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ing done at the museum, residents and visitors will be readily reminded of the area's rich railroad heritage.

Willimantic's rapid 19th century growth is linked directly with the arrival of the railroad in 1849. This new connection with New London meant that the slow, laborious job of hauling cotton in massive, four-wheeled carts from the ports of Norwich and New London to feed the village's nascent textile industry, was over.

A small wooden railroad depot was hastily erected that year, and stood near where the railroad bridge today crosses Route 32. This was replaced a year later by a more substantial wood and brick structure, which sufficed for almost thirty years. The poor state of that particular depot, considering the town's rapid expansion, became a favorite target for local newspaper editors during the 1870s.

Willimantic's rapid urban expansion, from the days before the railroad arrived, was reflected in the fact, that in 1887, an entrepreneur from New York City, Joseph Stahl, proposed to build a horse-drawn railroad in town to connect the area around Recreation Park, to the area around the cemetery, with a branch line going up Jackson Street. This ambitious scheme was abandoned, as borough officials had just invested over \$200,000 to construct a badly needed sewerage system in town. However, lined urban public transportation arrived some sixteen years later, in 1903, when the Willimantic Traction Company introduced electric trolleys to Main Street that eventually connected Willimantic with South Coventry, Windham, Lebanon, Franklin, Sprague and Baltic.

A few years after the opening of the rail depot, Willimantic had developed into a highly important center of the New England railroad network. A commercial pamphlet, published by the New York-New England Railroad Company in 1886, pointed out to prospective travelers that Willimantic was

"... a town of importance for every surrounding indicates, and the building on every side betoken, a busy hive of industry. It is a railroad centre being crossed from east to west by the main line of New York and New England, and New London Northern Roads, and the terminus of the Providence Division of the New York and New England, and of the Air Line Division of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Road."

A year later, the *Connecticut Home*, a prohibition newspaper, published in Willimantic, boasted that the town received "... no less than 39 passenger trains each day, more than Norwich, New London or Middletown. Willimantic is the coming city of Southern New England."

The Providence, Hartford and Fishkill had arrived in town in 1853. This was followed by the Boston, Hartford and Erie line in 1872. By the mid 1880's, passengers could travel the Air Line, or the shortest route between New York and Boston, through Willimantic.

I came across the following account regarding the first-ever rail trip out of Willimantic by accident — often the case during research. I was seeking information about the area's early textile industries, when I unearthed a rare surviving

copy of an old local newspaper entitled *The Willimantic Public Medium*, which gave an eye-witness account of the first public railroad journey from Willimantic to New London on Monday, November 22, 1849.

It is a delightful example of 19th century writing and social mores and deserves to be reproduced in its entirety. A stylish local scribbler, 142 years ago, described the momentous, historic event thusly:

A general invitation having been given to our citizens to take a free ride over the railroad to New London on Monday last, at an early hour the village was all astir. The morning was damp and drizzly and the weathercock gave notice of a stormy day. Wishing to see the fun, if not go with the crowd, we went to the railroad near Colonel Jillson's.

An interesting company of men, women and children, beau belles and babies were assembled, huddled in groups anxiously awaited for the carts, some with umbrella but more without, some with trunks and carpetbags going on a journey free, gratis for nothing without paying a cent. Others with little children in arms and lots of boys uproarious with mirth and excitement, joyously anticipating their first ride on if not in the cars.

All were very good natured for such a blue Monday and fun, frolic, noise and laughter abounded. Soon the whistle was heard. "Hurrah" shouted the boys, "the cars are coming, the cars are coming. Cheers, shouts and screams mingled with the squealing of children and blowing of steam as the crowd made a perfect rush for the cars. Children were run over and tumbled down helter-skelter, hats knocked in, bonnets smashed, clothes torn, and amid noise and confusion crowding, jostling, pushing, elbowing and shouting, people endeavored to get in first.

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