



Settled in 1654

Town of Pelham
Westchester County, New York

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(In Memoriam, 1937-2008)

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To: The Honorable Members of the Board of Trustees
Village of Pelham, New York, Westchester County

Given my unavailability to attend this evening's regular meeting of the Village of Pelham Board of Trustees, I respectfully request your indulgence to accept this brief written statement in connection with public comments being made regarding the former New York, Westchester & Boston Railway Bridge that remains above Highbrook Avenue. I have delivered this statement to Matt Carey for submission.

In the early years of the 20th century, a group of powerful men backed by financiers including J.P. Morgan decided to build a new railway line that would connect New York City to Boston. The group worked quietly to assemble tracts of land through one of the fastest-growing suburban areas in the United States – the area northeast of New York City including the Village of North Pelham.

The railroad opened in 1912. Experts considered it the most advanced and luxurious commuter railway line in the world. It was so expensive to build, it became known as the "Million-Dollar-a-Mile Railroad".

The inaugural run of cars on the line occurred on May 16, 1912. Among the beaming and proud local officials who rode the train on that inaugural run was the Mayor of the Village of North Pelham, Peter Ceder. Pelham and its local officials were particularly proud of the beautiful overpass that carried trains across Fifth Avenue, the lovely train station located at that overpass, and the beautifully-arched overpass that crossed Highbrook Avenue and that echoed the design of the much larger Fifth Avenue overpass.

The New York, Westchester & Boston Railway only operated until 1937 when it failed, a victim of the Great Depression and the continued rise of the American automobile.

The railroad had become an important part of Westchester County – and Pelham – history. The line was dismantled, "sold off, covered over, and otherwise forgotten". Numerous books have been written about it. As one source states, "[p]art of the line in the Bronx was integrated into the New York City Subway in 1941, while the rest has slowly returned to nature, with most traces rapidly disappearing to the passing of time and memory."

I would urge the members of the Board of Trustees, in all deliberations that might affect the Highbrook Avenue arch, to remember its historic importance and the fact that Pelham remains one of the only communities that has had the foresight to retain such an important architectural element of the historic New York, Westchester & Boston Railway. We should be proud!

Very truly yours,

Blake A. Bell, Town Historian