

Northborough Historic Resources Survey: Rail-Related Properties Northborough, Massachusetts

As part of Phase II of the Town of Northborough's historic resources survey, AHS personnel inventoried rail-related features using Massachusetts Historical Commission Form B (buildings) and Form F (structures). Like many Massachusetts towns, Northborough was transformed in the 19th century by the coming of the railroad. The existing town center grew as hotels, stables, and other amenities were built close to the railroad depot, and both business owners and farmers benefited from greater access to goods and markets.



Cold Harbor Brook railroad bridge, ca. 1866.



Assabet River railroad bridge, ca. 1852.

Two stone-arch railroad bridges were inventoried. The 13-foot arch across the Assabet River probably dates from the original construction of the Agricultural Branch Railroad, which began building a connection between Northborough and Framingham in 1852. The 15-foot arch across Cold Harbor Brook dates from 1866 when the line was extended to Sterling. The latter is known to have been built by noted railroad contractor and bridge builder George W. Phelps (1820-1899).

Both stone arches were recommended for National Register of Historic Places consideration based upon the importance of rail transportation in Northborough's history and the arches' embodiment of typical 19th-century railroad masonry construction.

The survey also inventoried a trackside building, the ca. 1900 former Deerfoot Creamery. The creamery provided a way for Northborough's farmers to process milk and other dairy products, ship them out by rail, and distribute them in the greater Boston area.



Deerfoot Creamery (arrow) and Northborough freight depot, 1927.

To prepare these forms, AHS's historian made extensive use of railroad track maps, historical society photograph collections, and other archival sources. In its evaluation of the project, MHC made special note of the survey's thoroughness.