

The Midland & Beyond
It all Started in Oneida
By Richard Palmer

Oneida was the original headquarters for the New York & Oswego Midland Railroad. Board and annual stockholders meetings were held here. At first such meetings were held at various places in town. The first permanent site was a commercial building on Main street in downtown Oneida called the Walrath Block. Until moved to Oswego shortly thereafter, this housed the offices of the president, secretary, treasurer, chief engineer, and others. The building is now gone. Meetings were also held at the Devereux Opera House.

At a board meeting there on March 26, 1868 a major action was taken to choose William B. Gilbert of Albany as chief engineer to replace A.C. Powell, who resigned for personal reasons. Gilbert was a well-known railroad construction engineer who left the New York Central to become chief engineer of the Midland. He was at the right place at the right time and had complete charge of construction.

Gilbert was born in Rome in 1810 and graduated from Norwich University in Vermont in 1828. He was assistant engineer, working with John B. Jervis, on New York State's first railroad, the Mohawk & Hudson. He also was assistant engineer on the Saratoga & Schenectady, New York & Harlem, and the Havanna and Renan in Cuba. Gilbert's more local accomplishments included being chief engineer of the Syracuse and Binghamton Railroad, of which he for a time was superintendent."

"Opening of the offices in Oneida stirred public interest to have the railroad's permanent main facilities located here. But construction was already well underway to establish the "head office" in Oswego. On November 25, 1869 the first passenger train passed from Oswego through Oneida to Norwich, a distance of 106 miles, but there was no depot here until 1873. The move" of general offices from Oneida to Oswego occurred on September 20, 1870.

Eventually built in Oneida was a station, engine house and smaller buildings. The station at Oneida was one of the most elaborate structures" ever erected on the Northern Division. Architects differ on its design. Some say it is "Second Empire." One local architectural authority said ""the cupola makes it appear more Italianate."

"Following is a description of the station Oneida Democratic Union Thursday, August 14, 1873:

"MIDLAND ARRANGEMENTS. - The Oneida Midland passenger depot will be thrown open for business on Monday morning, the 18th inst., without fail, also after which time passenger trains will cease to run up in the village as at present.

The passenger rooms of the new depot, through the orders of Supt.
McKinley have been out in excellent shape by E. B. Whitney, ticket and freight agent at the station. The ladies' sitting-room attached. The gentlemen's sitting-room is somewhat larger, being 24x40 feet.

The ticket and telegraph office is about 12x16 feet in size, and is well planned for convenience. These rooms have been fitted up in first-class style with elegant gas-futures and everything calculated to render them agreeable and pleasant. A gentleman by the name of (Thomas) Hopcraft is to act as telegraph operator and ticket clerk.

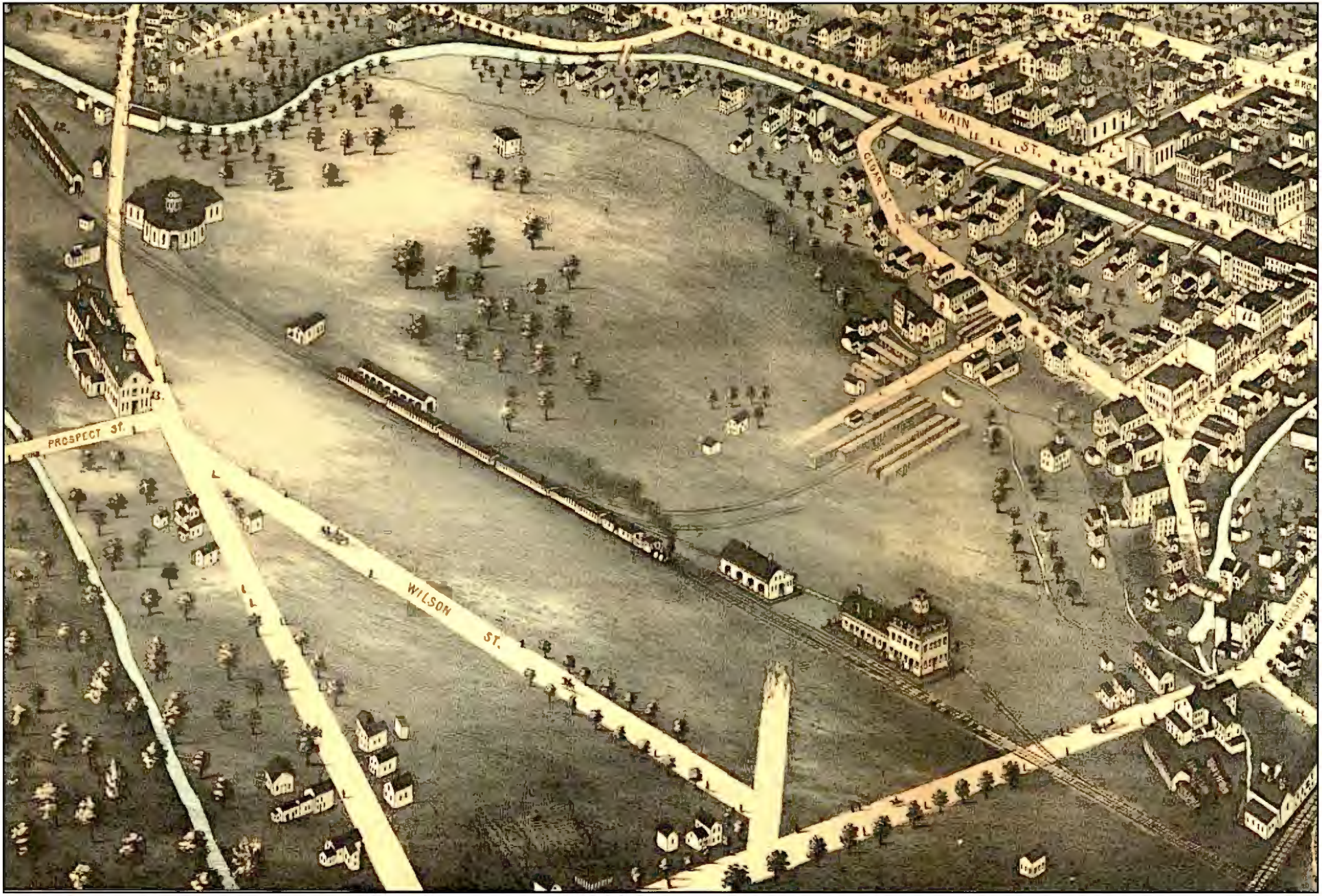
The seats in the passenger rooms at present will accommodate fifty, but we are informed that more commodious cushioned seats have already been ordered, and will too take the places of the ones already there.

The freight office consists of two rooms, each 18x20 feet in dimensions, which are already in good shape, containing the necessary desks, furniture, &c. The office of Fuller & Angel, wood contractors for the company, is also on the same floor. They occupy a well-finished room 18x20 feet in size. Dermot Kelly, the company's advertising agent, has a snuggly arranged little office, also on the second floor.

The restaurant, 66 feet in length by 30 feet in width, will be in operation within a week's time, though it is yet unknown who will have that department in charge. The restaurant had a cook-room, a kitchen and a parlor attached. The platform from this eating-room to the track will be about 30 feet in width, while the one in front or the main depot depot about 20 feet in width, with a plank eight feet wide leading to the highway.

Here we might add that a new plank walk, somewhat elevated, of thesame width and having open railing, will extend along the south side of the street from that point to the bridge in front of Berry's tannery.
The gas-pipe leading to the depot will be laid on the opposite site of the street in the course of a few days. Freight trains will conveying freight from and to all points along the line between Oswego and New York today (Thursday). Midland timetables for passenger trains will be distributed on Friday and Saturday of this week."

Skipping over the generations this station was especially busy during the summer months catering to travelers to Sylvan Beach. Passenger service gradually deteriorated to the point the only service provided was a slow-moving milk train between Oneida and Oswego. It was demolished in the
late 1930s.



This is an 1874 birdseye view of Oneida, showing the new Oneida station of the New York & Oswego Midland Railroad



This portion of the city of Oneida tended to encounter flooding problems around the depot during a heavy storm.