



THE

Boston & Maine Railroad Historical Society
Incorporated

NEWSLETTER

“Every foot of track on the B&M, mainline or branch, rain or shine, was the scene of legitimate human endeavor.”
– Robert W. Jones, “Boston and Maine: Three Colorful Decades of New England Railroading.”

July-August 2022

Meeting/Membership Telephone Number (978) 454-3600

www.bmrrhs.org

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Former Boston & Maine EMD F7A #4268 debuted on the Conway Scenic Railroad this spring following a long restoration to operation by its owners the 470 Railroad Club. The 1949 diesel locomotive has arrived in North Conway after leading a special trip back from Crawford Notch on Sunday, May 22, 2022. Trailing are former Maine Central EMD GP7 #573 and its sister F7A, B&M #4266. Stephen Quill-Schuffels photo, courtesy.

TIMETABLE OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday, July 29 – Sunday, July 31:

Lowell Folk Festival

Dutton Street, Lowell, MA. We will have our exhibits inside B&M combine #1244 open to the public during the first Folk Festival since 2019! Be sure to stop in and tour the combine, 0-6-0 #410, and the exhibit.

Sunday, August 14:

Concord Model Railroad Club Show

Everett Arena, Loudon Road, Concord, NH. 10am-3:30pm. We plan to have tables at the show with merchandise, clothing, models, books (including the new George Corey book), and more. We hope to see you there!

BOSTON & MAINE RAILROAD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization composed of people who want to share their knowledge, and learn more about, the history and operations of the Boston and Maine Railroad, its predecessors, and successors. Formed in 1971 by a group of interested B&M employees and railfans, the B&MRRHS now has nearly one thousand active members.

Our principal activities are publication of our journal, the *B&M Bulletin*, and our *Newsletter*, monthly speakers, archives and hardware preservation, preservation of the B&M 0-6-0 switcher No. 410 and coach-baggage combine No. 1244, participation in railroad shows, and maintaining two web sites: www.bmrrhs.org and www.flickr.com/photos/bmrrhs. If you would like to join the Society, you can join on-line or download an application at www.bmrrhs.org.

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About the Newsletter

The Boston & Maine Railroad Historical Society *Newsletter* is published six times a year. We welcome your articles, photographs, and news items about the Society, the Boston & Maine Railroad, and current railroad events in New England. It is best to query the editor before writing articles. Please address correspondence to the Newsletter Editor at:

Rick Kfoury, B&MRRHS Newsletter
B&MRRHS, P.O. Box 9116,
Lowell, MA 01853

or email rickkfoury51@gmail.com.

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MEMBERSHIP AND DUES

Join us on-line or renew your membership on-line at bmrrhs.org. Credit cards may be used if you join or renew on-line (via PayPal). Dues are also payable by check, money order, postal money order, or cash (in person only). All payments in U.S. dollars. Please allow four to six weeks for processing.

Basic Individual - \$40	Basic & Spouse - \$43
Contributing - \$50	Sustaining - \$55
Supporting - \$80	*Canada & Overseas - \$75
Benefactor - \$100	Corporate - \$500

* *Canada & Overseas members please pay via PayPal*

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Notices are sent monthly based on members' renewal dates. If we have an email on file for you, a renewal reminder will also be sent via email. Envelopes are clearly marked "RENEWAL NOTICE." Not responding will result in removal from the member list.

- When members renew, typically the month of renewal does not change. (A member with a 06/19 renewal date who pays in August would have a 06/20 update to renew.)
- The label on your *Newsletter* envelope shows your renewal date.
- Refer questions to the Membership Secretary Stephen DeFrancesco at bmrrhsmembership@gmail.com.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Please advise Membership Secretary of new address before you move. Returned and forwarded mail costs the Society money. Write *Stephen DeFrancesco, Membership Secretary, B&MRRHS, P.O. Box 1438, Tewksbury, MA 01876.*

NEW MEMBERS

We would like to take the opportunity to our welcome new members who have joined the Society since the last *Newsletter* and through early February:

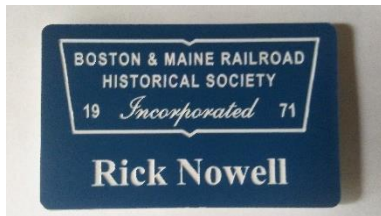
- Matthew Wirth, Portsmouth, NH
- David Poor, South Ryegate, VT
- Stephen LaBonte, Hudson, NH
- Bryon Farley, Westbrook, ME
- Larry R. Forkum, Rochester, NH
- Michael L. Frager, Portland, ME
- Robert W. Moen, Charles City, IA
- John Provencher, Rye, NH
- Stephen Weiss, St. Petersburg, FL
- Jeffrey Batchelder, St. Albans, VT
- James M. Battle, Rochester, NY

Welcome Aboard!



MEMBERSHIP BADGES AVAILABLE

B&MRRHS members are entitled to wear the official membership badge at all society events. The badge is an attractive shade of blue with white lettering, 3 inches wide by 2 inches tall. The badge has a secure magnetic attachment system that eliminates pinholes from shirts and sweater. The Society sells and mails badges at cost. Please make checks for \$12 payable to B&MRRHS and send to: Name Badge, B&MRRHS, P.O. Box 9116, Lowell, MA, 01853. Please specify name for the badge. NOTE: Magnets are known to be harmful to those who utilize Pacemakers.



NEW MAILING ADDRESS FOR MEMBERSHIPS

Please be advised that we have moved our P.O. Box for new and renewed memberships, and we are **no longer using** the Derry, NH P.O. Box address. Our current P.O. Box address is:

Membership Secretary, B&MRRHS
P.O. Box 1438,
Tewksbury, MA 01876

WEBMASTER'S REPORT

Work continues on our website overhaul; Rudy Garbely is making great progress, and previews are looking excellent! The current website remains accessible while the new site is under construction. We recorded our June meeting in Laconia, which will be uploaded to our Youtube channel. We have temporarily paused the release of new episodes of our podcast *High Green* due to work on the website; episodes will resume as soon as the new site is up and running. We are also working on new episodes of *Minuteman Tales*, with an episode on Penacook, NH soon to be released.

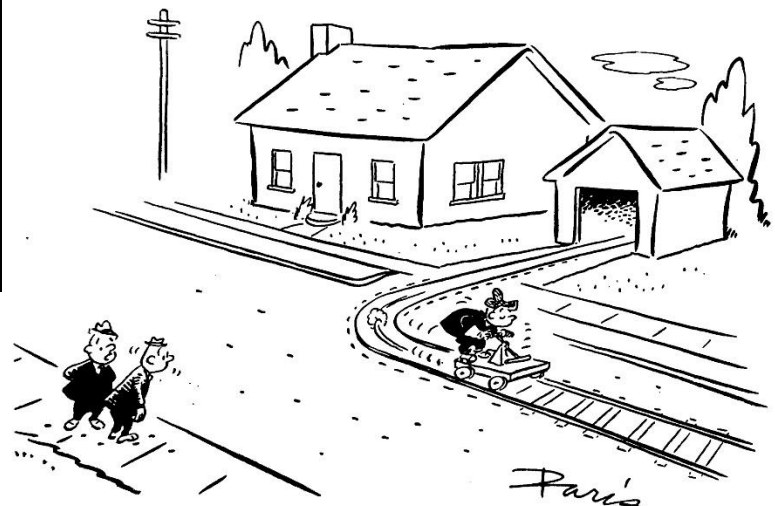
– James P. Nizgus, Webmaster

EDITOR AND VICE PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Greetings, and happy summer! I hope that you are finding the season productive and enjoyable. Heading into the second half of the year (hard to believe), the Society has been busy. The first half saw a return to regular in-person meetings, with a return to Rogers Hall in Lowell as well as new ventures in Rowley, MA and Laconia, NH. It's been great to see and hear from new folks in different places. Work continues on our publications, our website revamp, and creating online content.

In this issue of the *Newsletter*, we bring you news from our Archives Committee, another fascinating excursion from Andrew Riedl, and an amazing article from the October 1962 edition of *New Hampshire Profiles* which serves as a reminder of the hoopla regarding Steamtown USA which rocked New Hampshire and the Boston & Maine's Cheshire Branch sixty years ago this summer. I hope that you enjoy this edition of the *Newsletter*, and look forward to saying hello to some of you at the Concord Model Railroad Club show in August! Thanks for all that you do for us. ☘

– Rick Kfoury, Newsletter Editor and Vice President



"I understand he works for the railroad."



FROM THE ARCHIVES

B&MRRHS Archives Report
 Rick Nowell, Archives Chairman

May 14, 2022

We held a work session at Lowell on April 16, the first at Lowell since November 2020. Our volunteers mounted photographs, prepared a shelf list of ICC Valuation Surveys, prepared a listing of Boston Terminal photo folders, and packed up Bulletin Order files for transportation to North Chelmsford. Seven volunteers took part.

The ICC surveys (prepared 1914-1916) are used by historians to document former railroad buildings and by modelers to obtain construction details. The shelf list reveals that we hold 204 volumes encompassing the entire B&M system *with the exception of the following valuation sections*: **Valuation Section 4.7** Lake Winnepesaukee Wharf Property; **V.S. 7** North Adams Branch (ex-Boston and Albany RR); **V.S. 13.7** Land and Wharves at Salem, Mass.; **V.S. 22** Wells River to Groveton; **V.S. 23A** Portion of Suncook Loop leased to Suncook Valley RR; **V.S. 23.6** Suncook Valley Extension (Pittsfield to Centre Barnstead); **V.S. 23.8** Lake Winnepesaukee Wharves; **V.S. 27** New Boston Branch; **V.S. 29** Suncook Valley Branch (Suncook Valley RR); **V.S. 39.1** Cheshire Branch; **V.S. 39.4** Ashburnham Branch; **V.S. 40.2** Turners Falls Branch; **V.S. 41** Bennington Branch; **V.S. 44** Massawippi Valley RR; **V.S. 44.1** Quebec Central RR; **V.S. 44.2** Stanstead Branch; **V.S. 45** Richford branch; **V.S. 49** Mount Washington Railway; **V.S. 50.1** St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain RR operated by Hardwick and Woodbury RR; **V.S. 52.1** Montpelier & Wells River RR; **V.S. 52.2** Montpelier & Wells River RR (Montpelier to Tilton Bridge).

The inventory of the Boston Terminal photo files, of which there are 43, will be used to reorganize and relabel the folders to make photos of this important area easier to locate.

Rick Hurst's volunteer group has devoted several work sessions to establishing a comprehensive file of Bulletin Orders, Notices, and Circulars at North Chelmsford. These documents are organized by year and division, the earliest being from 1933. Brad Kippen's volunteer group has scanned, processed, and cataloged some 4,358 negatives from the Robert E. Chaffin Collection. An index listing the negatives has been posted to the website. Brad notes that the most recent addition is Chaffin's New Haven collection. A few photos of the interior of our Archives at Lowell have been posted to www.flickr.com/photos/bmrrhs. Mr. Brandon Bourgeois, a remote learning student affiliated with a library/archival program at Clarion University, completed the volunteer requirement for his academic program. We thank him for his contributions to our Archives. Volunteers are also needed for the following special projects:

- Negative scanning and postproduction. Contact Brad Kippen, fbk3amtk@aol.com
- Transcription of inventories and employee service records. This involves entering employee name, occupation, and location data from historical documents into an Excel spreadsheet. Contact Rick Nowell, fnowell3@gmail.com.

The Center for Lowell History, where our main Archives collection is located, is open by appointment only, Monday through Thursday, 9 to 5, and the third Saturday of each month from 9 to 3. Masks are required per order of the Center for Lowell History. If you have questions about the Archives or would like to volunteer or be placed on our email list, please contact me at fnowell3@gmail.com. View our on-line archives at www.bmrrhs.org and our photo archive at www.flickr.com/photos/bmrrhs

Respectfully submitted,

Rick Nowell

Rick Nowell, Chairman

MAY MEETING

LOWELL, MA. – On Saturday, May 14, we held a public meeting at Roger’s Hall in Lowell, MA. Several members turned out to enjoy light refreshments and an engaging presentation by Philip E. Johnson on the Hampden Railroad. The Hampden was envisioned as a direct way for the then jointly-owned New Haven and B&M to compete with the Boston & Albany’s route across Massachusetts to Boston. Eventually, the B&M and New Haven were ordered to separate, and the Hampden Railroad never saw a single train — despite amazing engineering, massive bridges, and the completion of track laying. Johnson is undoubtedly the expert on this fascinating story and gave a great presentation; you can find his books online. ☞

JUNE MEETING

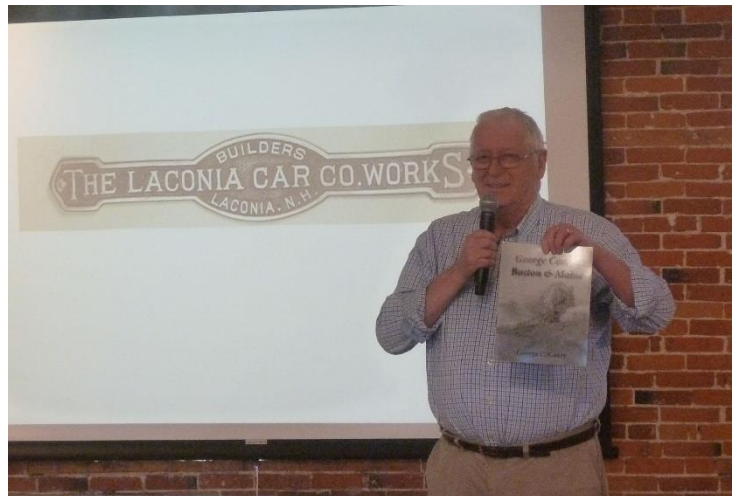


Warren Huse

LACONIA, NH. – The Society enjoyed a meeting on Saturday, June 4 at a new location for us, the city of Laconia, New Hampshire. The setting was the historic Belknap Mill, where Warren Huse, writer for the *Laconia Daily Sun*, and author of numerous publications about Laconia history, presented an overview of the Laconia Car Company. The iterations of the car shops produced thousands of railcars and trolleys from the 1840s to 1928; several of which are still in preservation today. Warren’s presentation was recorded and can be found on our YouTube channel. Attendees also enjoyed touring the former Boston & Maine Laconia passenger station, which currently serves as the headquarters for Railbike Adventures (run by the Hobo & Winnepesaukee Scenic Railroad). A B&MRRHS exhibit on temporary display inside the station includes many interesting artifacts from our archival collections. ☞



Chairman Paul T. Kosciolk mans the sales table.



**Director Carl R. Byron with our new book, *George Corey’s Boston & Maine*, now available. Check it out!
 Both photos provided by John Alan Roderick.**

HILLSBORO, NH FREIGHT HOUSE DEMOLISHED

HILLSBORO, NH. – The editor noticed on May 27, 2022, that the old Boston & Maine freight house in Hillsboro, NH is no more. The spot where it stood off Henniker Street behind Family Dollar is littered with debris, the most noteworthy of which was a large safe with its door removed and lying beside it (presumably either a railroad safe or from one of the businesses that occupied the structure more recently). The building was abandoned and in disrepair for many years, with its roof beginning to cave in. It was one of, if not the, last railroad building in town. The last freight into Hillsboro ran December 31, 1972 and retrieved the empties in spring 1973; the line between Bennington and Hillsboro was abandoned in 1979. Several B&M structures have been lost recently, including the Plymouth, NH freight house; the South Bennington, NH station; the West Rindge, NH station; the entire Westboro Engine Facility; and the Gonic, NH freight house. Alas. ☞



In the summer and fall of 1962, steam-powered tourist trains thundered out of Keene, NH over the Boston & Maine's Cheshire Branch. Meanwhile, a great debate fumed over the museum planned to open there – Steamtown USA – and particularly, the State's involvement. *The Newsletter* remembers these final chapters of steam operations on the B&M's Cheshire Branch, and what might have been.

“THE STEAM OVER STEAMTOWN”

From an Article in *New Hampshire Profiles* by Paul E. Estaver, October 1962

WHEN the Manchester *Union Leader* and the Concord *Monitor* see eye to eye on a New Hampshire issue, it's time to sit up and take notice. This is highly unusual. It's even more unusual to find the Portsmouth *Herald* and the Keene *Sentinel* supporting any position taken by Governor Wesley Powell, save possibly for the occasions when the governor makes an effort to combat highway fatalities. Everybody is against death.

But not everyone is in favor of Project Steamtown. There has been enough controversial steam generated over this proposed railway museum to drive the train

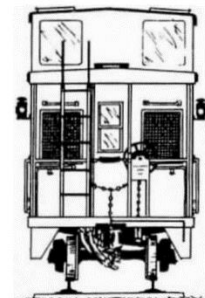
from Keene to Walpole and back seven times over.

For his favorable attitude toward Steamtown the governor has been called everything from a "foresighted public servant" to an "utter hypocrite."

As a result of his offer to provide the engines, cars, railway line, and other steam memorabilia if the state would build the museum, F. Nelson Blount of Dublin has been termed a philanthropist. He was also labeled "the Billy Sol Estes of New Hampshire."

It's quite a lively battle: at stake is a million-dollar state bond issue and ranged around the stake is a cast of characters colorful enough to stage a Broadway show. And

pervasive in the background are the nostalgic aroma of train smoke and the lonesome cry of a steam whistle echoing up the Connecticut Valley. For if Steamtown is built, under whatever auspices, its educational and historic aspects will be far overshadowed by the warm picture it will perpetuate of the steam era, now fast slipping from memory.



If you're a railroad buff, you probably think it's a wonderful idea. Nelson Blount thinks it's a wonderful idea, and it would be hard to find a more complete steam enthusiast than Nelson Blount.



F. Nelson Blount

Unquestionably, he deserves top spot on our Steamtown showbill. At the age of 44, he is a wealthy man, owner of Blount Sea Foods Corp. with operations in Rhode Island and Maine, largest individual shareholder in the Ocean Spray Cranberry cooperative, and owner of the Edaville Railroad in South Carver, Massachusetts, whose tracks run through the South Shore cranberry bogs. Altogether, Blount is owner or partner in eleven corporations, including his brother's shipbuilding firm on Narragansett Bay which specializes in the construction of tugboats, ferries – and, on occasion, steamboats.

Blount himself has been a railroad and steam fan for as long as he can remember. At the age of 17, he wrote a book on steam power. Two decades ago, he qualified as a locomotive engineer on the Boston and Maine, which involved the traditional "writing of the rule

book," setting down from memory all 750 rules by which trainmen operate. Over the years, Blount has taken some 10,000 photographs of trains; he has pictures of every locomotive which has run on the New Haven line during his lifetime.

Then, as time passed, Blount began to get into his railroading hobby deeply. He began collecting locomotives and other rolling stock. He himself did not originate the Edaville Railroad – it was started by his cousin Ellis D. Atwood in 1942 – but it is apparent that Blount took an avid interest in it from the beginning. By 1955 he was its proprietor. But Nelson Blount is more than a nut on railroading. He is a shrewd promoter and a sharp businessman with the reputation for the Midas touch. Possibly it is superfluous to point out that he is not the sort of businessman who sits long behind a desk. He's more comfortable in old clothes than a business suit.

Once, a visitor to his farm in Dublin noticed an energetic farm hand operating the manure spreader and commented to the dairy foreman that good farm help like that is hard to find nowadays. "Oh him," said the foreman. "That's no hired hand, that's Nelson."

The same thing applies to Blount's various small railroad lines. You won't find him up front – not even in the ticket office. He'll be out with a gang clearing brush or replacing ties, or he'll be the engineer with his hand on the throttle.

And when these things don't occupy him, he's keeping up on his stunt flying (in vintage aircraft, what else?) or big game hunting.

He's a flamboyant, outgoing man who doesn't drink, has given up smoking, and frequently carries a Bible in his pocket. If the hunting

has been good, he'll throw a big feast, invite the entire town of Dublin, then show them movies (often his own) for the evening.

Blount also loves to talk, and his conversation is as expansive as his life; he says a million as easily as he says a hundred. He'll talk to anybody. There is nothing withdrawn or secretive about him.

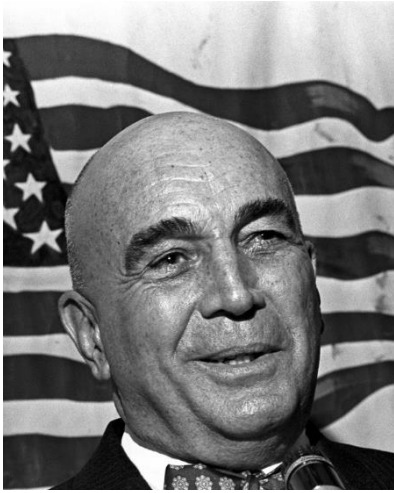
Yet despite all this he is a difficult man to interview, because he wanders from the subject at hand, a trait exasperating to a reporter who is looking for specific answers to specific questions. Perhaps this partly explains why Blount's press has occasionally been unsatisfactory and why, when he wanted to swap the state of New Hampshire a railroad in return for a museum, he was greeted with Yankee suspicion, at least from some quarters.

In this drama, Blount's opposite number is Paul Cummings, Jr., editor of the Peterborough weekly Transcript, Yankee to the roots of his hair, and a personality in many ways very much like Blount. Cummings is one of a distinguished, public-spirited New Hampshire family long associated with publishing and printing in New Hampshire.

But let it not be thought that Paul Cummings, Jr. is a shy or taciturn man. Like Blount, he works as easily in the shop as in the office. Like Blount, he speaks his mind – verbally and through his newspaper. Like Blount, he's not a man to run from a scrap.

Another leading character is Governor Wesley Powell, who has frequently been a walking storm center. Very much a scrapper, the Governor has played his part in this particular drama with surprising restraint, possibly because the issue,

politically viewed, is a difficult one on which to please all the people.



William Loeb

Next comes William Loeb, publisher of the Manchester *Union Leader*. For the sake of this particular plot, it needs only to be said that Loeb is a crusading newspaperman. His reputation as a conservative, a gladiator, and master of invective is nation-wide.

The fifth of the dramatis personae is Russell Tobey, a very different sort of man. Reserved, articulate, rather a patrician Yankee, he is a son of the late Senator Charles Tobey and has spent his career as a public servant in this state. In 1935 he joined the Forestry and Recreation Department as the Director of the Recreation Division. When his division was regrouped with several others into the Department of Resources and Economic Development this year, Tobey's job remained essentially the same under the title of Director of the Division of Parks. The alphabet at the State House has been rearranged, but you'll find most of the letters still there, if you look hard enough.

Be that as it may, the breadth and scope of New Hampshire's state park system has grown hugely during Tobey's administration. In

1938 there were ten "units" (parks, historic sites, etc.) with a total budget of \$15,500, earning income of \$15,700. Last year there were 40 units. The October 1962 budget had increased to \$1,244,666, and the income to \$1,347,731. Tobey, of course, does not take credit for this entire expansion, but there is little doubt that he has grown with his operation over the years.

Now let us step back for a long view of ten million dollars. You have to be far enough away from the orchestra pit to see the whole stage at a glance at this point.

The scene is a meeting in May, 1960, of the Governor and Council (in New Hampshire the Governor acts with the consent of five Councilors; our founding fathers didn't much like the thought of an all-powerful executive). Before the Governor and Council was Russell Tobey on behalf of the state park system. Tobey wanted to repair a dam at Crawford Notch, and in the ensuing conversation it became evident that this repair was a stopgap measure.

"What would it cost to do the job right?" asked the Governor, possibly inspired by the fact that his gubernatorial opponent Hugh Gregg had, in that election year, called for just such improvements.

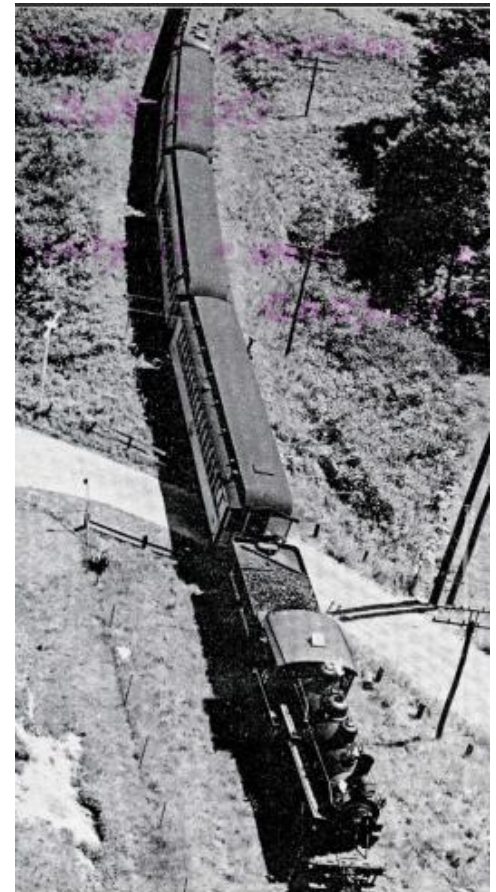
"Well," said Tobey, "it isn't that easy to answer. The problem is one of allocation of funds – where we can do the most good with the least money. Under the present budget, it isn't sensible to go all out on any single site."

"How much," asked the Governor, "would it cost to put all our state parks into first class shape - make all reasonable expansions?" Tobey said he didn't know, but he'd find out. Several meetings later he had the answer: ten million dollars. And from this grew H.B. 377,

including one million for industrial promotion and expansion, which was passed in an amended form by the 1961 legislature. More on this to follow.

Now the scene changes, and Nelson Blount takes the spotlight. On December 12, 1960, he announced the purchase of ten acres of land and the old roundhouse at North Walpole, New Hampshire, twenty miles west and north of Keene. This property, he said, signaled the birth of Steamtown. It was the first anybody heard of it.

But before long a number of people were hearing about Steamtown, among them several interested officials at the State House, for early in 1961 Blount





approached the state with a proposition: if New Hampshire would build a railroad museum, he would promise to donate 20 steam locomotives to be housed there, and in conjunction with this he would create an excursion railroad, similar to the Edaville line, to run from Walpole to Westmoreland. It sounded interesting enough that in March of '61 the Governor appointed a "Steamtown Committee" to study it. Committee chairman was Edward Ellingwood of the Keene Regional Industrial Foundation; the other members were the then mayor of Keene, Charles Coolidge; Dino Houpis, representing the Keene Chamber of Commerce; Jason Sawyer, secretary of the Monadnock Region Association (and chairman of the Forestry and Recreation Commission); Richard Preston of the NH Planning and Development Commission; Russell Tobey of the Recreation Division; and, ex officio, Councilor Weeks, representing the fifth of the state that included Keene and Walpole.

Through the spring months of 1961, this committee met five times,

made field trips to inspect the rail line and the museum site (moved now from Walpole to Keene because of a planned highway project), and conferred and corresponded with the manager of the Edaville Railroad, the architects Morehouse and Chesley engaged by Blount to draw museum plans – and of course with Nelson Blount himself. Their report, submitted in June 1961, included estimates of building costs (then calculated at \$775,000), operating expenses, income potential, staffing and equipment needs, projected cash flow for three years, and a detailed list of what Blount was requesting and offering for the project.

With this report at hand, it was now a good deal clearer what was in the offing. The basic plan called for two buildings: a roundhouse, and a station of traditional style with ticket window, waiting platform, restaurants, together with water tanks, coal loaders, and a parking lot for 500 cars. As soon as delivery arrangements could be completed, the state was to be given physical possession of 20 steam locomotives (listed in detail), and the ownership

of these would be transferred to New Hampshire over a period of ten years. In addition, Blount offered a miscellany of fire engines, steam rollers, and steam engines of various types. He also said he might throw in a few more locomotives, but was *adamant that they be kept under cover, clean, and painted.*

All of this would be owned by the state, and Blount would own and operate the scenic railroad line in conjunction with it. Further, the state would have the option to buy the excursion line, so long as Blount would have a lifetime option to drive the trains.

The five-man committee was unanimous in its approval of Project Steamtown, and last August the Governor and Council referred the matter to the Forestry and Recreation Department for study, allocating \$4500 for an engineering survey. Meanwhile, other things were happening. On July 6, H.B. 377 passed into Public Law 263. Effective September 4, funds for park improvement and historic sites, including Steamtown, were available.

Then, for a few weeks during the summer of 1961, Blount ran an excursion line from the town of Bradford to Sunapee in the hope of arousing public interest in a New Hampshire steam railroad. Unfortunately, the locomotive in use was shortly condemned by the I.C.C., not because it was unsound, but because its papers had been lost when the Canadian National had prepared to scrap it. For a few days Blount tried running the Bradford-Sunapee line with a diesel, but attendance dwindled to nothing. At least it was clear that steam engines were the basis of success for such an operation.



And the third thing that happened that summer was the first rumbling from the Peterborough press. Everyone, said Cummings in effect, is in favor of Steamtown, but should this be undertaken by the state? If it's such a good idea, why doesn't Blount do the whole thing himself? This sounds like a project for private enterprise.

In any case, the investigation proceeded. The Portsmouth engineering firm of Wright and Pierce was engaged to make a study of the museum site, which was done under the supervision of the N. H. Public Works and Highways Department, and this report was submitted to Governor and Council on March 15, 1962. The estimate for the project was then set at just under one million dollars. About this same time, after much preliminary work, the city of Keene came into the act.

On March 15 the city council voted 15-0 to purchase and donate to the state land for the museum. By this time the site had been chosen: about two miles up the track from Keene. No money was mentioned in the vote. On March 21 a public hearing in Keene was held, as it

must be by law for the use of these monies, with officials attending from city, from state, and from Blount's enterprises. The project was explained in detail, and questions were answered. When a straw vote of those attending was taken at the conclusion of the meeting, the tally was 634-11 signed ballots in favor of Steamtown.

Ballots for the occasion were printed and provided by the Keene Chamber of Commerce, which had used all possible means to publicize and urge attendance at the meeting. On May 17 the Keene city council, with the enthusiastic endorsement of the Chamber of Commerce, voted 14-1 to appropriate \$100,000 for land and utilities for Steamtown.

But the popularity of Steamtown was still something short of universal. Through the spring of '62 Paul Cummings kept banging away editorially, asking essentially the same questions outlined above. There also sprang up in Keene a group known as the Inquiring Citizens. Some of them were frankly worried over the loss or devaluation of their property

adjacent to the Keene-Walpole track, but other serious questions were asked: Was this to be a Coney Island operation that would cheapen the Monadnock Region? Would it ever make money? Could the money appropriated under Public Law 263 legally – or morally – be expended on what was to be essentially a tourist attraction? A list of such questions was compiled, ultimately numbering 108, and another public hearing was planned.

During the spring, other newspapers in the state began to take interest. The Keene *Sentinel*, predictably, was in favor. So was the *Monadnock Ledger*, in Jaffrey. These two were joined by the *Portsmouth Herald*, and all felt that the opportunity for the state was too good to be passed up. Here, they said, was an attraction which would be unique in the nation – a living railroad museum. But, insisted the *Concord Monitor*, the *Manchester Union Leader*, the *Nashua Telegraph*, and others, these are public funds – taxpayers' money. The state has no business taking part in a commercial venture, perhaps a money-losing one at that.

One particular hearing aroused the ire of several reporters. With Senate President Sam Green in the executive chair, the Governor's Council announced a meeting whose results were not to be made public. Annoyed, all but one of the usual State House newsmen refused to attend. Leon Anderson of the *Monitor* and Frank O'Neil of the *Union Leader* said in no uncertain terms that they considered it undemocratic and surreptitious. Councilor Weeks in particular was castigated in his own home territory for his part in the "secret meeting."

Then for the first time, upon his return from West Virginia where he had been recuperating from a heart

attack, Governor Powell took a strong stand in the arena of the Steamtown battle; he defended Weeks and the Council for their action. But as far as we can discover, the reason for the closed meeting was never aired in the press. It was simple: the Council wanted facts and figures to show that Steamtown had a chance of making money. Blount agreed to open Edaville and family records, but not for general inspection. The wisdom of such a procedure might best be judged from the reaction it brought forth.

During the final days before initial executive approval was to be given, the Keene Inquiring Citizens Committee rented the school auditorium and staged another public hearing attended again by state officials and by Blount and by an audience of some 700. The 108 questions were asked and answered. Another straw poll was taken, and the result this time was approximately 141-93, still in favor of Steamtown.

Then on June 28 the Governor and Council met and unanimously approved "in principle" the Steamtown project, directing Russell Tobey to write up the agreements, through Attorney General William Maynard, with Blount and with the City of Keene.

This was the Governor's firm commitment to Steamtown, and it was followed by editorial lambastings from Cummings and Loeb. On July 5, Loeb wrote: "This newspaper has no idea whether the 'Steamtown' project is a good one or a bad one, but this we do know – **IT IS NOT TO PROMOTE AMUSEMENT PARKS THAT THE CITIZENS OF NEW HAMPSHIRE ARE TAXED.**" In other parts of the same editorial Loeb spoke of "special interest

groups around Keene . . . raiding the public till." He said that if Steamtown were valid, so would be a state-owned Ferris wheel or merry-go-round at Hampton Beach or Rye Beach. He suggested that if the state were going to get into what should be a private enterprise, we were going a long way toward "socialism and communism".

Toward the Council he was a little more kind: he said probably they hadn't thought the project over very carefully. But in any case, he concluded, all tax-squanderers (presumably the Governor and Council) should be voted out of office; "if the taxpayers would get off their big, fat comforts."

Paul Cummings's editorial was less violent, but it voiced essentially the same opinions. "Keene and Monadnock Region interests have been in . . . a rush to carve up for themselves, \$1,000,000 . . . from the state recreational bond issue." He labeled the action "government at its very worst," and suggested that such "petty politicking" had caused "newspapers and radio stations to heel under" to the whims of the promoters.

This, then, is the history of Steamtown to the early days of the summer. A few other details should be noted: a state park for Spofford Lake was denied by Governor and Council, presumably because the large Steamtown appropriation would pretty much use up the Monadnock Region's share of the funds available. An Historical Commission which should have been consulted for advice was overlooked along the way – and then hastily called in to give their approval to Steamtown. Starting on July 13, the Monadnock, Steamtown & Northern began a series of daily runs to Westmoreland and Walpole on essentially the same basis as the Bradford–Sunapee line of the previous year – i.e., financed by Blount.

Since that time, the issue has remained moderately dormant, in which condition it rests at the present writing. Possibly the Governor and Council will have taken the next step by September 15 and brought the contention to life again when **PROFILES'** October issue is in your hands.



In any case, let us take a brief look at the major issues – and a few of the minor ones – before we project the possible future steps toward the realization of Steamtown.

1. **Objection:** This money was intended for state parks, not tourist attractions. **Reply:** Says Tobey, "Yes, it was intended for parks and is so earmarked, but the law clearly includes historic sites."

2. **Objection:** But Steamtown is not indigenous to New Hampshire history. Why not Strawberry Banke, the historic "city within a city" now in its initial stages at Portsmouth? **Reply:** "It's as indigenous to New Hampshire as to any other state," says Jason Sawyer. Besides, the law states that the purpose of the bill, among other things, is to 'derive maximum benefits from increase in the value of such facilities as tourist attractions.' It says the intent is 'to promote the welfare and improve the economy of the state.'" Tobey adds that Strawberry Banke is also under consideration for funds from the bill.

3. **Objection:** This project still violates the spirit of the law. It's not government business to step beyond the conservation of natural resources. **Reply:** Says Sawyer again, "The bill was purposely not made more specific when it was drafted, so how can you say what its spirit was? Nowhere is there mention in it of conservation."

A close reading of the original, administration-sponsored bill backs Sawyer up. Before its amendment by the Legislature, it would have allowed the state to "enter into agreements with *private persons*" and various public agencies to develop lands and facilities, which would have meant that any promoter could have legally obtained funds to develop a private enterprise in the

tourist field. Thus, the original bill, and presumably the spirit of the law, was much closer than the present one to being a pork-barrel appropriation. In its final form, the law calls for geographical distribution of the funds, and it includes several added safeguards, such as requiring public hearings and advisory commission opinions.

4. **Objection:** If it's such a good deal, why doesn't a private promoter get into it instead of our sticking the state with it? **Reply:** From Tobey: "It was offered first to the state, and the state has never dropped the initiative. We think it will benefit our economy. We can show that it will pay its own way. We look on it in the same spirit in which the state built Cannon Mountain Tramway in 1937." **From Blount:** "These locomotives don't belong in a private concession; they should be kept in a permanent institution, such as only a state government can provide. Several of the properties can be obtained – specifically the Pennsylvania Railroad collection – only on that basis, and already New Hampshire has lost several valuable engines and cars to other museums – the Smithsonian and the Chicago Museum of Science – because we couldn't commit ourselves to a museum quickly enough.

"Further, a privately-owned museum couldn't break even under the present tax structure. At present rates it might have to pay the city of Keene over \$60,000 a year as a private enterprise."

5. **Objection:** It isn't practical. It'll never make money. Edaville loses money. The Bradford–Sunapee line lost money. The present Steamtown line is losing money. It has gone downhill every week since it opened. On Sunday, August 12, it carried only five paying passengers (this last a direct quote). **Reply:**

Again Blount: "The August 12 figure is not correct. On that day we carried 367 paying passengers. Neither the Bradford–Sunapee line nor the present Monadnock, Steamtown & Northern were intended to make money. I lost \$31,000 on the former, and I anticipate a \$20,000 loss this year. These sums I regard as an investment in the railroad's future. There has been no wide-scale promotion to build traffic either year. In fact, our load this summer did drop off from 1,263 the first week to 812 the third week, then went back to 1,273 for the fifth week after our press party began to draw out-of-state riders. Edaville has never been intended as a paying proposition. Its function was to promote the cranberry industry. In fact, it does run in the black as a result of rental of trains to Freedomland and Pleasure Island. I can show, and the state of New Hampshire studies back me up, that Steamtown can amortize its bonds in thirty years."

Edaville figures, and the record of traffic at other state parks, show this to be a good likelihood. Such figures – budgets, estimated cash flow studies – are public properties. If experience bears them out, Steamtown will not be paid for by taxpayers' money. It will pay for itself. The state's official position is that the likelihood is sufficiently strong to warrant taking the risk.

These are the basic and most significant points that have been made on both sides of the question. How you evaluate the whole depends a good deal on your personal, governmental, and business philosophy. Other more minor points were raised. A retired B&M man, once an enthusiast, washed his hands of Steamtown when he saw a windowless coach,

with single long benches the length of the car. Blount's reaction: "Come to Edaville. We run plush coaches down there, but the public prefers open ones for the view and for the fun – flat cars, cabooses. We'll have coaches at Steamtown, and diners, whatever the public wants."

A question of grading and site preparation was raised. Gravel is being taken from the Steamtown site presently at the rate of 40,000 cubic yards per year. What about the cost of replacing this? The answer, according to Malcolm Chase of Public Works and Highways, is that this was taken into account in a review of the survey and will present no problem not anticipated in the present budget.

Finally, it was stated that the Portsmouth *Herald* supported Steamtown because Nelson Blount promised a tuna fleet to Portsmouth. *Herald* publisher J.D. Hartford denies knowledge of this, as do *Herald* editors. So does Blount. What actually happened is that John Rowe, formerly head of the Portsmouth Port Authority (which is seeking business, including tuna fleets), asked Blount after a Steamtown meeting whether this might be a possibility. At the time, Rowe had been appointed Commissioner of the Department of Resources and Economic Development, which now embraces the Division of Parks. Blount's reply was that no answer can be given for two more years, until studies can be completed to see how far north or south the tuna run.

Where now, Project Steamtown?

The steps to follow run something like this. By late August, the Historical Commission should have been consulted.

Then Blount must make arrangements to buy the Keene–Walpole line from the B&M. How much he'll have to pay for it is, he feels, an unfair question, since he must sit down and dicker with the railroad and strike the best bargain he can. "But it won't be anything like the \$5,000,000 figure that's been kicked around here in New Hampshire. That's about forty times the right amount," he says.

An even stickier question is whether he can even buy the line. B&M, at most recent information, is having second thoughts about selling the line at all. They wanted until January 1 to think it over, but now they have promised a decision by October.

If and when this step has passed, the following matters lie ahead:

1. Governor and Council must accept and approve the conditional agreements with Blount and the city of Keene.
2. Blount must deed his locomotives to the state.
3. Architects and engineers must be engaged by the state to make plans, down to the last nail.
4. Governor and Council must authorize the issuance of bids.
5. Bids must be made by contractors.
6. Governor and Council must accept bids.
7. Land must be purchased.
8. Construction period – probably a full year.

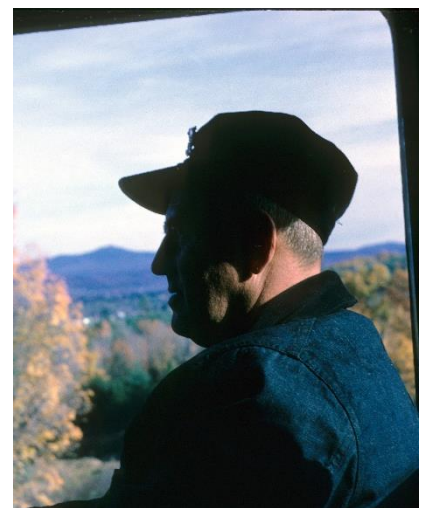
Paul Cummings states that he and/or a group of other citizens will obtain a writ to enjoin Governor and Council from authorizing bonds for Steamtown somewhere during the steps outlined above. He expects to bottle up action in the courts until the bill runs out so that the

Legislature would have to vote anew to continue it. The possibility of such a lengthy delay seems remote since the bill does not expire until July 1964. However, it is a possibility.

Informed of injunction plans, Blount stated that he'd wait and see. "I'd like to have Steamtown in New Hampshire," he said. "I think it's a good location—scenic, near the metropolitan centers. It's my personal preference because it's near my home. If it works out, I'm in hopes of extending the line down to the Connecticut River to meet a sidewheel steam river boat at what we'd call Steamboat Landing. But that's in the future. For now, as long as I'm convinced that the majority of New Hampshire people want Steamtown, I'll stay with it. If they don't, I have had tentative offers from Connecticut and Florida."

And one final note: Russell Tobey said it occurred to him after the June 28 meeting of Governor and Council – where both sides had been a little excited – that no one had thought to thank Nelson Blount.

It does seem that someone should have done that. ☘



ANDREW'S EXCURSIONS #14 NORWOTTUCK RAIL TRAIL BRIDGE

B&MRRHS MEMBER ANDREW RIEDL



Gazing across the massive iron truss bridge which spans the Connecticut River on the Norwottuck Rail Trail. The bridge is over a quarter mile long, and the perspective you get from staring down all the trusses is very unique to this trail. While the trail was quiet on this blustery April afternoon, it's a very popular recreational trail, and attracts plenty of crowds on warmer days. The Boston and Maine has been abandoned through here since 1980. Andrew Riedl Photo April 28, 2022.

"Some random thoughts pass through our mind as we gaze at the beautiful river." - The Central Mass. by B&MRRHS 1975

One type of infrastructure that the Boston and Maine Railroad had plenty of were bridges, and within the bridge category there was plenty of diversity. Everything from iron trusses to keystone arches to even a few wooden covered bridges, there was something noteworthy on virtually every line. I have always gravitated toward the truss bridges due to their seemingly delicate intricacies as well as their raw functionality. They can range in length from one span to theoretically infinite spans, and often these days seem covered in rust; yet still appear stronger than ever. I love all the lines and shadows that the trusses create, and I always enjoy seeing this type of bridge on both active and abandoned lines. There is something about seeing a massive iron or steel truss bridge that I have always found fascinating, and I

think it's because the utilitarian yet fascinating structures link the railroad to its industrial purposes so well.

Northampton, MA is home to one of the longest truss bridges on the system, and what is especially unique about this specific bridge is that it was built out of iron in 1887 at a time when most of these truss bridges were starting to be built from steel instead. The bridge crosses over the Connecticut River connecting the agricultural town of Hadley to the commercial and educational hub of Northampton. The single-track structure is comprised of nine individual spans over a broad section of the river that even includes a small island on its western end. The bridge is just over a quarter mile long and its history is just as fascinating as these facts.

The bridge was built as part of the Central Mass Railroad which opened in its entirety from Boston to Northampton in 1887 to compete with the Fitchburg Railroad to the north and the Boston and Albany to the south. The line never had much of a chance to be economically successful as it bypassed most major population centers and through passenger trains between Boston and Northampton only lasted until 1932. Six years later the 1938 Hurricane severed the line in the middle leaving the long bridge as a mere landmark of an obscure branch line rather than the elegant gateway to the Pioneer Valley from Boston that its creators had intended it to be. Freight service to Wheelright which carried the western portion of the line suffered a major setback in 1973 when a paper mill was closed. At that time infrequent but regular freight service became a once-a-week event with trains creeping across the long-neglected bridge at 5 miles per hour. The line was finally abandoned in 1980, and the rails were pulled up a few years after.

Soon after abandonment, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased the abandoned right of way between Northampton and Amherst, and the highly popular Norwottuck Rail Trail was built in 1992, including the wooden decked portion over the bridge. The bridge crossing is the most unique portion of the trail, in addition to passing through some gorgeous farmland in Hadley and Amherst. The trail is very popular to this day with college students commuting between the schools in the five-college region as well as recreational cyclists and people exercising. An interesting note about the rail trail name itself is that "Norwottuck" was the railroad name for South Amherst on the Central Mass, and while it was never a high traffic location, it did feature a junction with the Central Vermont Railroad as it traveled through Amherst on its journey from Palmer to the south to the Connecticut River Valley and beyond to the north. Fascinating that the rail trail name reflects some fairly

obscure Central Mass history, but a very interesting tribute nonetheless!

On a sunny spring day this past April, my son and I parked at the rail trail lot off Damon Road in Northampton to thoroughly explore this iconic bridge. The Norwottuck Trail crossing of the river is very well maintained, and the wooden decking enables easy passage across the former railroad bridge. One thing that immediately struck me was the sightline one gets when grazing down the rail trail, and the height above the river when you start walking across. I have ridden across this bridge on my mountain bike and have also walked across as well in the past, so I was familiar with the length and the sights. On this day in April, the wind was quite strong when we reached the middle of the bridge and when you get to that point you still feel like you're a very long way from the end. It was really neat walking through each of the nine spans which my son enthusiastically helped me keep count of. Parallel MA Route 9 seems to soar high above the rail bridge, but it's just far enough away that you feel very much removed from the car traffic on the busy thoroughfare that connects Northampton to Amherst.

When we finally reached the Hadley side of the bridge, the trail continues through some pristine farmland

offering some spectacular Pioneer Valley scenery until it arrives in Amherst, just south of the town center. We turned around and headed back across the bridge to Northampton and enjoyed the return crossing just as much as we had the initial passage. While the wind was intense on this sunny afternoon, it offers one of the better vantage points of the river in the area, as well as firsthand appreciation as to what a feat constructing this bridge was, especially for such a marginal railroad that never had a fighting chance to become a profitable competitor.

While there is no shortage of great B&M locations to explore in the Pioneer Valley, I very highly encourage you to place this iconic bridge high on your list and take a walk, run, or bike ride across it the next time you're in the area. The massive structure leaves one with such an appreciation of what a feat it was to construct it, and how strange it is that so early on, the line became such a marginal footnote in the overall story of the B&M. Take your time crossing it and appreciate all the lines and shapes the iron creates and imagine a small engine creeping across at five miles per hour simply trying to finish its work for the day and hoping the bridge will live on to see another one. A truly unique piece of history that continues to live on and defied the odds over so many years! Happy Explorations! - AR



B&M SW1 #1121 on train H-1 westbound crossing the Connecticut River at Northampton, MA - April 25, 1967.

Donald S. Robinson Photo - Walker Transportation Collection - BHS



Vignettes from the Archives



Above: Manchester, NH, July 10, 1953. Boston & Maine gas car #182 running as train No. 1511, adorned with pennants, has arrived in the Queen City with the last regularly scheduled passenger run over the Manchester & Lawrence Branch. **Below:** In a classic scene from 1952, B&M 2-6-0 #1497 prepares to depart North Station with train #3111. Preston S. Johnson images from the Preston S. Johnson Collection, B&MRRHS Archives.

