



Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation

Resource Evaluation

307251

Date: 08/26/2022

Staff: Daniel Bagrow

USN Number: 04901.000118

Name: Lowville and Beaver River Railroad Historic District

Location:

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
October 4, 2023
Part of
Public Record

Docket No. AB 180X

Resource Status:

- Determination:** Determined SR/NR eligible by the Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation on the date noted above.
- Contributing:**

Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register:

- ☒ Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns in our history.
- ☐ Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possesses high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- ☐ Have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.



Summary Statement:

The Lowville and Beaver River Railroad Historic District (LBRR) is a short-line railroad located along an approximately ten-mile corridor from the village of Lowville to the village of Croghan in Lewis County. The LBRR is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and meets Criteria A and C as a rare and intact example of a historic transportation line and engineering work linked to the economic development and settlement patterns of Lewis County in the early twentieth century. The LBRR is substantially intact with the district including numerous resource types ranging from depots, functional railroad lines, bridges, turntables, and numerous buildings related to the storage, repair, and operation of trains. Construction of the railroad began in 1904 and operation continued until 2007. The LBRR moved passengers and freight, especially lumber, paper mill products, and agricultural products. The period of significance ends in 1972 based on the fifty-year requirement of the National Register program. The district retains integrity of location, design, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The primary resources within the district include:

- Depots: Lowville Depot (two buildings: 1) two-story, cross gable, brick, two-over-two sash window, roof brackets, 2) 1-story, brick and frame former railroad depot with hipped roof and wide overhanging eaves), Beaver Falls Depot (one-and-a-half-story, wood frame, gable roof, clapboard siding), Croghan Depot
- Engine House: Lowville Engine House, Croghan Engine House
- Turntables: Lowville, Croghan
- Trestles and Bridges, culverts: Black River Flats, Black River Bridge (1905, Warren through truss), Crystal Creek Bridge, Beaver River Bridge, at least four culverts
- Rolling stock: LBR 1947 (GE-44T, B-B, #28345) which is a diesel engine acquired by the LBRR in 1947. Currently housed at the Lowville Engine House.
- The district also includes tracks, switches, signals, and other components of rail infrastructure.

Before the Revolutionary War, Lewis County was little known. The first surveys to the north and east of the Black River Valley labeled the entire northern part of the state as wasteland, and no map until 1795 showed the river to be anything other than a bay off Lake Ontario. However, after the Revolution, the area quickly opened up. Two changes facilitated settlement. First, in 1784, the legislature established the New York State Land Commission to sell patents and raise money to pay off war debts. Second, in 1788, the Oneida Nation was persuaded to surrender ownership of most of the land west of the Adirondacks in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix. Four years later, Alexander Macomb, William Constable, and Daniel McCormick negotiated the bargain price of 8 pence per acre for more than 3.6 million acres of land in the northern part of the state. The size of this purchase (1/8 the surface area of the state) triggered an investigation into political favoritism, but no one really knew the extent of what had been sold until the purchase was surveyed in the 1790s.

All the land in what are now Lewis, Jefferson, and St. Lawrence counties (and portions of Franklin, Herkimer, and Oswego counties) was included in the sale, but, at that time, the entire area was part of Herkimer County. Herkimer had been split off Tyron County in 1791; Oneida County split off Herkimer after 1798. Lewis County was taken from Oneida County in 1805 and named for then-Governor Morgan Lewis.

Road access to Lewis County in the early nineteenth century was limited due to its remote location far from major population centers. Early efforts at settlement were sporadic and minimally successful. The

New York State Legislature approved the construction of what is today NY Route 26 between Rome and Watertown in 1803. In the winter, wheat from the Black River valley was taken by sleigh to Albany or to Utica and Rome after the Erie Canal opened in 1825. Settlement efforts in this area of Lewis County would eventually prove more successful beginning ca. 1830. The Black River Canal, constructed between 1836 and 1855, made those over-the-road treks obsolete.

Railroads soon outcompeted canals but the topography in Lewis County was unforgiving. The Utica & Black River Railroad (U&BR) was eventually built from Utica to Ogdensburg in stages: from Utica to Boonville in 1855, to Lyons Falls in 1867, to Lowville in 1868 to Cartage in 1871, to Sackets Harbor in 1874, and Ogdensburg in 1878. An 11-mile branch line from Lowville through Beaver Falls to Croghan was planned in late 1880 but it was not until 1903 that J.P. Lewis backed the short line to serve his mills at Beaver Falls.

The J.P. Lewis Company paper mill began in 1836 when Jacob and Rudolf Rohr acquired land adjoining Beaver Falls and built a sawmill. Lewis, LeFevre, and Charles Nuffer later constructed a pulp mill next to the sawmill. J.P. Lewis gained sole control of the pulp mill in 1883 and built another using an improved pulp grinding process in 1887.

The idea for the railroad may have occurred in the local businessmen's club, the Lowville Club, either over a card game in the back room or simply in a discussion where the issue of a railroad to connect Lowville with Croghan, where it would connect with the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad. Soon all present agreed, most prominent among them, coal dealer G.A. Blackmon, who incidentally had built the Lowville Club in which they were meeting, took the business in hand and on August 3, 1903, formed the Lowville and Beaver River. Railroad Company.

First he collected an investment of \$11,000 from a few friends and business colleagues. Then he went out by horse and buggy into the farm country north of the Black River, where he told farmers that the railroad would make shipping milk to New York City easier and increase their milk receipts. After several weeks of this, Blackmon had \$60,000 in subscriptions to stock. Then he went after and obtained another \$50,000 from businessmen and townspeople in Lowville and vicinity. That spring, C.E. Brownell surveyed two routes and that summer James T. Campbell won the contract for construction of the line. Despite labor troubles, the need to construct a long trestle over the Black River flats, and the subsequent death of Campbell, the building of the railroad continued through 1904 and 1905 until the construction crews completed it in January 1906.

The L&BR was dieselized in 1947, while #1923, their remaining steam locomotive, was used on standby service in case the diesel needed repairs. It last operated in January 1957. The locomotives of the L&BR were numbered 10, 12, 51, 1912, 1923, 1947 (Diesel), 1950 (Diesel), 1951 (Diesel) and 8 (Shay/steam). All of the diesel engines were GE 44-tonners.

In January 1960, negotiations began with the J.P. Lewis Company for the purchase of all the LBRR railroad stock, which was acquired by J.P. Lewis in August. It eventually became a part of the Genesee Valley Transportation Company (GVT).

In 1998, the Railway Historical Society of Northern New York (RHSNN) acquired the Croghan depot for storage and to serve as a museum. The LBRR was placed out of service after the paper mill in Beaver Falls closed on January 24, 2007.

A detailed survey of all the district's resources has not yet been completed but based on submitted photo documentation the Lowville & Beaver River Railroad is a highly intact assemblage of buildings, structures, and objects, reflects the period of significance, and is able to convey the significance of this locally significant railroad line which aided in the growth of both Lowville and Croghan during the twentieth century.

Sources

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