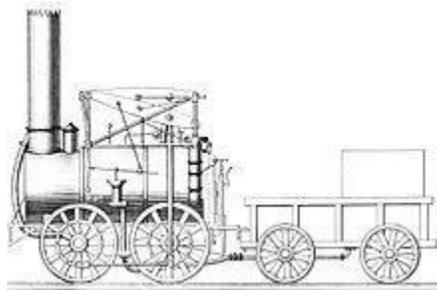


This Week in Saratoga County History

The Railroad Came to Malta

Submitted by Paul Perreault, August 20, 2020

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It is becoming popular to refer to our area as Tech Valley because of the nanotech facilities in Albany and Global Foundries in Malta. This is not the first time the Capital District was at the forefront of a technological revolution. In the early nineteenth century some of the nation's first railroads were built right here.

On April 17, 1826, the Mohawk & Hudson Corporation was chartered to build a line from Albany to Schenectady. When the M&H made its debut run on September 24, 1831, it became the first operating road in New York State and one of the very first in the country. By avoiding the slower part of the Erie Canal around the Cohoes Falls, the railroad gave Albany merchants a big advantage with the ever expanding western trade. Even before its completion, other entrepreneurs saw the advantage of running a line from Schenectady to Saratoga to provide the most modern mode of transportation for the fashionable summer visitors to the Spa. The Saratoga & Schenectady Railroad was incorporated in February, 1831 and by July, 1832 was running trains to Ballston Spa. Prior to constructing a bridge over the Kayaderosseras Creek, travelers at first continued on to Saratoga by stage.

Business leaders in Troy saw the opportunity to catch up to their commercial rivals in Albany by building a line from Troy to Ballston Spa. On April 14, 1832 the Rensselaer & Saratoga Railroad was chartered with a capital of \$300,000. Included in the charter was permission to construct a bridge over the Hudson which gave an important advantage to the Troy interest. The bridge connected Troy to Green Island and from there the line ran along the west shore of the Hudson to Waterford and then to Mechanicville (called Borough) and on to Ballston Spa via Malta.

In January, 1835 orders were placed for two locomotives (the Erie and the Champlain), eighteen passenger cars and twenty baggage cars. The passenger cars were twenty four feet long and eight feet wide. The exterior of the cars were painted a fawn color with buff trim while the interior of the cars were paneled and decorated with paintings of different scenes such as Napoleon crossing the Alps and portraits of important men of the age.

On August 18, 1835, completion of the line was celebrated with a special train of dignitaries, stockholders and officers who traveled from Troy to Ballston Spa where they all went to the elegant Sans Souci Hotel for food, drink and speeches. Regular service included two trains a day each way and cost \$1.00 from Troy to Ballston and an additional 25c for the trip on to Saratoga.

By purchasing other small, struggling lines, the R&S grew to 175 miles of road from its original 25 miles and exerted control over the upper Hudson and Champlain valleys. Such an attractive business caught the attention of the larger Delaware & Hudson and in May, 1871, a lease for \$750,000 a year in perpetuity was executed and the line became a part of the D&H empire. Although the right of way was abandoned in 1965, the road continues to serve the community as the Zim Smith Trail.