

## The Railroad 1873 - 1956



*This easterly view of the Marshfield depot shows engine #5 headed for Montpelier sometime around the turn of the century. The photo below was taken in 1913. This building was much less substantial than the one which preceded it (following page).*

“In 1869 the town raised \$17,500 by bonding and \$12,500 more by private subscription toward the construction of the Montpelier and Wells River Railroad. According to the original survey the railroad would have run directly from about where Patty’s Crossing is north of Lord’s Hill directly to Niggerhead Pond. In this plan the station would be about 2 miles from the village. Strenuous objection from the town however induced the builders to swing the track around through rocky Loveland’s Ledge (a hard place to build a railroad) and bring the station to within a mile of the village.



“The first train ran through on Nov. 29, 1873. About 2 years later a telegraph line was laid along the route of the railroad. For many years, before the advent of the telephone in town, there was a private telegraph from the railroad station to the store now owned by Frank E. Brown.

“In 1867 the town voted to give a right of way for, and to pay land damages in behalf of, a proposed Montpelier – St. Johnsbury Railroad, but it was never constructed. In 1873 a railroad was proposed and the route surveyed that would connect Hardwick and Cabot with the Montpelier – Wells River Railroad at Marshfield, but this was never built.”

-- Pitkin’s *History of Marshfield*

“The railroad of course changed the life of the town. There were four passenger (mixed) trains a day. You could send to Montpelier by a friend, or go yourself to buy from more select merchandise. There were 4 mails a day. I rode the train home from Goddard (trolley car to Montpelier) every day one fall. My father hired different people to drive me to Barre in a car but two mornings Alva Shaw took me with his spirited horse and buggy.

“When my mother was small, the women and children rasberried at the gravel pit, along the track and got back to the station to sell their berries to the train man at 3 cents a pound for shipment to Boston.

“Butter of course was shipped to Boston in 5# boxes as well as the 1# blocks.” --Mrs. Helen (Prouty) Tracy, 1976



*This view of the depot was an early one, showing the first building on the site which was nearly identical to the station in Plainfield Village. On the flatcar on the lefthand track is a steam boiler, perhaps destined for a nearby mill. The buildings at left are barns belonging to William Pitkin or Marvin Dwinell or both. These two men married sisters, Elvira and Maria Bemis, daughters of Abijah and Harriet (Pitkin) Bemis who settled nearby.*

“The railroad has a sharp grade as it goes around Lord’s Hill. In the 75’s the engines burned wood, and instead of being numbered they were lettered in big gilt letters *W. A. Stowell* or *D. R. Sawtell*. These and some other people were the ones that ran the railroad. We always remember the way the sparks would fly out of the big flaring smokestacks at night when they were pulling freight cars loaded with cattle, hogs and lumber. Once a week they had a butter car to take the butter to Boston.

“In the 75’s and 85’s the ‘gravel pit’ that was a part of District No. 11 was a busy place. Much of the gravel that was used for ballast on the Montpelier and Wells River railroad came from there. A woodshed a hundred feet long was where the engines wooded up. Farmers could draw all the four-foot wood they could cut. The railroad would pay them for all they could deliver. It was a year around job for someone with a saw rig to cut this four-foot wood into sixteen inches. The engines would burn it about as fast as the fireman could throw it into the fire box.

“It was in 1873 that the first train went over this road that added so much to District No. 11. Long side tracks at the gravel pit where twenty or thirty flat bottom cars would draw gravel all summer to make the fills in the railroad which at that time had a lot of temporary trestles. The cars were loaded by hand. The shovelers were as thick as they could stand and work, the whole length of the train. There were not signs ‘Men Working,’ but there was a boss walking the length of the train that saw to it that the shovels were kept busy until the cars were loaded. Then he would yell, ‘Clear off the rails and get aboard.’ . . . Then they would all get aboard and ride to the place where the work was being done. The workmen lived in the box cars on the job and were called ‘Contract Labor.’

“Several saw mills shipped hundreds of cars of lumber from the gravel pit, surplus rails and ties were stored there. Farmers would have carloads of sawdust come to the gravel pit from some of the steam lumber mills located on this railroad.

“There was never any station house there, but trains would stop to take or leave passengers. All the business was handled at the Plainfield Station. This gravel pit that is so plainly seen from King’s Hill was a busy place at the time of this story.”

-- Bert Herman Townsend, writing on the history of District 11 in Marshfield in 1943