

RAILROADS IN ACTON

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW ENGLAND TOWN

The Acton Historical Society
The Friends of Bedford Depot Park

October 27, 2018



Acknowledgements

- Bill Klauer, Acton Town Historian
- Lisa Soo, Acton Historical Society Archivist
- Bill Davies, Friends of the BFRT
- Boston and Maine Railroad Historical Society Archives, Lowell
- Boston and Maine Bulletin
- The writings of Ronald Dale Karr, especially *Lost Railroads of New England*

Presentation Outline

Overview of Acton's Early History and Industry

The Fitchburg Railroad

The Marlborough Branch from South Acton

The Framingham and Lowell

The Nashua, Acton, and Boston

Historic Sites in Acton Along the BFRT

Overview of Acton's Early History

- Acton and its geology – glacial activity and till leaves rocky soil.
- Native Americans and migratory pathways, seasonal settlements, and river system transportation (Assabet, Sudbury, and Concord rivers)
- Two defining waterways: early settlements on Fort Pond Brook and Nashoba Brook
- An independent town in 1735, from the Concord Settlement and 600-acre Iron Work Farm grant (South Acton)\
- Role of Acton's Minutemen in the Revolutionary War – Isaac Davis
- Agricultural Development – Apples, hops, livestock, and mills (grist, saw, forges) to support the rural economy

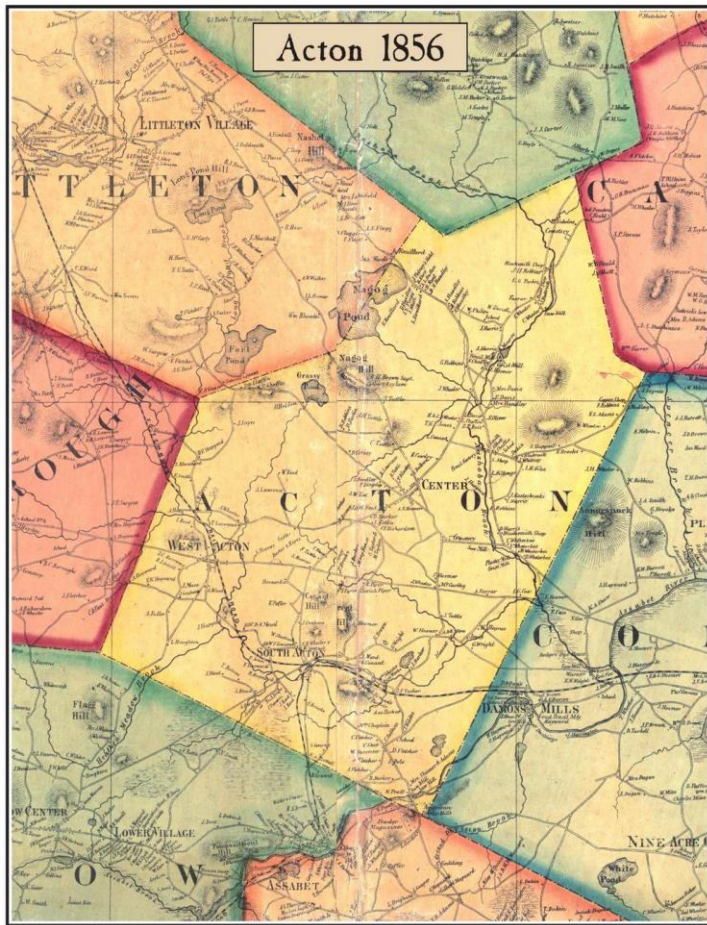
The Seeds for Early Industrial Development

Two Major River Systems for Mills

- Nashoba Brook (North and East Acton)
- Fort Pond Brook (South and West Acton)

Railroad Service for Industrial Development

- Fitchburg Railroad (South and West Acton)
- Framingham and Lowell and Nashua, Acton, and Boston (North and East Acton)

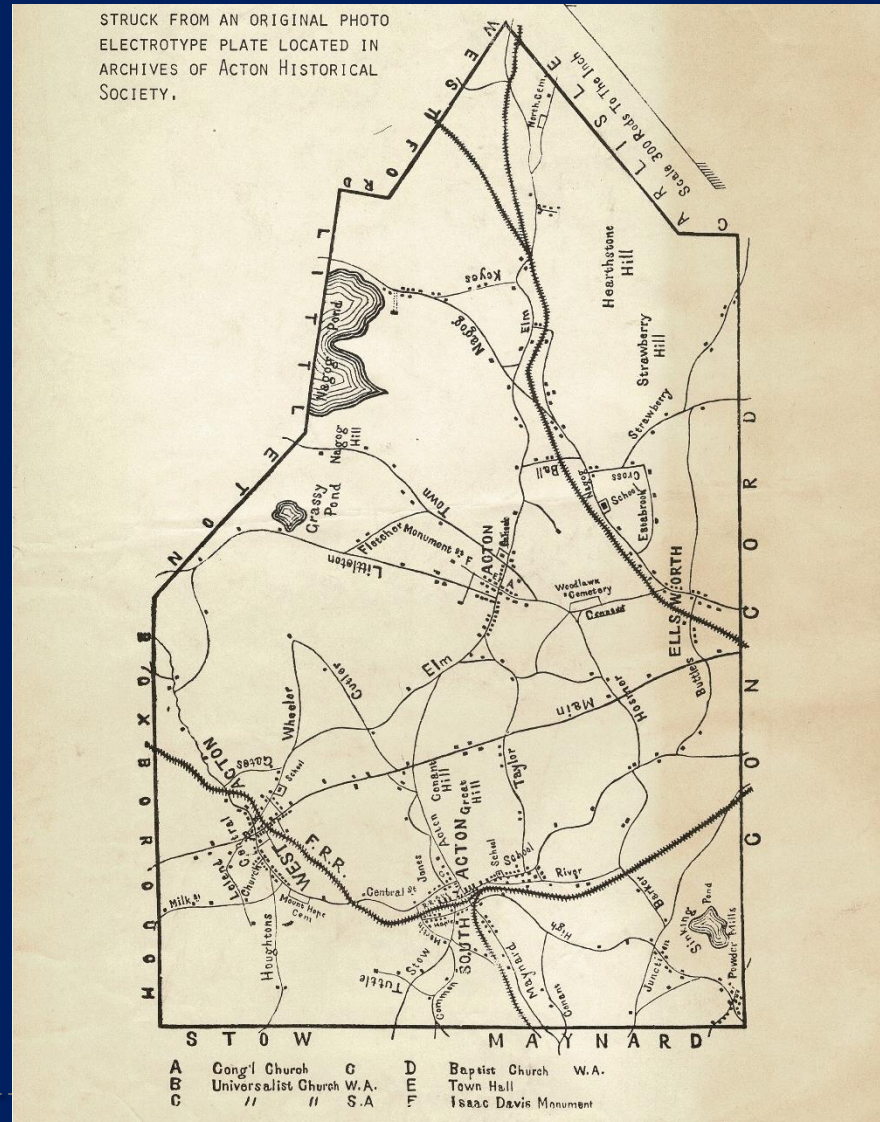


South Acton Woolen Mills 51 River St.

Bringing the Railroads to Acton

- Earliest New England railroads in 1830's were Boston and Lowell, Boston and Providence, and the Boston and Worcester
- Acton's merchants and leaders were supportive of railroad access to their area.
- Faulkner and Wetherbee were state legislators and wanted their mills served by the railroad. Bradley Stone was another railroad promoter – had a real estate business in West Acton
- Route through Acton Center on Main Street voted down – Fitchburg routed through South and West Acton

Acton in 1875 – Four Major Rail Lines

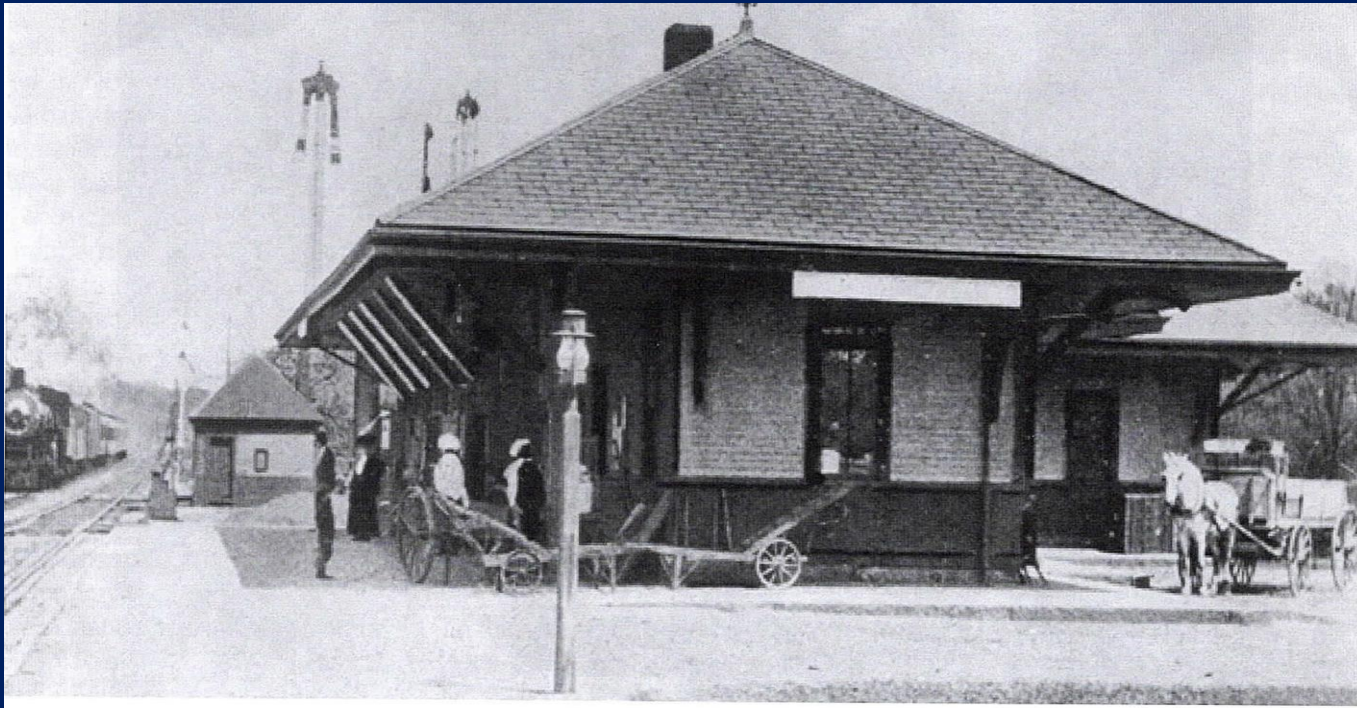


The Fitchburg Railroad

- Incorporated in 1842 between Boston and Fitchburg
- Extended operations through Hoosac Tunnel into Vermont and NY. Leased to Boston and Maine in 1900
- Came to South Acton and West Acton in 1844. At its peak employed about 30 local Acton residents as crossing tenders, operators, station agents, and section gang members
- Shipping goods to Boston used to take a day each way by wagon.



The Fitchburg Railroad

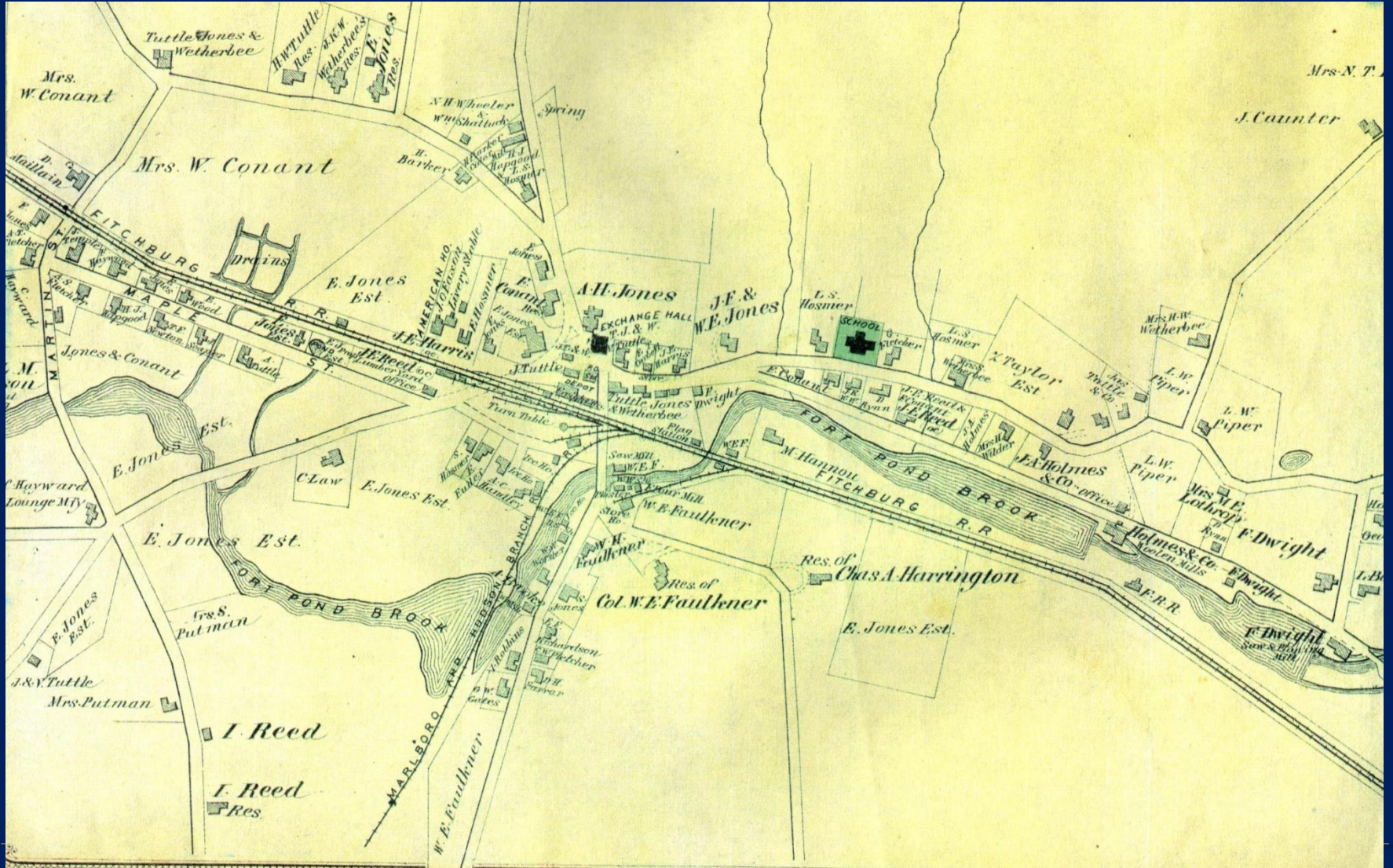


Concord Junction (West Concord) Station
Built by the Fitchburg Railroad 1894

The Marlborough Branch

- The Lancaster and Sterling Railroad was chartered in 1846 to service those towns from West Acton. It was acquired by the Fitchburg Railroad and the charter was changed.
- Connected South Acton to Hudson in 1850. The Marlborough Branch Railroad opened in 1852 to connect Hudson south to Marlborough.
- Made South Acton a major junction and service point on the Fitchburg. A turntable and engine house in South Acton serviced trains well into 1900's
- Passenger service from Marlborough ended in 1932. The section between Maynard and Hudson was abandoned in 1943. Passenger service to Maynard via the Fitchburg mainline in South Acton ceased in 1958. The line was formally abandoned in 1979

South Acton



South Acton Station

- Currently the busiest station on the Fitchburg Line
- First station built in 1845. Moved to Jones Farm and used as a fire station after new station built in 1902. This station burned in 1984 and was torn down
- Had a two-stall round-house, turntable and engine house



Early hand-colored postcard of Marlborough branch train at South Acton station in 1911

The South Acton Crossing



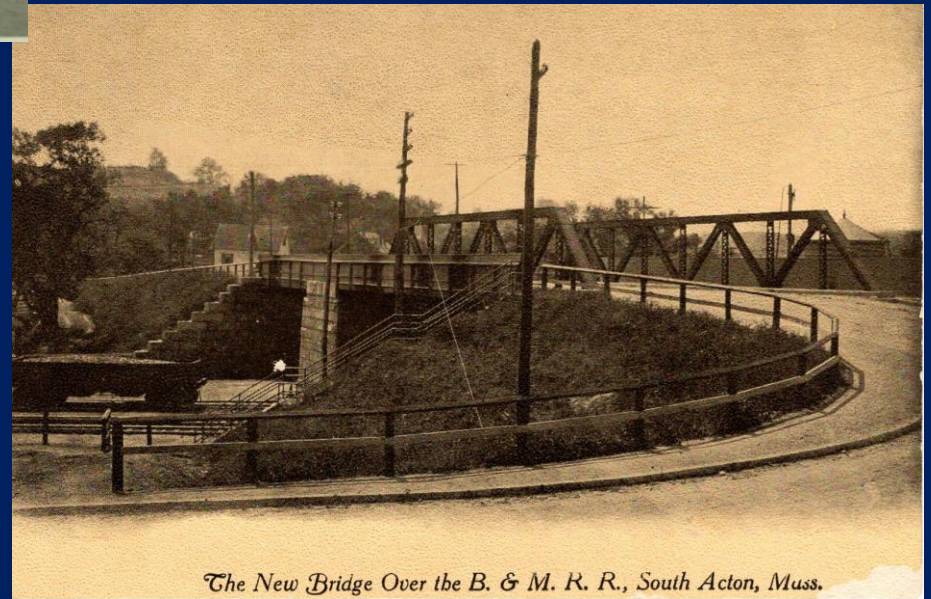
Stow Street crossing with 1902 station in middle background

The South Acton Crossing



Pre-bridge grade crossing.
A danger to pedestrians and
traffic

South Acton railroad bridge built
in 1895, renovated in 1979,
rebuilt in 1995



The New Bridge Over the B. & M. R. R., South Acton, Mass.

The South Acton Station



Built in 1902, 4 years before the bridge

Sold in 1960 to a private owner. Attempts at development stalled.

Looking west towards Main Street Bridge



The South Acton Station



Burned the day after Christmas 1984



A LANDMARK DESTROYED — Acton firefighters extinguish the remaining flames after the fire that destroyed the old South

Acton train depot the day after Christmas. (Photo by Ray Valley)

The South Acton Station



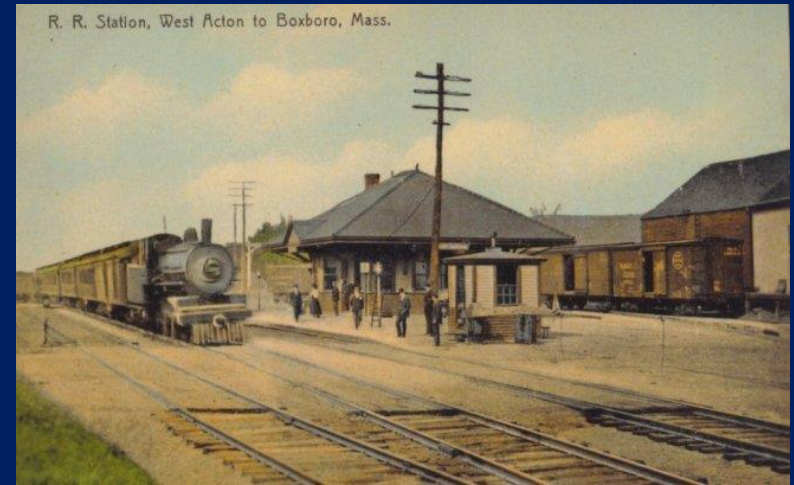
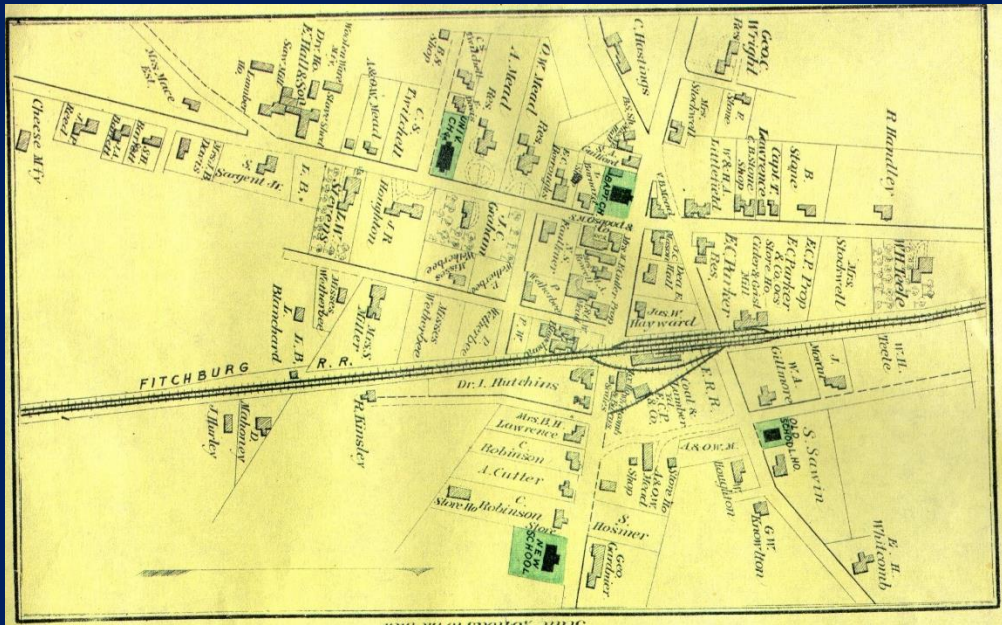
After station burned in 1984 an asphalt platform
was built further west

The South Acton Station



New Acton station opened in 2015

The West Acton Station



West Acton station closed in 1930's and demolished in 1960's

The West Acton Station



West Acton station looking east along Mass. Ave (Route 111)

The West Acton Station



Site of former West Acton station near where
New London Pizza is located

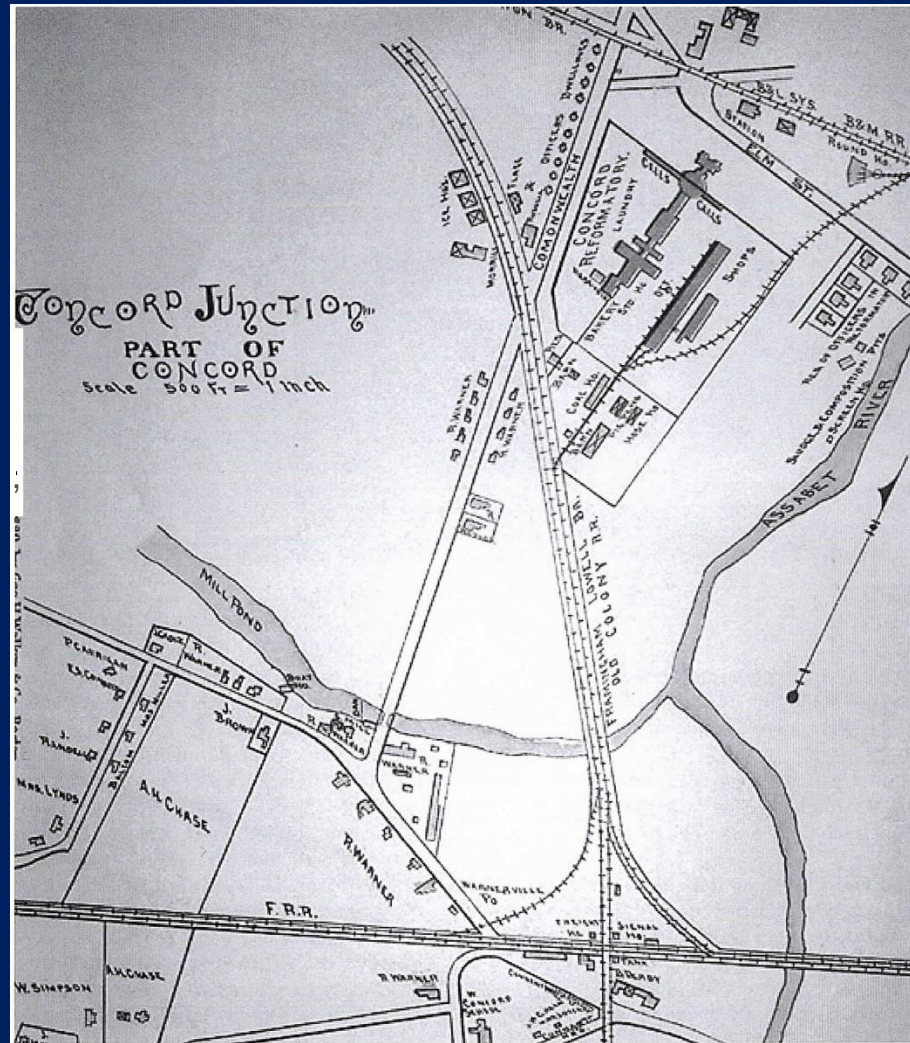
The Reformatory Line

- 2.6 mile Boston and Lowell 1879 extension of Boston-Lexington-Bedford-Concord line connecting from Lowell St. in Concord
- Chartered as the Middlesex Central Railroad to serve the State Prison (now MCI Concord) and in 1884 the Concord Reformatory
- Opened in 1879, passenger service ended in 1926, freight ended in 1962



The Reformatory railroad station on the Middlesex Central line was opened in 1879. Visitors to the prison could eat and spend the night in this building located to the east of the main prison, facing the Assabet River. The station house was razed when the bypass connection to the Mohawk Trail was built.

Middlesex Junction



Middlesex Junction
off the map at upper
left where the
Reformatory Line
intersects with the
Framingham and
Lowell

Middlesex Junction

- Located west of Route 2 rotary near Reformatory cemetery
- Connected the Nashua, Acton, and Boston with the Boston and Lowell Reformatory branch line
- Built by Boston and Lowell to compete with Nashua and Lowell for freight traffic to Boston. Closed due to complicated Nashua, Middlesex Jct., Bedford, Boston route
- Built 1879, out of service by 1887, abandoned around 1900, tracks removed around 1914

The Framingham and Lowell (F&L)

- Chartered in 1870 to connect Framingham rail hub to Lowell mills
- 26 mile line through Sudbury, Concord, Acton, Carlisle, Westford, and Chelmsford
- Many merger, lease, and transfers involving Old Colony, New Haven, Penn Central, Conrail, CSX
- Passenger service ended in 1935
- Freight service to several customers up to the 1980's



The Framingham and Lowell (F&L)

SOUTHWARD.		LOWELL AND FRAMINGHAM CENTRE.				OLD COLONY DIVISION.				NORTHWARD.	
Distance from Lowell	STATIONS.	Distance between Stations	6031 6109		6033	Distance from Framingham	STATIONS.	Distance between Stations	6030 6104 6032		
			Ex. Sun.	Sun. only	Daily				Ex. Sun.	Sun. only	Daily
			1st Class Passenger	1st Class Passenger	1st Class Passenger				1st Class Passenger	1st Class Passenger	1st Class Passenger
			A M	A M	P M			A M	A M	P M	
0.00	Lowell (B. & M. R.R.) N	0.00	6.18	7.18	5.10	0.00	Framingham	0.00	7.50	8.50	6.30
0.57	Lowell (B. & M. Junc.)	0.57	6.20	7.20	5.12	2.01	Framingham Ctr.	2.01	s 7.58	s 8.56	s 6.36
3.87	Chelmsford	3.30	s 6.26	s 7.26	5.18	2.20	Conduit	2.20			
6.31	Byams (South Chelmsford)	2.44	s 6.30	s 7.30	5.23	4.39	Nobscot	0.18	s 8.02	s 9.00	s 6.40
8.95	Carlisle	2.64	s 6.34	s 7.34	5.28	6.61	Middlesex	2.22			
10.69	Westford	1.74				6.75	South Sudbury	0.14	s 8.07	s 9.05	s 6.45
10.83	North Acton	0.14	s 6.38	s 7.38	5.32	8.29	Sudbury	1.54	s 8.11	s 9.09	s 6.49
13.18	Acton	2.35	s 6.43	s 7.43	5.36	10.19	Raymond (North Sudbury)	1.90	s 8.15	s 9.13	s 6.53
15.08	Concord Junction N	1.90	s 6.48	s 7.48	5.41	13.65	Concord Junction	3.46	s 8.21	s 9.19	s 6.59
18.54	Raymond (North Sudbury)	3.46	s 6.54	s 7.54	5.47	15.55	Acton	1.90	f 8.25	s 9.23	f 7.03
20.44	Sudbury	1.90	s 6.58	s 7.58	5.51	17.90	North Acton	2.35	s 8.30	s 9.28	s 7.08
20.30	South Sudbury N	1.54	s 7.02	s 8.02	5.55	18.04	Westford	0.14			
21.98	Middlesex	0.14				19.78	Carlisle	1.74	f 8.34	f 9.32	f 7.11
24.34	Nobscot	2.22	s 7.07	s 8.07	6.00	22.42	Byams (South Chelmsford)	2.64	s 8.39	s 9.38	s 7.17
25.52	Conduit	0.18				24.86	Chelmsford	2.44	s 8.44	s 9.43	s 7.22
26.72	Framingham Ctr. N	2.20	SA 7.11	SA 8.11	SA 6.04	28.16	Lowell (B. & M. Junc.)	3.30	8.51	9.47	7.27
28.73	Framingham	2.01	7.20	8.20	6.10	28.73	Lowell (B. & M. R.R.)	0.57	8.53	9.50	7.30
	Arrive		A M	A M	P M		Arrive		A M	A M	P M
	Note references						Note references		H	H	H

H Will make flag stop at Lowell Yard Office to let off employes.

The time shown at Framingham is for information only.

Timetable from 1926

East Acton Station

- No photos of original station. This was the freight station later used as the passenger station
- Also known as Acton Station – Built in 1870 and torn down in 1938
- In the early 1900's, up to 18 F&L trains a day scheduled. NAB had up to 6



Notice two sets of rails F&L in foreground

East Acton Station



East Acton Station (located near Concord Rd.)
Notice NAB early powered speeder

East Acton

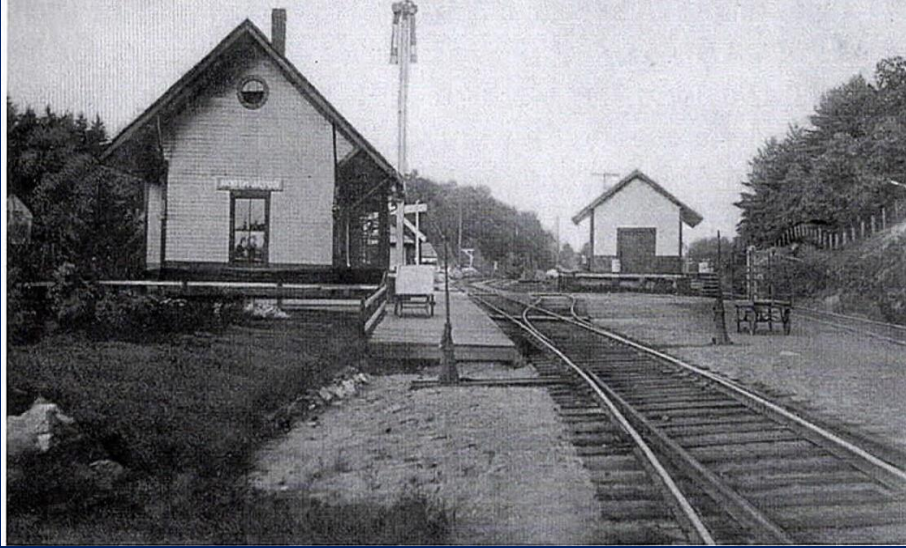
- Was a small commercial area that developed thanks to the railroads



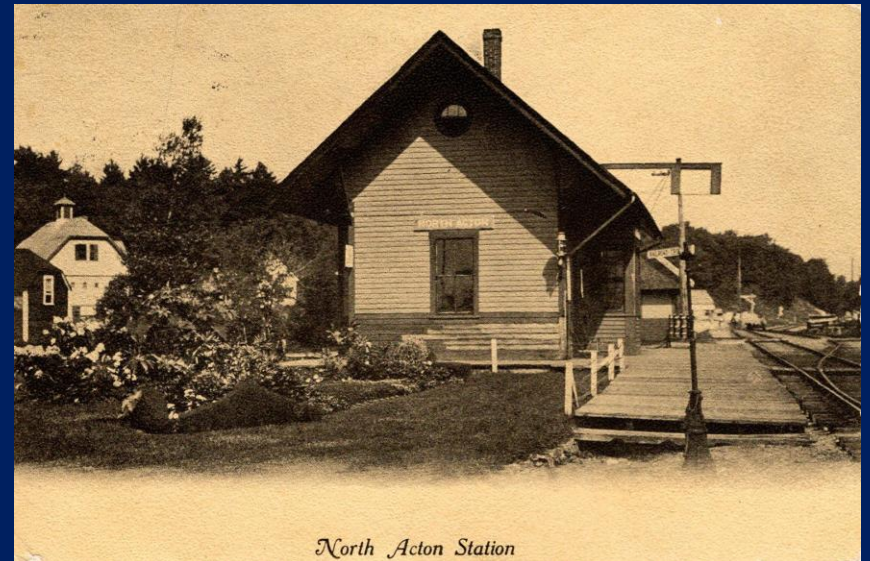
The Old Mill, East Acton, Mass.

Joseph Robbins Saw Mill on Concord Road

North Acton Station



- Built by the NAB. Down from Acton Monument company at end of Harris St.
- Opened 1873 Buildings and cattle pen between rails - F&L line on right



North Acton Station

End of the Framingham and Lowell

1090-A

RAILWAY EXPRESS AGENCY 86.347
INCORPORATED
SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND DIVISION
EXPRESS BUILDING—UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, R. I.

H. A. HANSON,
SUPERINTENDENT

April 26, 1933.

Agents:

North Sudbury,	Mass.
Nobscot,	Mass.
Sherborn,	Mass.
Acton,	Mass.
Chelmsford,	Mass.

DISCONTINUANCE OF TRAIN SERVICE
CLOSING OF OFFICES

In view of the discontinuance of all train service by the New Haven Road, between Mansfield and Framingham and Framingham and Lowell on April 30th, we are left without any means for transportation of express matter; therefore, it becomes necessary to close our office heretofore maintained in your town, and you will please notify what few patrons we now have, of the intended action.

For your information, beg to say, that shipments for the offices given below will be handled on and after Monday next through the offices indicated opposite their name.

Sherborn, Mass. - To be handled at Framingham
No. Sudbury, Mass. - To be handled at South Sudbury
Nobscot, Mass. - To be handled at Framingham
Acton, Mass. - To be handled at South Acton
Chelmsford, Mass. - To be handled at Lowell

A Route Agent will call at your office on Monday or Tuesday next for the purpose of cleaning up the final reports, and making disposition of such equipment as you may have.

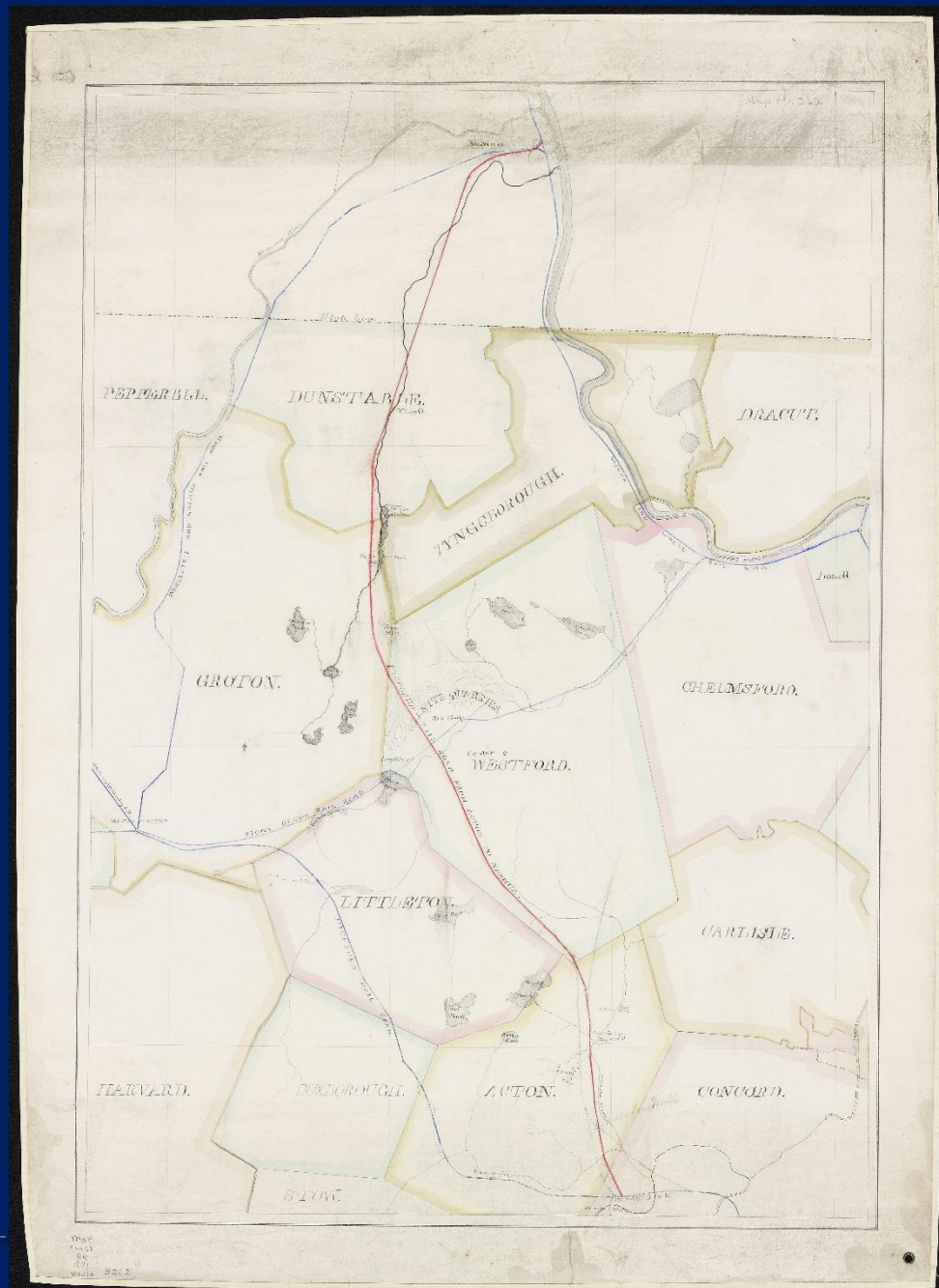
H. A. Hanson

CC:
Mr. Candage
Mr. Thomas

The Nashua, Acton, and Boston

- Service from 1873 – 1926, abandoned in 1927
- Was nicknamed “The Red Line” because it continually lost money
- 24 miles and 6 stations from Nashua to Concord Junction (West Concord)
- Chartered (Daniel Wetherbee and John Fletcher of Acton were incorporators) to compete with the Boston and Lowell RR and link northern New England to New York without going through Boston
- Also provide access to New York ferries from Fall River/New Bedford (Old Colony Railroad)
- Single track along side of Framingham and Lowell from North Acton to Concord Junction

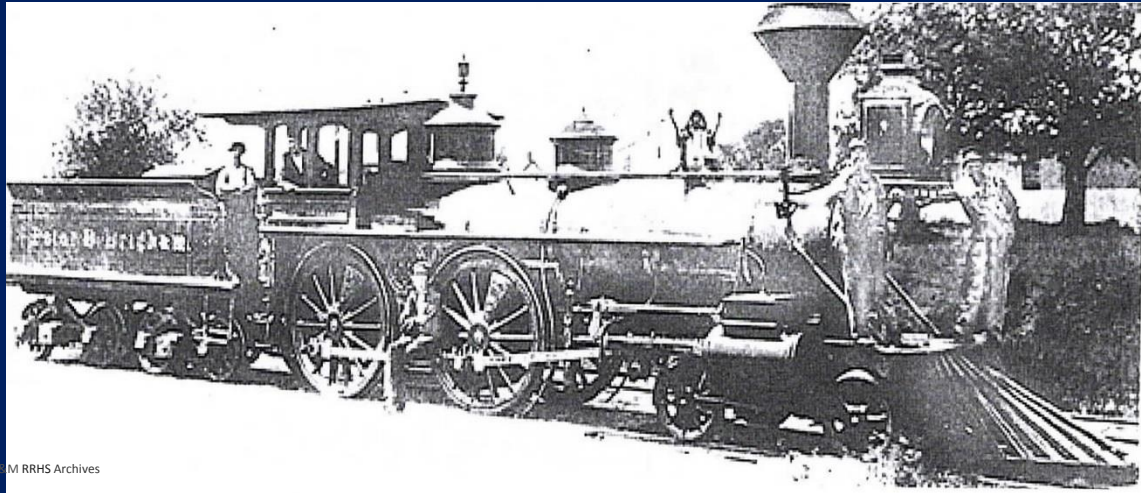
The Nashua, Acton, and Boston



The Nashua, Acton, and Boston

- When opened the NAB only owned rails from Nashua to North Acton. Was granted 4 miles of track rights on F&L to connect to Fitchburg RR at Concord Junction
- NAB paid F&L \$300 per month for usage rights
- The F&L built the NAB its own track in 1891. The NAB maintained its section
- NAB was leased by the Concord Railroad and in 1895 by Boston and Maine, which operated it at a loss for 30 years
- For a few years after 1892 the “New York Express” ran parlor car service for tourists from Lake Winnepesaukee and the NH White Mountains to New York City along the NAB. This traffic was later routed through Worcester

The Nashua, Acton, and Boston



BBM RRHS Archives

Peter B. Brigham Engine
Named after railroad's president. 1873 Mason

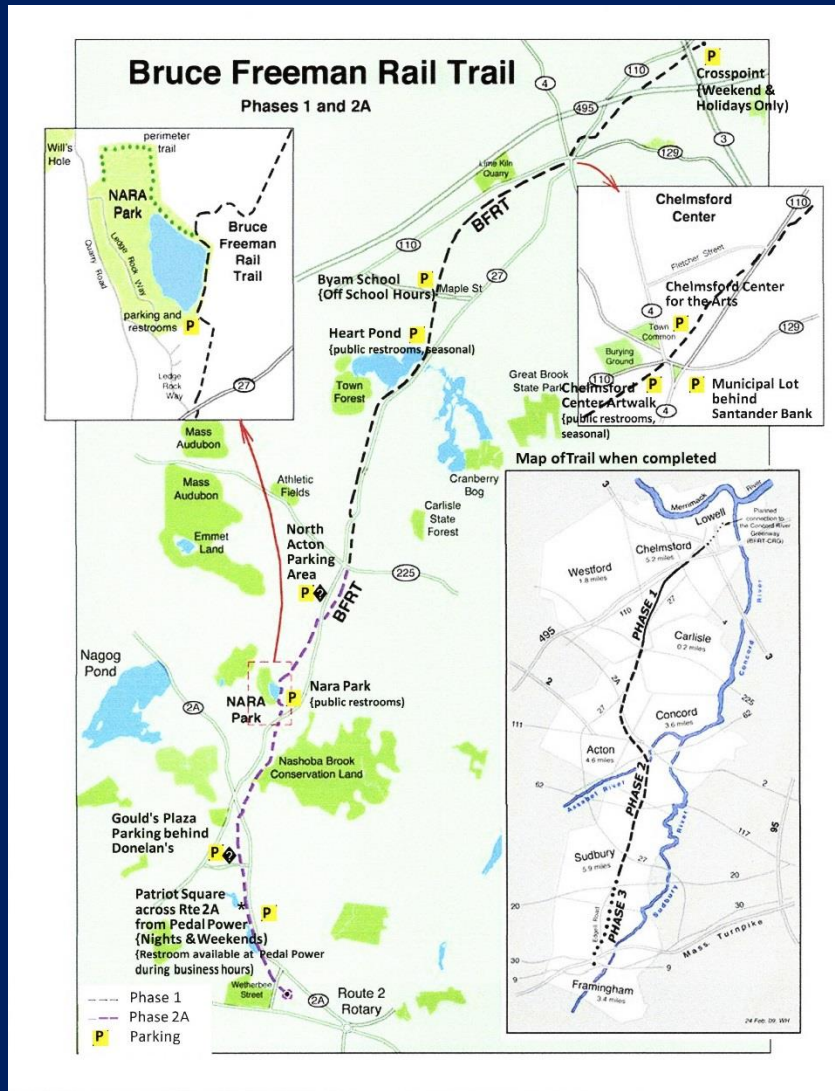
Why Did the Local Railroads Fail?

- Too many railroads were built in Eastern Mass. In the 19th century the competition, freight cost reductions, and lack of business resulted in many small railroads losing money and being absorbed by larger systems
- The NAB served the rural towns of Acton, Westford, Groton, and Dunstable.
Not enough passenger or freight traffic in the area to support the line
- The rise of the automobile from 1910-1930 significantly cut into passenger revenue.
- Trucking companies began to take away U.S. Mail contracts early 1920's
- Once the Boston and Maine took over the lines going south from Nashua the rural NAB was redundant

A Legacy of Local Rail Trails



Historic Sites: Section 2A of the BRFT



F&L Behind
Robbins Brook Condos
(courtesy of Bill Davies)

Historic Sites: Section 2A of the BRFT

- Route 2 Crossover
 - Site of Middlesex Junction
 - Wright-Holden Farm (Owned by Reformatory)
 - Reformatory Cemetery
- Concord Road
 - Site of mills behind Bursaw Oil
 - Original East Acton (Acton) station
 - Freight office served as station
 - Water tank existed just beyond freight office



The Old Mill, East Acton, Mass.

Historic Sites: Section 2A of the BRFT

Brook Street

- Isaac Davis and the Acton militia crossed the old road April 19, 1775
- 1840 Pencil mill at 40 Brook St. – burned by arsonist 1944
- Greenhouses for winter vegetables built along railroad for Boston market



Historic Sites: Section 2A of the BRFT

Davis Road Area

- Was once part of Great Road and crossed over narrow portion of Nashoba Brook connecting with Wampus Road
- Crossed railroad at Ebenezer Monroe pencil factory(1825-1898). Included site for grinding plumbago (graphite)
- Davis Road abandoned in 1918
- Near site of stone cavern (“Potato Cave”) site of murder of hermit Aaron Woods for his money on December 6, 1872.

Ebenezer Monroe Pencil Factory



Historic Sites: Section 2A of the BRFT

Harris Street

- Formerly called Depot Street
- North Acton train station located at end of road near Acton Monument Co.
- NAB and F&L lines separated at North Acton depot
- Corral for McCarthy's cattle
- importing business

North Acton Station Showing
Harris House and Barn

