

Arterial Scrapbook No. 22



OPENED IN 1895 - When the New York Central overhead crossing was opened in the last month of 1895, the necessary traffic curve as noted in this photo was not considered cause for worry because their horse-drawn vehicles didn't go very fast. Elimination of the grade crossing that had been the scene of many accidents was considered a greatly needed modernization. The trouble was that the 18-foot clearance was not enough to

comply with a 1960 change in the Railroad Law. A legislative "sleeper" decreed that all railroad bridges must have a 21-foot clearance. That gave no end of troubles for highway engineers who finally ended by discarding both the railroad bridge and the present Mohawk River bridge. A modern arterial bridge still on the drawing boards is supposed to solve most of the problems. (Donlon)

Railroad Bridge, Due To Be Eliminated, Was Erected in 1895 as Safety Measure

By H. P. DONLON

The Bridge Street overhead crossing of the New York Central that came into use during the early part of 1896 resulted from a lot of accidents, some of them fatal, at grade crossings. Despite crossing gates and attendants, there were hazards—including Central and Hudson River engineers "who tore through the town."

One speeder, engineer Nathan Hagar, was doing between 35 and 40 miles an hour, on May 21, 1889, according to an estimate by Amsterdam police who went to Albany, placed Hagar under arrest and brought him back for a two-day trial a week after the arraignment. There were many witnesses for both prosecution and defense. Hagar maintained the train went through the city no faster than 20-25 miles an hour, but speeding had to be stopped so he was found guilty and fined \$25.

Talked From 1892

By Jan. 26, 1892, railroad officials and city officials were ready to talk solution of the grade crossing problem. Mayor William A. Breedon headed the city fathers and Board of Trade members and the transportation group had as spokesman General Manager John M. Toucy. The railroad would build the bridge and take care of property damage on the south side of the tracks. The City of Amsterdam would condemn and acquire needed Bridge Street property on the north side of the tracks.

The proposed railroad overhead was to clear the tracks at 18 feet. It would be necessary to raise the Mohawk River bridge from five to six feet on the southerly end and eight feet, four and one-half inches at the northern end.

New Station Too

The New York Central agreed to erect a new depot on the south side of the railroad tracks, directly opposite Railroad Street. (The passenger station was then on the north side of the track at the foot of Railroad St.) The new station would be reached by a foot bridge with stairway on each side. The Shuler property and a house owned by the railroad east of Bridge Street would be removed to provide a site for the new depot.

The court-appointed Bridge Street Commission did not get organized until Oct. 16, 1894. The commissioners were Andrew J. Nellis, Johnstown; Joseph B. Graham, Schenectady; and James B. Bailey, Tribes Hill who held sessions frequently until Jan. 30, 1895 when they arrived at determination that the redesigning and widening of Bridge Street between the Main Street corner and the new New York Central overhead was going to cause \$49,871 damages to abutting properties.

Supreme Court Justice Landon subsequently raised the damages total to \$51,171 when findings were confirmed on Feb. 26. (Original claims had totaled \$110,000). Heaviest damage, sustained by the Delos B. Lewis building (Kaiser-Boswell), was \$21,250. The West Main and Bridge Street corner structure, owned by Marie, Franklin and Antionette Toll, slated for demolition to accomplish widening, was damaged \$12,395. Demolition costs of \$125 for the Toll Building and \$500 for the Lewis property were allowed if the owners wanted to have the work done. Otherwise, the properties needed would be sold at public auction for removal by the purchasers.

On the east side of Bridge St., Harry and Melanie Luther (Segel Bldg.) were awarded \$1,000. Next south on Bridge was the Angelina Finchout property, the owner of which received \$5,400 damages. Owners of properties on an alley that paralleled East and West Main Sts. were given minor damages. Each member of the commission that made the awards received \$170 and the commission expenses over the three-months period amounted to \$51.40. Several tenants licked al-

leged financial wounds when the commissioners decided that they had no damages beyond inconvenience.

New York Central plans for the overhead were aproved by Mayor William St. Fisher and Engineer Crane on July 15, this with exception to the 18-inch side pieces that would prove attractive seats for bridge loungers. An iron railing was substituted.

The railroad overhead was pushed until Oct. 31 when non-arrival of some iron work sections presented complications. Traffic in the meantime was being detoured to the Railroad St. grade crossing, but the climb to the westerly end of the river bridge was a strain on two-horsepower wagons (there was no paved ramp at the time) and complaints were heard.

Opened Dec. 18, 1895

A temporary wooden bridge was opened on Bridge St. on Dec. 18, 1895, and the planked road was covered with cinders by Contractors Grattan & Jennings. One of the Herrick coal trucks was the first vehicle to cross the overhead that was three feet higher than the river bridge. The Railroad St. grade crossing was closed. Work of making a fill for the southerly end of the overhead was started.

Buildings along Bridge St. next to the new overhead lost their ground floor as fill was made on the north side, toward Main, and former second floors became ground level for the new and steep grade from the busy corner to the new railroad crossing. Widening eliminated the former William A. Donnan Store, No. 2 West Main St., and the David Straus wholesale grocery became the new corner. There was a sharp curve involved in connecting the improved street with the new railroad bridge, but nobody complained. In the horse-and-buggy era, there was no hurry.