

Freight needs foster rail lines in north and south sections

By Arnold Wilder

Erected in 1872 and passing through Sudbury, Concord, Acton, Westford and Chelmsford to Lowell, the Framingham and Lowell rail line became part of the Old Colony System and eventually a part of the Penn Central Railroad.

The southeastern corner of Westford, through which it passes along Acton Road (Route 27) is relatively short, but a station called Carlisle, at the intersection of Acton and Carlisle roads, served the southern part of town during the many years that local passenger trains operated.

Neighboring farmers transported milk to this station; occasional cars of grain were unloaded. For a considerable time, Nashoba post office was located in the station. Here Billy Butterworth served as agent, postmaster and as a clearing house for local gossip.

Following the prevailing pattern of the late 20s and early 30s, when better roads and more automobiles were available, passenger patronage declined. The local morning and evening trains were replaced with a Mack Railroad of awkward design, then by a highway bus.

Finally all passenger service ceased in 1938.

The little station was sold, moved across the street, and became part of a residence. The building was razed by fire a few years ago.

The roadbed has deteriorated; railroad gossip has it that Penn Central will abandon the line. In late 1974, all through movements of freight were re-routed via Worcester to Lowell via B&M.

H.E. Fletcher Industrial Railroad

Herbert E. Fletcher opened and developed stone quarries in the northeast section of Westford in 1880. Here granite of high quality for a wide variety of building purposes, such as railroad stations, terminals and commercial buildings, could be obtained.

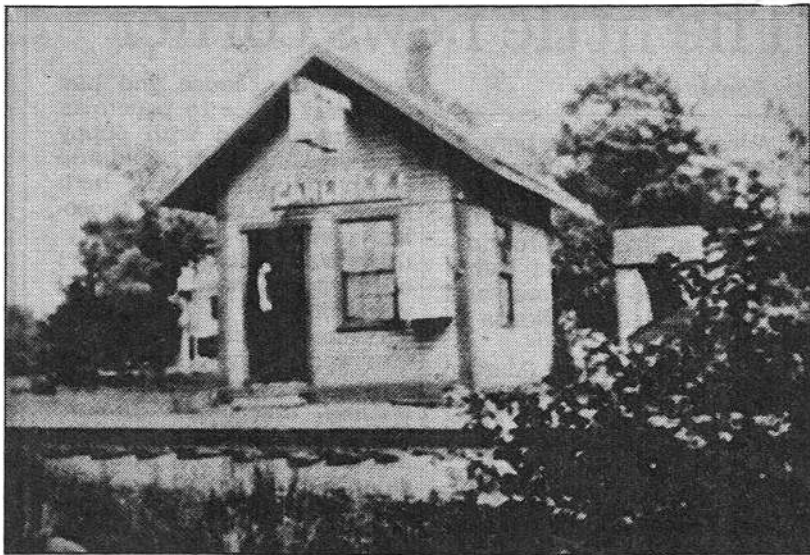


Photo courtesy of June W. Kennedy

THE SMALL FRAME building that served as the Carlisle station for the Framingham and Lowell Railroad saw trains pass through the southeastern section of town twice daily. The abandoned building was added to a residence but burned to the ground a few years ago.

Movement of this heavy material was a ponderous, tedious distant to the nearest railroad siding at Brookside or West Chelmsford. This effort, both by manpower and ox-power, must have been considerable but accepted in those early days as the means to an end, it being the only mode at hand.

The H.E. Fletcher Company apparently determined that, to be competitive, a more sophisticated means of granite transportation was required. In 1895, the company constructed a standard gauge railroad from a point on the Stony Brook line of the Boston and Maine, just east of Brookside Road near the old Gilson's Store. It continued due north up a moderate grade to cross Groton Road into the quarry area. A considerable amount of tracks was then constructed on the property to facilitate handling of the stone through various cutting and finishing operations.

Perhaps the most spectacular is the line which circles down the outside perimeter of the quarry to reach the bottom.

Early motive power was a small four-wheeled steam locomotive without benefit of coal tender, but adequate to more

wooden cars about the quarry area. Later second-hand switch engines were purchased from Boston and Maine Railroad.

From the middle 20s, a #5 six-wheel B&M engine was to be followed by four similar but increasingly larger steam engines. By the summer of 1953, the 444 was replaced by a 470-horsepower General Electric diesel-electric engine. It continues in use to the present time.

Readily serviced by the company's electrician and fueled by a local oil company, one man operates this economical motive power, moving stone on steel flatcars as required, though no longer to the B&M connection.

As the demand for Fletcher granite continues, even though all the finished products are handled by truck on the highway, the continued use of the railroad within the operations seems assured. Its presence constitutes an important part of the railroad history of our town.

Arnold Wilder is a Westford native and an avid rail historian. His pieces on the town's railway past and present are included in "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos by June W. Kennedy.