

## Vaudeville and the New England Trolley Park Era

**Program length:** One hour

**Optional:** Combine this program with the one-hour “Vaudeville Retrospective” to create a custom two-hour presentation.

**Description:** This program explores the development of the late 19th and early 20th century “trolley park” and the parallel relationship with the growing entertainment and amusement industry.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, electric trolley companies across the U.S. constructed end-of-the-line picnic parks to encourage Sunday ridership. In an era of urban population growth and increased leisure for workers, these parks grew into popular amusement attractions, some of which survive today.

Outdoor Vaudeville theatres became an important component of these parks, and they hired thousands of performers who were

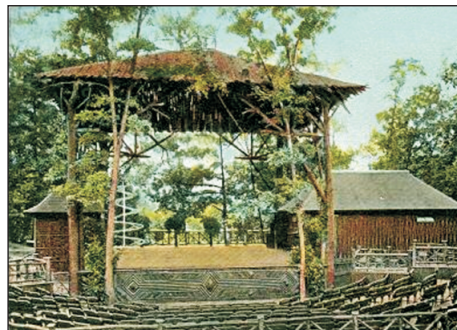
“at liberty” from indoor work during the summer months. “Big-time” and “small-time” Vaudeville acts worked at such parks, as did large-scale circus aerial and thrill acts. The effusive energy these performers shared with the public became a memorable part of the leisure experience.

Combining a lecture presentation and performance with interpretative graphics, this program tells the story of the rise and fall of the trolley parks in New England, and the fate of many of the parks in the ensuing decades.

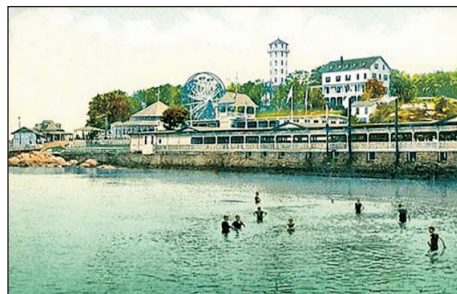


Whalom Park, Lunenburg, Mass. (1893-2000)

**About the Presenter:** R.W. Bacon is an all-but-retired acrobatic juggler, jazz banjoist, and comic dancer – and a nowhere-near-retired historian and museum professional. During a 35-year career in commercial showbusiness he performed at many former trolley parks, and thus brings observations of both the faded glory of some venues – and the timeless appeal of verdant leisure destinations. The program is based on his decades of research on American Vaudeville, and on an article prepared for the *NEPA Exchange*, the magazine of the New England Park Association. ■



Norumbega Park, Newton, Mass. (1897-1964)



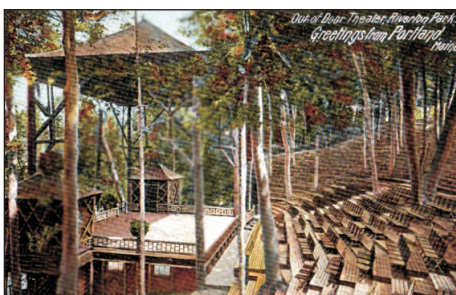
Rocky Point Park, Warwick, R.I. (1847-1995)



Mountain Park, Holyoke, Mass. (1894-1987)



Queen City Park, Burlington, Vt. (1900-1929)



Riverton Park, Portland, Maine (1896-1929)



Hampton Beach, N.H. Casino & Bandshell, (1899)



Savin Rock Park, West Haven Conn. (1870-1966)