

The industrial revolution and the modern tourism industry began at the same time. Wealthy persons of course had always been able to make extended visits to fashionable watering places or country homes. Before the industrial revolution, a religious pilgrimage was about the only acceptable reason for a lower or middle class person to travel. In protestant societies, some sort of pilgrimage with an educational component was acceptable. Artists were expected to travel from their city studios and take inspiration from nature. Farmers could attend fairs or make a trip to the seaside where they would fish or gather shellfish. There are even accounts in New Jersey of disgruntled workers at the early iron furnaces putting down their tools and going to the beach. But vacations in the modern sense did not yet exist.

If the idea of the modern vacation was still in its formative stages, the idea that a person could commute to work was even more radical. With the development of the first railroads from central cities to outlying countryside, commuting became possible for the affluent. But the vast majority of people had to live within walking distance of their workplaces. This was true even for the people who owned the workplaces and the growing cadre of professional managers who ran them.

Railroads changed all of this, and Jamaica Bay was just one of the many places they transformed. Like most cities of the period, the growth of Brooklyn after the Civil War was facilitated by the expansion of rapid transit lines and passenger railroads. Brooklyn

seems to have been particularly blessed with an abundance of steam dummy lines. A “steam dummy” is a locomotive whose boiler and machinery were enclosed by a wooden body. This body muffled the sounds coming from the locomotive and in theory, it could operate on city streets without frightening horses or disturbing pedestrians. In the 1800s people unable to speak were called “dumb” and what was a common disability gave the locomotive its name. By 1873 there were steam dummy lines in operation at Flatbush, Fort Hamilton, Bath, Coney Island, Canarsie, East New York, and other neighborhoods. The growth of these railroads was not without its critics. A letter writer to the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted in March of 1873 that Long Island was only four to twelve miles wide but would soon have six steam railroads running through it. Most of the enthusiasm for new railroad construction, according to the writer who identified himself only as "Anti-Pandemonium," was the result of hype created by real estate promoters and railroad companies. More steam dummy lines, according to Anti-Pandemonium, would fill the streets with locomotives "hissing and rattling" horses would be frightened, it would not be safe for old people to venture outdoors, and dwellings would be filled with smoke, steam, and "the abominable odor of coal gas." The suggested solution would be to increase the frequency of horse car service (“No Steam on the Streets Wanted, But One-Third More Horse Cars”, Letter to the Editor, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Mar.21, 1873).

The Brooklyn and Rockaway Beach left the Bay Ridge Branch of the Long Island Railroad near the shore of Jamaica Bay east of Canarsie, ran over the shoreline marshes and drove straight through the center of Canarsie, and terminated at the steamboat docks

of Canarsie Landing. (Figure EH-2) Passengers transferred to a steamboat for the trip to the Rockaway Peninsula or remained in Canarsie to swim, fish, or boat in quieter waters of Jamaica Bay. The railroad originated DeWitt C. Littlejohn (1820-1890) obtained a charter from the State of New York to build a railroad from Broadway in Brooklyn, through Vesta Avenue, and to Canarsie. As Littlejohn's brother was then speaker of the state assembly, there was no difficulty obtaining the charter and the land required for the right of way was inexpensive. There was little reason to build such a railroad and less reason to expect that it would be profitable (“To Improve Canarsie”, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 29, 1891). Other press reports credit the construction of the railroad to DeWitt C. Littlejohn’s father-in-law, identified only as Dr. Thompson. Thompson was reported to have a large tract of land on the Rockaway Peninsula and wanted a railroad to bring people to the beach. (“To Stop for Winter”, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Sep.08, 1896)

A real estate promoter named James S. Remsen, after whom a neighborhood on the Rockaway Peninsula is named, owned 150 acres on the peninsula's beachfront that he wanted to develop into a tourist resort. Remsen offered Littlejohn 75 acres if he built the railroad. A 3.5 mile single track railroad was completed by 1865. The railroad began operation with a few four wheeled cars and two dummy locomotives (“To Improve Canarsie”, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 29, 1891).

By 1871 the Canarsie railroad came under the control of Phil H. Reed, owner of the

Howard House Hotel (not to be confused with the Hotel Howard at Howard Beach) The bar at the hotel was a popular place to wait for the trains and people come pouring into the hotel between 9:00 Sunday morning and 3:00 Sunday afternoon. In the heat of summer, an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 people use the railroad and visit Rockaway Beach (“East New York, Canarsie, and Rockaway”, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 21, 1871).

The railroad was immediately popular. According to one press report the "restaurant men and mosquitoes of Canarsie did a lively business." The mosquitoes were less of a nuisance on the Rockaway Peninsula but the large numbers of "noisy young men" who frequented Fort Hamilton for baseball and bathing did tend to discourage the "better class of people" from using the beaches there (“Sunday Out Doors”, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 24, 1872).

The rolling stock of the railroad was described as consisting of a number of open passenger cars. Two new steam locomotives were built at the Grant Locomotive works in Paterson, New Jersey. The engines had 2-4-2T wheel arrangements and were designed to run double ended. (The 2-4-2 designation means two unpowered leading wheels, four powered driving wheels, and two unpowered trailing wheels. The “T” stands for “tank” meaning the locomotive carried its water supply in a tank mounted above the boiler. Fuel was carried in a small bunker behind the cab and the locomotive did not require a separate tender.) These locomotives were reported to have been dummies. With 50-inch

diameter driving wheels they had an estimated speed of 30 mph. However an engraving of a 2-4-2T locomotive reported to have been built for the railroad survives from this era. (Figure EH-3) The locomotive in the engraving was built by the Rogers Locomotive Works of Paterson, New Jersey, it was not a dummy, and the driving wheels are not fifty inches in diameter. A detailed examination of the railroad's locomotive roster will be required to resolve this discrepancy. Whatever type of locomotive brought the train to the waterfront, the next stage of the journey was by steamboat. From Canarsie to Rockaway the voyage on the steamboat "*E. Corning, Jr.*" took about an hour. No liquors sold on board ("East New York, Canarsie, and Rockaway", *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 21, 1871).

The route followed from the waterfront was from the Howard House to the curve of East New York Avenue and then into what was still undeveloped county, woods, fields, and farms. The route over the marsh grass meadows was described as "serpentine". Occasionally the train passed frames for the drying of nets or fishing boats. Fishing stakes appeared along the creeks and finally the Bay View House came into view. Canarsie itself was described as sandy and very dusty on windy days. The tourists at Canarsie were described as lounging, strolling on the beach, or going out in boats. Newspaper accounts say that they "stuff themselves with shellfish" play billiards at the hotels, or take a punt out to fish ("A Sunday Out, Opening of the Excursion Season", *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 13, 1872).

The 1894 edition of the *Brooklyn Citizen Almanac* states that during the summer months, the railroad ran trains to Canarsie every hour between 6:30 am and 8:30 pm. Trains from Canarsie ran on the half hour. The trip lasted 13 minutes (*Brooklyn Citizen Almanac*, 1894, 123). Plans to double track the railroad were announced in 1891 and the double tracking was completed in 1894 (“To Improve Canarsie”, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 29, 1891).

In September of 1896 the railroad notified the New York State Railroad Commission that they would not run service during winter months. The railroad had been operated year round but the owners claimed that revenues did not meet expenses after October (“To Stop for Winter”, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Sep.8, 1896). Clearly there were still tourists to be carried, but the year-round population had other transportation options, such as the expanding streetcar and rapid transit networks.