

THE STORY OF WAUMBEEK JUNCTION: A REMOTE RAILROAD STATION IN THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

by Joanne P. Jones

Walking into Cherry Pond and the Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge in Jefferson, New Hampshire, one comes to a spot about a mile and a half from the Airport Road parking lot where there is a large Pondicherry sign and several trails meet. Although little evidence remains today, this area is the site of an old railroad junction known as Waumbek Junction. The purpose of this article is to document the buildings which once were found at Waumbek Junction as well as the people who once lived there.



Waumbek Junction as it appears today (photo by Kevin Jones)

Although located in a remote, roadless area, Waumbek Junction (#1 on the map) was an active railroad junction in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It was here that the Boston & Maine Railroad (running roughly west to east; #6 on the map) met the Maine Central Railroad (running south to north; #7 on the map), allowing passengers to switch from one line to the other. Timetables for the two railroads indicate that the Junction was once a busy place where over a dozen passenger trains stopped during a summer day in the peak years prior to World War I, with passengers changing trains for destinations such as the Waumbek Hotel in Jefferson or the Fabyan House in Bretton Woods.

Interestingly, the Junction has had various names over the years. Originally called Cherry Pond, the name changed to Waumbek Junction in the 1890s. However, in May 1900, the name was officially changed to Jefferson Junction by a railroad order and remained Jefferson Junction until the late 1920s when it was once again named Waumbek Junction. Regarding the meaning of the word “Waumbek”, in their book *The Place Names of the White Mountains*, Robert and Mary Hixon explain that “in some eastern Indian dialects, *waumbekket-methna* meant literally ‘snowy mountains,’ and in the Algonquin language *waumbik* meant ‘white rocks’.”

Documenting the buildings that once existed at Waumbek Junction was not an easy task since very little detailed information about the Junction is readily available. By far, the most illuminating sources are two unpublished items—the valuation survey records which were compiled in the early part of the 20th

century by the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) as part of a nationwide inventory of railroad assets and the right-of-way and track maps that were done at this time by the railroads for the ICC. Beginning in 1914, survey parties were sent out to all railroad sites (including Waumbek Junction) to inventory and measure the buildings and other structures at a site and to calculate the value of the property. The records compiled by the survey parties who came to Waumbek Junction in 1914 and 1916, as well as the track maps of the Junction done by the Maine Central and Boston & Maine Railroads, show that a passenger station, freight house, station agent's house, barn, and ball signal were all found at one time at Waumbek Junction.

The passenger station (#4 on the map) was located on the east side of the Maine Central tracks just north of the junction with the Boston & Maine tracks, before the crossing of the John's River. It measured 16 ft. by 36 ft. and had platforms that extended along both the Maine Central and Boston & Maine tracks, so that passengers could easily switch from one train to another. Most likely the station was built in late 1895 or early 1896 and then closed to the public about 35 years later in the early 1930s (when passenger service was reduced in northern New England). It sat abandoned for a period of time before it was finally removed.



Undated postcard showing the passenger station at Waumbek Junction (courtesy of David Govatski)

The freight house (#2 on the map) was located in the diamond between the Maine Central and Boston & Maine tracks, across from and slightly south of the station. It measured 16 ft. by 28 ft. and was nearly surrounded by platforms. No date could be found for the construction or demolition of the freight house, but photographs indicate that it was still standing in the early 1980s. South of the freight house and just outside the diamond was a ball signal (#3 on the map) to control the crossing of the trains at the Junction. One ball or one red lantern raised to the masthead meant that Boston & Maine trains could cross the Maine Central tracks. Two balls or two red lanterns meant that Maine Central trains could cross the Boston & Maine tracks. No dates could be found for when this signal was placed at the Junction or for when it was removed.



Freight house and ball signal at Waumbek Junction (courtesy of David Govatski)

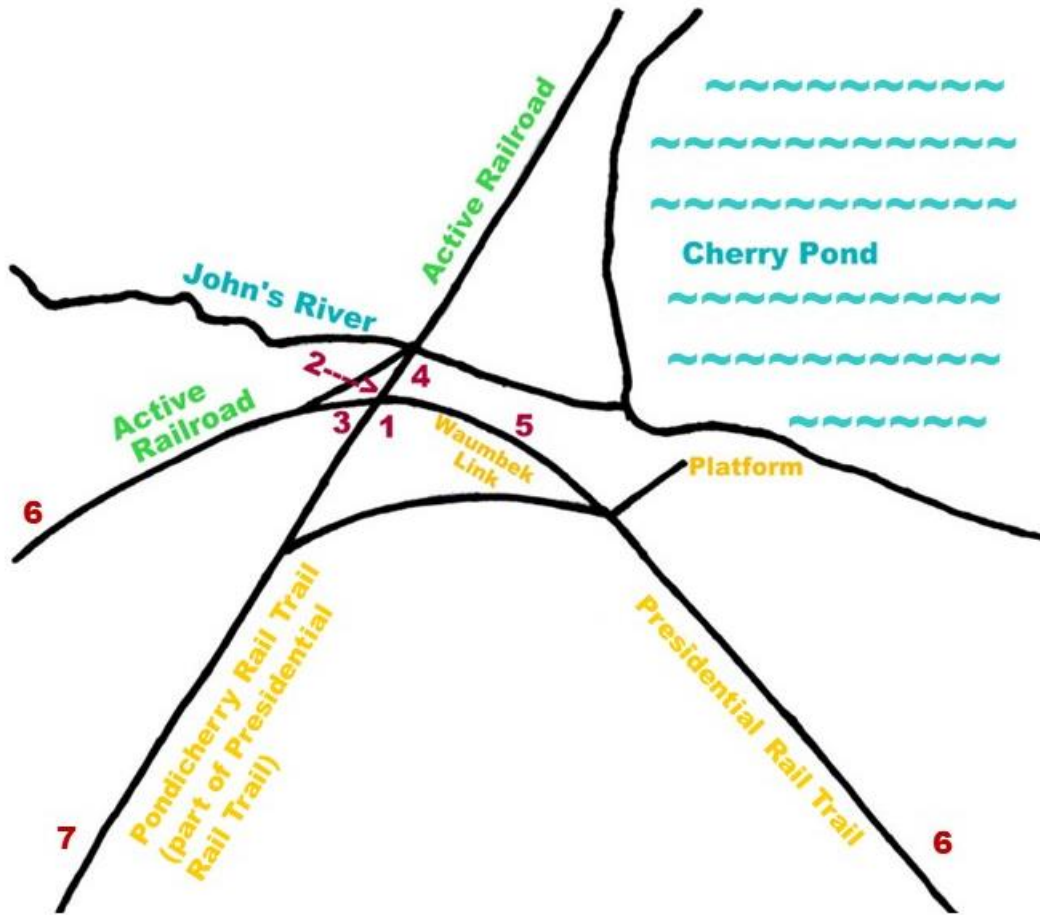
The house for the station agent and his family (#5 on the map) was located east of the Junction, about halfway between the Junction and the current Tudor Richards observation platform. Although no photos could be found, the ICC valuation survey records have floor plans for this structure, which show that it was a two-story building with a front parlor, dining room, kitchen, and several bedrooms. The ICC records also have a plan for a small barn, which was probably located somewhere near the house. No dates could be found for the construction of the house and barn, but they were most likely abandoned in the late 1920s.

Very limited information is available about the people who once lived at Waumbek Junction. A handbook published each year by the Maine Central Railroad reveals the names of the agents working and living at the Junction between 1914 and 1930, and the 1920 census indicates that a family of five resided at the Junction at that time. Unfortunately, the names of those agents who worked and lived at the Junction prior to 1914 could not be found.

After passenger service on the Maine Central and Boston & Maine Railroad lines declined and then ended, the tracks both east and south of Waumbek Junction were removed and in 1996/97 the Presidential Rail Trail was established along the former railbed. Three years after that, in 2000, the area around the Junction became part of the Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Joanne Jones and her husband Kevin have been long-time trail maintainers at Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge and pass through Waumbek Junction often. As a former librarian, Joanne decided it would be fun to do some research and learn more about what used to be at the Junction.

MAP OF WAUMBEEK JUNCTION



#1 marks Waumbek Junction; #2, the location of the freight house; #3, the location of the ball signal; #4, the location of the passenger station; #5, the location of the station agent's house; #6, the former Boston & Maine Railroad; and #7, the former Maine Central Railroad. (Map drawn by the author)

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