

# THE SYRACUSE BRANCH RAILROAD AND THE WOLF STREET UNDERPASS

## Around The City

The Daily Courier, Syracuse, NY  
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Completion of the New Freight Tracks Around Syracuse  
The First Train Over The New Road  
The New Tracks Accepted from the Contractors by Chief Engineer Chas. H. Fisher.  
The Laying Of The Last Rail  
A History of the Enterprise from its Conception to its Completion  
The Route Of The New Tracks  
On and After Monday Next all Freight Will Run Syracuse.

There has been a great deal of talk in the newspapers for the past two years about the new double freight tracks around Syracuse. The progress of the work of the construction has been noted from time to time, and various predictions have been made as to the time when the streets of Syracuse would be free from the vexatious freight trains that have for many years been a necessity, but a nuisance to our citizens. These predictions have at last become verified, the new tracks around the city are completed, and yesterday the first train passed over them.

Before noting this memorable event in detail, it may be of interest to describe the history of the new tracks from their inception in the brain of Commodore Vanderbilt, the Railroad King, to their completion by his trustworthy and capable agents. Two years ago Mr. Vanderbilt conceived the idea of constructing two new double tracks from Albany to Buffalo, which should be used exclusively for the freight business of his colossal roads. Mr. Vanderbilt at once proceeded to carry out his plans. The work of construction, &c., was entirely entrusted to his chief engineer, Mr. Charles H. Fisher, and to-day the double steel rail tracks are practically completed from Albany to Buffalo. As a part of this grand scheme of progress it was decided to construct

the new tracks around the city of Syracuse. The orders were given at once to purchase the land, and to proceed with the work of construction without delay. The company had already purchased a large tract of land, about five miles east of the city in the town of DeWitt, for the ostensible purpose of constructing cattle yards thereon. It is at this point that the new tracks diverge from the main line, at the station which is henceforth to be known on the time-tables as "DeWitt."

Having decided to construct these additional tracks, the company in April, 1873, employed Mr. James L. Bagg to purchase land on which to lay the track. In June, 1873, Mr. Bagg went to Europe, and Hon. Thomas G. Alvord having also been appointed by the company as their agent in the matter, proceeded at once to purchase the land necessary for the right of way.

The corporation name given to this belt road is the Syracuse Junction railroad company, although it is a part and parcel of the New York Central & Hudson River railroad company.

### THE ROUTE OF THE NEW TRACK

The first piece of property purchased belonged to Elijah Clarke, in the town of DeWitt,

adjoining the cattle yards. Hiram Macey's farm occurs next, then the Bogardus' estate, where the railroad crosses the James street road and the road leading to the Erie canal. Next the house lot of Henry Winne, then a piece of Josiah Tasker's property, comprising part of his race course, then Francis F. Allen's farm, then Wm. H. Avery's, then H. D. Denison's, then Peter Houghtalling's, then the estate of Joseph Breed, then Mr. Palmeter's farm, then the property of the estate of the late William Wheeler. On this land the track crosses the Syracuse and Bridgeport road. Then the line strikes Joseph Michael's and John Cheney's farms, entering the town of Salina at this point. The road then runs through the land belonging to the estate of the late Dioclesian Alvord, owned and occupied by seven or eight different individuals. The property is the town line. Leaving the Alvord estate the line runs through Mr. Overacker's farm in the town of Salina; then through Patrick Ford's farm, where it crosses the old salt road leading from the First ward of the city; then it strikes the lands of James Slatterly, Michael Pashler and James Hemmer, then the estate of Warren Gannet and L. Dippold at which point it crosses the Salina and Central Square plank road; then through the lands of B. A. Avery and Edward Oakes to the city line, between the city of Syracuse and the town of Salina. Then through the land belonging to William Savago and the estate of Ira A. Gilchrist, and then crosses the road leading from the Brewerton plank road to Bulkley (Buckley) road. At this point the track strikes the city and runs through the lands of Thomas Gale, and from there on to the lands belonging to the Salina Coarse and Fine Salt Company, and through the coarse salt lands of Hicock & Barry; thence through Thos. Gale's lands again, till it strikes the Liverpool level of the Oswego canal; crossing the canal it strikes the salt works of Patrick Cooney, and the estate of the late James P. Haskin, at which point it crosses the road leading from Salina to

Liverpool; through the lands of the estate of the late James P. Haskin and Clark & Alvord, to and cross the Syracuse Northern railroad; thence through the State lands, and across Onondaga creek; thence through the lake about four thousand feet, to the lands belonging to Harvy Stuart in the town of Geddes; thence through the late coarse salt field of R. N. & N. S. Gere to the lands belonging to the New York Central Railroad Company at the crossing of the Syracuse and Oswego division of the Delaware and Lackawanna railroad.

This completes the route. The average property purchased was about 120 feet in width, for which was paid from \$250 to \$1000 per acre. The property purchased was mostly farm lands. There was also some salt property purchased, and one whole salt field for \$25,000 from the Messrs. Gere. The whole account of the purchase from DeWitt to Geddes will reach \$126,000.

#### SURVEYING

As soon as the titles to the land has been secured, the matter of surveying and laying out the road, preparatory to ballasting and grading, was proceeded with at once under the direction of Chief Engineer Charles H. Fisher.

#### DENISON, BELDIN & CO.'S CONTRACT

After the ground had been surveyed the firm of Denison, Beldin & Co. took the contract of grading, masonry, trestling, fencing, etc. The contract was taken about June 1<sup>st</sup>, and work commenced soon after, and during the summer of 1873 they worked about one thousand men and teams. They first graded the ground for the now round house and freight yard at DeWitt, using a steam excavator and two trains of dump cars, with locomotives to do the hauling.

The road bed from DeWitt to the Brewerton plank road was easily constructed, the matrial

being earth, except in the out at Messina Spring, where rock was found. From the Brewerton plank road to the Oswego canal was required a heavy embankment averaging about twelve feet in height, which was formed from the sides. The space included between the Oswego canal and the Syracuse Northern railroad was trestle, the trestle resting on timber foundations, it being impossible to pile it, the material being too soft. This will eventually be filled in with earth. The road crosses the Syracuse Northern road west of the trestle, the latter road having been raised seven feet to make a practicable grade.

From the Syracuse Northern to the present track at Geddes is a high embankment over a mile in length, thirty feet wide on top, and averaging ten or twelve feet in height. This embankment is protected by a stone wall two feet thick, which extends entirely across the lake. The bridges of the new double tracks are all of iron, and are erected at the following points: Oswego railroad crossing, blast furnace, Harbor brook, new channel Onondaga creek, trestle from Syracuse Northern to Liverpool road, Liverpool road, trestle from Liverpool road to Oswego canal, Oswego canal, trestle from Oswego canal to Gale road, Gale road, Brewerton plank road, with two tracks underneath and two walks, Whisky Island road. Messina Springs, (two roads) two bridges.

The firm of George B. Phelps & Co., of Watertown, had the contract for laying the tracks and ballasting from DeWitt to the Oswego canal. From that point west to the Oswego railroad junction, Messrs. Lohb & Craigin had the contract. These gentlemen performed their work in a most thorough manner, and the tracks are splendidly constructed and ballasted.

#### THE PIONEER TRAIN

Yesterday morning Mr. Charles H. Fisher, Chief Engineer of the New York Central and Hudson River railroad, came to Syracuse for the purpose

of accepting the tracks from the contractors, and running the pioneer train around the city. At nine o'clock Mr. Fisher's private car with a passenger car attached was placed at the disposal of the guests who had been invited to accompany the pioneer train and witness the ceremonies of laying the last rail.

The passengers consisted of the following gentlemen:

Charles H. Fisher,  
Chief Engineer, New York Central and Hudson River railroad.  
George H. Barrows,  
Superintendent Middle Division.  
Lennder Gerry, Car Superintendent.  
A. L. Dick, Superintendent Telegraph.  
Messrs. Palmer and McCool,  
Assistant Engineers.  
Horatio G. Glenn, train dispatcher.  
William b. Kirk, Esq.  
Harmon W. Van Van Buren, Esq.  
John L. Cook, Esq.  
Josiah Britnull, Esq.  
M. J. Myers, Esq.  
Homer Williams, Esq.  
Charles Lohb, contractor, Buffalo.  
John D. Stone, Esq.  
Charles E. Wright, Esq.  
Frank Marsh, Esq.  
D. J. Halsted, Esq.  
S. G. Lapham, Esq.

Mr. Fisher had generously stocked his private car with refreshments, and was constant in his endeavors to minister to the comfort and convenience of his guests. The excursion train was drawn by Engine No. 154, Benjamin Stontenger engineer. It is a singular coincidence that this same engine took the first excursion train over Niagara Falls division twenty years ago. Superintendent Barrows who was then on the Western division of the Central road, had charge of the excursion train. The Mayor and Common Council of Rochester and a large number of prominent citizens accompanied the train. The engine was named the "Genesee."

## AROUND THE CITY

The distance from the depot to DeWitt, five miles, was quickly run, and the excursion train was halted to inspect the new station. Few Syracusans have a faint idea of the changes that have taken place in this vicinity since the work of building the new tracks commenced. On the north side of the main tracks the railroad company has constructed an immense yard covering over one hundred acres. The yard is over one mile in length and already over fourteen miles of side tracks have been constructed. There will be built twenty-five side tracks as necessity requires them. A huge engine house has been built in a semi-circular form, which holds twenty-two engines. This engine house will be completed in an entire circular form, and another just east of it will be built next year. Just east of the engine house is a large square brick building which is to be put to various uses. In the lower part is a large engine and pumps for pumping water from a running brook near by into the water tank. In the south end of the room are large oil tanks from which oil will be forced by pumps into cans, lamps, &c.

The upper portion of this house is to be used for sleeping rooms for engineers, firemen, etc. Next Friday evening the engineers are to inaugurate the rooms by giving a grand ball in the main room.

The excursion train was run to the east end of the new Yard, and the excursionists had a fine opportunity of gaining practical ideas concerning the manner in which freight trains are to be made up in future. All freight trains, excepting perhaps one local freight, are to run into this yard from both the east and west. The engines will be changed here, as will also the crews and conductors. Coal trucks, for loading engines, have been constructed. Telegraph offices and all necessary conveniences have

been established on the most approved and convenient plan for transacting business with efficiency and dispatch. Already, there are abundant signs that DeWitt Station will become a thriving place. Buildings are springing up rapidly, and in a short time hotels, boarding houses and stores will become a necessity. Building lots are in good demand, and even now bring large prices. After a thorough inspection of the yards, buildings and tracks at DeWitt, the excursion train started on its way around the city over the new tracks. The ride over the new tracks was a most enjoyable one. The day was lovely, and every one was in the best of spirits. As the train rushed by the farm lands, the farmers and their wives rushed out to see the first iron horse that had passed by their doors. As the train rushed through Salina large crowds gathered to see it. Just before the train arrived at the Northern railroad crossing, it was swung up by Superintendent Burrows, and the passengers alighted to witness the laying of the last rail. This work was quickly performed by John Schultz and some laborers, and the line from beginning to end was complete. After inspecting the breakwater at the head of the lake, the train proceeded on its way, and in a short time reached the Oswego and Syracuse junction, the point where the new tracks diverge from the main line. The excursion train was switched on the main line, and ran back to the depot in Syracuse. On its arrival several invited guests enjoyed the hospitality of Chief Engineer Fisher by taking dinner with him in Williams' dining rooms. The excursion passed off most pleasantly, and was thoroughly enjoyable from beginning to end.

## THE WORK ACCOMPLISHED

It is almost impossible to imagine the work that has been accomplished in laying the new double tracks in the short time that was elapsed since Mr. Vanderbilt gave Chief Engineer Fisher the order for their construction. Only two years ago

the land had not been purchased to lay them upon, and now the new double tracks are practically completed from Albany to Rochester. The work that has been accomplished is unparalleled in railroad history in the world. It is but justice to say that to Mr. Charles H. Fisher, the Chief Engineer of the Central and Hudson River railroad belongs mainly the credit for the prompt and early completion of the tracks. The entire work has been done under his immediate direction and supervision assisted by a competent corps of engineers, who have most faithfully performed the duties allotted to them. The new tracks have been constructed in the most thorough manner. The bridges are all of iron and the tracks, especially those around the city are in nearly as good condition as the main line. Mr. Fisher is quite a young man for the responsible position he occupies, but his difficult work of constructing the new tracks has demonstrated his superior capabilities, and entitled him to rank as one of the first engineers of the country. He has most capable aids in Messrs. McCool, Palmer and Lush, assistant engineers, who are also young men of great practical ability.

Our citizens will appreciate the blessing that is to befall them, in the running of freight trains around Syracuse. For years the freight trains have thundered along through Washington street, constantly blockading the cross streets and public thoroughfares. On Monday next, November 16<sup>th</sup>, the winter time-table on the Central and Hudson River road takes effect, and commencing at 5 o'clock in the morning all freight trains, with the exception perhaps of one local freight, will run around the city. Our citizens will hail with joy this consummative, so long wished for.

#### EARLY RAILROADING

In view of the mighty improvements that have taken place in railroading in this country in the

past few years, and especially in the Central railroad, it may not be uninteresting to give a few facts concerning early railroading in this city. The first railroad between Syracuse and Auburn was completed in 1837; between Syracuse and Utica in 1839.

The depot which formerly occupied Vanderbilt Square was completed July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1839. The structure was regarded as a magnificent one, and thousands came from all parts of the country to gaze upon and admire it. It was the largest railroad depot in the country, and much fault was found with the management for making it so large. The directors declared that it was a waste of material to build such a monstrous station house. The upper portion of the depot was used for the company's offices. There were gates on either end that closed up when trains passed in or out. On the Fourth of July, 1839, the company decorated the depot with flags, etc., and gave a free excursion from Utica to Syracuse, to enable people to come and see the new depot which was regarded as the wonder of the age.

Thousands embraced the opportunity, the city was thronged with strangers and the new depot was the centre of attraction. Hon. D. P. Phelps was the general ticket agent, continuing in that position eleven years. The rails in use in those days were the old strap rails, and many was the accident that happened by the curving up of a "snake head." Such a thing a freight train was unheard of at that time. John Wilkinson was President of the road, and farmers were accustomed to bring eggs, butter, etc., into Syracuse, in baskets which they took in the stage coach cars then in use. For a long time the farmers entrusted Mr. Wilkinson to put on a special car for carrying their produce. Mr. Wilkinson scouted the idea at first, but finally had constructed a short platform car, with a railing around it, for the farmers. The new car was brought into the depot and the people flocked to see it. "There," said Mr. Wilkinson, "I

guess that will carry all the freight the farmers can pile on it.” The enormous freight business of the Central railroad to-day, which has necessitated the construction of the new double tracks for its special transportation, shows that Mr. Wilkinson did not clearly foresee the future. In 1849 the double tracks between Syracuse and Utica were built, and in 1865 they were completed to Rochester. In 1868 the old depot was hauled down on Sunday morning, and for a year the trains stopped in front of the Everson block at Franklin street. The present depot was built in less than one year by Chief Engineer Fisher.

Truly, gigantic strides in railroading have taken by the last twenty years. Will the march of improvement continue in the future? The New York Central with its four tracks of steel rails is now the largest railroad in the world. It is the only road which has two tracks especially for freight business and two for passenger business. Its past has been prosperous – its future cannot but be so. It is an honor to the Empire State and a credit to the nation.