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South Gilboa Railroad Station

Linda Stratigos

SOUTH GILBOA. Here the summit of the Delaware County track is reached, 1,747 feet above tide, which you have approached so gradually through the glade that you can scarcely realize it is within about one hundred feet of the Pine Hill summit. There are a few quiet boarding places in the vicinity and boating facilities upon Mayham's Lake, near the station. The hamlet is two miles toward the northeast. The train now turns into a westerly course, skipping over the level three miles at a lively rate when the whistle sounds and you see many passengers preparing to alight, having reached the end of their journey.

—The Catskills Mountains, the most picturesque Mountain region on the Globe,
Ulster & Delaware Railroad, 1902.

A railroad line, running from Kingston to Oneonta, was the brainstorm of Thomas Cornell, founder of the Cornell Steamboat Company. At the age of 52, Cornell had visions of bringing products by rail from central and western New York to his boats at Rondout near Kingston. The Rondout and Oswego Railroad was chartered in April 1866 with Thomas Cornell as president. The R&O charter authorized the construction of a railroad from Rondout on the Hudson River through the Catskills to Oneonta, a distance of 107 miles. The line reached Roxbury in 1871. As the company tried to extend the line to Grand Gorge, financial problems became overwhelming because construction costs had been much higher than the engineer's original estimate due to the curving nature of the line and the steep grades it had to conquer. The company reorganized and became the New York, Kingston & Syracuse Railroad Company and this company managed to reach Stamford in 1872. The new company went bankrupt in 1873 and in 1875 the company reorganized as the Ulster and Delaware Railroad.

The line ran from Kingston to Oneonta, through Phoenicia, Arkville, Halcottville, Roxbury, Grand Gorge, South Gilboa, Stamford, Hobart, South Kortright, East Meredith, Bloomville, the Davenportes to Oneonta. A separate spur, The Stony Clove line, ran from Phoenicia through the mountains to Haines Falls and Hunter. While these rail lines were conceived to deliver farm product to New York City, the railroad opened the heart of the Catskills to tourism.

The South Gilboa Station, according the United States Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, is historically significant and representative of railroad-related architecture associated with the history of transportation in the Catskill region in the early twentieth century. The building is a rare example of the

standardized, partly prefabricated stations erected by the railroad during the most important period of train commerce. The design of the station is consistent with many of the other stations that were on the line: the broad hip roof, oversized decorative brackets, raised platforms; a trackside bay window and beaded interior wainscoting.

Despite abandonment and lack of maintenance through the years, the station has remained in fairly good shape. The old rail bed has been turned into the popular Catskill Scenic Hiking Trail so that the station is now on that trail.

The original South Gilboa Station was on the eastern shore of Mayham's Pond. In photographs it appears to have been a pole barn structure with a long platform that was used for loading cars with ice during the winter for Kingston's ice houses.

Amazingly, South Gilboa and South Gilboa Station were busy places at the turn of the last century. South Gilboa had several churches, a store, post office, a grange hall and quite a few residents. In 1897 the Catskill Mountain Creamery was established at South Gilboa Station. In 1905 the Sheffield Creamery was built and their products were shipped out by rail until 1932. A lumberyard and custom milling shop was in operation along with a blacksmith, church, and store.

In 1905, after what Daisy DeSilva writes was "a controversy lasting over 30 years based on the question of the necessity of a station at this place and the choice of site," the current South Gilboa Station was built. It was in operation until 1932 when it closed due to lack of business. Kate Mattice remembered her weekly commute to and from the station to school in Stamford on Mondays and Fridays.

The South Gilboa Station was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in May 2000. Very few of the original stations remain standing. The Phoenicia Station was restored and is now the Empire State Railroad Museum. The Haines Falls Station has been restored. The Ulster & Delaware Historical Society is restoring the Roxbury Station; others are in private hands; most were destroyed by fire or simply rotted away.

In 2002 the Gilboa Historical Society purchased the station, which was in danger of suffering structural damage, with funds granted by the Catskill Watershed Corporation. The historical society hoped to restore and open it to the public for use as a rest stop and exhibit space on the Catskill Scenic Hiking Trail. But raising funding for historic preservation is difficult and while the O'Connor Foundation had committed to a grant of \$84,000, finding the match for that money proved to be impossible.

The most likely match opportunity was a grant that was available through the NYS Department of Transportation two years ago. One of the requirements to that grant application is municipal support—a resolution from the town board was needed in order to submit the application. Unfortunately, the Gilboa Town Board voted against writing that resolution despite the fact that the historical society would have done the paperwork and there was no risk to the town.

As a result of this lack of support, it became apparent that Gilboa Historical Society would not be able to raise the funds to restore the building and so has sold the station to the Catskill Revitalization Council in the belief that they will respect the history of the building and of our community.

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