

Arterial Scrapbook No. 47



SUBWAY TO GO - The subway beneath the New York Central Railroad tracks at the foot of Railroad St. will have been in use for more than 65 years when its entrances are blocked and buried beneath the eastbound lane of the arterIALIZED Route 5, while the new Mohawk River bridge will tower far above the

intricate pattern of highway connections. During recent years the subway has been a conversational piece only when a complaint was being registered against its condition. All properties on the south side of the tracks are to disappear. (Donlon)

Arterial Will Erase Subway, Object of Campaign in 1898

By H. P. DONLON

It took \$1,000 and six years of fighting to accomplish the underground passageway from the foot of Railroad Street to the New York Central passenger station. When the barriers were removed on Jan. 31, 1901, Amsterdamians dashed through the new subway all but unmindful of the fact that the new facility had not been painted and was still without lights.

Amsterdam traffic problems of the otherwise Gay 90's were not very different from those of the present in that many factors were involved. Construction of a new Central-Hudson Railroad (that was the official title) station on the south side of the tracks — the "depot" had been for years on the north side, at the foot of Railroad Street — raised one very troublesome question. As put in the Dec. 4, 1894 issue of the Daily Democrat it read:

"Will the proposed new passenger station have more than one entrance from the north side of the tracks?"

In to - whom - it - may - concern phrasing, the Democrat continued: "In the opinion of many there should be both a foot and a driveway entrance to the grounds from both Bridge and Railroad Streets. As far as can be learned, it is the intention of the railroad company to have but one carriage entrance, and that through Bridge Street."

Prententious Plans

The plans of 1892 were recalled, and reminder was given that "There will be an overhead crossing for pedestrians at the foot of Railroad Street" had been among the pledges. "Now there is talk that the present crossing to the gas house is to be closed and to reach the gas company's plant it will be necessary to cross the tracks at the foot of Walnut Street.

"As is generally known, the new railroad station is to be erected on the east side of Chuctanunda Creek on a site now occupied by a tenement house owned by the railroad."

Community day-dreaming was reflected in the hope: "It is be-

lieved that the company intends to erect an arcade with passageway for pedestrians through the center, or small stores on either side. A crossing for carriages should be constructed from the foot of Railroad St., thus reaching the east end of the new station," the Democrat commented.

Around and About

The years passed. Finally, on Nov. 1, 1898, the new Amsterdam passenger station was opened — without safe crossing of the tracks at Railroad Street for man or beast. The overhead bridge had failed to materialize. The railroad company had erected fences around the former Railroad Street crossing in accordance with agreement with the Common Council. The only entrance to the new station was by way of Bridge Street.

Four days after the station opening, the Democrat was crying: "Let it be built." The community petition had changed from an overhead for pedestrians to a subway for pedestrians. There was no answer to the complaint.

The solution lay in political pressure and on Oct. 3, 1899, less than a year after the new station had been opened, the Common Council had revoked agreements of the city, made two years previous. The aldermen were now insisting that the action of the previous council had been illegal. The city was still interested in the lower end of Railroad Street. Railroad fencing had to come down.

The Old Squeeze Play

When the New York Central sensed that a court battle was in store, Mayor Samuel Wallin was invited to New York City for a conference with President S. R. Calloway.

They met on March 14, 1900, and the Amsterdam mayor returned home to inform the council members that the Central would construct a subway as requested and "make it ample in size and convenient in every detail."

It had been estimated that cost of the subway would be about \$6,000 and the railroad had

originally insisted that the City of Amsterdam pay one-half the cost. The final offer was that the city would put up \$1,000. The mayor suggested an appropriation in the amount, and the aldermanic assent was unanimous.

Work on the subway was started in June of that year and the railroad crew had completed the concrete passageway with steps at both north and south ends by the end of January, 1901. Tarred paper had not been placed over the concrete roof, gravel had not been spread along the tracks, the subway had not been painted and there were no lights in the tunnel, but there was safety from the trains. Vehicular traffic could go around Bridge Street.

Full Power — No Money

Some of the "finishing touches" were added during the following months but one decree of the council went unheeded. This was a resolution adopted at the last meeting in November, 1900: "Resolved, that a committee of five besides the mayor be appointed to arrange with the NYC & HRRR Co., for the erection of a suitable tablet in the subway at the foot of Railroad Street, and that the committee have full power in the erection thereof."

A half century of wear and tear on the 1901 subway left little cause for community pride, and protests about the condition of the passageway increased as railroad station users decreased. In recent years, many pedestrians have preferred the risks of crossing the tracks between trains to going underground.

Specific treatment of the problems has not been disclosed in arterial talk but it seems likely that the big dirt movers will be blocking both ends of the subway soon after the railroad station has been removed. The nostalgia will be as small as the \$1,000 that the City of Amsterdam paid for 65 years of use of the tunnel.