim, (who took prisoners to the county jail in handcuffs on the cars as the constable did not have a company car), made an arrest on the car. Once, when returning from taking a prisoner to jail, he noticed the conductor had entered a far smaller amount on the coin collecting device than had been paid by the customer. He promptly arrested the conductor and had him in jail the following Friday.

The big red car also played a dramatic roll in many families as it carried their young men off to the military life and war. Herbert Meire's last ride on the car was in 1941 from the Covina reception center to Los Angeles with a group of draftees. After a brief physical they were all sworn into the army and went off to war.

The same held true for the late Don Hendricks who won the fishbowl lottery when World War II broke out. On the appointed day for his departure, he went to the station at Myrtle and Olive. Kiwanians Ranny Draper and John Nimmo were there waiting, each with a small gift for him. The red car rolled up, Hendricks climbed aboard and was off to Los Angeles and then the war.

While not everyone who will ride the "Big Red Car" on Saturday at the Country Fair 1886 has a personal memory about the cars, if their parents or grandparents lived in the area during those three generations, it was probably a primary source of safe and reliable transportation and they might have ridden it many times in their lives.

Boarding for the 25 cent ride will be at Shamrock Ave. next to the American Legion Hall.



Photo by Tom La Barbera

No. 1058 will make its second local appearance of the year at the Country Fair.