

CRANSTON AND WARWICK RAILROADS

by
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By the early 1870's population in Cranston along the Pawtuxet River, and in Warwick south of that river and along the shore line, was increasing rapidly.

There was a mill at Bellefont near Elmville and a sizeable village called Pawtuxet at the mouth of that river.

The year 1872 saw the Buttonwoods Beach Association complete several substantial houses and a hotel on its property, and summer cottages were being built along the shore, including Warwick Neck.

Rocky Point was growing in popularity as a place for clam dinners and amusement. People in the vicinity wanted public transportation.

Buttonwoods solved the problem by providing horsecar service from the Apponaug Station of the N. Y. Providence & Boston R. R. Right of way for the street railway was obtained in 1873. Tracks were probably laid along what is now called Long St. to Buttonwoods Ave. to the settlement. Fare was 30 cents from Providence, the N. Y. P. & B. road taking 20 cents.

At about the same time, May 1873, the Warwick Railroad was incorporated. In the article of incorporation, the road was to "commence at the City of Providence, thence passing southwesterly, through or near the village of Pawtuxet in the Town of Warwick, to Warwick Neck, thence northerly or westerly to a point in Cowesett Bay and connecting with the Pawtuxet Valley Railroad or the New York, Providence and Boston Railroad at or near the village of Apponaug."

The annual report of the Railroad Commissioners for 1874 gave the route of the road.

"This road (the Warwick R. R.) commences at Auburn station on the New York, Providence and Boston Railroad, thence through Bellefont, within about three-fourths of a mile of the village of Pawtuxet, Mark Rock, Long Meadow, Bayside, near Rocky Point, intending to lay a track for the accommodation of patrons of Rocky Point, thence to Cowesett Bay, distance eight and fifty-two one hundredths miles. They intended early in the spring to continue their track from Auburn to Cranston Print Works. (This was never done). At Cowesett Bay, they have built a wharf of three hundred feet front, and have had the channel dredged so they have twelve feet of water at low tide. The anticipated cost of the road complete is \$200,000.00, \$75,000.00 of which was subscribed before work was commenced, and the balance they are to issue bonds for. With one exception, all the stockholders are land owners near the road, and therefore are doubly interested. The rolling stock has not yet been procured, but will be in time for the general opening which will be early in the spring."

It appears from the Railroad Commissioner's reports for the next year that the railroad started operations on July 5, 1875. Apparently the builders had high hopes. Before operations began, they got permission from the General Assembly to contract a drawbridge from their terminus on Warwick Neck across Warwick Cove to Oakland Beach, the draw to be not less than 30 feet in the clear.

The road started operations on July 5, 1875, with one leased locomotive, 4 passenger cars and one other car, presumably a freight car. The first report made to the Railroad Commissioners covered the period July 5 to November 30, 1875, a little less than 5 months.

Passengers carried.....	36,779
Freight carried.....	200 tons
Revenue from passengers.....	\$ 5,271.10
Revenue from freight.....	\$ 196.64
Capital stock actually paid in.....	\$ 39,205.00
Funded debt.....	\$200,000.00
Floating debt.....	\$159,368.74
Interest due during the year.....	\$ 10,822.88
Interest paid during the year.....	none

The next report, covering the 7 months from December 1, 1875 to July 1, 1876, was worse. Passengers carried dropped to 7,569. Total receipts from Passengers & Freight dropped to \$1,721.21.

The first year of operation was very disappointing. Receipts did not meet operating costs and the road had to be suspended.

Sometime in the year 1877, the road was leased to "The Pontiac Branch R. R. Co." They had no better success. For the year 1877, the number of passengers was 6,568 and total receipts \$1,052.90, while interest charges were \$14,000.00.

The road was not operated in 1878 or in 1879.

In the latter year, the mortgage was foreclosed and the road was sold to the Rhode Island Central R. R. Co.

In 1881 the New York, Providence and Boston R. R. Co. bought the road for \$45,000.00. At that price and with the larger road's resources, it should not be hard to make the road meet expenses.

The Buttonwoods Beach Association, ever mindful that it had a transportation problem, established a ferry across the mouth of Brush Cove, between Buttonwoods and Oakland Beach, in July, 1874, a full year before the steam R. R. was in operation. It may have been large enough to take horse-drawn vehicles across; I have found no record to tell. A carriage was run between the ferry and hotel.

Soon after the New York, Providence and Boston Railroad acquired the Warwick Railroad, it asked permission to extend its rails to Buttonwoods. The Association granted permission on May 17, 1881. Brush Cove was bridged and the road built as far as the "north line of the barn."

The Buttonwoods Association no longer needed the horse railroad and by the end of November 1881, it was sold.

In the summer of 1881, people living along the line could feel that they had reliable transportation at frequent intervals at a reasonable cost. Five trains per day each way, with average fare about two and one half cents per mile.

But the road did not pay. Running expenses plus interest were \$5,486.00 more than gross receipts for the year ending September 30, 1888. It carried 254,112 passengers and 10,091 tons of freight over 9.9 miles of road.

In succeeding years the report was merged with the report of the New York, Providence and Boston Railroad and so lost its identity.

On June 30, 1899 the New York, Providence & Boston Railroad ceased to exist, being merged with the New York, New Haven & Hartford.

On June 2, 1899, the R. I. Suburban Railroad was organized but did not commence operations until January 1, 1900.

The Warwick Railroad, from Auburn to Buttonwoods, was only a part of the R. I. Suburban Railroad, so no separate accounting is available. But the first six months of operation, January 1, 1900 to June 30, 1900, showed an operating loss of \$15,335.26. The 38.3 miles of track were all electrified.

However, in 1900 they double-tracked the road from Auburn to Oakland Beach, built a double track from Grant's Station to Rocky Point, and a power station on the bank of Old Warwick Cove. The power plant had 5 boilers of 175 HP capacity each, 2 Slater steam engines and 4 belt-driven generators, with total capacity of 1,000 kilowatts at 550 volts. For condensing water, they drilled a well that proved to be a true artesian, flowing with considerable pressure.

On April 3, 1902, the Rhode Island Co. was organized. It took over the Union Railroad, which served the City of Providence and the Pawtucket Street Railway.

On June 30, 1904 the Rhode Island Co. leased the Rhode Island Suburban Co. The Rhode Island Co. paid no dividends in 1906; but a few years later did earn dividends. More direct routes were established, so one no longer had to go to Auburn to get to Providence, and service was otherwise improved.

There was one more change of ownership when the United Electric Railway was granted permission to substitute bus transport and remove all the rails to Buttonwoods. The bridges across Old Warwick Cove and Brush Cove were ordered removed and the Warwick Railroad passed into history.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Ernest E. Mowry of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad for his search of the railroad archives and the State of Rhode Island records and obtaining therefrom much of the data used in the story.

I am also greatly indebted to Mr. Randolph T. Ode for extracts from the early records of the Buttonwoods Beach Association, from which was obtained the information about early transportation to Buttonwoods.

PONAGANSETT

by
MRS. LOUIS W. HARRIS

It is a beautiful, sunny, summer afternoon, so let's take a walk to the Ponagansett Village that used to be.

Some of you may notice a trace of a road opposite the Tunk Hill Road where it joins the Rockland Road. Let's start there. If we go by the road it will be perhaps a mile and a half but "through the woods" or "across the plains" is shorter. Most of the people who lived in the village came to Rockland on foot.

We pass three or four houses, then we come to the hill at the top of which is the Ponagansett School. (Lower Ponagansett, sometimes called). Surrounding the school are good sized oak trees. Then we enter the woods with a good growth of oak trees where grey squirrels race from tree to tree with their acorns. A red squirrel may scold harshly at us from his perch or a chipmunk may scurry along with a chestnut in his mouth. Among the oak trees were large chestnut trees which provided the school children as well as the little animals with enjoyment. One large boulder, quite smooth, and standing at a good angle provided a slide for the children which the mothers did not appreciate.

Now we approach a large granite ledge on the left. In small crevices on the ledge the beautiful columbine blooms in the spring and in the larger openings black birch trees grow providing sweet tasting bark. At the bottom of this ledge bubbles out a fine spring of cool water. Then on through the pleasant woods till we come to the open field opposite the Ponagansett Falls. Down the hill and we are in the village.

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