

Railroad Extended From DeKalb Jct. To Hermon First to Serve Stella Mines

By H. F. TIMMERMAN, Supt.

Early in 1905 it was learned that Stella Mines located between DeKalb Junction and Hermon, at that time closed down, were to be reopened and operated under new management under the name of St. Lawrence Pyrites Co. At that time I was employed by the New York Central railroad company as chief clerk at DeKalb Junction in charge of accounts.

Felix A. Vogel was general manager of the St. Lawrence Pyrites Co. He got in touch with me and outlined the movement the Hermon people were promoting. That was to have the existing railroad from DeKalb Junction to the mines extended into Hermon. Before he committed himself, he wanted to know if there would be traffic enough to warrant the extension.

He asked me if I would go over our records for the past three years and give him the amount of traffic received that was destined to Hermon. Russell and DeGrasse and also the amount delivered to our station from the above towns to be shipped out.

I compiled this data and gave it to him. Shortly after that I obtained leave of absence and went to the Pacific Coast and was not in touch with developments until I returned and went back to work for the NYCRR at Adams.

L. A. Boyd, superintendent of the A. & St. L. R.R., phoned me asking if I would meet him at DeKalb Junction the next morning. I did so. We rode locomotive No. 1 to the mines and walked over the right of way that had been obtained for the extension into Hermon. He told me that the road had been incorporated under the N.Y. State Railroad Law, April 19, 1906, as a common carrier and included land purchased from Frank Glasby for yard sidings and station. He planned to build the extension yard and sidings at Hermon, DeKalb Junction and mines, in time to open the road for traffic January 1, 1907.

Construction

To do this he would put on another construction gang and wanted me to take charge. When this work was completed, I was to set up an accounting system for the railroad and interchange with the N.Y.C. at DeKalb Junction and also take the agency at Hermon.

I accepted and obtained leave from the NYC and supervised building the extension and yards at Hermon. When Mr. Boyd completed the yard sidings at DeKalb Junction, we consolidated both gangs to construct the sidings at the mines and mill. We worked ten hours per day seven days per week. We had general good weather, but during November and December we worked some rugged days and encountered some frost the latter part of December.

During the intervening time the station at Hermon was completed and I had the accounting

system set up. As soon as the main line was finished into Hermon, I shipped my furniture. The car containing it was the first car ever to arrive at Hermon by rail.

The last week in December was very cold and as Mr. Boyd was a Southerner, he contracted a severe cold and took to his bed. As soon as he was able to travel, he resigned and returned South.

Mr. Vogel appointed me acting superintendent, and before the road was formally opened, superintendent-in-charge of all departments, and I retained the position until the road suspended operation.

However, in spite of cold, frost and snow, the day before Christmas at noon the last tie and rail was laid and the last spike driven (an iron spike, not gold plated).

Formal Opening

Before the road was formally opened, we ran several passenger trains out to DeKalb Junction and return, giving all who wished a free ride. We had a full load every trip. I think we carried more passengers that day than any day while the road was operated.

Mr. Vogel felt like celebrating. He asked Mrs. Timmerman to get a committee of Hermon women to canvass the town and invite everyone to a free dance to celebrate the completion of the road. He would hire Mixes Hall and an orchestra. The ladies cooperated, the hall was jammed. Mrs. Webb Mix kept the punch bowl filled. I think the punch was plenty potent as everyone seemed in a happy mood. Even the older people were dancing like teenagers.

The road was formally opened for traffic January 1, 1907. We ran round trip passenger trains and one round trip freight train per day. Our equipment consisted of Locomotive No. 1, one combination coach, ten box cars, one flange car, 20 bottom dump ore cars and two side dump tailings cars.

When we suspended operations we had added another 66 foot combination coach and three more Baldwin locomotives. This additional motive power was necessary to take care of increased business and have one locomotive in reserve. To house them, we had to build another locomotive house.

Although the traffic we were handling when the mines got going full capacity and other freight far exceeded our estimate, due to the short haul, the rates for freight and passengers we were permitted to charge were restricted by law. We were operating with a small net profit, but if faced with a costly accident or repair bill, our surplus would be wiped out. The solution was to obtain more traffic and thus more revenue.

Milk Haul

The surrounding territory was a heavy milk producing section. This milk was manufactured into cheese, and several carloads were

delivered to our station each week while factories operated. We knew if the milk were delivered to us in fluid form, our revenue would be many times greater, so we began to work on that angle.

However, there were several factors to be considered, the supply of milk, a suitable location and building, and a milk shipping company to sell the idea to. The price fluid milk shippers were paying in other sections exceeded the price farmers received from cheese, and fluid milk could be sold the year through giving the farmers a steady income.

We had a suitable location and building in the vacant wagon shop situated on the west bank of Elm creek which would furnish ample supply of water. This property was owned by James Brown and Louis J. Knox.

I obtained an option on this property, went to New York city and interested the Mutual Milk & Cream Co. They sent men up to check into the matter. They took up the option, installed necessary equipment, contracted for a supply of milk, and started shipping fluid milk to New York city. This gave us a substantial increase of revenue.

Other Traffic

Other traffic began to develop. Late in 1911 we leased land to R. J. Fairbanks & Sons. Early in 1912 they built a feed mill and coal silos. We built a track from our main line to their buildings. Mr. Phillips leased land on this track and built a maple syrup storage building. The Wayne Lumber Co. purchased a large timber tract a few miles south of Hermon, built a mill, and shipped the lumber from Hermon station.

Another good break with substantial revenue I contracted with Frank Augsburg, general manager of the DeGrass Paper Co. at Pyrites to furnish tailings from St. Lawrence Pyrites Co. mill to fill trestle approaches to their bridge spanning Grasse river. We delivered each day for three months, three 80,000 hopper bottom dump gondolas to NYCRR at DeKalb Junction, which they picked up and delivered to the paper company siding at Eddy. This was a good deal all around: the St. Lawrence Pyrites company saved expense of drawing tailings to their dump; and our road and NYC enjoyed substantial revenue; and the paper company got material for their fill at lower cost than any other method.

Thus, our efforts to obtain more traffic began to pay off and our earnings improved. Edward Burnam put bus service on between the town and station, carrying passengers and express. Thomas Hamilton ran a bus line from Russell carrying passengers, mail, and express. This new business not only benefitted the railroad, but the town and surrounding section as well. The farmers had more money, the merchants sold more goods, and the feed dealers, more feed.

Milk Business Changes

The various changes in the milk business, if told in full, would make a good sized book, and I

will briefly outline only the things that directly affected the railroad.

After operating a couple of years, the Mutual sold out to the Northern Condensed Milk Co. who enlarged the building to their needs, installed up-to-date condensing equipment, and contracted for a larger supply of milk. When World War I started in Europe, they sold out to the Hires Condensed Milk Co. (a subsidiary of Hires Root Beer Co.)

Hires increased the capacity of the plant and purchased several cheese factories, used them for receiving stations, and trucked their milk to the condensery, which increased their milk supply. Hires purchased a right of way for a spur track from our main line to their plant.

We went into the market for used steel rails for this spur track, but found all available rails had been earmarked for shipment overseas, practically cornering the market. However, they missed enough to let us by.

The Potsdam Stone Quarry near Hannawa Falls had suspended operation. We purchased steel rails from their tracks from the Merrett Estate, took them up, and trucked them to the highway. Tim Snell had his big trucks pick them up and delivered rail side at Potsdam. We loaded them on flat cars and shipped them to our yard at DeKalb. That took care of the rail situation for Hires spur.

However, there were ties needed. We only had an emergency supply that could not be spared. I contacted the NYCRR Co. They told me they had a tie crew up in Quebec inspecting and loading ties, and there was a quantity of ties that did not meet their specifications, but would answer our purpose. I went to Riviere du Loup, Quebec, and contacted Mr. Crockett, the tie contractor. He took me up to his camp 23 miles on the Timiscouata railroad. I inspected, branded, and purchased ten carloads of cedar ties. When they arrived, we built the Hires spur track which enabled us to shift to their plant carloads of coal, sugar, cans, and boxes.

After the U.S.A. entered World War I, Hires sold out to the Nestle Food Co. They enlarged and improved the plant and contracted for more milk. We handled one carload from Rensselaer Falls and one carload from Heuvelton every day. Nestle shipped their condensed milk to England. Some of it reached there and some did not.

During operation we had the following employees: Office and station, Wright Davidson, Claude Gates, Jay Rudd, Glenn French, Stanley Dygert, Henry Kenney; engineers, William Tull, Dan Clark, George Babcock, George Whetmore; conductors, Charles Lephart, Edward Rerick, Jay Rudd.

The section and tool house was in DeKalb Junction yard with a section gang of from seven to ten men. Alton Foster was foreman, B. E. Jones, N.Y.C. & A. & St. L. railroads, joint agent, DeKalb Junction.

We continued successful and profitable operation through the

See below center

remainder of the war and up to February 12, 1921.

When because of the shutdown of the St. Lawrence Pyrites Co. and Nestle Food Co. condensery, the railroad suspended operation. All rolling stock was sold. Tracks and bridges removed in 1924 and 1925, and the corporation was dissolved on September 23, 1927. *

Before closing this article, I would be sadly amiss not to state that in bringing the railroad and condensery to Hermon, we had unstinted cooperation and support of the people of Hermon and the community at large.

I was very sorry to have the railroad, the St. Lawrence Pyrites Co. and the condensery suspended operation. I think that was the

general feeling of all the Hermon people, as everyone enjoyed good business from the above industries while they were operating. When they closed, the value of village property declined, and many people had to leave and seek work elsewhere. But those

who remained carried on and adjusted themselves to the changed conditions. There still was a very large and prosperous farming community to serve, and Hermon is still a thriving, bustling community and a good place to live.