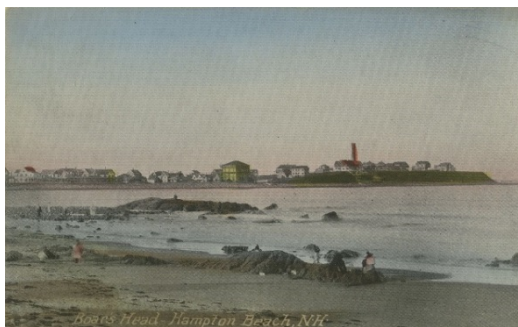


# Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

## "A Seaside Tourist Destination"

Hampton Beach completely transformed at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The town leased the beach to a locally formed agency to develop the area into the center of activity and entertainment that exists today. In less than a decade, Hampton Beach gained an electric trolley, a bridge connecting Seabrook to Hampton Beach, the famous Hampton Beach Casino, and a bandstand across the street to attract thousands of tourists to this recreational center every summer!

### Underdeveloped



Looking north to Great Boar's Head from Hampton Beach Proper  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

As the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century approached and more people visited Hampton Beach for recreation and entertainment, the town realized that the beach, in its current condition, was ill-suited to become a premier tourist destination. It was underdeveloped and much of the major activity and development was on Great Boar's Head, not the

beachfront.<sup>1</sup> There were several hotels and resorts but the only activities available outside of them were swimming and sunbathing.<sup>2</sup>

Factory workers from all over New Hampshire and Massachusetts wanted a recreational destination to spend their leisure time at.<sup>3</sup> In order to become the premier destination of the N.H. seacoast, the town knew that the beach needed to change.

### The Hampton Beach Improvement Company

In 1897, the town held a meeting and voted to take several actions that they hoped would revolutionize the beach. In order to have the beach transformed into the recreational center that people wanted, the town voted to lease the beach to the new and locally formed Hampton Beach Improvement Company, or the HBIC. The lease began the next year in

1898 and was set to last 99 years. It gave the HBIC the ability to control the character of the beach as it developed over the years.<sup>4</sup> One of the first major changes that the HBIC made was that the center of beach activity was moved from Great Boar's Head to the middle of Hampton Beach Proper.<sup>5</sup> The changes that this local group made to the beach have affected much of its development since then.

## The Electric Trolley

During the same town meeting of 1897, another major change was approved: the installation of an electric trolley system. The ceremonial laying of the first rail spike occurred the same year on May 19, 1897. The construction of the trolley system began at Whittier Junction next to Hotel Whittier. This was at the current intersection of Route 1 and Winnacunnet Road, next to where the Galley Hatch now stands.<sup>6</sup> Less than two months later, on July 3, 1897, the construction of the electric railway system was complete.<sup>7</sup> It began operation and opened to the public only six days later on July 9, 1897.<sup>8</sup>



The first spike of Hampton's electric railway was driven in on May 19, 1897 by Judge George Lamprey.  
*(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)*

The trolley tracks began at the Exeter Depot on Lincoln Street in the center of Exeter, the town just northwest of Hampton. The trolley company's original name, The Exeter Street Railway, was a result of the depot's location. From the depot, the tracks went east through the center of Exeter and through downtown Hampton. In the middle of Hampton, the trolley tracks went through the intersection of Route 1 and



A trolley stop on Water Street in downtown Exeter  
*(Picture courtesy of the Hampton Historical Society)*

Winnacunnet Road where the first spike was ceremoniously laid. From there, they headed east toward the beach to the road that is presently Ocean Boulevard. Once the tracks reached Ocean Boulevard, the trolley route headed south along the coast and ended just south of Great Boar's Head.<sup>9</sup>

Hampton's trolley system was unique because it was one of only three municipally-owned trolley systems in the country.<sup>10</sup> It ran every half hour

and could transport thousands of people in and out of the Hampton Beach area every day.<sup>11</sup> The trolley provided people with a quick and accessible way to get to the beach. In just the first year, it transported almost 555,000 passengers!<sup>12</sup> One of the reasons it was so successful was because everyone could ride at a "moderate cost," as recorded by a Hampton Union reporter in 1899.<sup>13</sup>

## Hampton Beach Casino

In 1899, the Hampton Beach Casino, one of the most influential and iconic buildings on Hampton Beach, was built and opened<sup>14</sup> by Wallace D. Lovell through a deal with the Hampton Beach Improvement Company. Lovell wanted his Casino to be an attraction in itself<sup>15</sup>, similar to another of his other business ventures, Canobie Lake Park in Salem, N.H.<sup>16</sup> He included a large amount of amenities and activities in the building and on the property, including a theater, lockers, a restaurant, a dining hall, several games such as billiards and a bowling alley, a bathhouse with one hundred dressing rooms and a baseball diamond, a multi-sport playing field, and tennis courts behind the building.<sup>17, 18, 19</sup>



Canobie Lake Park in Salem, N.H.  
(Photo courtesy of Canobie Lake Park)

The Casino later gained two additions; the Ocean House was added in 1900, connected by an overhead walkway on the north end, and the Opera House was attached to the south end in 1901.<sup>20</sup> This was the type of major tourist-centered development that the HBIC had imagined for the beach.



The Hampton Beach Casino, connected to the Ocean House [right] by an overhead walkway. The Ocean House was a hotel with 50 rooms.  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

## The Bandstand

In 1901, Lovell built a bandstand directly across the street from the Casino. The bandstand was meant to compliment the Casino by hosting



**The Bandstand, built in 1901**  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

daily concerts. These shows drew in tourists who could watch them from either the beach, the area in front of the bandstand, or the second-floor balcony of the Casino, which had the best seats.<sup>21</sup>

The bandstand was so well-liked that it became one of the centers of outdoor entertainment for several decades. It hosted several music festivals and even offered refreshments for the festival-goers.<sup>22</sup> The combination of the Casino and the Bandstand was so popular that that small area of Hampton Beach became an epicenter of activity.

## Epicenter of Activity

The electric trolley company made its first extension during the few years after the turn of the century. The route was extended all the way to the center of beach activity and stopped right in front of the Casino and Bandstand.<sup>23</sup> The thousands of people that rode it every day could step right off the trolley car and enter the



**The Exeter Street Railway stopped at the activity center of Hampton Beach**  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

Casino, join a concert audience, or even step onto the beach!<sup>24</sup> The trolley company added a ticket office just north of the bandstand and operated a popcorn stand adjacent to it.



**The popcorn stand, operated by the trolley company**  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

The distance the trolley traveled was soon expanded to the surrounding towns to provide even more people with easily accessible transportation to the beach. It was not long before the trolley company name was changed to the Exeter, Hampton, and

Amesbury Street Railway. In fact, by 1899, it was possible to "ride by trolley from Boston and go beyond Hampton Beach."<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, the combination of the street railway and the building of the Casino and



Bandstand “changed Hampton Beach dramatically.”<sup>26</sup>

## The “Mile Bridge”

Wallace D. Lovell was a major influence on the development of the beach during the few years surrounding the turn of the century. In 1901, the same year the Opera House was built<sup>27</sup>, Lovell realized his plans to build a bridge over Hampton River just south of Hampton Beach Proper. This bridge connected Seabrook to Hampton's seacoast and increased tourism from yet another surrounding town.<sup>28</sup>

It was called the “Mile Bridge,” though it was 350 feet short of a mile. This made it the longest wooden bridge in New England, and many people claimed it was the longest in the world.<sup>29</sup> The street railway was added to the bridge and it was opened to the public on May 14, 1902. It was



The Grand Opening of the “Mile Bridge” on May 14, 1902  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)



The tollbooth in the center of the “Mile Bridge”  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

ceremonially opened by New Hampshire Governor Chester B. Jordan who had the first street car run from Hampton to Seabrook.<sup>30</sup> The tracks ran along the western side of the bridge and there was a walkway along the eastern side.<sup>31</sup> In 1901, the Hampton Union said of the trip from Seabrook to Hampton, “a more beautiful trolley ride or carriage drive could scarcely be imagined.”<sup>32</sup> As Lovell intended, more people started coming from the southern route after the bridge opened.<sup>33</sup>

The “Mile Bridge” was a toll bridge and had fees ranging from 1¢ to 10¢. A toll was required by pedestrians, automobiles, and even livestock that were led across the bridge. The tollbooth was located at the center so that the crew could operate the drawbridge as well.<sup>34</sup> Even with the toll, the bridge was heavily used.

According to Randall, the “Mile Bridge” was the fourth and final element—following the electric trolley, the Casino, and the Bandstand—

that transformed Hampton Beach area "from a small New England beach community into a major American resort."<sup>35</sup> The facilities and amenities that Hampton Beach had gained around the turn of the century did exactly what the HBIC and Lovell hoped it would: it drew in the masses.<sup>36</sup>

Visitors began pouring into the area by the thousands and Hampton Beach eventually came into competition with other tourist and seaside



Tourists coming from Boston by the  
Exeter, Hampton, and Amesbury Railway  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

destinations around New England. The majority of the people who took advantage of the trolley to the beach were middle class Americans. Once these people were provided with an affordable vacation spot that was easy to travel to, they continued to visit and have supported the beach and

its development ever since then. Other resorts in the area did not have as much success weathering the social changes and new demands of the tourists. Hampton Beach stood out as the destination that continued improving with the changing times and social revolutions.<sup>37</sup>

## Seasonal Beach

Because Hampton Beach was a northern seaside resort, its greatest economic support was naturally seasonal tourism. By the time the "Mile Bridge" was opened, Ocean Boulevard, as it is now called, was lined with several types of businesses. Alongside the Casino were "bakeries, grocery stores, cafés, entertainment venues, and souvenir shops."<sup>38</sup> According to many, Hampton Beach was the town's greatest asset because of its natural and economic value.<sup>39</sup>



Three of the businesses along Ocean Boulevard  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

By 1905, nearly anyone could visit Hampton beach and experience all it had to offer. Those who were willing to spend the money could stay in the fancier seaside hotels and resorts. Boardinghouses were also popular with the less wealthy summer visitors.<sup>40</sup> Even the operation of the electric trolley was somewhat seasonal; it transported the masses during the summer, slowed down during the fall, and had very low usage during the winter. Unfortunately, the winter also brought with it very high operation costs.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the tourists it transported during the summer kept

it going.

## The Automobile Arrives



Automobiles parked and traveling along Hampton Beach and Ocean Boulevard  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

At the turn of the century, Henry Ford made his new automobile available to the masses. This was a worldwide event that greatly affected Hampton Beach. Both personal automobiles and buses quickly appeared on Ocean Boulevard.<sup>42</sup>

In the summer of 1905, around 300 automobiles passed through Hampton Beach every day!<sup>43</sup> The

explosive popularity of the automobile would soon have a profound effect on the trolley business.



Vendors selling items like fruit and ice cream on the beach behind the Bandstand  
(Picture courtesy of Lane Memorial Library)

As the first half of the twentieth century progressed, everything that had been established at the beginning of the 1900s continued to grow at an exponential rate. Automobiles filled the streets and the HBIC development continued expanding. In order to conserve both the natural and aesthetic aspects of Hampton Beach, the State of New Hampshire



took over the responsibility of maintaining the beach in 1933. Click NEXT to read about Hampton Beach's major period of growth in 1910-1950: "The Summer Playground for All New England."

- <sup>1</sup> New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development. Division of Historical Resources. *Hampton Beach Area Form*. By R. Walsh, J. Keane, and Carol S. Weed, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. Concord, N.H., 2009, 6.
- <sup>2</sup> Randall, Peter E. *Hampton, A Century of Town and Beach*. Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall Publisher and the Town of Hampton, 1990, 42.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid 45.
- <sup>4</sup> *Hampton Beach Area Form* 6.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Holman, John M. Lane Memorial Library, "The Trolley Era of Hampton, 1897-1926." Accessed August 13, 2013.  
<http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/holman/trolley.htm>.
- <sup>7</sup> Tucker, James. "Our Town: The Exeter Street Railway." *Hampton Union*, October 4, 1951. <http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/ourtown/trolleys2.htm> (accessed August 9, 2013).
- <sup>8</sup> Tucker, James. "Our Town: Our Town Buys Trolley Line." *Hampton Union*, November 1, 1951.  
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- <sup>9</sup> Cummings, O. R.. *Trolleys to the Casino: Exeter, Hampton & Amesbury Street Railway*. New England Electric Railway Historical Society, Inc., 1969.  
<http://www.abebooks.com/Trolleys-Casino-Exeter-Hampton-Amesbury-Street/5889453714/bd> (accessed October 24, 2013).
- <sup>10</sup> Tucker, James. "Our Town: Colorful Era of Electric Railways." *Hampton Union*, September 27, 1951.  
<http://www.hampton.lib.nh.us/hampton/history/ourtown/trolleys1.htm> (accessed August 9, 2013).
- <sup>11</sup> Randall 42
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid 52.
- <sup>13</sup> Holman.
- <sup>14</sup> *Hampton Beach Area Form* 7.
- <sup>15</sup> Randall 42-43
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid 55.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid 42.
- <sup>18</sup> *Hampton Beach Area Form* 7.
- <sup>19</sup> Aykroyd, Elizabeth, and Betty Moore. *Postcard History Series: Hampton and Hampton Beach*. Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing, 2005, 38.
- <sup>20</sup> *Hampton Beach Area Form* 7.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 36.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Randall 43.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, 53.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, 43.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid 58.
- <sup>28</sup> *Hampton Beach Area Form* 7.
- <sup>29</sup> Randall 61.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 67.
- <sup>32</sup> Tucker, "Our Town: Colorful Era of Electric Railways."
- <sup>33</sup> Randall 62-63.
- <sup>34</sup> Aykroyd and Moore 67.
- <sup>35</sup> Randall 58.
- <sup>36</sup> Tucker, "Our Town: Colorful Era of Electric Railways."
- <sup>37</sup> Varrell, William. *Summer By The Sea: The Golden Era of Victorian Beach Resorts*.



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Portsmouth, NH: The Strawberry Bank Print Shop, 1972, 36.

<sup>38</sup> *Hampton Beach Area Form 8*.

<sup>39</sup> Tucker, "Our Town: Colorful Era of Electirc Railways."

<sup>40</sup> Randall 594.

<sup>41</sup> Tucker, "Our Town: Trolley Lines Go Into 'Red'"

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Randall 625.