

William H. Weed Brings Telegraph To The Midland By Richard Palmer & Dan Myers

(Article compiled by Richard Palmer and F. D. Myers III, great grandson of Weed's brother Henry Matthews Weed. Myers and Palmer are members of the Ontario & Western Railway Historical Society).

It was an important day on Saturday, January 1, 1870 when the Midland's telegraph line was officially opened between Oswego and Norwich. Telegraph offices were established at all the principal stations on the line, for commercial and railroad business.

This was largely the result of the efforts of William H. Weed, superintendent of the Midland's Telegraph Department. Not too much is known about this, other than, according to newspapers, it was "constructed in the most substantial manner, and of the best materials, ensuring prompt and reliable transmission."

Weed was born on January 24, 1847 in Mexico, New York, the second son of the Rev. Thomas Allen Weed and Lydia Matthews. His father for many years was pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Mexico. William was one of six boys and was a graduate of the Mexico Academy. Gaining the reputation as "one of the most expert telegraph operators in the state." In 1869 he was hired by Dewitt C. Littlejohn, President of the New York and Oswego Midland Railroad, who apparently was impressed with Weed's talent at telegraphy. Work commenced in July and was completed in 1871.

For a few years Weed enjoyed a distinguished career in the railroad and telecommunications business. He also made notable contributions to the community surrounding Mexico, including the fire department, the W. H. Weed Hose Company, which was named for him.

Weed was married to the former Harriet Herrick, daughter of the mayor of Oswego. The couple had two children; Fannie Herrick Weed (Johnson). 1878-1945, and Henry Matthews Weed, 1882-1945. Weed's family subsequently moved to Spokane, Washington.

In 1875 the Midland telegraph was leased to the Atlantic and Pacific Telegraph Company and Weed was put in charge of the Midland lines. He subsequently became the railroad's general passenger agent. In October, 1878 he resigned that position to become superintendent of the Western Union Telegraph Company in New York. He became general passenger and ticket agent for the Rome, Watertown & Ogdensburg Railroad in Oswego in 1879.

By 1881 he was a contractor, engaged in building telegraph lines between Middletown and Goshen, as well as for the Central New York Telegraph and Telephone Company, building its line from Oneida to Hamilton. This established phone service at Eaton, West Eaton, Morrisville, Peterboro, Pratt's Hollow, Munnsville, Knoxboro, Valley Mills, Stockbridge, Oneida, Durhamville, South Bay, Fish Creek and North Bay.

He died unexpectedly on April 16, 1889 of gastric fever while in Albany at the age of 42. Then, he was also president of the Northern New York Telegraph Company. One brother, Charles, died July 26, 1892 in Chicago, Ill., where he was employed by Ball & Co. For five years he was Midland station agent at Liberty. Another brother, Louis J. Weed (1852-1896) was a Midland telegrapher at Constantia, N.Y.

Sources

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