



Photo courtesy of June W. Kennedy

The conductor and motorman of the "Jolly Jumper" electric car pose proudly at the end of the trolley line near First Parish Meetinghouse. The bright yellow car was popular with children, who paid 5 cents for the school run. This branch line of the Lowell and Fitchburg Railway Company ran from 1907-1920.

Trolleys open world to young

By June W. Kennedy

The coming of the electric trolley car lines at the turn of the century played its part in the growth of this community. Westford residents who witnessed the changes brought about by trolleys share their feelings:

Edmund Whitney: "I was the conductor of the electric car, but left because it didn't pay enough money to keep the family going. Had the run from Ayer to North Chelmsford to Brookside (Nabnasset). Fare was 25¢. It was an 8-wheel car, all good and solid.

"In winter a snow plow was attached to the front. A coal stove was in the corner; the conductor was the fireman. It used too much electricity.

"The Westford Centre car was bright yellow; the others were a darker color. The conductor was in the back; the motorman up front. This was just a little car — 'little dinky' or the 'Jolly Jumper', a 4-wheeled affair that would bob up and down. Charged the children 5¢ for the school run. This one was electri-

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Elizabeth Carver McKay

cally-heated."

Elizabeth Carver McKay: "I remember the motorman, Mr. Cutter, and the conductor, Ed Clemens. They would take us to Brookside, then we'd take another trolley to North Chelmsford, and still another to Lowell. It was the same coming back.

"By the time the trolley car hit our driveway [then next door to

the Roudenbush School], we two little Carver children were sound asleep. Mr. Cutter would carry my brother and Ed Clemens would carry me — right into our house. Then they'd drive up the street to the white church. [At night the car was parked there because both the motorman and the conductor lived in the Centre].

"One time the trolley broke down and it was parked right in front of our house. My brother and I, and all our friends, thought the town was so mean. If they had only opened the door, we could have played trolley car all winter.

"Another small-town, homey touch comes to mind. My mother had had a friend visiting her one day. Having boarded the car and ridden down the hill past Old Homestead [next to Abbot Middle School], the friend ran up to the conductor and exclaimed, 'I've left my watch at Cora Carver's, I've left my watch at Cora Carver's!' They stopped the trolley, reversed direction, and went back while she got her watch."

■ TROLLEY-PAGE 14

Westford Eagle

Trolley lines open world for early century youth

TROLLEY-FROM PAGE 7

Fred Fisher: "We kids used to put rocks on the tracks. It didn't endanger the car, but it sure annoyed the motorman. The old trolley really used to sway coming up and down Westford hill."

Ben Prescott: "The train didn't run the hours the old trolley ran. The 6 o'clock train might be the last out of Lowell and the 6 or 7 o'clock train the last one in.

"I remember when we were kids — three or four of us in that neighborhood [Chamberlain Corners] boys, you know — we'd take a train into Lowell, get off at Middlesex Depot, walk down Middlesex Street. This would be a Saturday night and

the first place we headed for was Page's Restaurant to buy a great big bowl of oyster stew for 15¢.

"Then there were two or three different movie houses around that we could go to for a dime — silent movies [Charlie Chaplin] with the old piano going. I was never too much about movies."

"Course everybody went, but I was more interested in them days in vaudeville. Practically every Saturday night, the wheelwright's son and I used to go to B.F. Keith's. They had vaudeville there. What a time we would have! We'd stay till half past 10 or 11 o'clock, then we could get the electric car out to North Chelmsford, change there and then out to Nab. From there,

we walked home.

"Start with half a dollar, get home broke once a week, but have a good time."

Al Belida: "The original Fitchburg & Lowell cars were made of wood sheathing like the wainscoting in the kitchens of that period. The cars were painted a dark brown. When coming to a stop, they smelled richly of ozone; it used to make some people very sick.

"At the end of each trip, the rear overhead trolley wheel which connected to the electric wires, was hauled down; the wheel at the opposite end was raised. This enabled the car to make a new run the other way. Similarly, the trolley's headlight

was switched to the other end.

"Later, the Eastern Massachusetts cars were made of steel and painted a bright orange. They were a faster and smoother car."

Sam Taylor (from Westford Wardsman, 1909): "The Sunday School of the Methodist Church at West Chelmsford, which includes Westford corner, Oak Hill, Brookside and various other scattered fragments of rural life not yet large enough to be named village, will take a trolley ride excursion to Canobie Lake Park."

June W. Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos.