

**Modeling the O&W  
No. 42 in a Series  
O&W Archeology - Some visits to Hamilton**

By  
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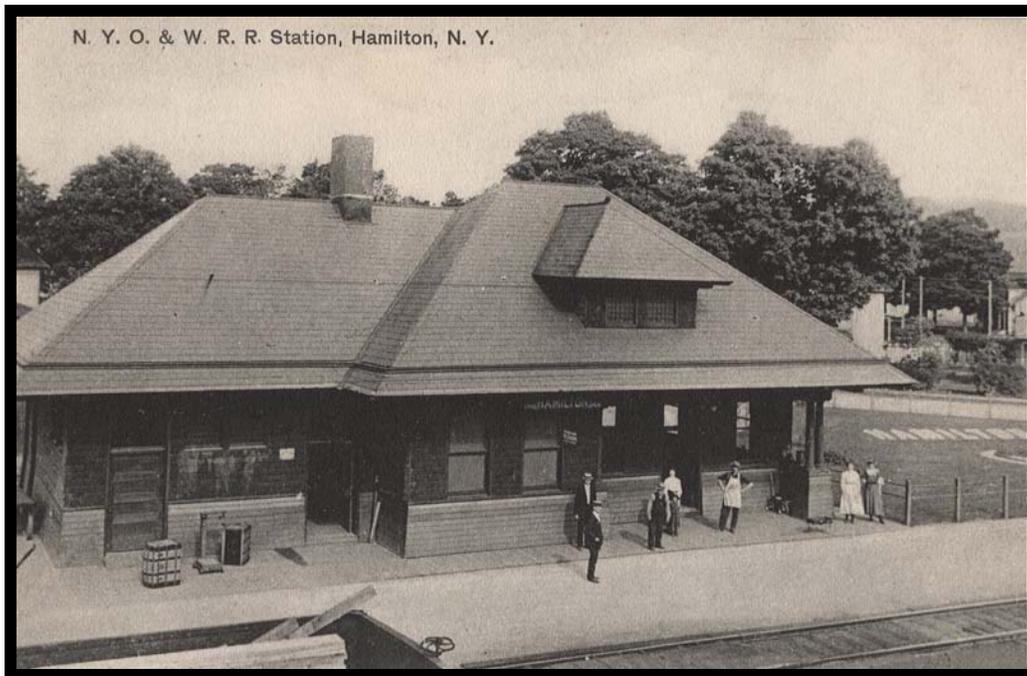
**Just south of the Lebanon Street crossing in Hamilton is this marker and plaque, adjacent to the NYO&W Main Line Right-of-Way which is now only a pleasant grassed pathway and which otherwise, to the south, gives little suggestion, beyond its very linear nature, that it was once a vital rural artery of commerce.**

Author's Image – July 2008

The recent Web article featuring the Hamilton Depot of the O&W, written by member Mark Kennaugh, sent me to some old albums of photo images of long ago, in answering a few E-mail questions posed by Mark as he was preparing his article. The finished article was a delightful overview of the present state of the Hamilton Depot and the immediate environs through which the O&W once operated. As I've long felt and believed, the enthusiastic efforts of our group of "O&W -philes" is a mutual and collaborative undertaking from which we can each share our "finds" and fruits of research. So too is it with Hamilton. . . . and while not to diminish Mark's wonderful effort, I shall here add some small further documentation. . . . and a tale of my own unexplained intrigue with Hamilton.

As the remnants of the O&W fade away, by redevelopment, neglect, or simply by the encroachment of nature and its reclamation of the intrusion or the railroad, there is less and less to see and observe with every passing day. When I first became entranced with the O&W (never having seen it operate) I soon came to realize that its remains would surely melt away. At some level (and with a not inconsiderable effort being some 250 miles distant) I set out to capture, record and document that which remained. . . . starting about 1970. Even before the creation of the first "generation" of O&W Auto Tour Guides (mapped out and composed by Charlie Breiner and Bill Scott), I had made a number of exploratory trips to "O&W Country" guided only by some historic

USGS maps. . . and little else. So, to share some images I've collected and made (and always with a notion to someday "recapture" in models at least portions of the O&W that once was). . . here are some additional views; -



This "Real Postcard" view attests to having been printed in Germany for the R.W. Hubbard Company of Hamilton. While no date is specified, the card is post-1901 so far as it has a space on the reverse for a written message. This view is very nearly an "original" view of the configuration of the Depot over 100 years ago. Notice the carefully placed and whitewashed stones in the park adjacent to Lebanon Street.



Here is the Hamilton Depot as it stands in July 2008, with many "curtain" additions serving to close in the overhang of the eaves for additional workshop space. The building now serves as a furniture showroom [the addition just peeking into the far right of this image] and a workshop used to produce large framed "Composite" photo arrays for various organizations, college fraternities and sororities; -- among others.



As I found the Hamilton Depot in 1972, on a dreadfully overcast and (pouring) rainy day, little seemed to have changed from its life as an active Depot and it stood in nearly an original configuration as when built, in this image taken from "trackside;" -- excepting the eliminations of the "eye winker" dormer window on the south face of the roof, and the entry door to the waiting room at the near end of the building. When that was done I can't say, but that unusual dormer and window was a peculiarity specific to the Hamilton and Delhi Depots. The original Depot at Summitville was built from identical plans originally marked as "Hamilton" and then so too was the Depot at Delhi constructed from those same plans. Singular to the Hamilton Depot was the detail of a short wall and a set of pillars at this south end of the waiting room area, which can be clearly seen in the RPC image preceding.



This is an image that ultimately found its way to a broader distribution as a Real Postcard, residing in my collection however as a B&W print. That distinctive eyewinker is clearly visible here, as is the detail of the fencing and park adjacent Lebanon Street. The original Midland Depot stands to the north. . . and as shown in this image to the far left. Along with the "new" Depot, the old Midland Depot, which was used as a freight house by the O&W, still stands; -- making Hamilton unique among former O&W served communities on having both an O&W and a Midland Depot still extant.



Seventeen years earlier, on that fateful night in 1955 this's approximately the view (absent the truck parked across the ROW at one of the Jaquay buildings next to the former bushel basket factory) that the crew of ill-fated engine No. 803 would've seen as they approached HI Depot and prepared to blow for the Lebanon Street crossing. Moments after this vision the engine and crew were airborne beyond the Leyland coal dock.



Upper left is how the old Midland Depot looked in 1972; -- with still the gritty appearance of having endured the hard life of a railroad building through the era of steam engines, ashes and cinders. Below right is how this building looked in July 2008 – now thoroughly recycled with vinyl siding and quite tidy, with little indication of its former life. . . that is, to the uninitiated.



In July 2008 the Jaquay Feeds building was still evidently in operation, and attended to as witnessed by the summer chore of grass mowing being done with a rider mower. The inset is an old image, undated but inscribed on the reverse as showing the “. . .last boxcar to Hamilton.” Once the O&W departed the feed operation had to build a canopy and modified unloading means for a continued service by highway trucks.



Even though as soon as I venture out on the abandoned O&W ROW, and the realization that I succeeded in arriving just too [many years] too late settles in and that I've". . .missed the show. . ." I still like to lurk about to capture whatever it is that may be left to suggest the "texture" and "feel" of place and times when the O&W was of the present. For such as may be only tiny details, those bits will be filed away in the photo albums and memory bank for the time when the modeling "Time Machine" will look to such information to complete a structure or diorama. Here, the Jaquay feed sign still endures on a humid summer day in 2008 after many decades of hard winters and baking in the strong summer sun.

A part of my fascination with the O&W is its struggle to survive in the relatively [outbound] traffic barren reaches of those rural areas it served. I'm old enough to recall the many branch lines and sidings which once served every community of even modest size; -- and the small historic Massachusetts town where I did most of my growing up (located at that peculiar geographic cusp and line of demarcation between urban/suburban and rural populations) had two "through" railroad lines. The visit of the switch job to bump cars at the coal dealer and

lumber yard(s) brought a scad of young boys (me included) on bicycles to watch the railroaders at work. One branch line of considerable length terminated not far from the home of my youth and it served two lumber dealers and a coal yard; -- while the more heavily traveled main line the other side of the town square served yet another coal dealer (and still another only but three miles further distant) then still another lumber dealer and a feed mill). While not ever having sorted out some of my compelling interests, I can easily suppose that many of the towns and villages of the O&W strongly mirror, as well as many similar communities in the Northeast, those places where I spent schoolboy days. Hamilton as well as, strongly resembles that which I remember from many years ago.....wistfully recalled, and not so changed, as are other places, from those further and further departing days.....



Before leaving this tour of the North end of the Hamilton tracks a last look is at the toolshed identified by author Mark Kennaugh. . . now looking for a longer life with a metal roof as shown in the color image, but inset is the same building (also with its addition to the south) discovered on my exploration of long ago. Whimsically, we should all look so good after 50 years of retirement!



If there is a part of the story and history of the O&W railroading through Hamilton never to be overlooked, it must be the "Flying Diesel Corps." accident, all so well chronicled by many authors in the past. Here is No. 803 in the morning hours after landing, in the robust safety of which none of the "flight crew" was seriously injured. . . .and before the wreckers have arrived to put the line back together again.



My engineering background, and some experience in designing steel structural elements on a summer job always led me to wonder how the Leyland Coal Dock in Hamilton avoided a complete and utter collapse when the 180+ ton AB FT set of No. 803-AB hit the "ramp" at speed that fateful night in 1955: - that is, until I saw it. . . .



These images serve to answer that question; -- the upper sepia toned image from 1972 with the coal dock still standing clearly shows the substantial I-Beams, further placed upon heroic concrete piers, which supported the track ramp. The right inset color image is from 2008, and all that is left are those "Best of American Made" beams! The ROW, in 2008 has become a pleasant walking path....all so very silent. . . .and now seemingly so remote.....so unconnected. . .

So, my visits to the far reaches of the O&W route are my way of putting the "boots on the ground. . ." to see and envision that "feel" and "texture" [as I like to repeatedly characterize] of the O&W now past, in places where it once trod so proudly. That all helps as I start a modeling project to sit back, and let the mind wander to "see" and envision that which no longer is.....and to craft that [artistic] view of that place. . .then. I've sometimes even asked myself why I return to places I've visited in the past, and my answer is that upon any one

visit, and whereas the half century absence of the O&W, and a “clock” running, time has consumed much of those remnants left. . . . any one visit may indeed be the last.....at that place. . . . As the following image will show, there can be many places very similar to those out on the abandoned O&W to see much of anything at all. . . .With the typical “steam era” buildings fast disappearing, it behooves modelers and historians alike to capture images of any of those remnants still left, before they too vanish. . .



And here are images, not in Hamilton, not on the O&W, but of a similarly abandoned railroad consignee location; -- the Whitney Coal Company, where those boys on bicycles, mentioned earlier here, raced to watch the local switcher on its rounds. Located not far from where the Concord Minutemen fired the “. . . Shot heard round the world. .” on April 19, 1775, this’s all that left of the small yard, sidings and retail coal tipple; -- the track “chute” and part of a Conant Unloader. . .and then only if you know where to look!

Not as one ever characterized as any sort of “shrinking violet” I captured a few more images before departing Hamilton after my July 2008 visit. I’ll apologize now for poor image quality, since the lighting was exceedingly poor, and I had not come prepared for any interior photos.....and to answer George Shammass. . . “Nope, the place has been cleaned out.....”

On my 2008 visit, and on an early Sunday morning the Depot doors were open and so I ventured inside to meet and be greeted by the owner, at his work table. After some chat he graciously allowed me the run of the entire Depot (albeit without my asking first – always I’ve found by experience as the best course) since he “wanted” me to see the inside. . . .



The Hamilton Depot attic now serves only as a storage place for the huge picture frames used to complete the composite photo arrays that the owner fashions for customers.



Inside the Hamilton Depot are two images; -- on the left is the fireplace and mantle at the northwesterly corner of the public room and to the right are the selves of paint and artist supplies nicely backlighted by the window facing out to the street side of the Depot.



In a last look at the Hamilton Depot area in July 2008, this image looks South down the Right of Way to the Lebanon Street crossing and the firehouse who's Fire Company erected the historical marker shown at the top of this column. While a view such as this shows little detail of interest, it does however capture that "look" that is useful in "Modeling the O&W". . . as a part of that "feel" that is so important when trying to recreate these scenes in miniature.

So, that will close this column and a part of that record of my most recent trip to Hamilton Depot. At some time in the future, and I can't say when, Hamilton will become the subject of a Depot diorama. . . . and a depiction of the O&W at Hamilton, New York.....in happier times.....

Until the next column, and next time.....More Later,

Mal Houck