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[Entertainment News](#)  
[Movie Listings](#)  
[Observation](#)  
[Bridal Connection](#)

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[Local](#)  
[Bay Area](#)  
[State](#)  
[National](#)  
[Business](#)  
[Obituaries](#)  
[Weather](#)  
[Archives](#)

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[Column](#)  
[Oakland Raiders](#)  
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## But This Is Chico: Trolley helps join fashion dreams, transportation for '40s youth

By STEVE BROWN

It was 1947, the last year the Sacramento Northern trolley system would run in Chico. Patricia Darrow, who lived at Fifth and Oleander avenues, was in the seventh grade at Central Elementary School at First and Hazel streets, now the site of the Meriam Library on the Chico State University campus.

"In the seventh grade, it wasn't cool to ride a bike to school. My Dad used our '42 Chevy for work and it was a long walk, so I gratefully rode the trolley," she said.

"I remember Dior's New Look' was in and I had to fight my swirling skirt, cinched waistband and ballerina flats to grab the brass pole and get onto the wooden steps without dropping my books and lunchbag. I got off in front of the old Greyhound Bus Depot at the corner of First and Main, cut through the gas station on the triangle and hurried past the college. I had to beat the bell because we were marked down for lateness and, in those days, a good attendance record was almost as vital as being neat and clean.

"On the rare mornings I was early, I treated myself to a detour to peek into a small shop across from Parker's Hardware, near Barth's Sporting Goods. The shop sold used movie star clothes. Like most red-blooded Americans in the '40s, I was wild about movies. You wouldn't believe how the very thought of seeing Linda Darnell's old dress thrilled me.

"I can't remember ever going into the store, and it wasn't in business very long, but it certainly made going to school more interesting.

"To spare the expense of a round-trip fare, I usually walked home from school. Today, I live on The Esplanade and can see the trolley route from our front windows. It would be fun to flash back, and wave to myself, all dolled up, riding that cute, rattling trolley, just like Judy Garland in 1942's Meet Me in St. Louis."

This recollection expresses nostalgia not only for Chico's vanished trolley line, but for downtown landmarks that now exist only in memory. I liked the movie references. 1947 was the year "Magic Town," starring Jimmy Stewart, was released. Several scenes were shot in Chico, including Stewart's arrival at the Southern Pacific Train Depot.

If you have stories about riding Chico's trolley system, which was in business from 1904 to 1947, I invite you to send them to me either by e-mail to sbrown@chicoer.com or by mail to Steve Brown, c/o Enterprise-Record, P.O. Box, 9, Chico, CA 95927. I want to thank those of you who have already sent stories. I hope to turn them into a series of columns over the next couple of months.

Two members of Sons in Retirement (SIRS) recently told me that one of Chico's trolleys is on display at the Western Railway Museum east of Fairfield. The group recently went there as part of a "mystery trip."

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- [Kentucky Derby](#)
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- [Black History](#)
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- [Super Bowls](#)
- [Space Exploration](#)
- [Mars](#)
- [2004 Auto Show](#)
- [Mad Cow Disease](#)

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- [Observation](#)
- [E-mail It to the E-R](#)
- [Opinions/Editorial](#)
- [Letters to the Print Editor](#)

**Local Living**

- [Features](#)
- [Column](#)

Many Chicoans seem to clamor for specific businesses to come to town. Trader Joe's is an obvious example. And then there are some businesses that many people feel are wrong for Chico. I like to focus on businesses that are already here that are just right.

Lyon Books, which opened early this year next to the Post Office on Fifth Street, is one of them. It's exactly the kind of business that can help turn City Plaza into a vortex of downtown energy. But more importantly, it gives downtown a locally owned bookstore with a personable and attentive staff and a thoughtfully chosen selection of new and used books. If you don't see the book you want, the staff will order it for you and do whatever it takes to make sure it gets into your hands.

The way to get rid of undesirable businesses is to boycott them, so I suggest just the opposite for Lyon. Call it a shop-in. Book lovers should patronize this business on a regular basis to browse, of course, but also to spend money there. Judging by the popularity of the weekly Friends of the Library book sale, Chico has hundreds of book lovers. They should include Lyon on their regular book-hunting circuit.

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[↑ RETURN TO TOP](#)

**Go to Section**