



Glues from Hopewell Valley's Long Lost Railroad

IN THIS ISSUE: OLD STORIES RETOLD

Our regular readers have by now seen these issues come alive with the rich history of Hopewell Valley. We have been exploring different areas of the community and with some careful research, tried to convey a sense of that local history through these pages. In this issue we explore some of the stories that have peaked our interest over the years.

I have been out in the countryside investigating clues to old stories, dodging cars and sticker bushes in the process. The saga of the **Mercer and Somerset Railroad** and its connection to big business, politics, monopolies and the growth of railroading in 19th century America, took place right here in our community 132 years ago. In addition to the story of my hunt and some photos published in this newsletter, we have posted more photos and more stories on this subject on our website, www.hopewellvalleyhistory.org.

In his story, "Hopewell's Students Spread the Baptist Word Throughout the Colonies," Dave Blackwell has done some excellent research on the events that connect the village of Hopewell with the founding of Brown University, and the Old School Baptists and the part they played in this story of national importance in early American history.

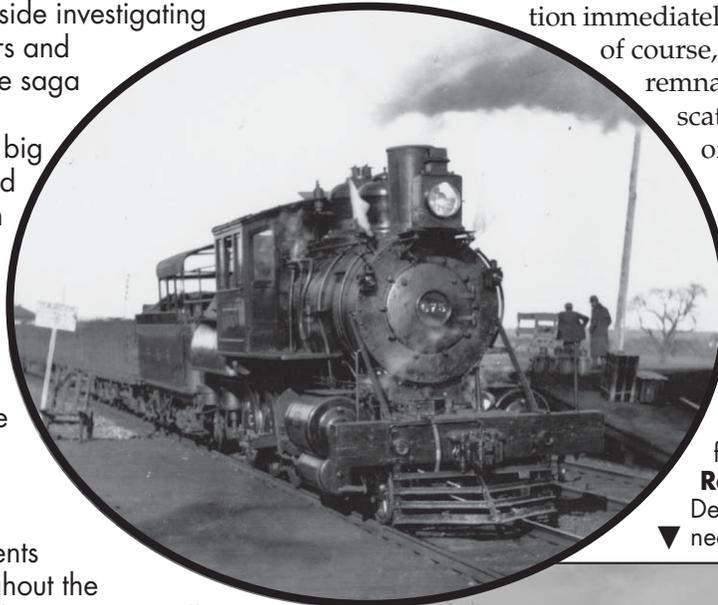
No issue of a publication released in the fall would be complete without some mention of the national pastime, baseball. In honor of our very successful program on baseball, given by Dr. Bill Gleason at the County Library on October 3, Jack Davis has treated us with a look back in Hopewell Valley's baseball past. Through first hand accounts, gleaned from the old *Hopewell Herolds* in the Society's collection, he recreates "Hopewell Baseball in 1893".

—Jack Koepfel

There was a time when the wail of a train whistle in the distance was a common thing. Soon the chug-chug-chug of the steam engine approaching followed. Again and again the engineer pulled on whistle and the shrill sound of its note echoed off the distant hills. The series of short and long blasts signaled his message for miles around.

I remember the first time I heard about an old railroad that used to bisect Hopewell Valley. It captured my fascination immediately. The route no longer exists of course, in fact it's long gone, but remnants of it can still be found scattered across the countryside of Hopewell Township.

(continued on page 512)



◀ The c. 1900 photo shows a train stopped at the Pennington Station on the old **Reading Railroad**.

This recent photo shows the original Pennington Train Station for the old **Mercer & Somerset Railroad** still standing on West Delaware Avenue in Pennington near the high school.



The Hopewell Valley Historical Society was formed in 1975 by a group of citizens interested in preserving the heritage of Hopewell Valley. Today we are dedicated to collecting, preserving and disseminating that heritage. We achieve this through programs in the community and the publication of this newsletter.

ON RAILROADS IN HOPEWELL VALLEY

"A sketch of important events that have taken place since Mrs. Isabel Clarkson came to Pennington in 1870, as the bride of Daniel A Clarkson in October of that year."

"In 1870 the Pennsylvania Railroad built a branch railroad from Somerset Junction on the Belvidere Road to Millstone to connect with a branch road there which then connected with the main Pennsylvania Road at New Brunswick. This road had a number of curves and was nicknamed the Corkscrew. The proper name of the road was Mercer and Somerset, because it extended through the two counties. DANIEL A. CLARKSON & WILLIAM RICHARDSON had contract for building the section that extended through Pennington.

The railroad station was situated on West Delaware Avenue. The first ticket agent was JUDGE LEVI ATCHLEY who was succeeded by THEO. HERON. This road was completed in 1871. At that time communication between Trenton and Pennington was carried by stage. GEORGE SORTOR was the stage driver in 1870 and JOSEPH CONRAD was the last of the stage drivers. In 1871 when I came up from Trenton to Pennington in his stage with my little five weeks old baby JESSIE, who was born in my old home in Delaware.

The coal-yard near the station was on DR. HANLON'S property and was carried on by MARSHAL TAYLOR and JUDGE LEVI T. ATCHLEY. This railroad was in operation until the National Air Line was built in 1876. The Pennsylvania Railroad fought hard to prevent this road from putting in a frog and blood came near being shed and men called it the Frog War.

MR. McMINN was engineer of the new road at this time and took a very active part in the Frog War, as did GEORGE CORWINE also. After this road was built, the Mercer and Somerset was abandoned and DANIEL A. CLARKSON and G. M. DORVANA sold the land back to the original owners at a very low price. The land which belonged to A. P. LASHER, he refused to buy back. It was bought by B. F. LEWIS and the dirt that composed the R. R. bank has been used to fill up Pennington streets. The Stockholders in 1870 were DANIEL WYCKOFF who afterward sold out to CHAS. T. BLACKWELL, JOSEPH FRISBIE, OLIVER GRAY, WILLIAM MUIRHEAD and GEORGE SORTOR.

In 1889 and 1890 the old depot station of the Mercer and Somerset was purchased by JOHN A. MURHEAD to be



used as a decorating pottery. The chief designs used during the time the pottery was in operation were the Holly pattern and the Moss



Rose Bud pattern. Owing to the distance from any large railroad this pottery property was purchased, by B. F. LEWIS who afterwards sold it to GEORGE ATWOOD who converted the old station into a slaughter house and meat shop.

In 1876, the National Air Line had become the Delaware and Bound Brook Road and the stations at Pennington and Hopewell were built. DANIEL A. CLARKSON had the contract for both buildings. JOHN MCPHERSON superintending the one at Hopewell and SAMUEL H. CHATTEN doing the work of the one at Pennington.

When the Reading Road was built, the Seminary would not let them have a grade crossing, so the bridge was built and the railroad had to fill up the street that originally was level, all the way from the Mercer and Somerset railroad to the corner of Main Street.

—Isabel Clarkson, Pennington New Jersey

"These records were copied from the original notes of Mrs. Isabel Clarkson, wife of the first Mayor of the Borough of Pennington by Alice Blackwell Lewis, June 1940."

These copied notes are now part of the Hopewell Valley Historical Society's Alice B. Lewis Collection

Officers and Trustees of the Hopewell Valley Historical Society

President: Jack Koepfel (Pennington)

Secretary: Jim Reilly (Pennington)

Treasurer: Meg Koepfel (Pennington)

TRUSTEES:

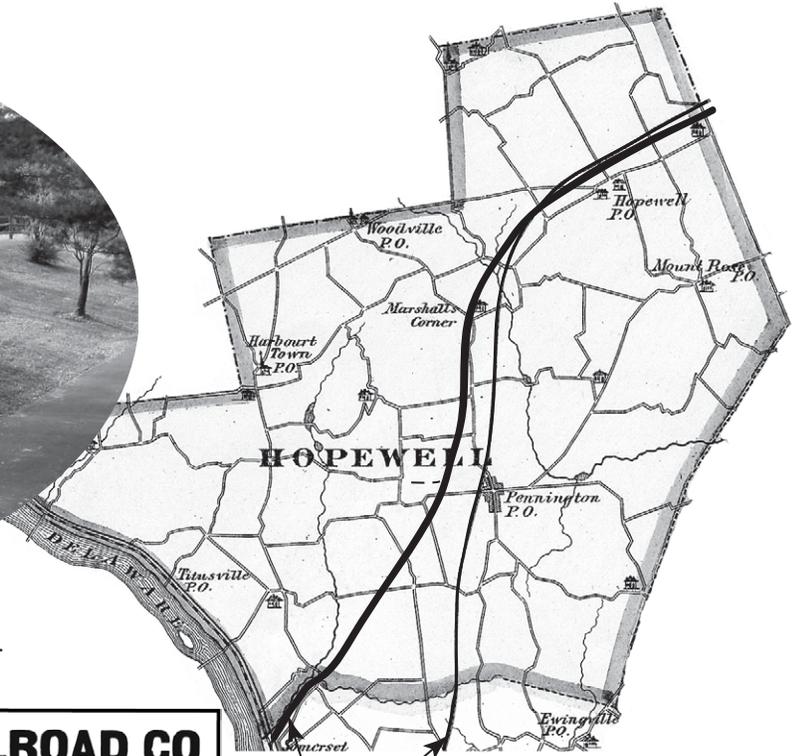
Term ending 2008: David Blackwell (Pennington), Cis Chappel (Hopewell Borough), Bob Johnston (Titusville), Elaine Zeltner (Hopewell Borough)

Term ending 2009: Larry Mansier (Hopewell Township)

Term ending 2010: Jack Davis (Pennington), Noel Goeke (Hopewell Township), Debbie Gwazda (Pennington), Virginia Lewis (Hopewell Borough), Gretchen Overhiser (Pennington)



▲ The old railroad bed is clearly visible in this recent photo taken along Scotch Road.



A B

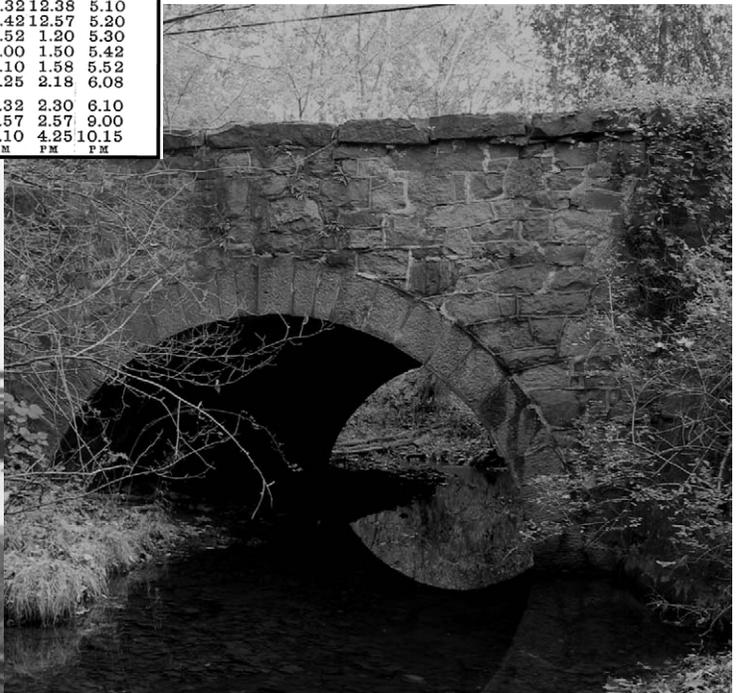
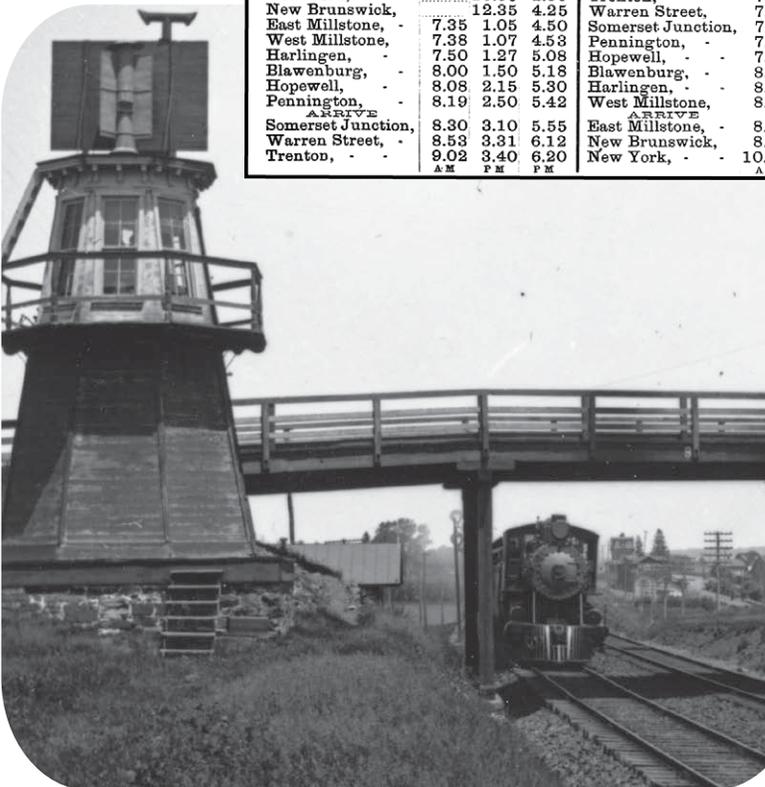
▲ Map of Hopewell Township in 1875 showing the **Mercer & Somerset Railroad** (A) paralleling the **Delaware & Bound Brook Railroad** (B).



PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD CO.
 United Railroads of New Jersey Division.
BELVIDERE DIVISION.
 ARRANGEMENT OF PASSENGER TRAINS
 TO TAKE EFFECT
Monday, November 27, 1876.
MERCER AND SOMERSET BRANCH.

GOING SOUTH.				GOING NORTH.			
	Millstone	N. Bruns.	N. Bruns.		Trenton	Som. Junc.	Som. Junc.
LEAVE	and	and	Trenton	LEAVE	and	and	Trenton
	Pass.	Pass.	Pass.		Pass.	Pass.	Pass.
	No. 664	No. 871	No. 271		No. 221	No. 418	No. 808
New York, -	10.55	2.55		Trenton, -	7.05	12.15	4.43
New Brunswick, -	12.35	4.25		Warren Street, -	7.13	12.22	4.50
East Millstone, -	7.35	1.05	4.50	Somerset Junction, -	7.32	12.38	5.10
West Millstone, -	7.38	1.07	4.53	Pennington, -	7.42	12.57	5.20
Harlingen, -	7.50	1.27	5.08	Hopewell, -	7.52	1.20	5.30
Blawenburg, -	8.00	1.50	5.18	Blawenburg, -	8.00	1.50	5.42
Hopewell, -	8.08	2.15	5.30	Harlingen, -	8.10	1.58	5.52
Pennington, -	8.19	2.50	5.42	West Millstone, -	8.25	2.18	6.08
ARRIVE				ARRIVE			
Somerset Junction, -	8.30	3.10	5.55	East Millstone, -	8.32	2.30	6.10
Warren Street, -	8.53	3.31	6.12	New Brunswick, -	8.57	2.57	9.00
Trenton, -	9.02	3.40	6.20	New York, -	10.10	4.25	10.15
	AM	PM	PM		AM	PM	PM

▼ An old stone bridge from the **Mercer & Somerset Railroad** carries cars along Jacobs Creek Road today.



▲ Southbound train approaching the Delaware Avenue bridge in Pennington.

Clues from Hopewell Valley's Long Lost Railroad *(continued from page 512)*

infamous **Frog War** of 1876. At one time this section of the old line was the driveway into the old Township dump. After the landfills were closed, the road fell into disuse. You can still make it out as it cuts diagonally across the field just north on Marshalls Corner-Woodsville Road.

Just north of Stony Brook Road, where another stone trestle can be spotted along the brook, the route crossed the present day golf course and headed toward the location this *Battle of the Frog*. The dictionary defines this type of a frog as a section of track where one railroad crosses another railroad. On January 5, 1876 an army of men, representing competing railroad interests, faced off in a field just east of Van Dyke Road. A depression in the earth today identifies the spot where one hundred and thirty-one years ago the Pennsylvania Railroad's monopoly ended.

Traveling east the line approached the village of Hopewell and entered it on present day Model Avenue.

For a few short years this was the only railroad in town and one wonders if the large setback of the homes along the western end of the street is related to this old right-of-way. An 1876 map of Hopewell clearly shows the two lines paralleling each other all the way across town. The other remaining train station is now a residence on the corner of Mercer and Model Avenues. The route east of town is not as easily located today, but its fun to imagine our section and the clues still visible today in Hopewell Valley.

Please visit our new website, www.hopewellvalleyhistory.org for more information on the **Mercer & Somerset Railroad**. Additional photographs of my hunt for clues and the discovery of the actual site of the **Frog War** can be found in Photo Gallery section. A firsthand account of the "Battle of the Frogs", as well as brief history of the railroad, is posted in the Local History section of the site.

Hopewell Valley Historical Society
P.O. Box 371
Pennington, NJ 08534-0371

Address Service Requested