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— HISTORY —

## Air Line railroad had dramatic impact on the region

A direct railroad connection between New York City and Boston was not completed until 1873, when the section of the line being built from New York City reached Willimantic, which had been connected directly by rail to Boston since 1868.

The Air Line railroad had a dramatic impact upon Willimantic's economic growth, and it impacted a number of small towns along its route in different ways.

The line's locomotives were steam driven, and sparks flying from the locomotive's stacks often caused forest fires, and set crop fields alight. Just seven years after the Air Line's completion, an Air Line locomotive almost destroyed downtown Andover.

On June 30, 1880, the Boston express, while speeding through Andover at 11:45 a.m., dropped sparks on the roof of the Andover railroad depot. The small station building, was covered with old shingles, and was as dry as tinder. Within minutes giant flames were engulfing the depot. Employees of the New York and New

England Railroad Co. bravely rushed into the burning station in an attempt to save railroad property, and succeeded in removing the railroad company's books, telegraph instruments, parcels, freight and the U.S. mail as Andover's post office was located in the depot.

The blaze spread cinders around the small town, and the Webster House Hotel, which stood directly opposite the depot, caught fire. The railroad company's tenement house, occupied by a Mr. Hall the station agent, and buildings belonging to L. D. Post were also on fire in several places.

The water from the depot's tank was hosed onto the Webster house, and neighboring wells were pumped dry to save the other buildings.

Local people from around the town assisted railroad employees



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to fight the many fires. Many risked their lives by bravely approaching the flames.

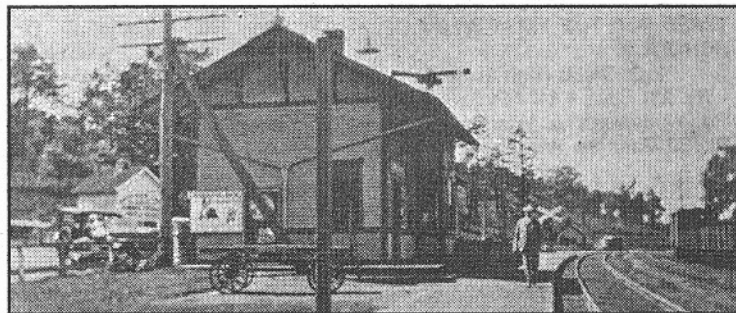
Capt. Hutchinson's expansive barn, and several dwelling houses caught fire, but teams of women carrying water in chains were able to extinguish the flames. Just as it seemed the fires had been doused, a new alarm was given.

L. H. Porter's large house was burning. It was about a 100 yards from the depot and had also suffered from the locomotive's flying cinders.

A large force set about the fire and extinguished it, but while this fire was being fought, it was discovered that Porter's barn was also on fire.

The flames had gained such headway that it was impossible to extinguish them and the barn was burned to the ground. Then W. N. Cleveland's barn was found to be on fire, but was promptly extinguished.

Had the Webster House or Post's building burned, then Andover's main street would probably have been totally destroyed. As the



The Andover railroad depot pictured in the early 1920s.

flames were being fought the 12:50 p.m. train to Boston was held up at Andover for an hour, and the passengers, porters and engineers joined the locals in fighting the fires. There was also a court in session. Justice Phelps adjourned it and everyone left the court to combat the flames.

The Andover selectmen sent a request to the New York and New England Railroad Co. and asked it to place new netting in the smoke-stack of engine No. 2, which had set the fire. The same engine had set fire to the Andover depot two weeks previously, and had also set

seven fires on the section between Andover and Bolton in one day.

It was an eventful summer week in Andover in 1880. The previous day Leonard Lathrop was thrown from his mowing machine and badly cut his ankle as he fell onto the knives. Two days earlier, George Ray, a teamster in the employ of Charles Pixley, slipped from a load of hay and was badly injured.

He fell between the horses and frightened them. The lead horse ran into Edward Reed's carriage, and its occupants were thrown into a ditch.