



# Book Review

## 'Lost Trolleys' Gives Glimpse Of Bygone Era

*Lost Trolleys of Queens and Long Island*, by Stephen L. Meyers, Images of Rail Series, Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, South Carolina, 128 pp, \$19.99.

BY LINDA J. WILSON

From the late 1800s to the mid 1930s, electrically powered trolley lines dominated public transportation in most American municipalities, and Queens, Brooklyn, Nassau and Suffolk Counties were no exception. Now Arcadia Publishing, a leading publisher of local and regional history in the United States has added *Lost Trolleys of Queens and Long Island* by Stephen L. Meyers to its list of profusely illustrated books on local Queens history to explain the importance of trolley transportation to Queens and Long Island and supply some of the reasons for its demise and almost complete eradication from the local landscape.

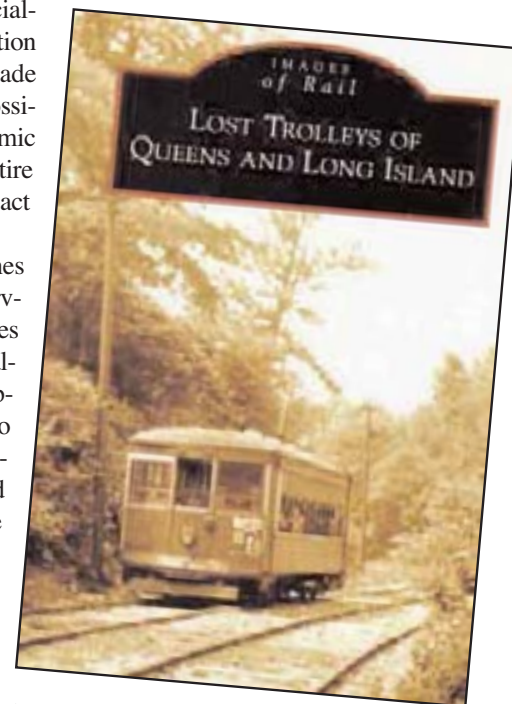
Most Arcadia publications are written by experts in their particular field, as is *Lost Trolleys*. Meyers was born a mere two

blocks from the geographic center of Manhattan and came by his fascination with rail traffic at an early age. He demonstrated Lionel model electric trains as one of his first jobs and researched their past and present as a hobby. He earned a bachelor of science degree in transportation economics from New York University in 1955 and after a career in transportation with several airlines became an instructor of international trade at the Academy of Advanced Traffic in Chicago. A member of the Electric Railroaders' Association in New York and other, similar groups, he is the author of *Manhattan's Lost Streetcars*, also published as part of Arcadia's Images of Rail series.

Meyers notes in his introduction to *Lost Trolleys* the considerable importance of trolleys to America's growing urban population in the later years of the 19th and early years of the 20th century. Before Henry Ford put America on wheels with his Model T, the only way to get from one place to another was on foot, on horseback, by horse-drawn carriage or by "bone-shaker" bicycle. The

trolley, inexpensive, frequent and, especially where trolley lines ran in conjunction with railroads, nearly ubiquitous, made shopping, visiting and business travel possible. "It was a major social and economic factor and had a lasting effect on the entire area," Meyers says of the trolley's impact on Long Island.

Many of the Long Island trolley lines came into being because the rail lines serving the Long Island coastal communities on the North Shore could not economically run to each town. Trolley line subsidiaries were built by the railroads to connect each community with the railroad line and ran until paved roads and almost universal car ownership made them obsolete. In 10 concisely written and heavily illustrated chapters, Meyers describes the trolley lines that reached almost every corner of the Long Island landmass that begins on the eastern banks of the East River and extends to the North and South Forks. He demonstrates expert knowledge of the power sources that sent the trolley cars on their way over the tracks that ran almost everywhere and notes the importance of the lines' connection to Manhattan. His detailed descriptions of the several and varied types of trolley cars is almost encyclopedic. Moreover, his background in transportation economics provides considerable insight into the reasons for the trolley lines' ascendancy and demise—a demise so complete that today only a few faint traces attest to the once



flourishing trolley transportation network. Remnants of once extant stations and the framework that once supported trolley tracks and power lines on the Queensboro Bridge, other line segments now taken over by the Metropolitan Transit Authority's A train subway line or lines even paved over to become part of the Grand Central Parkway are all that remain as evidence of the trolley lines of Queens and Long Island.

*Lost Trolleys of Queens and Long Island* will be a welcome addition to the library of any rail history buff.

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