

The Rowland Springs RR. layout

Its unbelievable history provides clues to the selection of rolling stock and structures. Once it was 2-foot gauge, then interurban, and now it is standard gauge with self-propelled cars

BY LINN H. WESTCOTT

WITH the sudden fuel shortages of the mid-1970's, North American lifestyle was greatly changed. There were disasters, as we well know. But also, back in those years, came the beginnings of some delightful developments: results of Yankee ingenuity, Southern perseverance, Western vigor, and Canadian candor in combination. One of the instances that exemplifies this occurred in the region around Trondheim down in Maine. The story occurs in four eras which I will not take in chronological order. Suffice it to say, for the moment, that today Trondheim is a thriving community as it was also in the early 1900's; but in between it had decayed what seemed hopelessly.

The bad years were much the result of the automobile. The interstate highway was not built close enough to Trondheim to help it; yet it was near enough to siphon away most of Trondheim's small factories. Even the little woodworking plant that made the famous Curvable Flyer sleds for youngsters had gone. The Grand Chunk Ry., coming up from Portland, threaded its main line through Trondheim; but passenger trains had been withdrawn, the freights rattled through without stopping, except for the local. It came on Thursdays in alternate weeks only. Main St. was a row of stores, many of them boarded up. Behind were the once lovely homes, some in good repair, others not. Most of the younger people had moved away from their family homes to Portland, Boston, or farther. This is the way it was nearly 20 years ago when the fuel shortages began; but before we come to the present, let's backtrack to the early 1900's.

Then, Trondheim was alive. It was building new schools. Factories were enlarging their quarters. And in those days, being a county seat was also considered beneficial.

But overall, the reason for Trondheim's prosperity was because it was the gateway to Rowland Springs, some 17 miles to the south. That's 27 kilometers in case you have forgotten the old measures. Rowland Springs rivaled such watering places as Saratoga, French Lick, and Manitou. It was fashionable for the



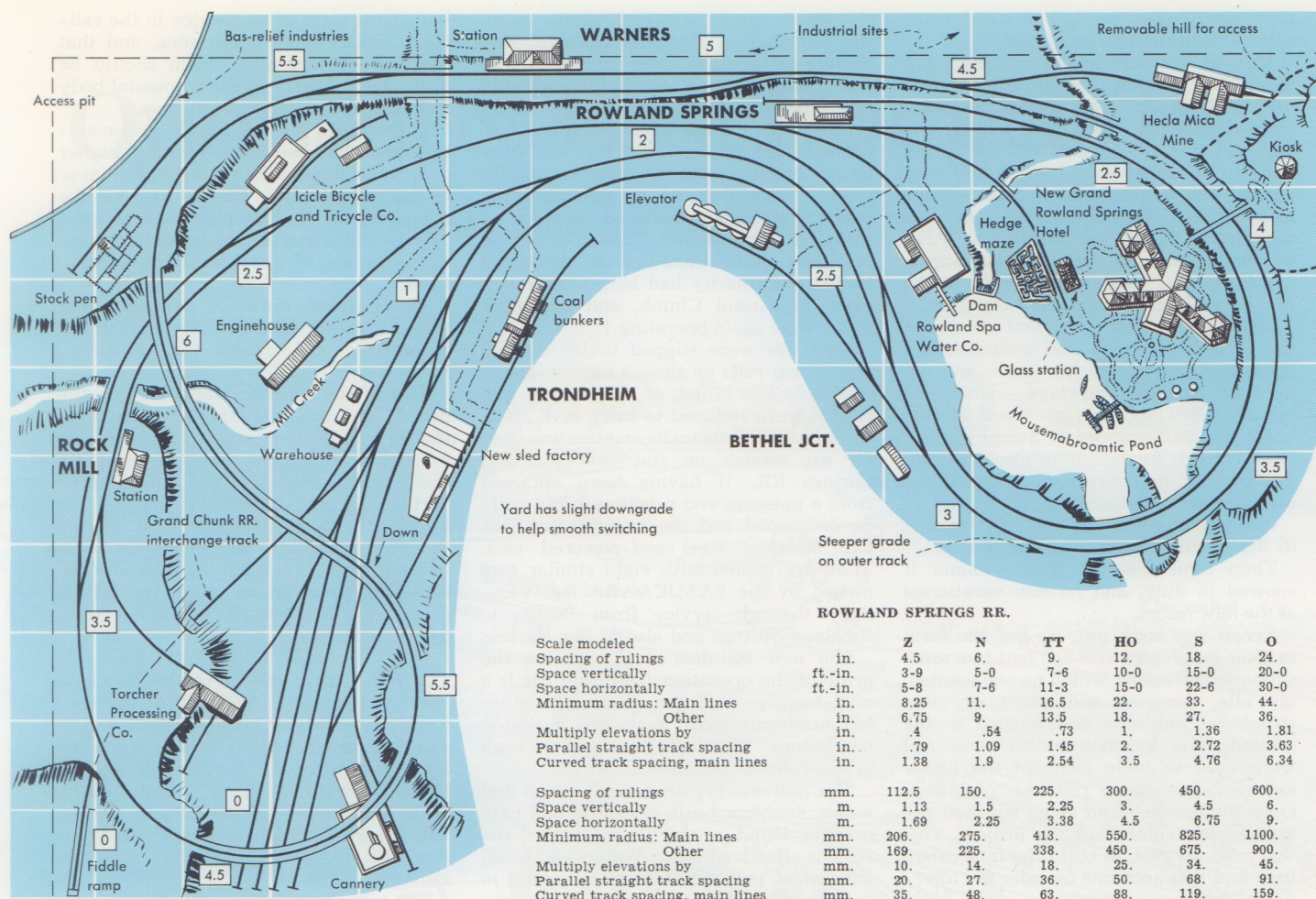
people of Boston, from Beacon Hill, Back Bay, and even as far west as Newton Highlands, to vacation at the Rowland Springs Hotel and Spa, playing tennis on the lawn, canoeing on Mousemabroomtic Pond in front of the hotel, drinking or swimming in the spring water, or getting lost and finding oneself again in the great maze beside the pond. The maze was a network of footpaths separated by tall hedges of yew that kept seven gardeners busy pruning them. It was said to be a copy of a similar maze at Clematis Brook, near Boston, and that one was a copy from Hampton Court in England.

The hotel building was like a castle and a chateau combined. It had a grand central dining room, a glass veranda looking down upon the pond, and several wings of rooms with large windows and handmade lace curtains. The grounds were lovely, sloping down in all directions to a moat which had been dug around the foot of the hill. By deed, no

roadway was ever to cross the moat and intrude upon the tranquility of the estate.

An exception was made for the interurban cars, for they were built with especially quiet gears. They crossed a trestle onto the hotel lawn where guests could descend under a glass-roofed shelter. Except for a footbridge, the interurban was the only approach to the hotel.

At the north end of Mousemabroomtic Pond was the Rowland Spa bottling works, connected to the interurban with a short spur track. From here carloads of bottled water were shipped to every state and six of the provinces. Some of the wetter states ordered the water by the tank car load; and for these the interurban trestles had to be specially reinforced. The trademark of Rowland Spa Water was beautifully lithographed on every bottle label: a mermaid in the pond looking up at the flag-topped towers of the hotel. In the hotel's east wing there



was a plunge where you could soak in the great water. Glasses of spa water were kept fresh on tables in the lobby. It was said to cure more ailments than any other water taken twice.

The secret of the water was in the bog at the far side of the pond. Here a natural spring welled upward, then filtered through the decaying reeds to reach the pond. This gave it a natural carbonation, a pale tea color, and the flavor of roots. Much of its popularity was not due so much to its supposed curative properties as to its unique ability, as a mixer, to make cheap vodka taste like Scotland's own boggy brew.

A great wintertime specialty of the waterworks was to cut the ice from the pond in the old-fashioned way. The sawed blocks were hauled to the upper floor of the bottlehouse, then were cut and polished into precise 1" ice cubes—the only effervescent ice cubes of their time and on the menus of better hotels only "in season."

The cubes were shipped in white refrigerator cars bearing the mermaid emblem and fancy lettering reading "Rowland Spa Icicle Cubes."

The interurban was a fairly crooked line with several short but rather steep hills to climb. In all other respects it was a first-class property. It had its own flat-car, several tank cars, and several refrigerator cars, but boxcars of other roads were used for the bottle goods. The pride of the line was in the two parlor cars that met all Grand Chunk trains in Trond-

heim to take guests to the hotel. These cars were a pale olive green with dark red trim and brass fittings, including a polished trolley pole. They had wide arched windows with ruby glass in their upper panels. The carpet was green and the seats were comfortable wicker arm-chairs. A white-turbaned Hindu porter handed you a glass of Rowland Water at the least provocation.

Each car had three tiffany lamps hanging from the ceiling with a leaded glass image of the mermaid carefully worked into the design. A big brass curving handbrake handle could be seen by the front window as the motorman pulled the car up to a stop—an assurance of the safety of the equipment.

Nearly always the cars were run in pairs. Sometimes the traffic required it but the real reason was that it was more impressive.

There was another car on the road. This was plainer, but well kept. It had a baggage compartment and coach seats behind. Every evening it made a run to the hotel to take the many chambermaids safely home. Its other important service was as a locomotive. It had heavy trucks with large motors and ordinarily could manage three boxcars or one tank car over the line. Things were different with wet leaves on the track. Then one of the parlor cars had to be summoned to shove from behind while the combine struggled in front to get one elephantlike tank car over the humps.

The reason the interurban line was so

crooked takes us back to the first of the four eras of our story.

In the 1870's Trondheim was a village settled by people from the old country. The Grand Chunk Ry. had reached it and the future looked good. Rowland, farther south, had been bypassed by the railway, which made a deviation to reach Lewiston. There was not much at Rowland, anyway. A small sawmill had dammed the Mousemabroomtic River, creating the pond. This also created the bog which in turn created the strange spring water, but that was not appreciated for a while.

At first the farmers of the area were glad to have the railroad; then they began to forget its importance to them and grumble about the freight rates. Among the complainers was Knute Svernn of Rowland, a wealthy gentleman farmer whose mansion was on top of the mound where the Rowland Hotel was built later. Svernn got the idea of building a second railroad, to Trondheim, passing through Rowland, and he had a lot of support for his idea from neighboring farmers. They had learned about the economical way a 2-foot-gauge railroad had been built between Billerica and Bedford in Massachusetts.

Svernn went to the Maine state legislature and obtained a charter for the Casco Bay & Rumford RR. with the idea of running first from Trondheim to Portland, then extending north beyond Rumford. Stock certificates were printed and

prospects looked good, but word came that the Billerica line had failed.

Most of the enthusiasm collapsed, but Svenn had a lot of Old World stubbornness and tried to go it alone. He had a plan he thought would be workable. He believed that the water from the spring had cured his gout and so should help others. He would build a 2-foot-gauge railroad from Rowland to connect with the Grand Chunk at Trondheim. Also, he would build an inn. The plan was to use the profits that should accrue in the first several years to extend the project.

Svenn put a down payment on one of the B&B locomotives and a car, bought enough of the rail to lay track, and got the line between Rowland—which he renamed Rowland Springs—and Trondheim into working order. Svenn did not have enough funds left to also build an inn. Instead, he converted his own home into a public house.

Springtime came and ads were placed in the Boston papers. This was in 1883.

Then came disaster. That summer it snowed in July, and no one vacationed at the new resort.

Svenn was bankrupt. He lost the farm to some neighbors who had lent him some support. The house, which no one wanted, lay idle, decayed, and eventually was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. The locomotive, car, and rail were used to build some of the better known 2-foot-gauge railroads of Maine. Only the crooked and steep roadbed remained as evidence of the project. This was used, in 1904, to build the interurban line; and that accounts for why the interurban itself was so crooked.

What happened to the interurban? That brings us to the third period of the histories of Trondheim and Rowland Springs.

WITH the end of World War I it became painfully evident that Bostonians were no longer charmed by Rowland Springs. They could drive farther north for their vacations. Both the interurban and the hotel were closed. The parlor cars were said to have been sold to a South American line, but I could find no trace of them. The combine body became a hotdog stand in Trondheim. Rails were never removed but the ties rotted beneath them.

For a while Rowland Spa Water was shipped by truck, but Prohibition had come, limiting demand. Then a spring freshet burst the dam and drained the pond. Now the spring was perfectly pure and so had no commercial value.

The great hotel building was soundly built, but nature took a toll of some of its wooden parts. The roof caved in over the grand staircase. Moss grew on the railings and water dripped onto the solid walnut planks of the floor. The lack of a road, although an original cause of the hotel's failure, now became a blessing. The nearest public road was a half mile away, too far for lazy vandals to walk to stone the many windows. Sometimes the older people of Trondheim would climb the hill behind their town and look far to the south to see the summer sunset reflected in the windows of the once grand building.

TODAY, less than 20 years after the fuel

shortages came, we can again enjoy the offerings of Rowland Springs. This change came when some businessmen of Kennebunkport realized that there would again be a need for resorts one could reach without using an automobile. They remembered Rowland Springs and they found that the hotel building was mostly sound. They decided to re-create the resort, including a railroad to meet all trains at Trondheim. [The Eastern & Maritime Joint Canadian & American Railroad Authority had long since taken over the Grand Chunk, and passenger trains were again operating.]

New ties were slipped under the old interurban rails on the ex narrow-gauge roadbed. The worst of the curves and grades were reduced to more civil standards. At first a steam locomotive was used for all service on the new Rowland Springs RR., it having been obtained from a museum and reboilered. But traffic developed and the railroad now has two stainless steel self-powered cars. They are pooled with eight similar cars owned by the E&MJC&ARA for twice-daily through service from Boston to Rowland Springs and also to Bar Harbor.

The new stainless steel cars are the pride of the operation. The front car is a mail-baggage-buffet combine. The other has luxurious coach seats and a skytop tap lounge. The little mermaid is seen in bas-relief on the side of each car.

The roof was repaired on the hotel and a new dam was built. Chemists and naturalists found a way to re-create the famous Rowland Spa Water—a small amount of pollution had to be added to the pond deliberately, since less than natural pollution was otherwise found in American streams by that time.

Just as the project appeared to be ready to go, a calamity occurred that made it look like the Casco Bay & Rumford fiasco would be repeated. Not everyone had been in favor of the resort revival, including a certain county supervisor. He managed to have the state legislature pass a bill that ruled that no new railroad service can be established over public highway crossings unless the crossings are grade-separated. The Rowland Springs RR. had seven such crossings of public roads, all at grade. To finance them all would be impossible.

Here the Rowland Springs RR. lawyers did not give up. They went back into the history of the road and showed that the Casco Bay & Rumford had never been dissolved. They argued in the courts that it was fair and sensible to require railroad-highway crossings to be separated. They said this really should have been done from the beginning. The judges and everyone nodded. Then the lawyers went on and said that it was also fair and sensible that the first party to any railroad or highway site had priority; that it was unfair to expect the first builder to pay for a crossing that did it no service. The new Rowland Springs RR., operating on the right of way of the Casco Bay & Rumford, had inherited one grade crossing with the post road that existed before the original railroad. It is justifiable, they admitted, that the railroad should pay for the separation of that crossing. But, they continued, the other six crossings with public roads that were

built later were of no service to the railroad, in fact were a nuisance, and that the cost of separating them should be borne by the party or governmental body that built the offending highways.

This did not go well in the local county court, but the case went to higher courts and the highest ruling was in favor of the railroad. This famous case set the precedent for the fair play we now have in most states and provinces for allocating the expenses of grade crossing separations.

The railroad built its overpass over the post road. The county built three separations and closed the remaining roads.

Two of the railroad stations along the rebuilt railroad are shells made from the enameled steel panels of abandoned service stations, but these are rapidly being replaced with beautifully proportioned gingerbread structures in keeping with the historic past of the region. For railfan excursions, the steam locomotive pulls several old wooden cars. One of them, with an unknown history, came from South America; it has wide arched windows.

THE route for a model of the Rowland Springs RR. could be built as narrow-gauge, interurban, or short line; and it can be fitted into many room shapes. An L corner with the benchwork against the outer walls is suggested here. Track radii and length of trains and sidings will depend on space and equipment, but it would be out of character to make either too large.

The route is point to point with a loop at one of the terminals. A crossover at Bethel Junction permits lap running.

Most of the cars reaching Trondheim are switched to the Grand Chunk via the interchange track. They are lifted by hand at the end of this track and are stored on racks below the layout surface. Other cars are rerailed at the fiddle ramp. Even the self-powered cars for Boston leave the layout by this route.

Dashed black lines mark the minimum limits for the rear and one end of the layout, but it is better if several inches of scenery can be extended beyond, as shown in color. In HO and larger sizes, an access pit will be needed in the corner to reach nearby turnouts for maintenance.

One double-switched industry combination is suggested in the plan. Mica-bearing rock is mined and taken by mine-company-owned cars to the upper level of the processing plant by way of a spur at Rock Mill. After processing, the mica materials are dumped into railroad-owned cars from the lower level of this plant.

The main line has two intermediate stations with passing tracks. This makes dispatcher or timetable operation of trains practical, but it would then be helpful to add a second passing track at Warners so three-train meets could be made at at least one point along the line.

Sometimes it is not practical to represent all of the features of a prototype on a model layout. Here, for instance, the moat around the hotel has not been modeled, but there is a suggestion of the hedge maze.