

Then & Now – Boston, Barre & Gardner R x R Arrives

Mr. Philip M. Morgan’s Informal Talk, to Worcester’s St. Wulstan Society January 27th, 1956

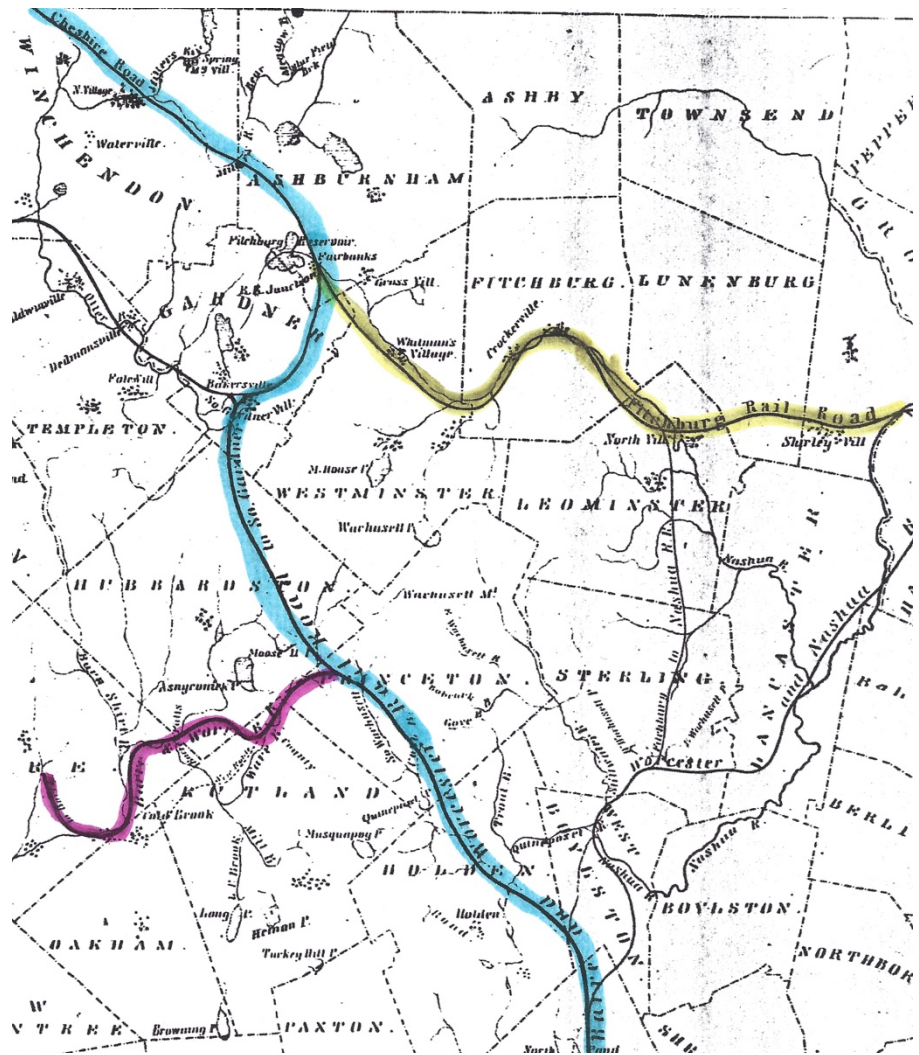
Tonight, I've chosen the subject of the Boston, Barre, and Gardner Railroad very largely because it is the railroad with which I was most familiar in my childhood. Of course, when I first became acquainted with it at the beginning of the 20th Century, it was known as the Peterboro Branch of the Fitchburg 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:

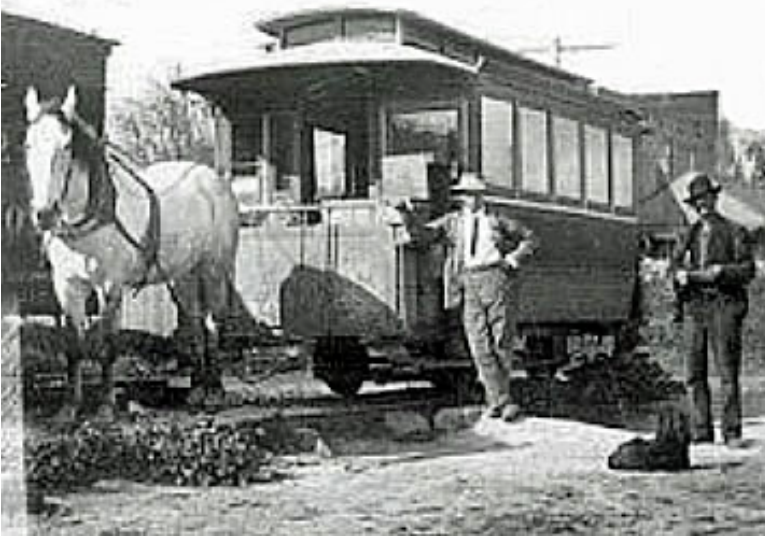
“The Barre and Worcester Road was chartered April 26, 1847, an extension of time was granted, and again in 1849 when the name was changed to Boston, Barre and Gardner.”

“In 185, 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:



Blue highlights the Proposed BB&G RxR, Purple the Barre Spur, & Yellow was the Gardner to Fitchburg RxR



English Horse Train

“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 this 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 x R in 1847.

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,



**Early Version of the 1402 Engine
That Ran on the BB&G line.**

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	<u>\$ 3,900</u>
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.

PRINCETON, MASS.

76 miles from Boston. One way fare, \$1.96.
16 miles from Worcester. One way fare, 45 cents.

Princeton is situated high among the foothills of Mount Wachusett and for many years has been a popular resting place for many of the best people of Boston, Worcester, Providence and New York. It contains within its borders many beautiful ponds and lakes, and Princeton good roads, a little stiff in places, perhaps, for the cyclist, have an excellent reputation for driving. The air is dry and bracing, and there are no sufferers from hay fever in the town.

WACHUSETT HOUSE. — P. A. Beaman & Son, Proprietors; adults, \$2.00 to \$3.00 per day, \$10.00 to \$20.00 per week; special rates for families and children; two and one-half miles from station; transfer 30 cents each way, including one trunk; accommodates 175. Livery attached.

PROSPECT HOUSE. — W. C. Davis, Proprietor; adults \$2.00 per day, \$10.00 to \$15.00 per week; two and one-half miles from station; accommodates 100.

MOUNTAIN HOUSE. — G. H. Derby, Proprietor; adults, \$2.50 per day, \$12.00 to \$14.00 per week; four miles from station; accommodates 100.

MOUNT PLEASANT HOUSE — C. A. Whitaker, Proprietor; adults, \$1.50 to \$2.00 per day, \$8.00 to \$12.00 per week; two miles from station; accommodates 75.

FOREST HOUSE. — Edwin Grimes, Proprietor; adults, \$10.00 per week; two and a quarter miles from station; accommodates 30.

THE LYNDON. — Mrs. H. F. Pratt, Proprietor; adults \$1.50 per day, \$8.00 to \$12.00 per week; two and a quarter miles from station; accommodates 25.

HARRINGTON FARM. — A. E. Harrington, Proprietor; adults, \$1.00 per day. \$6.00 per week; special rates for children; four miles from station; transfer, 50 cents

Train Travel Ad To Princeton 1880's

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.



Mogul 1450 Last Steam Engine

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 someday 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 map above shows that 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).



Last Passenger Train in 1954 – at least 8 coaches long

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

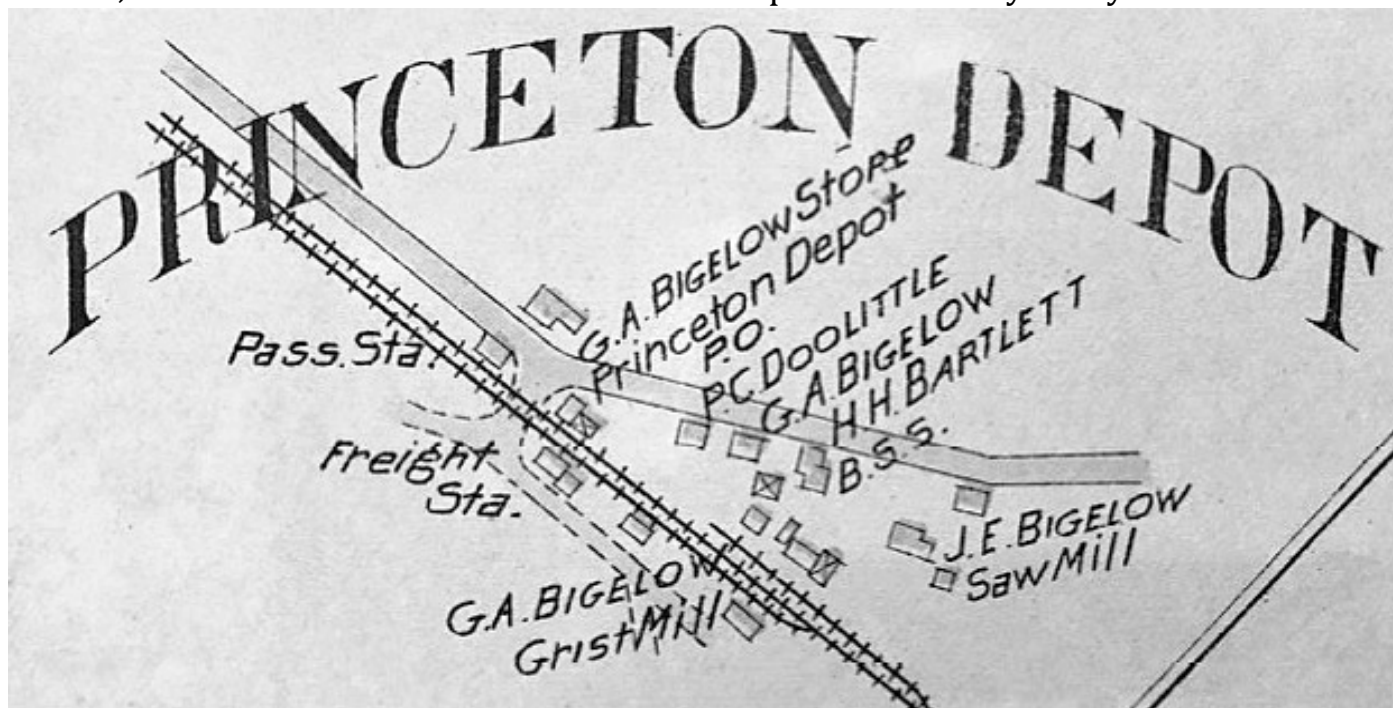
Hubbardston and Princeton whose businesses were in Boston. From Hubbardston, it was regularly a convenience to Frederick Cunningham, who was a lawyer in Boston. Mr. Bullock, I'm sure, will remember the service, and I'm sure he will recall the names of Princeton citizens who availed themselves of this special service. The operation from Gardner to Jefferson usually consisted of a locomotive and a single car.

Interestingly, it was 40 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.



1910 Map of the Buildings Which Were Part of the Princeton Depot.

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. **To read more, copy and paste this URL into your favorite Browser:**

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oIDTfvM8biwyZ_hSYMpx9BWmCHXsQ-s/view

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.



P&W Railroad At Crossing 2022

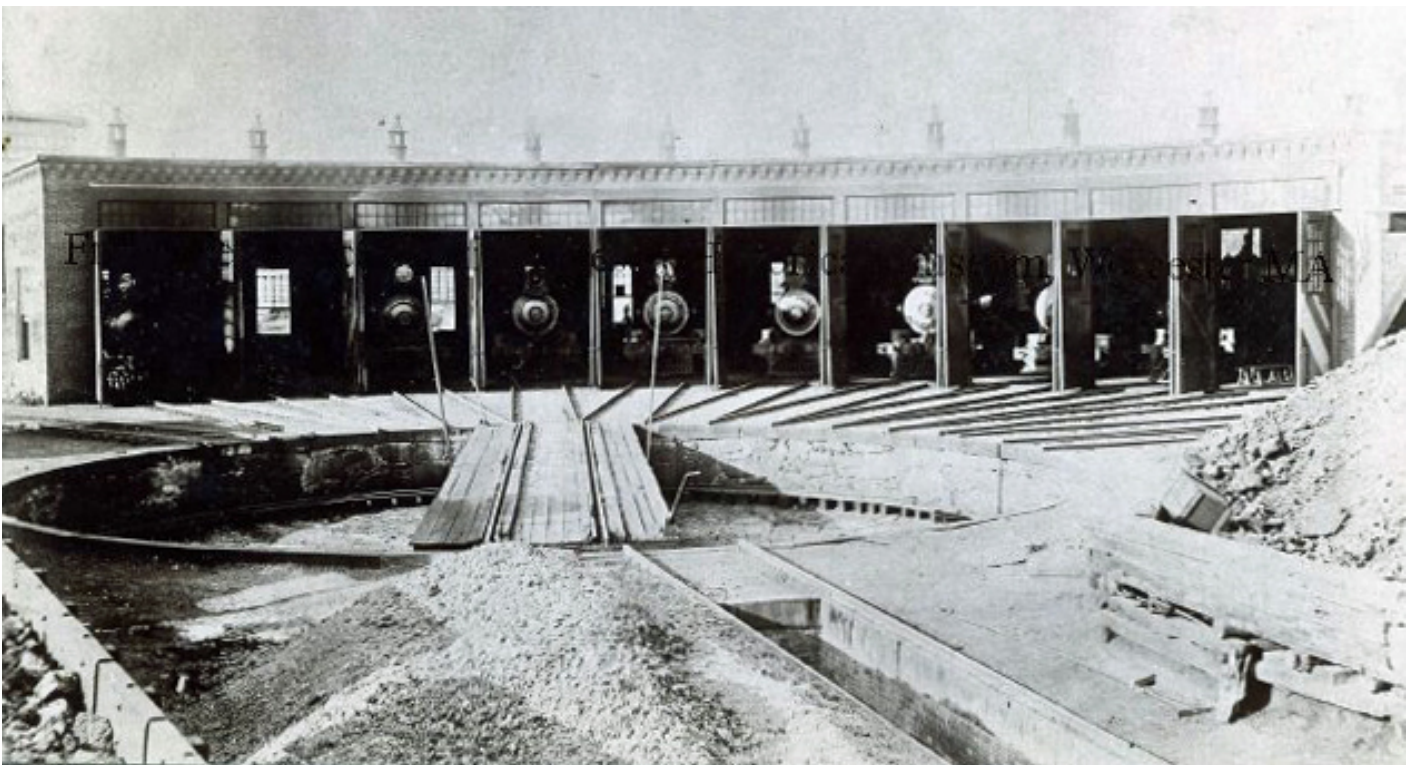
6. The trees had been lumbered so no more freight came from that source.
7. The small industries of the 19th Century, which existed largely because of the availability of intermittent waterpower, had moved to the city, where the labor market was more abundant.
8. The farmers' grain and produce was largely 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.

Today, the rail line is owned and called the Providence and Worcester Railroad; it moves freight only and has rail lines that service most of the New England states.

During the summer of 2022, this document was OCR scanned, images added from the PHS collection, and slightly updated using parenthesis to clarify locations of places mentioned in this document by William "Bud" Brooks. The original typed versions can be found in a Gray File Box entitled “PHS Previous Research and Talks.”



BB&G Engine Round House in Worcester c 1900

BB&G Train Accidents

There have been two major train accidents since 1871. They were:

- A Collision Between 2 BB&G Trains (a Freight and a Passenger) in 1876 With Three Fatalities. **To read more use this URL:**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1j1BgyY-cVU9ZoyMdf10WZPhG9Ih3E24R/view>

- A Collision Between a BB&G Freight Train and an Auto at the Crossing at Brooks Station Rd. in 1989 With Three Fatalities. **To read more use this URL:**

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-Ykww05wyPHbCXP9Wzsatg2HBeg_GJyS/view



Porter Grain Depot 281 Hubbardston Rd.



1956 Blueberry Special Getting Ready to Leave Winchendon