



Westford Depot

It was a quiet day at the old station when this photo was taken by "Woodside of Lowell." Depot master Charles Whidden, center, is flanked by his daughter Etta on the right, with little Florence Whidden. Leaning on the hitching post at left is Clarence Whidden. Across

the tracks was a dam which powered a grist mill owned by Burbeck & Heywood. The station was demolished in 1947.

Westford depot demolished but name, memories linger

By GORDON B. SEAVEY
WESTFORD — One of the longest thoroughfares in Westford is Depot Street. It stretches from Westford center across Stony Brook to the junction of Dunstable and Tyngsboro Roads.

Yet there is no such thing as a Westford depot — it was demolished 30 years ago, after being closed for several years. Declining passenger and express needs caused its demise as automobiles and trucks took over. But the name, and memories, linger.

The Boston & Maine's last local passenger train, from Worcester - via Ayer and the Stony Brook line - to Lowell, was dropped on April 25, 1953.

The Stony Brook Railroad Company was formed to build a connecting link between North Chelmsford and Groton Junction (which became Ayer in 1871). Upon completion, it was leased to the Nashua and Lowell Railroad in 1848.

THE NEW company had no rolling stock, but established four passenger and freight stations in Brookside (Nabasset), Westford, Graniteville and Forge Village in this town. Others were at West Chelmsford and North Littleton. Passenger trains ran on regular schedules, up and down the line, morning, noon and night, except Sundays.

Most of the passengers were headed for Worcester, Lowell or Boston. It served businessmen, shoppers and students, and the regulars used monthly ride tickets which were duly punched by affable conductors, one punch per trip. Bound for Boston, all passengers were required to change at Lowell.

The front of the Westford station boasted a bay window, in which was the telegraph instrument, usually clicking away in meaningless messages to the ears of the public.

One room was devoted to express packages, with another of equal size for passengers.

IN COLD weather, passengers would huddle around the pot-bellied stove, discussing affairs of the town.

Good weather found passengers waiting on the platform watching the waters pour over the dam as Stony Brook rushed to its next mill pond at Brookside.

As each train came to a hissing halt, passengers would climb aboard, some going into the smoking car which was combined with a baggage section, but most (including all women) entered the regular coach with its plush seats. If it were a group of three or four, one seat back could be flopped over, making a foursome.

Regular commuters often had a "reserved" four-seater so they could enjoy a card game. Harry B. Prescott was one of the most stalwart of all commuters, going daily from his home at 20 Depot St. to the Boston Wharf Company, up to the time all passenger travel was stopped.

H. ARNOLD Wilder, a noted railroad buff, reports that Mrs. J. Willard Fletcher (Etta Whidden) was the long-time agent and telegraph operator. Then came John B. "Jack" Gray in the '20s, and when promoted to general freight agent, Joe Murphy came to Westford. Mrs. Walter Fletcher, Sr. served as caretaker of the station in 1928 after the post of agent was abolished. It was her duty to open the station as a shelter, light the fires and clean the floors and the lamps. These duties she performed until the building was torn down.

The 8:15 a.m. train was the one on which local farmers would ship great jugs of milk to Lowell, at a very low rate. George Hartford, who made a meagre living on an old farm

on Patten Road, near Westford Academy, could be seen daily carrying a couple of jugs by wagon through town to the Depot, a round trip distance of perhaps six miles. Empty jugs would return on evening trains.

THERE WAS rural free delivery mail service in town, but to get the mail from the railroad to the post office, a distance of one and one-half miles, required a special courier. Old timers will remember Frank Bannister, his long legs moving him at a

rapid pace, carrying the mail (only a sack or two) slung over his shoulder, heading to the post office in the grocery store at the common.

Later, when Samuel Balch retired as an R.F.D. man, he brought the mail in a Model T Ford. He was allowed to carry express packages and passengers as a sideline, for a small fee. It was reported that when one pretty young lady in town was to be married, he transported packages to her home "as my wedding present to you!"