

# There was a time you could take

by CLARE O'NEILL CARR

The small steam train slowly makes its way north from the Rhinecliff station, chugging softly past Long Dock, and rounding a large curve north of Astor Cove, toward the busy station of Hogs Bridge in Rhinebeck.

It passes a small private station at the Astor Estate. It doesn't stop, however, since no family guest is aboard.

It is about 3:15. The train has left Rhinecliff a few minutes early, and, since it is a clear summer afternoon, the train stops midway to its destination. Some ladies dressed in long skirts, children by their sides, step out of the single passenger car and pick the blue huckleberries which grow along the tracks.

Among the passengers are some Rhinecliff natives and several vacationers traveling from New York City.

Some are taking the ride for the pleasure of it, others are heading for Connecticut or to spend several weeks in the country, perhaps boarding at a farm in Upper Red Hook or Elizaville.

They have been traveling since early morning and are tired. But the fine day, and the fields with the Hudson and the Catskills beyond lift their spirits.

Climbing back into the carriage with their berries, the fireman stokes the engine, and the small caravan continues eastward.

The engine pulls its passenger car, along with a feed car, coal car, milk car and mail car, out across the meadows toward the bridge at Rhinebeck Creek.

Steam drifts back toward the Hudson as the train approaches Hogs Bridge, three miles from Rhinecliff.

It is 1910, and the Central New England Railroad, nicknamed the Hucklebush Line, is on its afternoon run from Rhinecliff, 41 miles to the Connecticut state line near Millerton.

## OLD CNE

The old CNE, as it is remembered by local residents, had its beginning in 1871 as the Rhinebeck and Connecticut Railroad, built as a main connection from southern New York northeast to the state line and western Connecticut. The line eventually extended to Hartford and Springfield, and after 1910 was owned by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad.

Once, busy crossings and small sidings dotted between Rhinecliff and Boston Corners have all but been forgotten since 1938 when the last train ran through.

But at the turn of the century, the Hucklebush was relied upon by farmers to transport their milk daily and receive feed for their animals, for transportation by summer visitors and commuters going east and west bet-

ween the country towns and the big cities of Poughkeepsie and New York. It carried the mail, produce from farms, and transported coal east from Pennsylvania via Poughkeepsie.

It even carried school children. Red Hook resident Elmore Fraleigh remembers several high school commuters from Elizaville to his class at the Red Hook High School.

## Traces still visible

If one looks carefully enough, he or she can detect the flat line of the original train bed crisscrossing northern Dutchess. With the aid of a 1910 railway schedule, which was given to the Red Hook Historical Society by the Chanler Chapman estate, one can imagine the progress of the train that afternoon in 1910 as it pulled into Hogs Bridge (in the vicinity of present-day Montgomery Street) at exactly 3:36 p.m.

A small brick building still standing north of the bridge is the only reminder of the busy train intersection once located there.

Our passengers would have looked out to see a passenger station, a shellac factory, a power company which produced gas and electricity for the village of Rhinebeck, and two coal companys.

One of the buildings later became Rhynders's Coal and Feed Store, according to Fraleigh.

After the Rhinebeck stop, the train progressed north across Astor Flats or Meadows, parallel to present Route 9 to Wey's Corners, just west of the present intersection of Routes 9 and 9G. There was no station, but a siding allowed for freight and passengers to be exchanged on signal.

Running along the flat meadows west of the Old Stone Church, it made its way slowly past the present intersection of Rokeby and Middle Roads in Red Hook, and crossed Route 9 where Colburn's Oil Supply now stands.

## Red Hook was busy

The Red Hook station was located where the Farmer's Co-op now stands, at the south end of Elizabeth Street (then called Depot Street). Several of the freight houses are still there, including the small passenger booth.

This was a busy stop, with farmers as well as local industry relying on the daily trains.

The Baker's Chocolate Factory stood where Landsman's Packing now is. The Borden's milk house, where dairy farmers delivered milk to be pasteurized and shipped, stood along the tracks.

Skirting the village of Red Hook, the train headed northeast towards Fraleigh's stop, at the corner of present Route 199 and Echo Valley road, before its next stop at Cokertown.

Elmore Fraleigh remembers wat-

ching the train go by as he sat in the small school house near Irving Fraleigh's farm as a boy. The farm on Route 199 for which the stop was named is still operated by Irving Fraleigh Jr.

It headed east from there, toward what is now Crestwood Drive, and crossed the present Feller-Newmark Road.

## Near Spring Lake

Local historian John Losee remembers the train pulling out from its next stop, Cokertown on Spring Lake, and running along the east side of the lake, crossing over between the upper and lower lakes.

Losee's family, who lived in Upper Red Hook, had one of the few summer camps there at that time. He and his friends would put pennies on the track, which the trains would flatten as they went by.

The old train bed, which meets Spring Lake Road, is used as a road by the Cokertown Rod and Gun club.

From Spring Lake, the train would make its way on the western shore, then behind the two or three cabins which bordered the lake, toward the Elizaville station, referred to in earlier schedules as Ellerslie.

From there the 1910 schedule mentions stops at Jackson Corners, Mount Ross, Silvernails, Gallatinville, Ancram, Copake, Boston Corners and Millerton. In a June 3, 1878 schedule, however, Silvernails is not mentioned. Mount Riga is noted as a stop after Boston Corners, and State Line is on the schedule as the last stop, instead of Millerton.

## Trucks takeover

Walter Wilken of Red Hook, manager of the Farmers Co-op in the days when the daily milk train stopped there, remembers well when the trains stopped running and trucks took over the milk transport from the creamery.

"That was the year I was married; I had to cut my honeymoon short and come back because the schedules were all messed up (when the trains stopped)," he recalled.

Rhinebeck historian DeWitt Gurnell remembers the last train through on July 15, 1938.

A good crowd gathered at Hogs Bridge that day, perhaps a hundred people, said Gurnell.

Most hated to see the trains go.

"The train was a part of the community that would be lost", said Gurnell.

"There was a general feeling of sadness."

(Editor's note: In addition to the sources mentioned in this story, information was obtained from an article Keith MacPhail published in the 1974 Dutchess County Historical Society Year Book.)