



**WESTERN RAILWAY MUSEUM
SUMMER 2016 APPEAL
SN BIRNEY #62
LAFLIN PARK**



The Western Railway Museum has one Birney Safety Car. Today, it is 96 years old. This is its story.

1920-1923 San Diego Electric Railway

Our Birney Car, Sacramento Northern #62, was built by the American Car Company in St. Louis in 1920. It was purchased new by the San Diego Electric Railway as their #301. The picture to the right shows our Birney when it was new in 1920.



The Birney car was designed to solve a problem that San Diego Electric and all other trolley systems in the United States were suffering from in the early part of the 20th century. That problem was how to make money on trolley lines that lacked enough customers to fill a full sized trolley car. What was needed was a car that was small and light weight for minimum purchase cost and low power consumption. For minimum labor cost, the car must be safely operated by one person instead of the 2 man team of conductor and motorman normally required. The Birney car, named after W.O. Birney, the chief engineer of the Stone and Webster Company, was the answer. Beginning in 1915, thousands of Birney cars were produced to very similar designs by all the major streetcar builders in the United States but the most prolific builder was American Car Company of St Louis, who built our car.

San Diego Electric tried the Birney cars for 3 years but the promised operating economies did not work out for them. As a result, in 1923 they sold their Birney cars to the Sacramento Northern Railroad. Perhaps the small town streetcar service provided by the Sacramento Northern would be a better match to the Birney cars.



1923 - 1947 Sacramento Northern Railway

From 1923 to the end of service in 1947, the little fleet of 11 SN Birneys carried passengers in Sacramento, Yuba City-Marysville and Chico. At the end, the four Birney cars of Chico offered the last 5-cent trolley car ride in the United States.

The picture to the left shows our Sacramento Northern Birney #62 posed in Chico, California in 1947. The occasion is an excursion of the Bay Area Electric Railfans. It is a classic

downtown Chico picture from a bygone era. The large building to the right behind the car is the Chico town hall. The automobile approaching on the left is a 1938 Pontiac. When the Sacramento Northern abandoned streetcar service, a small group of railfans led by Eldon Lucy purchased #62 from the junk dealer for \$50.00.

Birney cars were used in small cities up and down the Central Valley from Bakersfield and Fresno in the south to Marysville and Chico in the north. They were used in Santa Cruz, San Jose and Oakland. Of all the hundreds of Birneys that ran in northern and central California, only #62 survived.

1948 - 1951 Bay Area Electric Railway Association

Birney #62 did not stay in Chico for long. In March of 1948, it was loaded on a Sacramento Northern flatcar and delivered from Chico to Oakland. About 100 miles into its journey, it passed by a small parcel of land in rural Solano County shown on the railroad maps as Rio Vista Junction. It went seven miles past Rio Vista Junction to the Sacramento River, crossed the river on the ferry boat Ramon, and emerged from the Oakland hills near Lake Temescal.



The picture above tells many stories. The flat car and box cars have wood bodies. By 1947, such cars were considered obsolete and would not be allowed to travel cross country. Their use was restricted to the tracks of the railroad that owned them, in this case the Sacramento Northern. The shiny boxcar behind the Birney looks brand new. In fact, it is 30 years old, having been built for the parent company Western Pacific in 1918. The reason it looks so nice in this picture is that in 1947, the WP turned over 27 of these 1918 boxcars to their subsidiary, the Sacramento Northern. As a result of the change in ownership, the railroad repaired and repainted all 27 cars, so the #2312 is fresh out of the shops. Today, the Museum collection includes not only the Birney car, but an Oakland and Antioch flat car similar to the one in the picture and an SN boxcar #2314, only two numbers different from the one pictured.



1948 - 1957 Bay Area Electric Railway Association

Once the Birney car arrived in Oakland, it needed storage. The picture above shows the Birney with the rest of the Museum collection stored outside in the Yerba Buena Yards of the Oakland Terminal Railway. Like a distant relative who came to town to visit for a few days and ended up sleeping on your couch for years, the Museum collection was to end up staying at the Oakland Terminal for 12 years, long past its welcome. The survival of all this equipment is the result of the incredible

indulgence of the Oakland Terminal Railway management towards our organization, as we had nowhere else to store the collection.

March 1948 Bay Area Electric Railway Excursion

Our Birney car in Oakland on a Bay Area Electric Railway Association excursion on the Key System at Ashby & San Pablo loop in 1948. In the background is Key System streetcar #359, which is long gone, but at the Museum today, visitors can ride on sister car #352



January 1951 San Francisco Excursion

Because the Birney was stored in Oakland, we were able to arrange a tour of the car on the Municipal Railway lines in San Francisco. The car was transferred from Oakland to San Francisco on a Southern Pacific flat car. San Francisco never purchased or used Birney cars, but this series of pictures shows our Birney on a memorable tour of the Municipal Railway lines in January 1951.

Here is the Birney at Playland at the Beach at the end of the B Geary line. Today, Playland is 45 years gone, replaced by condominiums. The B Geary streetcar line is long gone, replaced by busses in 1956. But Birney #62 is still with us.



Here is the Birney in downtown San Francisco on the Geary Street line at the corner of Jones and Geary making way for an O'Farrell and Hyde Street cable car. The O'Farrell Hyde street cable car lines was torn up in 1954. The Geary Street streetcar line was torn up in 1956. But today, Birney #62 is still with us.

1957 Marysville

The end was near for the Key System in Oakland and in 1958 the Key was abandoned. But in Marysville and Yuba City the last remnants of the Sacramento Northern still switched freight cars through the streets of the city using electric locomotives. In 1957, the Birney car left Oakland for Marysville on a Sacramento Northern train. For the next seven years while in Marysville, the generous cooperation of the railroad again allowed the Birney to be used for excursions. In 1960, the Central Valley Development Corporation, made up of Museum members, purchased Rio Vista Junction. The Birney car stayed in Marysville until time and change again caught up. In 1964, one year before the last electric locomotive operation in Marysville, the Birney car finally arrived at Rio Vista Junction.



1971 Rio Vista Junction

When Car barn 1 was erected at the Museum, the Birney car was one of the first cars inside under cover. Here is a picture taken in 1971 of the crew involved in the first attempt at repair of the car roof. At this time the car was already 51 years old and showing its age. Today, another 45 years have passed.



Your help is needed to make a difference!

As this is written, our Birney is stored in Car barn 1 out of service. Ninety-six years of use have taken their toll. Our Birney does not need a major restoration but it needs significant work to address 96 years of wear and tear. Your help is needed to make a difference and return Birney #62 to good health and regular service.

Repairs are budgeted at \$20,000 and include:

- Mechanical work to replace worn out suspension parts, worn motor bearings and other components.
- Professional preventive maintenance for the motors to return them to top condition
- Repairs to the body and roof

We want to return the Birney to active service in better than ever condition. You can help make this dream a reality. Your generous donation will make the difference. Thank you for your support.



WESTERN RAILWAY MUSEUM LAFLIN PARK



The Western Railway Museum needs your help to
upgrade and beautify our Laflin Park

Undeveloped Land in 1960

View of the land we purchased in 1960. This view is looking south from the area around what today is Laflin Station towards the general vicinity of Car barn #1, and shows the area which would become Laflin Park. The Sacramento Northern Railway mainline is to the right.

The first cars to arrive were Key System #987 and Portland Traction #4001. Laflin Park was named after Addison Laflin, one of the founding members of the Bay Area Electric Railroad Association.



Laflin Park early 1970's

The transformation from an open field has begun. Trees have been planted and the park is coming to life. Individual volunteers planted the trees and watered them by hand using buckets to carry water to the trees!

In the background you can see Car barn #1. The view in this picture is from the same vantage point as the picture above. What a difference!

Laflin Park Now – What a transformation!

Volunteers still water the trees and lawns by hand but now they use hoses and sprinklers to keep the park green and attractive for our members and visitors. Looking at all three pictures on this page you can see the remarkable efforts volunteers made to create our beautiful park.





Western Railway Museum
5848 State Highway 12
Suisun City, CA 94585

Looking for a place to hold a birthday party, picnic event, or social gathering in a scenic location with trolleys in the background? Have you considered Laflin Park at the Western Railway Museum? If you are, we need your help to make the park even more inviting and functional for hosting groups, events, parties, and gatherings.

Laflin Park has changed substantially over the years as you can see in the photos. However, the years have taken their toll on the infrastructure supporting the park. Plumbing and electrical services are obsolete and need to be replaced. The streetlights no longer work. Because of the recent drought, our beautiful park has suffered serious damage to many of our trees and other plants. We need to take steps to upgrade the park and restore its former well-groomed condition through improvements to our irrigation and electrical systems.



Laflin Park Needs Your Help!



We have a unique opportunity to make some significant improvements to Laflin Park that will enhance the visitor experience by:

- Making it easier to maintain the lawns and greenery
- Bringing our water system up to code with backflow preventers
- Saving on water and pump use
- Opening new revenue producing opportunities with a more attractive park
- Providing electrical facilities throughout the park to restore/improve walkway lighting and provide electric outlets in selected areas for special events.

The unique opportunity comes from a commitment from a vendor to donate the plumbing components needed to replace the current irrigation system with a modern system using automatic timers. The timers will irrigate the park based on how much water is needed due to current weather patterns. This will remove the labor intensive manual process of moving hoses and sprinklers throughout the park that often results in too much wasted water in some areas and not enough water in other areas. Museum volunteers will provide the labor to dig the trenches, install the irrigation components, and connect the timers to the new sprinkler system.

Irrigation and Electrical replacements estimated at \$15,000 in addition to donated irrigation plumbing components and volunteer labor.