

Brief History of Seashore Trolley Museum / History of the Vehicle Collection

Excerpted from "A Look Back" by Jim Schantz, Chair of Seashore's Board of Trustees, December 2013 (with edits by Sally Bates, 2/17/17)

1939 *The First – The Beginning*

The end of streetcar service on the Biddeford & Saco Railroad was approaching. A group of mostly Boston street railway enthusiasts, including Ted Santarelli (who became our long-time president), pooled their resources to purchase a classic open car—No. 31—to preserve and operate for future generations. They paid \$150.



To the best of our knowledge they were the first group of private individuals anywhere in the world to save a piece of rail equipment in an operating museum. Subsequently, groups worldwide have followed in our founders' footsteps.

Seashore's current site in Kennebunkport was chosen by our founders because Biddeford's Mayor ordered No. 31 out of town. They soon added several cars, most notably Manchester 38 (the dark green interurban car) which was delivered to Kennebunk Station by steam locomotive!

1940s *The Focus Broadens*

With most of Seashore's early activists in military service during WWII, not much happened here until the war ended in 1945.

The founders' original goal had been to save New England country trolleys, fast disappearing during the Depression, reasoning that large cities would always retain streetcars. But suburbia grew, and by the end of the 40's a number of large cities had converted to buses and more seemed headed in that direction. So Seashore broadened its collection focus. New Haven had kept a fleet of open cars to serve Yale football games until '48, and Seashore acquired four of these crowd-pleasers.

Connecticut open cars – a type that had long since disappeared elsewhere



1950s Building and Operating National and International Collections

Seashore's leaders included visionaries and serious students of street railway history.

They extolled the extreme reach the street railway industry had once enjoyed and the way technology had been customized to meet needs of individual locales. While other trolley preservation groups' efforts were regional in nature, Seashore's leaders believed the industry should be preserved on a national and international scale, giving rise to the goal of establishing The National Collection of American Streetcars. In 1951, Liberty Bell interurban 1030 from the Philadelphia area became Seashore's first acquisition from outside New England.

Streetcar systems were converting to buses at an alarming rate, and their resources were limited as they were all people of ordinary means. They dug in deep and moved quickly.

As Boston retired most of its old streetcars, Volunteers headed south almost weekly in 1954 to pick up another Boston car.

By the second half of the 50's, key traction era cities such as Brooklyn, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Milwaukee had ended streetcar service or retired their last classic cars—leading to many long distance acquisitions.

Milwaukee & Suburban Transport Corp Car 861 arriving at Museum



Montreal converted its richly varied streetcar system to bus in 1959 and our leaders arranged for the eventual shipment of 10 streetcars and interurban cars from that city.

Ted Santarelli's frequent worldwide travels resulted in the acquisition of four British double deckers, as well as cars from Australia, New Zealand, and several European cities - adding relevant international variety to the collection.

Car 279 – a gift from the Mayor of Rome, Italy – on its way to Seashore



At Kennebunkport, track was laid as quickly as possible. The dream of operating cars on Seashore's track was realized with the first gasoline-powered generator supplying 600 volts to streetcars.

Because the site was not suitable for visitors a second location on Route 1 in Biddeford was developed. With support of the generous Butler family, a short line was constructed there and ran from 1957 to 1961.



Continuing into the early 1960s, Seashore leaders acquired more property, which was still relatively inexpensive in the area. A large parcel at the main location plus a four and a half mile right of way connecting the two sites was assembled.

Regular restoration work began in 1954.

1960s Becoming a Museum of Mass Transit

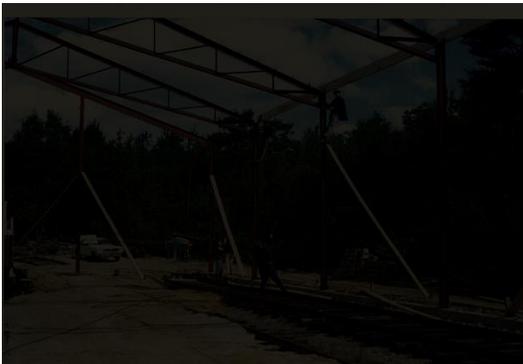
As managing two locations became draining, the difficult decision was made to discontinue the Biddeford operation and invite the public to the main Kennebunkport location.

Development of the Streetcar collection continued, though only about a dozen street railway operations still existed when the decade began. The first rapid transit car, New York “High V” 3352, was acquired in the 1950s, and a decade later leadership decided to expand the rapid transit collection, as classic pre-war cars were being retired by the four rapid transit cities of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago.

As the final American interurban operations were abandoned in the Chicago area, a representative group of steel interurban cars from that city joined Seashore’s fleet.

Notably, Seashore’s first bus arrived in 1962 followed the next year by the first trackless trolley. The rubber tired vehicle collections grew, with the goal of representing major manufacturers and key vehicle models (rather than cities), as standard models were sold across the country.

To shelter the growing collection Car barn construction began in earnest and continued into the 1970s. As resources were limited, the lowest cost alternative—wooden pole frames with aluminum siding—predominated. A second-hand Quonset building was being assembled as a car barn when winter snow collapsed it. Our current *Town House Shop* building was built on that site - a triumph that arose from a near catastrophe.



Fairview Car barn and Riverside Car barn at early stages of their respective constructions

1970s Improving the Visitor Experience

Volunteers expanded the main line ride north toward Biddeford, building track on the former Atlantic Shore Line right of way.

The restoration shop continued to expand and develop new skills, relearning the arcane practice of hot riveting and advanced woodworking. Restoration continued on a wide variety of cars.

Late in the decade the present Visitor Center was constructed, greatly improving our ability to interpret history for visitors and expanding our Museum Store.

Funding for all major projects continued to come primarily from a combination of visitor income and donations from our always generous members. Several small federal grants were received, helping to expand the restoration program to year-round operation and improving interpretation.

1980s Growing Expertise – And Sharing It!

Restoration skills continued to develop as more specialized equipment was in place. Major restoration projects on cars in almost any condition became routine, including Brooklyn Convertible 4547, Eastern Mass. Street Railway 4387, Bay State Street Railway 4131, Wheeling 639, Cleveland Center Entrance car 1227, and Boston Center Entrance car 6131.

We improved interpretation for the public, including with expanded signage and exhibit labels.

The Society demonstrated that it is a resource to the transit industry as well as preserving transit industry history! We lent the MBTA in Boston old but still-serviceable work cars to help with their overhead wire and maintenance of way duties. Seashore volunteers also helped guide the accurate construction of replica streetcars for the National Park in Lowell.

Seashore's visionary collection experts identified gaps in the National Collection in terms of important cities or types of car and launched a push to fill as many as possible. Gaps were plugged by tracking down car bodies in non-transit use as sheds or cottages and by finding cars deaccessioned by other museums. The quest was successful, with a number of cars acquired during the 1980s and a dwindling number up until essential completion of the program in the last few years.

The Museum's last two significant property acquisitions—from the Butler family including the house to the west of our entrance and from the Smith family to the east of our entrance—were completed in this decade with long-term loans from members in amounts from \$1,000 to \$10,000, many of which were forgiven before being repaid. Seashore's holdings now totaled 330 acres.

1990s Expanded Public Programs

We expanded our menu of special public events were expanded to attract visitors.

Our active spare parts acquisition program paid dividends as demand grew for parts from heritage trolley lines springing up across the country. Proceeds of these sales allowed construction of the Parts Warehouse and purchase of supplemental storage containers.

Seashore's operating trolley line reached a major milestone with the completion of Talbott Park loop, giving the ride a destination, and allowing regular use of single end cars.

A significant library and archive collection had been growing over the years, with most material placed in storage. In the 90's an active library program with growing volunteer support coalesced to care for and catalog collections, perform research, and plan for future facility needs.

2000s New Outreach Initiatives

Our activities in Lowell (MA) picked up again as that city began planning to expand its streetcar system to serve the downtown area. Seashore brought New Orleans car 966 to Lowell to demonstrate the feasibility of operating historic cars and establishment of a branch museum. A two-floor indoor streetcar exhibit was also opened for the public.

Another outgrowth of the Lowell operation was Seashore's participation with the American Public Transportation Association's efforts to help promote and guide the reintroduction of streetcars nationwide.

A special project centered on Atlantic Shore Line electric locomotive 100 sustained by a State allocation of Federal transportation enhancement funds. The wooden locomotive was thoroughly restored and educational programs and exhibits were developed to explain the project.

2010s Managing Strategically

We're implementing strategies to preserve and protect the Museum's collection and infrastructure, retain and develop new audiences, and build community support and involvement.

In 2012 we hired the Museum's first professional Executive Director.

We have developed a robust roster of Business Members, introduced high-profile special events, and established a Seashore Trolley Museum Advisory Council comprised of community members.

In 2016 we completed a major structural roof replacement at the Town House Restoration Shop that eliminated leaks, added insulation, and improved lighting – creating a better environment for vehicles and visitors and shop staff in that building.



**Fairview
Carbarn -
Expansion
scheduled to
begin in 2017**

**Gleaming
new roof on
Town House
Restoration
Shop**

In early 2017 we are on the cusp of a project that will improve and expand Fairview Carbarn – a major step forward to renewing our vehicle storage program.