

The Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad

(An informal talk by Philip M. Morgan before the St. Wulstan Society January 27th, 1956)

Tonight, I've chosen the subject of the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad very largely because it is the railroad with which I was most familiar in my childhood. Of course, when I first became acquainted with it at the beginning of the 20th Century, it was known as the Peterboro Branch of the Fitchburg Division of the Boston and Maine Railroad, indeed it wasn't until many years later that I ever heard the original name.

I was reminded of it when reading Blake's History of Princeton, where I found the following reference:

“The Barre and Worcester Road was chartered April 26. 1847, an extension of time was granted, and again in 1849 when the name was changed to Boston, Barre and Gardner.”

“In 1851 the time was again extended two years and the road released from its obligation to build the section leading to Barre. In 1853, and again in 1856, the time was extended and liberty was granted to build it in sections, the first section to extend from Worcester to Princeton, the second from Princeton to Gardner, and the third from Princeton to Barre. The road was completed to Gardner in 1871, but the section from Princeton to Barre was not built.”

An interesting comment by Blake reads as follows:

“It will surprise the reader of today that this railroad was to be a horse railroad like railroads already established in England, and in some respects the construction was to follow the English model. It was proposed that a stone foundation be constructed on which should be laid rails of granite surmounted by a bar of iron. The motion on such a road if level, would be easy and pleasant, and if the inclination did not exceed 26 feet to the mile, there would be no serious obstacle

from friction. It was also suggested that at different grades a flat car might be provided on which the horses could stand and feed during the descent, and thus be rested and refreshed for further labor.”

Mind you, this latter quotation refers to the early prospectus for a railroad before the advent of the steam locomotive and before the rolled steel rail. By the time the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad had been completed from Worcester to Gardner, the use of horses for power and of granite rails were both things of the past.

The fact that there was a 25 year delay between the granting of the charter and the completion of the first two sections - 26 miles in length from Worcester to Gardner - shows the relative unimportance of this railroad as compared with the Boston - Albany Railroad completed in 1861 and the Boston - Providence R.R..

Sometimes one wonders why the railroad was ever built. As I've thought about it these factors have come to mind.

1. The development of through highways in Central Massachusetts was greatly retarded. It wasn't until the early 20th Century and the advent of the automobile that any substantial program of highway construction was undertaken in Central Worcester County.
2. The development of the granaries in the Middle West and the transportation of those crops to the East at reasonable prices made the growing of corn, rye, wheat, and other grains on New England's limited and rather poor fields uneconomical for the dairy or poultry farmer.
3. The development of ice boxes using natural ice and later of refrigerating railroad cars, made the construction of large storage ice houses on all of the ponds by- which the railroad passed one of the largest industries of Central Worcester County in the latter part of the 19th Century and the early part of the 20th Century.

As a child, I remember so well the long strings of boxcars lined up by these ice houses in the summer, which were loaded every day and dispatched to nearby

cities like Worcester, Boston, and Providence for distribution the next day by horse-drawn ice wagons in the respective city of destination.

I also remember how, in winter, the morning train bound North early in the morning would stop at each of these houses to let off crews of ice harvesters and equipment.

4. The milk train, which ran south every morning at 4:30 a.m., served as the means of transport of the farmers' milk to distributing centers in the larger cities of New England.

5. There was still a quantity of pine lumber, and spruce, which was transported to the cities by this railroad.

6. Small shoddy mills, small furniture factories, tack mills, all had to use the railroad as the only means for transportation of their products to their markets.

7. The development of summer resorts and colonies in small towns along the route of the Boston, Barre and Gardner, such as Jefferson, Princeton, and later in Peterboro, when the line was extended through Winchendon, via Jaffrey and Rindge.

8. The railroad served as the rapid means of transporting blueberries, which in season, numbered hundreds of cases - hence the familiar name of the "Blueberry Special". Others will claim that this name came from the fact that when the train broke down, the passengers would disembark and eat their fill of blueberries, which grew in profusion all along the route.

9. Importance as link between Massachusetts and Vermont at Gardner; Cheshire at Winchendon; and Central Massachusetts at Jefferson.

A whole evening could be devoted to each of these nine reasons for the existence of the Boston, Barre and Gardner Railroad; however, I shall dwell only upon parts of its history and then the contribution, which the railroad made to the

development of “summer resorts”.

In 1847, a committee of Directors made a report to the stockholders of the Barre and Worcester Railroad, informing the stockholders that permission had been granted to construct a railroad "from some convenient point in Worcester on the Nashua and Worcester Railroad through Holden, Princeton, Rutland, Hubbardston, Oakham to Barre, and from Princeton through Hubbardston to some convenient point on the Vermont and Massachusetts Railroad in Gardner.” They further informed the stockholders that it was estimated that it would cost \$727,000 to construct the railroad, and the following equipment, which was to be bought from the Rhode Island Locomotive Works and the Osgood Bradley Car Co., totaling \$70,400, would be required to begin operation. The equipment was as follows:

5 Engines	\$35,000
7 Passenger cars	\$13,300
20 Freight Cars	\$13,000
6 Baggage cars	\$ 3,000
Snow Plows and other equipment	\$ 2,200
Gravel Cars	\$ 3,900
Totaling	\$797,400

The population to be served by such a route would total 38,000 persons.

In the report to stockholders of February 1870, we learn that the contract for the construction of the railroad was given to R. P. Cook & Co. of Brockville, Canada. We also learn, in other annual reports that the first trip of the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad, which was the successor to the Barre and Worcester, was made on The 4th of September in 1871.

In the early reports of the railroad we also learn that one D. Waldo Lincoln, and Stephen Salisbury, Junior and Senior, were Directors of the Boston, Barre and Gardner.

From the annual report of 1874, we are informed that the railroad then terminated at Garden Street in Worcester, that during the preceding year had been extended to the Monadnock Railroad in Winchendon from Gardner, which meant that by the end of 1873 the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad crossed the following other railroads: At Holden, the Massachusetts Central; at Gardner, the Vermont and Massachusetts, and at Winchendon, the Cheshire Railroad. They were operating four passenger trains each day and, at the end of 1873, the railroad to build had cost \$1,182,550. In the year of 1873, they had a total income of \$95,796.70 - an expense of \$80,535.37 - leaving a gross operating income of approximately \$15,000.

The report for operations in 1876 reflects for the first that the effect of leasing from the Monadnock Railroad the Winchendon to Peterboro branch, and marks the first year in which income from the connection with the Vermont and Massachusetts Railroad was reflected in earnings. Total income in 1876 was \$158,476.09, with an expense of \$120,502.18.

The Tenth Annual Report, given in January of 1879, and reflecting operations of 1878, was given by George S. Barton of Worcester, who was the then president of the railroad. The interval between 1879 and 1881 was not a particularly profitable period for the railroad; indeed, there were assignments made for the creditors and third mortgage bonds were issued.

The Twelfth Annual Report, delivered in 1881, and covering operations in 1880, showed a net for that year, after all expenses, of \$4823.56.

The Thirteenth Annual Report indicated that one W. W. Rice of Worcester was a Director.

The Fifteenth Report, of 1884 showed that Mr. A. George Bullock, of Worcester, was a Director, and in that year the railroad reported a net income of \$1633.85. An interesting item included in the report on 1883 operations shows that 350 tons of steel rails replaced a like amount of iron rail.

Although the Annual Reports of 1878 and 1860 refer to an accident and to “the Princeton Disaster”, none of the gory details are contained in the report to stockholders. I would some day like to find some source that has some record of these particular accidents. Perhaps they are in the newspaper files in the library, but I have not had a chance to investigate as yet.

The enclosed map showing the route of the Barre and Worcester Railroad was part and parcel of the report of the Directors to the stockholders in 1847. You will note on that map the proposed route from Princeton to, Barre, through Coldbrook.

It was this railroad, which brought Mount Wachusett and Princeton within reach of the people of Worcester. One could leave Worcester at 8:00 in the morning, stop at almost every crossing, and be at Princeton station three quarters of an hour later. Upon arrival, there would be countless horse drawn carriages, stages, carryalls, and even farm wagons, to meet those who were to sight-see, to visit, to vacation, or to join their families in their year-round or summer homes.

The normal schedule at the turn of the century called for six trips each way on weekdays. Seldom were there less than 3 cars in the train and on holidays there might be as many as eight coaches (all wooden, of course, with open platforms and kerosene lamps).

For a while in the early 20th Century, a special service operated from Gardner to Jefferson where the Boston, Barre and Gardner railroad passed under the Central Massachusetts Railroad and where a single car was attached to a through train from Northampton enroute to Boston. This service was offered to summer citizens of Hubbardston and Princeton whose businesses were in Boston. From Hubbardston, it was regularly a convenience to Frederick Cunningham, who was a lawyer in Boston. Mr. Bullock, I'm sure, will remember the service, and I'm sure he will recall the names of Princeton citizens who availed themselves of this special service. The operation from Gardner to Jefferson usually consisted of a locomotive and a single car.

Interestingly, it was forty years before the advent of the railroad that city residents were attracted to Princeton, even though to reach the village required a seven-mile

stage journey.

According to Blake, the first stage line through Princeton was probably established about 1822. It made but one trip a week and went from "Royalston, through Gardner, Westminster, Princeton and West Boylston to Worcester." After a few years, the route was shortened and ran only from Gardner to Worcester. This was a comparatively small stage drawn by two horses, and it continued to operate until the Massachusetts and Vermont Railroad came to Gardner.

A second stage route ran through Princeton, it originated in Barre, and passed through Hubbardston, Princeton, Sterling, Lancaster, Bolton, Stow, Sudbury, Weston, Waltham, Watertown, Cambridge, and Boston. This route was established in about 1823. Horses were changed in Princeton, Bolton and Lincoln. This operation continued until the railroad from Boston to Fitchburg was completed.

1849 saw the establishment of a third stage route from Princeton to Oakdale upon the opening of the Worcester and Nashua Railroad. This was a real stage operation. Four horses drew the vehicle and the U.S. mail was carried. This route operated until the Boston, Barre and Gardner Railroad came into operation twenty-two years later.

Many of the hotels, which played such an important part in the second half of the 19th Century development of Princeton, were well established years before railroad service was inaugurated on the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad. It is, however, interesting to note how the advent of closer rail service required the enlargement of the then existing accommodations and developed entirely new ones.

Records show that licenses of the **Wachusett House** go back to 1822. With the inauguration of stage service to Oakdale in 1849, soon thereafter, the then owner removed the old house and built a new one. Twenty years later, or just before the Boston, Barre and Gardner Railroad began service, a large "L" was built, "A more commodious dining room was added in 1873" (2 years after the railroad came).

The present residence of P. A. Beaman (then owned and occupied by A. T. Beaman) was enlarged and opened as an "annex" in 1883. Nearby houses took in people for the Wachusett House, indeed as many as two hundred people were often accommodated for a weekend, and as many more were turned away for lack of accommodations.

The **Prospect House** came into being in 1860 when Wilkes Roper remodeled the Baptist Church into a hotel. He sold to George Bliss of Worcester in 1874 (3 years after the advent of the Boston, Barre and Gardner Railroad). He enlarged the dining room. He could accommodate 75 guests. In 1895 - Wayland Davis, the then owner, added a story to the building to increase the accommodations to 100 guests.

The **Mountain House** at the base of Wachusett, started as a boarding house about 1856 and three years later opened as a hotel. In 1860, (9 years after the advent of the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad), they added a story to the main house and built a new wing. These additions made it possible to accommodate about one hundred people.

Daniel Howe built the **Grand View House**, across from the Mountain House, in 1859. Soon after that, he had sold the Mountain House to the Bullards, who were kin of his wife. Extensive additions were made to the original building in 1893 (22 years after the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad) to provide forty sleeping rooms. This hotel burned in 1899.

The **Mount Pleasant House** started in 1868 when Charles Whittaker opened his house for boarders. In 1875 (4 years after the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad) extensive additions were made so as many as 40-60 guests could be accommodated.

"**The Harrington Farm**" first opened its facilities to city people in 1882 (11 years after the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad). It still operates successfully and can accommodate about 30 people. It was probably the start of more climbing expeditions to the summit than any of the other place. The Harrington Trail is the

most famous of them all.

The **Summit House** was an outgrowth of William Morse's booth for the sale of candy and cigars atop the mountain. His wares for the booth were transported by a small two-wheeled cart drawn by a pony from his base at the Mountain House. Four years later, in 1870, he built a small stone house to house his growing business. In 1874 (3 years after the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad) the Wachusett Mountain Company built a road to the summit and erected the first Summit House.

The road to the summit was never profitable despite the toll charge of \$2.00 per horse and carriage. It was built long before the days of hard surfaces like we have today, which meant that a large crew of men and work carts were required from early spring until fall, in order to keep the road passable. The traffic never developed to a point where one could call it heavy. Horses, who may have driven out from Worcester in the morning, would be so fatigued that they would not be in condition for the winding climb the same day. This meant a three day trip in the event anyone planned to take their own horse and carriage up the mountain; - 1 day to Princeton, 1 day up and down the mountain, and 1 day for the return to Worcester. All this information has come to me as a result of my questioning the present P. A. Beaman as to why his family sold the mountain to the State in 1900 for \$25,000. The building was enlarged five years later and again in 1884, when a three-story building, 40' square was built by P. A. Beaman (Sen.) & Son. But enough of these details, you had enough to impress upon you the impact of the railroad on Princeton as a resort. For nearly three quarters of a century it grew, reaching its peak at about the turn of the century.

Many factors contributed to the decline of the resort business in Princeton, and the final abandonment of passenger service on the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad.

1. The station was 2-3/4 miles from the center of town and many of the resort hotels were as much as two to three miles North of the town.
2. The advent of the private automobile by 1910 had begun to change travel habits

of people.

3. The far West, with the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Coast, not to mention the Canadian Northwest, was through their railroads, diverting many by “tourist” accommodations from the closer “resorts” to the more distant places.
4. With faster and individual transportation by automobile, the popularity of the railroad waned, service was curtailed, and the final passenger train was removed on March 7th, 1953.
5. The originating “ice” freight began to dwindle in the 1920’s with the coming of artificial ice plants and the electric and gas home refrigerating units.
6. The trees had been lumbered so no more freight came from that source.
7. The small industries of the 19th Century, which existed largely because of the availability of intermittent waterpower, had moved to the city, where the labor market was more abundant.
8. The farmers’ grain and produce was largely handled by truck.

This story of Princeton as a resort town can be repeated many times in New England. Modern transportation has made beautiful Princeton another “bedroom” for people who work in Worcester, Gardner and Fitchburg.

Some of the thrill of the old Boston, Barre and Gardner Railroad came back to me this summer when floods forced the diversion of tremendous 90-car freight trains over that route from the Boston and Albany R. x R. Even so, much of the childhood thrill of a chuffing steam engine was missing for the three sleek diesel engines seem to lack the romance of the smoke and dirt of the locomotives which inaugurated service on the Boston, Barre and Gardner Railroad 79 years earlier.