

A Very Short History of the Train Stations in Montclair, NJ

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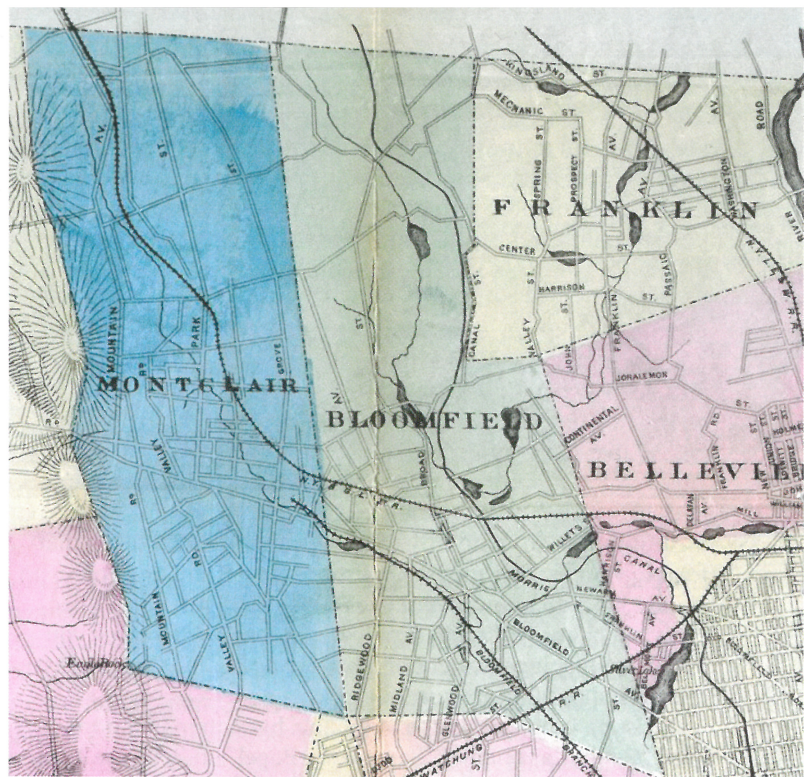
IN THE EARLY 1800's the primary transportation modes were: by boat, horse, wagon, or stagecoach. Local transportation was by foot or perhaps bicycle. Most urban dwellers walked to and from their homes, shops, and workplaces. This severely restricted where one could live. One was either an urban dweller, small village community or lived on a farm.

Before the railroad became a feasible mode of transportation, Montclair (then West Bloomfield) was a collection of farms with rural villages. Many wealthy families from the New York City area and Jersey City built summer vacation homes in the area because of the beautiful rural setting.

New railroad technologies altered the crowded urban environment of the pedestrian to change American residential history forever. Up until around 1830, the rail system was powered by horses or a "gravity" engine which needed to be hauled back into place by horses. This wasn't necessarily a practical or efficient means of public transportation. Once that the steam locomotive was introduced the reach of the railroad transportation was greatly expanded.

This fostered a more established community and by the late 1800's families decided that they not only wanted to vacation here, but they wanted to put roots down and build permanent residents in the Montclair area. In the 1860's the first attempts to introduce a railroad line was to link the Montclair area to Jersey City and New York City was introduced along with a change in name from West Bloomfield to Montclair. "Montclair" was perceived to be a more inviting name. Although not met with unanimous approval from residents who cherished the rural setting and wanted it to remain, the rail lines were built.

The original rail line, The Newark and Bloomfield Railroad,



An 1889 Map of Montclair Township

was opened for travel on July 1, 1856. The entire length of the line was only a little over 4 miles long and extended from Roseville Junction (Newark) to Montclair.

Several successful businessmen living in Montclair wanted to establish a railroad line so that they could work in Manhattan and commute to Montclair by steam engine railroad. The proposed line would take the commuter from the north end of Montclair to ferry terminals in Jersey City and Hoboken.

According to William H. Shaw in his History of Essex and Hudson Counties, New Jersey, which was published in 1884, a longer route was established by The New York and Greenwood Lake Railway. It ran from Jersey City to the New York State Border 43 miles passing through Arlington, Bloomfield, Montclair, Little Falls, to Greenwood Lake. It was very popular and was constructed as the "Montclair Railway". This rail line was "a popular line in the summer time for excursionists and fishermen. The trains are run at such hours as to give pleasure seekers a long day at the Lake, or among the romantic hills surrounding it". Unfortunately, this train line wasn't financially successful and foreclosed on in 1883.

This wasn't the end of the dream for a commuter rail line, municipal bonds were issued and several railroads into and



The third Lackawanna station



The first Walnut Street station, 1888



The second Walnut Street station, ca. 1955



Park St./Watchung Ave. Station ca. 1910



The second Upper Montclair Station



Mountain Ave. Train Station, ca. 1888

through Montclair were developed. This allowed families to relocate from the crowded and dirty urban areas and move out to this rural mountainside community while still working in Manhattan.

"By 1889 there were forty trains running daily each way between Montclair and New York. This was double the train service that the village was getting at the beginning of the decade. On Sundays there were two trains each way, and on Saturday nights a midnight "theatre" train." (excerpt from "Montclair in the Elegant Eighties" Volume IV by Gladys Segar) The "suburbanite" was created.

How much do you know about the Railroad Stations in Montclair? There are 6 "official" Stations in Montclair.

- Lackawanna Station (later moved to Bay Street)
- Walnut Street Station
- Watchung Avenue Station
- Upper Montclair Station
- Mountainside Station
- Montclair Heights Station

Lore has it that there were six separate stations because the railroad executives wanted to live in Montclair, but all wanted easy access to a station.

- **LACKAWANNA STATION**
 - There were 3 different station buildings located at this site before the rail was re-routed to the Bay Street Station.
 - The Architect for the third building at Lackawanna Train Station was William Hull Botsford, but he never saw the completed project because he went down on the Titanic in 1912 before the dedication of the Station.
 - Station was closed after moving to Bay Street. Bay Street Station was opened on February 27, 1981 with a small shelter and only one platform. It was updated again in 2002 with a more up to date utilitarian building.
 - The Third Lackawanna Station was converted to a shopping center and now is undergoing a major re-development.

- **WALNUT STREET STATION**
 - Known as the Montclair Station, one of the original stations in Montclair, part of the former "Montclair Railroad" completed in 1873. Demolished in 1953.
 - There were 2 different station buildings located at this site.

- The second building opened in 1953 and was drastically downsized.
- The present building no longer functions as a train station and was leased out as a bar/restaurant while the platform still is used for commuter travel.

- **WATCHUNG AVENUE STATION:**
 - Two Stations were located at this location.
 - Originally called the "Park Street Station" until 1919. The New York Sun ran a small notice in their March 31st issue that the change in name was requested by the residents of the area "to perpetuate the original Indian name for that part of Montclair".
 - Second building still in use. Waiting room is still available, but no ticket office.

- **UPPER MONTCLAIR STATION**
 - Three structures have occupied this station location.
 - Originally a stop on the Montclair Railway when the area was rural.
 - Became one of the stops of the Erie Railroad in 1892, at which time it was rebuilt to include a covered waiting platform as well as a waiting room.
 - Largely destroyed by fire in 2006, porte-cochere only remained. Rebuilt to "resemble" previous station, but with a larger footprint.
 - Popular restaurant now occupies the space of the renovated waiting room, the exterior platform remains.

- **MOUNTAIN AVENUE**
 - Built in 1893, original building is still in use.
 - Was named for Upper Mountain Avenue
 - Was rented out as a 2-bedroom house since the 1990's. The renters were considered "Station Agents" and maintained a waiting room decorated with period pieces.
 - The waiting room is still open to the public.

- **MONTCLAIR HEIGHTS**
 - Has the highest elevation of all six Montclair train stations at 365 ft.
 - Was originally a transfer station to trains heading west or for passengers who were coming in from the west travelling to Manhattan.
 - Officially closed as a train station in 1959, but platform still in use.
 - Located at the southwest corner of Montclair State University. ■

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