

Rail Trail signs reveal Highland's History

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Peter Bellizzi, President of the Hudson Valley Rail Trail Association, recently told the Lloyd Town Board that his group has erected a quartet of new signs that tell the history of different aspects of the town's rail trail's history.

Bellizzi said his Association began discussing new signage three years ago and credits Matt Kierstead, of Milestone Heritage Consulting, for researching and compiling the text and pictures that went onto the signs. Fossil Industries, of Deer Park, NY, was hired to construct the sturdy signs.

Bellizzi said the cost was \$20,000, which was paid for with a \$10,000 grant from New York State Office of Parks and Recreation and \$10,000 from the Rail Trail Association.

Bellizzi said the Association has been talking about adding additional signage along the rail trail in the future.

"This is just the beginning because there are so many different spots along the trail that we want to identify," he said. "These are the first four signs that we had made and there is plenty more information from Matt for other signs."

Bellizzi said near Commercial Avenue there is an old railroad turntable that was once used to actually turn engines around and also a 30 foot tower and pump station in the area. He said they are going to fix the Ford's farm bridge, just west of the pavilion, that was used to cross over the rail trail when the trains were in active use.

Bellizzi hopes the signs impart information to the public of what all was here in Highland, especially the length and breadth of the rail lines that not only crisscrossed Ulster and nearby counties but eventually ran up into New England, carrying goods and in wartime, transported troops and supplies.

"We're trying to tell some of the history of the Town of Lloyd and of what the railroad meant on this side of the Hudson," he said.

Highland Station

Highland was once an Ulster County transportation gateway via Hudson River ferries and steamboats, a New Paltz-Highland electric trolley, the West Shore Railroad along the Hudson, and the New Haven Railroad "Maybrook Line," now the Hudson Valley Rail Trail. The passenger depot and freight house built here after the railroad was completed in 1889 were part of community life for many years.

Passenger Depot

In its early decades the depot served passenger trains running between Hartford, Connecticut, and Campbell Hill, New York, and a shuttle to Poughkeepsie. The depot became a social center where people came and went, sent and received packages, got their world news, and exchanged local gossip. The US Mail moved by Railway Post Office, and before the telephone, the station agent provided communication via telegraph. Highland passengers included commuters, salesmen, shoppers, schoolchildren, and patrons of local resorts and Shawangunk Mountain hotels.



▲ **HIGHLAND DEPOT**
Historical photograph of a Central New England & Hudson Railroad steam engine at Highland station in 1889. Source: Train of Lloyd Historical Society Collection.

Freight Service

The Maybrook Line was mostly a freight route and served a freight yard west of the station. The freight house next to the depot handled packages and less-than-carload freight. The Great Depression beginning in 1929 and the rise of the automobile impacted passenger traffic, and passenger service ended here in the 1930s. Freight traffic peaked during World War II but dropped off dramatically after the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge, now the Walkway Over the Hudson State Park, burned in 1974. The depot and freight house were demolished, and the last freight train ran here in 1982.



▲ **HIGHLAND DEPOT**
This view of the Highland Depot is from the 1920s. The building was the station agent's office and the platform and tracks. The freight house stands at right. Source: Vision News Service.



▲ **FREIGHT TRAIN**
New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad freight locomotives pulling a Central New England freight train from the Maybrook Line in the early 1930s. Source: Railroad Collectors' Archives and Special Collections, UConn Library.

Pratt Lumber

In 1889, George Washington Pratt relocated his lumber and container business here to take advantage of the new railroad line and Twaalfskill Creek waterpower for his sawmill. George and his son Marcourt Joseph Pratt established the George W. Pratt & Son Company and sold coal, grain, ice, and lumber from here. George Pratt was a founder and president of the First National Bank of Highland. Marcourt Pratt served as a US congressman for Ulster County from 1920 to 1932. After over a century of ownership the Pratt family sold the lumber yard in 1993, and it closed in 1995.



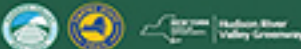
▲ **GEORGE W. PRATT**
1840-1920
Source: Train of Lloyd Historical Society Collection.



▲ **MARCOURT J. PRATT**
1888-1932
Source: Train of Lloyd Historical Society Collection.

Aerial View

Aerial photo of the Highland station taken about 1960 showing the elevated depot, freight house, and platform north of the tracks at left and Pratt Lumber buildings south of the tracks at center. Bridge over Ulster Avenue / Route 44 is at top right. Bridge is at bottom center. Source: Train of Lloyd Historical Society Collection.



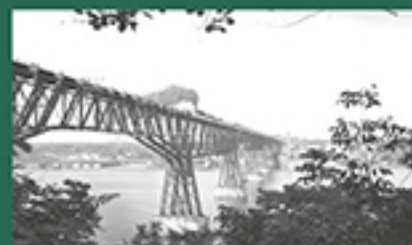
This Highland Station sign is located on the rail trail beside the High Bridge residential apartment complex. It shows the station was used for passenger and freight service and for the Pratt Lumber Company for a century.



The Highland section of the trail extends west through New Paltz and east over the Walkway Over the Hudson.

The Maybrook Line

Welcome to the Hudson Valley Rail Trail in Lloyd, New York, a segment of the Empire State Trail that follows part of the former New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad "Maybrook Line," once an important southern New England freight rail gateway.



▲ **POUGHKEEPSIE BRIDGE**
A westbound New Haven Railroad freight train on the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge approaches Lloyd in the late 1940s. Completed in 1888, this 8,768-foot-long cantilever truss bridge carried Maybrook Line trains 212 feet above the Hudson River. It burned in 1974, impacting regional freight rail routes. It is now the Walkway Over the Hudson State Park. Source: Kent Cochrane.

The Maybrook

East-west rail traffic south of Albany crossed the Hudson River on freight car ferries between Beacon and Newburgh until 1889, when the railroad bridge across the river was completed at Poughkeepsie. The "New Haven," then southern New England's dominant railroad, consolidated several existing end-to-end rail lines by 1904 to create the 125-mile-long Maybrook Line. The Maybrook moved freight gathered from five railroads converging at a large freight yard west of the Hudson in Maybrook, in Orange County. From there New Haven trains carried freight east through Lloyd, across the river to Poughkeepsie, over the hills of Dutchess and Putnam Counties, and ultimately to the Cedar Hill freight yard outside New Haven, Connecticut.



Rise and Fall

Like its hilly route, the Maybrook Line had its ups and downs. It was busy during World War I but lost traffic during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Maybrook's finest hour was during World War II, when powerful New Haven steam locomotives moved record freight tonnage over the line. After the war, traffic declined again, and diesel locomotives replaced steam in 1947. Competition from Penn Central rail lines after 1968 and Interstate 84 after 1971 further eroded service. A 1974 fire shut down the Poughkeepsie bridge, ending Maybrook Line long-distance freight trains and altering regional freight rail patterns. The last freight train ran on the Lloyd-to-Maybrook portion of the line in 1982.



▲ **"MAYBROOK BOUND"**
This watercolor painting of New Haven Railroad diesel locomotive-powered trains meeting at Poughkeepsie, New York, captures the spirit of heavy freight service on the Maybrook Line in the 1950s. Source: William G. DuMaine Jr.

Rail to Trail

Today the Empire State Trail follows the route of the former Maybrook Line for forty-four miles from Lloyd to Brewster, New York, over the Hudson Valley Rail Trail, the Walkway Over the Hudson, the William R. Steinhaus Dutchess Rail Trail, and the Maybrook Trailway.

▲ **MAYBROOK LINE**
The Maybrook Line was a key rail freight connection across the Hudson River, linking important railroad lines from the west with southern New England. In Lloyd, the Hudson Valley Rail Trail follows the Maybrook Line for 5.4 miles between the former of Highland and Elting Corners. Source: Milestone Heritage Consulting / Emily Moser / Toddle Associates.



▶ **END OF THE LINE**
Sculpture workers tore up the Maybrook Line tracks in Lloyd in 1982, the year after rail service ended here. The Hudson Valley Rail Trail Association opened the first short section of the Hudson Valley Rail Trail on the Maybrook Line right-of-way in 1997. The trail has expanded east and west and become a segment of the 750-mile-long Empire State Trail in 2020. Source: Austin McInerney photo, Vision News Service collection.

This sign, located across from the Highland Welcome Center at the Walkway Over the Hudson, shows the importance of the Maybrook Rail Line as a key freight connection across the Hudson River and into New England.



This sign stands beside the red 1915 'N5' caboose at the Rail Trail pavilion