



REPORT TO THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

AGENDA ITEM NO. VIB
HPC MEETING: 07/25/2016

July 25, 2016

FROM: DANIEL ZACK AICP, Assistant Director
Development and Resource Management Dept.

APPROVED BY

DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR

BY: KARANA HATTERSLEY-DRAYTON, M.A.
Secretary
Historic Preservation Project Manager

SUBJECT: REVIEW CONDITION OF THE FRESNO TROLLEY CARS (DINER) (HP#099) LOCATED AT 1731 S. CHERRY AVENUE (c1912 AND c1925) AND REQUEST THAT STAFF MEET WITH PROPERTY OWNER PURSUANT TO THE MINIMUM MAINTENANCE STANDARDS, FMC 12-1626 (c).

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission review the condition of the Fresno Trolley Cars (Diner) to consider whether the property owner is out of compliance with the Minimum Maintenance provisions of the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance. If the Commission finds that the structures are not in a state "of good repair," the Commission may request that staff contact the property owner to attempt to ameliorate the situation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pursuant to FMC 12-1626 property owners of designated historic resources are required to preserve their buildings "against decay and deterioration" and in a "state of good repair and free from structural defects." The Historic Preservation Commission is authorized to request that staff meet with the owner to discuss ways to improve the condition of any defects at a historic property (12-1626(c)). Formal action to correct any violations, however, is channeled through the Development Department or other appropriate agency. On most projects it is the City's Code Enforcement Division (now Community Revitalization) which acts on behalf of historic preservation concerns, usually in concert with a slate of other health and safety violations.

BACKGROUND

The Fresno Trolley Cars Diner consists of two former trolley cars from the Fresno Traction Company that have been placed perpendicularly to one another and connected. The car that is parallel to S. Cherry Avenue is a "Dragon" type, thus a circa 1912 design that included a low set of double doors in the middle of the car. The second is a "Birney" (mid 1920s). Attached to the east and northeast sides of the former diner are concrete block bathrooms, a kitchen and a storage room. One or both trolleys were moved to their present located in 1935 and converted into a diner, initially called the "Standard Diner." By 1968 the property was renamed "Trolley Car Carole's" and served as a "hangout for the coffee and poetry crowd" (Hansen 1991:26).

State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary # _____
HRI # _____
Trinomial _____
NRHP Status Code LR-A 99

Other Listings _____
Review Code _____ Reviewer _____ Date _____

P1. Resource Name: Fresno Trolley Cars Diner (Standard Diner)

***P2. Location:** *a. County: Fresno

*b. USGS 7.5' Quad: Fresno South, 1963 Photorevised 1981. Parcel located in Section 10, R20E T14S

c. Address: 1731 S. Cherry Avenue

d. Assessor's Parcel Number: 468-303-06

***P3a. Description:** The Fresno Trolley Cars Diner (soon to open as the 51 Café) consists of two former trolley cars that have been placed perpendicularly to one another and connected. The overall interior plan is thus a slender L. The car that is parallel to S. Cherry Avenue is a "Dragon" type, thus a c1912 design that included a low set of double doors in the middle of the car. The Dragon car measures 40x8 feet, the second car, a "Birney" is 32x8 feet. Both cars are riveted sheet metal over an angle iron frame. The Dragon trolley has a double, vertical paneled wood door in the center that apparently was put in long ago and replaced the original doors (see picture on page 76 of Hamm). A series of double hung wood sash windows flank this double door. A conductor's door is on the west elevation at the north end of the Dragon car. There are eight double hung sash windows on the south elevation of the Birney model. A single panel wood door is at the far east end of the Birney. The Birney terminates in an anticlimber, termed a "Ubangi Lip." In the 1920s the Southern Pacific required this feature on all its cars in the belief that it helped protect the lightweight trolley in the event of a collision. The interiors of these trolleys have been modified to accommodate seating for the café although the rounded ceiling and framing is exposed and intact. Attached to the east and northeast sides of the diner are concrete block bathrooms, a kitchen and a storage room. The diner is located south of the Center City in an industrial/manufacturing section of town.

***P3b. Resource Attributes:** HP18 (train/former trolleys); HP6 (commercial building/diner)

***P4. Resources Present:** ●Building



P5b Photo date: 2/2/04

***P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:** Dragon car c1912; Birney c. 1925; Dragon car moved to site as diner in 1935 (Hamm; Assessor records and Building permit).

***P7. Owner and Address:** Barbara Ortiz
P.O. Box 2601
Fresno, CA 93745

***P8. Recorded by:** Karana Hattersley-Drayton, Historic Preservation Project Manager, City of Fresno

***P9. Date Recorded:** 2/2/04

***P10. Survey Type:** Intensive

***P11. Report Citation:** Evaluation of the Fresno Trolley Cars Diner (Standard Diner) for the Local Register of Historical Resources.

***Attachments:** ● Building, Structure and Object Report ● Continuation Sheet

*Recorded by: Karana Hattersley-Drayton

*Date: 2/02/04

■ Continuation



Birney Car, South Elevation

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

*NRHP Status Code: 5S3; 3CS

*Resource Name: Fresno Trolley Cars Diner (Standard Diner)

B3. Original Use: Street cars from Fresno Traction Company

B4. Present Use: converted to café in 1936; presently undergoing renovation for use again as a diner.

***B5. Architectural Style:** Dragon model and Birney model street cars with kitchen, storage and restroom facilities as additions.

***B6. Construction History:** The "Dragon" car apparently dates to c1912. The Birneys were initially purchased for Fresno in the mid-1920s. One or both trolleys were moved to their present location in 1935. A kitchen was moved onto the parcel from Amador and Broadway at the same time. In 1945 a 10x12 foot storage area was added. The 1950 Sanborn curiously only shows the footprint of the "Dragon" model and a kitchen/outbuilding. In 1967 a restroom was built. The café was rewired in 1969. The current owner stripped off the exterior sheathing that had been added and has replaced and repaired the steel roof of the cars.

***B7. Moved? ■ Yes Date:** 1935 **Original Location:** Rolling stock for the Fresno Traction Company

***B8. Related Features:** A kitchen, storage area and bathrooms are appended to the east and northeast elevations.

B9a. Architect: N/A **B9b. Builder:** Fresno Birneys were mostly produced by the St. Louis Car Co.

***B10. Significance: Theme:** Transportation and City Expansion **Area:** Fresno

Period of Significance c1912-1925; 1936 **Property Type:** street cars; trolley car diner

Applicable Criteria: Appears eligible to both the California Register of Historical Resources under Criteria 1 and 3, and the Local Register of Historic Resources under Criteria (i) and (iii)

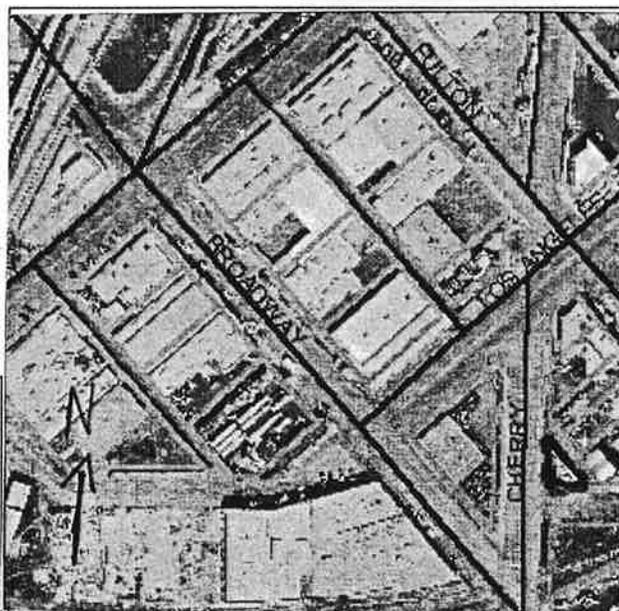
The Fresno Trolley Cars Diner (Standard Diner) is constructed from the only known surviving street cars from the Fresno Traction Company. The first horse car lines in Fresno were developed in 1887 with the purpose of promoting real estate sales on the eastern side of the City (Railroader 248:3). Electric service started in October 1902 under the Fresno City Railway Company with H.A. Voorman, president. In 1903 the Railway Company was renamed the Fresno Traction Company with A.G. Wishon, Manager. By 1905 there were 15.5 miles of track in the system (Harrison in Clough pp248-9). Wishon was also the developer of the Alta Vista Tract subdivision which was planned to illustrate how electricity could made like easier. Wishon constructed a trolley line down the middle of Huntington Boulevard (Rehart 1996:187). In 1910 the Fresno Traction Company was sold to the Southern Pacific Railroad (**see continuation sheet**).

***B12. References:** 1950 Sanborn Map; Fresno County Assessor's Records; Building Permits on file with the Planning and Development Department; Steve Renovich, "Fresno Traction and Fresno Interurban, The Western Railroader 248 (n.d.); Edward Hamm Jr., When Fresno Rode the Rails, 1979; Charles W. Clough, Fresno County in the 20th Century: From 1900 to the 1980s, 1986; Doug Hansen, Fresno Sketchbook, 1991; Catherine Morison Rehart, The Valley's Legends and Legacies, 1996; George A. Kerber, Staff Report 8 April 1980; Chester H. Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture, 1985; Bill Patnaude, "Historic Resources Inventory Form for Fresno Trolley Cars, Fresno Inter-Urban Railway Car" 26 June 1978; Paula Lloyd, "Ticket to the Past" Fresno Bee: Neighbors Cityview 10 July 2003:3.

***B14. Evaluator:** Karana Hattersley-Drayton

***Date of Evaluation:** March 17, 2004

(This space reserved for official comments.)



CONTINUATION SHEET

Primary # _____

HRI# _____

Trinomial _____

*Recorded by: Karana Hattersley-Drayton

*Date 2/2/04

■ Continuation

The era of electric street cars was reasonably short in Fresno. The Fresno Traction Company consistently lost money and in the early 1930s, with rising costs of operation and a poor economy, the Company began to close down its lines. In 1934 the 1912 vintage center-entrance "dragon" cars were declared surplus and placed in dead storage in the car yard at First and Platt (Hamm 1979:37). The last trolley ran out Wishon Avenue on May 21st, 1939 where it met with a bus at a ceremony that marked the transition from "rails to rubber" (Clough 1986:59).

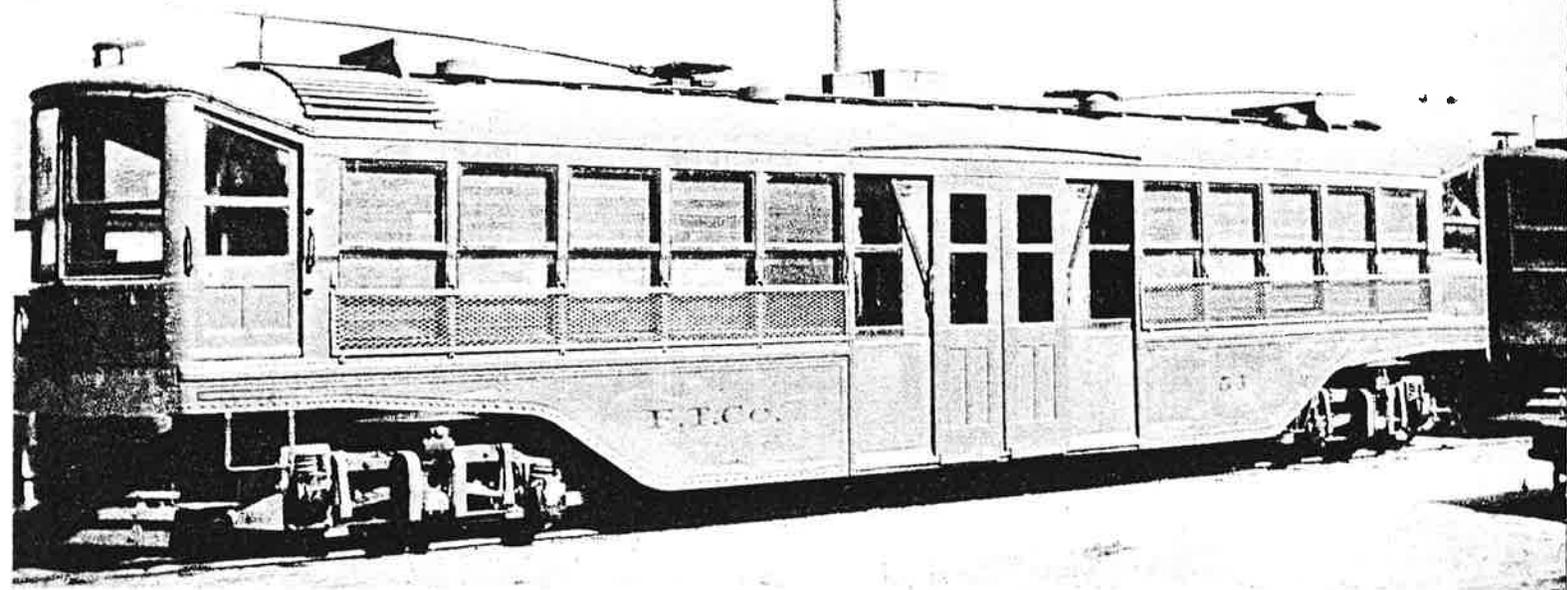
In 1935 one surplus trolley, the Dragon 51, was hauled to the triangular parcel on South Cherry for William Meyers (Assessor's records). The Dragon was a special model with low-set center doors designed so that women in "hobble skirts" could easily board (Hansen 1991:26). Because these models could not easily convert to a one-man operation they were retired early (Hamm 1979:76; see attached). A building permit issued in 1936 indicates that the trolley was remodeled for a café with a kitchen brought to the site from Amador and Broadway. What is unclear is whether or not the 2nd trolley, the Birney model, was brought over in 1935 or placed later. The 1950 Sanborn indicates a footprint of one car with an attached outbuilding, presumably the kitchen.

The trolley diner was initially called the Standard Diner (see page 11 of Hamm, as attached). In 1968 it was renamed "Trolley Car Carole's" and was "a hangout for the coffee and poetry crowd" (Hansen 1991:26). By 1978 when the diner was recorded in the City's architectural survey it had been sheathed in wood siding and had metal awnings over the windows, thus obscuring much of the original fabric. In 1980 The Historic Preservation Commission considered an application for listing the trolley cars on the Local Register. Due to the exterior modifications the application was denied with the caveat that "if the structure's exterior is returned to its original appearance, staff would recommend that the matter be reconsidered ..." (Kerber 2 April 1980).

The current owner purchased the trolley car diner in 2003 and since then has undertaken an ambitious program to research and restore the cars. The exterior paneling has been removed, the metal roof repaired, and the exterior repainted. She has also set about to upgrade the wiring, bathrooms and kitchen facilities and bring them up to current health standards. The plan is to open a café by this summer.

The Fresno Trolley Car diners (the Standard Diner) appears to be eligible to both the California Register of Historical Resources and the Local Register of Historic Resources under criteria 1(i) and 3(iii) as the last surviving vestiges in Fresno of the early 20th century streetcar system (1) and as an example of a particular property type popular in the 1920s and 1930s: the diner (3). Changes of course were made to the cars when they were moved to the site in the 1930s, including a change-out of the double metal doors for heavy wooden ones on the Dragon car. Nevertheless, the diners retain excellent integrity of location, setting (industrial), materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Integrity of design has been somewhat compromised through multiple upgradings and renovations necessary for a café facility. The kitchen, storehouse and bathroom additions, although critical to the success of the diner, are non-contributing elements but tucked around back do not detract from the overall historicity of the resource.

*Hamm, When
Fresno Rode The Rails*



Broadside view of "Dragon" 51 shows graphically why these cars could not be converted to one-man operation, and hence were retired early.

MARK EFFLE COLLECTION

The Arlington Heights line opened for service in 1914, but the extension to Calwa proved abortive. And, by the end of 1915, all plans for Calwa service had been dropped. As a result, the big "dragons" saw most of their service (according to old-timers) on Blackstone, as school trippers in Wishon service, or as crowd carriers to the fairgrounds. Numbers 51-54 were withdrawn from service at the close of 1934, and were scrapped soon after. These ungainly cars had one fatal flaw: their drop-center construction rendered them impossible of conversion to one-man service.

When the new lightweight Birney-type streetcars were first conceived, slightly before America's entry into World War I, cost-conscious transit managers everywhere began investigation of this newest revenue-building miracle. And the SP-controlled Fresno Traction Co. was no exception. To test the radical new design, Fresno Traction ordered five of the Birney cars from the American Car Co., St. Louis. These new single-truckers were placed in service on Fresno Avenue and were immediately successful.

Satisfied with the trial Birneys, Fresno then obtained 12 more of them; but this time the order was placed with the St. Louis Car Co., also of St. Louis. The American car order arrived in 1919, and the St. Louis group in 1920. From 1920 on, these trolleys were the mainstay of the Fresno Street and Blackstone Avenue lines, serving until the 1939 abandonment. Two other Birney types, second-hand equipment from Stockton, California, were transferred to Fresno in 1936 and operated until the end in 1939.

Fresno Traction's Birneys are listed as follows:

CAR NUMBERS	CLASS	LENGTH	TYPE	TRUCKS	BUILDER	DATE
59, 60*	Pass.	28'0"	Birney, closed	Single	St. Louis	1920
61-65	Pass.	28'0"	Birney, closed	Single	American	1919
66-77	Pass.	28'0"	Birney, closed	Single	St. Louis	1920

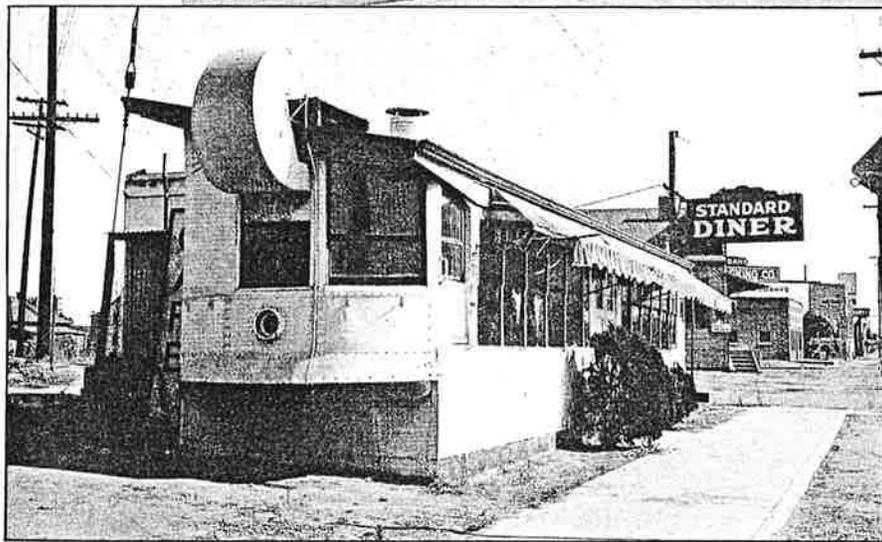
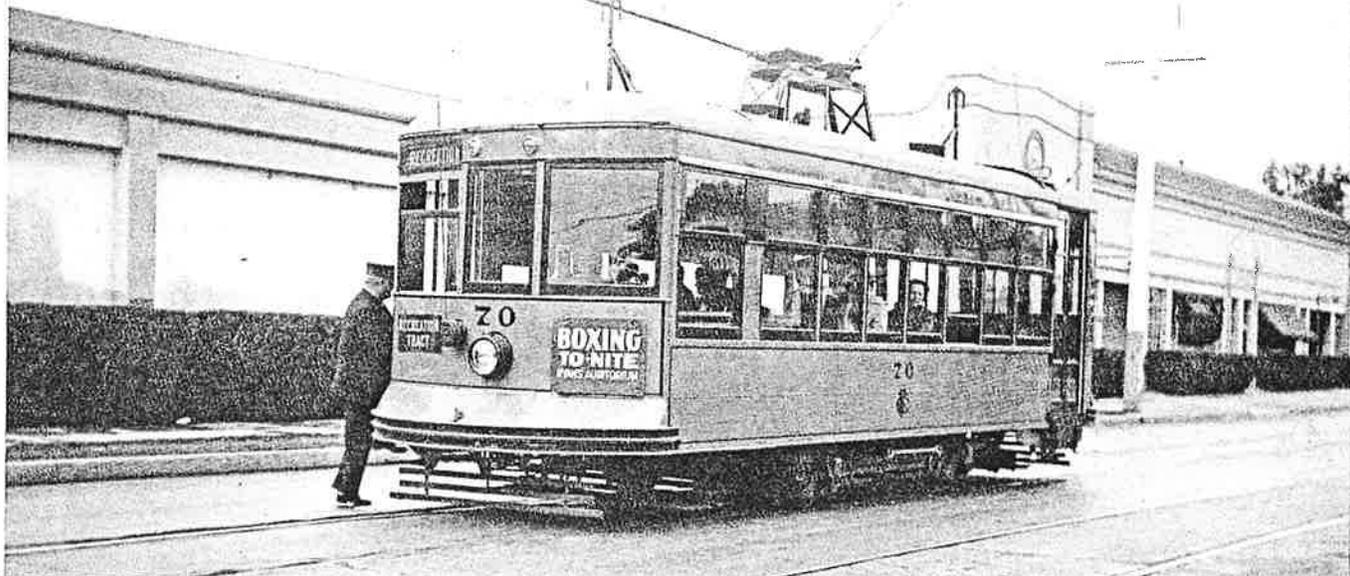
*Obtained from Stockton

The final new equipment purchases for Fresno occurred early in 1924. In that year the company ordered 12 new double-truck Birneys from St. Louis Car Co. These were much larger vehicles. But due to production problems, the builder was not able to immediately supply these cars. As a result, these bigger trolleys did not enter Fresno service until 1925. These ran mostly on the Fortcamp extensions (Roeding, Wishon) and, with the exception of Nos. 81-83 which were sold to Pacific Electric, Los Angeles, in 1933, ran until abandonment. These big cars are listed as:

CAR NUMBERS	CLASS	LENGTH	TYPE	TRUCKS	BUILDER	DATE
81-92	Pass.	42'5"	Birney, closed	Double	St. Louis	1925

After 1934 only the single and double-truck Birneys remained in passenger service. A complete roster follows.

When Fresno Made The Haults, p 11



Car 70 changes crews at the 1st & Platt carbarn, February 25, 1939. Fresno cars carried dash signs advertising major sporting events, dances and the like.

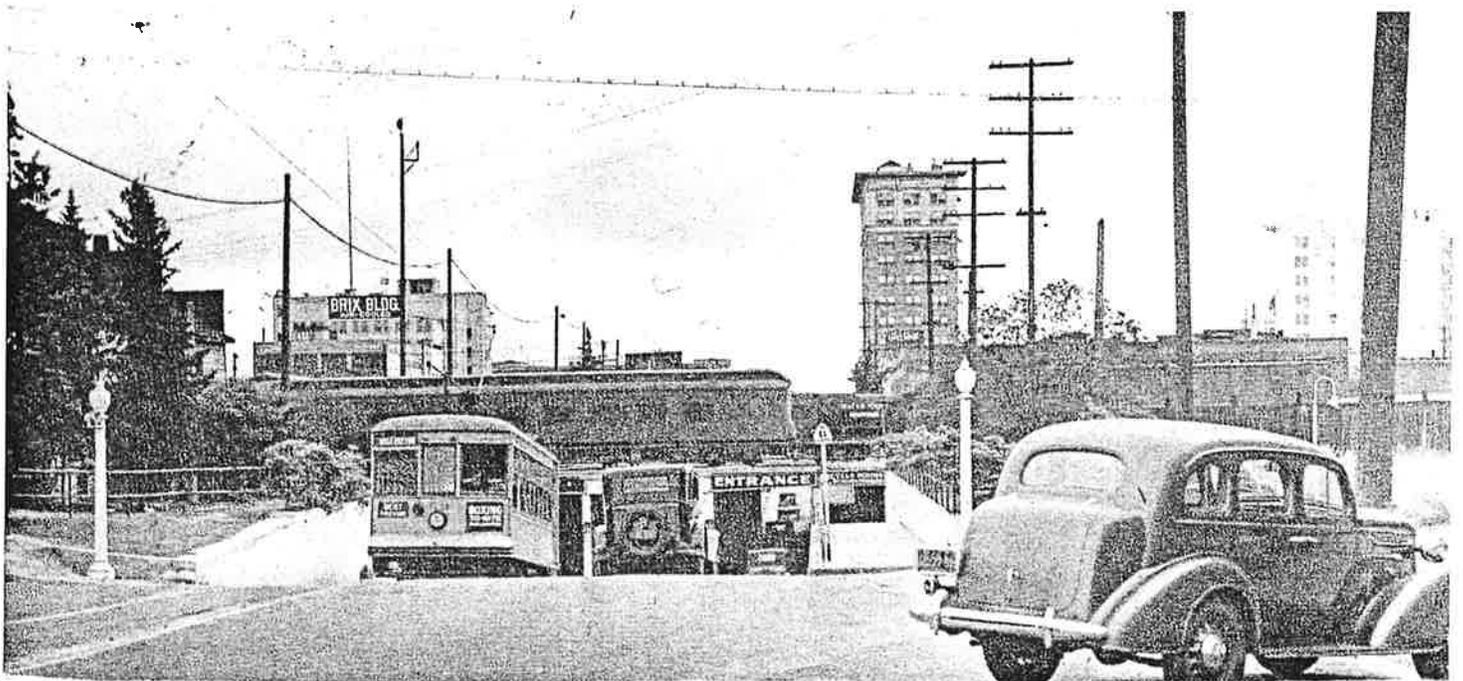
CRAIG RASMUSSEN COLLECTION

Latter-day career as diner was the fate of one of Fresno Traction's ungainly stepless cars.

INTERURBANS

Single-trucker Birney 59 pops out of the Fresno St. railroad subway, bound for West Fresno. View dates from April 1937.

FRESNO BEE



*Recorded by: Karana Hattersley-Drayton, M.A.

*Date: 19 July 2016

■ Update

Birney car upper photo; South end of "Dragon" lower photo July 19, 2016

