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# Clayton Trolley Line Revived in Book by Washington University Graduate

Washington University graduate Walter Eschbach donated a copy of his new book to the Clayton History Society on Thursday.

By [Nate Birt](#) | [Email the author](#) | 5:55 am

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Walter Eschbach holds his newly published book chronicling the history of Clayton's trolley line Thursday at 3 Oak Knoll Park. Credit [Alyssa Stahr](#)

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[Washington University](#) graduate Walter Eschbach remembers riding the trolley that traveled through [Clayton](#) as a student in the late 1940s. The subject of streetcars so intrigued him that he turned a first-year paper into a decades-long research project, published as a book earlier this year.

"My first year at Washington University was 1946," said Eschbach, 85, a [Sunset Hills](#) resident. "I (had come) home from the war. And the English professor said, 'Well, I want a 500-word English theme about what interests you the most—women, street cars, anything.'"

He turned in the paper at the end of the semester and spend the following years adding interviews he conducted with people who had connections to the Clayton line.

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On Thursday, Eschbach visited the carriage house at [Oak Knoll Park](#) to present a copy of his book—[Clayton 04: A Kaleidoscope of Streetcar Memories](#)—to Sarah Umlauf of the [Clayton History Society](#). The book will be one of the prizes at [Saturday's Clayton Century Foundation fundraiser](#) benefiting efforts to chronicle the city's past.

Clayton celebrates its centennial next year.

Eschbach's book explores the 42 stops made by the Clayton Car Line on Route No. 4 from 1921 to 1949, when the line operated. The trolley stopped in front of Washington University before traveling down Skinker Boulevard and then west on Wydown Boulevard, whose stone shelters served as stops along the way. Its route extended 5 1/2 miles west to Ladue.

The enclosed trolley held about 25 people. Commuters included the elderly, black residents, students and house workers, Eschbach said. The trolley had rattan seats, which often snagged women's silk stockings. It also featured glass windows, a stove and a sandbox whose contents were spread over icy and leaf-covered rails to ensure safe travel.

A replica of the trolley is stationed at the [Museum of Transportation](#) in [Kirkwood](#). A similar car operated in St. Louis city at [The Chase Park Plaza](#) and at Jefferson Barracks, he said.

How would St. Louis look if trolleys had never operated?

"I don't think Clayton would be here," Eschbach said. The trolley line brought people to the city for its courthouse, where they got married and filed death certificates. Development grew from there.

His daughter, Carolyn Bottila, also visited Oak Knoll Park on Thursday. In an interview earlier this week, Bottila described the efforts of she and other family members to encourage the book's progress.

"Finally we said, 'Dad, get this book published,'" Bottila said. Her mother, Nancy (Davidson) Eschbach, graduated in 1945 from [Clayton High School](#) and also rode the trolley.

Eschbach responded that he needed to proofread the book, which he did before moving ahead with publication.

"People that have lived in Clayton all their life will recognize a lot of the names that have contributed (information) over the years," Bottila said.

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