



**Streetcar station** and waiting room was in the variety store at corner of Main St. and Railroad Ave.  
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

## *History of*

# **Streetcars**

From 1886 to 1937, Hamilton had streetcars.

The service began when the Naumkeag Street Railway brought its line on Main Street from Beverly, through Wenham, and into Hamilton.

At the start, horses pulled trams that rolled on steel rails buried in the street. It was easier for a horse to pull a car along rails than on a dirt road. Normally, a team of 2 horses pulled the car. However, when there was snow on the ground, a team of 4 horses was used.<sup>2</sup>

The line ended at the corner of Main Street and Railroad Avenue. Hannah's variety store, located on the corner, was the streetcar station with waiting room.<sup>6</sup> Drivers unhitched the team of horses and hooked them to the other end of the car for the return trip.

Later in 1886, the company extended its tracks along Willow Street, and from there down Asbury Street to the Asbury Grove Campground.<sup>6</sup> The Association referred to the service as the "horse rail road." It promoted the service, for it ran at no cost to the Grove.

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.<sup>2</sup> Soon after, the Eastern Massachusetts Street Railway removed the depot at the front.<sup>14</sup>

Streetcar service started at 7 am and ran hourly in the morning, and, in the afternoon, half-hourly. The last car left Salem, at 10 pm. Service ran everyday.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

The horse-drawn open streetcars, often called "breezers," had 2-sets (*trucks*) of single-axle, iron wheels. The streetcar had open sides, with 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. <sup>5</sup>

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. <sup>2</sup>

The Naumkeag Street Railway, in 1890, wanted to add service along Main Street to Moulton Street, but the town denied its request. <sup>6</sup> This would have brought the noisy cars through the town center, from Bridge Street to Farms Road (*now Cutler Street*).

Starting about 1890, the Lynn & Boston Electric Railway, which had acquired the Naumkeag Street Railway, began to switch to electric-powered streetcars. In 1897, the electrics reached Asbury Grove.

The name trolley came from the small metal cart with wheels that ran along the electrical wires hung above the streetcar.

Some time after 1898, the Boston & Northern (B&N) Street Railway, which bought the streetcar company, built a car barn on Railroad Ave. The company began leasing the property, in 1903, from John J. Crosby. <sup>282</sup> (*In 1911, the company became Bay State Street Railway.*)

The Hamilton car barn replaced the car barn in Wenham, which was on the corner of Main Street and Arbor Street. The use of horse-drawn cars, which were kept in the Wenham car barn, ceased in 1898. <sup>4</sup>

The Railroad Avenue car barn likely had three bays. A 1910 Walker Lithograph & Publishing map indicates the building could hold up to twelve cars. <sup>299</sup>

B & N used the garage to store and maintain its streetcars, called "rounders." The name came from the cars not having to be turned around when making return trips: the seat backs, which pivoted at the base, simply were pushed back. Drivers could operate the cars from both ends.

The electric cars had 2 trucks of double-axle iron wheels. 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. <sup>7</sup>

Getting to and from the Grove became easier, in 1898. Electric streetcars began making the trip. <sup>1</sup> The streetcars made the trip from the depot down Railroad Ave., along Willow Street, down Asbury Street ending at a station close to the Grove's entrance. The station was on what now is the green. The tracks extended to within 10 ft. of the entrance. <sup>12</sup>

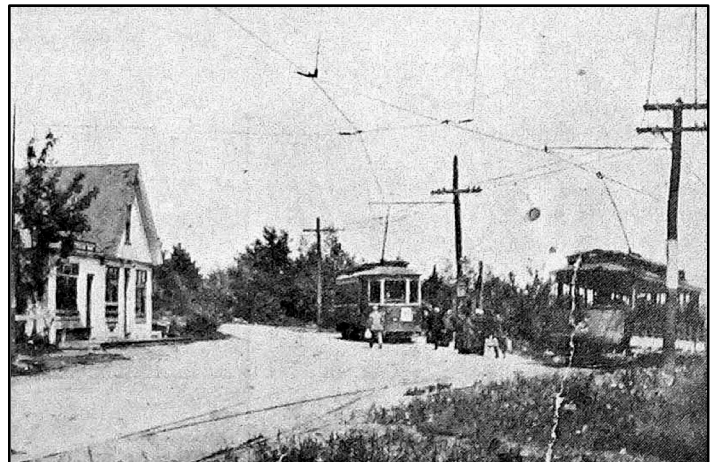
The line running from Beverly to Asbury Grove, lasted until 1930. The distance Beverly to Asbury Grove was 7.5 miles, which took 40 minutes, and the fare was 10¢. A trip from Salem took about 2 hours each way, and cost 30¢. <sup>3</sup> Special cars, with a seating capacity of 50, ran on Sundays and holidays. <sup>1</sup>

People in Hamilton could use the streetcar to go Boston or Newburyport. A ride from the depot to Boston took 2 hrs. and 15 min. and cost 25¢; from the junction to Newburyport took 1 hr. and 25 min. and cost 25¢. <sup>15</sup>

Many of the people from Beverly to the Asbury Grove station were not going to the Grove for religious services: some were cutting through the Grove to reach Idlewood Lake. A perimeter path, Sunnyside Ave., connected the Grove to Idlewood Lake. At the end of Sunnyside, there was a path, with



**Asbury Grove station** was close to the front of the Methodist campground on Asbury Street. Cars ran on the hour. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society



**At Essex junction**, riders switched to car (*left*) going to Essex or remained on car (*right*) going to Ipswich. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

wide wood planks, that led through the marsh to the north end of the pond, a distance just over a half-mile. It no longer exists.

The greater use of the electric streetcars caused the demise of the Boston & Maine branch to the Grove, in 1901, after 30 years of service.<sup>1</sup>

There also was streetcar service on the east side of Hamilton. It ran from Ellis Square in Beverly along Essex Street onto Grapevine Road in Wenham, then along Essex Street in Hamilton to the intersection of Sagamore Street and Western Avenue (*then known as Crooked Lane Hill*).

From the junction, there was a line along Sagamore and onto Candlewood Road to reach Ipswich and another line that opened in 1895, first along Western Avenue that ran to Gloucester.

The line to Ipswich opened on Jun. 26, 1896. The first car was met by a large crowd at Market Square. Hundreds of people took advantage of a free ride to the junction, "some enjoying it as many as three times."<sup>8</sup>

In a variety store and lunchroom at the junction, there was a waiting station. John Hinkley ran the store that offered, "fine confectionery, cigars and tobacco, soda, soft drinks."<sup>6</sup>

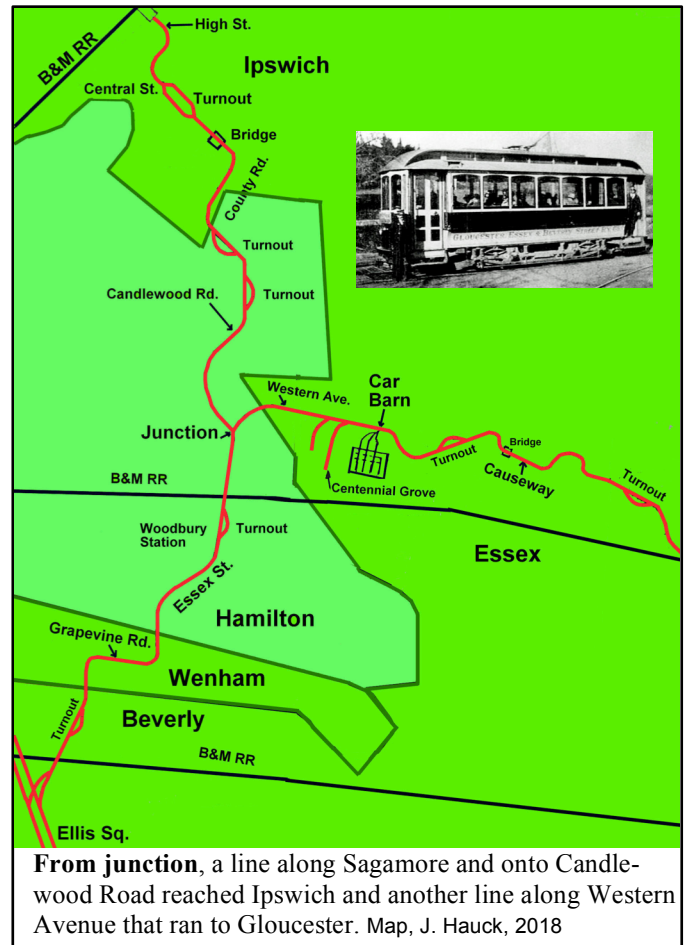
The Ipswich and Gloucester lines were single tracks. Along the routes, there were turnouts where a car going in one direction pulled over to allow a car, going in the other direction, to pass. Stopping at the turnouts also allowed people to leave or get on the streetcar.

About halfway between Ellis Sq. and the junction stations, there was a station where Woodbury St., in Hamilton, crossed the tracks. The Woodbury station was near a turnout.

The end of the trolleys in east Hamilton came, "At 1:11 on the morning of June 20, 1920, the last car reached the barn, after meeting the theater crowd from Boston. After sunup that day, thirteen passenger trolleys and two flatcars loaded with rails passed in a parade over the cut bridge and on to Beverly."<sup>17</sup>

Streetcar service to Asbury Grove ended in 1931. Four years later, 1935, the town removed the tracks and installed new curbing. The 1932 Emergency Relief Act (*E. R. A.*) paid for removal of the tracks. Hamilton's highway funds paid for installing curbstones.<sup>10</sup>

Streetcar service, in South Hamilton, ended in 1937.<sup>1, 4</sup> For the next 6 years, the Railroad Avenue car barn was vacant. The last company to run streetcars was the Eastern Massachusetts Street



Railway Co. It acquired the business, in 1919, from the bankrupt Bay State Street Railway.<sup>16</sup>

## References

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