

THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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— BULLETIN —

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RAILROADING IN SUTTON (?) and VICINITY

By - Charles A. Brown

The author has been associated with railroading for many years. He is on the staff of the SHORELINER, a publication by the New Haven Railroad Historical and Technical Association, Inc. and he is editor of TROLLEY STOP. The trolley museum at Kennebunkport, Maine was organized by Mr. Brown where he holds membership #1. He was associated with the Baldwin Locomotive Works for twelve years. His constant research and sustained interest in railroading has produced many published articles.

Most present day residents of Sutton are unaware of any railroads in the vicinity. The only active railroad now is the Providence and Worcester Railroad which just barely traverses the town in the Wilkinsonville area for about a mile. In fact, Sutton's only railroad station, ever, was the one in Wilkinsonville. Paradoxically, while railroad stations all over New England and elsewhere have been disappearing, Sutton's Wilkinsonville Station still stands. Not on its old location to serve passengers alighting from or boarding trains, but not far away, serving as a utility building for Clarence Chase.

Many residents will remember the trolley tracks of the Blackstone Valley Street Railway, ducking under the P&W tracks (then the New Haven RR) near DeFalco's pit. That operation of rail transportation quit in the early 30's when jitney buses and private autos siphoned traffic off the trolley line, causing it to abandon service.

Sutton's only inclusive railway system existed in a cranberry bog located in the now abandoned State Fish Hatchery pond system parallel to the West Sutton Road. The following is an excerpt from the Sutton Historical Society BULLETIN, JUNE 1979, " - miniature type train box cars running on miniature train tracks were used for hauling...tracing of the digging still exist...gravity propelled the cars to the bog at which time oxen took over...to pull the empty cars back to the pits."

These railroad operations are history, now, but there is another railroad that might have affected Sutton had it been built as proposed. In 1851, the Millbury and Southbridge RR was chartered with Asa Waters of Millbury, Ebenezer D. Ammidown and Manning Leonard, both of Southbridge, as incorporators. On Feb. 6, 1853, two proposed locations for the railroad were filed. One of these routes reportedly would have skirted Sutton in order to reach the valley of the French River in Oxford. No part of the proposed Millbury and Southbridge Railroad was ever built or excavated, so this remains a "paper" railroad.

But, there was some really historically significant railroading near Sutton, in Whitinsville in the late 19th century.

On January 3, 1844, Blackstone Valley industrialist Paul Whitin met in Providence with eight other prominent area entrepreneurs to form the Providence & Worcester Railroad. The Providence & Worcester RR was needed, these men agreed, to improve upon the speed and reliability of the Blackstone Canal Co. Like Paul Whitin, the other founders of the P&W had a stake in the area transportation, most having something to do with textiles. They sought to expedite the movement and reduce the cost of the movement of their products and raw materials, as the American Industrial Revolution began to bloom. With the opening of the P&W in 1848, the Blackstone Valley became a center of the textile industry - but the P&W line had missed Whitin's textile machinery manufacturing shop by a country mile. Whitin's shops were located on the Mumford River in the town of Northbridge, and were powered by the waters of the Mumford, a tributary of the Blackstone. The nearest rails were the P&W at Linwood. In deference to Whitin, the station at Linwood was named Whitins. Whitin's machine shop grew with the textile industry it served, and the Whitins name can be found today in mills around the world. Horse and oxen power was used to draw wagons of raw material and supplies between Whitins Station and the machine shop and, in the reverse direction, to transport the finished machines to the freight station. This 1¼ mile drayage proved to be an early inconvenience to the growing company. In 1889, a fire destroyed Whitin's barn. As a result, Marsten Whitin then began his search for a better means of hauling freight between the shop and the P&W at Whitins station. Marsten Whitin's inquiries led him to the Thompson-Houston Electric Co., of Lynn, Mass., then one of the leading builders of electric motors, generators and control equipment. Thompson-Houston was one of the two prime components of what was soon to become the General Electric Co. It is somewhat surprising to contemplate the reasoning behind Whitin's selection of electric power for his railroad connection, as his decision was made only two years after Frank Sprague had proven the feasibility of electric traction in Richmond, in 1888! The order for electric locomotive #1 was placed with Thompson-Houston in June 1890, and specified that the unit be capable of hauling 60 tons at a speed of 7MPH. Handling the order for Thompson-Houston (their very first for an electric locomotive) was Mr. Curtis H. Veeder but, who was at the time employed by Thompson-Houston.

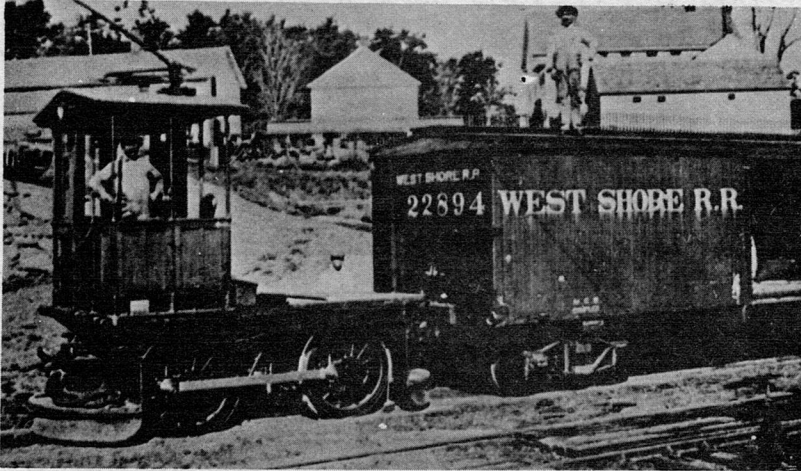
While we are waiting for the delivery of #1, let's look at other traction events in the Blackstone Valley. The street railways had brought Northbridge within easy commuting distance of Worcester by 1894, through a series of extended links through Millbury, Wilkinsonville, Saundersville, and Farnumsville to the Rockdale section of Northbridge. Further extensions were delayed by six years of economic depression, but in 1900, the Worcester & Blackstone Valley Street Railway entered Whitinsville via a spur from Rockdale, along Church St. Another spur from Linwood (Whitins Station) to Whitinsville along Linwood Ave. is the one on which little #1 and her later sister locomotive worked. In November 1890, the Whitinsville Street Railway was incorporated apparently as a subsidiary of Whitin Machine Works. Rails were laid the necessary 550 VDC generator installed wires strung along the 1¼-mile route. But, there was no locomotive to use the energy in the wire. Horses were used to haul freight cars on the newly-laid railway. Whitin wrote Thompson-Houston of his displeasure at the delay of the locomotive. On December 20, 1890, Marsten Whitin wrote to Charles H. Gould of Thompson-Houston: "The matter has hung fire for so long, that we are getting suspicious, and when the machine gets here we shall give it the hardest test we can." The little engine finally arrived in May, 1892, nearly a year and a half late. The exact date is not recorded, but on May 11, 1982 Marsden Whitin wrote saying that it was being given a

through testing. The practice of hauling freight cars with horses continued after #1's arrival, however, in spite of #1's satisfactory performance until legal problems were solved stemming from a transportation company being run by a manufacturing concern.

When #1 arrived, it looked more like a fork truck than a locomotive. It was actually an adaptation of a mining locomotive. The locomotive had a wheelbase of only 6'4" with four 42" wheels, was 15'9½" long and weighed 42,525 lbs. The single motor powered one axle through a 1:25 reduction gear box and the main drivers were connected to the other set by driving rods. The control mechanism consisted of two rheostats, which were arranged so that no reversing switch was necessary. The Motorman stood facing whichever direction he wished to move, and had only to push the rheostat lever in that direction. A positive center lock was provided to prevent passing the neutral position of the control. Mechanical brakes were provided through wood lined bands engaging on a drum connected to the motor mechanism. The locomotive performed better than its specs, and hauled 4 to 6 loaded cars of merchandise or coal [200-300 tons] at speeds of 5MPH. Creature comforts for the motorman were minimal - he worked his levers fully exposed to the weather, except for a gazebo type roof over his head.

In 1893 the Whitinsville Street Railway went into bankruptcy. The assets of the Street Railway were bought by the Whitin Machine Works in January 1894, and the line was thereafter run as an integral part of the machinery manufacturing business. From 1894 until 1899 the line was exclusively used for freight movements. Then on January 1, 1899, passenger service was inaugurated over the line by the Linwood St. Rwy. This was a private corporation, owned by Marsten Whitin and a number of lesser Whitin associates. From its formation until 1925 the Linwood Street Railway leased the right to use Whitin Machine Works trackage, and ran frequent cars between Whitins Station at Linwood and the carbarn at the west edge of town, meeting all New Haven passenger trains and shift changes at the Machine Works. On January 26, 1925, the directors of the Works voted to buy the physical property of the Linwood Street Railway which had been in financial trouble for seven years for the sum of \$4,908.00. Agreement was made to keep the line running as long as there seemed to be a need for passenger service. That need was so diminished by the mid-30's due to the increased use of private passenger cars and jitney buses up and down the Blackstone Valley that on February 28 of that year, passenger service was discontinued. Freight service electrically powered continued until 1943 when the line was dieselized. Little change took place on this line over the years between 1900 and 1943, except that in 1940 a GE steeple cab 50-ton electric locomotive was bought second hand to replace the aging wood locomotives fashioned by the Taunton Locomotive Works to replace the original #1. This GE steeple cab locomotive came from the Southwest Missouri RR, as their #2, a number it retained while serving Whitins #2's tenure at Whhitins was not too well documented by the railfan community, as it arrived and departed during the years of World War II, when railfan photography and other activities were at low ebb. Dieselization took place in 1943, and the line flourished until the plant completed the move to the South in the 1960's. The frame of GE#2 was spotted in the plant in 1961, converted to an intra-plant flat car.

No story about Whitin Machine Works would be complete without mention of the 2-foot narrow gauge line serving the heavy in-house needs of the foundry and machine shops. This line, too, was electrified using the same 550 volts as the big brothers. The locomotives seemed grotesque, reaching for the same 21' wire as the standard gauge locomotives. The narrow gauge was dieselized later than the standard gauge division, using two GE 28-ton diesels acquired new in 1949. These machines were rescued from the scrap-heap by the railfans, and see service today on work trains and railfan extras at Edaville Railroad, So. Carver, Mass.



WMW #1- First industrial electric locomotive in USA



1- Snow plowing



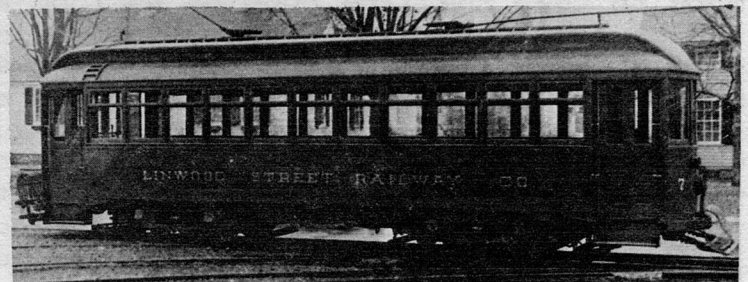
4- Narrow gauge diesel

WMW LINWOOD
STREET RR
LOCOMOTIVES
AND TROLLEY

2- Electric pulling cars
at Linwood Station



Linwood Street RR trolley



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1892 Electric Railway Engineering

NOTE - The author of this article
will be our guest speaker
October 4 meeting at the
Manchaug Baptist Church

A READER WRITES.....

Brought back many pleasant memories for me. It was in 1911, and I met a delightful lady dressed in a calico dress and a sunbonnet. It was Eliza Bullard and she asked me if I would like to see her house. The walls were covered with scenes of Colonial Days, and she had a chair that Lafayette had sat in.

The country store at the top of the West Sutton Hill had a fascinating array of penny candies. Mr. Luther gave the children haircuts. We put a bowl on top of their heads, and cut around it and the result was a very neat Buster Brown effect.

I attended the little one-room schoolhouse and Miss Lucy Phelps was my teacher. She was very strict, but an excellent teacher. In winter we used to get on our sleds at the top of the hill and coast all the way down to the school at the foot of the hill.

I stayed at the Freeland brick house for 6 months. Grandma Freeland was a wonderful lady. When she was nearly 100 years old she used to make a big batch of doughnuts every Saturday. She slept in the big ballroom. On rainy days we played in the ballroom.

Miss Alice Davis was our teacher in the little Eight Lots School House. We all adored her. There was a pond across from the school and we took our skates and skated at recess and at lunch time.

My step father was Henry Franklin Rice. He was in the State Legislature with Calvin Coolidge. He was a Civil War Veteran and he is buried in Sutton.

I enjoy the Bulletin very much.

Sincerely,

Ruth Bullock Cass

(Mrs. Matthew M. Cass)

YOU MAY HELP

An opportunity has been presented to the Society to participate in a local historical indoctrination course in preparation by Diane Phaneuf, fourth grade teacher at the Sutton Elementary School. She approached the Society for assistance in gathering material and personal involvement if possible.

Donald King has collected sample BULLETINS to be passed out to students, visits to specified sites are planned (the Blacksmith Shop, etc.) A very important segment of the course will be in class presentations by persons owning or having available some antique artifacts of local historical interest and to discuss that item with the class or delegate the presentation to an associate.

Please communicate with Diane Phaneuf at the Elementary School if you believe your cooperation will be helpful to the children in learning about Sutton's interesting history. They will be grateful.

MEMBERSHIP NOTICE

At a recent meeting of the Society's Board of Directors, the problem of unpaid dues was discussed. At the Board's discretion, the Treasurer was advised to drop from the membership all delinquency over a three year period.

MONTHLY MEETINGS— By Betty Pentland

March - The Society voted to donate \$500.00 toward a fund being raised by the DUDLEY GENDRON VFW POST to purchase a transportation van for the Elderly of Sutton. Kenneth Shaw presented a program on "Antique Tools." He explained their functions and answered questions pertaining to them.

April - This meeting was held at the Manchaug Baptist Church. Guest co-speakers were; James Mavor, Jr. and Byron Dix. Both men have coordinated a common avocation in studying and analyzing stone sites such as the cairns and stone chambers in New England and the Upton Chamber in particular (guests from the Upton Historical Society attended). They defined in lay terms and illustrations how calculations from astronomical alignments imply that the Upton Stone Chamber is much older than Colonial settlement, perhaps built 710-740 AD.

May - The evening's program at the Manchaug Baptist Church was presented by Dan Griffith who showed slides and discussed the plans for development of the Blackstone River Valley and restoration of sections of the canal.

June - At this meeting Mrs. Alice Riley abbreviated Sutton history transcribed in calligraphy by Mrs. Beverly Anderson was presented to the Society.

Professors James Border and Karen Border on the staff of Berkshire Community College were guest speakers. Their illustrated lecture on megalithic manmade stone work in North America and Europe was provocative.

The annual Blacksmith Shop fleamarket yielded \$362.00.

July - Due to rain, the planned picnic at the Eight Lots School House grounds was held at the West Sutton Baptist Church Hall. Marjorie Knapp described several historical papers belonging to her family. Charles Pentland trailered several one cylinder antique engines to the meeting.

August - The aborted July picnic was held at the Eight Lots School House grounds. It was voted to reserve eight copies of Vol.II Sutton Town History for the Society. Evelyn Smith generously offered two more copies.

September - A fleamarket at the Blacksmith Shop on Labor Day netted \$597.25. Shirley Nelson in settling a relative's estate donated many household furnishings and clothing to support a substantial sale. Many thanks go to Shirley for her kindness.

1983— MARCH TO SEPTEMBER— Welcome to new members

M/M Bradford Beaton
M/M Raymond Cofsky
M/M William Ekland
Dorothy Gould
M/M Robert Humes

Elizabeth A. Kolak
M/M Frank E. Morse
Mrs. Jean O'Reilly
M/M Donald Phaneuf
M/M Cliff Schwanske

IN MEMORIAM

Marguerit Higginbottom * Dr. Chester Nowalowski * Ethel Reed
Walter B. Shaw

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