

Arterial Scrapbook No. 54



QUITE A STATION IN ITS DAY - The Amsterdam passenger station of the New York Central was cause for community pride when the mayor of the city stepped up to buy the first ticket at this window on Nov. 1, 1898. Adding to the previously unheard of facilities for travelers were the "ladies parlor" and "ample quarters for the baggagemaster," a position of importance during the years when rail travel attracted more patrons.

Among the furnishings still causing comment are the radiators in the middle of the floor. The old depot was doomed from the time the arterial engineers failed to provide access to the south side of the railroad tracks. The new Mohawk River bridge will be constructed high above the present station site, and elimination of the overhead crossing and present bridge will cut off the area along the river. (Donlon)

RR Depot, Now Outmoded and in Way, Was Show Place When It Opened in 1898

By H.P. DONLON

The New York Central & Hudson River Railroad station that was opened on Nov. 1, 1898, was a source of great pride to the community — "an elaborate building of which Amsterdam may well be proud, and considerably larger than that at Schenectady," the Evening Recorder called to attention when the plans were announced.

\$60,000 Edifice

The builder was W. J. Gillette of Syracuse, and the cost was \$60,000. Several local contractors were contacted by the railroad company, including H. C. Grieme, John J. Turner, Orville B. Terwilliger, Martin J. Serviss and Dennis Madden, before the Syracuse construction offer was accepted.

"Plans for the station fill 10 sheets," the press announced as details were disclosed. "The front elevation gives a view of the handsome structure 113 feet in length. A platform 300 feet in length will extend along the front, or north side of the station and will be 12 feet in width, while the rear platform will be six feet wide.

"The building is to be of pressed brick with terra cotta trimmings. It will be lighted throughout with electricity, more than 100 lights being used. The chandeliers will be of a combination order, for use of either gas or electricity. The building will be heated throughout with steam and the plumbing will be of a first class order," the announcement read.

Shortage of Electricity

Subsequent developments brought a change in the lighting plan. Strange as it may sound, local firms producing electricity didn't have an output large enough to take care of the railroad needs for the new station. Gas was piped in from the next door neighbor, the Chuctanunda Gas Light Co.

"The man waiting room is to be commodious and will be located in the west end of the building. In the center and at the front is to be the ticket agent office and telegraph of-

fice," the description was continued as came the big "feature."

"On the north side will be a new feature in depot construction — a ladies' parlor which will have a lavatory connected with it. On the south side will be another feature to be much appreciated — a smoking room for men. Between these two apartments, will be a corridor leading from the main waiting room to the baggage room, at the east end of the building. Here the baggagemaster will have ample quarters, with another entrance at the east side.

"The main approach will be from Bridge St. and in the rear is to be a covered carriage way. The old station is to be torn down, and upon its site is to be an overhead foot bridge," informed The Recorder as its readers were given a Dec. 24, 1897 preview of the new railroad station.

Dates From 1898

It was about a year later, on Nov. 1, 1898, that Amsterdam's Mayor Westbrook stepped up to the ticket window in the new station, opened that morning, and bought the first ticket — to Albany and return.

The new building fulfilled all expectations, except that the chandeliers with 100 electric lights were not in evidence. Neither was the overhead foot bridge. Another two years were to pass before the dangers of crossing to the new station via rails and ties were eliminated — and then not by an overhead but by a subway.

Selection of sites has always been — and still is — a railroading problem. Before decision was reached to build the 1898 station on the south side of the railroad tracks, there had been lengthy debate.

When the first wood-burning engine of the Utica & Schenectady Railroad Co. hauled open passenger cars through the Mohawk Valley in 1836, the number of customers did not immediately warrant construction of train-waiting facilities. But in due time they came and an 1852

map of Amsterdam shows a combined passenger-freight station on the south side of the tracks at the foot of Railroad St.

According to early railroad tradition, many rail travelers availed themselves of the hospitality of "The Railroad Hotel," later "The Commercial Hotel," located on the north side of the tracks on Railroad St. (The present Evening Recorder parking lot.)

First Station in 1868

Amsterdam's first passenger station was a brick building on the north side of the tracks, constructed in 1867 and opened the following year as the railroading business expanded following mergers that brought about "The New York Central & Hudson River Railroad" in 1853.

The 1867 station served for about 30 years during the period of rapidly expanding railroad facilities and the 1898 passenger station was part of planning that included 1895 construction of the Bridge St. overhead and the ramp leading to the new station. All resulted from planning started in 1892 when the complex was proposed.

So came the then new passenger depot that with the passage of nearly 60 years has in turn become outmoded and standing in the way of both progress and the new arterial bridge across the Mohawk.

The station was quite a building in its day, a day when the New York Central was picking up and discharging passengers at Cranesville and Hoffmans on the east and Akin (Fort Johnson) and Tribes Hill on the west. Dime and quarter fares were welcomed, and frequent stops for the convenience of a couple of passengers were not looked upon as a hardship on either the railroad or the traveling public. Both have undergone considerable change since Nov. 1, 1898.