

OLD COLONY RAILROAD

Duxbury Clipper, Thursday, February 21, 1974

(A recent editorial of the Vineyard Gazette discussed the possible reactivation of passenger service to Cape Cod. Here is an old newsclip that sheds light on the first run of the Old Colony line. -- Ed.)

In 1845 the Old Colony railroad was opened for business with a run to Plymouth. The train consisted of an engine and 3 coaches, the latter having doors on the sides instead of on the end as now. Arriving in the historical town, a chowder was served in Plymouth Hall to 400 guests. Here is an account in the Boston Advertiser written in 1895:

"The road and all the machinery being new, the train proceeded at a moderate pace, stopping at all the way stations to take in the gentlemen who had been invited to join in the excursion. The route passes through Dorchester on the sea coast border, crosses the Neponset River near its mouth, passed the villages of Quincy and South Weymouth, Center and South Abington, a portion of Hanson, a corner of Halifax and

(From a recent issue of the Vineyard Gazette.)

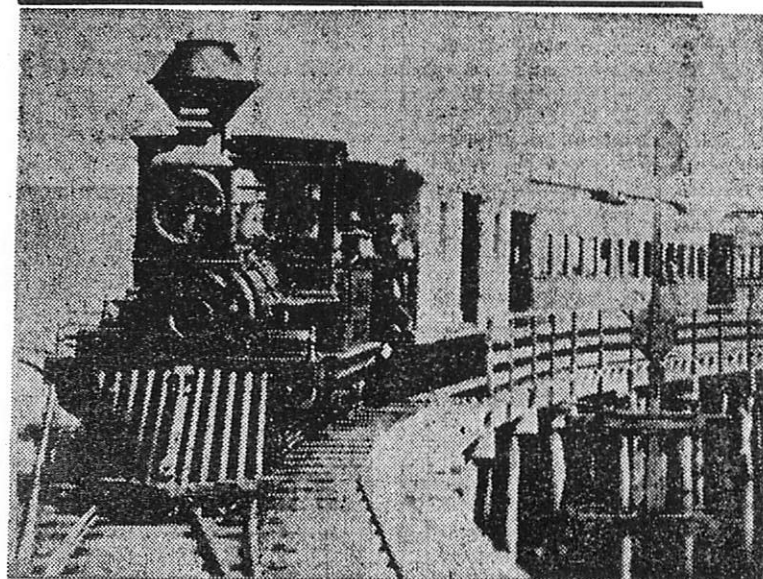
Last Train

In 1959, the last passenger train to roll through Cape Cod stopped in Hyannis, and the 65 miles of track that had linked travelers from New York and Boston with the summer havens of the Cape, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket for 113 years fell silent, except for the rumble of an occasional freight train.

Now, legislators are trying to get the trains rolling again on Cape Cod, as the prospect of gasoline shortages threatens to cut tourist traffic to areas of the Northeast not reached by mass transit.

"Rail travel would be a considerable convenience to people coming to the Island, and might help trade otherwise hurt by the shortages," said Daniel Hull, executive secretary of the Martha's Vineyard Chamber of Commerce. Environmentalists applaud the idea of a train hook-up because, many say, it would probably lessen the number of cars brought to the Island."

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There may be a train around the bend in the Vineyard's future—as there was in her past. The Active (above) ran from Oak Bluffs to Katama until 1896.

the village of Kingston to its terminus, Court St., in Plymouth, a distance of 37 miles.

"The route as far as Quincy and Braintree is pleasant, but from the latter point on is uninteresting. The track, with the exception of a small portion where the work is not finished, was in excellent order. The depot buildings at the way stations are yet unfinished.

"The work was completed at a cost less than the capital of the company, which is \$1,000,000. This is the 7th of the main lines of railroad that now radiate from Boston as a common center, measuring in all their branches more than 800 miles in extent.

"Said one passenger later: "Going up the grade from what is now Quincy Adams, at that time Braintree, the locomotive was unable to pull the train and some of us were obliged to get out and help push the engine and train up the slope. First, we detached the engine and pushed that up the grade, then we took the cars and gave them a lift up the hard place, and that was the way in which we helped along the first trip over the new railroad.

"We went along all right then until we came to Kingston, 4 miles from Plymouth, and here we found that the bridge was not completed. The engineer did not dare to run the cars over the road heavily loaded as they were, and so we got out and pushed."

The Pennsylvania Central railroad has a legal right to use all of the track which still exists between Boston and Cape towns, and the road is eager to chug from Boston to Buzzards Bay if tracks are cleared for comfortable passenger transit. Frank Keefe, manager of the railroad's New England passenger service, said the initiative and the money to repair the tracks would have to come from the Cape and Islands before Penn Central would begin working on the system.

Penn Central is one of 7 bankrupt railroads scheduled to receive as much as \$3 billion in federal aid as a result of a bill signed into law by President Nixon. There will be a 2-year study of the railroads before any action comes out of the grant.

The line may be included in federal plans to set up one large northeastern railroad network from the scattered remains of the 7.

The run would go through Hyannis, Barnstable, Sandwich, Bourne, Bridgewater, Middleboro, Brockton, and Buzzards Bay. Hook-ups by train or bus would be investigated for Falmouth and Woods Hole.

A meeting at the South Station in Boston the other day brought some 40 selectmen, town managers and other officials together with representatives of the Penn Central to discuss the possible resumption of railroad passenger service. The Penn Central men said they had no objection to passenger service to Cape Cod

and, with an obviously necessary subsidy, would be willing to undertake it.

The meeting, therefore, was described as encouraging. The subsidy, which in other times might have seemed a hopeless requirement, is not at all out of bounds in the present revision of the national attitude toward transportation. There is still some hard work to be done to get the passenger trains or even the old Budd cars operating again, but the goal makes hard work worth while.

As things now stand, service could be restored only as far as Quincy, since the Dover street bridge, burned out many years ago, has never been restored. And the condition of the road bed and tracks needs looking into. Freight trains operate at only 8 miles an hour, and the Penn Central men thought a speed of not more than 20 miles would be immediately practical for passenger trains. No one knows how much is involved in getting the tracks in shape for 50 to 60 miles an hour.

The Vineyard fought to the last to retain passenger service and has never been completely reconciled to the loss of either Boston or New York trains. Restoration of service would mean an alternative to the appallingly heavy automobile traffic of recent years, an alternative many Vineyard passengers would avail themselves of gladly, and the whole effect would be a great gain for the Island.