



Timelines of  
Point  
Pleasant  
History

# The Point Pleasant Trolley Follies

## For Additional Information:

This article is based in part on *Trolleys Across the Sand Dunes*, a 1977 book by Joseph F. Eid, and the November, 1945 issue of *The Marker*, the newsletter of the North Jersey Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society. Additional material came from the 1966 book *Bay Head 1879-1911* By William C. Schoettle.



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From 1878 to 1919,

The trolleys never made a profit and they often ran erratically. But for four decades the trolley cars rolled over the sands and through the pines.

Right: A trolley heads west on Arnold Avenue. Bay Avenue is to the right.

The 41-year era of the trolley ceased in Point Pleasant on the Sunday after Labor Day, 1919. At the end of the final day of summer service, a motorman operating the Point Pleasant Traction Company's last run headed his streetcar back to the car barn on Atlantic Avenue for its winter rest. In May, 1920 the company announced it would not resume service. The era of the automobile was upon us and trolleys would never run in the Point Pleasant area again.

Trolleys brought mass transit to this part of the shore for the first time. At the height of their popularity in the first decade of the century 600 passengers regularly used them daily and a single day ridership record of 1,100 was recorded. The electric trolley also brought with it the first power plant and the opportunity for home electricity.

But the story of trolleys in town is also one of fiascoes and unfulfilled dreams. Always in shaky financial straits, various companies went in and out of receivership, changing owners and names and almost always losing money. Plans to connect lines with Brielle and Monmouth County were thwarted. A right-of-way was obtained and graded into Lakewood, but never operated. And an early attempt to extend service into Bay Head was stopped dead in its tracks when the Mayor and other prominent citizens literally ran construction workers out of town.

The first street railway in town was a horse car line serving guests of the Resort House hotel (later known as the Warwick Arms) on Richmond and Atlantic Avenues. Operated from 1878 to 1890 by the owners of this first grand hotel in Point Pleasant, it took guests over a mile on a single track on Atlantic Avenue directly to the ocean. Guests rode for free. Others paid. This was a one horse and one car service. When the trolley reached the end of the line, the horse was unhitched and hitched to the other end of the car.

The South Jersey Street Railway company began operating electric trolleys on August 2, 1894 with five second-hand open cars from Brooklyn. A big parade marked the beginning of service. The earliest operation ran from the railroad station west two blocks, along Arnold to Bay Avenue. There the single track turned south for four blocks to Atlantic Avenue, then east to the beach along the old horse car route. Upon reaching the beach near where Ocean Avenue would later be built, the line turned on to a private right-of-way over the sand to the Beacon-By-The-Sea Hotel near the Bay Head border. The fare was five cents.

The coming of electric streetcars also brought the first electric lights to Point Pleasant. In fact, the assets and ownership of the first streetcar companies and electric companies were commingled and the power plant for both was located on Atlantic Avenue near the railroad. It boasted a 97 foot high smoke stack. By Christmas, 1894 electric lighting was installed in several residences. By the next summer a separate dynamo was in place just for lighting. In 1900 those living near the power plant began complaining about noise.

Expenses almost always outran revenues for the trolley business. In the spring of 1895 it was necessary to hire a gang of laborers to dig out the tracks from the shifting sand dunes. Even though the system never operated in the winter, a snow plow was bought, probably to move the sand. To cut costs the company at times eliminated conductors, making motormen collect fares. The Borough Council fought that move on safety grounds. In 1896 the company went into receivership and emerged as the Bay Head and Point Pleasant Street Railway Company. But the attempt to actually extend service to Bay Head led to one of the great fiascoes of the era.

While Point Pleasant Beach encouraged the trolley and electric company to bring more guests to town, Bay Head wanted rural tranquility. Municipal officials refused to grant permission for either electric wires or trolley tracks. This was despite the fact that the new Grenville Arms Hotel opening on East Avenue (not to be confused with the still operating Grenville on Rt. 35) , was all wired for electricity , but had no source of power.

On Sunday, June 15, 1901 street car officials took matters into their own hands. In the middle of the night, after the good local citizens were asleep, workers were sent to place poles and string overhead wires for the extension. Apparently the plan was to act first and force Bay Head to either accept a fait accompli or go to court. But municipal leaders responded directly. Led by mayor Aaron Pennington, a contingent of Bay Head officials arrested two workers caught on the top of the newly installed utility poles and chased others out of town. The Borough Council members then personally took axes and destroyed the poles and wires. The inevitable litigation and negotiations ensued. Two years later the line was finally allowed to move into Bay Head, but along back streets, including Lake Avenue, west of the route the trolley owners wanted. The southern terminus was an octagonal waiting room 840 feet west of Mount Street.

In 1902 the line reorganized again becoming the Point Pleasant Traction Company. For the 1903 season the tracks were extended west along Arnold Avenue to the popular river front resort of Clarks' Landing. The next year the only closed car the system ever owned was added. Bobbing up and down the dirt-covered streets, it quickly became known as the "Rinkey-Dink."

Mass transit systems always have problems. This tongue-in-cheek early century account from the Beacon newspaper: "Accident policies were sold by the gross to the old and sophisticated inhabitant of Bay Head for he or she knew that every trip to Point Pleasant might be his or her last. Anything might happen, the car might and often did jump the track and go cavorting madly over the sands, or if conveniently near any of the numerous lakes or ponds enroute might with great willingness submerge itself in the translucent depths, none of which antics were especially conducive to the comfort and welfare to the passengers."

As the first decade of the century was coming to a close, plans began for an extension to the then highly fashionable resort of Lakewood and beyond to Trenton. Companies formed for this project were variously called the Trenton Lakewood & Atlantic Railway, the Lakewood & Seashore Rail Road and the Trenton, Lakewood & Seacoast Railway. During this era service was extended west for another mile to the Pine Bluff Inn on the Manasquan River at Pine Bluff Avenue, near the present Point Pleasant Canal.

Eventually land was cleared and graded all the way west to Lakewood. A bridge was partially constructed over the north branch of the Metedeconk River. Utility poles were placed along the entire right-of-way. Rail was actually laid west into the woods to approximately the current Brick Township-Point Pleasant border. Trolleys made test runs to the end, but never carried any passengers.

The trolleyway to Lakewood came very close to being completed. But there were several delays in getting track when steel was diverted to Europe during World War I. The financial situation of the backers became more shaky and the automobile era was dawning. The plan died. Jersey Central Power & Light acquired the right of way for a power line. It can still be seen locally crossing the Bridge Avenue extension, Riverwood Avenue, and other streets and cutting through Point Pleasant Borough residential areas.

With the end of the 1919 summer season, the trolley cars went into the Atlantic Avenue car barn, never to operate again. It was reported they were still in the wooden barn in the summer of 1923, but were gone in 1924. Track was ripped up along the gravel streets. But for at least 20 years more the faintly visible "Point Pleasant Traction Co." lettered on the front of the power house on Atlantic Avenue reminded residents of the area's mass transit past.

— *By Jeff Heim*

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