

Railroads in Delaware County

By Joan Odess

In 1848 the first railroad, the NY & Erie, entered Delaware County setting in motion significant changes in this mountainous rural area. The first train ran through Sullivan County, into Delaware County via Long Eddy and passed through Deposit on its way to Binghamton. In 1873 railroads reached deeper into Delaware County with the completion of the New York, Ontario & Western (O & W), affectionately called the Old and Weary in later years. The O&W ran through East Branch, Walton and Sidney, and included a side branch from Walton to Delhi. In the 1870s the Ulster & Delaware (U & D) railroad, nicknamed the Up & Down because of the rough terrain it traveled, connected the eastern side of the county running from Kingston through Ulster County to Fleischmanns, Arkville, Roxbury, Grand Gorge and Stamford. By 1900 the line had extended through Hobart, Bloomville, East Meredith and Davenport ending in Oneonta. The Delaware & Eastern, later called the Delaware & Northern (D & N), one of the last lines to be built in Delaware County in the early 1900s, connected the O & W in East Branch to the U & D in Arkville with a spur to Andes from Union Grove Andes Junction.

The railroad brought new opportunities to Delaware County, both

for import and export. Manufactured goods became more economical and readily available. "The whole dairy industry of the eastern part of the county has been put upon a new and improved basis. The supplies of lumber, feed and flour which are required by the farmers and others are brought to them at a much less cost and at a more convenient distance." (Murray 1898:119).

At the same time local products could be shipped out with more ease and efficiency than ever before. "Many farm products, which under former circumstances were not worth sending to market, now became valuable and merchantable. This was the first step towards bringing Delaware County out into the world" (Murray 1898:116). Locally produced wood products, lumber, blue stone and dairy products were exported. "Famous for its butter, Delaware County became equally important as a source of milk. Special trains, cleared for rapid runs, carried fresh milk into New York City" (Roads & Rails Through Delaware County).



The same lines that shipped goods also transported people. With the coming of the railroads, the popularity of the Catskills as a vacation spot soared. "They offered sweltering city residents 'pure air, cool

climate, picturesque scenery, shady groves, fine drives, hunting and trout fishing and boating”(Resort Towns of Delaware County). Some of the most popular resort towns included Stamford, Arkville and Fleischmanns where lavish hotels sprang up to accommodate visitors. “Other resorts targeted vacationers with more moderate budgets. Even local farm families, encouraged by railroad agents, opened their homes to the most modest city residents, offering menus of freshly picked foods, the finest milk and butter products, and rooms cooled by mountain breezes.” (Resort Towns of Delaware County).

The advent of the automobile and auto truck lead to a steady and irreversible decline of the railroad. Along with better-kept roads and the creation of new highways, long-distance trucking companies began competing with the railroad. Trucks, unlike trains, could deliver directly to stores, resulting in a decrease in freight traffic on the railroad. Tourists too began travelling by car rather than train enabling

them to look beyond the rail lines for vacation destinations. “While World War II postponed complete failure, the downward spiral of railroad profitability began again with peace. In quick succession service declined, stations closed, new highways skirted the county, and rail routes were abandoned” (Roads & Rails Through Delaware County).

Today the only freight cars to be found in Delaware County are in Sidney where goods are transported on the Delaware & Hudson line. Arkville is home to the only passenger train in the county, the Delaware & Ulster Rail Ride, which offers excursions from the historic Arkville depot to Roxbury, Hallcotsville and Highmount. At Hanford Mills Museum visitors can hike the bed of the U & D line and visit an old freight car, which is home to the museum’s “Box Car” exhibit. Additional hikes can be taken on the Catskill Scenic Trails from Bloomville to Grand Gorge following the well-maintained bed of the old U & D line.



The Merrickville Tunnel at Northfield. From the Cora Dann Collection. DCHA Archives