

IRS campaign to battle refund fraud

In an effort to combat refund fraud, the Internal Revenue Service will be taking a closer look at the Social Security numbers taxpayers put on their 1994 tax returns.

The IRS will compare the Social Security numbers of the taxpayer, spouse and all dependents listed on the tax return with a file from the Social Security Administration, according to IRS district director Tom Kuntz.

Taxpayers who have incorrect or missing Social Security numbers may receive a delay in the return of their refund, he said.

Last year, the IRS contacted nearly 1 million

Americans — including almost 2,500 Montanans — regarding invalid Social Security numbers on their tax returns. While many were simple, honest errors, some were intentionally fraudulent, Kuntz said.

The goal of the new "revenue protection strategy" is to prevent fraudulent tax returns from entering the system, he said.

The IRS believes much of the filing fraud that occurred last year involved returns claiming refundable tax credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit or the motor fuel excise tax credit.

The problem has increased in recent years, as

the Earned Income Tax Credit has increased from \$400 to a current maximum of \$2,300, Social Security Administration representative Tina Longmire said.

"The incentive is there more so than it has been in the past," she said.

An estimated 13 percent of the American taxpayers who filed for the Earned Income Tax Credit last year intentionally claimed too much, costing the government approximately \$183 million, Kuntz said.

(More on IRS, page 7A)

Thirsty thief follows milk man around

Either Cat Woman is alive and well in Helena or a thief was really thirsty last week.

Someone followed the Lazy Daisy Dairy delivery truck around town and stole \$55.38 worth of milk off peoples' door steps, according to Capt. Mark Lerum, Helena Police Department.

Strange as it may seem, this has happened before, said Lerum.

The incident is still under investigation.

6A

HELENA

TROLLEY LINES

On September 8, 1994, the "Quarries" column told the story of Helena's early trolley lines. The first horsedrawn coaches appeared in 1886 to link a growing Helena business district with the Northern Pacific Railroad depot at the end of Helena Avenue. This run marked the first street-railway transportation anywhere in Montana.

During the late 1880s, Helena real-estate developers financed several trolley companies to connect their additions with the commercial district. Other entrepreneurs soon invested in lines to the Broadwater Hotel and Natatorium, Fort Harrison, Montana University in the valley, and the smelter in East Helena. The city's urban network first electrified in 1890. Within five years, cars drawn by horses and by steam engines had disappeared from Helena's streets.

To survive financially, the various streetcar companies consolidated in 1894. Yet even unification could not preserve local control of the service. In 1905 Helenans avoided bankruptcy by selling the operation to J.G. White and Company of New York City. That corporation immediately reconstituted the business as the Helena Light and Railway Company (HL&R) and incorporated it in Connecticut.

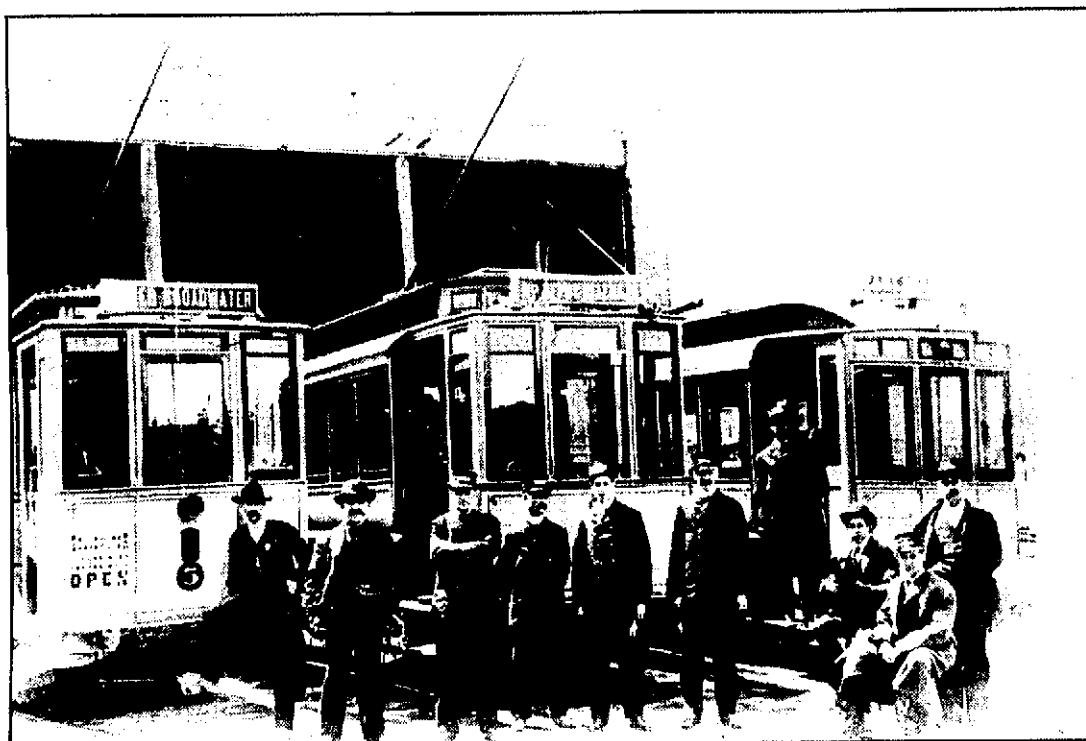
From its immediate predecessors, the HL&R inherited the unusual situation of owning three of the city's major public-service utilities: electricity; natural gas; streetcars. Few Helenans questioned this control of services by an out-of-state concern. On the contrary, the Helena Light and Railway Company immediately drew widespread local support for its reduction of the ten-cent ticket to a five-cent fare.

DURING THE DECADE PRIOR to World War I, the HL&R modified route alignments, maintained excellent relations with the local chapter of the Amalgamated Street Railway Employees Union, and added new electric cars to a growing fleet. In 1907, the company's rolling stock included 20 cars: 13 closed; 4 open; 2 work trailers; 1 snow plow. The 17 passenger cars traveled 373,094 miles over 18.8 miles of company track, carrying 1,820,657 customers. Helena's population at the time barely exceeded 12,000.

Automobiles had begun operating on Helena's streets in about 1905. By 1909 they carried passengers for hire, thus competing directly with the trolleys. Although this auto competition proved profitable only during "State Fair Week" in September, it foreshadowed difficulties for Helena's streetcar system.

In 1911, the HL&R completed a new branch line to the Fairgrounds, including the construction of an underpass on Henderson Avenue beneath the Northern Pacific tracks. The company built an impressive new car barn and shop — "the finest in Montana" — in 1912, at the intersection of Main and Cutler (currently a nondescript spot between the Public Library and the Federal Building). Here it reconditioned its entire fleet to meet Progressive safety legislation passed by the State Legislature.

THE 1913, MONTANA Legislature also made the Board of Railroad Commissioners the ex-officio "Public Service Commission (PSC) of Montana," with jurisdiction over public utilities. The Helena Light and Rail-



A trio of Helena Power and Light Company's closed "single truckers," posed in front of the old Helena Electric Railway car barn about 1900. Note that no two cars are exactly alike — a vestige of the patchwork history of trolley ownership in Helena during the 1890s.

Photos courtesy of Montana Historical Society

The fortunes of Helena's street railway ebb and ebb

DAVE WALTER



MORE QUARRIES FROM LAST CHANCE GULCH

way Company thereafter dealt with the PSC on all issues regarding increased fares, line changes and abandonments, accident investigations, and equipment modifications. Interestingly, the new commission tacitly approved the unusual monopoly that the HL&R held on the electricity, gas, and trolley utilities in Helena.

At least some of that approval resulted from the pride that Helenans voiced in their streetcar network. The *Helena Daily Independent* (never a paper to mince words about

a reliable advertiser) noted in its "State Fair Edition" on September 21, 1913:

"The company must be reckoned among the agencies that have exerted an influence in the upbuilding of Helena and in the placing of it in the forefront of wide-awake and progressive Western municipalities. There are few, if any, towns in the West that can boast of a better-equipped street-railway system, operated by a more courteous, accommodating, and competent group of men."

EITHER AUTOMOBILE COMPETITION or inordinately rising expenses ultimately would have doomed Helena's streetcars. Because these two factors combined, the demise proved quite rapid.

In 1913, the State of Montana first licensed automobiles. Helenans registered 242 cars, and the Helena Cab Company recorded nine autos. Only four years later (1917), Helena citizens registered 1,088 vehicles; East Helenans licensed 76 more; the HL&R listed two Fords and a Hudson! The movement toward a more immediate, more flexible means of travel began to build. And the HL&R continued to run on a five-cent fare.

Throughout their existence, however, Helena's streetcar lines represented more than economics. Local groups chartered the open cars to travel the city at Christmastime, serenading neighborhoods with carols, entire clubs rode the trolleys to events at the Broadwater Plunge; Fourth of July celebrations at Central Park (northwest of the Green Meadow Country Club, along Ten Mile Creek) drew "specials" draped in flags. The sights and the sounds of the urban streetcar assured Helenans of their place in a modern, progressive America.

AS OPERATING EXPENSES increased following World War I, the Helena Light and Railway Company annually ran at a deficit. It attempted to abandon unprofitable lines, only to meet opposition from the PSC. It proposed ticket increases, only to have those proposals slashed by the PSC. It improved its equipment, only to suffer a flurry of passenger-accident lawsuits.

As a result, HL&R customers soon realized that their electric and gas payments were subsidizing the trolley system. For instance, in 1921, the HL&R's overall gross revenue was \$77,085, yet the street-railway deficit reached \$38,658. Similarly in 1923, the entire company showed a gross income of \$93,280, although the trolley line lost \$33,247.

If the demise of Helena's streetcar system needed a symbolic event, it received one on December 16, 1924. At 11:20 a.m. — in a blinding blizzard, with temperatures well below zero — Great Northern steam locomotive No. 236 from Butte hit broadside the outbound East Helena/Smelter streetcar at the grade crossing just northeast of the Helena city limits.

(More on STREET, page 7A)



The Helena Light and Traction Company's famous "Big Open" car (otherwise called the "Number 12"), posed in front of the Broadwater Natatorium in about 1904.

Helenet: Computer network

Computer power: Possibilities of local network are endless, organizers say

QUESTIONNAIRE TODAY ON 4A

By CAROLYNN FARLEY
IR Staff Writer

A group of Helena residents wants to expand its neighbors' minds and opportunities by opening the doors to information through computer networking.

Helenet, the brain child of Todd Murphy and Marshall Mayer, would provide information on a wide range of topics to tri-county residents who have personal computers and modems in their homes, according to Murphy.

The system would be basically the same as Internet, except on a smaller scale, he said.

"Our goal is to get more and more people computer literate out there," said Murphy. "This would be a good way to get them to understand the power of the computer."

MURPHY SAID THE POSSIBILITIES for the system are endless and could include information on local government, non-profit directories, travel/tourism, community calendars, real estate and more.

"You might be able to order a pizza or groceries without leaving your house," he said. "There is even a possibility people could get their newspaper delivered over their computer screen."

Such a system could benefit everyone because organizers intend to provide services people want, said Murphy.

Murphy said he is unsure whether organizers will charge a fee to subscribe to Helenet.

"We know we need to get the money somewhere, but we just don't know where it is going to come from at this time," he said.

Murphy and Mayer intend to apply to the Helena City Commission for \$2,500 to get the network off the ground.

ACCORDING TO THE ASSISTANT to the city manager, Lynn Moon, city commission members have information about Helenet, but no official meetings on the subject have been held.

(More on HELENET, page 7A)

SKI REPORT

Update of conditions at area ski resorts. Information is current as of December 28.

FOR ROAD CONDITIONS, 1-800-226-7623

SKI AREA PHONE	Base (Bottom/Top)	NEW SNOW	% OPEN	Conditions*
Great Divide 449-3746	12/24	1"	60	PP Open Fri - Sun
Big Mountain (406)862-3511	25/62	6"	100	PP Open Daily
Big Sky (406)955-4211	40/61	0"	100	PP Open Daily
Bridger Bowl (406)587-2111	40/55	0"	100	PP Open Daily
Discovery Basin (406)563-2184	27/50	0"	100	PP Open Daily
Showdown (406)236-5522	24/27	5"	95	PP Open Daily
Snowbowl (406)549-9777	22/53	3"	95	P Open Daily
Red Lodge (406)446-2610	30/40	0"	100	MG Open Daily

* CONDITIONS KEY: P - powder; PP - packed powder; FP - firm pack; HP - hard pack; MG - machine groomed; S - spring snow; NA - not available.