

The Sodus Bay Railroad That Never Ran

An 1874 Seneca County map clearly shows the Sodus Bay Railroad. Looking at the map, one would have no reason to even consider the possibility that this railroad never actually operated.

The first railroad in Seneca County was begun in 1841 to connect Auburn with Geneva through Seneca Falls and Waterloo. As early as 1851 there is documentation of serious efforts to build a railroad from Sodus Bay, through Wayne, Seneca and Tompkins Counties so as to extend to the Pennsylvania coal mines. No serious action was taken until after 1869 when the New York State Legislature authorized towns and corporations to bond themselves in aid of railroad enterprises. The town of Seneca Falls voted to bond itself for \$200,000 to aid in the construction of such a railroad. Within a few days other towns held similar meetings. On February 18, the people of Farmer Village (Interlaken) raised \$5,000 and expected to raise another \$5,000. One farmer put up \$1,000 of his own money. Covert was bonded for \$50,000, and Ovid bonded for \$60,000. Waterloo agreed to \$160,000 in bonds, but taxpayers forced a resolution instructing the railroad commissioner not to issue the bonds to the town. As a result, Waterloo was left out of the designated route of the railroad. Town officials in Romulus, Varick and Fayette did not show much interest in the project.

Other interests were competing to keep this Sodus Bay Railroad. Just two weeks later, a charter was recorded for the building of the Geneva and Ithaca Railroad. In Geneva, the steamboat company and coal interests were trying to defeat the building of railroads throughout the counties. Another railroad was being projected from Sodus Bay which was to go through Phelps and other areas of Ontario County.

A ground-breaking ceremony was held on June 3, 1871. Various contracts were awarded to local companies. By 1873, the railroad had been graded, fenced and road signs put up from Waverly, PA to Sodus Bay. Ties were scattered all along the road, but nothing else was ever done. This railroad was caught in the disastrous economic collapse known as the Panic of 1873.

Despite its never being completed, there were still the bonds to be repaid. As late as 1918, the Town of Covert still owed \$3,000 on the principal and the Town of Ovid still owed \$6,000. The Town of Seneca Falls debt was not repaid until July 1925.