



# Pages in Time



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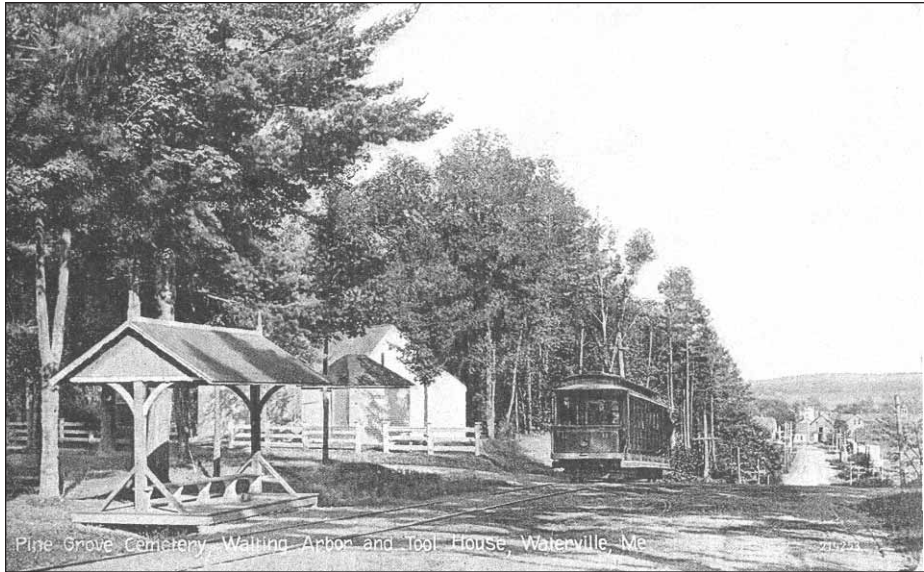
## The trolleys of Waterville: Mass transportation of yesteryear

by Lyn Rowden

In the 1880s electricity came to Waterville, first as street lights, next for stores, then for trolleys. The first trolleys were horse-drawn, but it wasn't long after Waterville's first electric company formed in 1886 that the Maine Legislature authorized the Waterville-Fairfield Railroad Company (1888 to 1891) to operate 3.25 miles of track.

Two open cars carried 40 people and two closed cars conveyed 20, running all day for five cents a ride. Summertime was popular for trolley trips when the seemingly high speeds created a refreshing breeze. Under the seat heat was provided in winter. Soon, lines carried, not only mill workers commuting to jobs or students traveling to Colby College and Coburn Classical Institute, but ladies in long dresses who could neatly travel to stores and public functions. By the early 1900s trolley routes expanded to include stops where picnickers and thrill seekers could enjoy a day at places now lost to the mists of time: the lovely Cascade Park and its outdoor theater (across from the Country Club), the enchanting Central Maine Fairgrounds with its daring fifty-foot Ferris wheel (between Shaw's and Seton Hospital), and on Snow Pond, the exciting Messalonskee Hall (near Pressey House) with its thrice weekly dances, roller skating, and sports. The fairgrounds had nearly closed when the trolley brought thousands of riders and revitalized it. If one looks down a straight line where Lincoln and Washington Streets meet, a burm can still be seen where the trolley used to run.

Lines were expanded to Benton Station's pulp mills and to Shawmut's dam con-



Trolley heading toward the Pine Grove Cemetery waiting arbor and tool house in Waterville. Photo from an old postcard used with permission from Arthur Ray.

struction. In 1909, the concrete bridge, which remains as the base of the Waterville-Winslow Bridge, was built as the trolley bridge. Barred from crossing the railroad tracks, trolleys used a precarious overhead viaduct to cross Bay Street, the concrete abutments still visible. Fort Halifax Dam, demolished last year, furnished electricity for trolleys which went to East Vassalboro, opening lakes to visitors, who could connect to railroad lines to Bangor or Portland and destinations further still.

Direct current electricity

came from a huge infrastructure of overhead wires generated by many small plants where belted water wheels harnessed the power. Entrepreneur Amos Gerald, of Fairfield, builder of Maine's first electric light plant, first electric train system, and the Waterville-Fairfield Railway, became involved with almost every trolley in the state, organizing Waterville-Fairfield Electric Light Company, 1892 - 1911, Benton Fairfield Railway Company, 1907 - 1930, Fairfield and Shawmut Rail Company, 1907 - 1927, Waterville-Oakland Street

the-line was at Webber's, now Gifford's Ice Cream; another was on Common Street where the Opera House was a popular destination. Some cars had seat which could flip in either direction. A motorman station was housed at each end. People could get on and off anywhere, but there were many picturesque waiting arbors. Airbrakes were used for stopping; later, safety on/off switches were added. The cars' mahogany interiors were nicely kept with shiny brass bell pulls and rattan seat covers. Insets along the top of the walls held posters

Railway Company, 1903 - 1919, and consolidating the Waterville-Fairfield-Oakland Railway. When he died every trolley paused for three minutes in his honor.

The cars did not turn around; they simply reversed. A light and bell were provided on either end while a sign told the destination.

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for events at many of the stops, contributing to a rise in both attendance and trolley use.

Cars weighed about 20 tons, the base made of concrete. Open cars, called breezers, with nine to 14 rows of seats with a hooded top, were often, quite literally, overflowing with folks hanging on the outside. Waterville had Duplex Convertible cars with sides that could roll up and down.

Many workers were required to maintain lines, and car barns and tool shops dotted the routes. Strong-backed lads could earn spending money clearing the tracks of snow. Later, rotary plows were throwing the snow off countryside tracks. Still, Main Street had to be shoveled with care, and someone had to dig out the plow!

As automobiles emerged in the 1920s there was less use of the trolleys that had carried over two million passengers a year. Although a slight profit was made in 1936, no one opposed closing the lines. On October 10, 1937, Waterville residents lined up to take their memorable farewell ride and bid an era good-bye.

Information was obtained from a lecture by Waterville historian, Arthur Ray, of Sidney.

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