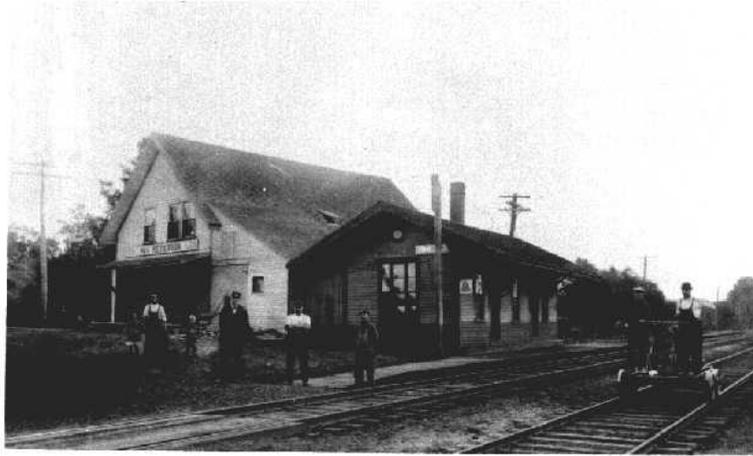


Oak Hill Railroad Station & Peterson's Grain Store

By Frank Hodgdon



Oak Hill Railroad Station & Peterson's Grain Store, circa 1905: William Peterson is shown with his two children and their dog. Station Agent Fred Walker also appears. For many years previously, the grain store had been owned by A. M. Sylvester.

The Oak Hill Station was Scarborough's first railroad station and was located at what today would be 44-46 Black Point Road. The Portland, Saco, and Portsmouth Railroad, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Eastern Railroad Company, commenced operations in 1842 and was Portland's first railway link with Boston and points south. It joined the Boston & Maine Railroad at South Berwick just this side of the Maine-New Hampshire border at the Salmon Falls River, and for 30 years carried B&M trains the 50 miles to Portland's principal station on Commercial Street just below J. B. Brown's fabulous Falmouth Hotel (present day site of Canal Plaza).

Leaving Portland, the PS&P crossed the Fore River just south of the Casco Bay Bridge via a wooden trestle to Turner's Island, to the Cape Elizabeth Station which stood near the Summer Street (Broadway) crossing, today the site of an Irving Plaza, and thence through what in 1927 became the Rigby Yard, to the "No Nothing" crossing of the Pleasant Hill Road in Scarborough and thence on to the Oak Hill Station. The grain store and post office were built by Asa M. Sylvester just prior to the Civil War era, when the siding became a busy shipping point for the horses and livestock supplied to the Union Army by a man named Russell, who had purchased the former George Vaughan estate we know today as the Willowdale Golf Club. It is said this enterprise, which gathered horses and livestock from all of Maine, saw the estate dotted with some 32 hay barns!

The railroad continued across the great marsh to the West Scarborough Station, which stood at the intersection of Old Blue Point Road and Portland Street. In those days, Pine Point Road did not exist. Later, in the 1870s, a modest station was built between Pine Point Road and the river

to replace the original. The line continued through the Old Orchard Junction station to Saco, Biddeford, Kennebunk, Wells, and ended at Agamenticus.

In 1871, in a bid for the hostile acquisition of the B&M Railroad, The Eastern Railroad terminated its lease with the B&M and refused to allow B&M trains use of its tracks. Faced with this dilemma, the B&M forthwith built its own line to Portland along the shore, bypassing the PS&P. Subsequently, in a later economic downturn, the B&M acquired all the assets of the Eastern Railroad, completely turning the tables on its old foe.

The "Old Eastern" continued operations through 1944, although most of its way stations, including Oak Hill and West Scarborough, were done away with in 1925. The Scarborough Historical Society has recently acquired one of the signs which once marked the West Scarborough Station to augment its earlier Oak Hill Station sign.

The photo with this story is rare, although many postcard photographs of the station continue in existence. This picture was graciously loaned to me by Natalie Carlsen, who today lives near Monterey, California. Her mom and dad lived in an apartment over the store while she was growing up in the thirties and forties. In the photograph are her grandfather, William Peterson, who had recently purchased the store, and his children Anne and Elsworth (Natalie's aunt and uncle) and their dog. The year is 1905, when her father, Clarence, was born. Clarence, known to everyone as "Pete" Peterson, inherited the grain store and went on to build the Red & White store up on Route One which continued through various owners until recent times, when it gave way to allow the right-turn lane onto Black Point Road.

Also in the picture are Stationmaster Fred Walker and a variety of unidentified section hands. As appearing here, Asa Sylvester's building housed a meeting hall on its second floor which was widely used in the days before the "new" town hall was built in 1883. Dances, parties, and gatherings of all kinds used the upper room. William Peterson modified the second floor into an apartment for his family, which Pete and his wife, Christine, occupied subsequently. The grain store survived the railroad station by 40 years and the tracks themselves by 25 years, disappearing in the 1960s. A duplex house today stands on the station site, and the right-of-way is now a part of an increasingly popular "rails to trails" program underwritten by the state.