

1970

# RHODE ISLAND YEARBOOK



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Every Rhode Island Home**

# DISCOVER RHODE ISLAND



*Buttonwoods terminus of original Warwick and Oakland Beach Railroad*

Wonson Collection

## The Warwick Railway

BY SHIRLEY M. GREENE

**W**ENDING its way gracefully through Duby's Grove, Buttonwoods and on to Oakland Beach, the little Warwick Railway had its beginning in the year 1874. The last spike was driven on December 3, 1874 and on July 4th 1875 the line opened for passengers. In the beginning the line was eight and fifty-two one hundredth miles in length and connected Providence with Oakland Beach. J. B. Gardiner was the superintendent and one could connect with the New York, Providence, and Boston Railroad from the west end of Union Depot. The entire cost of the original line was estimated to be \$200,000.

Hundreds of people rode the excursion trains to Rocky Point and Oakland Beach. Real estate values soared around the area as the transportation became easier.

After a year or more of this type of operation the expenses of the road were more than the revenue and so instead of a train with a locomotive and cars a combination car or "dummy" was introduced to the line. At times the passengers had to leave the car and go to a nearby stream or some kindhearted person's well along the tracks and haul water back to fill the ever hungry boiler. At other times there was apt to be a gap in the service. A trip would just not run and shortly the line ceased operations. A few years later when the service was resumed it ran without incident under the management of the New York, Providence and Boston Railroad. About fourteen years later it passed to the hands of the Rhode Island company and ran by overhead electric trolley wires instead of steam. The passengers were content with this mode of travel. The

swaying, clackety, clackety gay old cars transported the people to the resorts and to their destinations for a good old "Yankee Shore Dinner." Fuller's *History of Warwick* tells us that more clams were eaten in the months of July and August in Warwick than in any other town or city in New England, if not in the whole country.

The Weybosset Market as well as some of the department stores and factories would take all of their employees to Duby's Grove for an outing on the "open cars."

With the coming of the automobile the trolley cars started to lose their passengers and the cars didn't run as frequently to the old places with the romantic names of Duby's Grove, Buttonwoods, Silver Hook, Rocky Point and many others long since forgotten.

In 1949 the electric trolley line was once again sold and was converted to diesel operation. In 1954 the line was cut back from Lakewood and did not cross the Pawtuxet River any longer. However, in 1965 Geigy Chemical Corporation once again extended the tracks and the railroad now crosses into Warwick once again for a short distance of 600 feet.

Warwick Railway as it now stands under the ownership of Mr. and Mrs. Oscar J. Greene is a short freight line consisting of nine-tenths of a mile of mainline track and it has several sidings to add up to a total of 1.3 miles. The road runs between the main line of the Penn Central (formerly New Haven and Hartford Railroad) and Geigy Chemical Corporation in Cranston.

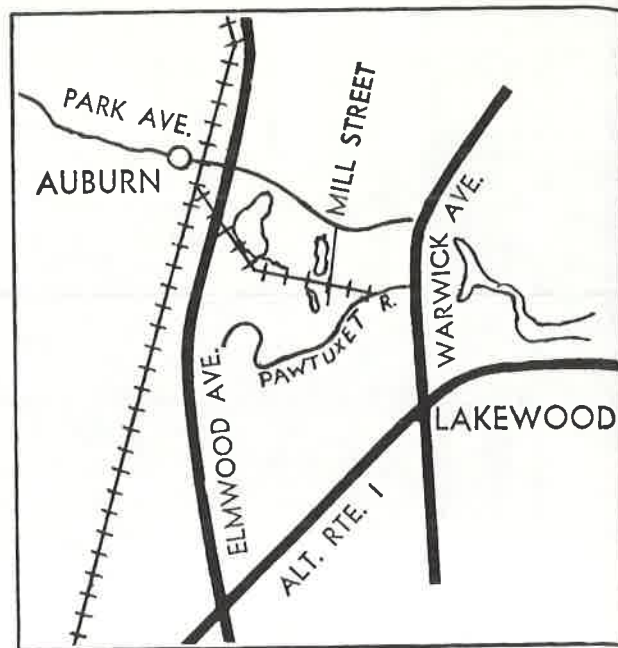
The main source of power is diesel and consists of a Vulcan, 65-ton, 425-horsepower engine and an Atlas, 50-ton engine. There is also a gas-electric which is a

real collectors' item and the Greens are slowly and lovingly restoring it. It is a double-end 1923 General Electric 35-ton engine and makes Mr. Greene, who is a former streetcar motorman with the United Electric Railway, happy when he can run it on the tracks. There are also two World War I boxcars being used as supply houses and a newly acquired flatcar. The railway uses about 1,500 gallons of diesel oil annually, runs up to eighty train-miles a month and gives the service when and where needed.

Working along with Oscar is the "most needed man in the City of Cranston," Loris J. Bass, the chief engineer. He also doubles as brakeman, conductor and maintenance crew. He is the track engineer who specializes in mapping out the new trackage when the need arises. He figures the location of the switches and the curvature ratio and supervises extra personnel. Mr. Bass and Mr. Greene have been friends for many years. They were motormen together and later were bus drivers when the trolleys were replaced with buses. They have continued their friendship through the years both working on Warwick Railway during their spare time when it was under a previous owner. There are days when they work all day together and speak not a word to each other. Not because they have had a misunderstanding or any ill will exists, but rather because they know each other so well that they work on signals.

A typical day starts a little before 8 a.m. when Oscar checks the Cranston yard to see if there are any cars for his customers. He then opens up the little office on Elmwood Avenue and does the necessary office work. When the Penn Central brings the cars to the interchange he rings Mr. Loris Bass who brings the engine out of the engine house at Mill Street and unlocks the main gates and starts up the tracks to cross busy Elmwood Avenue on the way to the interchange.

Mr. Bass and Mr. Greene alternate the engines to keep them in tip-top condition and they alternate their jobs for precisely the same reason. They both double as engineer, brakeman or conductor as the need arises. At the interchange they uncouple any of the empties they may have brought along with them and spot them so



Map showing location of Warwick Railway tracks

that the Cranston switching crew can pick them up and make them into a train. Then they will couple on to any cars that are assigned to Warwick's customers and go back to the customer's yards. There they will place or "spot" them where the customer requires so that they can be unloaded and later returned. Mr. Bass will then find work to do until the locomotives are needed again. There is unlimited painting to do, conductors' reports to make out, track to maintain and supplies to check. Meanwhile Oscar finds that his day is filled with office work answering phone calls, handling requests for cars, filing reports and doing all the necessary billing and other odds and ends getting ready for the weekly visit of an accountant.

The size of Warwick Railway does not excuse it from government regulations. Periodic reports must be filed with the Rhode Island Department of Public Utilities and the Interstate Commerce Commission.

The entire railroad is operated by the owner, Oscar J. Greene. Mr. Greene acts as president, treasurer, brakeman, conductor, general freight agent and captain of the complaint department. Mrs. Greene is secretary of the road and their eldest son, Herbert, is the vice president. At the present time Herbert is serving in the United States Navy, but when he is home he is at the railroad working with his dad and Mr. Bass. The other two Greene children are Robert, who works summers as "low-man-on-the-totem-pole" and Melinda who, at age 12, doesn't yet qualify as a "gandy dancer."

Now that we have discovered Warwick Railway is Rhode Island's shortest and smallest, Mrs. Greene is quick to add, "We are just as high and just as wide as any other railroad."



65-ton Vulcan diesel electric locomotive, one of the two "work horses" of the Warwick Railway