



Preserving Part of the Central Mass.

*Your editor spent an afternoon with **Richard Conard**, the chief visionary of the **Wayland Railroad Interpretive Site**, to learn about plans for a project that shares several similarities with Bedford Depot Park. As Mr. Conard walked me around the remains of the B&M Central Massachusetts Branch in Wayland Center, volunteers were clearing brush that obscured the old tracks. The following narrative was transcribed from a videotaped conversation that occurred in May 2003.*

I grew up in Wayland. I became a member of the Wayland Historical Commission, which is a volunteer part of the town government that is concerned with preserving the history of the Town of Wayland. My particular interest is in the history of the railroad in Wayland.

At Town Meeting in the spring of 2003, the Town approved an article for a study of a railroad interpretive site in Wayland Center. The goals are to preserve the foundations of the

Engine House, Turntable and Water Tank, to look at alternative uses and ways of preserving the Freight House, and to provide for public access to all of these railroad buildings and foundations in Wayland.

We would like to look into some type of landscaped park that people could experience...a park that would be attractive and make this railroad complex an attractive part of the Wayland Center Historic District.

Wayland Passenger Station [was] built in 1881 by the Massachusetts Central Railroad. It was used by the railroad up until 1950 when the agent in the building retired and was never replaced. The building was in disrepair for many years throughout the 1950s and '60s. At one point, the building was almost demolished. The Town finally recognized the significance of the building—and in 1970, they purchased the building from the railroad. It has been restored over a period of years by volunteers. Currently,

the Depot is occupied by a nonprofit handcraft gift shop called Wayland Depot, Incorporated, that is run entirely by volunteers.

[Editor's note: The Wayland Depot handcraft shop is normally open Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.]

About three years ago, there was a threat of development here that would have affected some of the foundations of the railroad Water Tank, Engine House and Turntable. I became concerned because one of the proposals was to build an access road along the railroad tracks along Wayland Depot that would have obliterated the foundations of the railroad Water Tank. The project proponents were required to do an archeological report as part of their project. The Massachusetts Historical Commission determined after the report was done that the project would have an adverse affect on the foundations from the railroad in Wayland. They determined that this was a significant part of Wayland's history and the state's history. Ultimately, the project was altered in such a way that it would not affect the railroad foundations.



Next, Richard took us on a walking tour of the site.

In the brush are the remains of an old railroad **freight car**. You can see some of the timbers and steel truss rods that supported the underside of the car. This was recently discovered only a couple years ago.

Just yesterday, some volunteers uncovered the foundations of the railroad **Water Tank**. The Water Tank was built in 1912 by the Boston & Maine Railroad. It held 50,000 gallons and was 35 feet tall. It was used to fill the tenders of steam locomotives that ran through Wayland. It was demolished about 1934 as best as we can determine. The granite and brick foundations were buried in the weeds and poison ivy. The weeds keep coming back, and we keep cutting them back to try to keep the site accessible and visible to the public.

The **station platform** is where commuters used to wait for the train. Until last year, this was pretty much overgrown with brush and weeds. The work party that we had in May 2002 cleared this whole platform off. We're continuing this year to work further west along the tracks, trying to clear brush.

A 50-foot diameter **turntable** was used for turning steam locomotives. It was hand turned. One person, by balancing an engine on the turntable frame, could turn a steam locomotive that might have weighed 125 to 130 tons by just leaning on a pole—the table was so well balanced. Only part of the granite wall is still visible. More of [the pit] has been filled in. There is part of a Boston Edison transmission tower in the turntable pit. We would like to do what we can to uncover parts of the pit.

Buried in the vines and brush are the foundations of the **Engine House**. This was a three-stall, wooden engine house built in 1877 and used until the time of World War I. It was used by the railroad for storing steam locomotives overnight. The Wayland Engine Terminal was discontinued about 1917 when there were shortages of coal and the railroad had to cut the number of passenger trains. At that time, Wayland was discontinued as a steam locomotive terminal. Trains continued to run through Wayland but did not end their runs in Wayland. They continued on to points west such as Hudson, Marlboro, Clinton and Northampton. With enough volunteer support in future years, we will be able to uncover these foundations so they may be seen by the public.

Here we have the remnants of a **rail rest** that was used to store spare rails. If the railroad discovered a broken rail that needed to be replaced, they would have a spare rail close by. There were three of these concrete posts [near Wayland Depot]. These were damaged by some construction equipment not too many years ago.





Next is a granite **mile post**. It indicates that the mileage to Boston is 17 miles and to Northampton is 87 miles. I've been trying to trim around here to keep the brush down. All of these [artifacts] require a continual maintenance effort to keep the brush from coming back and overrunning everything.

This is the **switch** for the Freight House spur track. It has been pretty much been neglected. The rails have been covered over completely by dirt.

Wayland Freight House was built in 1881. It was used to store and receive articles of freight on the railroad. It has been neglected for many years. The building is currently owned by the

Town and used for municipal storage. It is a post and beam building, built like an old barn. We hope to identify an alternative use for the building. We would like to fix it up. Whether it stays on this location or it is moved someplace else will be looked at as part of our study.

This effort in Wayland is being done entirely by volunteers. Unlike **Friends of Bedford Depot Park**, we have not established a "Friends of Wayland Depot Park." We are working through the Town. The Friends of Bedford Depot Park has undertaken probably a more ambitious project that we may end up pursuing in Wayland.

[The proposed] park can work whether a rail-trail is built along the Central Massachusetts Branch or not. If it is built, the park can provide a real amenity and stopping-off point for people along the trail to experience the history of the railroad that they are bicycling over. If the rail-trail is not built, the park can still work independently as a local focal point.

The results of the study will provide an opportunity for Town Meeting to look into funding alternative improvements. Our project involving the railroad certainly involves historic preservation—but it can provide an opportunity for open space if we create an interpretive park-like setting, also. ◇



For more information: <http://www.wayland.ma.us/historical/railroad.htm>