

The Chronology of Railroading in Walpole, Massachusetts

Edited by F.D. Donovan, July 2002*

The Walpole Railroad Company, chartered in 1846, was taken over by the Norfolk County RR in 1849, and a twenty-six mile line of track between Dedham and Blackstone was opened on April 23 of that year.

Earliest runs to Boston were either over the Dedham-Readville branch of the Boston & Providence RR, or passengers had to change trains as no lines were built through Endicott or Dorchester. After June 1850, Dedham center was connected with the West Roxbury branch of the Boston & Providence road through Roslindale.

On May 1, 1870, a north-south line was opened through Walpole Center by the Mansfield & Framingham Railroad Company, crossing the old Norfolk county line at grade. The M&F became the Boston, Clinton & Fitchburg RR when opened, and was absorbed in turn by the Old Colony RR in 1879, and the New York, New Haven U Hartford RR in 1898.

On December 1, 1890, the Old Colony RR opened a single-track line from Walpole Junction - later Cedar - to North Attleboro via Wrentham and Plainville. This, the Wrentham Branch, connected with the 4.6 mile Attleboro Branch RR opened in 1871, between North Attleboro and Attleboro, where a connection was made with the Boston & Providence RR main line.

On February 15, 1892, the Old Colony extended its Wrentham Branch easterly, building a 5.7 mile line from Cedar through East Walpole to Norwood Central, connecting at that point with the New York & New England RR - the later Midland Division of the NYNH&H RR. On June 27, 1903, the New Haven opened another extension of the Wrentham Branch, building a 4.6 mile line from North Attleboro to Adamsdale Junction. Now, a through train could run from South Station in Boston to Providence, via Norwood, East Walpole, Wrentham, North Attleboro and Pawtucket. Passenger service ended on the Wrentham Branch in 1938, and freight and gravel trains ran in desultory fashion for a while thereafter. In 1965, the rails were taken up from a point about one mile north of Valley Falls to a gravel pit in Plainville, MA. The entire Wrentham Branch was abandoned in the mid-1980s.

The New York, New Haven & Hartford RR began controlling the area railroads by purchase and merger in the 1890s, and developed the prosperous Midland route to New York via Norwood, Walpole, Blackstone, Putnam, Willimantic and Hartford. This line was the route of the famed New York & New England Railroad's White Train, best known as the "Ghost Train."

Passenger service on the Wrentham Branch ended in 1938 in the famous New Haven RR "88 Stations case," and all Old Colony passenger service was discontinued in June, 1959. Mansfield - Framingham passenger trains stopped running in 1933, but there are still freight trains operating on this line. Midland Division passenger service terminated at Blackstone in 1955 as a

result of hurricane damage to the railroad west of Putnam, Connecticut. The line between Franklin and Blackstone was abandoned in 1969 when Penn Central took over the bankrupt New Haven system. Conrail ran freight trains to Walpole, a service now provided by CSX, and well-patronized MBTA trains carry commuters between Franklin and Boston via Walpole.

* Originally compiled by Carl L. Smith, May 1969