

Report of the President  
of the  
New York and Erie Railroad  
to  
The Stockholders  
1857

Facilities at Hornellsville .....

Building	Dimensions	Material	Built
Depot, saloon, dwelling	24' by 327'	wood	12/1850
Superintendent office	30' by 54'	wood	5/1857
Freight depot	30' by 209'	wood	6/1852
Turning table	46' diameter	wood	3/1850
Round house	13 stalls, 65' deep	wood	2/1856

**From the Hornell Daily Times, dateline December 1st, 1879;**

Headline "Depot Destroyed and with it Rodgers dining saloon"

On Sunday morning, November 30th, the frame building that for so many years did service in this village as a depot for the Erie Railway was destroyed by fire.

The alarm was sounded by the engineer of train 18 from the Western division which arrived a few minutes after midnight. The engineer saw a fire burning in the quarters of servants connected with Rodgers dining saloon, who occupied the eastern portion of the second story for sleeping apartments

The fire department responds.....

When the fire was discovered the rooms of the servant girls was filled with smoke nearly to suffocation and it was with considerable difficulty that they were removed through a window.

The origin of the fire is unknown. It started in the second story, in the room of one of the servants, directly over the kitchen. There is no doubt but that it was purely accidental.

Had the wind blown from the east it is possible that the telegraph office would have been destroyed.

During Sunday trains ran as usual and business continued uninterrupted. The ticket office had been removed to the freight office and the telegraph battery house was made to do service as a baggage room.

The ruins had not cooled before a large force of men were employed

clearing away the rubbish, a beginning of a new temporary depot.

The new depot will be over 400 feet long, of brick: that it will face the junction of Loder, River and Jane streets, occupying the present site of the Buffalo division round house, that four tracks will run through it.

The new shops, according to report, will be located east of Front Street where the company has purchased about forty acres for that purpose.

NOTE: the story of the fire departments struggle fighting this fire will be written of separately.

### **From The Hornell Daily Times, December 2nd, 1879**

Headline "A temporary depot and dining room going up"

Erie carpenters from the Western Division at work on temporary depot to replace the one which burned Sunday morning (November 30th, 1879), a temporary frame structure of 183 feet long and 24 feet wide. The western portion will consist of three rooms, each 16 feet long east and west to be used for baggage and express rooms and waiting rooms and ticket office.

Of the remaining 135 feet, 15 will be washroom and passage way between platforms at the sides of the depot (note: the depot sat between tracks. Trains could arrive and depart on either side) The dining room will take up 60 feet and the remaining 60 feet will be kitchen and store room.

The building will have one story.

Hornellsville first depot was a shanty built of slabe, bark side out, in 1851, a year before the completion of the railway to this station.

In 1852 was begun a more pretentious depot, the nucleus of the one

just burned. It was a one story structure about 250 feet long and always contained a dining room for passengers. Up to 1858 three additions were made to its length, making it from 350 feet to 400 feet long.

About 1864, a second story was added to afford quarters for the help connected to the dining room. The small addition at the west end, used as an express office and lunch counter was put up in 1871.

**From the Hornell Daily Times, December 3rd, 1879**

Headline: The temporary depot.

The new hemlock depot is making favorable progress. About 100 feet of it is up and being shingled. It will probably be completed this week, and the dining room next Monday or Tuesday. It is not a very elegant structure.

**From the Hornell Daily Times, December 5th, 1879**

Headline: The Hemlock depot.

The new depot is advance apace. The baggage and express room was occupied this morning and the two waiting rooms are nearly ready for use. Rodger's dining room is under cover. The new structure is not a handsome building. It is made of rough hemlock lumber with wide cracks between the boards. The doors are about three feet wide, and old windows are brought into use.

**From the Hornell Daily times, December 6th, 1879**

Headline: That "Depot"

The hemlock temporary depot is all up, under cover and enclosed. The baggage and express room, the two waiting rooms and the ticket office are in use. The workmen are busy now inside of Rodgers dining room.

**From the Hornell Daily Times, December 15th, 1879**

Headline: Why we smile.

Mr. O. Chanute, of the Erie, is in town today, looking over the railroad yard, and has plans for the new depot, shops and yard. A final plan for the yard and the exact locations of the buildings have not been fixed upon, but it is known that the yard will undergo an entire reorganization, and that the new depot, shop and freight house are bound to go up.

**From the Hornell Daily Times, December 17th, 1879**

Headline: The site fixed on-to front on Loder, River and Jane Street.

It is rumored that Messrs. Chanute and Wilder, who were in town a day or two since, with plans for the new railroad buildings and re-organized yard at this station, fixed upon a location for the new brick depot that is to go up next summer. Its site will overlap the east end of the site of the present freight house about sixteen feet and extend from that point eastward, fronting on the junction of Loder, River and Jane streets for a distance of 400 feet or more.

**From the Hornell Daily Times, December 30th, 1879**

Headline Addition to the depot.

A small addition is being made to the west end of the new hemlock depot. It will be occupied as an office of the Pullman Car Company.

**From the Hornell Daily News, December 1st, 1879**

Headline: Destroyed by Fire.

(The actions of the fire department.)

The fire department promptly responded to the alarm, although many citizens did not hear it, in consequence of which there were few persons on the ground outside of the fire department and railroad

men. When the fire was discovered, the rooms of the servant girls were filled with smoke nearly to suffocation, and it was with considerable difficulty that they were removed. Most of them made their escape through a window, barefooted and in their night clothing and large portions and indeed entire wardrobes were lost. One of their number, Miss Mary Martin, action on the excited advice of some person, leaped from the window and seriously sprained her ankle. The servants, with such of their belongings as had been saved, were removed to the ladies waiting room where they were aided by kind hands.

(Here the newspaper report had a diagram of the depot building from which the location of the various rooms can readily be seen)

The first move of the fire department was to attach their hose to the Erie Company's two or three hydrants between the tracks on the north side of the depot. The water from these comes from a well south of the round house and the pressure supplied by the stationary engine at the shops.

The water was low and the pressure insufficient, as a consequence, no effective work could be done. The hose was then laid to the driven gang well on Center street near the Osborne House and the steamer \* set to work. Owing to the distance from the depot (about 1,200 feet) the pressure necessary to give effective force at the nozzle was too great for the hose and it bursted. The damaged length was replaced by a good one, and again it gave out. The same operation was repeated a third time.

In the meantime the fire was gaining headway. The wind was from the west and soon the east end of the building was in flames. The fire speedily swept eastward and fiercely attacked the office of the Pullman Car Company. As soon as the company's hydrants gave out, Mr. Wm. A. Rodgers gave directions to have the contents of the dining saloon removed. Many willing hands lent their help but while most of the

contents were removed, much was damaged. Mr. Rodgers, who manages the dining saloon for his brother, James H, Rodgers of Coleman House, New York, occupied the western half of the second floor as a dwelling. An effort was made to save his household goods, but the rooms had become filled with a dense smoke.

The most valuable furniture was lost, and that which was removed was considerably damaged. The fire was burning an hour without check, consuming all that lay east of the starting point. As a last resource the steamer was taken to the Erie's water tank. The water from this was drawn into the tender of engine 560 \* , from which it was taken by the suction pipe of the steamer even now, the two streams that were thrown were only intermittently strong and free from air.

The work of removal continued, and the contents of the ticket office, baggage room, United States Express Office and lunch room, including two safes, were saved.

The fire raged with great fierceness, and the air was filled with glowing sparks, threatening the neighboring railroad buildings. The freight house was in great danger and its contents removed to Loder Street on its north side for safety. Several times was the freight house on fire and it was only saved by the strongest efforts of the fire department. By many, Mr. Henry Foster, of Maple City Hose Company, is credited with being its savior. Because of his endurance in extinguishing the flames after all others had been driven from their posts by the intense heat. After the danger had passed, the goods were returned to the house. The fire burned slowly toward the telegraph office, having to contend with the wind from the west and the department fought it stubbornly with such means as they had at command. At the end of two hours it had reached the ladies waiting room and only the chimneys and a few blazing timbers remained standing in its rear. A report circulated that the Buffalo division round house was on fire. But happily this proved untrue.

After 2:00 AM there was no particular excitement . It was certain that the depot would be entirely destroyed while none of the detached buildings were in danger. Nobody but the firemen and railroad men remained to see the issue. The fire laddies did nobly, remaining on duty and fighting the fire under discouraging circumstances for six hours - from midnight to six o'clock in the morning. Their clothes were soaking wet and it was sufficiently cold to freeze, the water dripping from their fire hats into icicles. Several fine hats where ruined and a number of suits must have been considerably damaged. Their hands and faces were covered with a paste of water and railroad dust, and every one of them would have passed a creditable inspection for entrance into a negro minstrel troupe.

This ends the story of the depot fire as reported by the Hornell Dailey Times which was printed on December 1st, 1879. The newspaper article went on at length to describe insurance claims and loss amounts which contributed very little to the story of the loss of the Hornell Erie Depot.

\* Below is a photo of Hornell Fire departments 1875 steam fire engine on Cass Street looking towards Canisteo Street. The men have been identified (left to right) as Cornelius Kiley, Henry Cadogan and Robert Faulkner. The man on the right remains unknown. This engine, no doubt was used fighting the depot fire.

In their heyday, steam fire engines were manufactured by some 50 different companies who turned out over 5,000 engines. Some were hand drawn while Hornell's engine was pulled by horses. In the year 1859, a fire chief in a major city reported that steam fire engines would cause more harm than good discharging water under high pressure. Change was not welcome in some circles.

### The "new" Hornell Erie Depot

#### **September 17th, 1880 Hornellsville Weekly Tribune**

"They are staining the walls of the new depot a dark red. It will be quite attractive.

#### **November 26th, 1880 Hornellsville Weekly Tribune:**

"Hornellsville is totally given to spiritualism, atheism and her new depot and Elmira and Binghamton are forever quarreling about their size and backwoods characteristics.

### Port Jervis Union

Note: the microfilm collection at the Hornell Public Library contributed all the information in these pages. Sadly, the spring months of 1880, the period when there should have been entries reference the new Erie depot being built are missing.