

Meriden, Waterbury & Connecticut River Railroad

By GLOVER A. SNOW

THE STORY of the Meriden, Waterbury & Connecticut River Railroad is so typical of dozens of other similar undertakings of the last century that it reads like a case history of the "Railroad Fever."

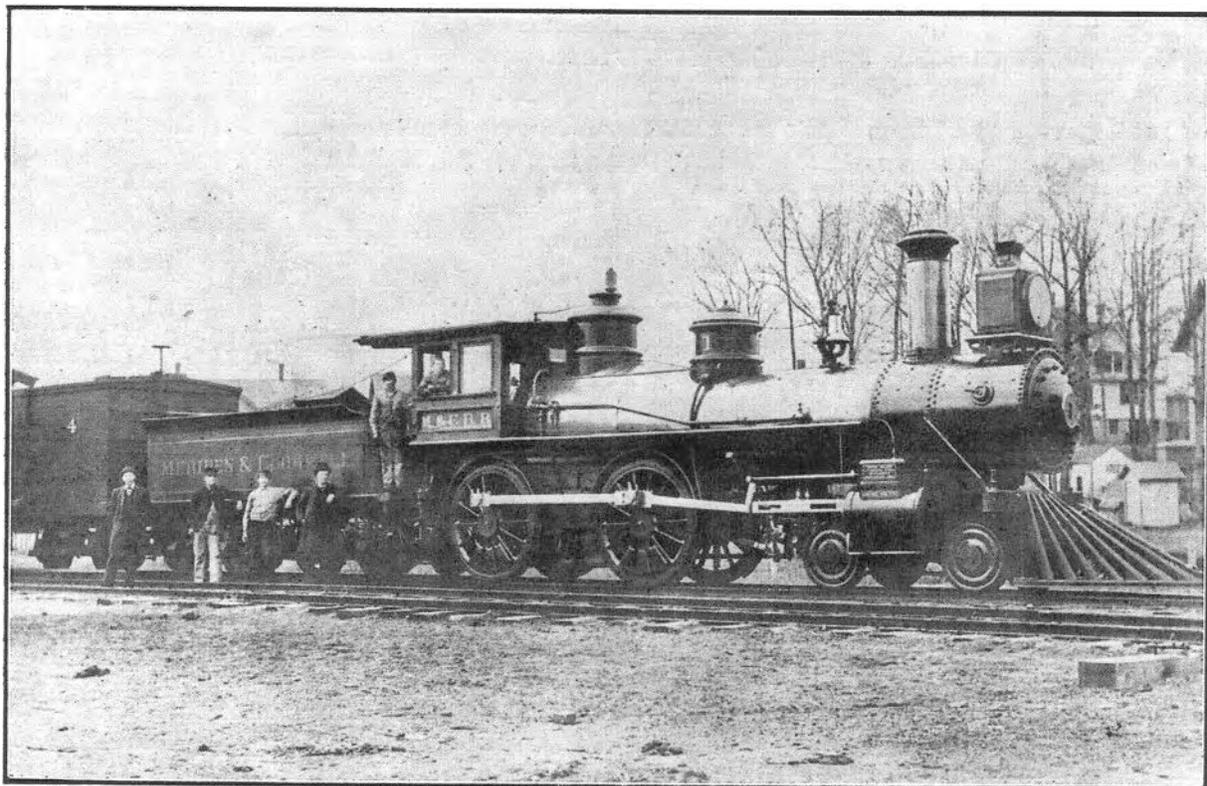
In the beginning every town wanted a railroad; just one—and any one would do. Meriden got its railroad early. Fortu-

nately, it was in a direct line with New Haven, Hartford and Springfield, so that when the first link of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad was proposed, not much persuasion was required to have it go through what was then West Meriden.

This, the first Connecticut railroad, opened in 1838 be-

tween New Haven and Meriden with stage coaches to Hartford for a year, by which time rails were completed through to that city.

Eventually, the Hartford & New Haven, as it was called, combined with the later-built Hartford & Springfield, and finally with the New York & New Haven to form the New York, New Haven & Hartford



—Photo from Collection of D. W. Peckham.

MERIDEN & CROMWELL RAILROAD NO. 1 photographed at Meriden, Conn.

Also In This Issue:

THE NEW YORK, NEW HAVEN & HARTFORD RAILROAD
Notes on 1952 Passenger Service Expansion

Railroad. The New York end was completed in 1849.

Since the Western Railroad was already running its trains between Worcester and Springfield, and the Eastern Railroad from Worcester to Boston (now Boston & Albany which is part of the New York Central System), the year 1949 was the 100th anniversary of the first all-rail route between New York and Boston.

One might think that with such a railroad Meriden would have been satisfied. It was for awhile. But before many years passed it was aware of what appeared to be rank discrimination on the part of the New Haven in favor of cities like New Haven and Hartford where there was water competition. The manufacturers of fast-growing Meriden were reluctant to accept this situation.

Until 1806 Meriden had been a parish of Wallingford. However, in that year Meriden was set off into a separate township. About the same time there were a number of enterprising small industries in the village which started to participate in the industrial growth of the country. They did so well in the 50 years from 1840 to 1890 that Meriden's population went from 1,800 to 25,423, which meant more than a two-fold increase between each census. The village grew into a city in short order, and the businessmen became more and more reluctant to pay the New Haven Road's high rates.

* * *

Meriden & Cheshire R. R.

THE FIRST attempt to break the railroad monopoly came in 1869 when a special town meeting appointed a committee to seek passage through the

Legislature of a bill to authorize the town to subscribe \$100,000 to the capital stock of a proposed Meriden & Cheshire Railroad. A little later the town of Cheshire authorized a subscription to the same enterprise.

At that time the only independent north and south railroad was the New Haven & Northampton Railroad, the Canal Line, and it is probable that the proposed line was to connect with it and thus form a new route to New York, to the South and the West, which would provide competition and lower rates.

This scheme probably failed because the New Haven got control of the Canal Line. There was active promotion in 1871 of a line between Norwich, Middletown, Meriden and Waterbury which would connect at Waterbury with the Boston, Hartford & Erie Railroad, but this scheme never really got started.

* * *

Meriden & Cromwell R. R.

BY THE YEAR 1881 Meriden was still groaning under what it considered were unfair and discriminatory rates, but there were several prominent citizens who had decided to do something. Manufacturers were particularly concerned with the cost of getting coal and heavy supplies. Their answer seemed to be a railroad from Meriden to the Connecticut River at Cromwell which would connect with boat and barge service on the river to New York and Atlantic Coast ports.

The mere announcement that such a railroad was contemplated brought unexpected results. The Consolidated, as the New Haven was known in those

Transportation

Volume 7

Published by:
Connecticut Valley Chapter,
National Railway Historical Society, Inc.
Warehouse Point, Conn.

Published August, 1953

THIS is our seventh year of historical publications, but our first history of a Connecticut steam railroad. A listing of our previous publications, most of them about street railway lines, may be had by writing to the above address.

The Meriden, Waterbury & Connecticut River Railroad

THE WRITER wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the many people who have helped him with information, pictures and general encouragement. Special mention should be given to Mr. Frank Korten and Mr. James Ullman, both of whom loaned the author very extensive notes they had made from contemporary newspapers; to Mr. C. B. Burr for documentary evidence which makes statements conclusive which otherwise might have been surmises, and to Mr. D. W. Peckham for many of the pictures used herein. Unfortunately both these men passed away since work on the history was started.

If any reader of this history is in possession of additional facts on the MW & CR, or pictures, the writer would deem it a favor if he were notified through Box 941, Meriden. If a second edition is ever published, such information will help to fill in gaps, which while not too evident, perhaps, are nevertheless present.

GLOVER A. SNOW
Box 941
Meriden, Conn.

days, proclaimed a 25% reduction in freight rates to Meriden.

It was apparently hoped this would satisfy the clamor for lower rates, and at the same time indicate to the promoters the kind of competition they would be up against. Meriden newspapers warned businessmen of this trick, and suggested that if the proposed line did not pay any dividends for 10 years the savings on freight already accomplished would warrant the heavy investment.

* * *

THE MOST ACTIVE promoter of the Meriden & Cromwell Railroad was Horace C. Wilcox who was a pioneer and a leader in the rapidly-growing silver industry. He was determined to let nothing stop the project, and when he put his shoulder to the wheel of any project, it moved. The original capitalization was set at \$300,000, of which \$230,000 was

pledged before the first organization meeting.

In addition to his original subscription Mr. Wilcox stood ready to take any remaining stock. He realized, however, that if the road were to succeed financially the stock would have to be distributed into as many hands as possible. Every effort was made to get subscriptions from all kinds of citizens, with particular emphasis on storekeepers, manufacturers and businessmen. Without a financial stake in the road they might be amenable to temporary rate cuts on the part of the New Haven Road which would have driven the Meriden & Cromwell Railroad Co. out of business almost immediately after its inception.

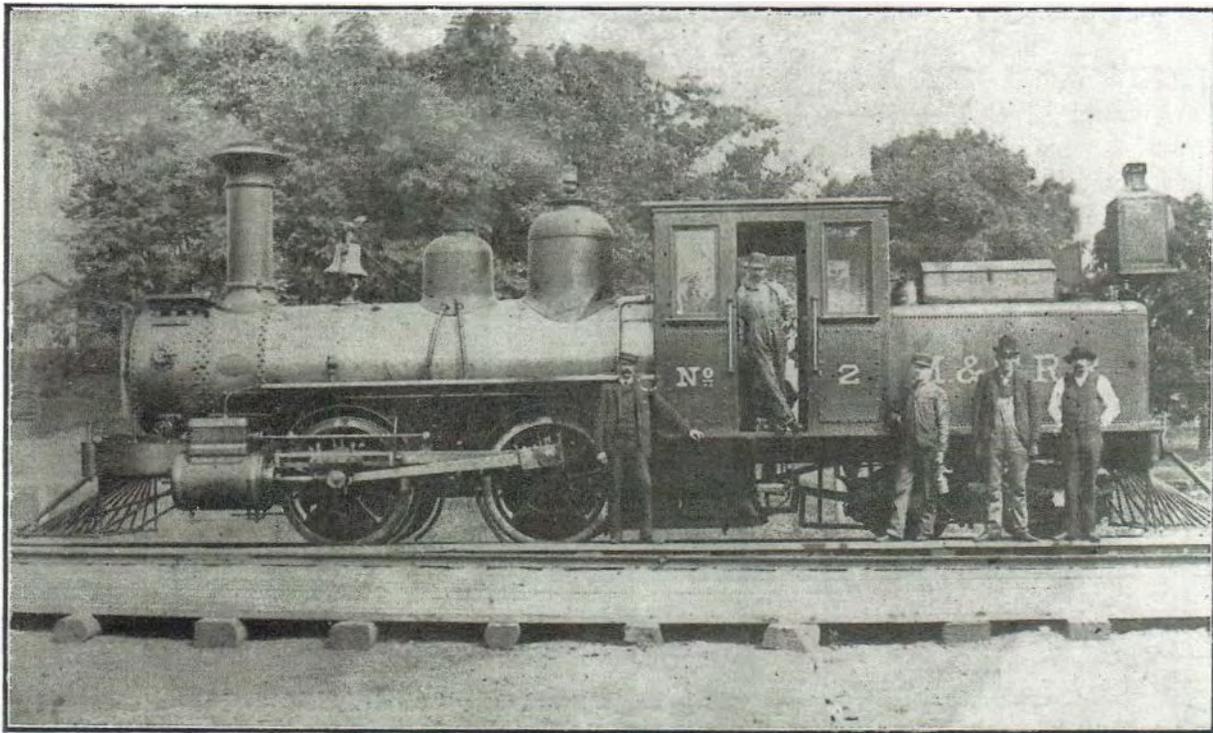
The initial meeting was held on July 5, 1882 with about 150 prominent citizens of the Meriden area attending. Seventeen directors were elected. On July

11th the directors met and chose a slate of officers which included Horace C. Wilcox as president.

* * *

EVERYBODY was optimistic. As one Meriden paper said: "It is fair to hope that the sound of the locomotive whistle will be heard on the road before snow flies." What such a hope was based upon is difficult to understand. At any rate it was reported in the public press on July 12th that "The Meriden & Cromwell Railroad Company are getting down to business. Stationery is being printed today." And on July 31st: "The company has an office in the Wilcox Block over the Post Office."

By September the layout for the proposed line was completed and submitted to the State Railroad Commission for approval. The original plan was for the western end to be "in



—Photo from Collection of D. W. Peckham.

MERIDEN & CROMWELL RAILROAD No. 2—The road's second No. 2.

the center of the south track north of the Wilcox & White Organ Co. factory situated on the north side of Cambridge Street and 131 feet west of the easterly wing." The petition to the commission stated that the company was trying to reach agreements with the New Haven for crossing its Berlin-Middletown branch, and the Hartford & Connecticut Valley Railroad for passing over its line.

* * *

THE hearing of the commissioners was held in Meriden. Presidents of both the New Haven and the Valley Roads, among others, thought it important enough to attend. This hearing on September 20th, was adjourned until the 27th at Cromwell. Once again President Watrous and Vice-President Reed of the New Haven, as well as President Babcock of the Valley Road, were there.

There was a long argument about a grade crossing with the Valley Railroad at Cromwell. The commission reserved its decision at the time, but within a couple of weeks gave assent to the layout. Engineer Drake of the new line said that it would be in operation within 12 months' time.

The next step was to make deals with the owners of the property over which the line would be built. Engineer Drake said that most of them wanted altogether too much money. He had to spend a lot of time with them, going over the individual maps he had to make of their properties. State laws compelled the new road to deposit with the town clerk of each town through which the line would run a map on a scale of 100 feet to the inch within

three months from the town's approval of the layout.

Then, as if that were not enough to keep the chief engineer busy, the powers-that-be decided to relocate quite a bit of the line, which meant doing the job all over again. On December 8, 1882, Consulting Engineer Crawford of New York City conferred with President Wilcox and they agreed that such relocations would considerably lessen the number of grade crossings and trim \$30,000 off construction costs. They then talked about getting the road running "by early fall, if not summer" (of 1883).

The formalities of petitioning for relocated sections got under way in January 1883, but it was not until May that the route was approved. To give some idea of the "red tape" incidental to these alterations, there were eight pages of small print in the notice of the hearing, all of which had to be sent to the 70 property owners who were or might be affected. The revision would, in addition to line changes, bring the road nearer the center of Meriden.

* * *

ON THE DAY of the hearing the Railroad Commissioners came to Meriden and took carriages to Westfield station on the New Haven's Middletown-Berlin branch. Both presidents of the Consolidated and the Valley Roads were on hand with their engineers. The party examined every point where the new railroad was to cross a highway. The commission did not announce its decision over the changes at the time. A few days later, on June 27th, the Meriden & Cromwell made an agreement with the Valley Road to cross its tracks below grade.

It was a full year since the

Meriden & Cromwell had been organized, but no construction had started. The public had apparently become impatient and skeptical; the local papers carried quite a few items calculated to reassure the populace. It was stated that the ties had been purchased and delivered at Cromwell and that actual construction would begin "at the earliest possible moment."

In August of 1883 the directors voted to buy an engine and five freight cars for use in building the road. A contract was let for grading, and in September work actually commenced.

* * *

BY the middle of December engine house, turntable and water tank at Cromwell were nearly completed, but delays from bad weather and other causes confounded all previous predictions about the time of opening. Another change was made in the location for the Meriden terminus. It was decided to put the passenger and freight station, as well as the yards, between Camp and Center Streets (on property now owned and used by the New Departure Division of General Motors), which at the time was adjacent to the old woolen mill.

The right-of-way skirted Brookside Park (then called Camp's Meadows) and the south edge of Pratt's Pond. The plan to build the depot on State Street near the Meriden Britannia Company (now Factory E, International Silver Company) failed to materialize.

In May, 1884, President Wilcox and two other officers went to Springfield and bought 40 freight cars, as well as a passenger coach, from the Wason Manufacturing Company. Meanwhile, the Rhode Island Locomotive Works was building what the newspapers

called "a light engine to be used in the constructing of the road. Afterward a heavy engine will be put on."

The first half mile of track was laid in May at the Cromwell end, and by the 28th of June it was completed as far as Highland station. Ground was broken for the Meriden roundhouse at Center Street in July. By the first of September the track had gotten to Pratt's Pond in Meriden.

* * *

THE BIG SWAMP between Highland and Pratt's Pond gave much trouble—and was to give more later. October saw completion of the main track to Center Street, and by the fourth of the month inspection and work trains had been run over the whole road. The directors called for the ninth and last installment of 15% on the stock from subscribers.

Meanwhile, docking facilities were constructed at Cromwell. A passenger and freight depot was erected there, and a similar combined facility at Center Street in Meriden.

Winter brought a slowdown in finishing the road so that formal opening plans were made for April 1, 1885. At the last minute it was announced that the event would be put off for a week because the State Railroad Commission would not be able to inspect the road in time for the earlier opening.

According to the local papers "some very pretty passenger cars are on the way. They were in Springfield this morning, and much admired by passersby." Actually only one coach was purchased new from the Wason company in Springfield, No. 10, the combination car. Additional coaches were rented from the Valley Road when needed.

Meriden & Cromwell officials made a trip to Cromwell in No. 10 on April 25th, and everyone was much pleased.

The road's first conductor was C. H. Stebbins who had been gathering experience on the New York Elevated, although he was a Meriden man. M. S. Osgood, an engineer of 20 years' experience, was to be the throttle handler. And "in cases of necessity Master Mechanic Gilbert, who has been with the road a year, will take charge of the engine."

The papers further stated that the road would start "with two fine engines built by the Rhode Island Locomotive Works, with passenger and freight cars by Wason & Co. at Springfield. About 50 freight cars will transport merchandise of all kinds."

* * *

THE STATE Railroad Commission made a trip over the line on April 1st and signified its approval. Three days later the stockholders were given an excursion to Cromwell for a preview of their new railroad. Guests from around the state accompanied them, including numerous editors and other

newspapermen. A large crowd gathered at Center Street depot to see the train off. It was reported that the trip "was a smooth one—not the slightest accident to mar their enjoyment. The commodious freight depot and cozy passenger room at Cromwell were much admired by the visitors."

* * *

ON APRIL 6, 1885, without fanfare, regularly scheduled service began. The timetable gave trains 35 minutes to make the run to Cromwell. There were flag stops at Highland, Smith's crossing and Westfield, and three round trips, leaving Meriden at 8:45 a. m., 12:15 and 5:10 p. m. Returning trains reached Meriden at 7:05, 11 a. m. and 4 p. m. The schedules were set up to make connections with the Hartford-New York boats on the Connecticut River. If shippers got their freight to the Meriden station by 5 o'clock at night, it would be delivered in New York the next morning; freight from New York got the same overnight service.

The new road received extensive writeups in newspapers all over the state as an example of what the citizens of a city could



—Photo from Collection of D. W. Peckham.

CROMWELL—The station and dock facilities on the river.

do to eliminate railroad rate discrimination and improve service. Several editors warned Meridenites that although the road's mission had been accomplished they should not neglect to patronize it. From general comments it could be inferred that the Consolidated Road did not have too many friends in the state in 1885.

Completion of the road and its apparent success brought agitation for extensions in various directions. One proposal was to Bristol via Southington to connect with the New York & New England Railroad for the Western business. (The New York & New England connection was eventually made at Waterbury).

* * *

THE FIRST STROKE of bad luck to hit the Meriden & Cromwell was a Connecticut River Spring freshet. On the 25th of the road's first month of operation it was reported that 50 feet of the line near Cromwell was under two feet of water. Whether the trains were allowed to plow through was not stated, but it was claimed that no delays were being encountered in freight deliveries from New York. However, conditions became worse because trains ceased operation within a week. After the water went down, the embankment, damaged by river currents, had to be replaced. Trains were back on schedule by the end of the month.

During this freshet the tracks were under water in three places, "Puddock" meadows, Cromwell meadows and at the dock. The road announced that alteration of the grade would be made at these places to prevent recurrence of the trouble. Just how this was done at the docks is a little puzzling, be-

cause the following Autumn it was stated that the track was being LOWERED to bring it down level with the boat. "This will be appreciated by the steamship company, who on this account has found it hard to keep a crew longer than one or two trips." (If the steamship company had that much trouble with the crews, appreciation seems a mild word; but that's the way it was reported in the papers).

The 1880's were the great days of railroad excursions. There were no family automo-

biles to give them competition, and trolleys were yet to blossom beyond the horsecar stage. Rail trips of 8, 10 or more miles brought out big crowds. The churches, Sunday schools, clubs, lodges and all kinds of organizations, promoted excursions to beaches, lakes, parks, and groves, and they traveled by special train. The Meriden & Cromwell went after this business, usually in conjunction with the river steamers. The papers repeatedly contained notices of excursions down the river.

Copy of Advertisement in 1885 Meriden Papers

MERIDEN and NEW YORK

via

MERIDEN & CROMWELL RAILROAD

AND

HARTFORD & NEW YORK STEAMBOATS

Summer Arrangement — 1885

Steamers "City of Springfield" and "Capitol City" leave Cromwell daily (except Sunday) on arrival of 5:10 P. M. train from Meriden, stopping at all points on the Connecticut River, arriving at New York 7 A. M.

Returning, leave Pier 24, East River, N. Y., daily (except Sunday) at 4 P. M., connecting at Cromwell with Meriden & Cromwell Railroad, arriving at Meriden 7:10 A. M.

Meals served at reasonable rates.

Single tickets, Meriden to New York, with berth	1.45
Excursion tickets, Meriden to New York and return, with berth	2.75
State Rooms, one way	1.00
State Rooms, round trip	1.50
Fare, Meriden to Philadelphia, summer season (Railroad from New York)	4.30
Fare, Meriden to Philadelphia and return	6.50

ON SATURDAYS—Excursion tickets, good for the trip only, for one passage and stateroom to New York and return, including use of a room three nights, giving excursionists an opportunity to visit seaside resorts in and around New York, Coney Island, Long Branch, Rockaway, Glen Island, etc., Sunday and Monday, arriving at Meriden Tuesday morning

Fare 4.25

C. C. Goodrich
Gen'l Agent Hartford Steamboat Co.
Fred K. DePeyster
Supt. Meriden & Cromwell Railroad
Meriden, May 9, 1885

One popular run was via the steamer "Sunshine" to Sag Harbor, Shelter Island and Niantic. There were moonlight excursions on the river on the barge "Frolic." There were trips to Osprey Beach. The route would be Meriden to Cromwell by rail and down the river to the beach by the "Frolic." These are some of the popular things people did in the 1880's before movies, radios, automobiles and television.

* * *

REPRODUCED on the preceding page is an advertisement of the Summer schedule of the Meriden & Cromwell for 1885. Just look at those rates. And they included sleeping accommodations, too! Meriden papers extolled the trip, and reminded readers that they "were indebted to the managers of our railroad for having the facilities perfected" and suggested they would want to use them "as a matter of local pride as well as convenience."

A coal bin and coal-handling facilities were erected at Cromwell in the Spring of 1885, and were used not only for the railroad and its customers but by coal purchasers up the river. It was noted in the papers that a large three-masted schooner with 400 tons of coal was at the dock at one time, being unloaded with the new donkey engine, which could handle 200 tons a day. The coal was transferred to scows for the rest of the trip to Springfield.

In addition to promoting trips to New York via Cromwell and the river both ways, which consumed a minimum of two days and two nights, publicity was given to a circular trip—down via Cromwell and back via boat to New Haven, leaving New York at 3 p. m. and getting into Meriden via the "steamboat

train" at 9 p.m. This gave a day in New York and consumed a little over 24 hours, or considerably less than both ways via the river. This did not give much revenue to the Meriden & Cromwell, but it could use any passenger revenue to advantage even though the road was built primarily for freight.

In September 1885 the railroad commission had another inspection, by special train, "and found everything in first class condition. They were especially pleased with the 500-foot trestle." The president of the Meriden & Cromwell went along to call their attention to such things.

In October preparations were made for the Winter freeze-up on the river. Shipments would leave Meriden as usual, but would be transferred to the Valley Road at Cromwell and it would carry them to Saybrook Point. From there they would go to New York by boat. Freight would be accepted until 6 p. m. at Center Street and still be handled overnight.

Another change, effective October 16, 1885, was to advance the time of the 4:50 p. m. out of Cromwell to 3:30, with arrival in Meriden at 4 o'clock.

* * *

AT the annual meeting of the road in January 1886, the officers reported net earnings of \$1,781.37 for nine months since the opening for business. The road had carried 15,312 tons of freight and 17,366 passengers.

The Summer schedule, with boat service from Cromwell to New York returned April 1st. At the same time McGuire's Swamp near Bullis Crossing, about two miles from Meriden, began to have Spring fever and heave around. The track settled, and there were times when

it was unsafe to run trains over it. Freight then had to be taken off the cars at the crossing and brought to Meriden by horse-drawn truck. Passengers had to alight and walk to another train on the other side of the subsidence. Aside from minor troubles like this, life on the Meriden & Cromwell appears to have been reasonably smooth during the following several months.

* * *

Meriden & Waterbury Railroad

PROJECTED new railroads were as popular a topic of conversation in the 1870's and 1880's as the building of parkways and superhighways is now in 1952. In talk and on paper the Meriden & Cromwell was given extensions to New Britain, Plainville, Wallingford and even New Haven, as well as to Bristol, Waterbury and Middletown. Everybody wanted extensions but few were willing to put their money into them. The one with the most steam behind it was a projected extension to Waterbury.

In February, 1887, a Waterbury paper reported revival of "the old railroad scheme. There is a movement on foot to build a railroad from Waterbury to Meriden to connect with the Meriden & Cromwell road. This would give Waterbury another tidewater connection for eight months of the year, increasing freighting facilities, and be a great convenience for passenger travel, as it would intercept the Canal, the Consolidated and Hartford & Connecticut Valley Railroads. Many of our business men look with favor on this project."

The Middletown correspondent of the Hartford Courant reported that the New York &

New England Railroad would build a line from South Manchester to Gildersleeve, to which it would bring freight from Springfield and other points. This never happened, but similar rumors persisted for years. The companion to it, that the New York & New England would lease the Meriden & Cromwell, eventually became a fact five years later. However, the comment of one Meriden paper in 1887 was, "No, never! Meriden isn't so anxious to sell her railroad, and Waterbury is willing to try her hand before yielding up her stock."

* * *

A MEETING of Waterbury citizens was held late in February and a committee was appointed to look into the matter. So in spite of rumors to the contrary, the extension at that time was far from assured. However, the following month the directors of the Meriden & Cromwell expressed approval, and a heavy selling campaign was started in Waterbury to raise that city's share of the needed capital. Meanwhile, a bill was introduced in the Legislature authorizing consolidation of the Meriden & Cromwell with the proposed Meriden & Waterbury.

At this point, it might be well to stop and consider the situation. The History of Middlesex County, published in 1884, says, "The purpose of the Meriden & Cromwell Railroad was to afford the manufacturers of Meriden an outlet for raw materials and manufactured goods and thus relieve them from the extortions of monopolies. The stock is mostly owned by manufacturers and merchants in Meriden, and no debts have been incurred in construction of the road, either by issue of bonds or otherwise." This was

a fair statement of the road's purpose, and what it had accomplished. If it had never gone over the hill to Waterbury it probably would have gotten along well enough and kept out of trouble. Apparently nobody realized what it would eventually cost to complete the line, and more especially to go far enough in Waterbury to connect with the New York & New England.

* * *

STRENUOUS efforts had to be made to sell the stock in Waterbury. One of the proponents said at a meeting there, "When Meriden wanted to raise \$200,000 for the Cromwell road, the leading silver company took \$100,000 worth, what some of its directors thought was an extravagant sum. So careful account was kept during the past year, and it was found that in the second year of the road, the savings on freight for them were \$7,800, nearly 8% on the investment."

The question of the practicability of a railroad over the mountain came up at the same meeting. The speaker quoted said that the steepest grade would be 112 feet to the mile for 1,200 feet, the rest averag-

Highway Competition Even in the 1880's

At a meeting proposing the extension of the Meriden & Cromwell Railroad to Waterbury, it was brought out that quite a number of 4-horse teams were carrying metal over the hills from Waterbury to places like Cheshire and Wallingford, this being less expensive than any routing via the Naugatuck Railroad under the rates then prevailing.

ing about 90 feet, or a little under 2%.

The original Interstate Commerce Commission Act was passed in 1887, but according to the proponents of the new railroad, the published rates under the act were even higher than those used previously. The only exceptions were those brought about by the short haul clause. For instance, the rate on coal had been 80 cents to Meriden and 75 to Hartford. The Consolidated, in view of the Cromwell competition, decided to cut the Meriden rate to that of Hartford instead of raising the Hartford rate to the old Meriden figure. The new act prohibited the rate being lower to a point farther on than it was to any point through which the traffic passed.

* * *

EXTREME difficulty was experienced getting Waterbury to pick up its share of the check. The original idea was for Waterbury to finance it entirely, with \$200,000 in stock. Finally, in order to prevent the scheme from collapsing, Meriden took \$75,000. Waterbury, with great difficulty, obtained subscriptions, on paper, for \$125,000. Much of it was never paid for, as it later turned out.

The whole road from Cromwell west was to be bonded for \$10,000 a mile, or \$300,000. This, with \$200,000 in stock, would make the total of \$500,000 it was thought needed to build and equip the road. Rails and ties would cost \$140,000, grading and bridges about \$270,000 ("the very best iron bridges"), it was said. The New York & New England connection would be about \$30,000 more.

The Cromwell end was, of course, practically tidewater, and with minor ups and downs

the line got to Center Street terminus without reaching 200 feet elevation at any point. The new line took off from Meriden & Cromwell tracks east of Twiss Pond in Meriden, went under Britannia and Broad Streets, passed over North Colony Road just north of the old city line, bridged the New Haven Road tracks at about 200 feet above sea level, then turned southwest and crossed numerous streets.

* * *

IRON BRIDGES were used at North Colony Street, the New Haven Railroad and Gracey, Kensington and Lewis Avenues. These were all underpasses. Beyond Lewis Avenue the track was almost at street grade, but wooden overpass bridges were erected for the highways, except at West Main Street which overpassed the rails on a more substantial structure. Land was purchased north of West Main Street for a passenger station, yards, an engine house, shops, and turntable.

South of West Main Street

THE CRAWFORDS, whose names appear in this story as engineers and superintendent, were a well-known family of engineers. J. U. Crawford spent five or six years in Japan at the request of the Japanese government to get its new railway lines running. He also held important positions with the Pennsylvania Railroad, and returned to its employ after his work on the Meriden road. Charles M. Crawford, the superintendent of the line, was his brother; and a third brother, Norman, was an engineer for the P. R. R.

MERIDEN & WATERBURY RAILROAD CO.

30 Meriden Nolan & Co.

Contractors Est. 1 to 17. Dr.

Meriden, Conn., August 1887

Aug 1 st	Estimate No. 1. For work done & material furnished upon the construction of the M. & W. R.R. under Contract dated June 17 th 1887	
	Section 1. Evaluation May, 1887 clearing	7897 60
	" 2. Evaluation clearing	1800 00
	" 3. Evaluation May, 1887 clearing	4800 00
	" 4. Evaluation clearing	2750 00
	" 5. " "	2640 00
	" 6. " "	1330 00
	" 8. " "	1635 00
	" 12. " "	1240 00
	" 15. " "	800 00
		<u>25592 60</u>
		2559 26
		<u>23033 34</u>

See 10% retained as per Contract
 Received Payment on 8/12/87
 By Nolan and Co.

I certify that the above account is correct; that the items therein specified were duly authorized and contracted for on favorable terms, and were necessary for the use and benefit of the Company.

John Crawford
 Chief Engineer

Facsimile of one of the bills approved in construction of the Waterbury extension.

the line followed the valley down the west side of Hanover Pond, where it turned west and ran up the Quinnipiac valley to get over onto the Cheshire side of the ridge. Up to this point the gradients were not difficult. The track dropped (with some ups and downs) from the crossing of the New Haven Road to Hanover Pond, to about 80 feet above tide.

An overpass at the Canal Line in Cheshire was at 164 feet elevation. The real climb began there. From West Cheshire station, a little beyond the Canal Road, to Summit was three miles, with an elevation of about 549 feet. After the road was built the time allowed by timetable from West Main Street to Hough's Mill, 3.1

miles from Hanover Pond, was 8 minutes. From Hough's Mill to Summit, 7 miles, the allowance was 30 minutes. From Summit to Dublin Street Station in Waterbury, 5.3 miles, took 13 minutes. This is a little ahead of our story, but will give some conception of what the new railroad was attempting.

E. B. Moss, one of the surveyors on the Waterbury extension, says that the grade from the crossing of the Canal Road to the summit of Waterbury Mountain was two per cent, compensated for curves.

In May 1887, when the extension was actually being organized, it was stated that the amount raised for the undertaking might not be sufficient. Since Meriden, and Horace

Wilcox in particular, would shoulder the additional burden "even if it takes a million," it "seemed advisable to give Meriden control." In other words Waterbury having fallen down on financing, it was in no position to dominate the enterprise. The officers of the Meriden & Waterbury were all Meriden men except for Charles Dickenson of Waterbury who was the president. This was a temporary setup until the Meriden & Cromwell and the extension could be consolidated.

* * *

SPEED was necessary because there would be no income from the west end until it was in operation. Here the new line ran into real trouble. Over 200 property owners were involved in the acquisition of the right-of-way. The company thought that the trustees of the State School in Meriden, through whose land the line would go, had understood and agreed to what was necessary. The company soon found it was wrong. After wrangling and personal recriminations, the road paid more than had been planned rather than undergo further expensive delay in construction which it was claimed ran to several hundred dollars a day.

There were other rows over land, including a serious tangle with the Scovill Manufacturing Company which dragged on and on, and when finally compromised after great expense and delay had one very curious angle. The railroad was noti-

fied, sub-rosa, by an official of the company, that it intended to go into bankruptcy at noon the following day, and that if the railroad did not want to become involved with getting a signed agreement from the receiver of the court, it had better work up an agreement that could be signed in a hurry. The engineers and surveyors worked all night to get specifications in order, the agreement was signed before noon the following day, and Scovill duly filed a petition in bankruptcy directly thereafter.

Crossing of other rail lines, too, was not accomplished without fights. The New Haven which controlled the Canal Road and the Naugatuck Road, claimed that they "owned the land under the railroad from the center of the earth to the stars above"; no road had a right to cross their lines without a special act of Legislature, etc., etc. They also refused to have any track connection with the new road at the north end of Meriden. The Railroad Commission held hearings in May, at which the president of the New Haven said the Meriden & Cromwell was no friend of theirs, and they wanted nothing to do with it.

* * *

THERE was trouble, too, over certain street crossings and alterations in Waterbury, with hearings, city council meetings and uncompromising attitudes that were finally softened, and agreements reached. In Meri-

den there was a certain amount of trouble, most of which centered about the width of the roadway under North Colony Road crossing. A compromise was reached on the basis that it would be changed in the future if required, but the city of Meriden was still plagued by the narrow opening 60 years later. The only change since 1887 was the gaining of a little headroom when the tracks were raised a number of years ago. This crossing got into the headlines in 1951 when a contractor who was lowering the highway through the bridge set off too heavy a blast and cracked the abutment, as well as water and gas mains under the street.

* * *

COLD weather and snow, including the big Blizzard of 1888 on March 12th, delayed construction of the Waterbury line. Operations were carried on as far as possible all Winter, but it took until March 20th to get the road shoveled out after the Snowstorm of the Century.

The State Railroad Commission's report for the year ending December 31, 1887, stated that approval of the location of the line was given June 30th, that its length would be 18.84 miles, "of which 11.6 miles are completed. It crosses the New Haven & Northampton and the Naugatuck divisions of the New York, New Haven & Hartford, being carried over them. It crosses 38 streets and highways, of which it was desired to cross 16 at grade, and the town authorities united with the railroad in urging that it be allowed. In view of the requirements of the law, we did feel justified in permitting any at grade." This of course added considerably to the cost of building the railroad.



On the Waterbury extension near Cheshire Street station.