

A History of
Wenham's Streetcars
From 1885 to 1934

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Wenham streetcar service began in mid 1886. Service ran from the Wenham-Hamilton town line to the Beverly/Salem swing bridge. (06/13/1894)
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum

WENHAM'S STREETCARS

The 19th century was coming to an end, and people in the rural areas no longer wanted to travel by horse and have all the work associated with owning a horse. Cities, such as Salem and Beverly, now had horse-drawn streetcars and the same companies, that provided this service, offered to extend their lines to the nearby small towns.

In Wenham, plans for a streetcar railway line began in September 1885. The Naumkeag * Street Railway Company, of Salem, petitioned the Wenham Selectman ** for a franchise that would extend its streetcar tracks from the Beverly line to the Wenham-Hamilton town line. The tracks were to run alongside Main Street. ²

The petition was approved at a special town meeting, held by the Selectmen, on October 25. Soon after, the Naumkeag Street Railway began to lay tracks, which were spiked to the ties, through 4 in. high steel chairs.

* *Naumkeag*: Name comes from the Indian people that lived in the area, when settlers first came to this country. Naumkeag Street Railway Co. was in operation from 1875-1896.

** 1885 Wenham Selectman were: John Gentlee, John I. Durgin, and James T. Brown

The rails were laid 4-ft 8.5-in. apart, the same as railroad specifications. Stone-paved beds were filled between the rails to protect the hooves of the horses.²

The first section of tracks, into Wenham, ran on the right-hand side of the road: the section from the Beverly line to the top of Pond Hill, opposite the Waters' Gateway (*now Great Pond Road*). However, from that point, the tracks crossed over to the left-hand side of the road, as they proceeded through the town, to the Wenham-Hamilton line. Since there were many stores on the right side of Main Street, it was decided to put the tracks on the left side, and not directly in front of the shops, Town Hall and the fire company building.²

On the corner of Main and Arbor, the streetcar company built, beginning in December 1885, a car barn and a horse stable. The two-story car barn was 100 ft long by 38 ft. wide. Next to it was a two-story stable, which was about the same size (*100 ft x 35 ft*). The stable was large enough to lodge 40 horses. It also had a cellar, where there was a horse-powered treadmill, which pumped water, for the horses, to gravity-fed storage tanks. Next to the barn there was a small office shed. At the back of the lot, there was a house for the manager and his family. The stable and barn were on the site of the old Dodge tavern. The last tavern owner being John Thorne Dodge.²

Early in 1886, with the completion of the first section of tracks, limited service began between Wenham pond and the Beverly/Salem swing bridge. On May 26, 1886, streetcar service, along Main St., passed the central cemetery, the Kemble mansion (*now The Maples*), Monument Square, the First Church, and extending to Wenham depot.²

The first horse-drawn streetcar rattled down Main Street, filled with company officials, selectmen and important guests. A reception followed at the Wenham Town Hall.²

Daily streetcar service, from Wenham, started at 7 am and ran hourly in the morning, and, in the afternoon, half-hourly. The last car left Salem, for Wenham, at 10 pm. Service ran everyday.²

The horse-drawn streetcar had a driver and a conductor, both dressed in dark blue uniforms, with long coats having bright brass buttons, vests and visored caps. The first Wenham conductor was Jake Barnes' (*1867-1947*).²

It took an hour to make the streetcar run from Wenham to the Beverly/Salem bridge. The fare was 10 cents.⁴

Streetcar use was high right from the start. There were no designated pick-up and drop-off sites: people would stand by the road and wave down the car and, then, tell the conductor where they wanted to go. When

the car was going to stop, the driver would ring a bell and announce the upcoming stop. At either end of the line, the conductor and driver re-hitched the team of horses from one end of the car to the other end.⁶

Customer assistance was a high priority for the streetcar company, eager to entice people to use its service. Not only did the 2-man crew run the car, but they also would run errands, and deliver packages and groceries. People who were ill could get a prescription filled, at the South Hamilton drugstore, and have it delivered by the conductor.²

The horse-drawn open streetcars, often called “breezers,” were built by the Newburyport Car Manufacturing Co. * The cars had 2-sets (*trucks*) of single-axle, iron wheels. The horse-drawn streetcar with open sides, drop curtains for use when the weather was poor. There were single seats on each side of the car. Passengers could enter the car from either side. The driver and conductor stood in the open front of the car, to collect fares.⁵

Normally, a team of 2 horses pulled the car. However, when there was snow on the ground, a team of 4 horses was used. During cold months, a small coal stove heated the car; and, for light, there was a kerosene lamp. Coal was kept under the seats by the stove. The conductor kept the fires going. The choice seats, during cold months, were near the little stove. Also during the winter, to help keep passenger feet warm, there were several inches of straw on the floor. Coal gas and smoke from the lamps made a winter ride an experience hard to forget.²

The car barn had many employees: a man to care for every 10 horses, a car mechanic, a car barn manager, and a night watchman, who had the stoves lit, when the cars went out, during the winter.²

In the early days of operation, Wenham, being the least important of the company's car barns and one of the last lines to be added to the Naumkeag system, got the poorest of horses and cars. Horses, which cost less than \$100; worked two hours a day (*usually one round trip*), except on busy days, when stronger horses would do extra duty.²

During the latter days, as the company switched to electric trolley power. Wenham received better horses, from other stables, as the lines gradually phased out the use of horses.³

In 1896, the Naumkeag Street Railway wanted to extend service to Ipswich, but the Town of Hamilton refused permission to lay tracks along Bay Road. The alternative route allowed the service to run along Essex St., in Beverly, through Grapevine Rd., Rubbly Rd., in a short section of Wenham, connecting to Essex and on to Ipswich. The route was abandoned after a few years of operation.³

* Newburyport Car Manufacturing Company, Newburyport, MA, went out of business in 1905.

In 1898, the railway company expanded its service to Asbury Grove. Track was extended from Bay Rd. down Railroad Avenue, onto Willow Street and then along Asbury Street to the Asbury Grove entrance.²

A trip to the Grove was a great outing for Salemites. The trip took about 2 hours each way, and cost 30 cents. The best cars were on the Asbury line. On Sundays and holidays, the company ran extra cars to the Grove. These cars, called "rounders," had reversible seats: after arriving, at the Grove; people boarded the same car and returned to Salem.³

Until 1898, horse-drawn cars continued in service to Asbury Grove. Then, the company switched to electric car service. In 1909, the improved electric trolley service resulted in the demise of Boston & Maine's short railroad branch line to the Grove. In 1931, Eastern Massachusetts Street Railway halted all trolley service to the Grove.²

The electric cars had 2 trucks of double-axle iron wheels. Also built by Newburyport Car Manufacturing Company, the later-model cars were enclosed and had glass windows for the passenger area, but the motorman stood in the open front. Passengers now entered the car from the front or rear and there were two rows on double-seat benches. The trolleys were a decided improvement over the horse-drawn streetcars.⁷

The first electric trolley motored down Main Street, with Pat McCoy, of Danvers, as motorman and Charles McQueeney, of Wenham, as conductor.²

State law was very specific as to who could be a motorman on electric trolleys. Trainees had to work under a motorman for 2 weeks, without pay, before becoming a motorman. Jake Barnes (*formerly on the horse-drawn cars*) was one of the first men trained, and later he trained all the new motormen.²

Electric cars were much heavier and required the laying of heavier-duty track on the ties and adding an overhead power line. The switch to electric power also eliminated the need for a Wenham stable and car barn. Other changes included:

- The house, in back of the horse stable, which faced onto Arbor Street, was sold in 1898 to Fred Mason. It was moved to the opposite side of the street, to a low hill back from the street. (*21 Arbor Street owned by Reginald Smith.*)⁶

- The second floor of the car barn, for a short time during World War I, was used as a rifle range.³

- In 1924, Eastern Massachusetts Street Railway considered selling the streetcar-barn property, on the corner of Arbor and Main. Many possibilities were considered, including a pool room, a gymnasium, and a

gasoline station. There was quick reaction to the possibility of a gas station in the center of the town. A group of public-spirited citizens, including Dr. John Phillips, Lester Libby, and Frederick Ayer, donated enough money to buy the property. In 1925, they gave it to the town, as an open space for a park.³ The site now is commonly called the car barn lot.

There were numerous owners of the Wenham trolley service. In 1892, during the early electric trolley car era, the Naumkeag Street Railway was acquired by the Lynn & Boston Street Railroad.^{*} In 1901, the line was reorganized as the Boston & Northern Street Railway Co.^{**} About 1910, the line became part of the Bay State Railway Co.⁺ Bay State Railway became the Boston Elevated Street Railway System, in 1919.

The end of the trolley service in Wenham came in the 1930's, after nearly 50 years of operation. The owner, at the time, was the Eastern Massachusetts Street Railway Company.⁺⁺ Two years later, bus service started, and still goes to North Beverly.

In the years following the demise of Wenham's trolley service, the steel tracks were removed and sold as scrap.

* Lynn & Boston Street Railroad: (1854-1901): one of the earliest companies to provide street trolley service in Massachusetts.

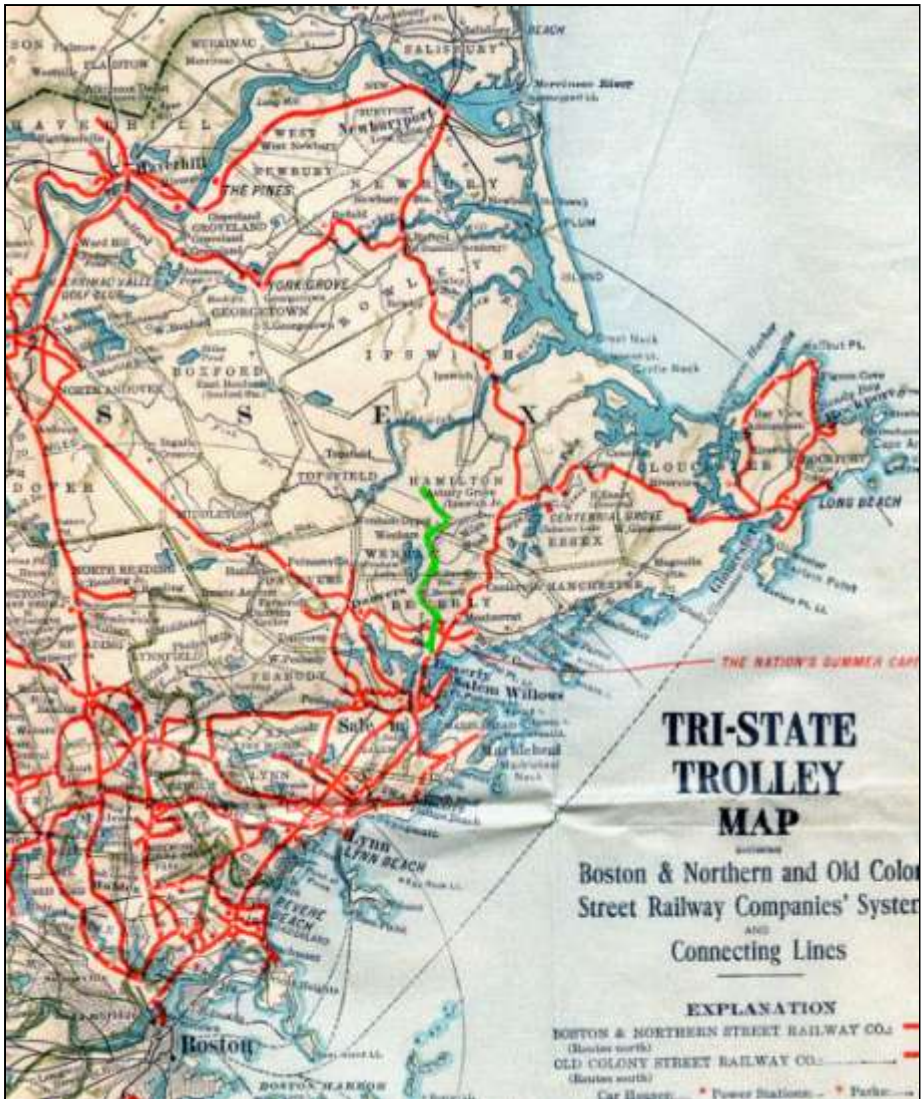
** Boston & Northern Street Railway: (1901-1911): acquired Lynn & Boston Street Railroad (1896-1901).

+ Bay State Street Railway System (1911-1919): acquired Boston & Northern Street Railway, in 1919.

++ Eastern Massachusetts Street Railway Company (1919-1955): acquired bankrupt Bay State Street Railway, in 1919. Streetcar service discontinued in 1937.

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A 1910 map of trolley lines in northeast Massachusetts. The line, in green, running from Beverly to Asbury Grove, lasted until 1930. The schedule listed the travel distance as 7.5 miles, which took 40 minutes, and the fare was 10 ¢.

Asbury Grove was listed as one of the “most attractive” “pleasure places,” to which people could take the trolley. It was said to have ball grounds, a grocery, bakery, restaurant, various amusements, and rooms to let, for only \$5/night.

At the time, the trolleys were operated by the Boston & Northern & Old Colony Street Railway Companies, headquartered in Boston.

A trip from Wenham Depot to Boston covered 22 miles. Travel time was just over 2 hours, and the cost was 30 ¢.



B&N electric car #3025, at Asbury Grove station.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum



Laying tracks for electric cars, in front of Jason Clark and BH Conant houses.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum



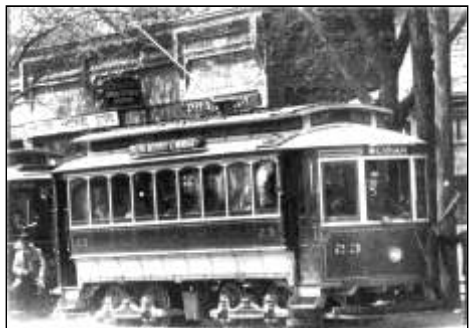
Streetcar, on Main St., passing Hobbs Harness Shop and First Church.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum



During winter, a team of 4 horses pulled the streetcar.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum



The Wenham depot had a large number of employees.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum



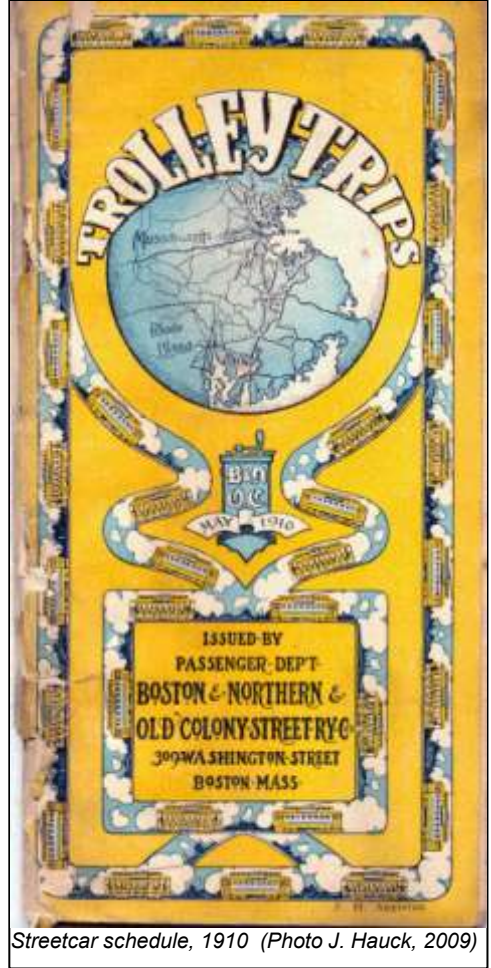
B & N car in front of Hamilton hardware and drug store.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum



Depot at Asbury Grove. Spur ran on Railroad Ave and Willow Street to Asbury Grove.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum



Eastern Mass Street Railway car, on Beverly/Salem swing bridge.
Photo courtesy Wenham Museum



Streetcar schedule, 1910 (Photo J. Hauck, 2009)