

## A MASKED ROBBER

Boldly Stops Two Castro-Street Cars.

THE PASSENGERS STAMPEDE.

He Secured Only a Watch and a Few Dollars.

FINALLY ESCAPED BY RUNNING.

A Third Car Would Probably Have Been Tackled but for a Police Officer's Presence.

A daring highwayman played a star engagement in the holding-up line on Castro street last evening.

Not only did he go through two cars of the Castro-street line, one after the other, but he would have performed the same operation on a third car had it not been for a timely warning given him by a conductor.

At 9 o'clock, just as car 105, going south, had got between Twenty-second and Alvarado streets on Castro, a tall, slenderly built man, wearing a black slouch hat and with his face half covered with a handkerchief, sprang upon the dummy [the grip car, which grabbed the cable], and presenting a pistol at Gripman Joseph Mears ordered him to stop the car.

Mears did not stop to argue the matter, but immediately obeyed the order.

"Now, give me what stuff you have," commanded the man with the pistol. Mears said he had no money and just then the conductor, W.J. Trubbold, came forward to see what the stoppage was for.

The masked man covered him, too, with the weapon and called upon him for money. "I've only got 15 cents," he asserted.

"Hand it over anyway," commanded the robber and Trubbold did so.

"Now, for the passengers," remarked the highwayman, who did not seem to consider it anything strange that the conductor did not have any more money.

There were four passengers aboard, but realizing that the car was being held up they dashed out the back door and escaped in the darkness.

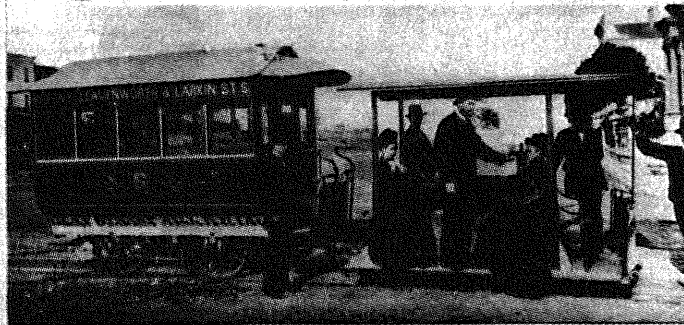
The highwayman swore vigorously when he perceived what had happened, and with a flourish of the pistol he ordered the gripman to go on with his car.

He then walked down Castro street, with his pistol in hand, toward car No. 121 that was approaching. He did not appear to be in any special hurry, and conducted himself very coolly.



## CABLE CARS 1873-1906

A postcard history from the San Francisco Archives  
Official issue, set of ten



The earliest cable cars, such as this 1873 model on the Clay Street Hill Railroad, had two parts: the grip car or "dummy," and the trailer. Riders sat in both. Photo courtesy S.F. Cable Car Museum

Two of the passengers from car 105 had in running down the street come up with the approaching car and at once notified those on board that a highwayman was abroad in the neighborhood. There were at least a dozen passengers on the car and they immediately inaugurated a stampede. In the midst of it the highwayman sauntered up, still holding his pistol in his hand.

He swung himself on the dummy and covered the gripman, W. Hamilton. The latter is an old soldier and does not get "rattled" very easily. He had prepared himself for the robber by grasping a heavy iron wrench. He stated afterward that it had been his intention to get a blow in on the robber as soon as he should get on the dummy.

The man who was after other people's money observed his action, though, and cocking his pistol with an ominous click he ordered him to drop the wrench. Conductor Grethers in the meantime had turned his money from his pockets into a box under one of the car-seats and then dashed off down the road, his intention being, he said, to save the next car that was coming up the hill from being stood up. He did not know whether there was one robber or two or three.

Still keeping the gripman covered, the highwayman told two or three of the passengers to hand over their valuables. One man gave him a purse containing \$2.70, and another young man passed him a silver watch and several silver dollars.

The other passengers slipped away before the robber could get around to the rear platform, and all he secured came from the two dummy passengers. The gripman escaped being robbed by saying that he had nothing. The approach of a car going toward town also frightened the robber off. He sprang off to one side of the road and hastened down the grade toward Twentieth street. The third car was stopped by the

conductor of No. 121 and the situation of affairs was explained. While the conductor was making his explanations the highwayman, pistol in hand, hove in sight, and the conductor cried out, "There he is, now."

There happened to be a police officer on this car, and he started toward the approaching man. Whether it had been the robber's intention to stand up the third car or not was not known. When he saw the tall form of the officer bearing down on him he changed his course and ran off at a rapid rate, going in the direction of town. The officer followed but lost track of him in the darkness. Notice was at once sent to police headquarters and in a very short while there were five or six officers on the scene of the affair and they began to scour the vicinity for traces of the bold robbers, but they were unable to learn anything.

"I never saw such a nery fellow," said Gripman Hamilton. "He ordered me to stop the car, and then seeing that I had the iron wrench he said to put it down or he would kill me. He was a man, I judge, 45 years of age and of a florid countenance, although I could not see the lower part of his face on account of his having a dirty white handkerchief tied around it. I asked him what he wanted to rob a poor man who was working for a living for."

"Got to do it," he replied. "I need the money mighty bad." I didn't have any for him, and then he looked after the dummy passengers. I don't know how much he got, although it could not have been over \$10, besides the watch. If I could have got a

show I would have banged him with that wrench. He wore dark blue clothes as near as I could judge, and his eyes were shaded by a wide-brimmed black slouch hat. My conductor threw all his money under the seat before he ran back to the other car. The fellow was not flustered the least bit, and I suppose he was going after the third car. From all I can learn he did not make much of a haul on the first two cars."

On account of the manner in which they stampeded, it is impossible to give any of the names of the passengers who were on the cars. Even those who gave up money and a watch refused to divulge their identity.

The spot where the robbery occurred is an ideal one for any such nefarious work. On one side is a steep bluff extending for two blocks and on the other are vacant lots. It is a dismal and dark place, and altogether suited for such a purpose. □

## If You Think It's Tough Riding The Muni Now...

Former 22nd Street resident Kevin Mullen, a retired deputy police chief, dug up this story from the *Daily Morning Call*, "the newspaper of the working man" 100 years ago in San Francisco. Our reprint has slightly larger type, but the headlines and punctuation are exactly as they were on June 24, 1894.

Mullen arrived in Noe Valley as a frisky 5-year-old in 1941—a year too late to ride the Castro Street cablecar over the hill separating Noe and Eureka valleys. But the tracks still led to the old car barn at Castro and Jersey. And the days of streetcar stickups were fresh in people's minds.

"Train robbing was a big deal in the late 19th century," says Mullen, who now writes about criminal justice and San Francisco history. "We think of it as a rural thing, but back then it did have its urban dimension."

The past is often seen "through the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia," he adds. "It's easy to forget that urban life has always been challenging." So go on and get your Muni pass. □



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