



# THE NEWARK-ROSELLE RAILROAD COMPANY

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Except for the flurry of excitement created between 1870 when plans were filed for the construction of the New Jersey West Line

Railroad\* and 1878 when bankruptcy proceedings were completed, the railroad left today's Hillside untouched until 1889.

The area was one of the last in the East to be serviced by a railroad. Adjacent communities such as Roselle, Cranford and Plainfield were experiencing real estate booms because of railroads, but the area here remained only slightly changed following the real estate boom of the 1870's.

Indirectly the old West Line Railroad was responsible for the extension of the existing Lehigh Valley Railroad through this area since when the bankruptcy actions were completed, the Lehigh Valley Railroad Company acquired the West Line property on the Hudson River at Jersey City, which later gave the Lehigh Company its own terminus for anthracite coal at tidewater.

The Lehigh was founded on April 21, 1846 by the same Asa Packer who was associated with the West Line later. Its original line ran from Mauch Chunk, Pa. eastward to Easton, Pa. Gradually it

\*The history of the West Line Railroad was traced in a pamphlet issued by the Hillside National Bank in the Fall of 1955.

pushed across the Delaware River and across New Jersey to South Plainfield and Metuchen. For many years, it used facilities of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the New Jersey Central Railroad to reach New York City and the Easton-Perth Amboy Railroad, controlled by the Lehigh, to reach tidewater on the banks of the Raritan River. In 1871, the Lehigh obtained an interest in the old Morris-Essex Canal. Use of the canal for rail purposes was opposed because it was considered a possible viaduct for a water supply.

In 1887 and 1888, news reports in the "Elizabeth Daily Journal" dealt with plans to extend the Lehigh to Jersey City. It was not until August 7, 1889, however, that the populace of Lyons Farms read its first positive statement that the railroad, later to be known as the Newark-Roselle Railroad, would pass through their area.

The paper stated, "There was a ripple of surprise in Lyons Farms yesterday when a force of surveyors made its appearance and began locating a route for tracks. With the usual cunningness of railroad surveyors they succeeded in keeping the excited village in the dark as to the exact route. They looked up the route of the West Line Railroad and followed it to Newark."

The story continued, "The railroad will pass through Lyons Farms, crossing the old road between Newark and Elizabeth about 100 feet on the Elizabeth side of the stables of the horse railroad company in the center of the village. There is no way of knowing the route from Roselle. The branch from South Plainfield to Roselle is double track and is some places a triple track. This is called the South Plainfield-Roselle Railroad. It connects with the Central Railroad to New York City. Some connections also are made on the Pennsylvania Railroad at Metuchen through the Easton-Perth Amboy Railroad. In its course to Lyons Farms, the route in all probability will be through Salem, crossing Morris Turnpike and Salem Avenue just beyond the Elizabeth-city line. Leaving Lyons Farms, it will touch Newark below the coal trestles. It is stated there will be a depot in Lyons Farms," the story concluded.

Subsequent news articles revealed that the railroad would cross over the Central Railroad at North Roselle, pass through property of George Wilson at North Roselle, Dr. Eaton's property in Union and run near Emmet Street in Newark.

The papers of incorporation of the Newark and Roselle Railroad Company were filed August 28, 1889 in Trenton. The road was described as a continuation of the South Plainfield-Roselle Railroad. It would be 6.506 miles in length.

It was learned in the community that the company through its land agent, a Mr. Pickle, and his counsels, James R. English and N. C. J. English of Elizabeth, had purchased tracts of land in sections of Roselle, Union, Salem, Lyons Farms and the lower end of Newark before the plan became public.

The people in the area reacted to the coming of the railroad by seeking to change the name of Lyons Farms to something more attractive for a railroad depot. Some of the names suggested were Hillsboro, Maple Plain, Frog Hollow, Slag Hollow, Elmhurst and Lyonia.

### Bridge Twelve

One of the parcels purchased by the land agent cut through the Dod-Crane property just south of the old road. In the sales contract the railroad agreed to erect a 10-ton capacity vehicular bridge known as "Bridge Twelve" from today's Pennsylvania Avenue to Hollywood Avenue to connect two portions of the farm. The bridge was used to drive the cows to pasture on the Pennsylvania side by the Dods, Cranes and Tichenors. In 1927, it was replaced by a \$7,000 footbridge.

In some instances the new railroad company was unable to reach agreements with the property owners and condemnation proceedings were started. Despite these on November 22, 1889, it was reported that a large force of men began unloading carts, shovels and steam shovels to be used in grading and construction of the new branch at the Stiles Farm in Morris Turnpike, Union Township.

Three disinterested freeholders were appointed to assess damages to and the value of the property of farmers who refused to sell. Hearings were conducted March 15, 1890 at 556 North Broad Street, Elizabeth on the value of 1.39 acres of land of Henry H. Isham, 3.59 acres of land of Simon Sternberger, near the Earl Brothers and Odgen Woodruff's property, 1.8 acres of land of Charles W. Taylor and 2.5 acres of land of Mrs. Mary A. Seaton, just west of Westfield Avenue, all in Union Township.

Another hearing was held in Newark on April 17, 1890 on the value of lands owned by Dr. Isaac M. Ward\* of Lyons Farms. It was testified that the property was damaged by as much as two-thirds its entire value because the railroad would cut through the pear orchard and render it worthless.

The land suits continued during most of 1890. Some of the settlements were: Mr. Taylor, \$4,900; Mrs. Seaton, \$17,800; and Mr. Sternberger, \$12,000.

Also recorded were transfers of real estate to the railroad on July 14, 1890. These included 6.37 acres of David Price part of Union Township and part of Clinton Township for \$9,000 and .92 acres for \$1,000 for Enoch B. Woodruff in Union Township.

Construction of the railroad was progressing. By November 28, 1890, the first track was completed and work on the second track had begun. Two work trains were being used. With the exception of the crossing on the old road here, most major street crossings of the new railroad were erected either above or below grade. The crossing was abolished when the North Broad Street overpass was erected in 1928. The Long Avenue crossing also became hazardous by 1912 and the Saybrook Civic Association requested gates. A watchman was placed at the crossing on January 27, 1912 and continued until September 1, 1952, when automatic gates were installed.

The first trip over the new railroad was made on January 14, 1891 by a special train containing Superintendent James Donnelly and other officers and attaches of the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

The first regular train, a freight, ran over the new tracks February 1, 1891. The new route was opened for passengers on February 16, 1891. The first passenger train contained three day coaches, a baggage car and a pullman car.

Residents of Elizabeth were displeased because they were cut off from the road and an unsuccessful attempt was made to make Lyons Farms, the Elizabeth station. At various times, it was called "West Elizabeth" and "Lyons Farms," until it became the "Hillside" station on August 6, 1919.

\*Part of Lyons Farms was located in Union Township, Union County, while the remainder was in Clinton Township in Essex County. This phase was described in "Ancient Boundary Dispute," issued June 3, 1957 by the Hillside National Bank.

## Passenger Service

During most of its service there were two morning and two evening trains, although in 1896, nine trains were listed eastbound and ten trains westbound from the area. The trains usually consisted of a locomotive, baggage or mail car and from two to four coaches. According to David H. Doremus, Lyons Farms residents could be observed hurrying from their homes to the station after they heard the whistle blow at the Townley Station at Morris Avenue. During the period the service was provided, the passengers had regular seats and games of whist and later bridge were played on each trip. F. W. C. Crane of Lyons Farms and a regular partner played a game of chess on a pocket-sized board. The train also stopped at Park View as the Meeker Avenue station in Clinton Township-section was named. Local passenger service was discontinued on May 29, 1948 after the Public Utilities Commission granted the railroad's request because the service was uneconomical.

In these early days, however, the people felt that the railroad would cause Lyons Farms to grow with a "most desirable population." The residents congratulated themselves for having one of the best equipped railroads in the nation. They urged the installation of sidewalks, street lamps and a city water supply to encourage new residents to purchase the new cottages that could be erected.

The Newark-Roselle Railroad concluded its short life in August, 1891. An application was filed by the Lehigh Valley Terminal Railway Company to consolidate seven short railroads with the Lehigh system. In addition to the Newark-Roselle, there were the Roselle-South Plainfield Railroad, The Newark Railway Company, The Jersey City, Newark and Western Railroad Company, the Edgewater Railway Company, the Newark and Passaic Railway Company and the Jersey City Terminal Railway Company. The action became effective August 28, 1891 and the railroad completed construction to Jersey City in 1892.

The first members of the community to benefit from these new facilities were the farmers who were provided with a way to ship milk rapidly to New York City. Steel now is the chief product handled by the railroad here.

In accordance with a procedure which prevailed in those days whereby a railroad created a new company whenever a new extension or link was

to be constructed, the Irvington Railroad Company was formed in 1904 to build the Irvington Branch from the main line of the Lehigh to Clinton Avenue in Irvington. It was completed in 1905. The company was merged with the Lehigh on June 29, 1906. For four months in 1915, a passenger train was operated from Irvington to New York on this branch. Because delays were too frequent, the service was discontinued.

The most famous passenger train of the Lehigh, "The Black Diamond," made its initial run from Buffalo, N. Y., to New York City on May 18, 1896. Many of the inhabitants turned out to see it pass. It was described as having "a plain exterior and a handsomely fitted interior." The railroad now seeks to discontinue all passenger service.