

New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad
Eastbound Passenger Station
Railroad Place
Southport
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-293

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CONN-293

NEW YORK, NEW HAVEN & HARTFORD RAILROAD
EASTBOUND PASSENGER STATION

Location: Railroad Place (south side of railroad tracks),
Southport, Fairfield County, Connecticut.

USGS Westport Quadrangle Map; Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 18.644840.4555100.

Present Owner
and Occupant: New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company.

Present Use: Passenger station and ticket office.

Statement of
Significance: The N.Y., N.H. & H. Railroad first rolled through
Southport in 1849, thereby establishing a fast,
direct link between this small village and Eastern
urban centers. In 1884 the board-and-batten depot,
built 1859, was struck by flying sparks and burned,
creating an urgent need for a new station. The
unique architectural character of the new 1884
depot is mostly the result of alterations to the
structure's original fabric. As originally con-
structed the rectangular brick depot, with project-
ing side bays, was covered by an expansive gable
roof. The wide eaves were supported by brackets
trimmed with wooden openwork vergeboards. The need
for a more protective roof covering resulted in
the addition of a deep pent roof at the second level.
The depot has been well maintained throughout the
years, and remains a busy intersection along the
New York City commuter line.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1884. On May 15, 1884 the Fairfield
"Advertiser" stated, "Southport wants and needs a new depot,
right away quickly." Two days later, the need had become
much more urgent. The village's board-and-batten passenger
station trimmed with Gothic tracery was struck by sparks
from a passing train and burned to the ground. By June
construction on the new depot was underway. Throughout
the year, the "Advertiser" published reports of the builders'
progress.

June 5, 1884 "Work on the new depot progresses, the

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bricks are being laid."

June 19, 1884 "The brickwork on the new depot is nearly finished and the rafters for the roof are up."

July 24, 1884 "The new depot is nearly completed and will be occupied next week. The inside is finished in Georgia pine and black walnut."

August 7, 1884 "The new depot was not open to the public till yesterday."

2. Architect, builder: The railroad company hired a New Haven builder to erect the new passenger station. The Fairfield "Advertiser" reported on May 29, 1884, "The contract for the new brick depot was awarded to W.B. Dickerman, of New Haven, for \$6500."
3. Original and subsequent owners: The New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company laid tracks through Southport in 1848-49. At that time the company purchased the immediately surrounding land; a small portion is the plot the 1884 structure stands upon. The Railroad Company has owned this land and all buildings erected upon it since 1848.
4. Original plan and construction: This rectangular one-and-a-half story brick structure is built upon a brick foundation with load bearing brick walls. The expansive surface of the main gable roof projects beyond the exterior wall, creating a wide eave overhang. At the gable ends, the eave is supported by sawed wooden brackets which receive their leverage from the wall itself. Openwork wooden vergeboards are attached to the plain raking cornice. A bulky pent roof supported by heavy brackets projects from the wall at the second level. (Because of the pent roof's awkward appearance and structural framing, it is quite possible that the roof is a later addition.) Two metal ventilators and a brick chimney with corbelling pierce the roof surface. A polygonal bay window is located on each side elevation. The bay on the track side is used as the Station Agent's office. Interior surfaces are of wood and plaster, and plainly appointed.
5. Alterations and additions: The railroad company completed maintenance work and made some addition changes to the depot during 1890-91. The following items from the Southport "Chronicle" and Fairfield "Advertiser" comprise a history of the undertaking.

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- January 24, 1890 "The N.Y., N.Y., & H. R.R. depot has been thoroughly renovated. The walls and ceiling were painted and the wood-work varnished. It is greatly improved in appearance."
- March 28, 1890 "The portico of the depot is being painted light green with dark trimmings. It adds much to the looks of the station."
- April 30, 1891 "The platform roof at the railroad station has been put up this week."
- July 30, 1891 "Work on the new station is being pushed, and it will soon be completed."
- August 13, 1891 "The baggage room at the depot is being enlarged by the addition of the space formerly occupied by the ladies toilet room."
- August 20, 1891 "The coat of paint on the new station adds much to its general fine appearance."
- September 10, 1891 "They have commenced to put new seats in the depot."
- September 17, 1891 "They have taken down the old ticket office in the depot."
- October 22, 1891 "The interior of the Southport station is being cleansed and brightened."
- November 26, 1891 "Platforms of the new station have been extended east and west and coverings have been built."

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad tracks were laid during 1848-49. The villages relative excitement about their new, direct link with urban centers is reflected in Jonathan Bulkley's diary, January 3, 1849: I "went to New York today in the morning train - the New Haven and New York Railroad is underway & it is said that over 1000 passengers pass over it daily." The greatest impact the coming of the railroad had upon the people of Southport was in their harbor economy. Rail travel made passenger and trade transport by boat less convenient, economical, and therefore desirable. However, while the Mill River harbor witnessed a decline in merchant traffice, it serviced an increasing number of pleasure craft. To the present

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day, Southport's harbor and the Pequot Yacht Club are the village's liveliest intersection.

C. Bibliography:

Banks, Elizabeth. This is Fairfield, 1639-1940. New Haven: Walker-Rackliff Co., 1960.

Fairfield "Advertiser," May 15, 1884; May 29, 1884; June 5, 1884; June 19, 1884; July 24, 1884; August 7, 1884; October 16, 1884; December 10, 1885; January 24, 1890; March 28, 1890.

Southport "Chronicle," February 27, 1891; March 20, 1891; April 30, 1891; July 23, 1891; July 30, 1891; August 13, 1891; August 20, 1891; September 10, 1891; September 17, 1891; October 22, 1891; November 26, 1891.

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PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Southport Historic District Commission, several members of whom provided the necessary funds. The project was completed in the summer of 1966 under the general direction of James C. Massey, then the Chief of HABS; Ralph Schwarz of the Ford Foundation; and Architect John C. Waite (Columbia University); with assistant architects Christopher Benninger (Harvard University), Richard Haines (University of Kentucky) and Andrew Craig Morrison (University of Michigan), and architectural historian David T. Van Zanten (Harvard University), at the HABS Field Office in Southport, Connecticut. The data was prepared and edited in HABS Washington office in January 1979 by Jan E. Cigliano, staff historian. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in September 1966.