

Make tracks for Ballston Spa



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With special essay
about the PP & J

Written by Maurice "Chris" Morley

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According to Edward Grose, the event of greatest importance by far in the development and growth of Ballston Spa was the construction of the Saratoga & Schenectady Railroad, begun in 1831 and completed in 1832, followed by the Rensselaer & Saratoga Railroad in 1833, which linked tracks from Troy to Ballston Spa. These were respectively the second and third steam railroads in New York State, the first road being from Albany to Schenectady. The arrival of the first train in the village dramatically changed life for residents and businessmen who, for the first time ever, could journey to Albany and back in one day. The following is Grose's vivid 1907 account of how these lines impacted life and commerce.

“The first train was run over the road from Schenectady to Ballston Spa on July 7, 1832. The train of three carriages as they were then called, was drawn by the locomotive “Fire- Fly” brought from England. The time occupied in the run was one hour and 28 minutes. The “Fire- Fly” for many years stood in the railroad shop at Green Island and is now preserved in the Smithsonian Institute at Washington.

The rails used were long strips of iron; three inches wide by half an inch thick, nailed to one edge of a horizontal timber about eight inches square. A piece of one of these primitive rails is in the high school museum in the village. Both locomotives and horses were used to draw the trains during the first year.

The first railroad station was on Bath Street, south of the tracks, where the flagman's house now stands, and was built in 1832. In 1849 a new station was built on the site of the present station, which was erected {on Low Street} in 1900.

Harvey Loomis, the proprietor of the Sans Souci, built The Arcade over the railroad tracks in 1832. The passenger trains stopped under the Arcade to accommodate the guests of the Sans Souci.

The first franchise for an electric railroad was granted in 1890, the road to run from Ballston Spa to Saratoga Springs. A number of franchises were granted at later dates, all of which were forfeited. The Saratoga Traction Company secured a franchise in 1899, and built the road from this village to Saratoga Springs, which is now part of the system of the Hudson Valley Railroad Company.

In 1896 a franchise was granted Arthur B. Paine & Associates and the Ballston Terminal Railroad was constructed. This road runs through the beautiful Kayaderosseras valley from Ballston Spa to Middle Grove, a distance of 12 miles.



Ballston Spa's Delaware & Hudson passenger railroad depot looking east, taken near Science Street with Milton Avenue in the far background. Horse and wagon driver on the right is at the Bath Street crossing. Station was torn down in 1900. Photo from Chris Morley Collection, from a glass lantern slide c. 1890 by J. S. Wooley, printed by Michael Noonan in 2007.

The company is now known as the Eastern New York Railroad Company. Their business consists largely in carrying freight for the large number of mills on the Kayaderosseras. The extension of the road through Galway to Amsterdam and Johnstown was contemplated at an early day.

The Schenectady & Saratoga Electric Road was opened in 1905. It is a double track road and one of the finest in the state. William Porter, now one of our oldest residents, has a record of long and faithful service as a railroad employee almost, if not quite, without parallel. He began work at the railroad station in this village in 1844 at the age of 15, when the late George Babcock was station agent, and continued in service in different positions until about two years ago when he retired from work after a service of 61 years in the same place.

Before the lines between Albany, Schenectady, Troy and Saratoga opened, the majority of travelers had made the trip to and from the village in rustic canvas-covered stagecoaches. With as many as 14 passengers crammed into each carriage, such trips typically involved long stretches down rocky, bumpy pathways over a period of days. By the time passengers arrived at their destinations they would often be completely exhausted. To reduce some of the anxiety, more industrious travelers would choose to take a canal boat for as much of the distance as possible, making the dreaded switch to a stagecoach only when no other option was available. During the winter months, short-distance travel was limited to horse and sleigh or horse and cutter, while long distance travel was nigh on impossible.



The American Hotel, which once stood on Bath Street, is visible in the center of this c. 1890 picture taken looking west from the D & H depot by an unknown photographer from the Chris Morley Collection. That's Science Street in the distance.

With the arrival of the Saratoga & Schenectady Railroad, everyone from the factory owners to the proprietors of hotels began to prosper. Rooms were filled to capacity. Entertainment establishments grew to accommodate the rapidly multiplying members of new guests and the village's business district thrived.

Pullman cars provided luxuries comparable to those inside a well-appointed home while rail passengers of the 1870s were extended the hospitality of a parlor and smoking salon. Meals were reportedly delivered and consumed in style while outside the scenery buzzed by at some 20 miles per hour. On Sundays passengers could conduct their own religious services with organ music and hymns. Trains were heated by potbelly stoves in the winter and were illuminated by candles or kerosene lamps at night. There was even a special little annex with a bottomless can to serve nature's call while enroute. Sleeping cars were available for evening runs.

Trains continued to play a vital role in the community throughout the first half of the 1900's. The fatal blow for Ballston's passenger train station came shortly after World War Two when automobiles became commonplace and air travel became safe, speedy and affordable.





**RAILWAY WILL
HAVE A FLOAT**

**Invited to Take Part in Parade
During Celebration of Ball-
ston Spa's Centennial.**

The Schenectady Railway Company has accepted an invitation from the village board of Ballston Spa to participate in the one hundredth anniversary of the village that will be held from June 23 to 25 this summer. The invitation was extended personally by I. W. Wigwag, president of the village board, to General Manager Peck, with the request that the company interest itself particularly in the floral parade that will be held during the celebration.

While the local officials have not decided as yet just how the company will be represented, it is thought that a float made to resemble a trolley car will be entered in the parade. It is also planned to have several motormen and conductors in uniform marching in line in the parade.

The D. & H. Railroad Company will also have a float in the parade. One of the first engines used by the company is now lying in the Ballston yards and it is thought that this relic will be decorated with flowers and exhibited.

This c. 1905 photo by J. S. Wooley from the Michael L. Noonan Collection shows the then new 1900 Ballston Spa D & H depot located approximately on the site of the original. The 1907 news clip at left courtesy of Ronald Ratchford.





Steve Leonardo, lead agent at the nearby Saratoga Springs railroad station, takes a reservation. PHOTO BY ANN HAUPRICH

Passenger trains still pass through village, but no longer stop

Although train whistles continue to fill the night air in Ballston Spa, Steve Leonardo, lead agent at the recently renovated Saratoga Springs railroad station, says the days of cars stopping to pick up and drop off passengers in the neighboring village are history. At least for the foreseeable future. The whistles currently heard coming from the tracks are from passenger trains as well as freight trains. Those wishing to become human cargo must drive or otherwise be transported a few miles up the road to The Spa City.

Whether or not the way things are is the way they will be down the line is not carved in stone, according to Leonardo. "Anything that passes through the Saratoga train station today also passes through Ballston Spa. I'd personally like to see a shuttle between the two communities," says the personable station agent, adding: "Ballston Spa has great potential. The tracks are already in place."

The fact that they linked to the Saratoga Station -- which was built along tracks owned by D & H and Canadian Pacific just off West Avenue in 1956 -- is an added plus. The station which is owned and operated by the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) was rejuvenated half a century later at a cost of \$5-million. The new 6,000 square foot passenger area contains an automated teller machine (ATM), a visitor's information kiosk, an outside patio area with benches, and a children's play area.

According to Leonardo, it's all about customers — keeping passengers and their loved ones comfortable and content. Leonardo who also has a professional karaoke and DJ business, goes so far as to bring in DVDs from his personal collection to share with those in the waiting area. "The only problem is that some people have walked off with the DVDs, so we're looking into tightening security a bit."

That's something he and Stan Zeh don't have to worry about with the grand piano that graces the sunny, spacious lobby. "We get a lot of talented Skidmore College music students passing through who stop to play and you can't believe the performances we get when members of the Philadelphia Orchestra are here during the summer. The CDTA also rents it out for wedding receptions . . . there was a beautiful one here just last weekend."



This photo taken by Salvy Prisco in November of 1952 shows his two daughters with baby brother in front of the boarded up passenger depot on Bath Street. A new passenger depot had opened a year before at the end of Columbia Avenue. Bottom photo by Michael L. Noonan shows the depot site where Manna's Restaurant & Banquet House now stands.



All Aboard the PP & J



The Chandler Trolley Car earned its keep with both freight and passengers. St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church on what is now Route 29 in Rock City Falls can be seen in the background. Photographs courtesy of the Chris Morley Collection.

Just before the turn-of-the-millennium, Maurice (“Chris”) Morley drew upon historical records and stories he recalled hearing from old-timers to pen this lively account about the once bustling Kayaderosseras Railroad from Middle Grove to Ballston Spa.

To help get you in the spirit of celebrating the Town of Milton’s 200th birthday, I would like to take you back in time to the year 1918 for a ride on the Kayaderosseras Railroad—or as we sometimes call it the “Push, Pull & Jerk.” Early in the morning, we pay our 30-cent fare for the full trip and board the electric train in Middle Grove in the Town of Greenfield bound for the high school, then on Malta Avenue, in Ballston Spa. For this trip the 28-seat motorized baggage and passenger car is the only one being used, but when the railroad is delivering or picking up freight at the mills along the Kayaderosseras, box cars and flat beds are added to the train.

Mr. Fred Bishop, our motorman, starts the car on its way and the Kayaderosseras begins to widen out into a pond, signaling that we are approaching George West’s Empire Mill where they manufacture paper used to make flat-bottomed paper bags. The sound of water rushing over the Empire Mill Dam and just a short distance further, the Excelsior Mill, is louder than the machinery in the mills which are located on the far side of the creek.

The cars begin to slow where the track curves into Rock City Falls passing the Big Falls Hotel on the edge of the track to our left. The buildings of the Kilmer or Stone Mill where newsprint for the New York Sun is made with rye straw are to our right as the tracks take us over the Kayaderosseras and into Rock City Falls. As we slow down for our first stop, the sounds of workmen come from the stone quarry to our right where they make lime for the paper mill and the welcoming porch of the Rock City Falls Hotel passes on our left. The train comes to a stop at Tenney Brothers store to load passengers and the cargo of mail and cans of milk for Ballston Spa.

The students must run down Washington Street to Milton Avenue and up to Malta Avenue in order to make it to school before the bell rings since the train is a little late again today!



Just before we pass over the Kayaderosseras once again, we go by the First Methodist Episcopal Church standing on the edge of the tracks to our right. A short ride brings us to West Milton and a stop at the Pioneer Mill where workers use the largest paper machine in the world to produce high grade manila paper. After passing the Johnson House on our left, the trip continues to Milton Center to stop for a few more passengers. Moving along once again, we see on our right the site of Haight's Grainery which burned in 1881, with the Lewis Grist and Saw Mill operating across the creek.

For the next few minutes we pass through a forest of pine, hemlock and hardwoods as the Kayaderosseras rushes to our right without dams or mills on our way to Craneville. The sound of water falling over a dam comes from the mill pond of L. M. Crane's Eagle Mill where they make paper collars and other paper products. After a quick stop for few more passengers, we move up the track to Factory Village where the power house and cow barn for the railroad are located. The train stops and our motorman speaks with Sas Eguen and his crew who are busily fixing tracks on the siding at the power house.

Under way once again, we pass the National Mill on our left where they manufacture newsprint for the Albany Journal and the Charleton Times. The train takes us into Bloodville and to the largest mill complex on our route — the Axe & Scythe Works founded by Isaiah Blood.

As we stop to pick up a few more students on their way to the high school, we see Blood's mansion standing on a hill to our left. Moving once more, we hear the sounds of hammers and workers as we pass through the axe works that occupy both sides of the creek and the track. We next pass stacks of logs waiting to be processed into pulp at George West's Pulp Mill before being shipped to his other paper mills along the creek.

On our left is the sash mill where Barber & Baker manufacture turbine water wheels as well as doors, sashes and moldings. A mile up the tracks, we pass Thompson's Finishing & Saw Mill before going beneath the tracks of the D & H, officially known as the Delaware & Hudson Railroad, but dubbed the Delay and Hesitate by school kids, as we enter the Village of Ballston Spa.

Crossing the mighty Kayaderosseras once again, we see the Blue Mill of the Glen Paper Collar Company on our left. The train then passes through George West's paper bag factory complex running parallel to the D & H tracks near Prospect Street, until we swing up Bath Street. We continue pass the Uline Brothers Iron & Brass Foundry which ships chilled plows around the country and Manogue's Planing & Saw Mill as we pull to a stop at the end of Washington Street near the Bull's Head Tannery, one of the largest employers in the area, processing hides into leather to use in the making of shoes.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL L. NOONAN

Local author Timothy Starr published two books during the Bicentennial year that detail the histories of area mills and trolley lines. Copies of *Lost Industries of the Kaydeross Valley* and *Lost Railroads of the Kaydeross Valley*. Both titles are available at Brookside Museum Gift Shop. Starr was photographed at Isaiah Blood's Axe Factory on the creek's west side in the Fall of 2007.