

# Manchester's Railroads

This historical plaque is located on the former site of the Detroit, Hillsdale and Indiana Railroad depot, built in 1870 when Manchester's second railroad was constructed. Railroads were essential to commerce and growth in 19th century towns, and the fact that a small village like Manchester was able to secure two railroad routes with corresponding passenger and freight facilities reflected a climate of strong economic growth and prosperity. From 1870 through the 1930s, these railroads were essential to the agricultural, manufacturing and travel needs of local residents and businesses.

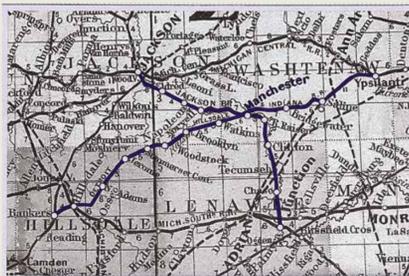


Figure 1 – Route Map of Manchester's Two Railroads, 1874

Figure 1 shows how these two railroads connected Manchester to the rest of Michigan and beyond.

Figure 2 shows the route of the two railroads within the village limits. Details on each railroad are contained in the following sections.

Railroads had a profound impact on Manchester area life. Local residents took trains to visit their grandparents, to play the neighboring town in sports, and some rode the rails to war. They sent their wheat, livestock, ice or manufactured goods to markets far away, and received back supplies, mail, catalogue orders, and visitors. By the early 1900s, the railroads employed more workers than any other area business except farming.

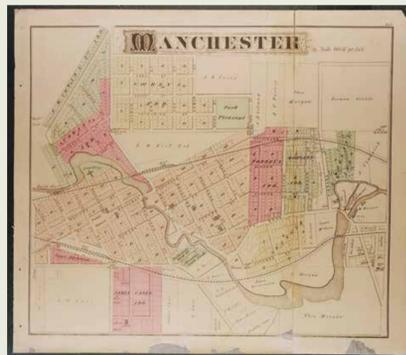


Figure 2 – 1874 Manchester Plat Map Showing Rail Routes within the Village

As Michigan was becoming a state in 1837, the vision was developed for several east-west rail lines running across the state. The southern route would connect from Monroe to New Buffalo, and the central route would connect Detroit to St. Joseph. But by 1836, planning was already underway to connect these two rail lines with a north-south route running through Manchester. This connection was completed in 1855, and then a second railroad was built from Ypsilanti to Hillsdale through Manchester in 1870 during a period of strong economic growth and promotion for the region.

## The Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad

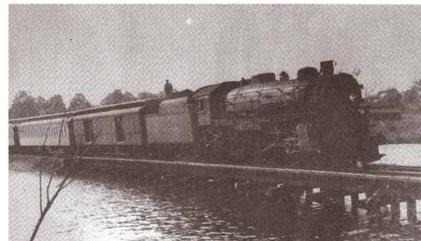


Figure 3 – LS & MS Trestle Bridge across Lower Mill Pond, circa 1949

Street to the Manchester Mill. Douglass Houghton's 1839 survey map for Washtenaw County shows that surveying for the "Palmyra and Jacksonburgh Railroad" had been completed up to Manchester from south of Adrian, but an economic panic and subsequent depression from 1837 through the 1840s postponed any construction. The first rail extension to reach Manchester occurred in 1855, as the reconstituted Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad built a connection from Tecumseh to Manchester. This rail line eventually continued on north and west to Jackson, and allowed Manchester's first passenger and freight traffic to flow between Jackson and Adrian.

There was no local press at the time, and we do not have any accounts of the railroad's arrival in 1855, but the line

John Gilbert's original vision for Manchester in the early 1830s included a railroad connection, just as railroad infrastructure was being started in Michigan. Gilbert was instrumental in developing Ypsilanti's first railroad, and the 1837 Second Plat of Manchester, prepared in conjunction with brothers James and Stephen Fargo, had the railroad coming right up Adrian

was relocated from the original plans to follow close to the current Territorial Street. No side rail line was ever constructed to the Manchester Mill as originally planned by the Fargo brothers. The station consisted of passenger and freight depots, a water tower, coal and oil storage facilities, and general storage yards. The rail line underwent many name changes and consolidations, with names varying from Southern Michigan Railway to the New York Central.

The line was 44 miles in length, with stops in Palmyra, Lenawee Junction, Tecumseh, Clinton, River Raisin, Norvell, Manchester, Napoleon, Eldred and Jackson, from which connections could be made from Jackson or Adrian. The line crossed the lower Manchester Mill Pond across from the current Manchester Village Hall – residue of this crossing is still visible. Figure 3 shows this bridge with an excursion train circa 1949. Regular passenger service existed until the late 1930s, and the railway itself ceased business in 1964. Portions of the line still exist and carry tourist traffic between Clinton and Tecumseh. The land in Manchester for the depot and tracks was sold off to private parties after 1965.

The original LS & MS depot (built 1856) and freight yard were located near 455 W. Main St, the current site of the Manchester Market and a large open field. Figure 4 shows the new Union Station depot built there circa 1910. The yard had side tracks to allow freight loading and maneuvering of cars while other trains came through. A freight depot stored grain in second floor bins, accessed by a 30 foot ramp. Traffic once was measured in several trains per day, but by 1964 was only two or three per week. The depot was demolished in the late 1950s, and the freight depot in 1981. Figure 5 shows the interior of the freight depot, circa 1915.



Figure 4 – Union Depot, Southern Michigan Railway/NYCRR, circa 1910



Figure 5 – Interior of LS&MS/Southern Railway Freight Depot, circa 1915

## The Detroit, Hillsdale and Indiana Railroad

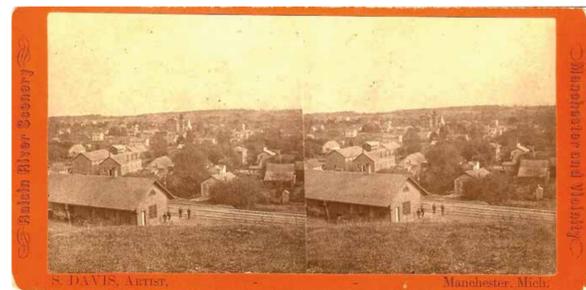


Figure 6 – View of DHI Depot and Adjacent Manchester Residential Neighborhoods

Manchester's second railroad also operated under a variety of names over the years, and was constructed in 1870 after a strong civic and municipal marketing campaign to bring a second railroad to Manchester, with direct connections running east-west between Detroit and Chicago. The rail line passed through Bridgewater Township going east to Saline, and west from Manchester through Manchester Township and Watkins Station to Brooklyn. Figure 6 shows a view of the depot and rail yards, and the surrounding Manchester neighborhoods south of the rail yard. Passenger trains arrived 2-3 times a day from the 1870s through the early 1900s. Freight yards handled cattle and supplies. Several local businessmen (e.g., William Burtless and N. W. Hall of Manchester, Jim Hogan of Bridgewater Township, and L. L. Watkins of Jackson County) maintained their own holding pens and sidetracks on their farms to handle their livestock shipping needs.

This new line included a major excavation project on a large hill behind Madison Street west of the Mill Pond, to produce a clear path through hilly terrain. Figure 7 shows this "cut" through the hill today, known then as "Kief's Cut", after John D. Kief from whom the property was purchased. The other major design element was a 370 foot wooden trestle bridge across the Manchester Mill Pond, shown in Figure 8. The bridge was dismantled in 1961, and the wood reused in constructing six pole barns in the Manchester area.



Figure 7 – DHI Railroad Cut, Known as "Kief's Cut", west of River Raisin Mill Pond



Figure 8 – DHI Railroad Trestle Bridge over Manchester Mill Pond

Manchester experienced a strong economic boom and prosperity during and immediately after the Civil War, resulting in major commercial and industrial developments in the town and rapid residential growth. On April 29, 1869, Mat Blosser of the *Manchester Enterprise* editorialized "The advantages of the contemplated Road from Detroit to Hillsdale by way of this place cannot be enlarged upon...All must see the vital interests to the prosperity, growth and importance of Manchester at stake." Many civic leaders and investors joined together to raise \$30,000 and pass a special tax, and successfully petitioned for the route of this railroad to come through Manchester. Major local leaders included Jeremiah Corey, William Burtless, John Cowan, Newman Granger, and John Kief.



Figure 10 – A Whistle Warning Sign along the former DHI Rail Bed

The first train on the road came through on September 23, 1870, heralding Manchester's unique position as the only local small town with two railroads. The *Manchester Enterprise* wrote many articles tracking the work project and its completion, including Figure 9, highlighting "Tickets to China" as to how convenient the two rail systems now made life in Manchester.

Passengers and freight were both accommodated here until 1910, when the new Union Station Depot at the LS & MS rail yard was configured to handle all passenger traffic on both lines, leaving the DHI depot to handle freight and other supplies only. When this occurred, passenger trains coming along the former DHI branch would pull into the junction west of town, wait until all traffic on the LS & MS line would pass, then back into the depot in Manchester to discharge passengers.

This rail line merged with the LS & MS rail line in 1881, and also eventually became a part of the New York Central Railroad, ceasing operations in Manchester in 1961. The rail line right-of-way and depot yard were purchased by the Village of Manchester in 1965, for use in installing various utility lines/equipment and providing access to the River Raisin. The major portion of the depot yard and adjoining area was converted into Chi-Bro Park through Manchester Chicken Broil funding, Michigan Natural Resources Trust Funds, Land and Water Conservation funds, and other sources beginning in 1975. In 2015, the former rail bed leading out from both sides of Chi-Bro Park towards the west and east village limits began transformation into the Manchester Shared-Use Trail, a recreational facility for walking, bicycling and other activities. In 2012, the Village purchased the tract of land along the east side of the Manchester Mill Pond adjacent to the former rail bed, for conversion beginning 2017 into a riverfront park.

Figure 10 shows one of the original whistle warning signs still existing along the former rail bed. This sign alerted the engineer to warn persons and other traffic of the incoming train.

The two rail lines crossed northwest of downtown Manchester, on the north side of the current Deutsche Grät Subdivision commons area, at a location known as the "junction". Here trains could pull into a side rail, and then transfer to the other branch. This was done primarily for backing passenger cars into the Manchester Union Depot after the two rail lines merged.

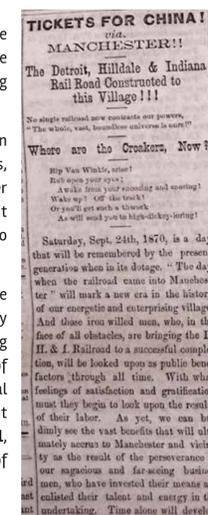


Figure 9 – "Tickets to China" – The Opening of the DHI Railroad, September 1870

## The Two Railways Vision

The installation of the second rail line through Manchester was a significant civic achievement, and was meant to continue and expand Manchester's strong economic growth after the Civil War. For a town the size of Manchester to have two rail lines, running in all four directions, was a major public relations bonus, and was meant to attract new businesses to the area with the opportunity for cheap freight. This is portrayed in the 1872 *Manchester Birds-Eye View*, shown in Figure 11. These views, commissioned by local merchants and leaders, were intended to promote the village and its prosperity. A classic symbol of prosperity in these times were multiple trains billowing smoke and coming into the village. This Birds-Eye View shows three trains simultaneously entering the village to deliver people and goods.

Figure 12 shows a happy time in Manchester history, with continued growth and prosperity, along with fun times when the trains ran regularly.

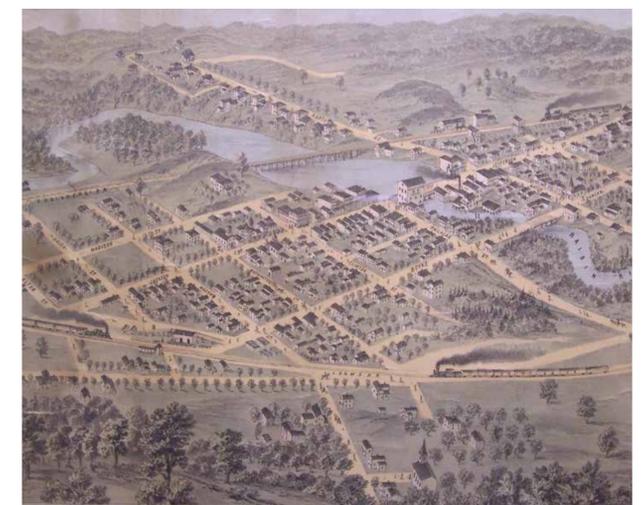


Figure 11 – 1872 Manchester Birds-Eye View, with Three Trains as Evidence of Prosperity



Figure 12 – Ice Skating below the Railroad Bridge – Happy Times, 1895

Created: December 2016  
Support from 2016 Community Tourism Action Plan  
Funded by: Washtenaw County CVB and Village of Manchester DDA  
Graphics by Sue Maher, Moxie Grafic LLC

Research and content provided by the Manchester Area Historical Society. Further details on the subject matter contained herein is available through the Manchester Area Historical Society.