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April 29, 2021

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By Charles R. Nichols

The opening of the Harlem Railroad line from Chatham to New York City had an enormous effect on the growth and well being of the Village of Philmont.

The New York Observer of 29 January 1852 had an article indicating that the trains started running over this line on 19 January 1852. The railroad station shown in the top photo was the first station in Philmont. The date of construction is not noted, but it must have been shortly after the trains started running.



There was a considerable amount of freight to be shipped by rail, considering the next fastest method was by horse. The farmers for some miles around brought a vast and diverse quantity of goods; animals (on the hoof), produce, and particularly milk. These freight cars were not refrigerated mechanically, so fast service was most important.

The various mills also shipped a very large amount of textile goods which were sent to New York City to be trans-shipped all over the world.

To the individual, the access to LCL (less than carload) freight shipment meant that large personal goods ordered by mail and items not suitable for mailing could be sent and received quickly and safely.

Passenger traffic was not neglected, and although the very early trains had a terrible safety record, by the late 1850's and 1860's it was considered a desirable way to go. Traveling salesmen of the early days (known as 'drummers') until well after World War I found the railroad indispensable. The thriving mill village of Philmont was a frequent stop for many of these gentlemen.

Accommodations for travelers, and others, was a necessity. Bar & hotels like the Vanderbilt, Empire House, Richardson's, and Hopkins House were going concerns.

A comparable station stop on the Boston & Albany line was in the hamlet of Mellenville - just a short mile distant. In order to accommodate visitors who had business in both communities, Philmont had a stagecoach! Not your western Concord Stage, just a two-horse buggy.

The Philo Tator Trade Card shown is for Winter 1882-83 and illustrates a rare example, for the time, of humor in advertising. The 'Rattler' was a nickname given to one of the Harlem trains, for obvious reasons, and the baby & rattle illustration was an attention getter.

One problem for the Village of Philmont while the railroad was in operation was that whenever a north or south bound train stopped at the station, the Main Street of the Village was blocked for the duration of the stop.



The last photo shows the second and final station, erected about 1910, and a much more

imposing structure than the first. The Philmont-Mellenville stage is shown, probably at this time operated by Mr. Whiteman who had a home and stable on Summit Street. The people shown appear to be the station agent and possible passengers.

The station stop was discontinued in July of 1959, and the last train ran on the Harlem in 1976.



No discussion of the railroad in Philmont could neglect mention of the only real book on the line, [The Coming Of The New York and Harlem Railroad](#), by Louis V. Grogan. Lou spent much of his youth in Philmont, and many of his family were employed by the railroad. Lou's book is a detailed study, station by station, of the route from New York City to Chatham.

There is much nostalgia connected with the Harlem. For a boy, listening early in the morning to the steam whistle blowing for Stever's Crossing, the memory is everlasting.

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