

Summer Homes and the O&W

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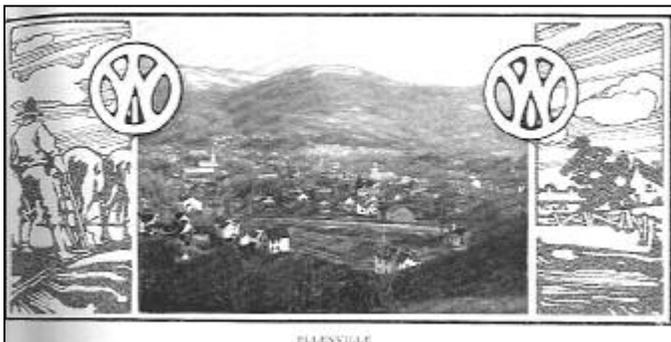
Early commercial transportation in Ulster and Sullivan Counties was limited to foot paths, then dirt roads suitable for animal-drawn wagons – which made commercial transport of products possible – and then turnpikes commissioned by businessmen. Water travel in Sullivan County began with rafts on the Delaware River to transport logs as early as 1764, followed by the moving of bluestone for sidewalks and curbs in New York.

Ulster County had access to the Hudson River, but that was 30 miles away from Ellenville. The construction of the **Delaware & Hudson Canal** opened a new transportation route from Pennsylvania to the Hudson. Coal mined in Pennsylvania was transported by canal to the barges on the Hudson River. So were many other natural and manufactured products in the communities that developed and flourished along the canal. The major drawback to water transportation, be it rivers or canal, is the restriction winter temperatures place on its use when the water freezes.

The development of railroads offered another option to Sullivan County in 1847 when the New York & Erie Railway entered Sullivan County at Tusten Depot. Passenger trains of the *New York & Oswego Midland Railroad* were using the new tunnel opened in 1871 under the Shawangunk Mountains at Wurtsboro, a development that would of tremendous benefit to Ellenville and the Town of Wawarsing.

The *New York & Oswego Midland Railroad* extended a branch into the Town of Wawarsing in 1871, establishing stations in Ellenville and Homowack (Spring Glen). For almost thirty years, the railroad and the **D&H Canal** ran side by side for miles between Ellenville and Wurtsboro.

In April 1878, the Liberty Register had carried an advertisement directed to proprietors of summer boarding houses and hotels, announcing a proposal to issue a pamphlet entitled *Summer Homes on the Midland*, which would be distributed in New York, Brooklyn, and vicinity. “The object of this publication is to offer the thousands who annually look for Summer homes in the country, detailed information concerning the accommodations and facilities offered along the line of the Middle Division and Branches of the Midland Railroad.” After describing the nature of the information needed, the advertisement continued “Station Agents will (until April 25th, but not later) receive the names of all wishing to register themselves as having accommodation to offer... on payment of \$2.00. A limited amount of space will be reserved for Hotels, or



Summer Boarding Houses, whose Proprietors wish to pay for inserting displayed advertisements.”

The emergence of railroad service hastened the decline of the **D&H Canal**, since the canal could not compete with the year-round service offered by the railroad, or its speed. The last boat to run the full length of the canal completed its run in 1898, although some local runs occurred after that year.

Railroad service had brought a new business to the Town of Wawarsing. The clean air, pure water, and impressive natural beauty of the **Shawangunk Mountains** and the **Rondout Valley** drew residents of New York City, and the summer resort economy blossomed. Farmers opened their large farmhouses to summer boarders, small and large boarding houses were built to accommodate the increasing number of summer visitors, and the economy of the Town of Wawarsing benefited.

However, all was not well with the *New York & Oswego Midland Railroad*, so the *New York, Ontario & Western Railway* took over the operation of the bankrupt Midland. The *O&W* management recognized the growth potential of the summer resorts, thanks in large part to *Summer Homes on the Midland*, and continued its publication as *Summer Homes Among the Mountains of the New York, Ontario & Western Railway*.

Summer Homes is an interesting publication and a fine historical resource. The *Ellenville Public Library & Museum* possesses several different issues that provided the information and graphics for this article. (The picture above is from the 1905 cover; the picture at left heads the *Ellenville Station* section). It is organized by station name, subdivided by post office address, and each community is described with a narrative, usually quite brief.

Until the early years of the twentieth century, railroad service was available only into Ellenville, which was the end of the branch line running from Wurtsboro. In