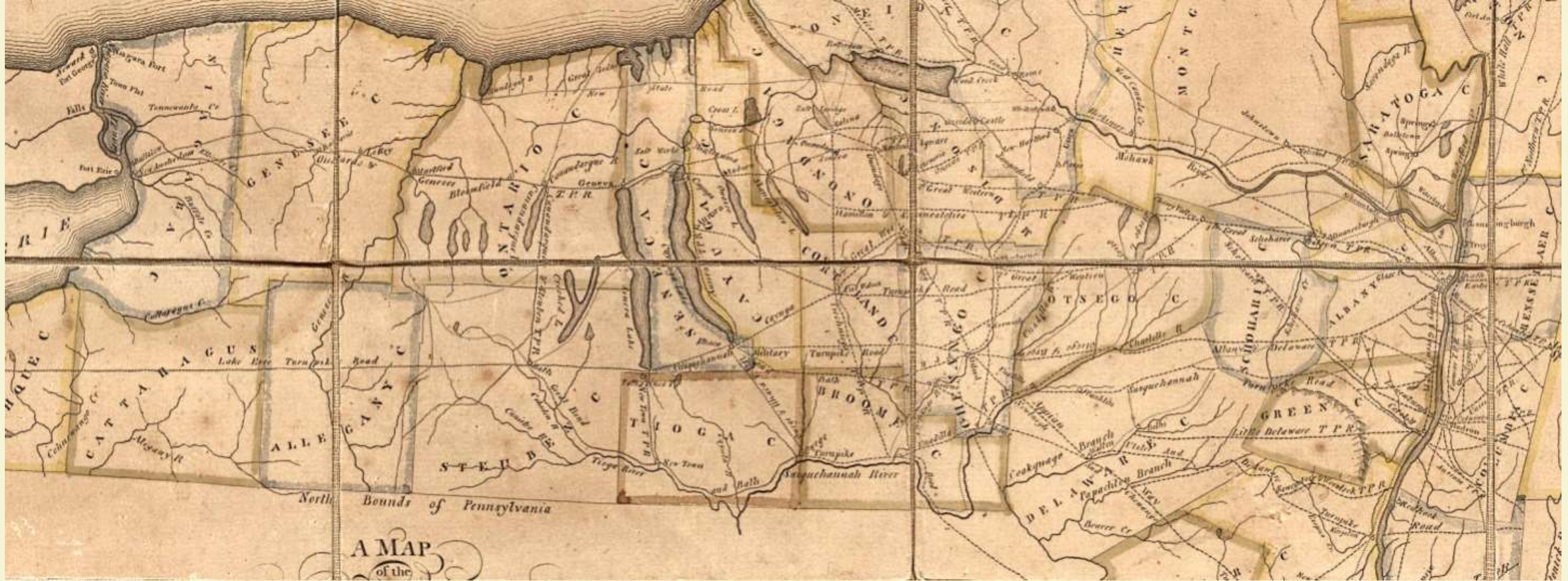


Travel and Shipping Before the Railroads

Why were railroads revolutionary? Travel over land was limited to horses and dirt roads. There were a few major roads in the central and western parts of the state, but lines on a map do not tell us about the quality of the road.



Road map of New York State, circa 1800

Toll turnpikes, essentially improved dirt roads, were the best land route for shipping freight, but fares were high and travel was slow. This region's main commodities were farm products—bulky crops that cost more to ship than they were worth. Wheat, for example, cost three times its value to send by road to New York City; shipping to closer markets was not much more profitable.

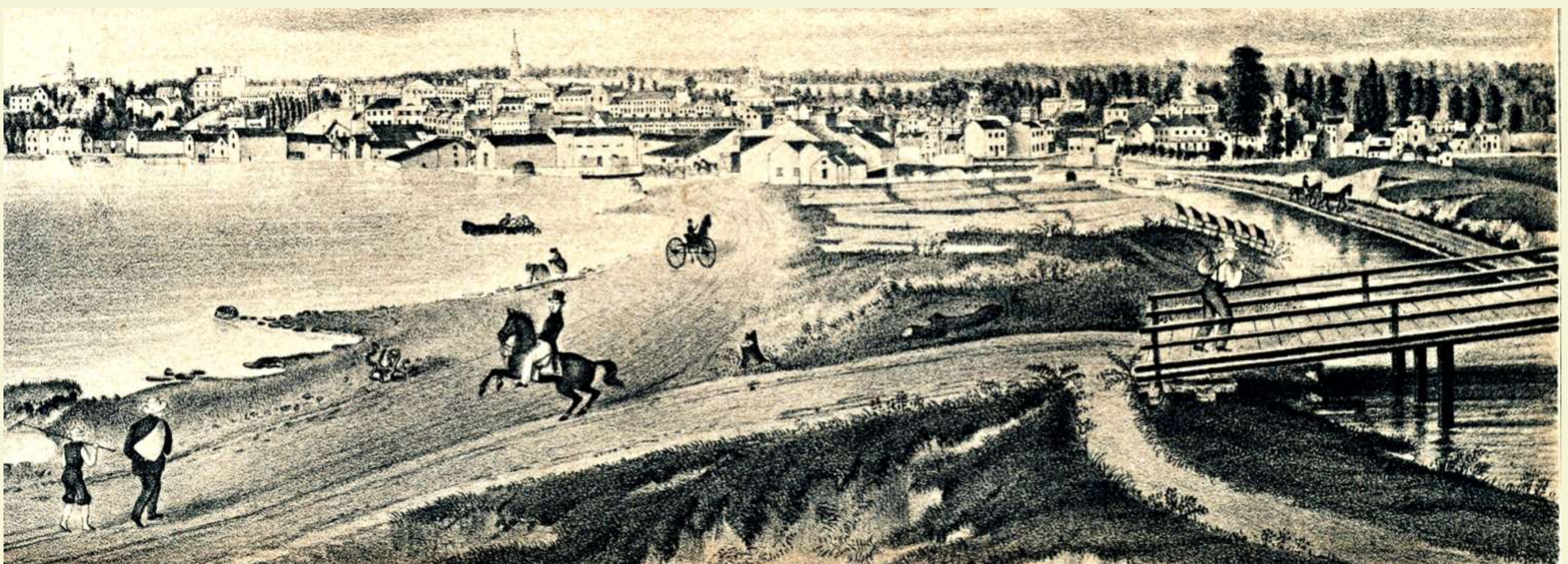
John M. Duncan, a Scotsman traveling in America in 1818, wrote about a stagecoach trip from Auburn to Geneva. It took eight hours to travel twenty-five miles, including time to repair a broken axle. Road conditions were poor enough, but worsened when they reached the foot of Seneca Lake.

"A wearisome swamp intervenes between Waterloo and the Seneca Lake, and a yet more wearisome log causeway affords the means of crossing it. This substitute for a road is composed entirely of the trunks of trees laid down layer upon layer till a solid but rugged platform is elevated above the level of the marsh..."

Heavy rains had submerged the logs, but the driver charged ahead:

"Several logs had floated out of their places and left yawning gaps in the causeway, across which our horses might be said to swim rather than walk, and the wheels followed them with a plunge so sudden and so deep that it felt as if the bottom of the road had literally fallen out, and our whole establishment were going after it."

Boats could carry goods east through the Seneca River, but they traveled slowly and were subject to seasonal water levels. The Erie Canal, perhaps the most successful American canal, was a big improvement over turnpikes, but canals had their shortcomings. They shut down in the winter, lock and embankment maintenance was more costly than anticipated, and the potential for routes was limited by geography. However, canals gave people a taste for more commerce and goods. Canals that carried coal from the Pennsylvania mines to the seaboard ushered in the age of steam, and spurred people on to find a better way to ship coal – the railroad.



Detail of Geneva's waterfront drawn by Henry Walton, 1836. The Cayuga-Seneca Canal, right, was extended into Geneva by 1834.

Who Paid for Roads, Canals, and Railroads?

Historically, infrastructure improvements in America have been funded a variety of ways. An overview of state and local projects of the past 200 years may give context to the development of the railroads.

Roads

Road improvements were hampered by the fact no one wanted to pay for them. The federal government did not believe in spending public money for local roads. In most states, landowners were expected to donate labor toward road maintenance but it was difficult to enforce. Private companies built turnpikes that charged tolls every ten miles; many travelers objected to paying tolls and the companies tended to lose money.



New York State roads, about 1794

Canals

The Erie Canal was publically funded, but the local canal began as a private company. The Seneca Lock Navigation Company, chartered in 1813, did much of the work to turn the Seneca Lake outlet into a canal that would connect with the Erie. The resulting Cayuga and Seneca Canal came under state control in 1825, but only when property owners along the lake gave away portions of their land to create a channel between downtown Geneva and the main canal.



Cayuga-Seneca Canal lock

Railroads

Railroads were funded by private stockholders. Although railroads became large corporations by the late 19th century, many began as small companies organized by people who wanted a railroad. (What became the New York



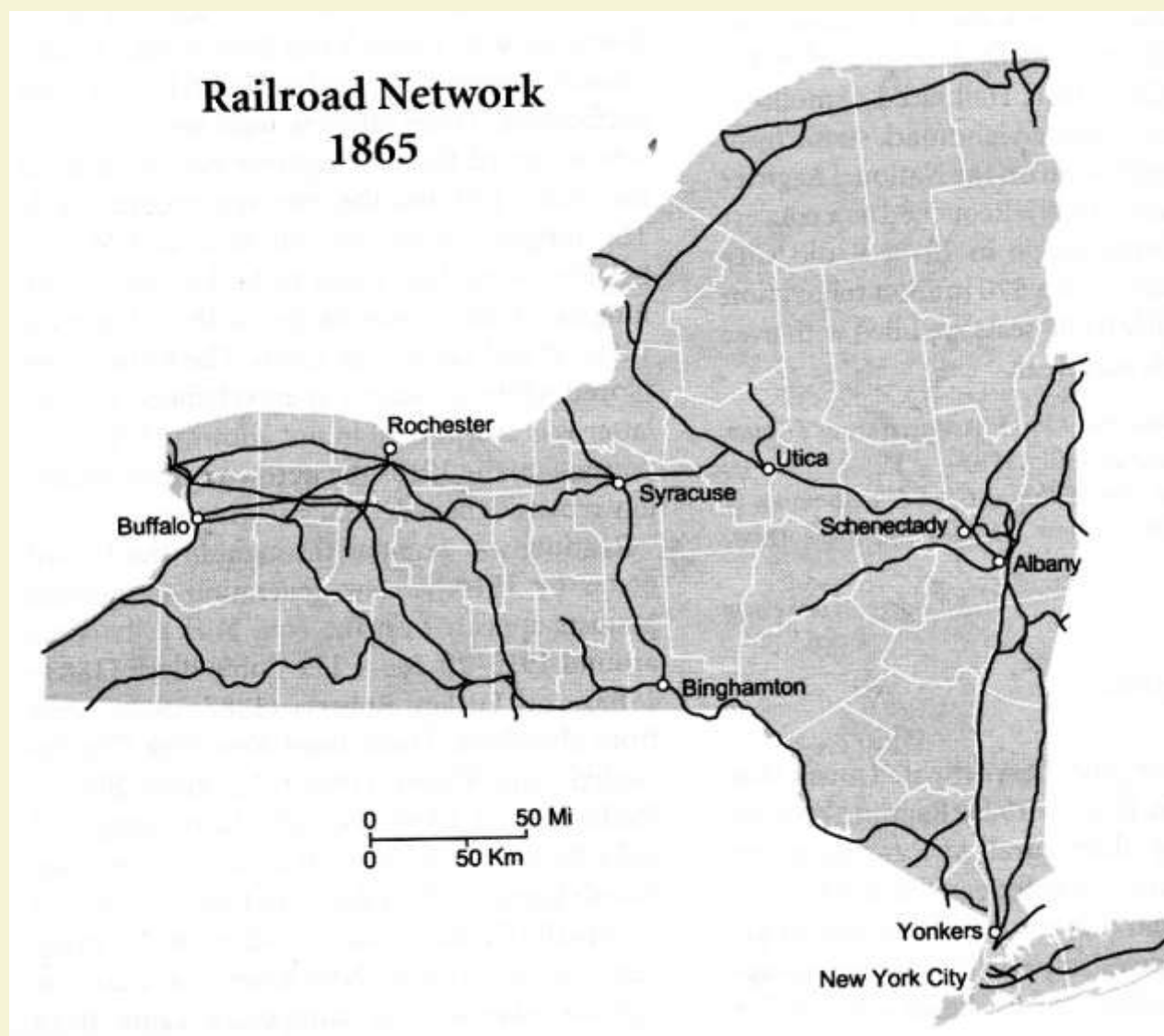
Stock certificate from a railroad that was never completed

Central Railroad from Albany to Buffalo began as seven railroads financed by small investors.) The people who would benefit from the railroad were expected to pay for it; directors generally represented villages along the proposed route.

Public attitudes toward railroads varied between, "It will be great for our village," and "I want the railroad, but don't take my land to build it." New York State's attitude was clear: Don't compete with the canals which generate income for the state. Early regulations forbade railroads from carrying freight except in winter, when the canals were closed, and imposed the same tolls as those on canal freight. Seasonal restrictions were lifted by 1847, and railroad tolls were abolished after 1851. The state lowered canal tolls to help them compete with railroad freight charges. In the 1860s, the canals profited from hauling coal from Pennsylvania and distributing it through the Erie Canal; this decreased after the railroads developed direct connections to the coal mines in the later 1870s.

Railroads Come to Geneva

While railroads were slow to develop, they offered faster shipping of natural resources, agricultural produce, and manufactured goods. Geneva, in particular, wanted routes to Albany and New York City to ship produce and railroads to Pennsylvania for anthracite coal.



New York Central depot with Nester Malt House in background

The Auburn & Rochester

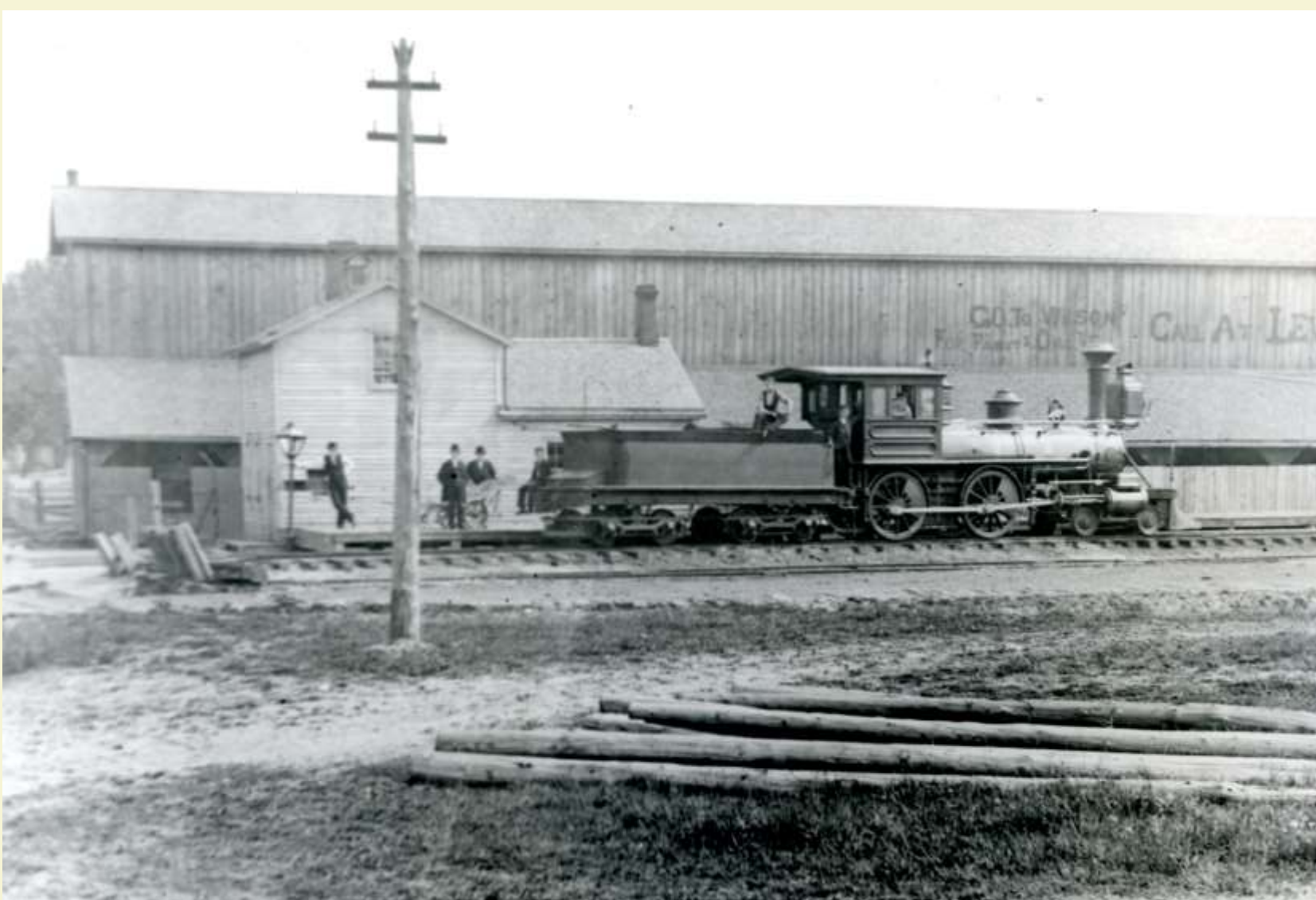
The route of the Auburn & Rochester Railroad was determined by a majority of stockholders from villages between the two terminals. It followed a logical path westward from Auburn to Geneva, then swung north through Phelps and Manchester before returning to Canandaigua and going through Victor and Pittsford to Rochester. A straight line from Rochester to Syracuse was opened in 1853, reducing that trip by twenty-one miles; the route through Geneva became the Auburn Branch line. These railroads became part of New York Central Railroad in 1853. The branch line through Geneva was an important freight line for industry, and offered passenger service until May 18, 1958.

The Geneva & Ithaca

The Geneva & Ithaca Railroad was organized in 1870 to connect the New York Central Railroad that crossed the state in a northerly route and the New York & Erie Railroad that ran through the southern tier. Directors and stockholders represented the villages along the proposed route. Constructed from each end toward the middle, the tracks were joined at Romulus on September 13, 1873.

The Geneva & Ithaca soon expanded down to Athens, Pennsylvania, providing access to coal; it was purchased by Lehigh Valley Railroad in 1876. Beginning in 1878, the railroad began offering service to Buffalo on NYCRR tracks. In 1889, the Buffalo & Geneva Railroad was organized, ultimately becoming part of LVRR's service from New York City to Niagara Falls (the 19th-century honeymoon capital of America) and Buffalo.

The downtown depot served LVRR passengers from 1878 until 1892. A new depot was built north of town in 1892; it was the first major commercial development in Geneva that was not on the lakefront, and it paved the way for industrial and residential expansion.



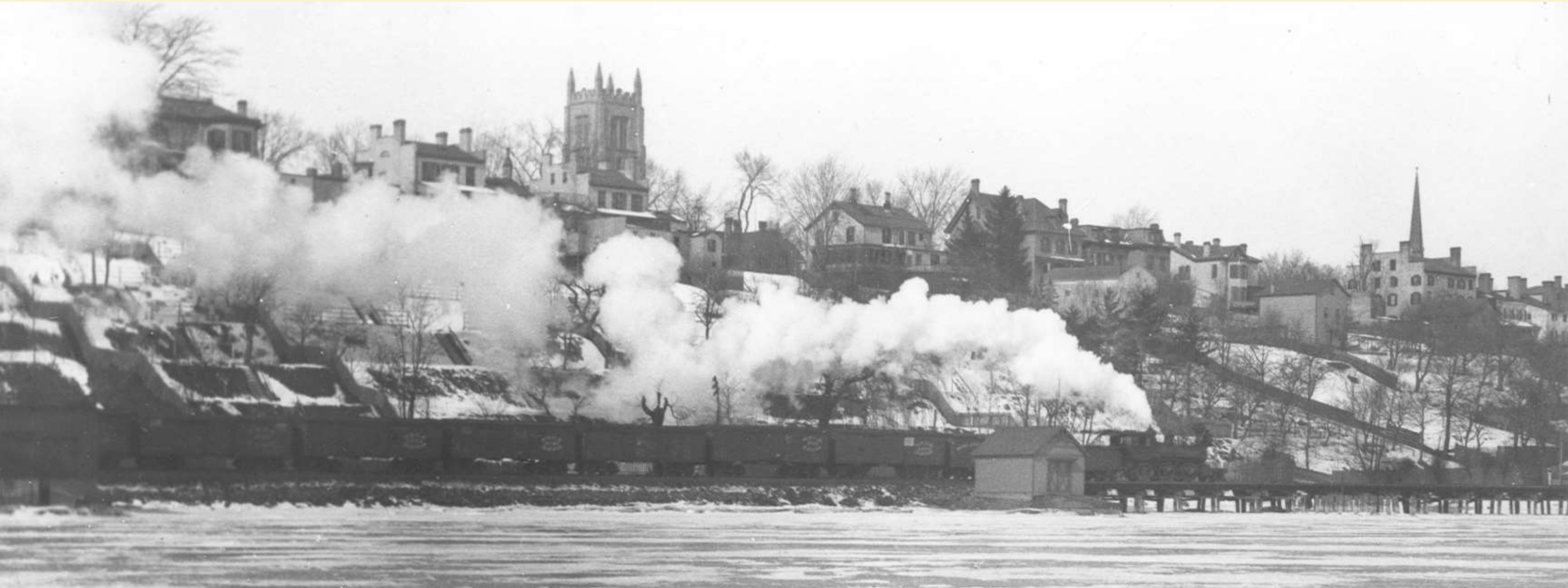
First depot of the Geneva & Ithaca Railroad, on Wadsworth Street, "kitty corner" from the NYCRR depot.



Second depot, built next to the first in 1878, and used for freight after the new passenger station was completed.

The Syracuse, Geneva, & Corning

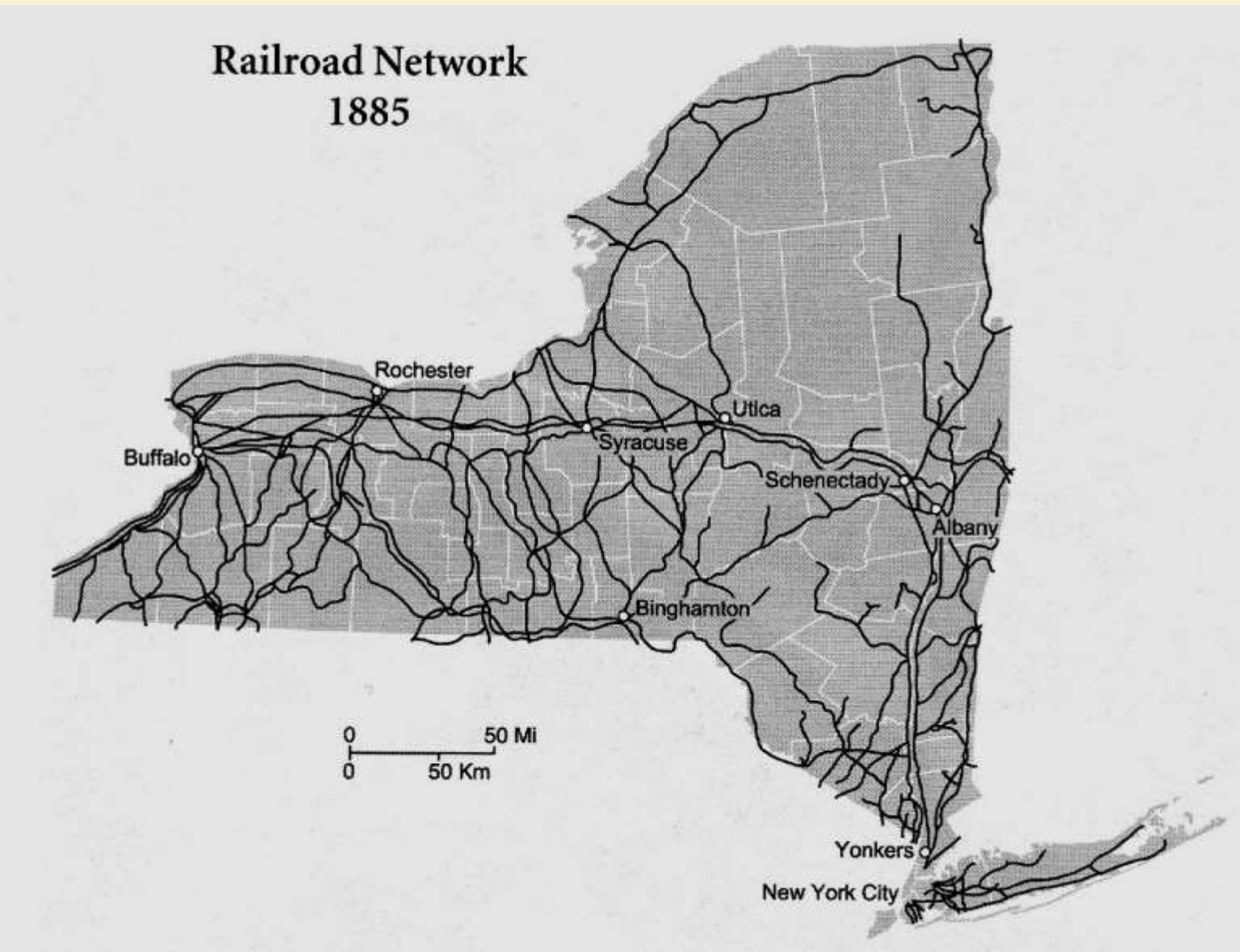
The Fall Brook Coal Company created the Syracuse, Geneva, and Corning Railroad in 1875 to connect their northern Pennsylvania coal fields to the New York Central Railroad. Rather than pay others to move their coal by rail and canal, the company sought to control their own shipping lines. The line opened in 1877 and within months was carrying about 1,000 tons of coal per day through Geneva. The construction of the Fall Brook line, as it was commonly known, was one of the most contested developments in Geneva’s history.



A locomotive arrives in Geneva on the Syracuse, Geneva, and Corning Railroad, December 1877. The terraced back yards of South Main Street homes are visible to the left.

Regional Railroads

As railroads expanded from a few major lines into smaller regional roads, they provided vital connections between urban and rural areas. Farm produce and natural resources needed to go to larger markets, and manufacturers wanted their goods to reach smaller towns. Regional lines also created stronger social connections between towns as well.



Geneva & Lyons

The Fall Brook Railroad brought coal to the New York Central branch line in Geneva; NYCRR then had to transfer it to coaling stations on the main line. They quickly solved this problem by building the Geneva to Lyons Railroad in 1878; Lyons was on the main line, and the road provided a north-south connection for all goods, not just coal. It also served as a connector for Lehigh Valley Railroad trains at Geneva to travel to the NYCRR main line before their route to Buffalo was completed in 1889.



Middlesex Valley

The Middlesex Valley Railroad opened in 1894 between Geneva and Naples. It became the Naples branch of the LVRR in 1895, and provided access to agricultural produce from around the villages of Stanley, Gorham, Rushville, and Middlesex.

Station in Naples

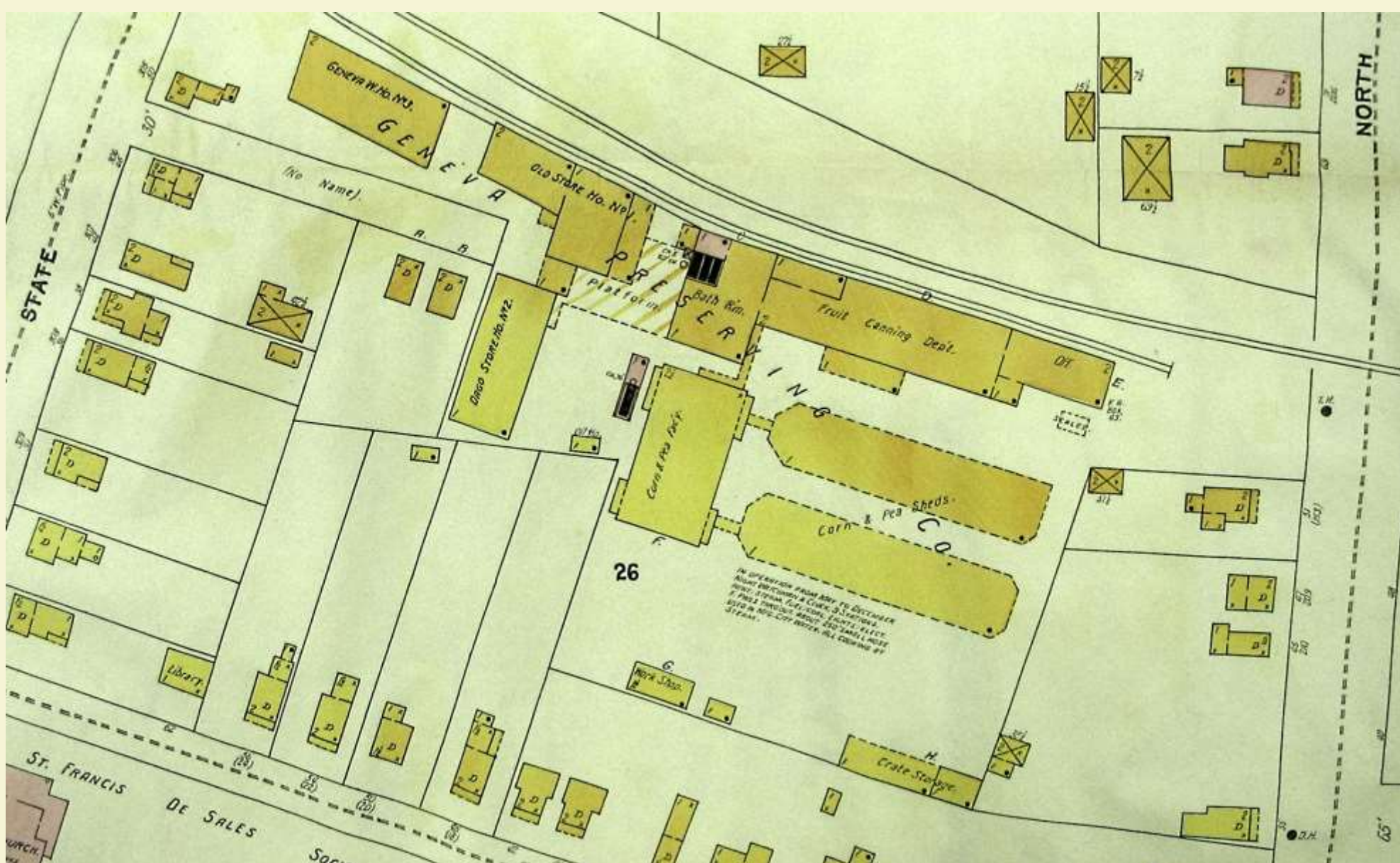
How Railroads Shaped Geneva's Industries

The Erie and Cayuga-Seneca Canals opened new markets for farmers through Geneva, particularly in getting produce to Albany and New York City. Steamboats carried passengers, freight, and canal boats up and down Seneca Lake, and brought Pennsylvania coal from the Chemung Canal. However, the speed of railroads dramatically accelerated Geneva's industrial growth.

Railroads took several decades to develop comprehensive networks, but Geneva was blessed to be on the New York Central in the beginning, and later joined to other key lines. Following are a few examples of industries that benefited from the railroads; more industries may be found in our larger exhibit, *Geneva's Changing Landscapes*.

The nursery industry, established in the 1840s, owed its success to American westward expansion. Between 1865 and 1873, 35,000 miles of new track connected the frontier with the east. Geneva nurseries provided trees and plants to the new pioneers; five million pounds of stock were shipped between the fall of 1871 and the spring of 1872. Plant material was shipped in thousand-pound boxes; the nurseries would not have been successful if not for their location close to freight depots.

R.G. Chase & Company packing shed near Pulteney and Hamilton Streets, circa 1870. These boxes were hauled by horse and wagon to the train stations, causing considerable wear and tear on the village streets.



The Geneva Preserving Company, formed in 1889, built its plant on the New York Central line near North Street. The company stayed in this location after their building burned down in 1912. The ability to easily ship thousands of pounds of canned vegetables and fruits to distant markets was key to the Preserving Company's success.

Map of Geneva Preserving Company, 1903, showing NYCRR line and siding closest to factory

Walter Fay and Ernest Bowen began making motors and boats in Auburn, NY in 1900. Four years later they moved their company to an ideal location on Geneva's waterfront. Boats could be launched out a lakeside door for testing, then moved back through the factory and wheeled across the street to either the New York Central or Lehigh Valley freight depots for shipping.

Although the shoreline has been changed, this factory stood near the present location of the Geneva Chamber of Commerce visitors center.



How Railroads Shaped Geneva's Landscape

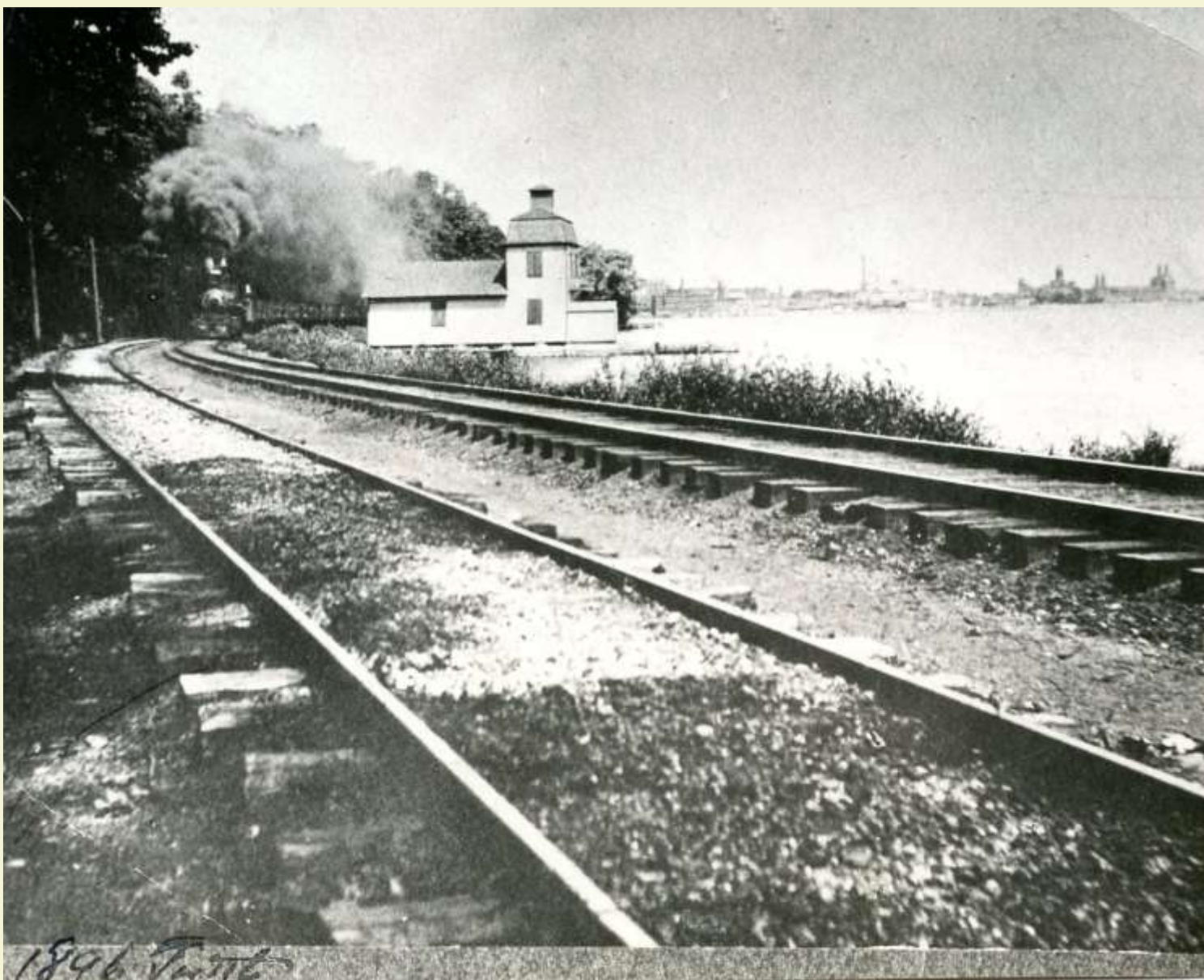
The railroads meant increased industry and retail business, but they required land, and railroads made poor neighbors. In the 21st century we cannot appreciate the frequency of steam locomotives rolling past houses with the accompanying sounds, smell, and soot. However, we can understand the problem of land being taken or encroached upon for the greater good.

The Syracuse, Geneva, and Corning Railroad, or "the Fall Brook," proposed laying its tracks along the lake, behind South Main Street homes belonging to Geneva's wealthiest citizens. Their outrage at losing waterfront access and being subjected to noise and soot was not shared by farmers who had already lost part of their land to railroads so that "our brothers at Geneva would be benefitted."

"Now that the water route is chosen by the managers of the Geneva and Corning Railroad where there are no fences to build, no barns or dwellings to pull down, (boat houses excepted) no fields of grain to be destroyed by fire from the cinders of the locomotives...then we have a great shaking among the dry bones! Let it come. A little coal dust and a little life will be beneficial to Main St. and its inhabitants."

Letter to the Geneva Gazette, 1876, from "Seneca Farmer"

A compromise was reached in 1877. The railroad built a trestle over the water from Mile Point to downtown, moved boat houses and bathing houses to the water side of the tracks and erected a high board fence between those structures and the tracks. They also agreed to fill in any areas of stagnant water between their tracks and the shore.



The construction of the Lehigh Valley Railroad's Buffalo and Geneva line, from the lake to the north side of the village, altered the landscape in ways that are now taken for granted. The railbed was gradually raised from Geneva's eastern boundary to the new depot on Sherrill Street. This required tons of dirt and building several bridges over streets and other tracks, and one stone arch over a creek. The LVRR bridges have been dismantled but the manmade hill and stone bridge abutments remain.

Stone abutments and arch on North Street

Electric Railroads (Trolleys)

Electric rail, local and interurban, was alive and well in Geneva until automobiles became affordable. Electric motors powered the trolleys and received current through a pole that traveled along overhead wires.



The Geneva & Waterloo Railway Company began local service in 1894. The car barn was at the Lehigh Valley Railroad station. The route connected the Lehigh Valley depot on the north side of the village with the Hobart (and later William Smith) campus on the south, by way of several residential streets and the business district. Fare was five cents and the trolley stopped when signaled; the run took about 30 minutes, depending on how many people got on and off.

The Geneva & Waterloo Railway Company merged with the Waterloo, Seneca Falls and Cayuga Lake Railway in 1895 to become the Geneva, Waterloo, Seneca Falls and Cayuga Lake Traction Company. It began service September 1895; the Geneva terminal was around Seneca & Exchange Streets, the trolley went north to North Street, then headed east until it met 5 & 20. The line went through Waterloo and Seneca Falls and ended at Cayuga Lake Park.



Car barn and power station near Waterloo

Interurban railways relied on a combination of daily traffic and excursion fares. The Company built a three-story pavilion, with dance hall, as an attraction at Cayuga Lake Park. They also built a steamboat dock, so travelers could make connections to boats that would deliver them to places along Cayuga Lake.



The Rochester and Eastern Rapid Railway, completed to Geneva in 1904, combined the long, enclosed passenger cars of steam locomotives with the convenience of frequent trolley stops. The railways profited from daily traffic between the many small villages on the route; they also had cars for package freight, perishable express, and fruit during the harvest season. Rochester and Geneva both promoted excursions to their lakeside

cities during the summer, and there were special trains when the University of Rochester played football games against Hobart College.

In 1909, the Rochester and Eastern merged with other interurban rail companies to form New York State Railways. Traffic declined as automobiles became less expensive and roadways were improved; small freight could be sent door-to-door by trucks, and people were no longer tied down by rail routes or schedules. The last run from Geneva to Rochester was July 31, 1930.



How Railroads Shaped Travel and Communication

Passenger trains were critical to the expansion of the United States. They created greater mobility: for people, citizens and new immigrants alike, moving into new territories; for businessmen; and for the new class of leisure travelers. Trains also moved the mail and kept families bound together by letters and postcards.

Comfort

Given the huge distances and long hours of interstate travel, railroads realized they needed more “through trains”, with limited stops and no transfers, and to create an experience for its travelers. Rows of bench seats might be fine for short trips, but long-distance travelers expected more luxury.



The Lehigh Valley Railroad advertised its Black Diamond Express, which ran from Buffalo to New York City through Geneva, as “the handsomest train in the world.” During its initial runs, the railroad offered free tours of the train’s interior, above, at stations along the way to drum up interest.

Immigration

Railroads both transported and employed immigrants to this region. Initially, Geneva was not the first destination for immigrants. Most cultural groups settled in larger cities in upstate New York, then came to Geneva. As people became established here, they sent for family and friends to join them.

Italians settled in Buffalo and were brought here in the 1890s as laborers for road and sewer projects; a large crew of workers was brought to work for the Geneva Preserving Company in 1897. There was a large Syrian community in Utica, from which people began moving to Manchester and Geneva to work for the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

Mail

Although the United States Post Office was created in 1775, it was revolutionized by the railroads. In 1838, an act of Congress designated all railroads as post routes; privately owned rail companies became responsible for moving the nation’s mail. They were compensated with rates that were set every four years, based on volume. The classic image of pioneers ordering goods from mail order catalogs was made possible by the railroads that delivered both the catalogs and the products. Direct-to-customer catalogs eventually changed how companies, such as Geneva’s nurseries, sold their goods and eliminated the traveling salesmen who rode the railroads.

How Railroads Shaped Cultural Geography

Settlement patterns have always existed based on class, race, and ethnicity. The railroads gave it a new name, “the wrong side of the tracks,” and introduced new people to the village.

After the Erie Canal opened in 1825, the waterfront streets became the commercial center of town, and a working class residential neighborhood. Exchange Street north of downtown was associated with canal warehouses, Irish immigrants, and transient canal workers. By the 1880s, homeowners near the rail yards included a ‘track boss’, a brakeman, a conductor, and three ‘railroaders’. Railroad engineers, brakemen, and firemen (who stoked the locomotive boilers) were among the renters on Exchange Street.



The lakefront exerted a strong force on Geneva’s industry and transportation until 1892, when the Lehigh Valley Railroad built its new passenger depot, above, on Sherrill Street outside the village limits. Land to the north and east of the station was available to build new factories with rail spurs to their loading docks, and for new houses for workers. Originally part of a farm owned by Samuel Torrey, this area became known as Torrey Park.

Largely unwelcome in Geneva, early Italian immigrants settled in Torrey Park and established businesses. Many of them either worked for the Lehigh Valley Railroad as maintenance of way workers, or for factories like the Geneva Preserving Company that were closely tied to the railroad. The influence of the railroad on the neighborhood was so strong that its volunteer fire department, organized in 1896, was named the Black Diamond Hose Company, after the LVRR’s premiere passenger train.



This map of Torrey Park in 1904 shows the LVRR lines in the heart of the neighborhood, with the depot shown in the left center.



Left:
The Syrian community settled downtown on Exchange, Tillman, and Geneva Streets. George Barody stands in front of his home on Tillman Street, 1920s.

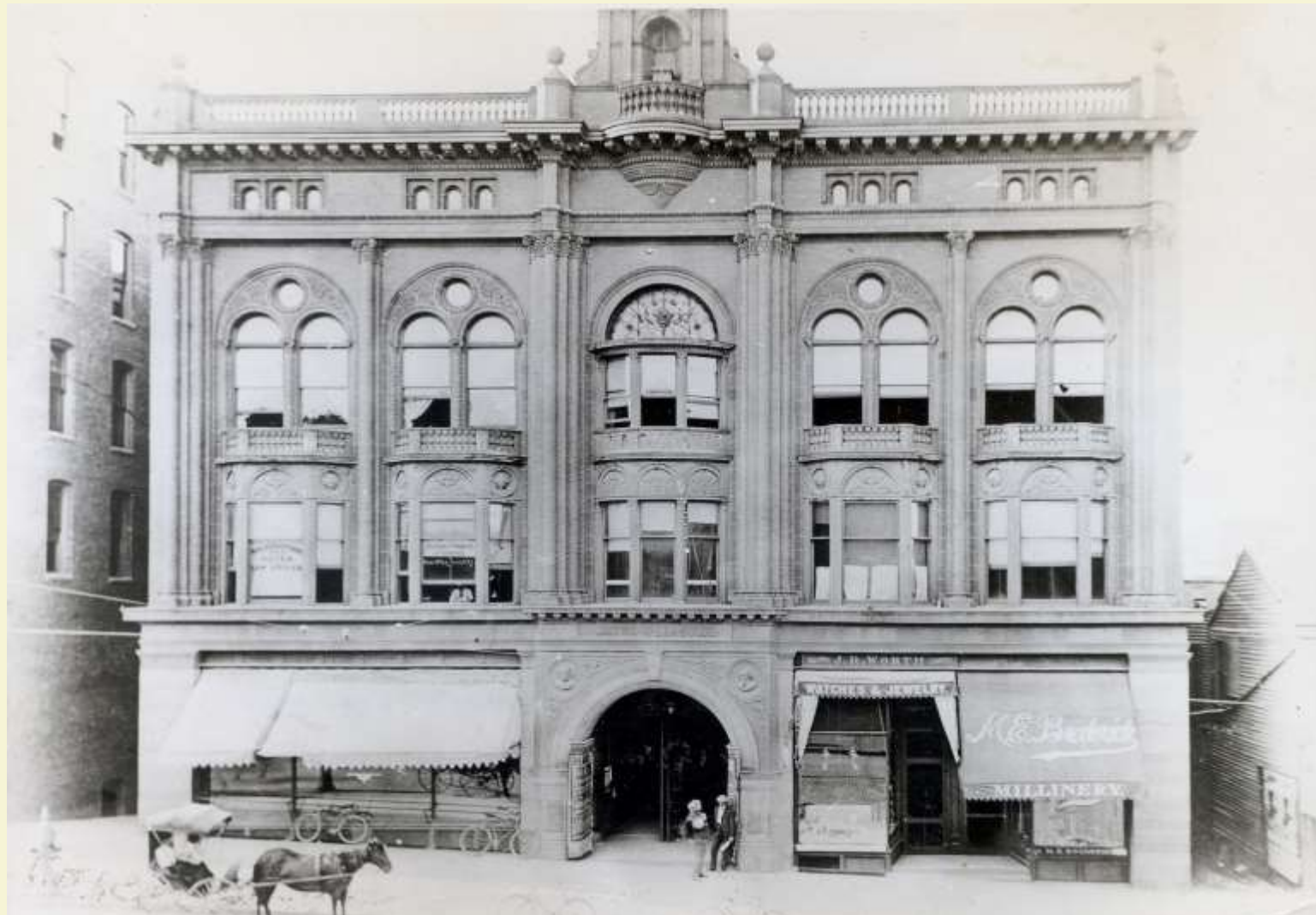
Right:
A predominantly Italian party of Brotherhood of the Maintenance of the Way Employees (BMW) members gather with their wives on the porch of the Sterling Hotel across from the LVRR Depot, 1920s.



How Railroads Shaped Cultural Life

Geneva enjoyed performances by nationally and internationally-known performers. This was due to two factors: location on two major railroads, and economics. Geneva was a convenient stop on performers' schedules, and musicians and actors relied on live performances – a day off was a day without pay.

Geneva had few public halls until the second half of the 19th century. By the 1890s performers were appearing at Dove Hall in the Dove Block and at the Regent Theater on Exchange Street, the Smith Opera House on Seneca Street, and Collins Music Hall on South Main Street.



The first play at the Smith Opera House in 1894 starred James O'Neill, father of playwright Eugene O'Neill, in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. George M. Cohan appeared with his family a month later. Musicians included John Phillip Sousa who played the Smith three times. Live theater and music continued until 1931 when the theater was converted to a movie house.

The Geneva Choral Society presented an annual two day festival each spring in the early 1900s. They hired an orchestra and a few professional vocalists, and one star performer. The 1914 festival featured contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink, who came by train from Ithaca where she sang the night before; the following year featured soprano Alma Gluck. The railroads were responsible for bringing many of the 1,500 people in attendance:

Ernestine Schumann-Heink (left) and Alma Gluck



"Geneva was the musical Mecca of this whole section. Not only was there an outpouring of Genevans, but of people from all the surrounding territory as far as Auburn, Corning, Hornell, Canandaigua, Rochester and many other places. Geneva was the musical center for fifty or more miles around."

Geneva Daily Times, May 5, 1915

The Torrey Park neighborhood became a musical center for jazz and big band musicians from 1946 to the mid-1950s. The Legott family expanded their restaurant across the tracks from the Lehigh Valley Railroad station into a nightclub; acts included the Nat King Cole Trio, Ella Fitzgerald, Tony Bennett, Dizzy Gillespie, and Lionel Hampton. Some of the club's audience moved away when nearby Sampson Air Force Base closed in 1956, but as performers began traveling by bus or plane rather than train, Geneva became more "off the beaten path."



Now a banquet facility for private parties, Club 86's walls are still lined with the contracts and photographs of the stars who played there, including Lionel Hampton (left) and Dizzy Gillespie.



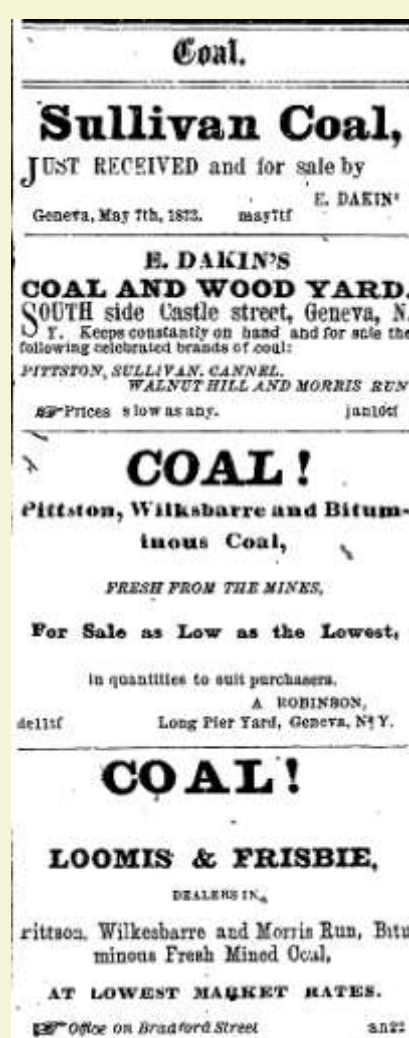
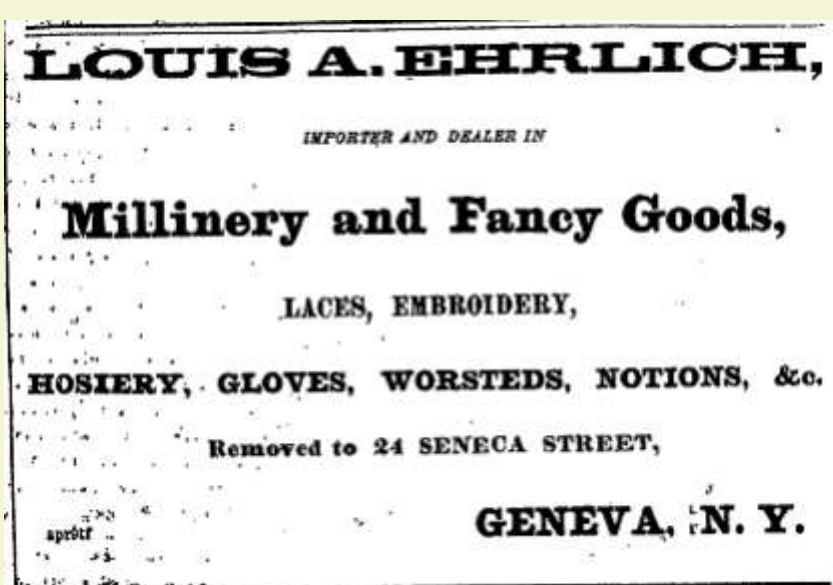
How Railroads Shaped Commerce

In 1836, many of Geneva's consumer goods were made in town. Railroads brought new products, from imported fabric to fresh seafood, for the village's retail stores. The railroads also created new job opportunities.



Everything that came to or left Geneva by railroad had to be delivered. As a menial but important task, running delivery wagons was a business opportunity for African Americans and recent immigrants. People and their baggage had to be delivered as well; Hobart College students kept coaches and wagons busy in the fall and spring.

Delivery wagons at the New York Central Railroad depot, circa 1875.



Fresh seafood, lettuce in January, and turning up the heat in our house with the touch of a button are all things we take for granted. This was far from true in Geneva in the late 19th century. Restaurants and retail merchants proudly announced their imported products. Even coal was advertised by its source and as "fresh from the mine."



While many immigrants took labor jobs when they arrived in America, there were entrepreneurs as well. Edward J. Smaldone came to Geneva from Salerno, Italy in 1912. After selling newspapers on the train between Geneva and Williamsport, Pennsylvania for three years, he opened his own newspaper and candy store on Exchange Street. The business remained in the Smaldone family until it closed in 1996.

The Railroad in Geneva Today

“We didn’t desert the passengers, they deserted us.”

R.A. Erickson, spokesman for the Lehigh Valley Railroad, 1959

Passenger traffic on the railroads dwindled in the 1950s. The New York Central Railroad stopped passenger service through Geneva in 1958. By the following year, the LVRR was petitioning the Interstate Commerce Commission to end its service. Geneva and Ithaca made their case for the importance of trains in bringing prospective and current students to their college campuses, but with little success. The LVRR was allowed to reduce its passenger service in 1959, and eliminate it in 1961.



The LVRR station still stands on Sherrill Street and is privately owned.

While railroads went through major restructuring in the 1960s and 70s, the importance of freight service has not gone away. Some materials such as coal, ore, and sand, are too bulky to be shipped by truck. Math is also in favor of locomotives and their cars. A locomotive uses one-tenth of the energy of a tractor trailer to haul one ton one mile. A 40 ton boxcar, set in motion at 60 mph on a level track, will coast for five miles.



Finger Lakes Railway Corporation (FGLK), a privately owned, Class III shortline railroad, has been headquartered in Geneva since 1995. The railroad maintains over 154 miles of track in 6 upstate counties including: Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Ontario, Yates, and Schuyler. From a historical perspective, they are using tracks that were once part of the Lehigh Valley (east side of Seneca Lake), the Fall Brook (west side of the lake), and the New York Central Auburn branch (Solvay to Victor).

Two major Class I railroads interchange with Finger Lakes Railway at Geneva: The Norfolk Southern and the Canadian Pacific. A partial list of commodities that are transported includes: steel, scrap metals, pulpboard, scrap paper, canned goods, sand, chemicals, salt, grain, fertilizers, plastic, corn syrup, and lumber and building materials.

While moving freight is the primary mission of the Finger Lakes Railway, they do operate excursion passenger trains for groups. The local Rotary clubs sponsor Halloween and Santa trains that have become traditions for many families. There have been conversations about offering regular excursions, or even connecting to Amtrak service at Lyons, if that town became an Amtrak stop. For the foreseeable future, however, the Finger Lakes Railway’s focus is on freight.



Guardian Glass, whose stacks are visible for miles, is one of the railway’s prime customers.

