

THE MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL:

Its history and unique features in the east Quabbin region

By Mark D. Mattson

The Central Mass. Railroad was conceived by a group of investors in Barre and later approved by the state legislature in 1869 to run 104 miles from Northampton to Boston to compete with the Fitchburg railroads running to the north and the Boston and Albany (B&A) line to the south, which included the existing Ware Railroad running up to Barre. The Central Mass Railroad opened in 1887 and was quickly acquired by the Boston and Maine (B&M) Railroad.

The Central Mass shipped commodities and commuters to Boston with three round trips a day. Even Calvin Coolidge commuted from his home in Northampton to his Governor's office in Boston in 1918. Profits fell as autos and trucks became prevalent. The flood of 1936 hurt the line and the final blow came with the hurricane of 1938 that flooded the valley and washed out rails at multiple places in the area. This ended the Boston to Northampton route and rails were removed east of Wheelwright. Because the paper mill at Wheelwright was an important source of revenue the western portion of the line was repaired and operated by B&M until the mill closed in 1973 and the tracks removed ten years later.

From those ruined tracks a new vision was conceived: converting the railroad into a rail trail. The Norwottuck Rail Trail opened an 11 mile section in 1992 from Northampton to Belchertown. The Wachusett Greenways section runs from Coldbrook in Barre eastward through Oakham, Rutland and Holden. Other sections closer to Boston are gaining attention as rail trail segments.

The East Quabbin Land Trust purchased 3 miles of railroad track from Creamery Road in Hardwick to Wheelwright in 2007, including two historic bridges. The lattice truss bridge is tall with overhead cross bracing. This design was patented by Itheil Town of Thompson, Connecticut in 1820. The truss members are thin strips of iron under tension that form a series of X's across the bridge from the upper corners and cross near the middle.

The pony truss bridge is undergoing repairs that will allow pedestrian use this summer. The bridge is a Howe truss bridge with no overhead cross bracing. This truss

design was patented in 1840 by a local inventor, William Howe of Spencer, Massachusetts. The Howe design uses strong beams slanting down and out from the center, which form a single large X in a box in each panel on the bridge when viewed from the side. The vertical sides of the box are angle irons under tension (on our bridge the box sides have two slanted angle irons that stick out to the side of the bridge for lateral stability). Due to abandonment and replacement with newer concrete bridges there are few examples of the lattice truss and Howe pony truss bridge designs remaining.

It is difficult to say with certainty but evidence suggests that these bridges were fabricated by the R.F. Hawkins Ironworks Company in Springfield and assembled onsite. The lattice bridge appears to be identical to the lattice truss bridge over the Connecticut River in Northampton. In addition, there is some evidence (found in the Northampton and Easthampton Directory of 1883/84) suggesting that William Howe and R.F. Hawkins were involved in a previous company building Howe and Lattice truss bridges prior to 1883.



Mark with his tractor at the pony truss after finishing the decking repairs.

The weak points of both bridges are the old creosote treated wooden beams and piles driven into the bottom of the river that hold the iron bridges up. Several piles are already repaired by cutting out the rotten wood and splicing in pressure treated blocks. The northeastern corner of the pony truss was jacked up so new beams could replace the rotted beams. With my old tractor fitted out with extra long forks, we removed the old ties and installed the new pressure treated beams to form a flat deck.

The pony truss bridge is still under construction and volunteers are needed in the spring to install the railings. Please consider joining other volunteers to complete this project. And the next time you are out at the rail trail, pause and think about the past and how you can help shape the future of the rail trail.

To visit the Mass Central Rail Trail, park at the former New Braintree train station site between Hardwick and West Roads in New Braintree, just over the silver bridge from Hardwick. ■

MESSAGE FROM THE Executive Director

Cynthia Henshaw



A core part of the land trust’s mission is to engage people in ways that foster a deeper understanding of and instinct to care about the land that sustains life. Getting outdoors is a critical step in that process.

From the very start twenty years ago conservation efforts that involved public recreation were tops on the land trust priority list. For instance, back in 1997 the land trust assisted the Town of Hardwick in acquiring the Old Furnace Launch and New Furnace Landing. Today the Old Furnace Launch has parking and easy access for fishing and boating along the Ware River. Further downstream, the New Furnace Landing includes the gazebo in Gilbertville and seven acres with a walking trail and new fitness stations overlooking the river.

Another step in meeting our mission came with the 2007 purchase of three miles of former railroad bed in New Braintree and Hardwick with the vision of refurbishing the bridges and opening the area as part of the Mass Central Rail Trail.

While it might seem unlikely for a land trust to get involved building a rail trail, this 15 acre property is handicapped accessible in a way that none of our larger preserves can be. The rail trail is a safe place to walk, run and bike; connecting several conservation areas with neighboring fields and woods. There is great value in having a rail trail available where sidewalks are limited and the landscape is beautiful. People come from all over to use the rail trail.

Over the years a dedicated group of volunteers and contractors completed the steps necessary to open a two mile section of the Mass Central Rail Trail. We are poised to finish another mile by repairing the pony truss and the trail surface to Wheelwright, but we need your help. Volunteers are needed to install the bridge railing and financial support is needed to buy the materials.

The rail trail is a terrific community resource. Please make your appreciation known by making a gift towards the effort. Thank You! ■



Mass Central Rail Trail TM

THE EAST QUABBIN LAND TRUST

works to foster the sustainable use of our natural and historic resources for the benefit of all generations through the conservation and stewardship of the farmlands, woodlands and waters in our region of Massachusetts.

As a non-profit organization the East Quabbin Land Trust envisions a regional community that continues to care for its natural environment and supports a sustainable local economy, ensuring a high quality of life for generations to come.

We welcome your thoughts, articles, and photographs on events in our area. For more information about the land trust, to become a member, or request a change of address, please contact us at:

East Quabbin Land Trust
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 Hardwick, MA 01037-0005
 413-477-8229 (tel & fax)
 email: EQLT@comcast.net

Visit our website at www.EQLT.org

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ED YAGLOU: A Life of Community Action

By Sam Frost

For many of us, helping out our communities is a part-time endeavor. We make enough time to patronize a church bake sale, attend the occasional school board meeting and spend a Saturday at the rail trail wielding a pair of tree clippers. And then there's Ed Yaglou.

There is no central Massachusetts Volunteer Hall of Fame, but if there were, Yaglou would be a shoo-in first ballot inductee. A 25-year member of the pioneering conservation nonprofit Wachusett Greenways, the Barre resident has been synonymous with local community action for decades.

Serving as one of Greenways' primary job site supervisors, he oversaw the addition of a plethora of segments to the Mass Central Rail Trail, an ongoing statewide venture that if completed would connect 104 miles of hiking trails stretching from Boston to Northampton. As supervisor, Yaglou was primarily tasked with the creation of bridges and tunnels between various sections of trail, including, among many others, the 2012 erection of the White Valley Bridge in Barre, a tunnel in Rutland running under Charnock

Hill Road, and two bridges over the Quinapoxet River in Holden. Some of these undertakings were arduous and immensely complicated. The White Valley Bridge project, for instance, involved numerous government bodies while building a multipurpose bridge designed for pedestrians, vehicles, and maintenance equipment. "It was the most complex project I've been a part of," Yaglou says. During his tenure, Wachusett Greenways annually added a mile of new trails to an ever-growing expanse of pathways that now covers 16 miles from Barre to Sterling.

As if such accomplishments weren't enough, Yaglou is also active in the Barre Players Theater and has been a director of the Barre Historical Society for 20 years. One of his most important and rewarding efforts during his time at the historical society was his role in the conservation of Barre's Concord Stagecoach, a project that took over 20 years to complete and cost over \$140,000. The considerable sum covered everything from the building of post-and-beam barn to house the coach to the removal of over a century's worth of accumulated grime and darkened varnish that had obscured the ornate decorations on the door of the carriage. "It looked like it had been in a fire," Yaglou says of its previous state. In the end, however, the venture proved well worth the time and resources. "I do not know of another one like (the stagecoach) in the entire country," Yaglou says proudly.

"All others have been restored, not conserved." (If you are confused about the difference, as this writer initially was, conservation keeps an artifact in its current state and protects it from future harm, while restoration attempts to undo existing damage and return the object to its original state, making it look new again.)

Yaglou has been so devoted to local community efforts for so long and has achieved such success that one would be forgiven for forgetting that volunteerism is his second life pursuit. Prior to his retirement from professional life in 1994, Yaglou enjoyed a fruitful career as an educator. Born and raised in Belmont, MA, he taught in Newton before moving to Connecticut for a stint as an assistant high school principal in New Canaan, CT from 1962-64, and then as a high school principal in New Haven from 1964-69. He would eventually move back to Massachusetts, where he acted as superintendent of the Wachusett school district before returning to the classroom as a high school math teacher for his final eight years in the education field.

He and his wife Grace, who has also taken an active role in local affairs, have been married for 58 years, and have four children together.

Nowadays things are relatively quiet for Yaglou on the community action front. He says he hasn't been especially active in conservation as of late, though he is still contributing money to "projects that capture (his) imagination," including endeavors in Barre, Rutland, and Washington, NH. He also has assisted the EQLT with its own rail trail construction efforts. "It's always been a fun afternoon working for the East Quabbin Land Trust he says," he says. "Cynthia has some super people." Most recently, he led this year's annual New Year's Day Walk/Ski along the Hardwick-New Braintree rail trail, which EQLT co-hosted along with Wachusett Greenways.

Most people do what they can, when they can to help community causes. While these incremental contributions are invaluable to local volunteer efforts, it is also vital that there are people willing to invest enough of their time and energy to take on leadership of these projects. Without the selfless commitment of these leaders, community action would be disorganized and unproductive, and the efforts of many would go to waste. It is for this reason that our area is so fortunate to count Ed Yaglou as one of its members. ■



Ed Yaglou installing railing sections at the lattice truss bridge.

Thank You for Your Financial Support in 2014!

Every gift is important to us and helps fulfill our mission together. We are only able to accomplish important conservation, stewardship and education efforts with your support. Thank you for your generosity! We apologize for any errors or omissions.

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FRIENDS OF THE MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL

By Shelby Braese

Since it was acquired, the three miles of the Mass Central Rail Trail that East Quabbin Land Trust owns in Hardwick and New Braintree has seen much change and improvement. As part of my AmeriCorps service and as the service learning coordinator for EQLT, I focus on expanding the number of people involved with the organization by engaging members of our communities including school groups, scouts, and youth groups. My projects create opportunities for volunteer participation through events on our properties. For instance, last fall we spent a morning clearing brush and picking up trash at the Wheelwright end of the trail. Along with help from others, including the trial court community service program, we were able to clear thirty years of tree growth from the trail bed. Now the trail is clear and other projects on the bridge and fencing are underway to officially open the mile into Wheelwright during 2015.

Overall, I am focusing on six projects that expand the capacity of EQLT and partner groups. One of these projects is to form a Friends group for EQLT's section of the Mass Central Rail Trail. The Friends group is made up of interested community members who want to actively participate in making decisions about what happens on the trail (like special events and future improvement projects). The East Quabbin Land Trust has a core group of volunteers that transformed the old railroad bed into the rail trail you see today. Formalizing a Friends group will expand the volunteer efforts from bridge construction projects to other things. One Friends group member suggested a picnic table along the Ware River where the lattice truss bridge crosses. Now that there are stairs providing easier access to the river (thanks to the Ware River Snowmobile Club) that area is a perfect location for a summer-time picnic. Keep an eye out for a newly installed picnic table as the weather warms!

We are seeking your ideas. For the past month now, EQLT has been distributing a survey about rail trail use. Besides general demographics, we want to know how much of the trail people use, what draws people to the trail and their favorite trail activity. People told us that they are very interested in group walks and nature walks or other family-oriented educational programming. A lot of local people use the trail, but there are many first timers from different areas

of the state who come visit too! It's great to see that the word is spreading about the rail trail. We hope through Friends group activities, more people will enjoy the rail trail.

Many survey respondents are over 50 and come to enjoy our beautiful rail trail. We've heard from far fewer



Participants in the New Year's Day walk 2015 made a quick stop on the historic pony truss bridge for a photograph and quick background on the bridge design. Volunteers laid down the decking and in the spring the railing will be installed before the trail can officially open for non-motorized recreational uses.

younger people; especially any under 25. Another goal of the Friends group is to attract younger people to come out to the rail trail. Of course, people under 25 are my main age group focus for my service learning projects. With the help of a group of people who can meet on a regular basis, community goals can be addressed and EQLT can offer more activities for both local and non-local people of all ages who come to visit our great section of trail. In the coming months, the Friends group will be planning the official trail opening to Wheelwright for late June or early July.

Please become a member of the Friends of the Rail

Trail group! Interested individuals can contact me at servicelearning@eqlt.org. We are currently gathering e-mails as the best mode of communication. I will host a Friends group meeting before winter ends. This will be an informational meeting with a focus on the soon-to-be opened section of rail trail. You don't have to commit to be a Friends group member to participate, so if you are interested, please let me know.

If you would like to take our Rail Trail Survey as well, please enter the following web address to take it online >>><https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/577NRX5><<<, find the link on our Facebook page, or send an e-mail to me at servicelearning@eqlt.org to receive a digital copy by e-mail that you can send back, or just stop by our office to take it in person! ■



Also this month we've started a Twitter feed! Yes, that's right. EQLT has begun a twitter page. We will be posting news and events there now as well as our newsletters and on Facebook. After receiving a lot of feedback from people regarding this hub of social media, we decided to start one for those of you who prefer twitter over other forms of social media.

Please follow us at >>> <https://twitter.com/EQuabbinLT> <<< to get all the latest updates! ■

STATION LOOP RAMBLE 5-MILER: Second Sunday in October

A hilly road and trail race with a flat fast finish on the Mass Central Rail Trail

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Comments about the race from Sam Frost

As the fog lifted on a beautiful brisk fall day and rays of sunlight gently filtered through foliage in peak color, the runners paced restlessly around. Assembled at Depot Road in New Braintree, they were preparing for what quite literally would be an uphill struggle. Their task was the EQLT's Station Loop Ramble, a five-mile race beginning and ending at the former New Braintree Train Station. They would start low in the Ware River valley before working their way up a long, slow incline through the pastoral open fields of West Road. This would be followed by their most forbidding obstacle of the day: The steep, winding hills of Unitas Road, replete with potholes, washed out sand and gravel, and other impediments to solid footing. At long last, they would make their way back down into the valley, completing the course with a 1.8-mile sprint to the finish back at the station.

As one of the runners that assembled that day, I had chosen to participate in the race for a number of reasons. Chiefly, I was drawn to the excellent course. It nearly goes without saying that New Braintree in mid-autumn provides a flawless backdrop for any sort of outdoor activity, but the Station Loop offers other charms as well. Namely, it combines a wonderful balance of running

environments, containing both gradual and steep gradients as well as an extensive flat stretch. Runners differ in their strengths and thrive in varying sorts of terrain, and this course contains something for everyone, regardless of preference (A resident of Unitas Road, I personally was disposed to that particular segment). The diversity of terrain made for a race that was alternately challenging and exhilarating, creating a memorable running experience.

I strongly recommend the Station Loop Ramble to all fitness-oriented people who are in search of new running opportunities, and venture to say that one would be hard-pressed to find many better racing locations in the area. Furthermore, you will be able to make a valuable contribution to the EQLT's efforts to preserve and maintain similarly pristine running and walking environments throughout the area. The picturesque Station Loop offers a gleaming showcase for the EQLT and gives evidence of the importance of the organization's endeavors. I guarantee that anyone who participates leaves with a greater appreciation of our local natural landscape and the urgency of keeping it conserved.

Give the Ramble a try. You just may start coming back every year. ■

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www.EQLT.org

MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL



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NEW DATE! NEW TIME!

The fourteenth annual
Dinner and Silent Auction
will be held on **June 27, 2015**
Starting at **5:30 PM**

At the Cultural Center at Eagle Hill
242 Petersham Road, Hardwick

MARK YOUR CALENDARS TODAY!!

UPCOMING EVENTS

JANUARY...

Sunday, January 25, starting at 2:00 PM

History of the Frohloff farm - Susan Gainley and Ed Hood will share their research and insight into the history of the Frohloff farm tracing the family lineage from earliest written records of ownership, and how the current farmhouse was constructed as the farm prospered. Talk will be at EQLT's headquarters, 120 Ridge Road, Hardwick.

FEBRUARY...

Sunday, February 1, starting at 8:00 AM

BioBlitz at Pynchon's Grist Mill - We'll head out and look for all forms of life in the winter landscape. Join us to go ice fishing, tracking and winter bird watching. All skills levels are invited to explore and learn. Parking on Wickaboag Valley Road at the kiosk just south of Snow Road. Contact Shelby at servicelearning@EQLT.org for full details.

Sunday, February 7, walk at 10:00 AM and talk at 1:00 PM

Looking for Bald Eagles - Join us for a day of looking for the iconic symbol of our country that was reintroduced to central Massachusetts several decades ago and now have a strong breeding population at the Quabbin Reservoir. Meet at Gate 35 in Petersham to walk to see bald eagles on the nest. At 1pm Dianne Davis will share her stories and insights about her role in the reintroduction of bald eagles in Massachusetts. Bring a brown bag lunch to eat at EQLT's headquarters before the talk.

Saturday, February 28, starting at 6:00 PM

Mid-winter Dinner and Dance - Looking for some fun to break the mid-winter blues? Come out for a buffet dinner and evening of dancing with your friends at EQLT. Check out our website for more details!

MARCH...

Sunday, March 15, starting at 2:00 PM

Tree and Shrub Identification Walk - Let's explore the bank and forest along the Ware River and Fitness Trail as we learn to identify common tree and shrubs. Meet at the gazebo in Gilbertville on Main Street.