

The Trams and Trolleybuses of TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

BY

Allen Morrison

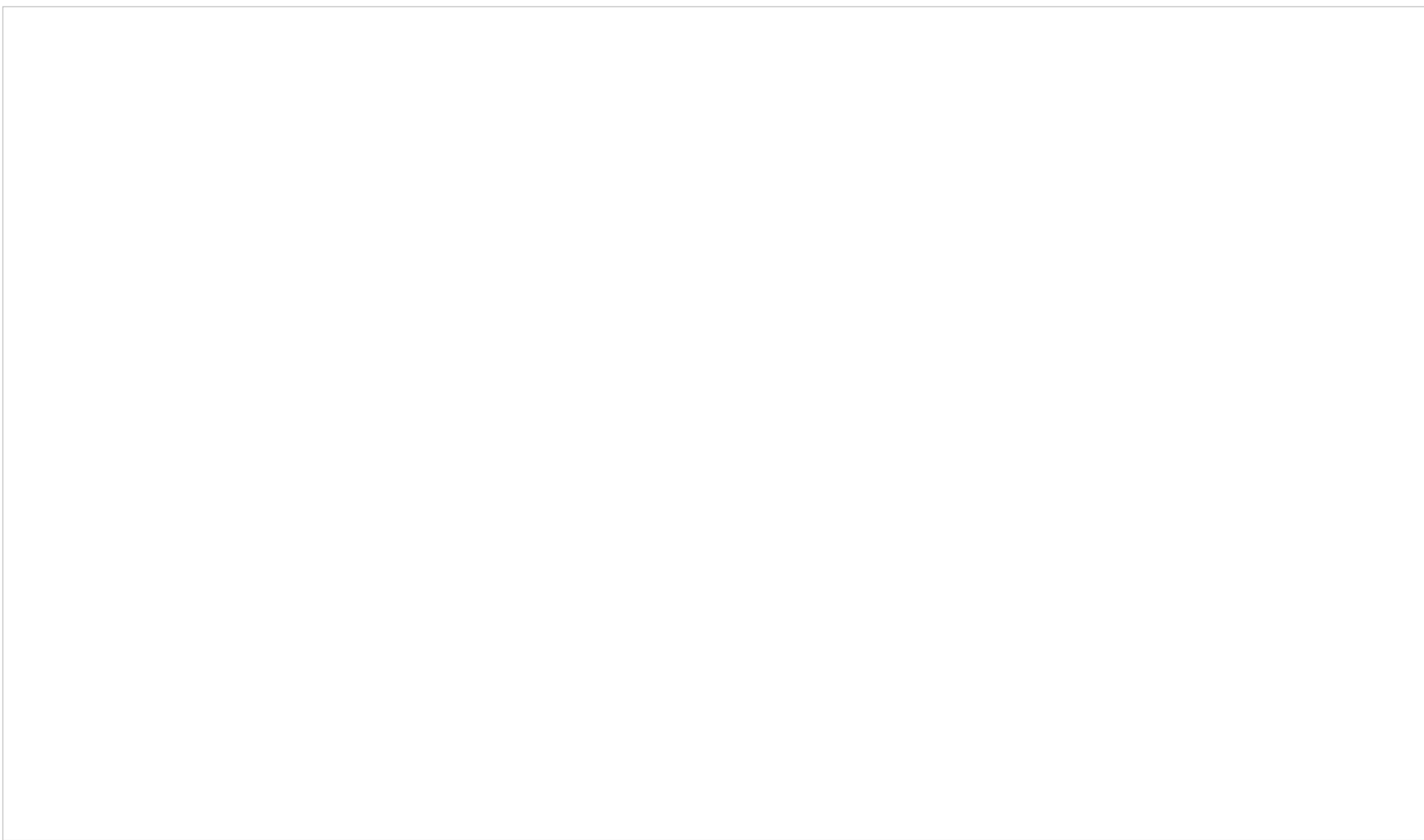
Trinidad and Tobago are the southernmost islands of the Lesser Antilles [see [area map](#)]. The larger island, Trinidad, is about 40 miles wide and lies only 10 miles from the northeast coast of Venezuela. Discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1498 and claimed by Spain, the islands were acquired in 1797 by the British, who merged them as a single colony in 1889. Trinidad & Tobago achieved independence in 1962 and formed a republic in 1976. In the 20th century, oil has replaced sugar as the country's principal export.

(1) SAN FERNANDO

There were no passenger railways on Tobago island. The first railway on Trinidad island was a horsedrawn line called the Ciperio Tramway, which was built in the 1840s by a Scottish planter named William Eccles to transport produce from his sugar plantation to the wharf at San Fernando, 10 miles south of Port of Spain [see [area map](#)]. Tramcars be

carrying passengers along the first four miles of the line from San Fernando to Sainte Madeleine, on 5 March 1859. Steam locomotives replaced the animals and pulled the line to Princes Town by 1864. San Fernando and Port of Spain were not connected by railroad until 1882.

The origin of the 1859 rolling stock is unknown. No pictures of Ciperó Tramway in operation have been found. The illustration below shows a vehicle built for the line in 1859 by American Car Company in St. Louis, USA. The term "California car" refers to the hybrid open/closed design. [*Street Railway Review*, Chicago, 15 March 1902, p. 14.]



The Ciperó Tramway was eventually absorbed by the Trinidad Government Railways system, which operated until 1968. TGR's last locomotive is displayed today on Harris Promenade in San Fernando. The right-of-way between San Fernando and Sainte Madeleine was called Tramway Avenue until recently, is now called Ciperó

Avenue.

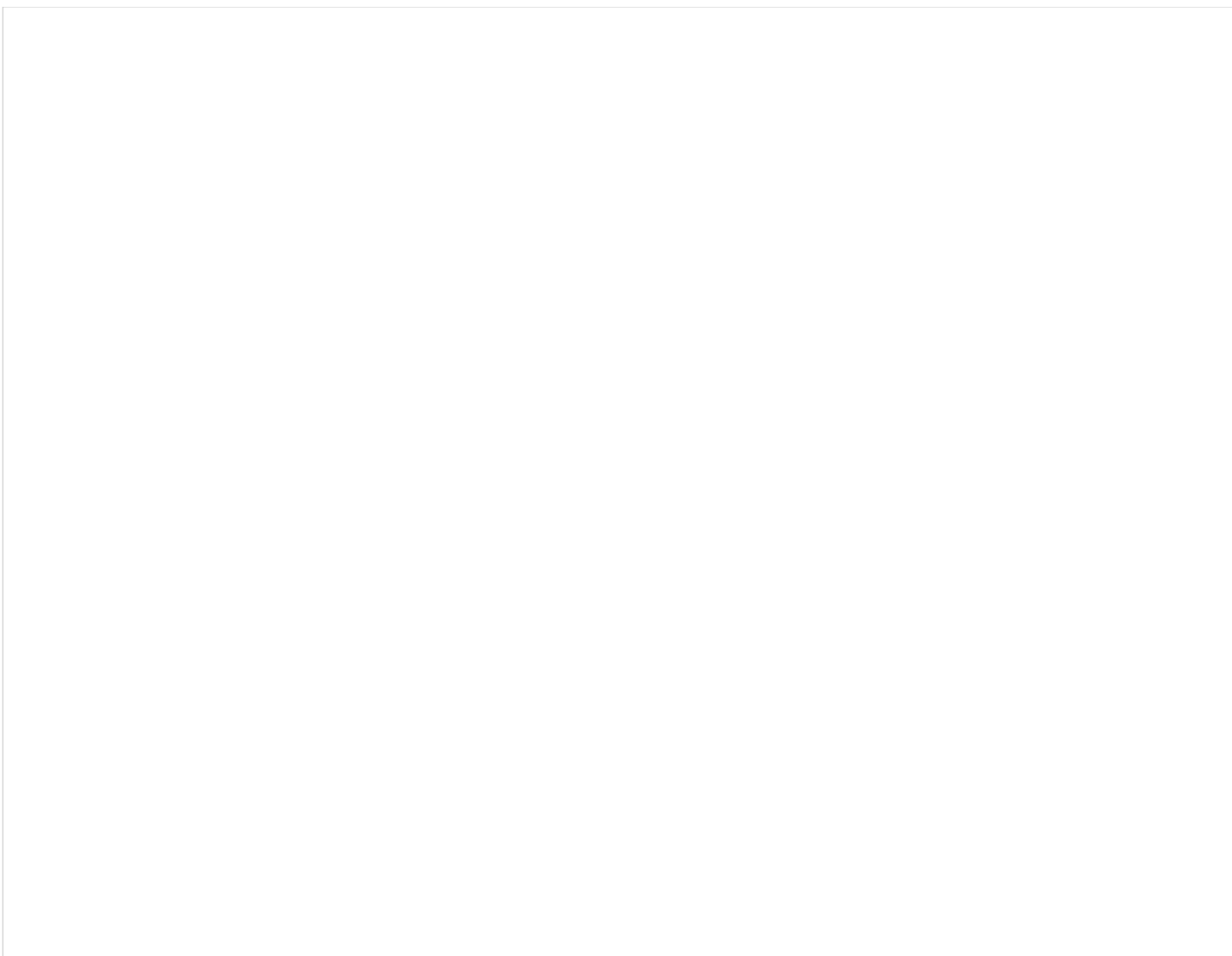
(2) PORT OF SPAIN

Trinidad's capital had a population of about 25,000 in 1870 when Trinidad Government Railways ran its first steam locomotive from Port of Spain to Arima, 14 miles to the east.

In 1879 a New Yorker named Roblins or Rollins acquired permission to install a tramway on the capital's streets. An American constructed a depot and stables near the railway station and laid two routes to Queens's Park Savannah [[city map](#)]. The Blue Tram went straight up Frederick Street.


The Red Tram went via South Quay, St. Vincent Street and Cipriani Boulevard. Port of Spain Tramways started carrying passengers on 29 May 1883.

The origin of its vehicles is uncertain. Tramcar number 1 shown in the undated photograph below, was built by Metropolitan Railway Carriage and Wagon Company, Birmingham, England, probably in the early 1880s [Metropolitan Cammell Archive, Birmingham Central Library]:



The existence of the photograph, however, is not proof that tram 9 ran in Port of Spain, or even left England. The photograph below – also undated but probably from about 1890 – shows a very different type of tram running along South Quay in Port of Spain [see [city map](#)]. It's too bad the photographer didn't notice the palm tree [col. Allen Morrison]:

Number 16 in the next view is turning from Broadway on South Quay [see [map](#)]. (This section of Frederick Street originally called Almond Walk.) The Railway Station is behind the photographer. The vehicle seems to be stranded without passengers or horse [photo by Montraville & Co collection Stephen Dalla Costa]:



Horsedrawn trams continued to run into the 20th century in the Port of Spain, despite the arrival of electricity. There were two separate electric tram systems, of different track gauges and using different cars.

Belmont Tramway Company began construction in 1894 and ordered three 6-bench open electric cars from J. G. Brill Company in Philadelphia on 1 October 1894. The photograph below was taken at the Brill factory before the vehicles were shipped to Trinidad [Brill Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania]:

Belmont Tramway tested an electric tram on 18 May 1888 and formally inaugurated electric streetcar service in Port of Spain the following 26 June. This was the fourth electric tramway constructed in Latin America, preceded only by lines in Nuevo Laredo (Mexico), Rio de Janeiro and Panama City (see [chronology](#)). The line ran from the railroad station ("Railway") up Frederick St. and along Queen's Park East [see [map](#)]. Track gauge is unknown but was said to be "narrow"; it was probably 42 inches. The only existing illustration of Port of Spain's first electric tramway was reproduced on a postage stamp in 1987 [col. Am]:

Belmont Tramway ordered another 6-bench car from B numbered 4, in 1896. The Tramways Company of Trinidad successor to Port of Spain Tramways, continued to operate horsedrawn trams throughout the city.

Port of Spain's *second electric tramway* was built by Trinidad Electric Company, organized in Nova Scotia in 1900. In 1901 the Canadians purchased the Tramways Company of Trinidad, Belmont Tramway Company and the Trinidad Light & Power Company and built a tram depot and maintenance facility at the west end of Park Street. See [below](#) [also see [complete tramway map](#)]. The structure fronting Ariapita Av. was later enlarged and used by trolleybuses [Trinidad & Tobago, Lands and Surveys Department Map "A.20.N", scale 1:2,500. Port of Spain, 1931]:

On 24 January 1902 Trinidad Electric ordered fifteen 9
bench open electric trams from J. G. Brill "for delivery by
June 1902" [*Street Railway Journal*, New York, 30 August
1902, p. 283]:

The new trams, numbered 1-15, were much larger than vehicles that Brill had built for Belmont Tramway several years before, and were distinguished by lack of bulkhead between the passenger and driver compartments. Trinidad Electric inaugurated Port of Spain's *second* electric tram system in July 1902 (the precise date was not recorded). The rails of the new system were laid to standard 56 1/2 inch gauge, the same used by Trinidad Government Railway.

The postcard view below shows two of the new cars meeting at Marine Square (today called Independence Square) at the foot of Frederick Street [see [map](#)]. Number 15 is about to turn left to allow number 8 to proceed north. Note that the route names are *painted* on the trams [col. AM]:

Trinidad Electric ordered five more similar cars from Bri
1903, to be numbered 16-20, and another four in 1904
numbered 21-24. The four tram routes – Belmont, Fort
Roads, St. Clair and St. Ann's (usually written St. Anns) -
met at the Transfer Station at the corner of Park and
Frederick Streets [see [map](#)] [postcard, col. AM]:

The postcard below shows one of the last cars built. View south from Marine Square, toward the lighthouse on the harbor [see [map](#)]. The Railway station was next to the lighthouse [col. AM]:

Trams 12 and 8 are at the north end of Frederick Street, below the Queen's Park Savannah [see [map](#)]. The building partly visible on the right is the National Museum [postcard col. AM]:

One of the unusual features of the Port of Spain tramway was its track around the *inside* of Queen's Park Savannah [see [map](#)]. St. Clair cars ran along the east and north side and after 4 pm each day trams marked "Savannah" ran in both directions around the entire 2.2-mile loop. This car was seen passing the 19th century mansions on Maraval Road [c. 1900 AM]:

The huge saman tree shown on this postcard was a local landmark [col. AM]:

Tram 3, which has lost its clerestory, was photographed
St. Ann's Rd., just north of Queen's Park Savannah [see [r](#)
[J. A. Penden]:

Tram 11 at the end of St. Ann's Rd. [see [map](#)]. Apparently
some point, wisely, Trinidad Electric gave up painting
route names on its cars [postcard. col. AM]:

(See [a 2012 view of the scene above.](#))

The long Four Roads line served lower income neighborhoods on the west side of town [see [map](#)]. An extra fare was charged beyond Cocorite [postcard, col. AM].

Toward the end of the Four Roads line there was a section
private right-of-way [see [map](#)] [col. Stephen Dalla Cost



Terminus of the Four Roads line. The conductor on the line is
walking the trolley pole around to the other end of the car
to
prepare for the return trip to town [col. Glen Beadon]

Trinidad Electric opened a new line to Laventille in 1918 [map](#)]. The *McGraw Electric Railway Directory* published year in New York noted 24 passenger motors trams run on 14 miles of track in Port of Spain. In 1920 a special archway was erected near Marine Square to honor the visit of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales [*Franklin's Year Book of Trinidad*, 1921, col. Glen Beadon]:

The *World Survey of Foreign Railways*, published in Washington in 1933, reported 30 cars in Port of Spain. The origin of the six additional trams is unknown, but it is possible that the Canadian owners transferred equipment from the tramway that they also owned in nearby Georgetown, Guyana, which closed in 1930.

The Trinidad government expropriated Trinidad Electricity in 1937 and thereafter the tramway system was operated by

local Trinidad Electricity Board. TEB eliminated the tram loop in Queen's Park Savannah and closed the Four Roads line beyond Cocorite. The photograph below was taken in 1941 at the corner of St. Vincent and Park Streets [see [m](#)]. Note the lopsided condition of tram 23 and the arch-roofed tram, without clerestory, on the right [Langford Collection, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich, England]:



This photograph of tram 26 was taken in the early 1940s. The inscription "Trinidad Electric Company Limited" is visible along the floor board. Destination signs say "Belmont" and "Laventille" [col. Arthur Krim]:

Tram 8 signed "Belmont" has been rebuilt without clerestory. This is St. Vincent St. [see [map](#)] [col. Arthur K]

On 12 December 1939 Trinidad Electricity Board ordered trolleybuses from Ransomes, Sims & Jefferies in Ipswich, England. The vehicles arrived in 1940 and were numbered 1-14. TEB opened a trolleybus line along Mucurapo Road and Ariapita Avenue on 1 October 1941 [see [map](#)]. The photograph in the advertisement below was taken on Seaview Quay, just east of the railroad station. Both vehicles are signed "Mucurapo Rd. / Ariapita Av." [*Passenger Transport Journal*, London, 12 June 1942, p. xxv]:

Here is an undated photograph of what appears to be Pcs
Spain trolleybus number 1. The location is uncertain, but
this may be the eastern end of Av. Ariapita, opposite the
trolleybus depot [see [map](#)]. The long word on the destination
board is illegible, even when enlarged [col. Glen Beado

In 1942 TEB acquired two more trolleybuses, numbered 15 and 16, that Ransomes had built for George Town, Malaya, but could not be delivered there because of the Second World War (Actually there had been three trolleybuses, but one was at sea.) In 1943 TEB closed the Laventille tram line and ordered a *second* batch of 14 trolleybuses from Ransomes which arrived in 1946-1947 and were numbered 17-30. These new vehicles, which had a somewhat different design, replaced trams on the Cocorite and Belmont lines, leaving trams in operation only to St. Clair and St. Ann's [see [morrison](#)]. Trolleybus number 28 shown below is signed "Henry St. James". The scene is Marine Square [postcard, col. All Morrison]:



In 1976 Trinidad native David Moore painted this scene which recalled the trolleybus days of his youth. Note left hand, English-style operation of both trolleybus and automobiles [David Moore]:

Port of Spain had the only trolleybuses in the western hemisphere that had doors on the left side and ran on the left side of two-way streets. TEB closed the St. Clair and St. Andrew tram lines on 31 March 1950, eliminating all tram operation in the city. However, it is said that, because of a tire shortage, the Belmont tram line was revived briefly in 1953 or 1954. Local transport was taken over in 1955 by City Transport Services, which closed the trolleybus system on the last day of 1956.

The Port of Spain tramway may have been the last to operate on a Caribbean island. The tramway in [Matanzas](#), the last to run in Cuba, closed in 1954; the [Kingston](#), Jamaica, system closed in 1948; San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1946; [Port-au](#)

[Prince](#), Haiti, in 1932; Bridgetown, Barbados, in 1925; Willemstad, Curaçao, in 1920; and the tramway in St. Pierre, Martinique, as well as all the town's residents were wiped out by an eruption of Mount Pelée volcano in 1902. The electric tramway in [Carúpano](#), Venezuela, only 100 miles west of the Port of Spain, closed in 1933; and the system in [Georgetown](#), Guyana, 300 miles down the coast of South America, closed in 1930.

In 2010 former Trinidad resident Glen Beadon sent the following photograph of his grandmother standing next to Port of Spain tram 7, which had been discarded by the tramway company about 1952 and placed beside the sea in Carenage, a town 3 miles west of Cocorite [see [map](#)]. The photograph was taken about 1956 [Edmund Wallace, courtesy Glen Beadon; see Mr. Beadon's "[Railway Biography](#)"]:



Also in 2010, Trinidad resident Burton Cole sent the picture below of one of the original 1902 trams which he says "was being used as a club house at the St. James Tennis Club until a few years ago"! The photograph was obviously taken before the vehicle was remodeled [col. Burton Cole]:

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(in order of publication)

Trinidad & Tobago. Lands and Surveys Dept. Topograph
maps at scale 1:2,500. Port of Spain, 1931. Wonderful de

including track layout, of the tramway system.

[Old Trinidad 1948](#)

In addition to the authors noted above, I wish to express

gratitude to the following persons for the information and illustrations that they provided: Harold E. Cox of Wilkes Barre, John R. Stevens of New York, Arthur Krim of Boston USA; Glen Beadon of Worcestershire, UK; and Jefferson McKell, David Moore, Burton Cole and Stephen Dalla Costa Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago.

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