

## The Kennebunk & Kennebunkport Railroad Company — 1882-1926

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Despite gloomy predictions by new-enterprise naysayers, the Kennebunk and Kennebunkport Railroad became one of the most profitable branches on the Boston & Maine line. It was constructed by local men in 1883 and ran from the Kennebunk Depot off Summer Street, down along the eastern side of the Mousam River to Parsons Station, then to Kennebunk Beach Station, diagonally across the Sea Road from the Wentworth Hotel and to the little Grove Hill Station just off Boothby Road. The branch terminated at the Kennebunkport Depot, which was actually in Lower Village just below the bridge to Kennebunkport.

The first railroad company to run tracks through Kennebunk was the Portsmouth, Saco and Portland Line. The company opened a depot in West Kennebunk in August of 1842 that remained the only depot in town for 30 years. Competitors, the Eastern Railroad Company and later the Boston & Maine Railroad Company, leased rights to run their trains on this line until the early 1870s when PS&P tried to renegotiate the 6 percent B&M lease at a higher rate.

Rather than pay the increase, B&M Railroad laid their own tracks between Kennebunk and Lower Village. The new station served tourists lured to the Kennebunks by elegant hotels and cottages being developed by the Boston and Kennebunkport Seashore Company.

In 1881, local capitalists, many of them Seashore Company stockholders, devised a plan to deliver the tourists even closer to seaside businesses by building a 4.5-mile railroad branch along Kennebunk Beach. Maine State Railroad Law required that \$5,000 per mile be represented by stock, but the rest could be mortgaged. So many investors stepped forward to purchase stock in the new railroad that they decided to finance the entire capitalization of \$65,000 with shares bearing 4.5 percent interest per annum. All shares were quickly sold and the directors had to refuse in excess of \$35,000 from hopeful stock buyers.

One of the initial shareholders was George C. Lord, native of Kennebunk, who just happened to also be the president of the Boston & Maine Railroad. Joseph Dane, president of the Ocean Bank, was elected president of the railroad, as well. Some of the other early investors were Hartley Lord, James Cousens, Moses Maling Charles C. Perkins, Charles E. Perkins, and Joseph Titcomb.

Work began on the track bed in December 1882 on land purchased from old Kennebunk families. Kennebunkport Seashore Company lots were also extensively used. The road construction contract for \$25,500 promised that all the work including grading, laying sleepers and rails, building wire fences four feet high, and filling in a dock at Lower Village, would be completed by the beginning of the 1883 summer hotel season.

A lot in Lower Village owned by shipbuilder David Clark was purchased for the Kennebunkport station. Joseph Day of Kennebunk won the contract to build a 48-by 20-foot depot with an attached 40-foot platform.

In June of 1883, the Boston & Maine Railroad signed a lease for the fledgling railroad, agreeing to handle all management and pay the 4.5 percent per annum interest due to the Kennebunk & Kennebunkport Railroad stockholders.

On June 18, 1883, Kennebunk Town Clerk Andrew Walker recorded the first passenger run to the Port. Two regular trips were planned for each day that week at 25 cents per passage. Within a few weeks, nine regular trips or 18 passages a day were scheduled. By the end of the first summer season the Kennebunk & Kennebunkport Railroad had averaged 1,200 passengers per week. Trains ran year-round but during the winter months the schedule was reduced to four trips a day.

B&M reported in 1887 that the 4.5-mile railroad was already one of their most profitable branches per mile. Many new hotels had been built at Kennebunk Beach and Cape Arundel to take advantage of the improved access. The Grove Hill Hotel was built near the Boothby Road stop and a depot was constructed for Parsons Station, diagonally across the Mousam River from George Parsons' farm, Riverhust.

"The Conductor is Mr. F. K. Webster and the Engineer is Mr. E. Stromach," wrote a reporter for the Biddeford Journal in July 1887. "Although the locomotives employed upon the road have been constantly changing," he continued, "Mr. Stromach has wielded the throttle for the whole four years of the branch road's existence. His portly form and genial countenance are familiar to summer travelers here. The locomotives employed upon the branch road have been, in turn, named: Strafford, Camilla, Exeter, and Newburyport."

F. W. Strout, the station agent at Kennebunkport, had also been there since the beginning. His station was by far the busiest on the line. "The amount of money taken in one day at Kennebunkport has often been very much larger than at some city stations," wrote the journalist. "One day last season Kennebunkport took \$500, this sum including freight bills and tickets."

As automobiles became more common, ridership on the line declined. When the Federal Income Tax Law regarding leased railroads changed in 1919, the Kennebunk & Kennebunkport Railroad officially became a subsidiary of the Boston & Maine Railroad Company. Against the wishes of local businessmen, the branch was abandoned on Sept. 8, 1926.