

Railroads in hudson valley region

[History](#)



In 1853, the New York Central Railroad was organized to consolidate 10 railroads that paralleled the Erie Canal between Albany and Buffalo. Cornelius Vanderbilt won control of the New York Central in 1867 and combined it with his New York and Hudson railroads running from Manhattan to Albany. The railroad helped boost the population and travel to this region. The freight trains carried mainly iron ore, animals, and dairy products. Dairy, lumber, mining, and circus businesses in Putnam County benefited from the new mode of transportation. Trains helped carry heavy material for these businesses including both raw and processed materials. The railroad also dispersed large quantities of material that could not be used locally. Initially, farmers were against the development of the railroad as the train tracks frequently ran through their property. They feared the danger this posed to their animals, the loss of prime low lands, and the damage to their crops by soot and smoke. Opposing farmers were soon convinced of the economic benefit of the railroad as it further opened the New York City market to their goods (Carson 43).

The opportunity for growth encouraged Gail Borden to open a milk condensery in Brewster in 1863. The Borden factory became a major employer for the area. Close to 80, 000 quarts of milk were condensed daily with finished products sent, via railroad, to New York City. The railroad helped in the growth of local mining interests, most notably the Tilly Foster Iron Mine. Previously, the expense of transporting the iron ore to the blast furnaces in Pennsylvania where steel was produced hindered the rapid development of the mine. The railroad was instrumental in the development of the Croton Water System in the 1890s. It made it easier to bring supplies and materials for construction of the aqueduct, dams and related facilities.

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The railway also employed many engineers, brakemen, firemen, and mechanics. For example, there were 15 to 20 stalls for servicing engines and a turntable in Brewster (Drury 89-91).

The system grew until it had 10, 000 mi (16, 000 km) of track linking New York with Boston, Montreal, Chicago, and St. Louis. Through the late 19th and early 20th centuries the railroads in the United States became very powerful, and with power came political interests and economic abuses. The Federal government, as a result, started to heavily regulate the railroads, including freight rates and passenger ticket prices. Government regulation and the coming of the airplane and automobile led to the decline of the railroads in the 20th century. The airplane could move passenger traffic quickly, eliminating the need for long-distance trains with sleeper cabins. As roads were built, especially with the creation of the federal interstate highway system, America embraced the travel independence offered by the automobile. World War II had provided a brief resurgence of the railroads as gasoline and rubber were rationed, and trains were once again needed to move people and freight for the war effort. But the decline continued as the country and its economy recovered from the War (Carson 165, 166). In 1968 the New York Central merged with its chief competitor, the Pennsylvania Railroad Co., to form the Penn Central Transportation Co. The merger failed, and the railroad was forced into bankruptcy in 1970. Its passenger services were taken over by Amtrak in 1971, and its other railroad assets were transferred to Conrail in 1976. The farms of the Harlem Valley became suburbia, and the dairy farms turned into housing subdivisions. The Harlem Division was now reduced to a commuter line. However, it had a large impact on the development of the region (Drury 123-128).

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