

Lakes Region Model Railroad Museum

Freight House History

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On July 1st. 1868, several individuals in Wolfeboro formed a corporation called the Wolfeboro Railroad to plan for and arrange a rail connection from Wolfeboro to the outside world. Alternative routes were explored and several different railroad companies were contacted.

They decided that an easterly 12-mile connection to Wakefield (also called Sanbornville) was most realistic and selected the Portsmouth, Great Falls and Conway Railway (PGF&CR) to build and operate this connection. PGF&CR was closely associated with the Eastern Railroad, and already used Eastern to operate several of its other lines.

Eastern Railroad took over operating responsibility for the Wolfeboro rail line once it was completed in 1872. A detailed 60-year operating lease and mortgage was executed between PGF&CR and Eastern Railroad in October 1878, covering all of PGF&CR's assets, referring to prior management of the PGF&CR railroad by Eastern.

The Wolfeboro freight house was part of this system, built by PGF&CR in 1872, and immediately operated by Eastern Railroad, although nominal ownership remained with the Wolfeboro Railroad. The first scheduled train from Wakefield to Wolfeboro ran on August 19th. 1872.

In 1884, the Boston and Maine Railroad (B&MR) leased all the operations of the Eastern Railroad, including the Wolfeboro branch line and, in 1890, bought the Eastern Railroad and PGF&CR outright. In 1892, the B&MR then bought the remaining assets of the Wolfeboro Railroad, and operated them well into the 20th century.

The arrival of rail service in the late 19th century immediately led to the establishment and expansion of manufacturing and shipping facilities in Wolfeboro, shipping out lumber products, excelsior from softwood brought in by rail, woolen blankets, shoes, matches, clay pipes, etc. The Sanborn maps of 1887 and 1917 show many manufacturing buildings in Wolfeboro, each with its list of products, and showing rail spurs bringing fuel and raw materials to them, and shipping out products.

The freight house in Wolfeboro was the center of all this commercial and industrial activity, which continued until the mid 1960s, well after the automobile had taken over most of the passenger traffic. In addition to supporting these industrial activities, tourist luggage was unloaded there, and supplies for the downtown merchants and hotels passed through the freight house. It was the essential conduit for almost everything that passed into and out of Wolfeboro.

However, Passenger traffic on the railroad dwindled through the 1920s and 30s as automobiles came into use and the road network improved, and the last scheduled

passenger train left Wolfeboro on May 16th, 1936. But mixed passenger and freight trains and freight-only trains continued to run until the late 1960s. The passenger station was closed and sold by the Boston and Maine Railroad to the Town of Wolfeboro in 1950 for \$5000. The intent was to demolish the structure and replace it with parking space, but preservation minded citizens objected and the building was preserved and is now a major landmark in the center of town, housing both the Chamber of Commerce and the Wolfeboro Nursery School.

The freight house, however, continued in use receiving and delivering freight from and to Wakefield.

The B&MR owned the freight house until August 1961, when it sold the freight house and the immediate lot to Douglas Parsons, a local businessman, for \$2,500, who used it to receive and deliver furniture by rail. The sale stipulated that the purchaser (and assigns) shall maintain a heated and lighted agent's office with space to handle a reduced level of freight traffic for 100 years or until freight service was discontinued.

Mr. Parsons sold the same property, including the freight house and its obligations, to Wolfeboro Oil Company in July of 1966 where ownership remained until December of 2016, when the Town of Wolfeboro bought the 0.27acre lot, including the freight house.

Meanwhile, in 1972, a new Wolfeboro Railroad was incorporated and ran tourist passenger trains to Wakefield from 1973 to 1978. Freight traffic was resurrected but intermittently and on demand, and mainly to Wolfeboro Falls, and only occasionally through the freight house.

After a one-year hiatus in 1979, a new Wolfeboro Steam Railroad took over and continued to run excursion trains to Wakefield from 1980 to 1985. The last train on the Wolfeboro line ran on June 15, 1986, removing all remaining rolling stock to Wakefield. In 1987, the town purchased the main line to Wakefield and its right of way from B&MR for a walking path, ending all possible use of the station and the freight house for their original purposes.

The freight house now follows the all too familiar path of the railway station. The town purchased the freight house in 2016 intending for it be removed and replaced by parking. Once again, preservation minded citizens blocked this plan, and the town was then faced with finding a use for the structure.

The Lakes Region Model Railroad Museum was formed to provide this use, in major part to preserve the freight house which is centrally located, in good condition considering its age and use, and can be rehabilitated with the tasteful and imaginative design being proposed here.

So ownership of the freight house was the following:

1872 to 1892	Wolfeboro Railroad Company
1892 to 1961	Boston and Maine Railroad
1961 to 1966	Douglas Parsons

1966 to 2016 Wolfeboro Oil Company
2016 to Present Town of Wolfeboro

In January 2021, the freight house was added to the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places as the Wolfeboro Freight Shed.