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# NEW STATE PARK FEATURES THE TUNNEL

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—Photographs by the Author—



Western Gateway is the newest of several Heritage State Parks located throughout Massachusetts. Their purpose is to remind visitors of our heritage from the industrial age and to spur commercial redevelopment in cities which, in the past, were major industrial centers. The Park is located within walking distance of the junction of Routes 2 and 8 in North Adams.

Rarely in our history has either business or government moved to preserve and commemorate important rail events until irreparable damage has been done or the parties involved have long since departed. Witness the shameful destruction of all of New York Central's magnificent Hudsons, or the fact that the only remaining ALCO PA's reside in either Mexico or Brazil. The rail industry frequently doesn't appreciate the intangible value of good will and seems to choose deliberately to minimize its impact upon our nation's history and culture.

Thus it was my privilege to be invited to the preview opening of the Western Gateway Heritage State Park in North Adams, Massachusetts, on October 11, 1985. Not only was an accurate, professionally done display completed and ready for public viewing, but the centerpiece of the park is none other than the Boston & Maine Railroad's "Route of the Minuteman" through the Hoosac Tunnel. The park is located in a portion of the former B&M freight yard which, along with six buildings, was purchased from the railroad. Not since Governor William Gaston rode into town behind a 4-4-0 to celebrate the tunnel opening in 1875, has the town had such a reason to celebrate.

The Heritage State Park System was the brainchild of the first Dukakis administration. Concerned about the fleeing of Massachusetts jobs to the Sunbelt, the Governor hoped to use the redevelopment of abandoned mill buildings to house visitor's centers touting the exploits and advances of the industrial age to draw guests and spur commercial redevelopment. As the anchor for these redevelopment efforts, Visitors Centers explain and display the stories of these cities and communities. In Lowell, it was the story of the development of waterpower to spin cotton; in Lawrence it was textiles; in Gardner, furniture; and in North Adams, the Tunnel and the transportation and engineering saga they represent.

The original grant proposal for the North Adams park was made in 1978. But with the problems inherent in choosing among various promoters' designs and proposals, and preparing the proper submissions to the state and federal governments, it was over four years before any visible progress was made. Even with the Fall 1982 groundbreaking behind the promoters, the project, like the Hoosac itself, had many pitfalls ahead. Nearly a year later, because it had to be scaled down to meet the aesthetic and financial realities, the park was running months behind schedule. Not until April 1984 was a formal construction contract actually signed with the first of several contractors. Work was set back even more when a fire completely destroyed the partially restored wing of one of the six buildings on November 16, 1984.

Opening day was originally scheduled for Memorial Day 1985, then set back to July Fourth, and finally arrived on October 12, 1985. The public found a park with much to offer. The old freight yard and shed complex has had its cobblestones replaced, replica gas lights installed, and the lovely period buildings rebuilt, literally from the ground up. Collapsing stone masonry, rotting sills and beams, and leaking roofs all have been heavily restored or completely replaced. All of the buildings are a joy to behold: the freight shed is now the Visitors Center, the coal pocket, a restaurant where patrons can wine and dine while admiring how their ancestors built with foot thick or better beams. The former grain mill has been restored, but not yet occupied by a tenant, while the remaining commercial space is occupied by a clothing store, toy shop, gift shop, and another excellent restaurant.

Kingpin of the entire restoration, however, is the original circa-1875 "Troy & Boston Railroad" freight shed. Restored with a grandeur that would make its original builders gasp, it houses the Heritage Park Visitors Center. Walking through the doorway, one has his senses assaulted by the images of North Adams maturing from an eighteenth century country

village to a bustling city at the turn of the twentieth century. Little of this growth and progress would have occurred if it were not for the construction of the Hoosac Tunnel between 1851 and 1875, placing North Adams straight on the Fitchburg Railroad's main line from Boston to "The West". The City Seal has proudly proclaimed "We hold the Western Gateway" ever since.

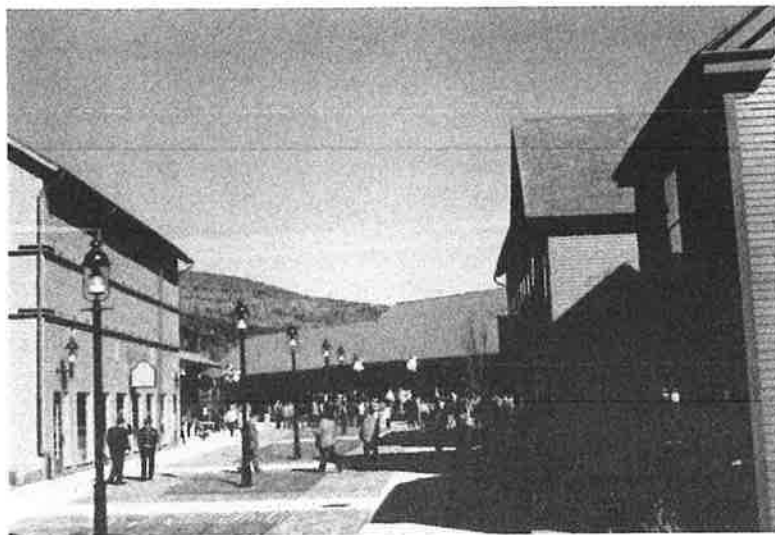
The Tunnel story, in a nutshell, is all there — the black powder, Mowbray's nitroglycerin, the Browne Brothers' exploders, Doane's jackhammers, and the political wrangling that put Crocker, Bird, Haupt, and "The Shanly" into the political and engineering history books for good. The displays, both physical and photographic, magnificently designed and implemented under the watchful eye of Duncan Smith from Boston Museum Design Group, tell the story concisely and imaginatively. Crocker and Bird's speeches ring out from under the Statehouse golden dome as the antagonists face off once again; nervous workmen discuss the bloody fate of blasters Nash and Brinkmann while reports of ghostly visitors roaming the tunnel continue to be heard, and miners' hammers ring until, with a warning shout, another blast rumbles through the mountain shaking free another few feet of Hoosac. Scale HO models not only depict both portals in steam/electric and diesel days, but even portray the central shaft and the Hoosac Hotel. All three HO dioramas show first class workmanship by local model railroaders.

Appropriately, Boston & Maine under its new Guilford

parent, gave four boxcars and a caboose to Heritage Park on December 22, 1983. B&M President Alan Dustin turned the symbolic keys to the caboose over to Governor Dukakis on the rotting freight shed platform while a small crowd, including the City's mayor, looked on. Three of those four cars today help to house the tunnel display, since they are now located on the sealed off dead siding beside the freight house and physically joined to the frame building. They have been turned into a 150-foot long display corridor which, for reference, is approximately the length of Hoosac in N scale.

The exterior of each of the four boxcars is painted in authentic GTI line color: B&M blue, D&H boxcar red, MEC green, the new GTI white, and the buggy in traditional boxcar red with a special "Heritage Park" logo. Of all the possible rail items that could have gone astray, only one error occurred. The painter decided to do the opposite side of the buggy with a white McGinnis era logo, rather than the proper "Minuteman" shield.

It remains to be seen if North Adams will appreciate its new monument to the city's heritage and whether economic success will return to the area. Naturally, regular patronage from the local community must quickly develop if the Park is to prosper for its investors. B&MRRHS members will find a trip to the Park to be a pleasant, rewarding experience. A significant segment of our favorite railroad's past has been preserved in a job well done by excellent designers and craftsmen. They all can be proud of their labors.



The old freight yard and sheds have been beautifully restored. Residents, tourists, and rail history fans can dine, shop, and browse as they reminisce on another generation that planned and built the tunnel through Hoosac Mountain.

Four boxcars and a caboose, painted in authentic GTI line colors and joined physically to the restored B&M freight house, contain the Hoosac Tunnel display. The cars were donated to Western Gateway Heritage State Park by the Boston & Maine.

