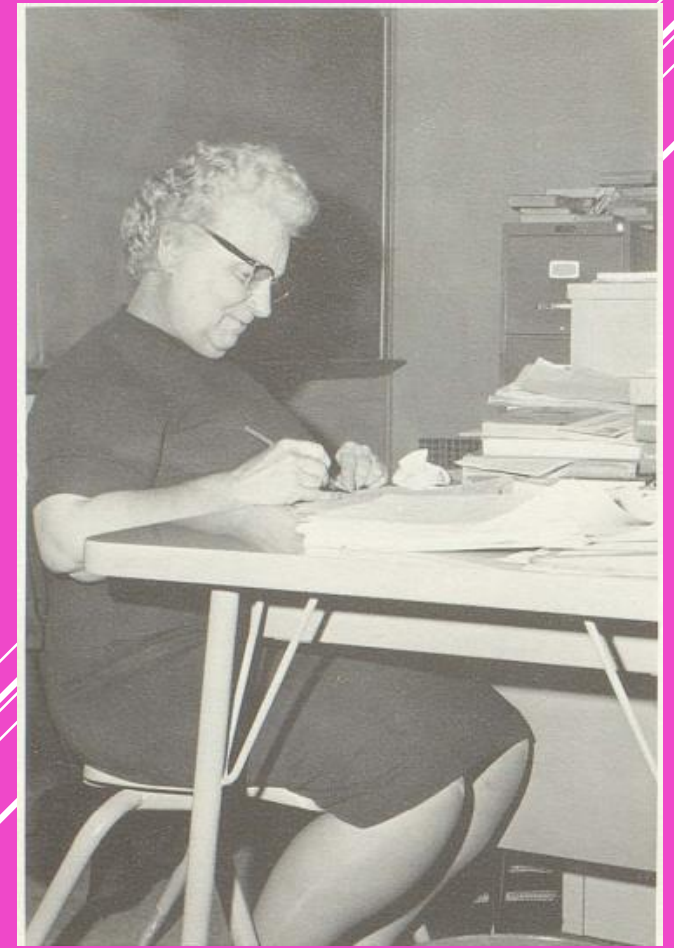


**Mildred Obrey, the Electric  
Trolleys & the  
Portland-Lewiston Interurban  
car #14 –  
the *Narcissus***

Eliot Historical Society ~ June 2023



**MILDRED KNOWLES OBREY**  
**1908-2007**

**Mildred grew up in South Berwick, Maine,  
the daughter of  
Forest Ayer Knowles and  
Ida Maple Rogers Knowles**

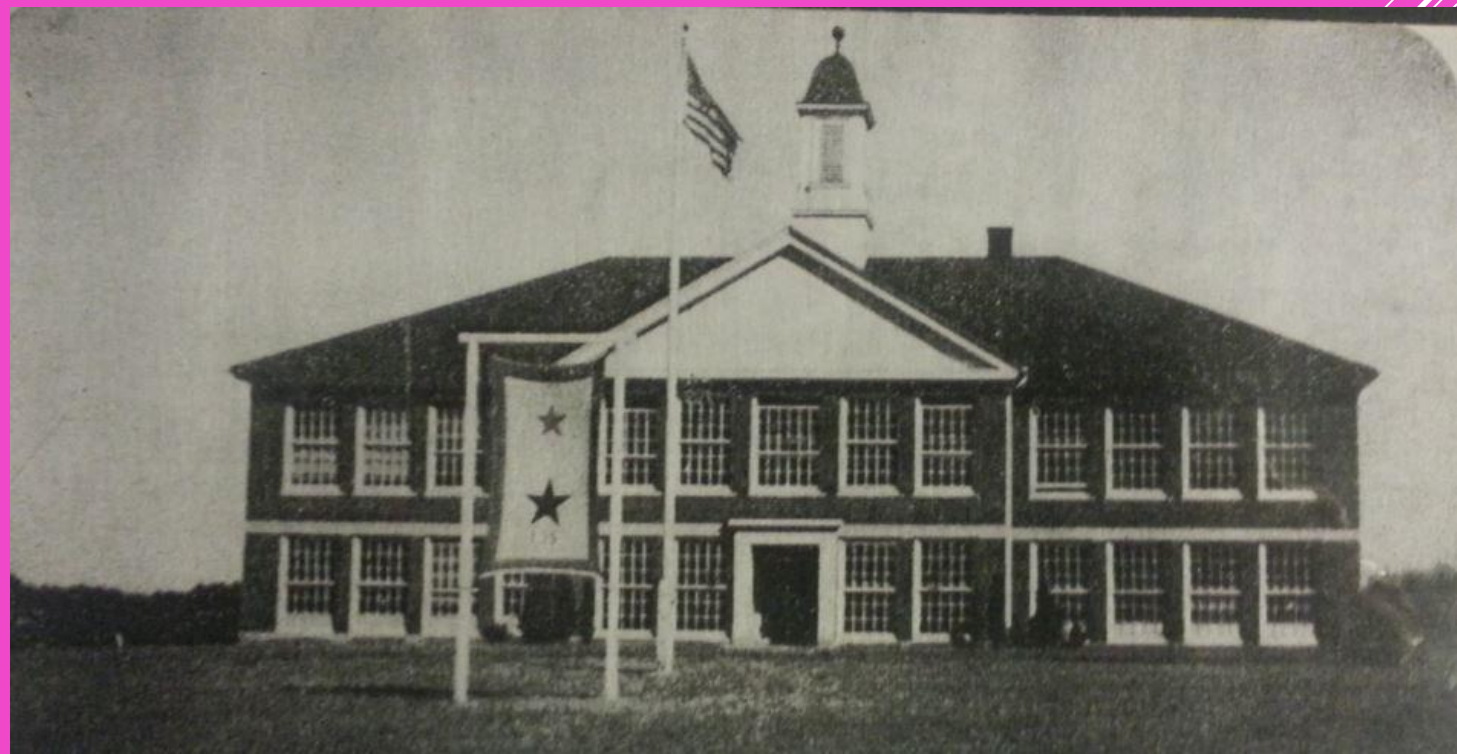
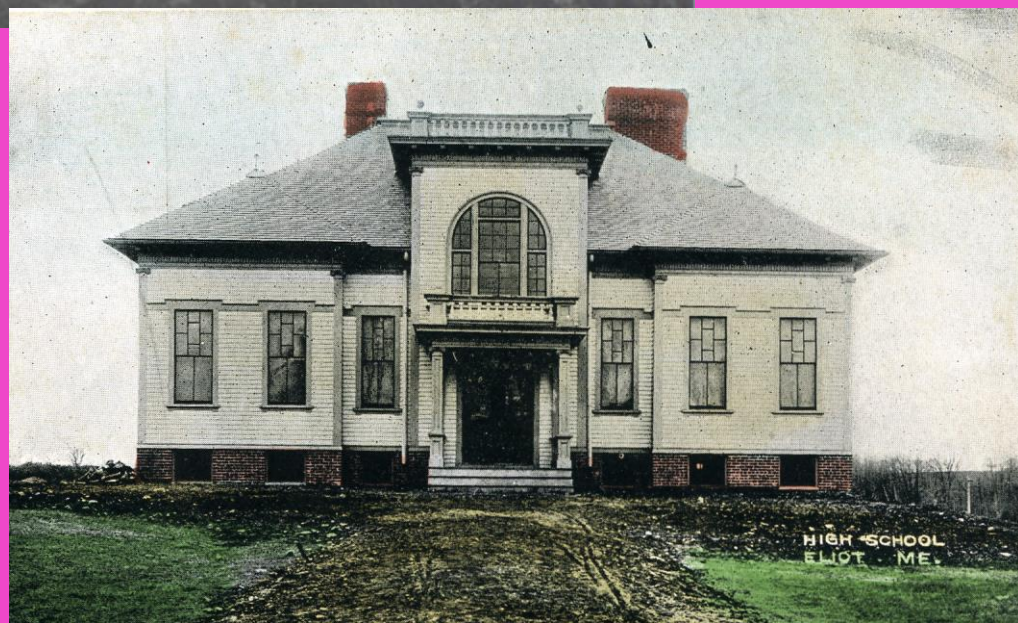


Photo courtesy: Barbara Obrey Amergian & Timothy Obrey,  
grandchildren of Mildred Knowles Obrey.



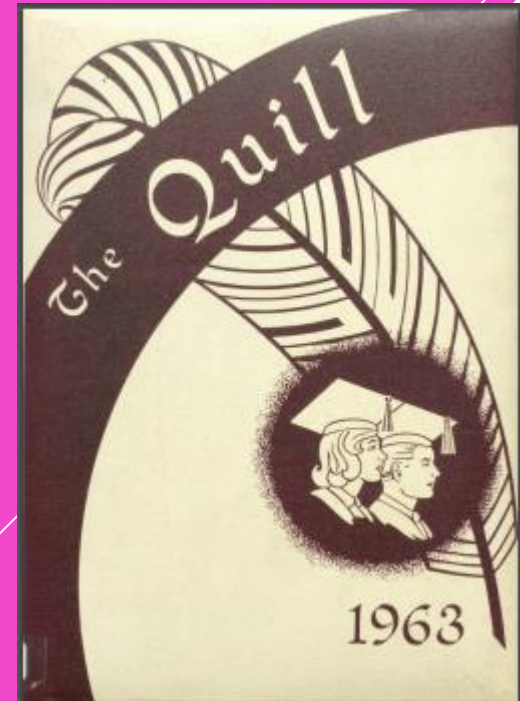


- She taught at Eliot High School & Marshwood High School, retiring in 1973 after 37 years of teaching.





- She was chair of the English Department at the High School and oversaw the School's library







Senior English students are discussing the effects of Transition Periods in English Literature. Mrs. Obrey is acting as the chairman of the class discussion.

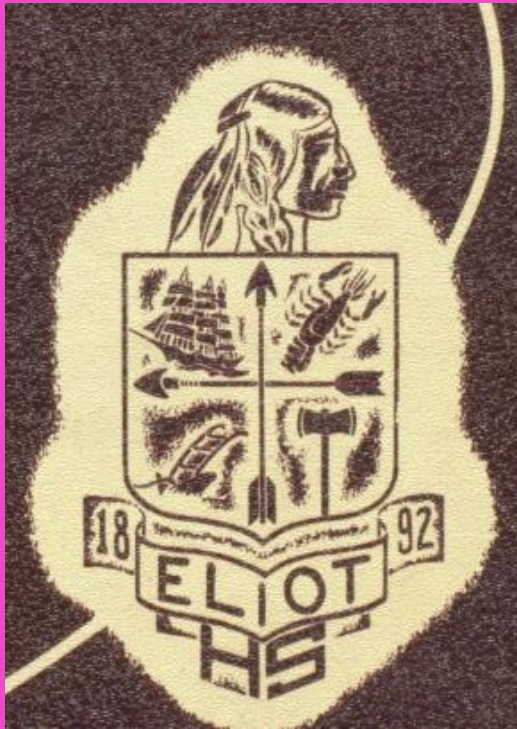


- She also directed school plays including "Hillbilly Wedding" (1953 with Robert Perham), "The Mikado"



Bob Perham, E. Perham, T. Scott, Mrs. Obrey, E. Evans, D. Bell

- Served as advisor for the High School's
  - National Honor Society
  - Yearbook
  - Senior Class
  - Future Teacher's Club



- ... and was MSAD #35 Board of Director for 15 years, many as chair



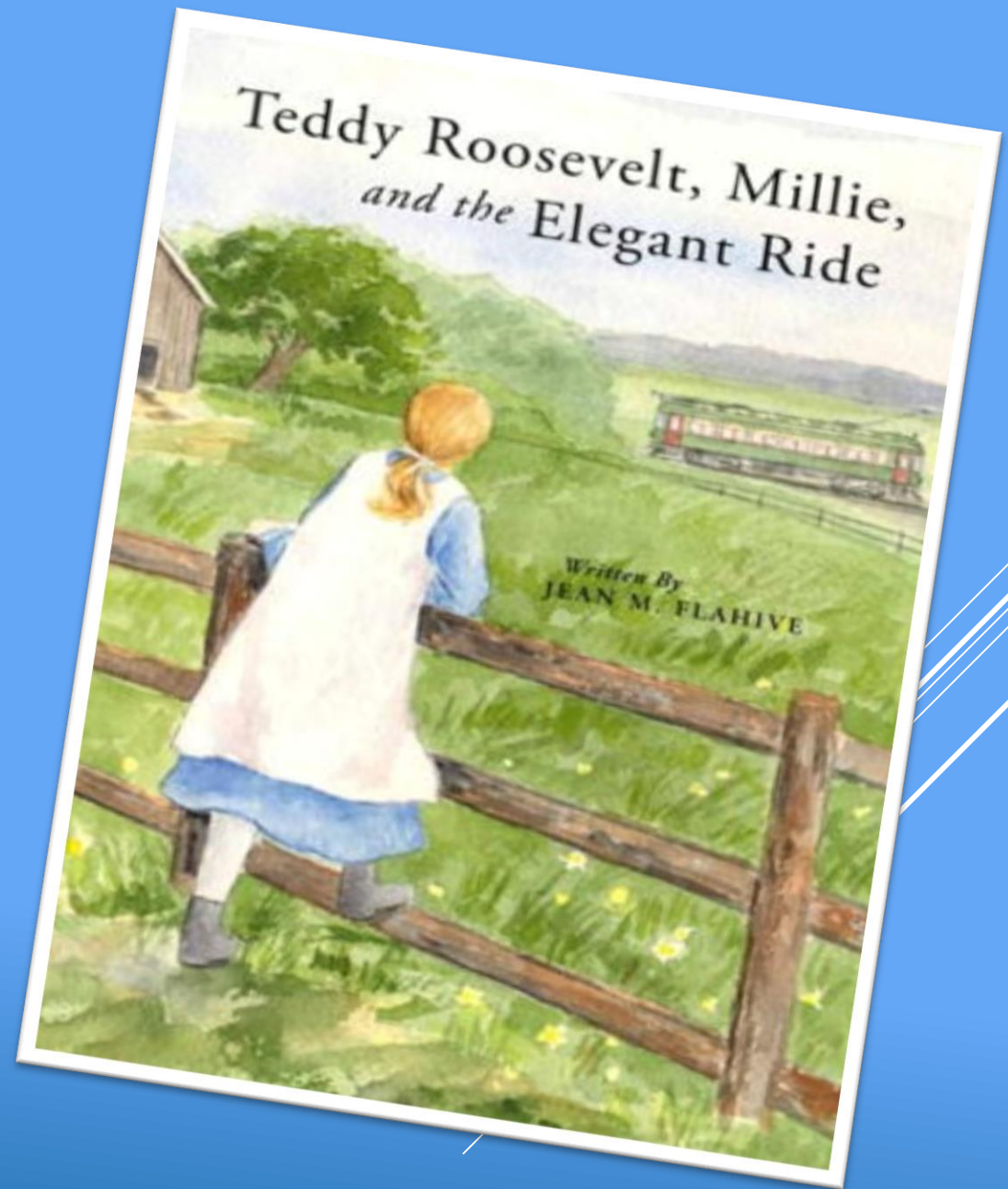


- Correspondent for the *Portsmouth Herald* newspaper for South Berwick
- Served on the board of directors of the South Berwick Chapter of the American Red Cross (1941)
- Was inducted into the Delta Kappa Gamma Society of the National Honor Society in 1973. Also inducted were Nancy Cultrera, Shirley Dufresne and Ella Wiechert.
- President of the York County Retired Teachers Association.
- 1966 recipient of the Fabyan Drake Good Citizenship Award

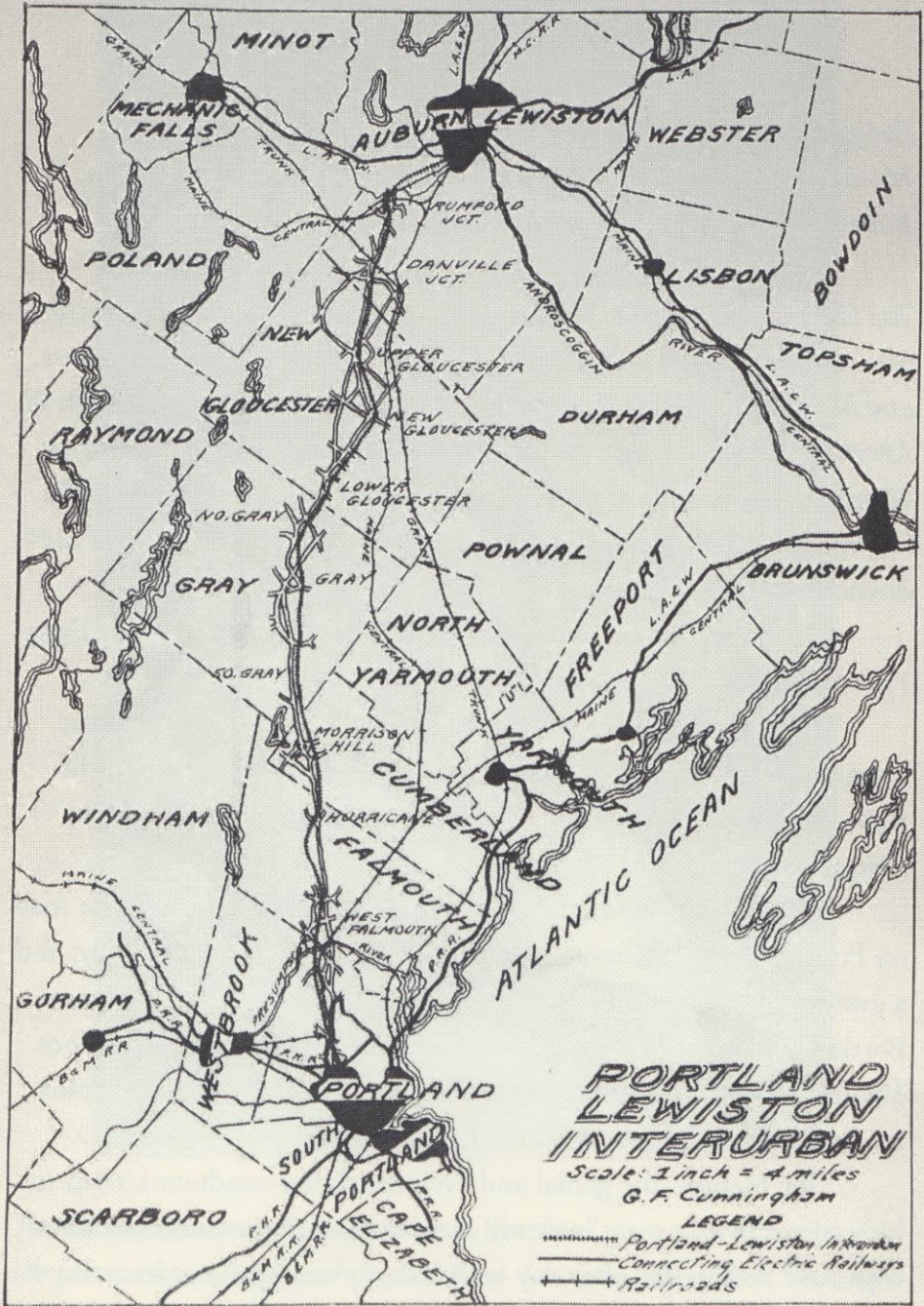


Mildred's recollections were used in the award-winning historical fiction novel, **Teddy Roosevelt, Millie, and the Elegant Ride**, by Jean Flahive.

This book recounts the story of a young girl who witnesses the visit of President Teddy Roosevelt to Maine, in 1914, and his ride on the electric trolley car the *Narcissus*.



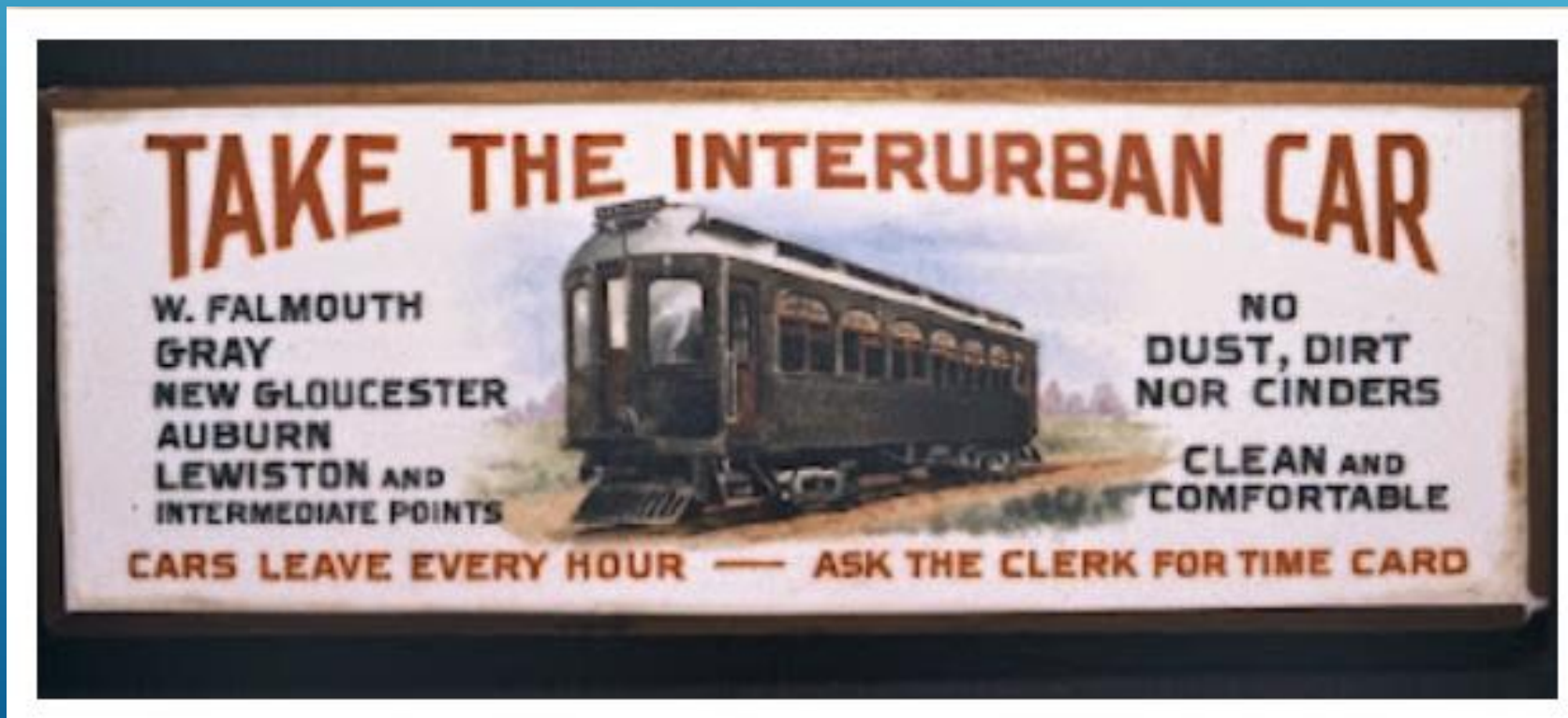




- The Portland-Lewiston Inter-urban was one of the best appointed and fastest electric railroads in Maine.
- 1914 - Began operating Auburn and Lewiston.



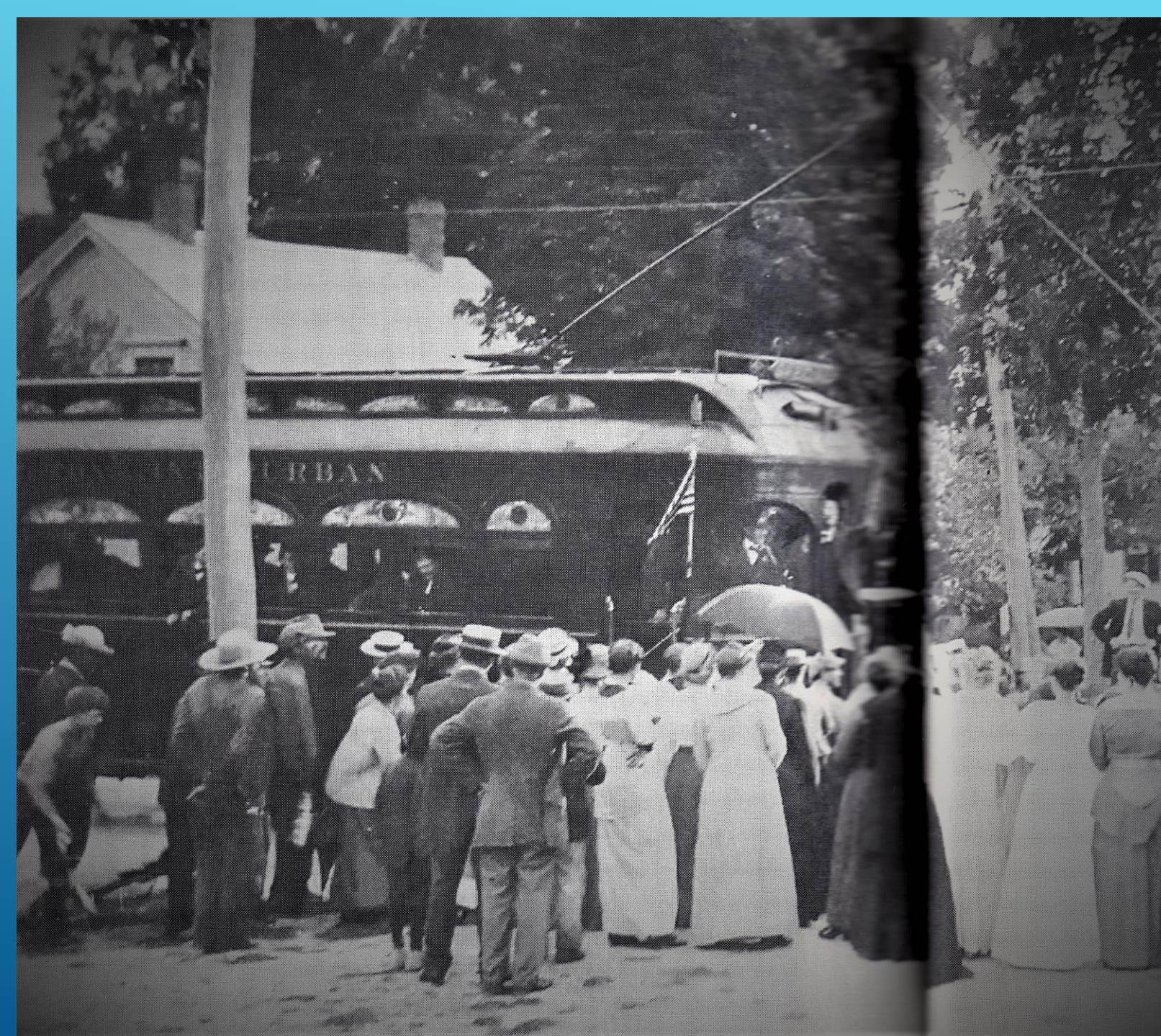
- **Six cars were built prior to the line's opening and temporarily placed in storage.**
- **Each numbered car, carried names of flowers - No. 14 was named Narcissus.**



- Each had a regular seating section and a separate smoking compartment.
- No. 14's exterior was painted Pullman green with red trim and gold leaf lettering.







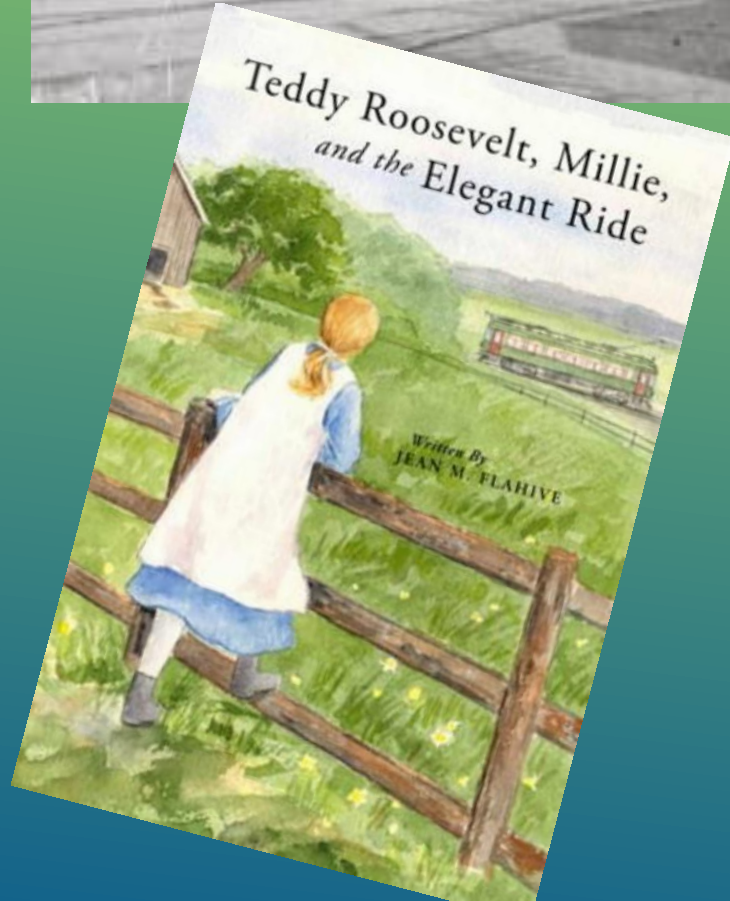
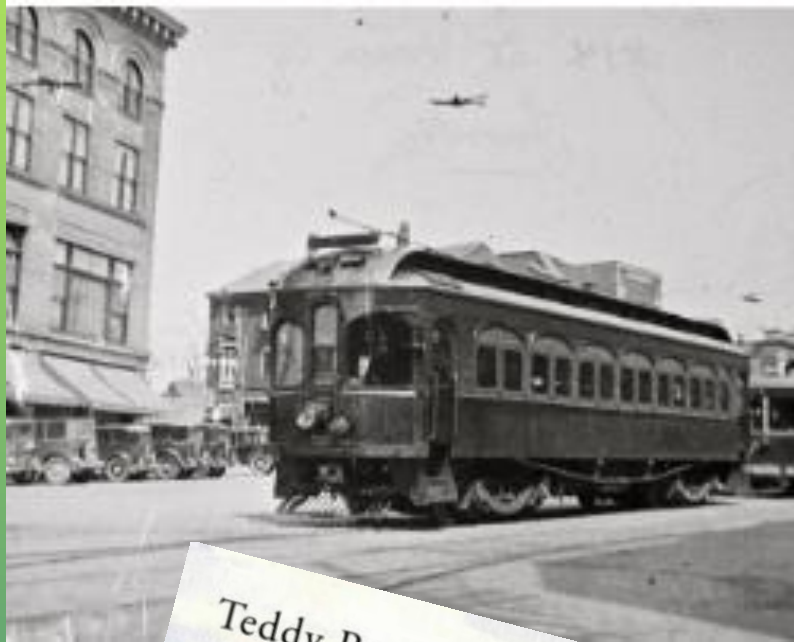
- In 1914, a month after regular operation had begun, former president Theodore Roosevelt rode No. 14 between Lewiston and Portland while campaigning for the Progressive Party.



- **1933 - The *Narcissus* was retired from service**
- **The body used as a summer cottage on Sabbatus Lake**
- **1969 - Acquired by the Seashore Trolley Museum**
- **1980 - National Park Service placed No. 14 on the National Register of Historic Places along with nine of Seashore's other Maine cars.**









Growing up in the state of  
Maine –

**Mildred Obrey: It was wonderful. I came from a family of seven, and my oldest brother decided, along with my father, that because my oldest brother didn't go beyond high school, that every member of my family who could physically go, would go to college.**

**So, I had a great deal of freedom, because I had all these older brothers and one sister. And I was just, uh, an offspring that came ten years later, after everybody else had grown up.**



Published by B. F. Davis

Central Square, South Berwick, Me.

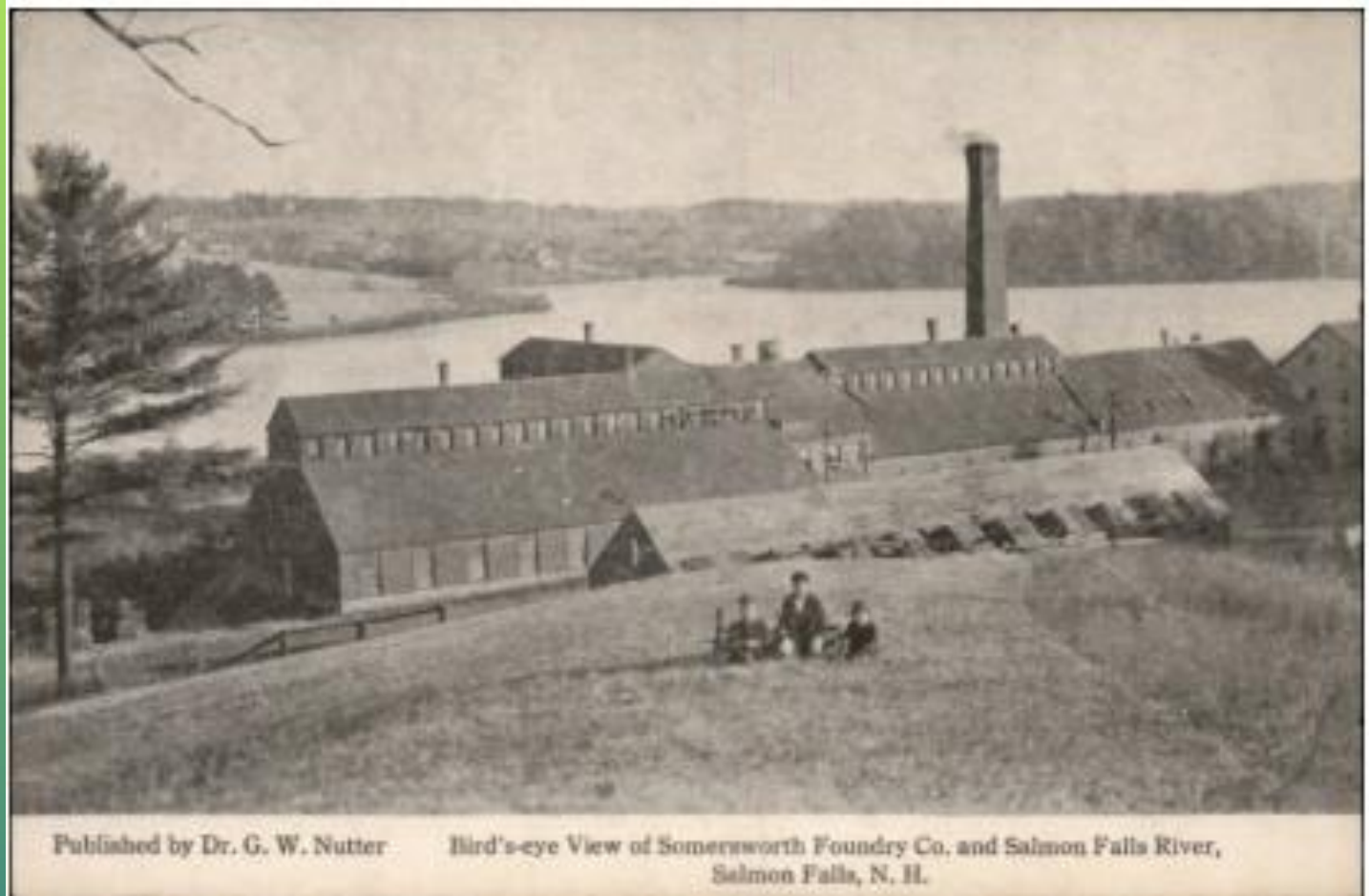


So, I had a lot of freedom. I knew a lot of people in South Berwick. And one thing that I remember about the trolley cars was that my father worked for Kidder Press in Dover (NH), and he went up and down the Atlantic seaboard, setting up printing presses.



**And my oldest brother was a molder at the Salmon Falls Foundry, and they took the trolley at 5:00 in the morning from the Congregational Church, which was just up the street about a sixteenth of a mile from my front door. And that was the reason we bought that particular house in South Berwick, rather, was because it was close to my parents and the people that were working in my family, to get transportation to Dover.**

**So, every morning, my brother and father took their dinner buckets - and they were the most wonderful dinner buckets you ever saw. In the bottom, if it was cold, my mother put in hot, hot tea. And then there was a tray that went on the front, and then she could put in a lunch for them that would keep warm from that hot tea underneath, and they would go off with that.**



Published by Dr. G. W. Nutter      Bird's-eye View of Somersworth Foundry Co. and Salmon Falls River,  
Salmon Falls, N. H.

**In the summer, she would put ice in there, and they could have a cold meal if it were a real hot day. And they would go on, get onto the trolley and come back at night at about 5:00 at night. It never came in on time, but that was all right. Nobody minded that at all. Mother just went on her merry way, preparing the food for supper.**



... in 1917 was a horrible flu epidemic. And I remember my mother said, "Go on up to the church and see if your father - you can see the trolley anywhere because he isn't home on time." And she waited. And then she'd send - when it got dark, she would send my brothers up, who were in high school at that time. And no Dad, no brother (Merle).

And mother was getting rather panicky. And soon my brother Merle and my brother Bert came down with my father, and mother said, "Where have you been?" He said, "We were all ready to take the trolley when one of the men that was with us in Dover fell dead from the flu at our feet." And he said, "We had to take care of him. He was a good friend of ours.



News circa 1918 promoted ways to protect oneself during The flu pandemic. PWM collection



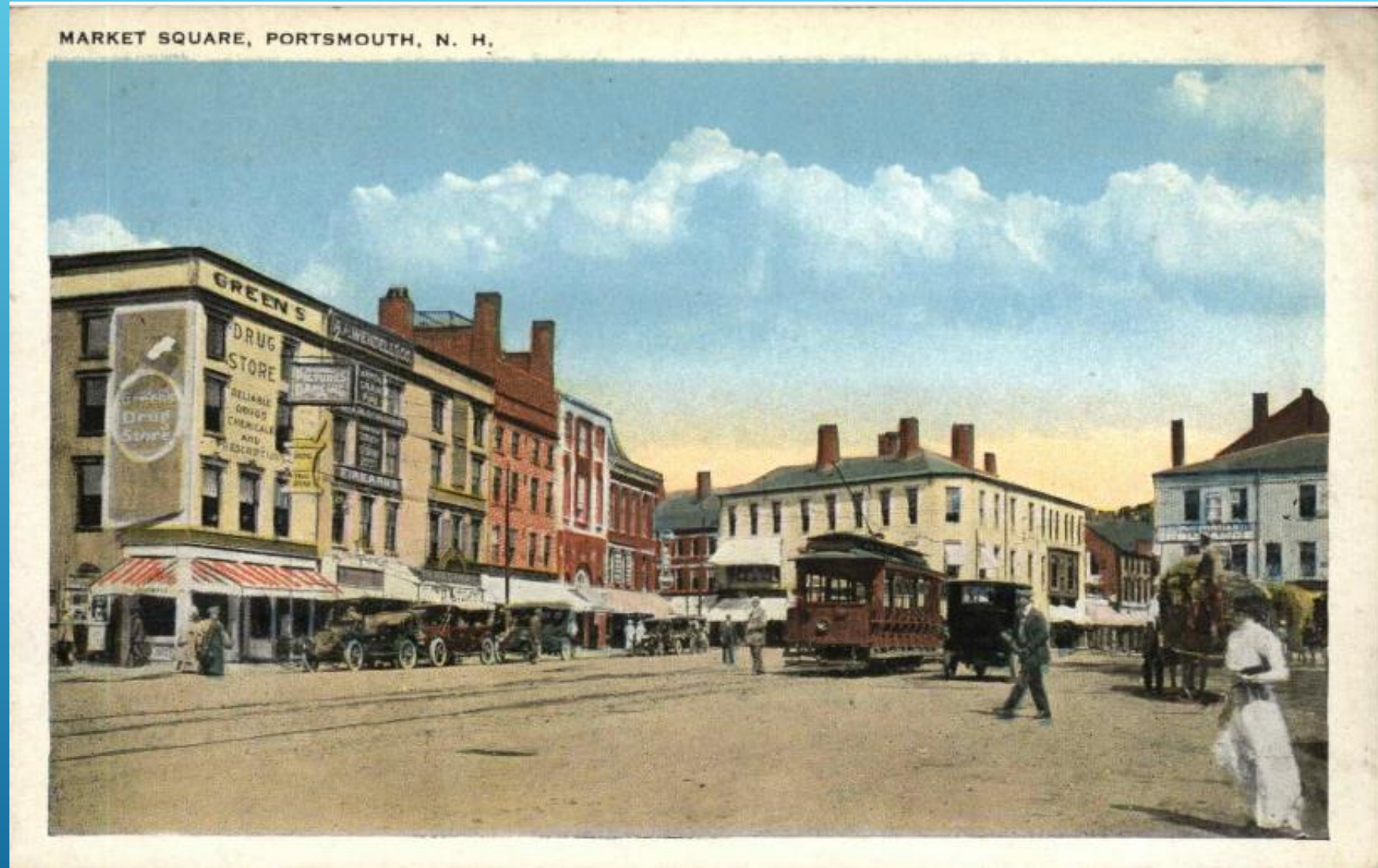
**And that was, I guess, probably one of the most traumatic things that ever happened, trolly-wise, to me. And then my brother Merle, who had been in that particular group, caught the flu, and he lived down in what was called "The Landing" in South Berwick. And I remember going down to visit him, and there was a wreath on the door of every other house down the whole street, which meant somebody was dead or had died in that house on the street.**

**So, that was my 1917 connection with the trolley. And P.S., my brother died from the flu that winter.**



**My father always wanted me to know what was going on, and he would take me on the trolleys to Dover or to Portsmouth (NH). If there was anything of any value that he thought historically that I should see, I went by trolley to there.**

**And then, I was - as I told you before, I was a "stickybeak" [busybody], and I would - I would meet people on the trolleys, and I'd find out something about them, and then I'd go calling on them, and I would see some marvelous things.**





**Sarah Orne Jewett's sister, Miss Mary, lived right in the center of the town. Her house is still there. And there was a big bandstand in the center of town, and every Saturday night, which was shopping night - not Fridays or anything. Saturday night was shopping night.**

**And we would go up to hear the band concert and do all of our shopping. And then I would see the people who were going back to Eliot or Portsmouth or Dover who had been over to South Berwick, shopping, on the trolley.**





**As I got older, I rode the trolleys here and there and everywhere by myself - well, with my friends, and we would take trips. We'd walk to Dover, and then - which was four miles over - we'd go into the tea room in Dover and have ice cream. We'd shop up and down the streets of Dover, and we'd take the trolley back to South Berwick again.**

**And then, as we got older, we decided that we could go walk to Dover, have lunch, then walk to Portsmouth, down to Dover Point to Portsmouth. And then we'd take the trolley back home.**





**By this time, I was pretty well grown up - I was 12 years old - and I thought I was somebody, I can assure you. and then every summer there would be a trolley that had no doors on it, no windows, and it was an open trolley.**





And we - our church - would hire the trolley to take us down to York Beach [Maine] for a picnic. And there was a friend of ours, of the church, who would allow us to have her cottage for the day, and what fun we used to have. We'd go out, walk around the trolley as it moved along. and it was oodles of fun. This picnic deal was a big deal, and then hot weather, that open car was on most all the time, except late at night. It got kinda chilly.

Ed Dooks: So, you walked on the running board of the trolley?

Mildred Obrey: Yes



Two PD&Y opens at The Goldenrod at York Beach.

How was the trolley operated? What do you remember about riding the trolley?

Mildred Obrey: Well, of course, I rode the pull, drag, and yank. Portsmouth, Dover, and York. (P, D & Y)

And they would start "boom!" And I remember there was a - sort of a handle that came out, like this. And, uh, then he would do something with it, and it would go {makes hissing noise] and make sort of a funny, little noise, and then it would go "boom!" and we would go up into the center of South Berwick - a big ride from the Congregational Church up to the center of South Berwick.





And then sometimes we got off and sometimes we went down even further. We went down to Hog Point, and then we would come back home again, or we'd go to Dover. This was in my high school years, some of it was, and that was oodles of fun to do that.

Mr. Gerrish, who lived right across from the Congregational Church in South Berwick, which is still there, and his home is still there, was the conductor. And every morning he used to go out with a leather bag, and that was where he had his change and so forth. And he had a belt around the front of him with - where you would give him a dime and get a nickel back, and he would reach in that funny bag to give it to you.



**Down at what they called the junction in South Berwick, there was a barn, a huge barn, where cars were stored. And they would change the cars at that time, at nighttime quite frequently.**

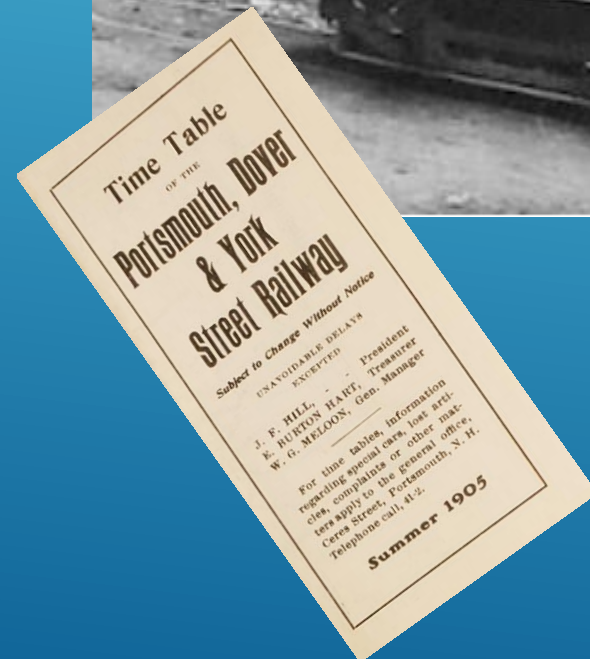
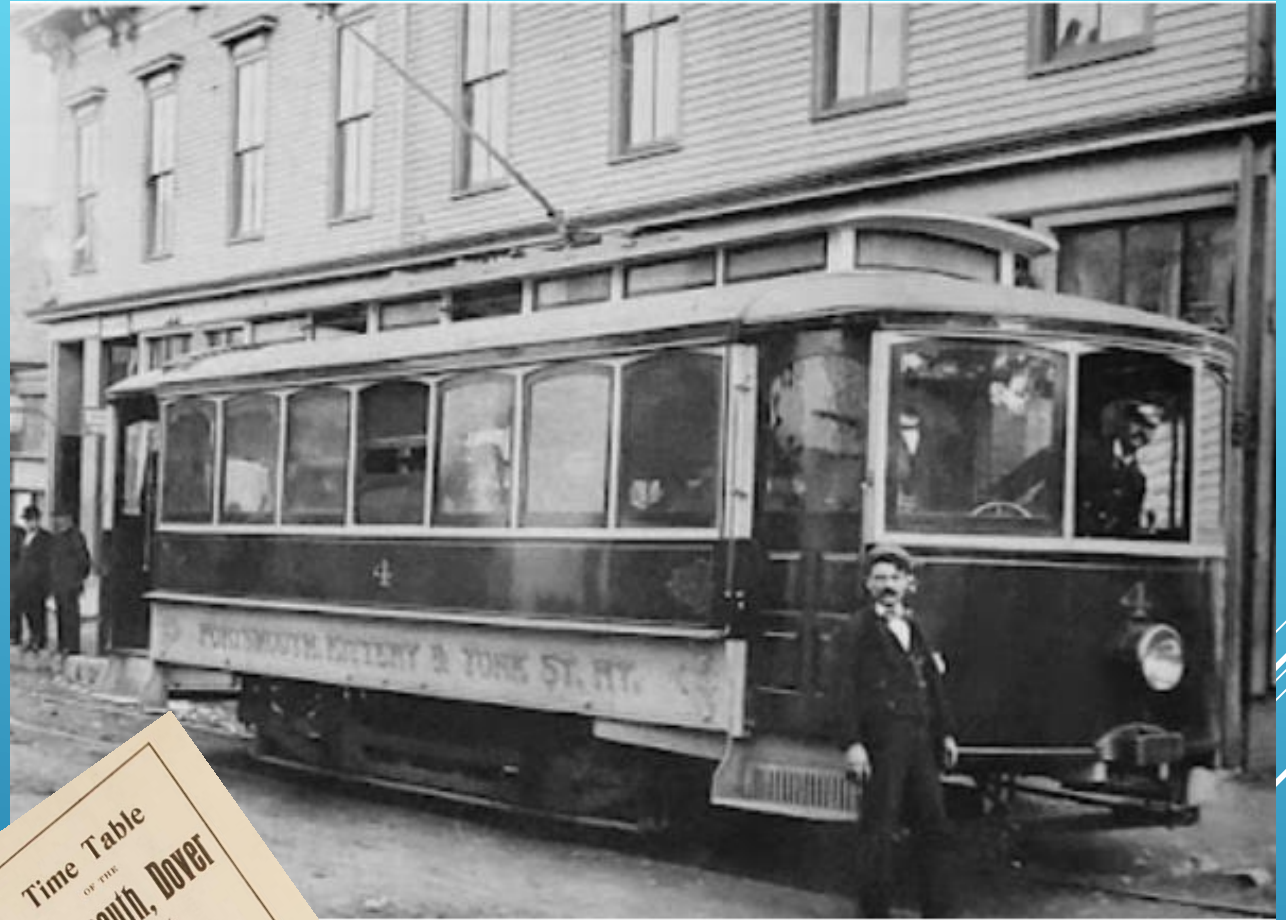
**But in the summer, on warm, warm days, it was fun to go on that troll with the open window frames. My father would be so tired that we didn't go out very much at nighttime. My father was one of the biggest politicians I ever knew in my life. He would come home from work. We would have supper - and it was "supper" in those days. It was not dinner, it was supper. And all of us would sit around the big table in the dining room, and we all would tell him what we had been doing that day.**





And we would listen to his political expertise because he read every newspaper he could put his hands-on, and he was a devotee of Teddy Roosevelt. And I remember one night he came into the house, and he said to my mother, "Where is that brand-new tub, washtub, that I got for you?" She says, "It's out on the back porch, hanging on the wall where I always leave the washtubs." He says, "I'm going to take it." And he went off, up the street with this brand-new washtub.

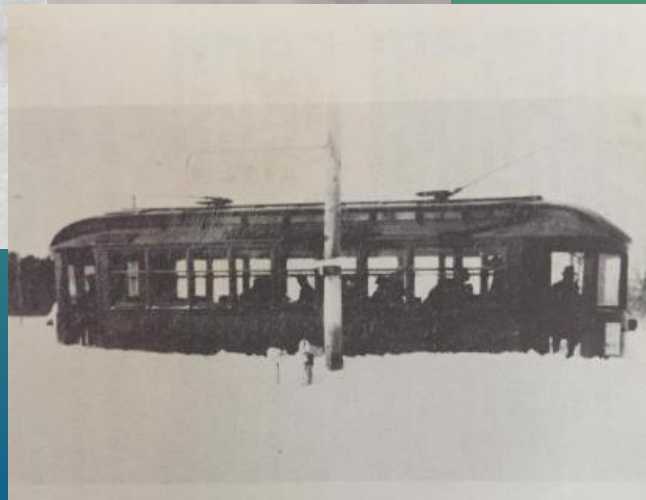
And I said to my mother, "What is he going to do with that?" "Oh," she said, "you wait. You'll find out." She said, "Go out on the porch and sit there and wait." Well, I went out, and I sat there, and pretty soon I heard 'tha-rump, tha-rump, tha-rump-rump-rump.' And here comes my father down the street with Mr. Swayze, who lived across the street and had a bakery up where Flynn's Bakery is, and two or three other men who played cornetts and clarinets, and my father played the drums [laughter] and my oldest brother played the bass horn.



And they came down with this great, big sign that said, "Vote for Teddy Roosevelt." And then they got on the trolley at the Congregational Church, and they - it happened to be warm - and they would yell, "Vote for Teddy! Vote for Teddy!" And I thought that was the most wonderful thing. My father was out politicining [sic] for Teddy Roosevelt. And I thought he was a wonder - Teddy Roosevelt was a wonderful man, and I thought my father was, too, I can assure you.







What about the wintertime? Tell me about how the trolleys operated in the wintertime?

Mildred Obrey: You never knew, because we didn't have really very good snowplowing in those days. We had sidewalks in South Berwick, which was more than Elliot ever had, but we had the sidewalks.

How did they plow the snow?

Mildred Obrey: They had a snowplow on the front. Eventually, they had a snowplow that was pulled by horses. It was a big one. But I do remember when they had - two - it would have two handles, a man would walk behind it, and the horses, horse, would be hitched to it, and he would come down the sidewalk and clean off the sidewalks and the road.

But I do remember when they rolled the snow, and this was a great, huge roller that would come down the road and would compact the snow so that the sleighs could go over it.



**In the wintertime, the trolley cars were heated? Yes?**

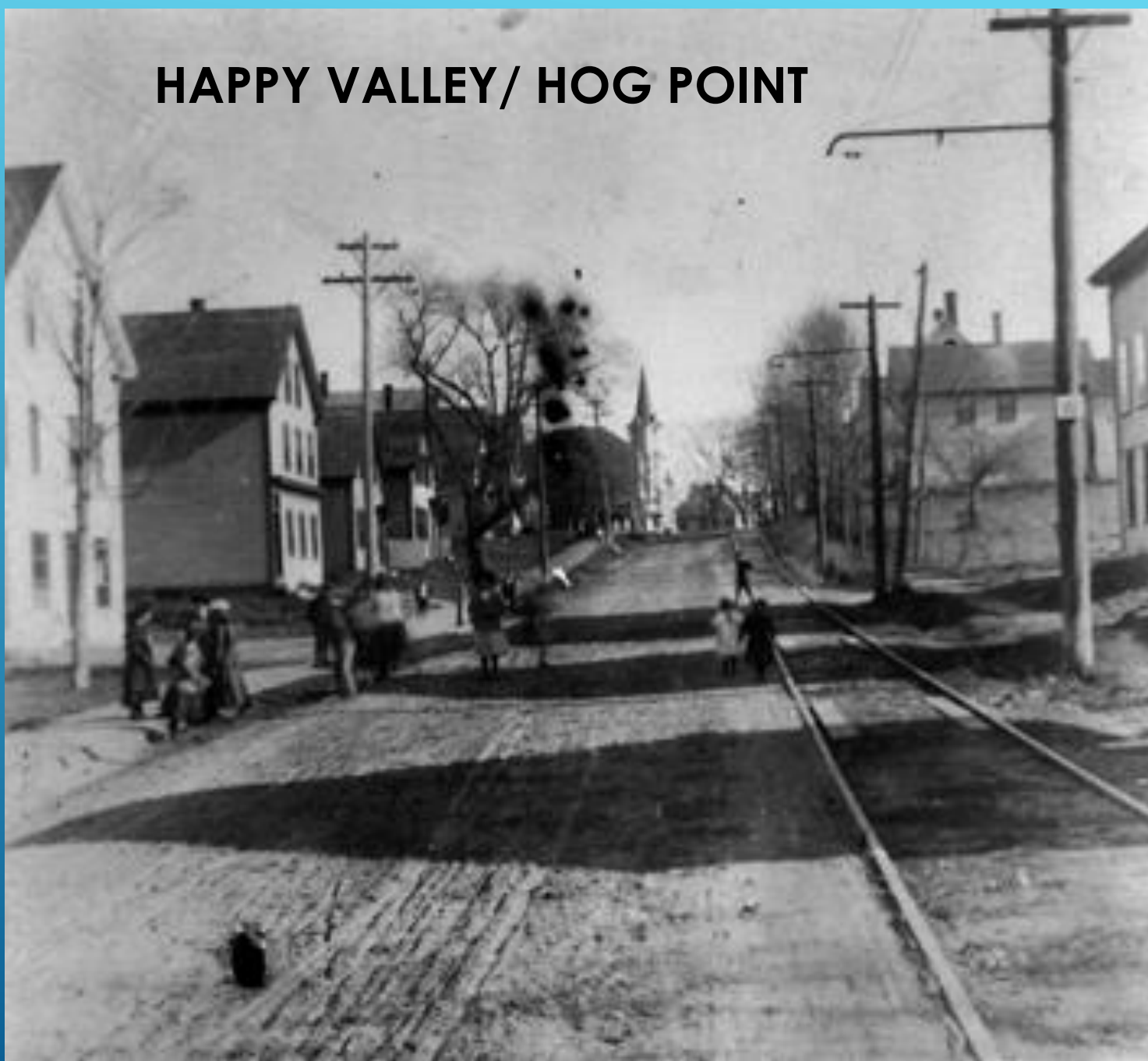
**Mildred Obrey: Yes. They were. I know that my father went back and forth to Dover on the trolley car. We kids used to ride it places that we were going in the wintertime.**

**Where would you go?**

**Mildred Obrey: Oh, Hog Point.**



# HAPPY VALLEY/ HOG POINT



## Why would you go down there?

Mildred Obrey: Well, just to go see what was going on. We had friends that went to Berwick Academy and lived in the Hog Point area, so we'd go down there and, we would go down to Hog Point, across the bridge, and go to Salmon Falls, which is now called Rollinsford (NH).

And, by the way, I was the only member of my family born outside of Maine. I was born in "Little Canada." So, when I went to school and was in the...first grade or kindergarten, they said to me, "Where were you born?" And I said, "Little Canada." So, they put me down as a Canadian.

Little Canada was a section of South Berwick by the bridge to Salmon Falls, down near the mill area, where the French people lived, so they called it "Little Canada." And that was the only place when my father started working at the Kidder Press, where he could get a rent that would, uh, get him onto trolley cars and so forth, on the train to go to Dover.



Why would you and your family use the trolley car?

Mildred Obrey: **Because we didn't have an automobile. You see, I was - I was born during the time when the first automobiles were, came into South Berwick. I lived in - we had moved from the land of Little Canada down on the riverfront, and I was -**

**They would use it for Dover, trips to Dover for shopping primarily. And then, later, during World War 1, my father left the Kidder Press and went to the Navy Yard. and, of course, you went by trolley to the Navy Yard.**

**Well, I guess Dad was the only one, because my brother, Merle, had died, and my brother, Herbert, was at the Naval Academy. My brother, Miles, did some, he went to Dover because he belonged to what is now called the National Guard**



...and sometimes, just to get on time to work in the cotton mill in Salmon Falls. One of my brothers worked in the cotton mill in Salmon Falls. And, I guess, just to get from here- and, of course, Dover was a place we liked to go to for shopping. And Salmon Falls had some very good stores. There was a McNally's Store in Salmon Falls that my mother traded with.

Otherwise, we shopped right in the center of the town.

We would buy candy, and we would buy popcorn and oranges and bananas. Oranges and bananas were a rarity. At Christmas time, in the toe of my stocking, I would have one big orange, and that was considered quite a luxury. And every Fourth of July we had a terrific picnic down in our backyard and invited everybody and his brother to it.

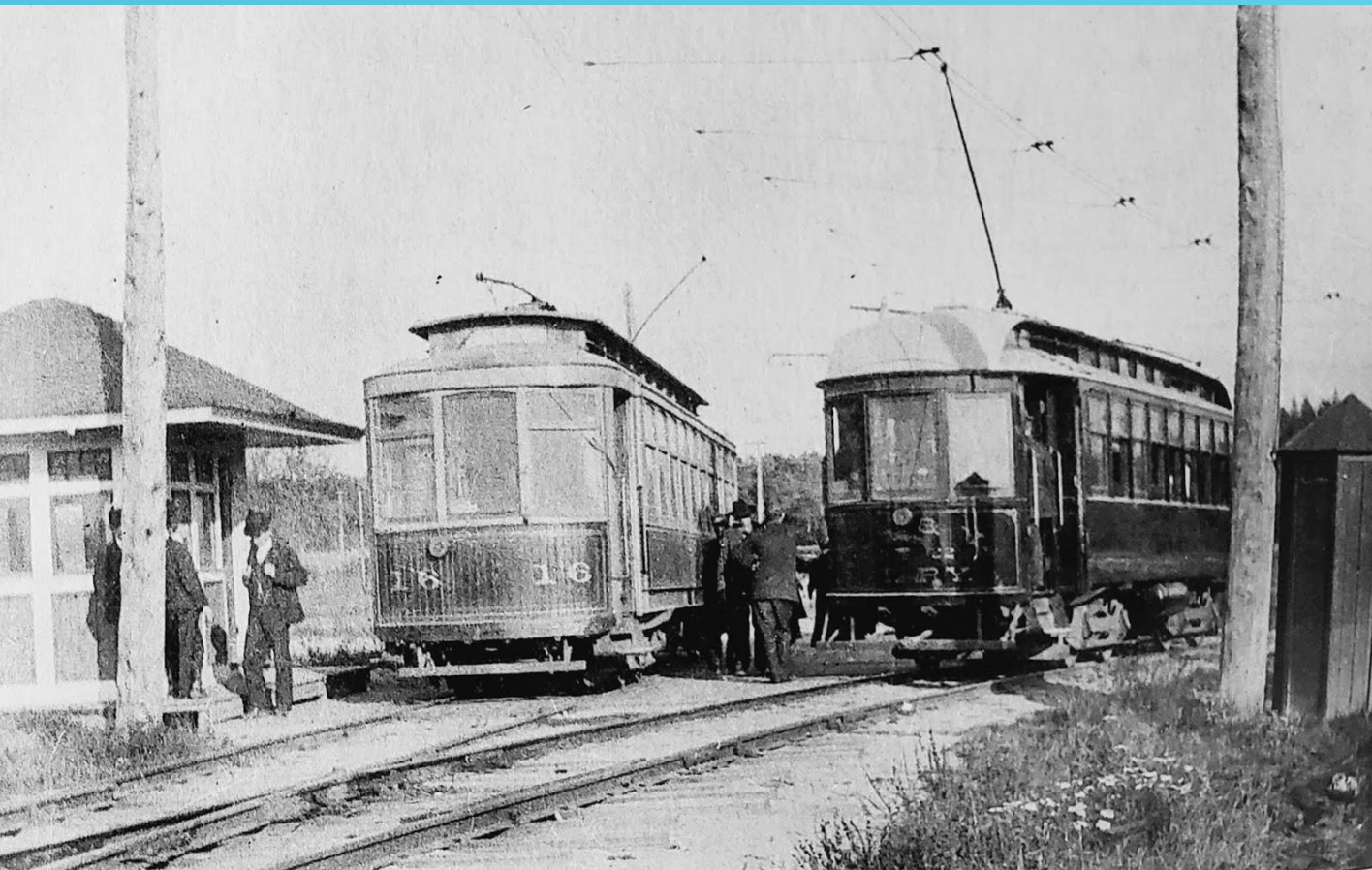




I'd get onto the trolley, and I always had a little purse with some change in it, and I would give Mr. Gerrish maybe \$0.10 because the ride to, Salmon Falls was \$0.10, I believe if I remember correctly. And I guess that was a roundtrip for \$0.10, from the Congregational Church down into Hog Point. Then I would walk across the street into Salmon Falls, and there they had a Hewdon's Dry Goods Store, and they had some wonderful gingham that I liked, and my mother would buy me gingham and make my own clothes for me.

She was an outstanding tailoress. She made at one time the uniforms for a whole company of National Guard people. She was a marvelous seamstress. So, we were self-supporting.





**No 16 at South Berwick Junction**

Tell me about the people who worked on the trolley car.

**Mildred Obrey: ... and, of course, Mr. Gerrish was still the conductor. That was my neighbor.**

**And then there were people that worked in the car barn that I didn't know very much about, because they probably were some of the French people who lived down in the Hog Point area. And I didn't know too many of them, because they went to a parochial school, while I went to the public school.**

**And then most of them I would meet in grammar school. And, by the way, grammar school went up to the ninth grade, and then you went four years from there to Berwick Academy, but not everyone got there, to Berwick Academy, at the time.**

What was the conductor's job? What would he do?

**Mildred Obrey: The conductor would move with the motorman. He would move the trolley. When the trolley turned around and came back, they would move the trolley over to go in another direction. And of, course, the conductor took the fares, and the motorman steered the trolley. Those were the two that I knew quite well.**



What, what condition were the trolleys in? Were they well maintained?

**Mildred Obrey:** They were always clean. Of course, in mud season, you'd get an awful lot of mud on the floor because it couldn't be helped, but they kept them clean. And the trolleys went at least once a day into the car barn to be cleaned and so forth, and they were, and the windows were clean, and you could see out of them.

They weren't comfortable because they had the wooden seats that you sat in. They were not upholstered seats. But you never seemed to mind it. You didn't expect to be a luxury, but it was a means of transportation.

Phil Morse: Did, did you ever, uh, peek into the car barn and see what was going on in the car barn?

**Mildred Obrey:** Oh, I had been in the car barn and seen them. I saw them move the car on the turnstile in the car barn, too. That was another thing that they did. Oh, yes, I knew the car barn quite well. And a friend of mine, who went to Boston University with me, married one of the men who had been sort of a headman at the car barn. His name was Butler.





Do you know why the trolley company went into bankruptcy?

Mildred Obrey: People were getting automobiles, and you got around much faster by automobile. And when you started out, you knew what time you were going to start and when you were coming back, so people just weren't riding the trolleys like they had when I was very young.



My last trolley - big trolley ride. I went from South Berwick to Dover, and then from Dover to Exeter (NH), and from Exeter to Newburyport (MA), and from Newburyport to Amesbury (MA), where my father worked for Sturtevant making the tops for the Franklin sedan people. And then I stayed in Amesbury one or two nights, then Saturday we went by trolley to Revere Beach, and he took me all around the beach at that time. From Revere Beach, we went by trolley to Portsmouth, and then we came home by train because the trains were still running at that time.

And then Dad got a car. We got a Willys-Knight car. It was a nice, little car, and he would come home by car. At one time, we could go, starting out in South Berwick could go to Boston by trolley, if you knew how to connect to those various spots. At Newburyport you could get to Boston by trolley and all around that area. I was at Berwick Academy at that time when I did that trip by myself.

## Describe the trolley cars in Boston.

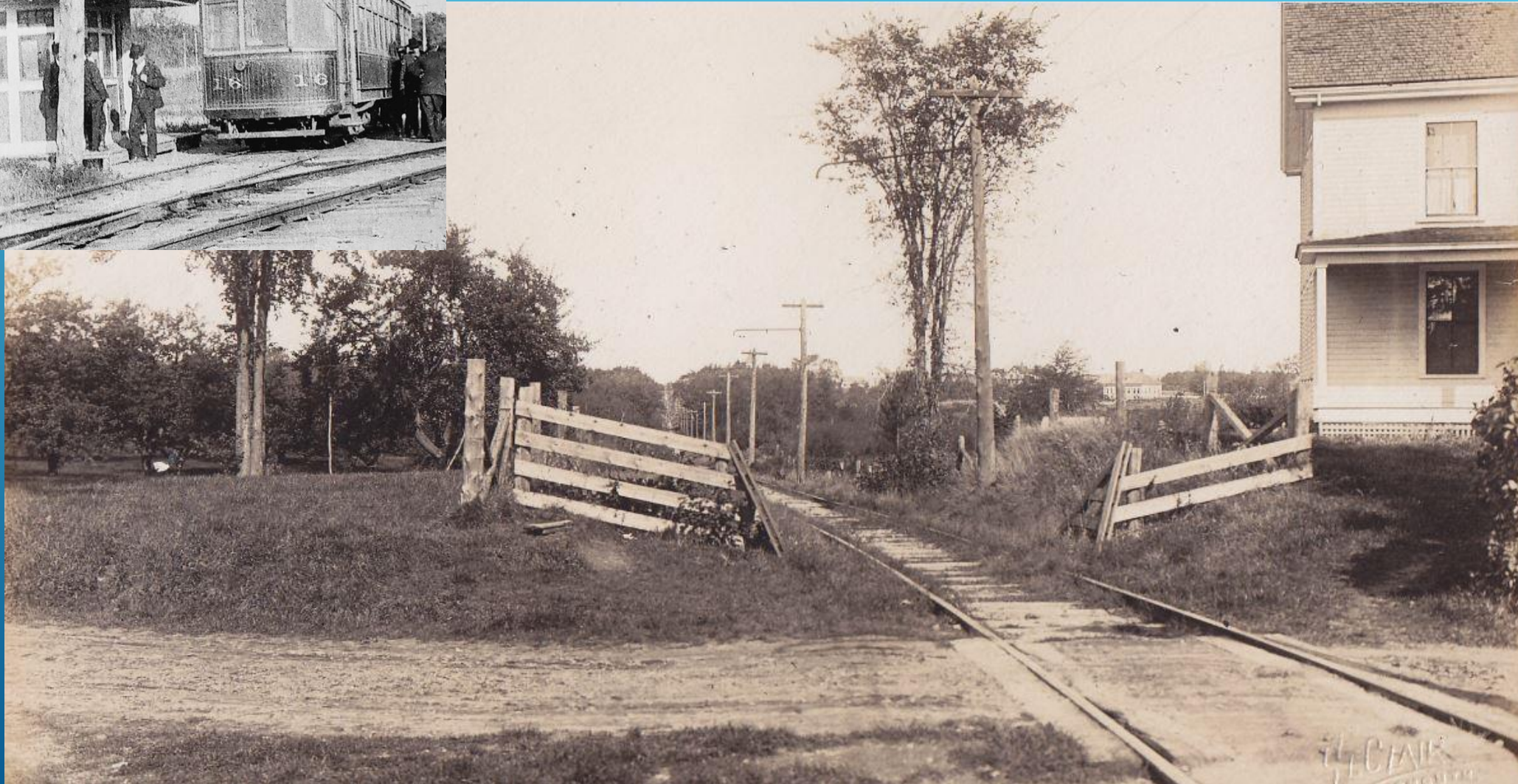
**Mildred Obrey: The trolley cars in Boston were very much - until the elevated railway came in - were very much like this. They were apt to be not quite as long, and they were quite fast, and sometimes, after Dad got a car, we would go up to just outside of Boston and take the trolley car into the city of Boston. And they went very, very fast. And they were kind of frightening for a country girl. And one day, my roommate and I at Boston University were sitting in one of those trolleys, and my roommate went like this. I looked and here was this old man, sitting. He had a hatpin. He had this great, long hatpin that the ladies pinned their hats on with, and he was sticking it in the rear ends of all the women that he could stick it in, and we thought that was hilarious.**





You have a picture of car number 16 there. Can you tell me about car 16? Do you remember it?

Mildred Obrey: Yes, This is it right here. That was the pull, drag, and yank, and that was - that's what I remember about it, that we went short distances primarily on this car, and also a bunch of us kids would use this car for jolly rides. That was if we got bored. We could take a ride on the trolley.



**Tobey's  
Corner -  
Near Mildred  
Obrey's  
house**



And then I remember the there was a trolley going down in the back my house here, down to Green Acre which was not a Bahá'í colony at that time but was Miss Farmer's home down there. Well, it was not her home. It was a building that she had owned. And she used to invite people from all over.





Frank Libman '10



**Mildred Obrey's home  
on Farmer Road, Eliot**

**There's that whole street. I live on Moses, Gerrish, Farmer Road, which was named after Sarah Farmer. And the trolley used to go down in the back of here when I was in high school this was. And the men used to love it when the Bahá'ís finally got down there. The men loved it, because there's a beach down there and water, and they used to go swimming, sometimes in the nude... And my father would come home and he would say, "Hmmm, saw a pretty good sight today."**

Did he ever go swimming with 'em?

**Mildred Obrey: No, but I went to many of the Bahá'í lectures. I met some very fine people. And one of the dearest friends I had lived right across there, and she was a Bahá'í.**

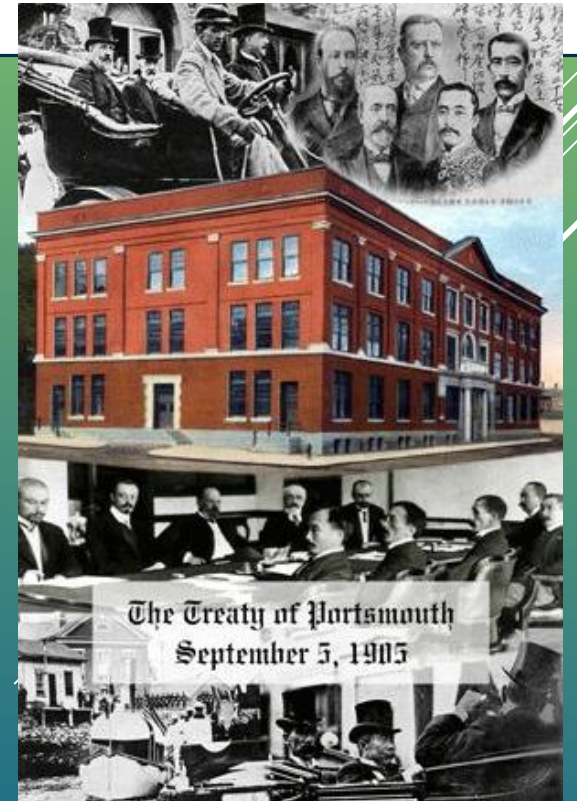


Tell us about your first recollections of riding the trolley with your father, when you went down to Kittery or Portsmouth and took the Ferry.

Mildred Obrey: Oh, yes. I was 3 years old (1905). There was a big Peace Pact that was signed at the Navy Yard in Portsmouth. They had a boat that had been at the Navy Yard. It had been used there for storage and all sorts of things and then it was reconditioned and was going to sail to Annapolis, Maryland, to be at the Naval Academy.

And my father thought I should go down to that, so my father took me by trolley car to Portsmouth. And then, in Portsmouth, we took the ferry, because this was before Memorial Bridge was built in Portsmouth. We went across on one of the last trips out to it, across by ferry, to the Navy Yard, and we boarded the boat.

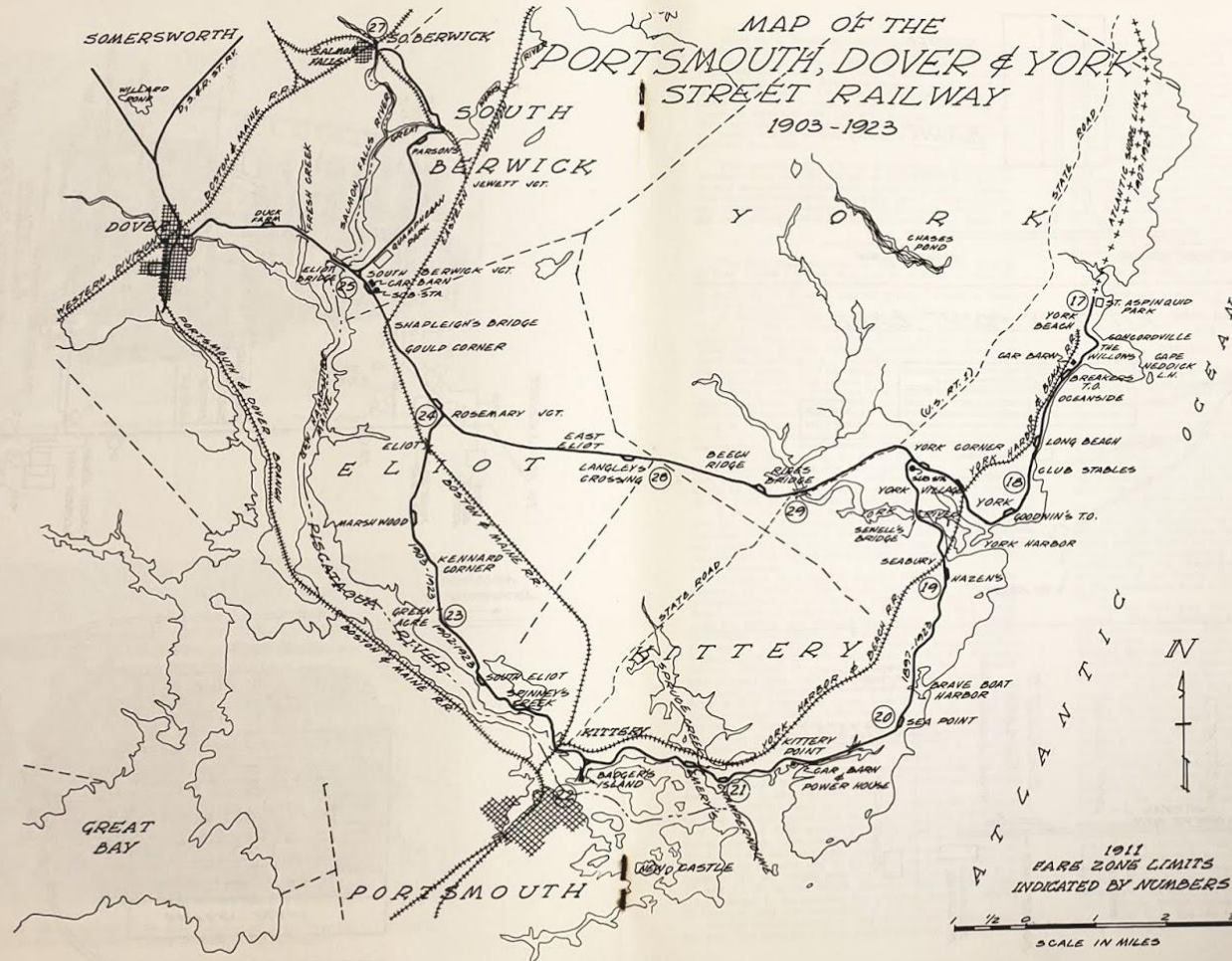
And there was a redhead sailor who carried me up the ladders and down the ladders, all over that boat, and told me all about the boat.





I think that trolley cars were a method, a means of our becoming a part of a world that was changing. We were able to see, by going these short distances that many times we went - we were able to go to a city, which was Dover, or to Portsmouth. We were able to go to beaches, before cars, automobiles. The common man could have them -

We were able to do all of those things that brought us into a world that was so different from anything that most people living in the countryside went through.



The trolley car meant to America, in the small towns such as South Berwick and Eliot and Kittery, it meant an opportunity to get away, because we didn't have automobiles, you see? There were automobiles when I was a little girl, but my family didn't have one. But we went all of the places, and we used the trolley to get there. And I remember going to Boston as a little girl, and I remember the, trolleys in the city of Boston.

So, it was a means of communication with a fast-moving world. So, it was a means of transportation in between the automobile.



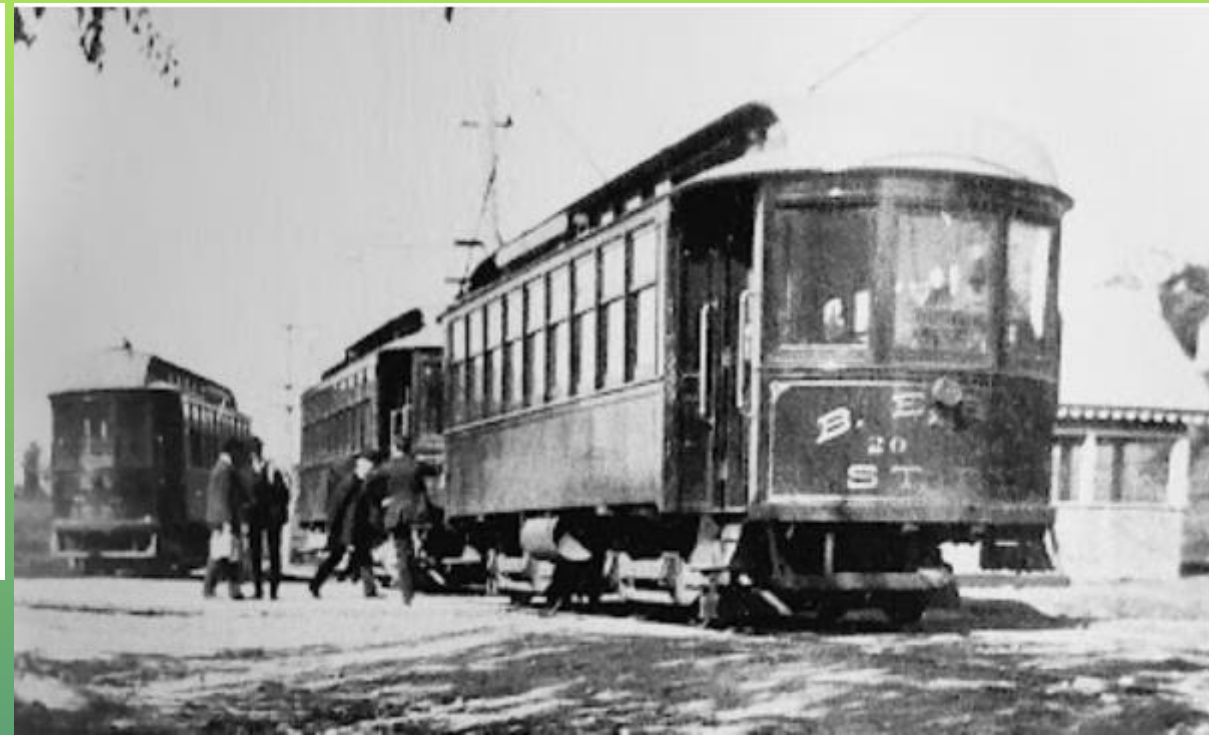
**What a wonderful way to bring a group of people into a modern world, and they were a means of doing just that. Because here was my father, who had been a cowboy. Here he was, working on automobiles, and would travel only by train, and this was just a wonderful. We young people that were growing up, we thought nothing of going to Boston as young people.**



**Now, the trolleys were still running then, you see, but we were in a new way of living. And I was not surprised at these things. We'd been through World War 1. Oh, I could tell you stories about that would make your hair stand on end. My senior year at Boston University was during the Great Depression.**



But you could adjust because you had lived during a period of time when we had to go through the mills closing, the shoe shops running at just very, very little; the Navy Yard being an area that was the Godsend to this whole community. You had seen, during that period of time, the trolley playing a part in bringing a brand-new religion [Bahá'í]. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, blessed my house when he came here and for a number of years, we had the mast to the boat that he almost went overboard in, on the Piscataqua River.



We'd been through this whole period of time when it was exciting, fast-moving, and the trolley car had played a big part in our ability to get from here to there, to be a part of it.



The trolley cars were that tie into the future that so many of us took and understood what to do because we got from there to somewhere else. And I was fortunate that I did get taken by people to many, many places. These trolley cars were just, just great. They really were. To get onto a trolley in Boston and go to Faneuil Hall Market when it was a real, honest-to-goodness market, and to get down to Filene's and Jordan Marsh's, Stearns, and all of those stores in Boston that you get to by trolley.

They were such a means of getting where you wanted to go. And then the automobile became very popular and it was only in the cities that you found the trolley cars. But you knew all about them. You knew how to get on them. You knew how to get off them. I missed those trolley cars to get from one place to the other because I didn't drive.



# CREDITS

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