

Bangor and Aroostook Railroad

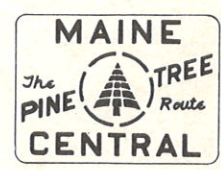
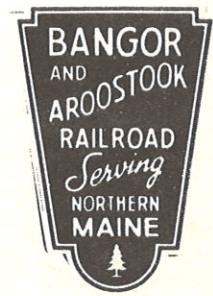
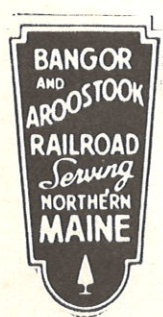


HISTORICAL AND TECH. SOC.

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MONSON

NARROW GANGE



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ISSUE I

SIXTY YEARS OF NARROW GAUGE ALONG THE B.A.R.

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Narrow gauge railroads are fascinating and have a wide following in the railfan and modeling circles. Almost every state has boasted several in their railroading past, Maine being no exception. The B.A.R. modeller is fortunate that he has a prototype for that revenue producing narrow gauge line he's been planning. This is the story of the MONSON RAILROAD COMPANY.

During the post Civil War railroad boom, towns and villages vied with one another for that all important transportation connection. The coming of the railroad, especially in the northern climes, meant growth of industry and commerce through the dependable transportation link. Topography or, finances sometimes dictated that the link be narrow gauged. This was a new plus to New Englander's noted for their caution with a dollar, as narrow gauge lines were 33-50% cheaper than standard gauge. Monson, Maine, in the county of Piscataquis, was the home of several lucrative quarries. The management realized that increased production would mean increased profits IF they could deliver their products year round. The Bangor and Piscataquis R.R. built a line up the Piscataquis River valley, with Greenville, on Moosehead Lake, and an eventual connection with the Canadian Pacific, its destination. It passed four miles to the west of Monson village. This was a partial solution to the problem. Eventually the slate quarries agitated for a spur from the Bangor & Piscataquis, or, a railroad of their own. The latter plan won approval and by the end of 1882 they were organized, chartered, surveyed and finances seemed secure enough to build during the next season.

The line was contracted to Charles and Robert Sawyer of Bangor, and construction commenced during the summer of 1883. The company opened for business October 22, 1883, with one engine, one combination, 14 flatcars, two box cars and assorted handcars, for rolling stock. The line began on the B. & P. at a point everafter called Monson Jct. It left the Jct., dashed across a highway and ducked into the woods on its way north to the village. Along the way it crossed one of the two bridges on the line, crossed a highway, passed and serviced a slate operation, intersected another highway, scooted across a long fill into the Monson yard.

Immediately upon the completion of the main line, a branch line to one of the major quarries was constructed. Also at this time, several grandiose schemes for expansion were paraded about in the hope of attracting further financial speculation. By 1886 enough interest had been aroused to again begin construction of a branch south from the Jct. toward the village of Wellington, 20 miles away. The proposal was to connect with the northward building Sebasticook & Moosehead R.R. at that point. The proposal also called for the standard gauging of the entire line and the eventual extension of the slate quarry spur northward to Greenville and the C.P.R. This would have created a bridge line if completed. Unfortunately, only a mile or so of the southbound spur was graded before the road sunk deep into insolvency. The Monson reluctantly put to rest its dreams of railroad empires. The insolvency situation looked grim indeed. The stock that was so eagerly subscribed for was less eagerly paid up. The expansion programs also ate up sums of the uncollected monies. Somehow arrangements were made to continue running the existing line, as a forced sale of the railroads property would not begin to make a dent in the debt owed. I suspect that the slate companies satisfied the creditors that they would assume responsibility for the bills, thus beginning to lay groundwork for total takeover and reorganization of the company later on.

During this time, another engine was acquired, several flats were shopped and emerged as boxcars, and, three pieces of badly needed M.O.W. equipment were added to the roster. These were a snowplow, a four wheel dump car and a flatcar converted to a snowspreader by the addition of wings. This last, could wing the snowbanks out of the way for the next storm. Also branches extended to other revenue producing quarries.

Time passed for the world, but the Monson remained pretty much the same. The link and pin couplers, stub turnouts and handbrakes that the line began with were destined to remain fixtures until the last day of operation. By 1900, the engines had been overhauled and converted from woodburners to coal. Routine maintenance was kept up and business began to improve. About 1908, the Monson Maine Slate Co., the line's largest shipper stepped in and assumed full ownership and control. I doubt that any money changed hands, the stockholders being glad to be out from under. Management was realigned with officers of the slate company becoming the officers for their newest possession. Purists may argue that the railroad quit being a common carrier at this time and became an industrial railroad that hauled passengers, mail and express. So be it. But under the slate company ownership, the line increased its rolling stock, and posted some of its highest earnings. The slate company takeover gave the line a clean operating sheet, but the bonded indebtedness was carried on the books. Any profits went into the slate company coffers. At the time of the slate company takeover, the line acquired six more flatcars. It also slapped a badly needed coat of paint on the other pieces of rolling stock and renumbered them.

The number 1 engine wore out in 1912 and a replacement was ordered. It showed up on the property in 1913. The number 2 engine was refurbished and used sparingly, lasting until 1918, when it was replaced by number 4, the line's last engine. In 1916 the line acquired two more flatcars, second hand, these being the heaviest constructed on the line's roster. When the number 2 engine was retired, it was converted into a snowplow experiment. The drivers were unconnected and a plow was affixed to the pilot and a new cab was constructed. The theory was that the locomotive weight would be an asset to a snowplow. It worked, but not as well as expected, so it spent much of its time rusting away, out behind the slate quarry sheds.

November 3, 1919 the engine house erupted in flames, burning flat and taking substantial woodshed with it. The two locomotives and the plow experiment were caught inside. Service was quickly restored thanks to the talented shop force. The engine house and wood shed were rebuilt and the companies' structures were now recipients of a new paint job. The Monson was meeting four B.A.R. trains a day at the Jct. and business was brisk. Slate was used for pool table bases, chalkboards, shingles, sinks, and what have you. The line's most prestigious customer was the Otis Elevator Co. which used slate for electrical control panels in the days before plastic and printed circuit boards. The demand was so great for these control panels, I am told, that the salesman used to haunt the offices and in general make a pest of himself in a vain effort to hurry up production. The completed panels were carefully crated (slate is a fragile substance, prone to chipping and flaking), loaded onto Monson flatcars and hustled down to the Jct., where they were shipped to the parent company, express rate. This was the most expensive and fastest way. I understand that Otis was a valued if not impatient customer for many years. The Monson also switched the slate company yards and brought flatcars loads of rough stock from distant quarries to the finishing mills. The line was kept busy during the early and middle years. Besides hauling slate products out, the railroad was responsible for off-loading countless carloads of ocean sand. The sand which was used for polishing the finished slate products, arriving at the Jct. in standard gauge gondolas and was emptied shovelful by shovelful into Monson flats with temporary gondola sides. Old time employees said it took two to two and a half carloads to empty a gondola. This sand was needed year round, but the crunch came in the late summer and early fall when it became necessary to load sand sheds at the slate companies to keep them operating throughout the winter. Transfer of freight, as you can see, was one of the disadvantages of the narrow gauge lines, regardless of location. Transfer crews had to be maintained, which meant increased payrolls, and the time required to off load a shipment that arrived late, could slow down production. Coal for the narrow gauge engines had to be handled in the same manner. It was loaded into a shed for storage at the junction and some was stored at Monson. I imagine that quite a few carloads of coal were delivered to the slate company to feed the hoist and machine boilers. Perhaps wood was used. Quantities of cordwood were loaded onto flatcars from the company wood lots. It was used to start locomotive fires in the morning, (a lesson learned and not forgotten in 1919!) some of the wood was transformed into ties, timber and lumber, all used by the quarries. Quarry trackage, not traversed by locomotives, was moved at random and differed in layout from year to year. As business improved, the slate plants sprawled, adding new and bigger sheds. The lumber was used in crating and building, generating additional carloads of freight if not revenue. Slate shingles were stacked on edge on flatcars or boxcars and sent to the Jct. to be off loaded onto the standard gauge boxcars. A load of shingles didn't appear to be very much, occupying a space 6 feet by 25

feet by 8-10 inches on a car, but it was heavy and if the trussrods were not attended to the cars acquired a decided stoop.

The advent of the late 20's started to add nails to the coffin of the Monson. The automobile and truck encroached steadily on the freight and passenger traffic. The depression accelerated the decline, the Monson could not compete with trucks and eventually lost service to a quarry. Passengers could not afford to travel, so didn't. To combat the rising operating expenses, train service was cut. The master mechanic rigged up an open rail car powered by a Ford model T engine, to handle the LCL chores and an occasional passenger. Crews were reduced until only 3 men handled all the train chores. The slate business also declined and sometimes the locomotives would restlessly reside in their stalls for a week or more before being steamed up again. At other times the line would be all hustle and bustle in an effort to deal with a spate of orders. These spurts would last for days or weeks, then subside into days of inactivity.

1938 was the last year of passenger service. The combination was shoved out in back of the engine house with the other pieces of derelict or not needed equipment. The Monson did not waste precious dollars on non essential repairs. When something wore out, ignore it. If it broke, they just quit using it, parked it on the nearest siding and pressed something else into service. Have seen pictures of equipment almost falling apart on the rails, hooked up behind an equally battered engine. Some flat cars in fair operating condition were replanked, by spiking down another layer of decking over the rotting base layer. This provided a serviceable, if rough, surface and prolonged the inevitable. The locomotives, because of the resale value were kept in running order, though only one was used most times. Horror stories persist of cars running on trucks without brasses or lubrication. Track maintenance was allowed to deteriorate and derailments were the rule rather than the exception. Any passengers, mail, or express was handled in the company's stake truck. The slate quarries business was still erratic and by this time the road serviced only the big parent company, 1/2 mile down the spur from the Monson depot was switched by the railroad. After a brief resurgence of traffic, the quarry, owned by the Monson Slate Company, owner of the railroad, failed. Embargo notices were published and the last train in revenue service ran during the fall of 1943. A salvage company was found and the line was sold for scrap. The rails weren't pulled up until 1944. All equipment was hauled to the Jet. and burned for the metal. The engine and railcar and rails were loaded aboard B.A.R. flats, destination, the Rochester N.Y. Iron and Metal Co. The quarry equipment was auctioned off at the same time and 60 years of railroad was gone forever.

The Monson lends itself perfectly to the modeler who wants a narrow gauge feeder line. Using "N" scale trucks and loco mechanisms, one can capture the atmosphere of the two footers. Scratch building skills need not be elaborate. Those who model in 1/4" scale have a whole world of scratchbuilding castings for the two foot railroad. Prize winning models of the Maine two footers appear frequently at most all NER and NMRA conventions. Interest is high.

The space required to model the narrow gauge need not be large for the interest generated. One could use the track plan with this article and a hidden storage track to successfully get into the narrow gauge business. As the later Monson engines were never turned, no fancy hidden trackage need be incorporated. The more disreputable the appearance of the rolling stock the better. Use a heavy hand with the grime and the rust.

Reference is made to the excellent series of articles by Frary and Hayden in R.M.C. on HoN 2-1/2 modeling techniques.

Also a source is available for commercial elevation drawings of Monson R.R. equipment. I have them in my files.

Coronado Scale Models
1544 E. Ctpress St.,
Phoenix, Ariz., 85006

They have drawings M-1 through M-6, scale 1/4" at \$1.00 each.

EQUIPMENT ROSTER 1883-1944

LOCOMOTIVES

1. "G.S.CUSHING", built 7-1883 by Hinkley Locomotive Works, Boston, Mass. A 14 ton, 0-4-4T Forney Type. Scrapped.
2. "H.A.WHITING" built 3-1884 by Hinkley. Also a 14 ton, 0-4-4T Forney Type. Used for snow plow experiment. Scrapped.
3. Built by Vulcan Locomotive Works, Wilkes Barre, Pa., 2-1913. An 18 ton Forney Type. Retired 1944, at Edaville Railroad, South Carver, Mass. 0-4-4-T.
4. Built by Vulcan, 2-1918. Also an 18 ton, 0-4-4T Forney Type. Same disposition as #3. Railcar. Built by Master Mechanic in early '30's. Model T Ford power. Retired 1944. Now at Boothbay Railway Museum, Boothbay Harbor, Me.

Locomotives 3 and 4 were too heavy for Monson's flimsy turntables and as money was not deemed necessary to straighten them, the engines ran forward to the Jct., and then backed home. Operations were so casual, that cars were sometimes hauled behind the loco (or in front) and others were pushed at the same time. The snow plow and the locomotive snowplow experiment and the railcar were the only pieces of equipment on the tables after the big power arrived.

COMBINATION

3. Built by Laconia Car Company, Laconia, N.H., 1883. Retired 12-1938. Scrapped. Built with regular flopper seats (single). Shopped for repairs and came out with longitudinal benches. Apparently green with white lettering in early years, red with no lettering in later years.

FREIGHT EQUIPMENT

BOXCARS

Original 1883 boxcars were numbered 15-16. Two flats converted to boxcars 13-14, 1883-4. 4 flatcars converted to boxcars 9-12, 1891. Possibly built by Laconia Car Co. or assembled locally from castings and lumber.

All boxcars numbered 1-8, 1908. Scrapped.

FLATCARS

Original 1883 flatcars numbered 1-14. See above for origins and conversions. All flatcars renumbered 9-16, 1908. Flatcar #9 converted to snowspreader, 1888. Flatcars 17-22 built at Monson shops from castings supplied by Bangor Foundry, 1908. These cars were heavier timbered than 9-16. Flatcars 23, 24 were acquired second hand from the Boyd Lumber Co., via Portland Locomotive Co., 1916. These were the ruggedest cars owned by the railroad. All scrapped.

ROADCARS

Snowspreader converted from flat #9, 1888.

Snowplow built from castings at Monson shops. Largest plow of any of the Maine 2 footers.

Dumpcar built 1888 by the Portland Locomotive Co. Used for ballast work. Disappears from roster 1894. Probably sold to quarry as a model for quarry cars.

Hinkley Locomotive snowplow experiment, built 1919.

All roadcars were scrapped.

SECTION CARS

Handcar built 1883. Crank type.

4-wheel trailers, built to haul ballast, and later used to carry mail, express and passengers. Apparently built locally from whatever was available, as both cars just barely resemble each other. Built 1916. Rumors persist of the existence of another, conventional type pump handcar. No pictures or records have been found of this car..yet.

QUARRYCARS

4-wheel dump type cars and flat type cars. Used to haul rough stock or refuse. Roughstock was smaller pieces. Some of these cars were operated in the mine shafts, reached by a platform lowered by derricks. Shafts were as deep as 900-1000 feet and some of the galleries extended underneath Lake Hebron. Motive power for mincars were narrow gauge electric locomotives and manpower on the surface.

2-4 wheel standard gauge dump cars operated on a short spur, to haul refuse from the Monson Maine Slate Co. finishing shed to the dump. Cars built for Boston & Lowell RR, 1877. Not used in later years. Pushed by locomotive and by manpower.

For additional information on the Monson and other two footers in Maine, a good book to acquire is "The Maine Two Footers" by Linwood Moody. Published in 1959 by Howell-North Press, 1050 Parker St., Berkley, Calif. It is also available through Kalmbach Publishing Co. (Model Railroader) and Carstens (Rail Model Craftsman). The price today, in the vicinity of \$8.00. 213 pages, 2 maps (inserts), 212 photos, maps. The author is a real story teller, grabs your interest from beginning with history and lore!!!

THE MAP

The map shows the line location of the Monson Railroad Co. and all of its branches that were actually built and used. The only proposed branch depicted is the Wellington spur where actual grading was done. This branch is delineated by a dashed line. As an aside, Topographic maps are an invaluable tool to the railfan and to the modeler. Most were made in the steam era so depict major trackage. Some have been updated but still show the location of the right-of-way. Scale 1:62,500.

PHOTOS

All photos in this issue of the Newsletter are from the collection of the author,

FROM THE ARCHIVES ---RAILWAY AGE, MAY 26, 1934---

SLEEPING CARS TO GREENVILLE, ME.

The Maine Central Railroad has completed arrangements with the Bangor & Aroostook R.R. for through passenger service between Washington, D.C. and Mt. Kineo, Me. this summer beginning on June 29, 1934. This service by rail and by boat, is to take place of that which was discontinued by way of Maine Central direct to Kineo, when passenger train service was suspended on the Mt. Kineo line north of Skowhegan.

Sleeping cars over The Pennsylvania, The New York, New Haven & Hartford, The Boston & Maine, The Maine Central and the Bangor and Aroostook will be run twice a week, leaving Washington, at 11:55 A.M. and arriving at Greenville at 9:20 the next morning. Connection will be made at the dock at Greenville with a steamer to Capens, the Mt. Kineo Hotel, Rockwood and Northwest Carry. Southbound departure from Northwest Carry is at 9:45 A.M. and from Greenville at 3:25 P.M.. Sleeping cars will be run to and from New York (Pennsylvania Station) four times a week.

Perhaps you are not aware of it, but The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. has in its possession many negatives of the Pullman Photographic Collection.

In 1969 Pullman-Standard gave the Smithsonian Institution 13,000 glass and film negatives covering railroad cars produced at the firm's main plant in Pullman, Illinois (Chicago). The negatives date between about 1888 and 1932, with a few scattered negatives dating as late as the 1950's. Pullman retained the great majority of the post 1932 negatives for its own records.

Gaps and unexplainable voids exist in the negatives received. Many exterior views are missing. However, the surviving negatives provide a reasonably complete record of the some 45,000 passenger cars built at the Pullman car works.

The following lists have been prepared as a guide to the collection: I.-Private cars (with an index to business cars); II. & III.-Passenger cars by Railroad (a two part list; A-M and N-Z); IV.-Pullman cars; V.- Street Railway and Rapid Transit. Those wishing to order prints may purchase copies of the above lists at one dollar each or may consult a master list at their office during public office hours; weekdays, 10:00 A.M. to 5:15 P.M. We request an advance notice. They will not conduct individual searches by telephone or correspondence. The negative files are not open to the public but in time they hope to have a complete set of file prints. Refunds and exchanges are not possible. Be sure to specify Pullman negatives when ordering.

Complete identification of all negatives was not possible. In some instances, the spelling of car names or ownership remains in question. All unidentified views have been listed under Pullman. Pullman owned cars are listed in the Pullman list; however, assigned cars may be inadvertently included in the Railroad list. Similarly, cars for subsidiary lines like the Michigan Central might be listed under both the Michigan Central and the parent New York Central. These lists are admittedly a provisional guide. They welcome corrections and hope to produce corrected editions at some future time.

A price list and order form will be furnished with each list. Again, please be sure to specify Pullman negatives when ordering.

The complete address is: PULLMAN PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, Division of Transportation, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560.

The B. A. R. Society is ordering a set of the lists for its library. The Society will purchase any photos of the Northern New England Railroads. A future issue of the Newsletter will cover the availability of these photos. Feel free to purchase your own lists.

THE BAR NEWSLETTER IS ISSUED QUARTERLY (MARCH, JUNE, SEPT., AND DEC.) BY THE BAR HISTORICAL AND TECHNICAL SOCIETY FOR THE BENEFIT OF ITS MEMBERS AND OTHERS INTERESTED IN ACQUIRING INFORMATION ABOUT AND PROMOTING THE RAILROADS OF MAIN. CONTRIBUTING ARTICLES AND MATERIAL FOR PUBLICATION IS WELCOME. THIS IS A NON*PROFIT ORGANIZATION. SOCIETY OFFICERS ARE:

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Address all communications to the Corresponding Secretary. Subscription by membership, \$4.00 /yr. *****

ATTENTION - The Society has recently made an addition to its photographic collection. Our library now has a color negative of the cover of the B.A.R. 56th Annual Report of 1949 which shows Diesel Engine #700 pulling a three car plus passenger train. The engine, in blue and grey with yellow divider lines; logo on the nose. Each car has a blue window band. Two procedures are available, (1) The society will send a color photo, postpaid, 8 X 10, \$3.50, or, (2) The Society will mail the negative to you, registered mail, and you have a local shop handle the processing. You pay for the registration both ways. (We will try to have a slide made from the original thus reducing the cost to you).

PHOTO CAPTIONS.....

1. Time, unknown. B.A.R. engine drifting down the Junction trackage. Transfer crew lounging on the freight shed platform. Example of casual Monson train in the background. #4 engine and two flats, one of shingles, the other of control panels for the Otis elevator Company.

2. Time unknown. #4 engine and two flats on the transfer track. Shack in the foreground was where loading ramps were stored. Note gondola sides strewn on the ground. Especially note how B.A.R. boxcar dwarfs the Monson equipment.

In 1918, the two-stall engine house at the Monson end of the line burned, destroying #1 engine housed within it. An order was sent to Vulcan Iron Works for #4, which was identical with #3 except for an extra stirrup for mounting to the cab. To many, the additional step seemed an unnecessary gadget, for the floor of the cab was only 30 inches from the rails. Notice the link and pin coupler on the front.

3. 1938. Loading ocean sand from a standard gauge gondola. Six man engine transfer crew. #4 engine is 24 feet long. Frank Elwin French on the shovel.

Frank E. French took over the job of engineering the lilliput line in 1925. Engineer French, an ingenious fellow, unhappy with the poor quality of the light given off by an original oil head lamp on an engine, replaced it with an automobile head lamp run by a storage battery.

4. 1918. #3 engine and combine at passenger platform. B.A.R. depot in the background. Angle makes Monson equipment appear gigantic.

The combination car with engine #3 was called "The Buggy". Engine #3 built by Vulcan Iron Works, 18 tons in weight. The combination coach, built by Laconia Car Works, Laconia, N.H., was equipped with oil lamps, pot-bellied stove and seats for about thirty people. As long as the railroad survived, well into the 20th century, it remained the only passenger car on the line. When "The Buggy's" seats, running lengthwise of the car, were filled to capacity, passengers stood up in the mail compartment for the six-mile journey to Monson.

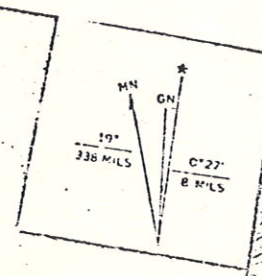
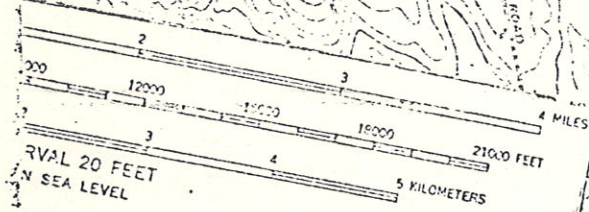
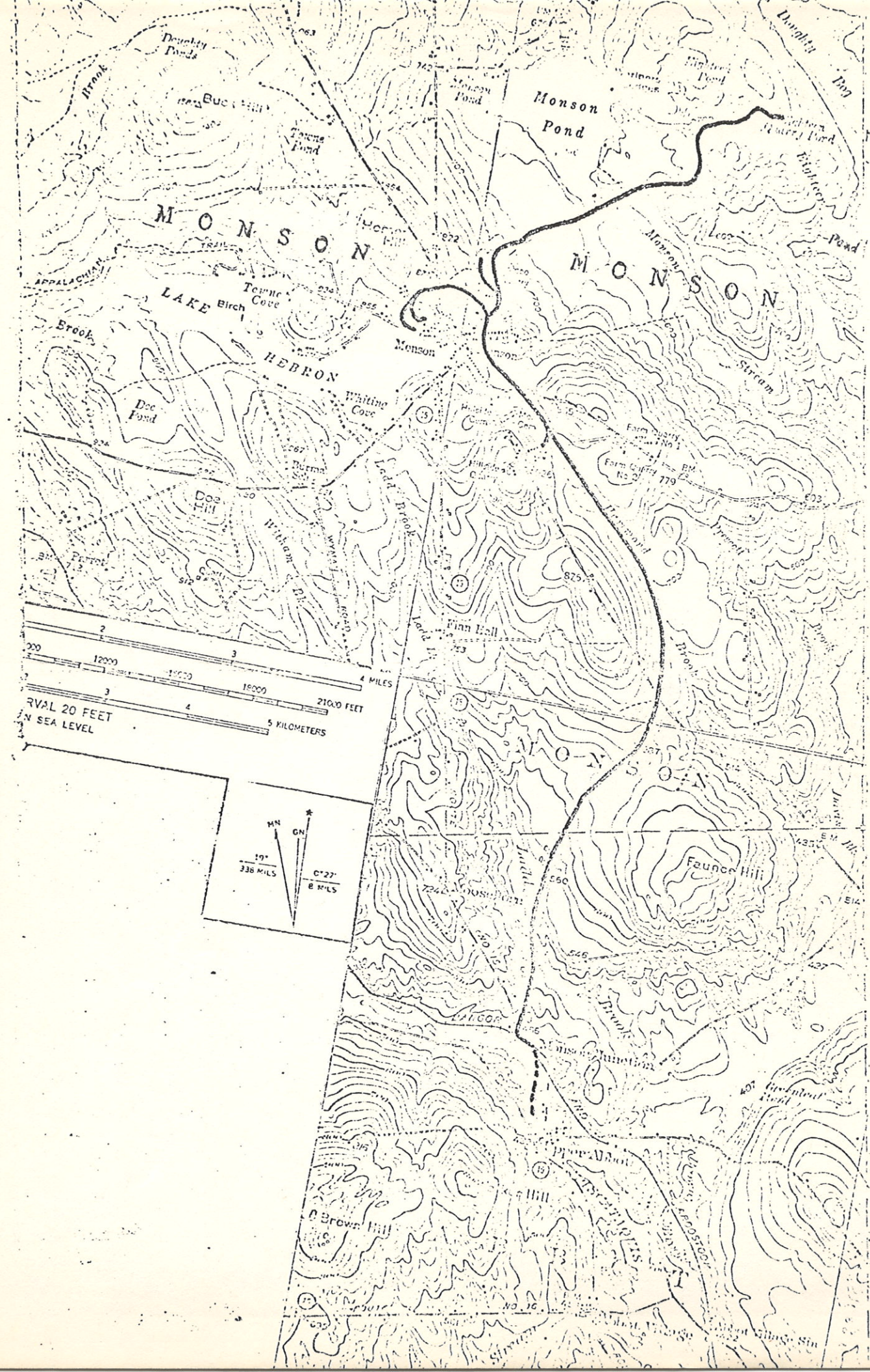
5. 1936. Railcar and trailer posed before the B.A.R. depot. The station, owned by B.A.R. was used by the Monson R.R.

6. 1900. View of the Junction depot and large freight shed. Narrow gauge flats, standard gauge boxcars visible..barely.

7. 1935. View of Monson turntable and well house. Turntable is 19 feet long.

Although not the only two-foot railroad in Maine, the Monson line did have distinctions all its own. It used, to the end of its days, link-and-pin instead of automatic couplings: and although there were vacuum brakes on the engines, old hand-wheel brakes had to be manned on the cars. There were no split switches on the tracks, but the system boasted having twenty-five stub switches and an honest-to-goodness, complete rock roadbed, the only one in Maine, built of waste from the slate mines.

8. 1935. View of the narrow gauge trackage, showing turntable lead, water house, coal shed, Monson flats and boxcars. Note the stub switch and "harp" switch stand.



Monson Railroad

IN EFFECT MONDAY, NOV. 16, 1925

MONSON TO MONSON JCT.

		⁴ A. M.	Miles	⁸ P. M.	
MONSON	lve	8 55	0	3 20	
MONSON JCT.	arr	9 20	6.16	3 45	

MONSON JCT. TO MONSON

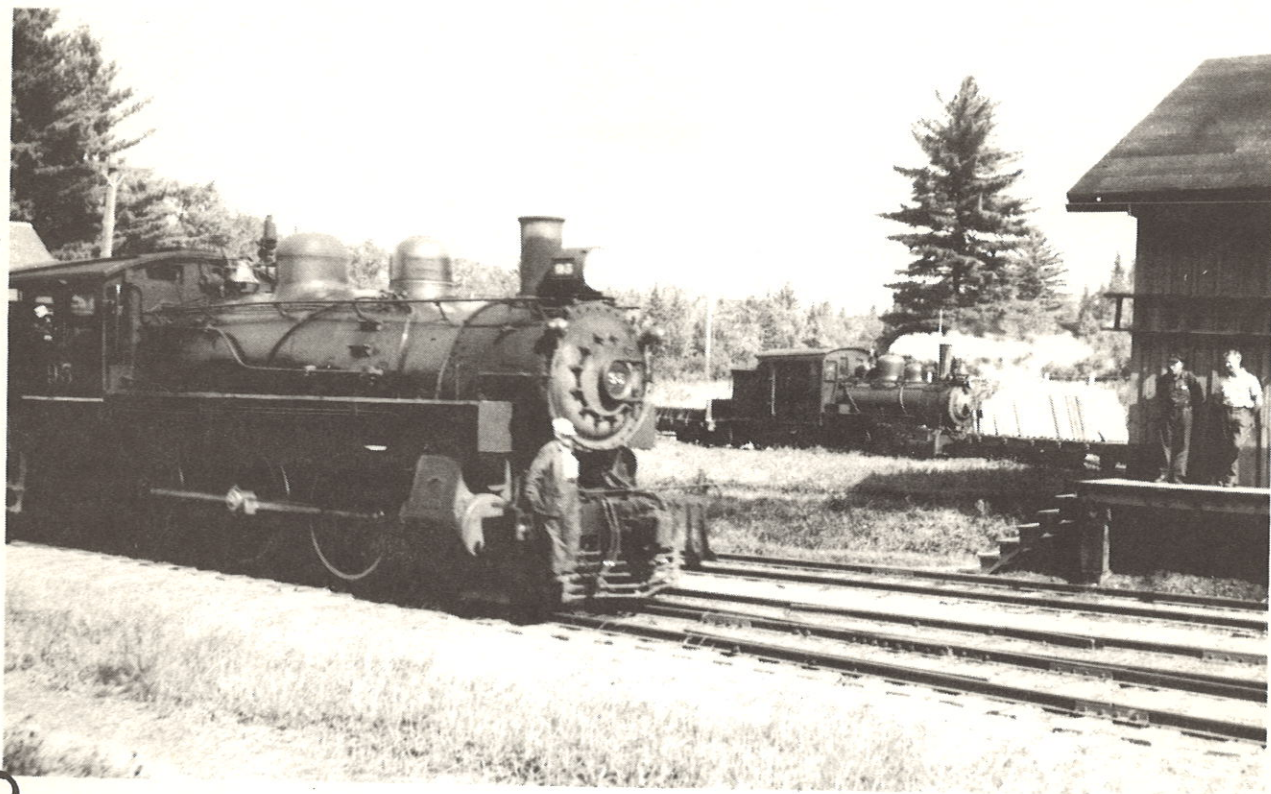
		³ A. M.	Miles	⁷ P. M.	
MONSON JCT.	lve	9 58	0	4 09	
MONSON	arr	10 30	6.16	4 40	

H. E. MORRILL, Supt.

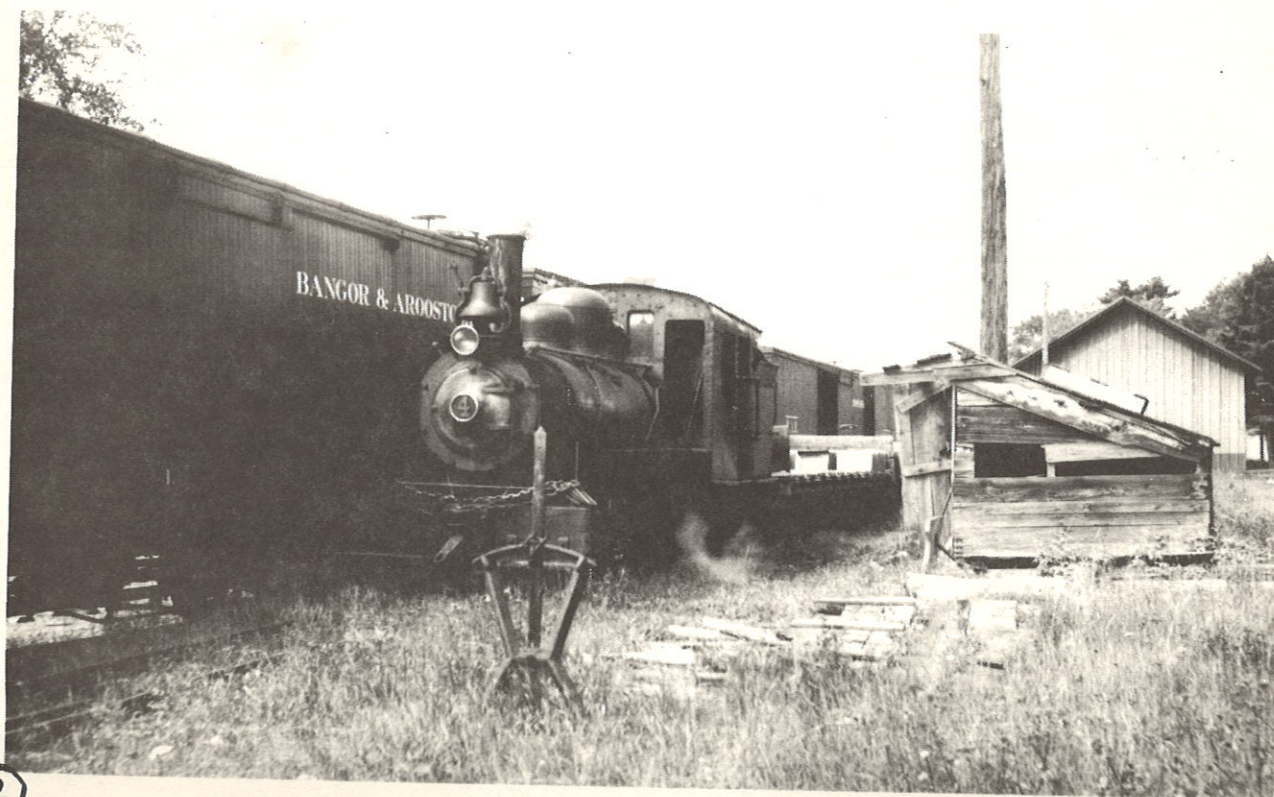
AMERICAN RAILWAY EXPRESS COMPANY, which operates the express business over the Monson Railroad, will ship your goods and attend to your travel wants.

For information inquire at any office of the

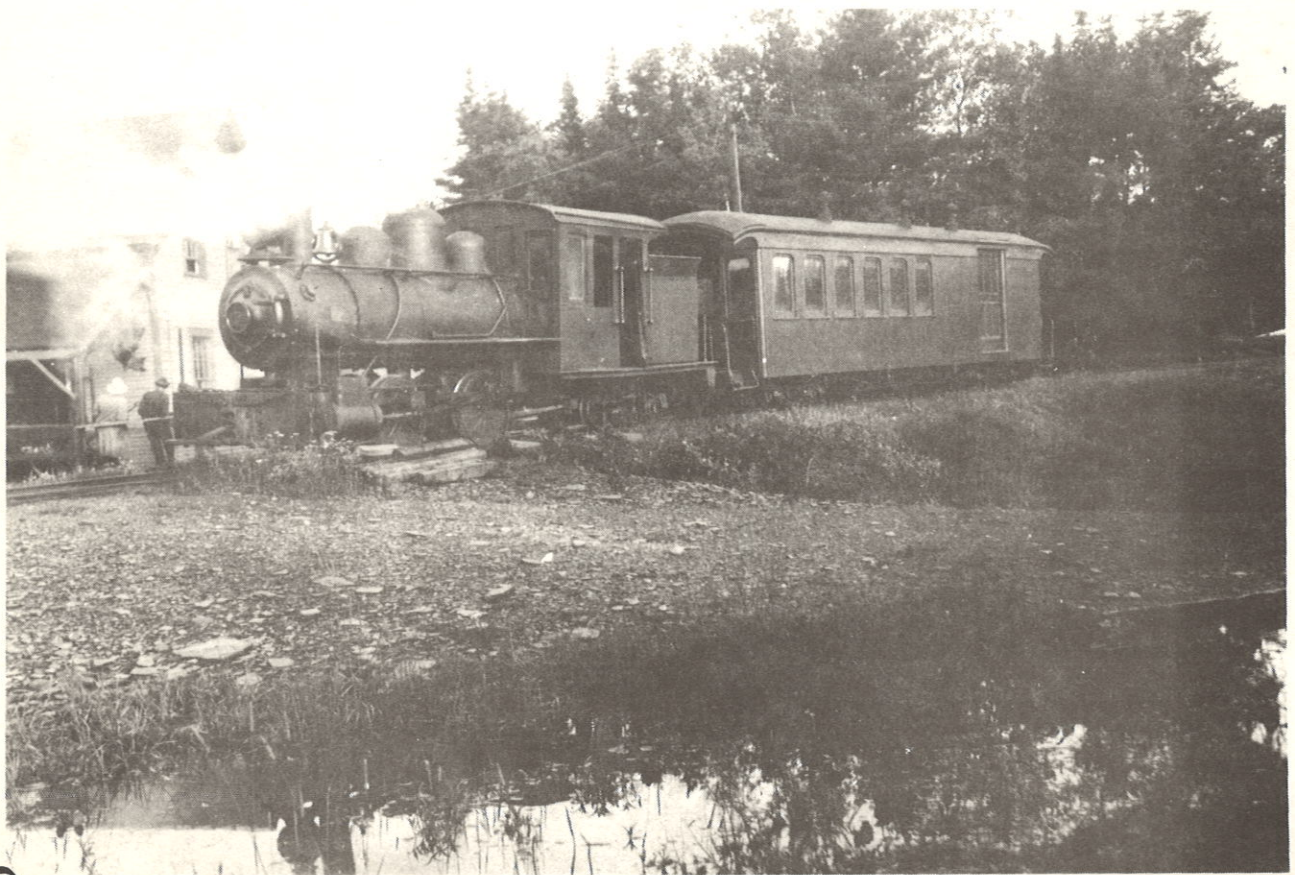
AMERICAN EXPRESS COMPANY



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