

# THE STONY BROOK RAILROAD

H. Arnold Wilder

## The 250th Anniversary of Westford, Massachusetts (1979)

*It is perhaps appropriate at this time, the Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Town of Westford, Massachusetts, through which the Stony Brook Railroad runs for much of its length, that the story of the railroad should best be told.*

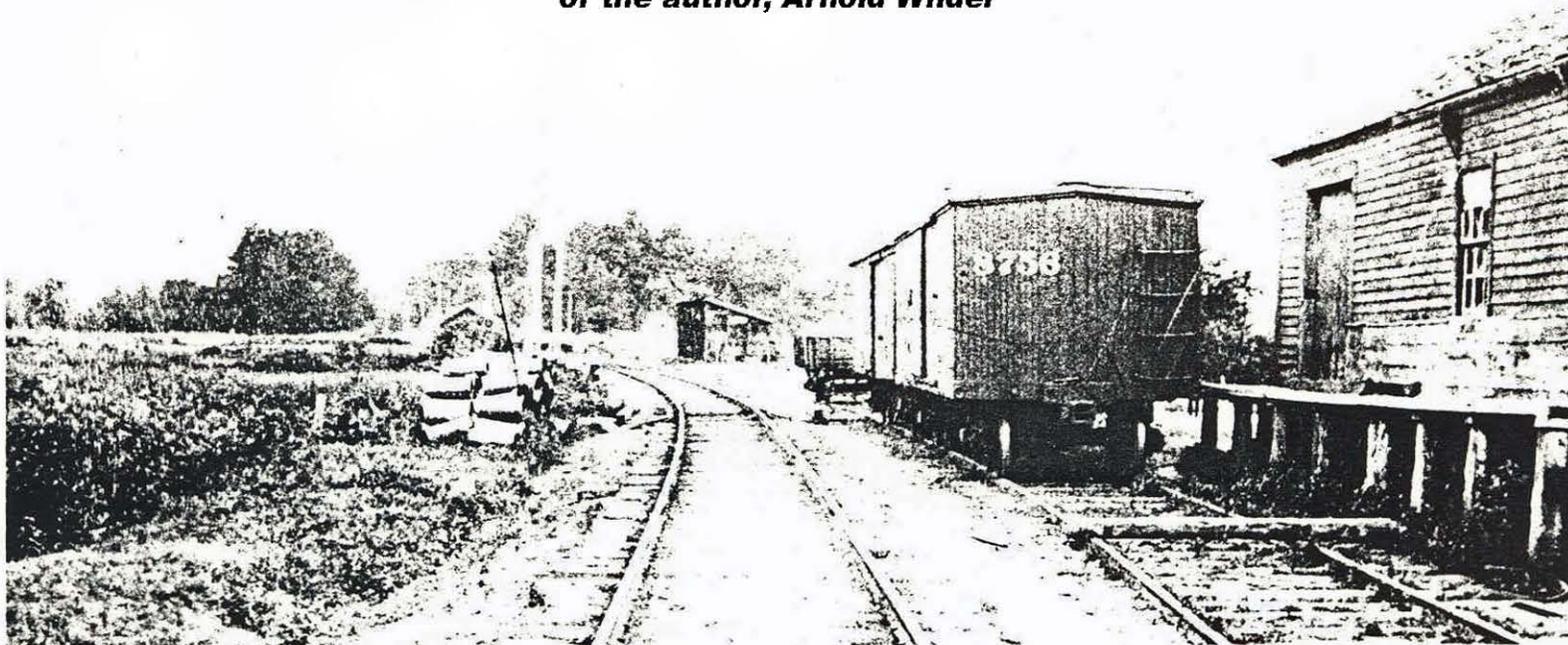
*The railroad's early coming had a profound effect on the commerce of the town, providing the movement of goods and services to industry along its rails, and contributing much to the history and growth of an urban community throughout its one hundred and thirty-one years of corporate life.*

— H.A.W.

All photos from author's collection, except as noted.

## The 350th Anniversary of Chelmsford, Massachusetts (2005)

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The freight house and old Boston & Lowell cars at Westford station, circa 1885.

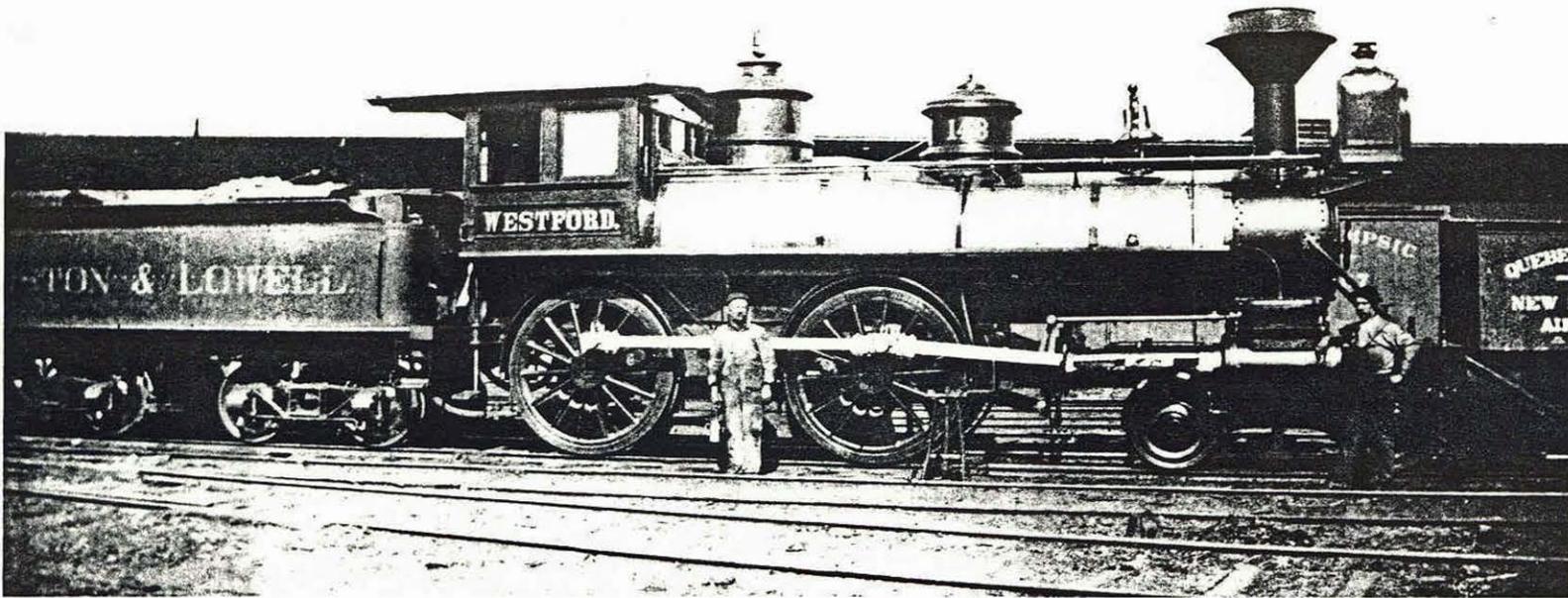
Reference to a so-called branch line on the Boston & Maine Railroad today all too often creates the impression to the historian of a weedy, limited-maintenance line, once used by passenger trains to urban communities, but now serving freight schedules with infrequent service. In contrast, we find the Stony Brook branch one of the system's most important lines, serving, with the Lowell Branch, east and north around the congested Boston area, and on to points in New Hampshire and Maine. Leased by the parent company through its absorption of the Boston & Lowell in 1887, it still re-

tains its corporate identity as the Stony Brook Railroad, with officers elected and annual meetings held at Lowell, Mass.

The completion of the Boston & Lowell Railroad between its namesake cities in 1835 proved to be an immediate boon to the commerce of the city of Lowell, then an important textile center, providing movement of passengers and freight in a matter of a few hours, instead of tediously over the Middlesex Canal, or by horse-drawn stage, measured in terms of days. Following the pattern, the Nashua & Lowell was completed in 1838, extending this modern means of travel to New Hampshire and

thus adding to traffic directly effecting the city of Lowell, providing new outlets for manufactured goods, and more rapid transport of passengers.

Thus encouraged, and with the completion of rail lines from Boston to Fitchburg, (1845) and from Worcester to Nashua, (1848), concerned citizens in Lowell determined that a more direct access route to New York and the growing west could conceivably promote growth to a prospering community. Accordingly, they applied for, and were granted a charter to build a new line, paralleling the then Nashua & Lowell to North Chelmsford, thence turning

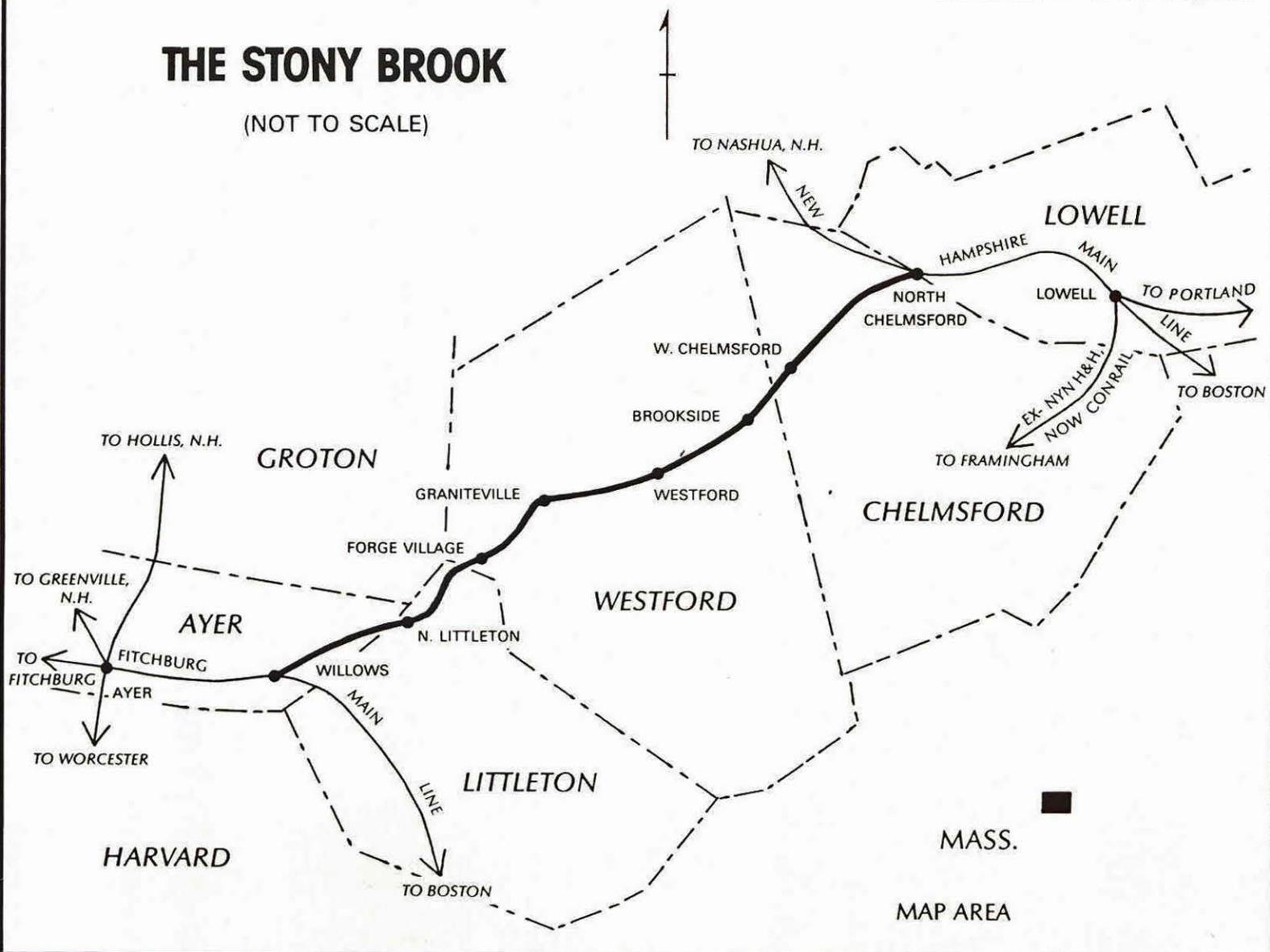


Boston & Lowell Railroad locomotive no. 148, *Westford*, shown in the Yard at Lowell, Massachusetts. The crew is unidentified. B&L equipment such as this was the only equipment used in the early days of the Stony Brook Railroad, as they never had any of their own.

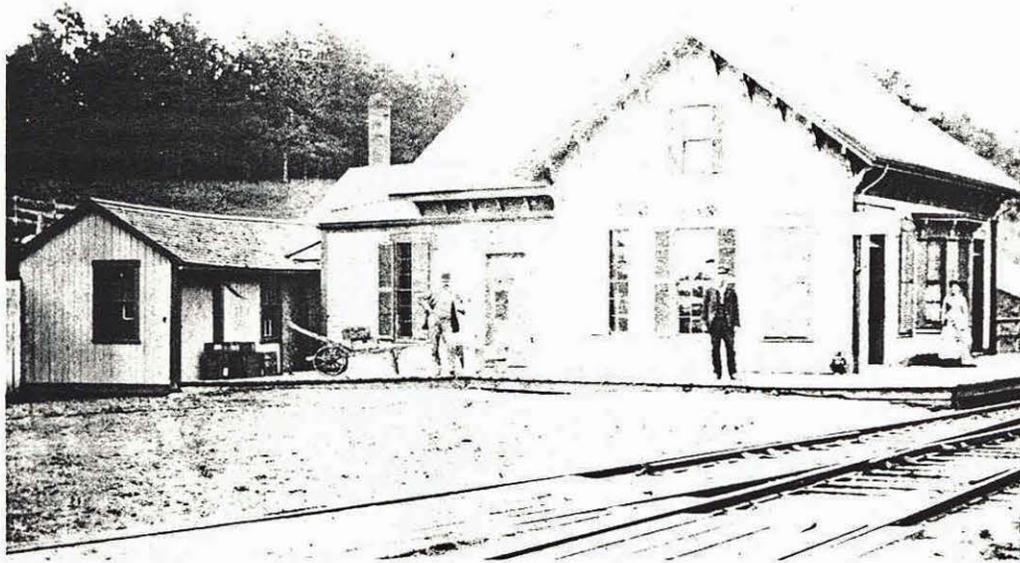
B&M BULLETIN — Richard W. Symmes

# THE STONY BROOK

(NOT TO SCALE)



MAP AREA



The station at Westford, Massachusetts about 1885. As was common in those days, the agent was provided with living quarters on the second floor. This view is approximately opposite that on the preceding page, and together they give a good indication of the rural aspects of the area as it was in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

westward up the Stony Brook valley through the towns of Westford, Groton, Littleton, to a connection with these new lines at Groton Junction, (after 1871 to become Ayer Jct. after J.C. Ayer, a Lowell manufacturer). Apparently the Stony Brook Railroad Corporation was early enabled to make suitable arrangements with the Nashua & Lowell to handle traffic between Lowell and North Chelmsford, and actually were furnished motive power and equipment to assist in building the line, 13.19 miles long, which opened for business on July 4, 1848. The line was promptly leased on completion to the Nashua & Lowell, thence to the Boston & Lowell in 1880 and, so far as can be determined, never had any rolling stock of its own, all such being furnished by the lessor. Passenger and freight stations of considerable proportions were erected at West Chelmsford, Westford, Graniteville and Forge Village, all with living quarters on the second floor for the agents. Smaller stations were provided at Brookside, North Littleton and Willows, (earlier called Sandy Pond). From Willows to Ayer, the line paralleled the Fitchburg Railroad and used the same "Union Station" at the Junction, but had their own small yard and engine facilities just east of the present overhead highway bridge in Ayer.

The rapid construction of numerous branch lines, as individual railroads, later to become part of the Boston & Maine

family, created familiar patterns of traffic, particularly to Salem, Lawrence and on to Portland, Maine, and the Stony Brook line early became an important by-pass line avoiding Boston congestion, and permitting through traffic from points east, to routes south and west, via Ayer. Local passenger service early adopted schedules of two "down" trains and one "up" in the morning, a round trip at noon, and two "up" and one "down" trains in the evening, some running as through trains to Salem and Lawrence. It is interesting to note that the through passenger service from New York to Portland and beyond operated via the old Worcester, Nashua & Portland Division until after 1911. Local trains on the Stony Brook handled mail and express, as well as much local milk in eight and forty quart jugs to city destinations. Salesmen's sample trunks, local produce and shipments from mail order houses were also included.

Freight trains, mostly powered by small 4-4-0s of the period, were frequently operated, but were necessarily short; thus dispatchers acquired experience in moving them from siding to siding. The opening of the Hoosac Tunnel in 1875, and connections with the Delaware & Hudson and West Shore Roads permitted service to the expanding west, with shipments of potatoes, textiles and paper products, and brought much new traffic into a growing New England. Lo-

cal services were provided for H. E. Fletcher's granite quarries, with sidings at Brookside, grain and sawmills at Westford, coal and wool sidings at Graniteville and Forge Village mills. Seasonal requirements for ice loading at huge houses at Forge Village, North Littleton and Sandy Pond added much additional traffic, (and revenue), to this busy single track line. Prior to 1927, due in part to the congestion in the Boston yards and dock areas, coal was off-loaded in Salem Harbor, and much of it, destined to points west of Ayer moved via the Salem Branch to Lowell, thence over the Stony Brook.

In keeping with the then Boston & Maine policy to install block signals on lines of heavy traffic, such protection was afforded the line after 1914, but did little to relieve the growing problems on this single line of track. In an effort to mitigate some of the problem, double track was installed in 1917 between North Chelmsford and West Chelmsford, and between Willows and Ayer, at least making the ends of the branch more capable of moving traffic. After the turn of the century, seashore and mountain resorts in New Hampshire and Maine grew in profusion, and the railroads responded to provide both day and night services from New York and Philadelphia. Solid Pullman trains, routed over the "Brook" after 1911 to accommodate the new shore resorts, raced over the line by night; familiar trains such as the *State of Maine Express* became operational bywords. Summer camps for boys and girls were to come, all dependant on overnight sleeper services at the beginning and end of camp season, (literally an eight week period between July 4th and Labor Day). To accommodate all this traffic, station operators worked around the clock at West Chelmsford, Westford, Graniteville and Forge Village to keep the hot shots moving, and still move the flood of freight traffic which clamored for track. Passing sidings which could hold forty cars and an engine were in use at each of these stations, and were seldom idle. Improvements in motive power had come about, as well as heavier cars; the freight power would grow to 2-6-0s, 4-6-0s, and then the 2-8-0s of the K-6, K-7, and finally the K-8 class, often doubleheaded; passenger trains would draw heavier 4-4-0s, the B-15 2-6-0s, and on the through jobs the P-2 and eventually the P-3 4-6-2s.

After the tumult of World War I, the United States Railroad Administration, or government ownership of the railroads ended and the B&M resumed direction of its own destiny. The railroad itself was badly in need of refurbishing, and the Stony Brook was no exception. While the short lengths of double track helped, it proved to be only a stop-gap in the crush of heavy traffic which ensued

during the war, and the need of double track must have been on the drawing boards for many years. In a period prior to the magic of Centralized Traffic Control (CTC), more track seemed to be the only solution. Management finally conceded that the period of "drag freight" and slow passengers was over, if they were to compete with the growing number of shiny automobiles and bigger trucks running on improved highways throughout New England. As has been often reported, George Hannauer of the Indiana Harbor Belt Railway became President, and straightway initiated a vast program of improvements to rejuvenate the ailing Boston & Maine. Early in 1927, the double tracking of the remaining miles of the Stony Brook was begun, and with it, the start of installation of the first CTC system in New England, if not in the eastern part of the country! In addition to the double track, a third, or passing track, of 100 cars capacity was installed between the two mains just west of Westford towards Graniteville, with all switches and signals to be controlled from North Chelmsford tower some four and a quarter miles away, with a control machine designed by General Railway Signal Corporation. This new system of train control placed in operation on March 25, 1929, made possible the operation of trains in both directions on both tracks, the moving of a slower train to the middle track to be passed by another, or to cross over from one main to the other, all under the direction of the towerman, now called Train Director, at North Chelmsford. This particular installation completely eliminated the previous bottleneck and became the prototype for similar installations on other parts of the B&M system where

heavy traffic was involved. With CTC in use, the need for train order operators ceased to exist, the operators at the four stations were transferred to new locations, and the importance of the once-busy stations largely diminished.

Some interesting figures were developed at the time of this installation of CTC. Freight movements consisted of approximately twenty through trains daily, with a maximum of twenty-five. Eight passenger trains were scheduled, but the extras, such as the *Bar Harbors* and camp trains could swell the totals to as many as thirty trains daily. A local freight daily except Sunday added to the list. Quite a list you'd say, in the hectic days of '29. Note may well be made here that while this installation included the first use of so-called "color light" type signals, the units themselves were not the modern one-lamp type in common use today, but rather a separate lamp for each color; red, amber and green, thus each signal unit had three bulbs and fixtures placed vertically. All switches at the several control points could, if necessary, be turned by hand, but only after receiving permission from the Train Director; in early days by use of wayside telephones located on pole boxes near each signal, as well as at each station. Radio would come in the days ahead.

Added traffic came in 1930 with the installation of a wye at North Chelmsford, from the Stony Brook line just above the Middlesex Street crossing, around to the New Hampshire Division main line north of the station. This facility permitted through traffic from Worcester, or from Fitchburg and the west, to follow a more nearly water-level route to Nashua and beyond rather than the

tedious climb through Groton and Pepperell on the old WN&P, even though it was six and a half miles longer. Then too, it led to the elimination of no less than thirteen gate-protected crossings in Nashua after passenger service was abandoned in the early thirties. Local passenger service on the Stony Brook, with the exception of two round trips from Worcester to Lowell, disappeared at the same time, being replaced by a growing fleet of highway buses.

This new mode was not without its local losses, as station buildings became redundant and were either sold or torn down. A corner of the freight sheds at West Chelmsford and Graniteville were converted into agent's offices; these men now caring for freight business at several locations. The station at Forge Village became a variety store with provision for motor patrol crews in rough weather.

While President Hannauer's term of office was relatively short (he passed away in 1930), he was succeeded by Edward French, a native Vermonter, who continued the policies of modernization, and we were to see bigger and more modern motive power and heavier track. The big Santa Fes led the early parade, followed by the beetle-browed Lima 4000 2-8-4s, and the wonderful 4100 4-8-2s. Passengers were not overlooked, since in addition to the P-3s which had long run this way, we now frequently saw the new P-4s built by Lima; no. 3710-3719, usually on night sleeper jobs. As a sidelight, we often found one and sometimes two P-4s on the local four car passenger train west, bound in early evening for Worcester, and thus available to handle one of the many night jobs or camp extras. Empty camp trains of Pullmans returning in daylight hours were also a feature to be observed.

This heavy traffic and new power had its effect on track and roadbed. Accordingly, in 1938, the Stony Brook line became the first "branch line" to be fully rock ballasted in its entirety, permitting speeds of 60 m.p.h. for passenger and 40 m.p.h. for freight. A section crew at Graniteville maintained constant vigil on track and right-of-way, and signal patrols with motor cars made daily checks on the CTC panels and relay houses. Much 85 lb. rail was changed out for 100 lb. and tie renewals were a constant procedure. Traffic during World War II demonstrated the wisdom of these procedures in large measure. A frequently quoted statistic during this period showed a movement on the Stony Brook line every twenty minutes in the twenty-four hours, and with the wartime extras, it was not hard to believe. Even after the cessation of the great conflict, published schedules in 1946 give support to the density of traffic which then prevailed.

North Chelmsford station and tower at the intersection of the New Hampshire main line and the south leg of the wye of the Stony Brook branch (foreground). The tower is the original "armstrong" structure, but housing the new CTC board.



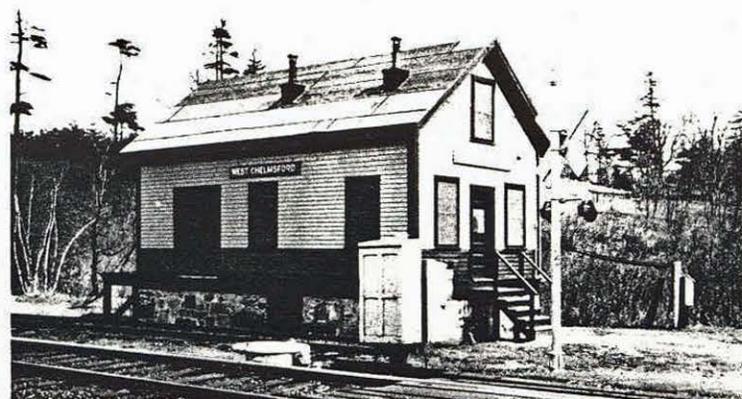
**SCHEDULED FREIGHT AND PASSENGER TRAINS — STONY BROOK BRANCH**  
**BOSTON & MAINE RAILROAD**  
 (Taken from published schedules)  
**JUNE, 1946**

TRAIN	NAME	FROM	TO	DIRECTION	TIME
85	BAR HARBOR EXPRESS	New York / Phil.	Bar Harbor, Me.	East	12:50 a.m.
CE-1	FREIGHT	Concord, N.H.	E. Deerfield, Mass.	West	1:25 a.m.
81	STATE OF MAINE EXPRESS	New York, N.Y.	Portland, Me.	East	2:50 a.m.
MP-2	FREIGHT	Mechanicville, N.Y.	Portland, Me.	East	2:30 a.m.
PM-1	FREIGHT	Portland, Me.	Mechanicville, N.Y.	West	3:30 a.m.
MP-4	FREIGHT	Mechanicville, N.Y.	Portland, Me.	East	5:50 a.m.
ML-2	FREIGHT	Mechanicville, N.Y.	Lawrence, Mass.	East	5:30 a.m.
WC-2	FREIGHT	Worcester, Mass.	Concord, N.H.	East	5:30 a.m.
M-6	FREIGHT	Worcester, Mass.	Portland, Me.	East	6:15 a.m.
805	LOCAL PASSENGER	Worcester, Mass.	Lowell, Mass.	East	7:03 a.m.
PM-3	FREIGHT	Portland, Me.	Mechanicville, N.Y.	West	9:15 a.m.
N-1	FREIGHT	Portland, Me.	Worcester, Mass.	West	9:45 a.m.
ZA-1	LOCAL FREIGHT	Lowell, Mass.	Ayer, Mass.	West	10:00 a.m.
MP-6	FREIGHT	Mechanicville, N.Y.	Portland, Me.	East	11:30 a.m.
90	EAST WIND	Portland, Me.	New York, N.Y.	West	12:41 p.m.
PM-5	FREIGHT	Portland, Me.	Mechanicville, N.Y.	West	1:45 p.m.
P-2	FREIGHT	Worcester, Mass.	Portland, Me.	East	2:00 p.m.
DE-1	FREIGHT	Dover, N.H.	E. Deerfield, Mass.	West	3:20 p.m.
91	EAST WIND	New York, N.Y.	Portland, Me.	East	4:19 p.m.
MP-8	FREIGHT	Mechanicville, N.Y.	Portland, Me.	East	4:45 p.m.
836	LOCAL PASSENGER	Lowell, Mass.	Worcester, Mass.	West	5:06 p.m.
LM-1	FREIGHT	Lawrence, Mass.	Mechanicville, N.Y.	West	5:30 p.m.
AZ-2	LOCAL FREIGHT	Ayer, Mass.	Lowell, Mass.	East	5:30 p.m.
PM-7	FREIGHT	Portland, Me.	Mechanicville, N.Y.	West	6:20 p.m.
M-7	FREIGHT	Portland, Me.	Worcester, Mass.	West	7:15 p.m.
EC-2	FREIGHT	E. Deerfield, Mass.	Concord, N.H.	East	8:45 p.m.
CW-1	FREIGHT	Concord, N.H.	Worcester, Mass.	West	9:20 p.m.
ED-2	FREIGHT	E. Deerfield, Mass.	Dover, N.H.	East	10:15 p.m.
82	STATE OF MAINE EXPRESS	Portland, Me.	New York, N.Y.	West	11:15 p.m.
84	BAR HARBOR EXPRESS	Bar Harbor, Me.	New York / Phil.	West	11:35 p.m.

**NOTE:** Times shown are at Westford Depot. Freight train times varied account delay in yards or making connections. Not infrequently, two trains bound in the same direction on parallel tracks overtook and passed one another; signalling was such that trains could operate in both directions on both tracks, all under the control of the Towerman, called "Train Director", at North Chelmsford.



Brookside station, circa 1920. The old trolley tracks to Westford appear in the foreground (abandoned in 1921).



West Chelmsford station, converted from the old freight house. Taken in June, 1946. The granite foundation appears more than adequate.

In keeping with the nation's travel habits after the war, the automobile and truck became more and more numerous, and although many trains lost during the war were restored, traffic system-wide began to decline. As a conservation measure, we began to notice that only one track was being used, except when meets were required, and the middle siding used less often. New diesel locomotives, both freight and passenger, appeared in growing numbers, and shortly we would witness long strings of dead steam locomotives, now outmoded, from the Maine Central and Bangor & Aroostook being hauled to the scrap merchant. The new EMD diesels hauled heavier trains, thus fewer of them, until the only steam train on the "Brook" was the Lowell - Ayer local freight. Much local business reverted to truck haul, oil replaced coal as a heating fuel, and many sidings, once busy, were gradually removed. The death knell for local passenger service came on April 25, 1953, when the last local passenger train operated from Worcester to Lowell, ending a service begun 105 years earlier. The *State of Maine Express* continued to run until October 29, 1960.

The election to the Presidency of the B&M of Patrick B. McGinnis in January 1956 served as the catalyst in the reduction of passenger service system-wide, the abandonment of many branch lines, and the gradual single-tracking of most of the system, now feasible with CTC. The Stony Brook was so relegated in 1957; single track in use between North Chelmsford and Westford, the former east bound main retained from Westford to west of Graniteville as a long passing siding, (the third iron between these points removed), single iron again from Graniteville to a new point west of North Littleton, known as Willows East, thence double again to Willows. Here important track changes had taken place in April 1946, when the Stony Brook line was cut over to the Fitchburg Division main line through a new interlocking, thus reducing the total Stony Brook mileage to 10.86 miles. Track changes prevail to date.

Handling the heavy traffic that it has over the years, the line has not been without its share of "service interruptions", and several are worth mentioning. Perhaps the wreck of the Buffalo Bill Show at Brookside in 1911 provided the most humor, even though not so considered at the time of its happening. The circus train, enroute from Fitchburg to Lowell, had apparently not been too well inspected, for a heavy ramp used to unload elephants from their car was improperly secured under the car, and worked loose, striking a number of objects all the way from North Littleton through Graniteville. At Brookside their luck ran out. The ramp struck Fletcher's

siding switch and several wooden cars of animals and performers were strewn along the track, releasing a number of animals, and it was said, big snakes! Until the trainers could round up the missing animals, panic prevailed in the small community. Small monkeys were among the refugees, and sandhouse gossip was entertaining as residents found all kinds of strange visitors in their back yards.

In June, 1913, the elite of Philadelphia paid an unscheduled visit to Graniteville when a section of the *Bar Harbor Express*, headed by P-2 3666 (now at the bottom of the Piscataqua River at Portsmouth, N.H.), derailed several Pullmans, whose fashionable passengers suffered a rude awakening. No serious injuries were reported, however.

A more serious affair occurred in July 1921, when a doubleheaded westbound freight split the siding switch at Forge Village. Both K-8s, the no. 2713 and the

no. 2635 turned over against the Abbot Worsted wool sheds, and the story is well remembered of heroic rescues of the crews from escaping steam. The lead engineer and head brakeman lost their lives, while other head-end crewmen suffered serious injuries.

In later years, with limited maintenance systemwide, pile-ups seemed to occur more often, and affairs on our line were not overlooked. In February 1964, eastbound MP-4, Mechanicville to Portland, stopped without ceremony at Forge Village in a most spectacular fashion, demolishing old Abbot Worsted buildings and scattering cars and wheels all over the square. Most notable was an N&W car of Winston cigarettes, which landed in the nearby canal with the door wrenched off. It was reported that many a smoker "switched to Winstons" in a surprisingly short time. Twenty-six cars were involved, with wreckers from Boston and East Deerfield in attendance.

Pictured below are two of the several wrecks that have occurred on the branch over the years. At top is the *Bar Harbor Express* after coming to grief at Graniteville on June 18, 1913. The rails have been slightly rearranged by the hurtling equipment! The lower photo gives some idea of the force with which the engines of a westbound freight piled up at Forge Village some eight years later on July 9, 1921. K-8s 2713 and 2635 were badly mangled, and two crewmen died.





COLLECTION OF HARRY A. FRYE

North Chelmsford, Massachusetts, sometime prior to 1927. In this photo by the late Carlton Parker, taken from the tower at the junction of the Stony Brook (left) and the New Hampshire main line, we see a 2-8-0 drifting in behind the depot with a caboose in tow. Note the array of rods in the lower right corner which controlled the switches and signals in the "armstrong" days. In the photo below is Forge Village station about 1946. The east end was used as a variety store, as can be seen by the sign, while the balance of the building was used by patrol crews and for storage.



At this same location a year later, westbound PM-1 derailed the rear four cars, including the caboose, just east of the crossing. Here we should report that a continuing contest had prevailed between the author and the local fire captain, as to how certain interesting bits of information pertaining to the railroad should be available to certain individuals before the general public, including the captain, were made aware of it, and he vowed one day to be the first to inform on a rail accident. In this case, however, our own Preston Johnson, Night Chief Dispatcher at North Billerica, learned from the head-end that, "they had lost their air and had no communication with the rear end". Knowing that we were close, the Night Chief called us at home, requesting that we check out the rear-end crew for possible injuries. Being fully dressed, we were able to depart within minutes, having first alerted the folks at home of our mission. Meantime, the fire captain, finding no fire at the scene, determined that, "this is the time", and lost no time in getting to a telephone. To his amazement, he was advised that we had gone to a wreck at Forge Village! His reply, "He can't be — it's only just happened!", became a legend in local circles and left the captain convinced that the railroad fraternity, both within and without the official family, has powerful connections. He's a believer! Incidentally, we did make it to Forge Village in record time, to find the conductor and flagman of PM-1 pretty well used up; waybills covered with fuel oil, and the interior a real mess. Assistance was provided, the Night Chief advised, and help was on the way. Even the fire captain got to lend a hand.

Closer to home, and more recently, on January 29, 1978, westbound BM-17, again after midnight, derailed an empty tank car at the Westford Depot crossing, dragged it up to the siding switch and in the words of the head-end crew on the scanner, "I think we've derailed". True enough, to the tune of twenty-three cars. In snow and biting cold, clearing away this "interruption" demonstrated the new techniques in equipment and approach to the problem. While the East Deerfield wrecker was used sparingly, the first two days the big Caterpillar D-9 bulldozer hauled many of the cars summarily off into a nearby field, and the new Holmes 75 ton mobile wrecker from Billerica appeared and did most of the re-railing of the cars involved. Many of the cars were foreign empties; one PFE car loaded with Maine sardines called for special attention in getting a diesel generator working again, lest the fish be frozen, and several cars of BAR origin loaded with paper were earmarked as priority. Due to storms on other parts of the system, there was a considerable lapse of time in re-railing the balance of the cars, and your author had ample

opportunity to inspect the scene in detail, and probably established a first in being mounted on his Palomino, *Topaz*, in, around and about a considerable railroad wreck . . . (Imagine the demerits allotted if he hadn't been there!)

On the positive side of railroading, it should be noted that the Stony Brook line carries a heavier traffic by far than does the main line Fitchburg Division between Ayer and Boston, due to the shifts in industry and related transportation requirements. Changes in freight schedules, as the railroad endeavors to tailor requirements to meet shippers' needs, occur too frequently to be carried here. Suffice it to say that Portland - Mechanicville service, both via D&H and Conrail, locals from Manchester and Lawrence to Deerfield, coal trains every three days to Bow, N.H., the empties returning, all serve to keep the "Brook" busy. Over recent years, changes in motive power were to be seen. The original F-units (covered wagons) gave way to GP-7s, GP-9s and GP-18s, then the 200 series GP-38-2s, and now the 300 series GP-40-2s. Erie-Lackawanna and D&H power and their cabooses were to be seen at one time. Now more often, variations of Conrail power and cabooses appear, particularly on the coal trains, which run through without change; helpers being added from East Deerfield to Ayer as required.

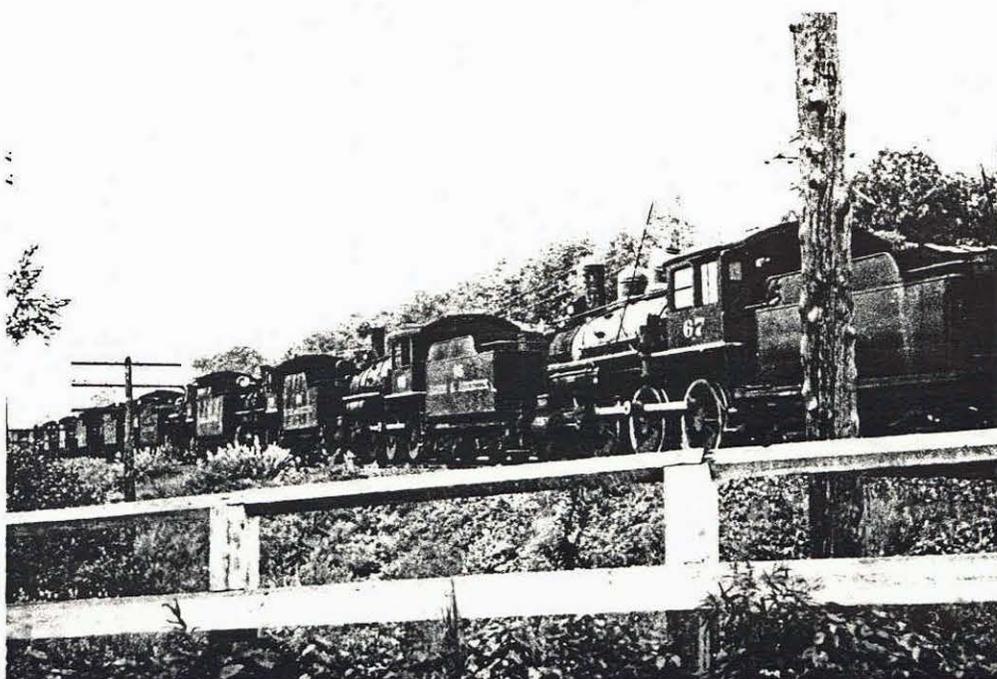
As the Boston & Maine Corporation struggles to regain it's solvency, it seems likely that continued upgrading of this line, in keeping with the main line west, will, from time to time, be evident, and thus continue to enable the capability of a so-called "branch line" to be a strong

part of a freight system which means much to the well-being of New England. With local service now largely gone, (Murray Printing at Forge Village continues to receive many cars of paper), few people in the community have an awareness of the importance of the railroad within it's borders, noting only the delays at highway crossings when a hundred cars of coal or a long freight rolls rapidly by. Older historians remember, and take pleasure in recounting the days when four stations were important in the affairs of the community, when many travellers used them daily, and when young people waved at the crews instead of throwing rocks. In the passing of over one hundred and thirty years, the changes have been many, and the recounting of some of them, laced with considerable nostalgia, is a pleasant task to be shared with others.

#### RESEARCH SOURCES:

Stony Brook Railroad Annual Reports  
B&M Employee timetables  
B&M plans of CTC changes  
Formation of New England Railroads  
 — Baker  
 William J. Fletcher (Historian Emeritus)  
 — Worcester  
 Dana D. Goodwin, Fitchburg

Uncounted on-the-spot contacts with railroad personnel, especially Daniel J. Sullivan, long-time agent at Graniteville, who unwittingly contributed much, and to whose memory this effort is dedicated with great affection.



A string of Bangor & Aroostook steam locomotives heads for the scrap yard in this photo taken on the Stony Brook line on July 31, 1951. No. 67 in the foreground was one of the BAR's 10-wheelers, once so familiar a sight in northern Maine.

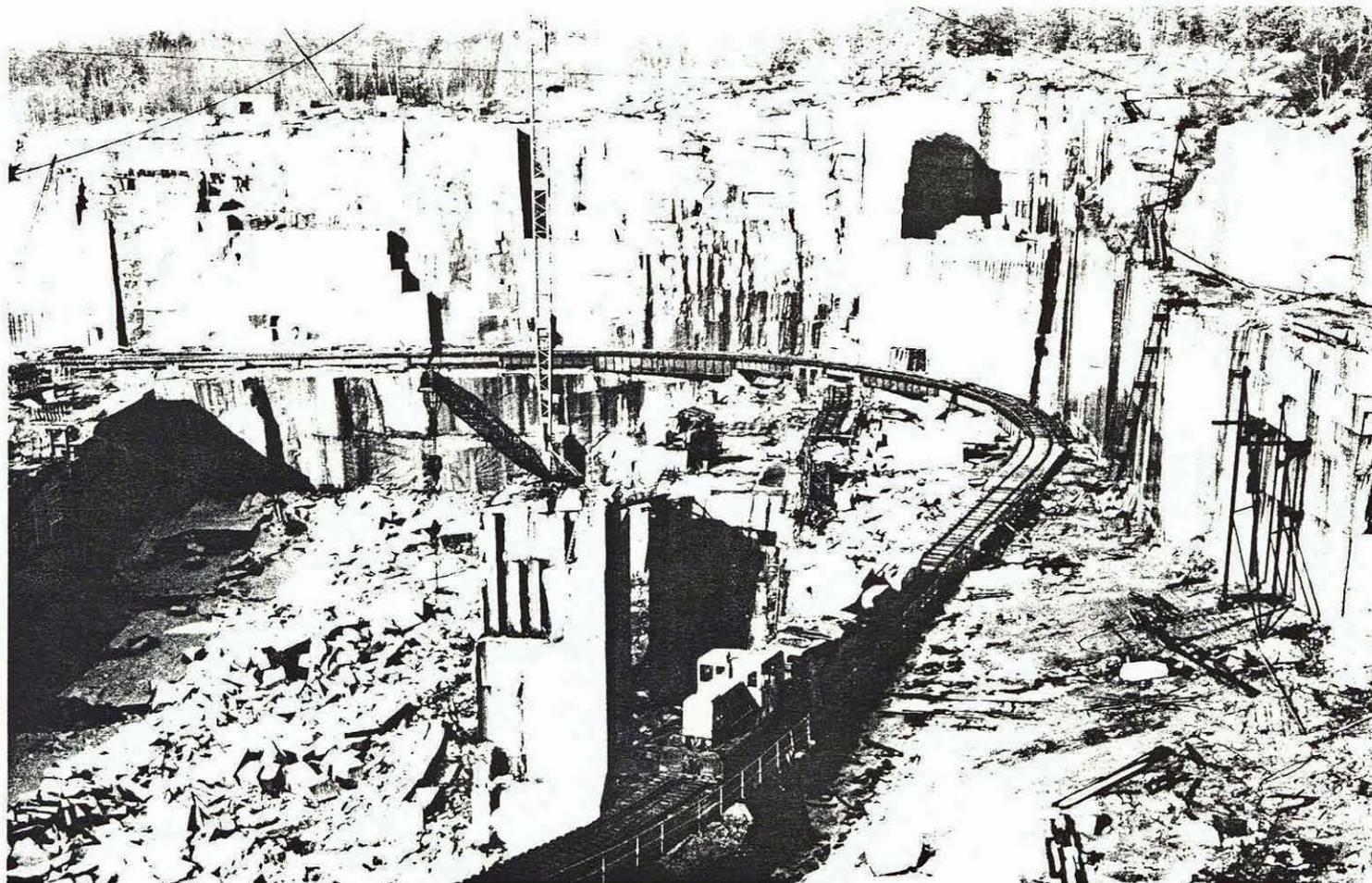


A Worcester to Portland freight negotiates the new cut-off trackage which branched off the Fitchburg main at Willows. An A-B-A diesel lash-up is leading a K-8 2-8-0 in this photo by Dana D. Goodwin taken on May 11, 1947. In the scene below we find RS-3 no. 1539 on Train 805 to Lowell pulling into the station at Graniteville during the last week of local passenger service, April 22, 1953.



# THE H. E. FLETCHER COMPANY

H. Arnold Wilder



H. BENTLEY CROUCH

H. E. Fletcher Co. no. 7 (G.E. #31864 — 6/1953) lugs two cars of granite up out of the quarry. This photo of the West Chelmsford operation was taken on December 28, 1971, and shows how the "trestle" work supporting the track is made up of spans of steel girders salvaged from various abandoned railroad lines. It has the look of a model railroad layout, and above all, proves that nothing is unprototypical.

The H. E. Fletcher Company, which had opened granite quarries in the northeast section of the Town of Westford in the middle 1880s, early learned that transport of this heavy bulk commodity required better means than the ox-teams first used, and so in 1885, constructed a standard gauge line from near Brookside station, one and one-half miles to their quarry site, and added several miles of track within the quarry area. Early motive power was a small four-wheeled tank engine, adequate for wooden cars of the day, but not the kind to stand up under rough handling which large blocks of granite imposed on them.

An early customer for Boston & Maine's used switch engines, small 0-6-0s were a favorite to negotiate rough track into quarryholes and to servicing sheds where considerable grades prevailed. In the twenties, their no. 5 was the former Class G, B&M no. 103, to be followed by G-10 no. 273 in Aug. 1928. This locomotive lasted until October 1946, apparently with shoppings at Billerica as required, and was replaced by a similar G-10, no. 287.

The quarry operations also required a self-propelled steam derrick which could handle a car or two about the property, and often did. Employed mainly to lift blocks of granite onto flat cars, it met it's "Waterloo" in August 1947, when an attempt was made to lift a heavy block without the use of outriggers, and it turned over, the operator narrowly

missing being scalded when the derrick landed against a 130 p.s.i. live steam line. The B&M wrecker, 100 ton no. 3364 was called in and the no. 287 handled the crane and tool car down into the quarry from Brookside, and the derrick was righted again.

Apparently the Fletcher Company found it more economical to replace their steam power in the days to follow, since G-11-a no. 410 appeared on the scene in 1950. Derailments did occur, most of them within the confines of the quarry, with little public notice. On March 14, 1952, however, the no. 410, backing down to the B&M interchange with several loads of stone managed to tip a rail over near the community crossing at Brookside, drawing a considerable audience. The steam derrick, the only other piece of motive power, appeared on the scene and removed the cars of stone on the head end. Then in country fashion attempted to pull the no. 410 back on by coupling up and pulling mightily. Much smoke and wheel spinning, but to no avail. Finally one of the old-time riggers exclaimed, "Getta outa da way!", and in fluent Italian directed his men to rig snatchblocks and cables between the no. 410 and a pulley fastened onto a tie in front of the derrick. When all was ready, the derrick began to hoist away on the cable, and slowly old no. 410 began to roll back onto the track. Presumably all in the day's work.

No. 410's tour of duty was short, being replaced in April 1952 by G-11-b no. 444, which in turn would steam only until mid-1953, when in company with the no. 410, steam power was shoved onto a weedy siding to be shortly joined by the old steam derrick. A new phase, in the form of 80-ton diesel no. 1, took over and prevails to date. A three tone chime horn on no. 1 continues to be a pertinent reminder of better days, as the diesel moves cars of stone from the quarry across Route 40 in Westford each day, and the unwary assume that a through freight is approaching on the Boston & Maine.

In former days, much cut stone and many carloads of granite grit were shipped via rail through the Brookside connection. Today however, most building material is of pre-cast concrete, and the use of huge blocks of building granite is largely diminished. Finished stone from Fletcher's today is of small dimensions and moves to the customer by truck; the lower end of the rail line seldom used.

With vandalism so prevalent today, it may be appropriate to note an earlier incident at the Boston & Maine end of the Fletcher connection several years ago. The siding,

protected by a derail, was used by B&M crews to switch out loads set there for interchange. On this particular day, the B&M crew opened the siding switch and derail, proceeded around Fletcher's passing siding in order to couple to the head end of several cars of granite grit. Having coupled to the loads, and tried the air, they then backed out of the siding at a fair clip, not noticing that enterprising young citizens had thrown the derail back on. Results were predictable; two cars sent over the derail before a stop could be made. The locomotive was on the wrong end and thus could not gain the main line, and so was shut down for the night. The Boston wrecker was called the following day to set the heavy cars back on the iron. The local juveniles were hailed into court, emerging, no doubt, with a warning and probation. Local photographers duly recorded the scene.

————— APPRECIATION —————

E. Kennard Fletcher, grandson of H. E. Fletcher, founder.  
 Robert O'Brien, Personnel Supervisor.  
 Employee friends of many years.  
 B&MRRHS Locomotive Records



JOHN A. GOODWIN

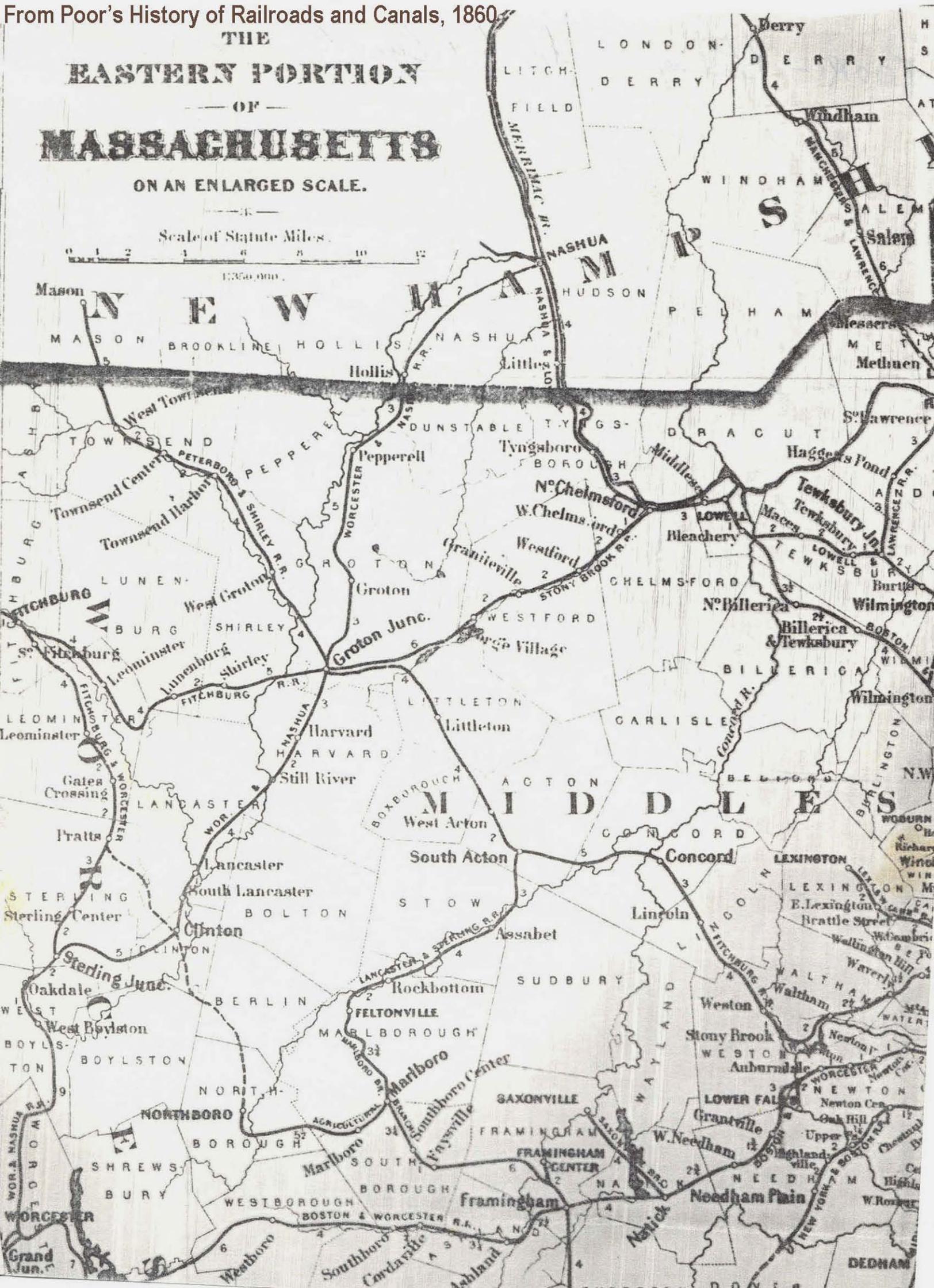
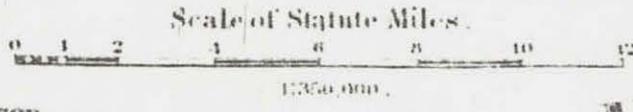
Here we see the pick-up operation of the steam derrick which tipped over in August, 1947. B&M crane M3364 provides the lifting force as Fletcher's ex-B&M 0-6-0 no. 287 looks on at rear.

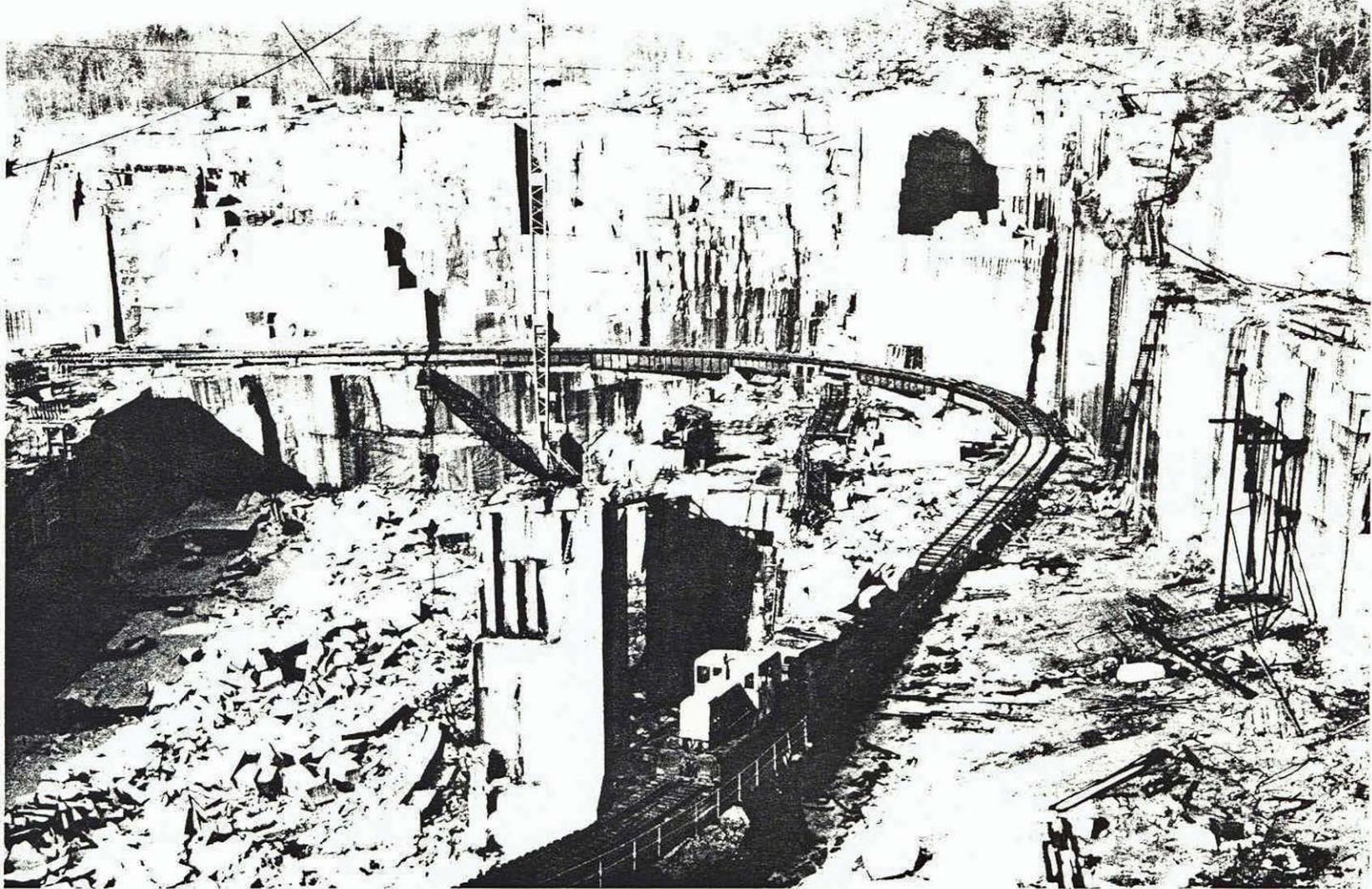


DANA D. GOODWIN

Fletcher's no. 410 in trouble at Gilson's Crossing, Brookside, on March 14, 1952. The former B&M shifter is being coaxed back onto the iron by the old steam derrick, but to no avail. She was eventually re-railed by cables and pulleys instead of direct tractive force.

# THE EASTERN PORTION OF MASSACHUSETTS ON AN ENLARGED SCALE.





H. BENTLEY CROUCH