

Volume 10 Issue 1

# *The* SPEEDWITCH





# The “Maybrook Trailway”

Empire State Trail  
Features  
New Haven  
History

By Matt Kierstead



The Kelley family of Patterson, New York snowshoeing on the Empire State Trail “Maybrook Trailway” at the former New Haven Railroad Maybrook Line truss bridge over MTA Metro-North Railroad’s Harlem Line at Towners, New York on a sunny February, 2021 day. *Matt Kierstead photo.*

## INTRODUCTION

On December 31, 2020, New York State officially opened its 750-mile-long “Empire State Trail,” an extensive connected system of preexisting and new public bicycle and pedestrian recreational trails stretching from New York City north to the Canadian border and from Albany west to Buffalo. The Empire State Trail includes numerous rail trail sections, including several contiguous segments of the former New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad’s “Maybrook Line” that once connected huge freight yards at Maybrook, New York and Cedar Hill near New Haven, Connecticut. The newest of these Maybrook Line trail segments, the “Maybrook Trailway” between Brewster and Hopewell Junction, New York, includes an engaging series of interpretive panels explaining the history of the rail line and the communities it crossed.

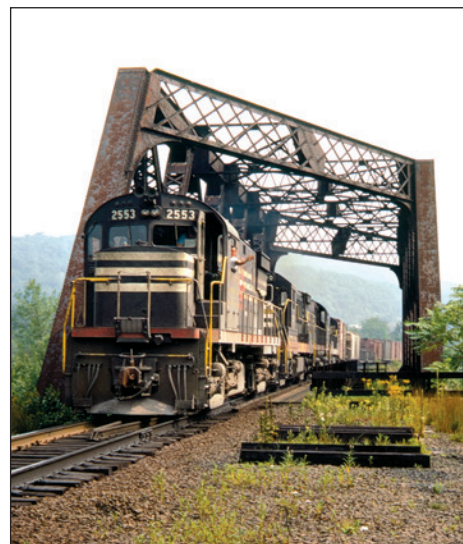
## EMPIRE STATE TRAIL

Planning for the Empire State Trail was overseen by Hudson River Valley Greenway, a New York State agency created to preserve the scenic, natural, historic, cultural and recreational

resources of the Hudson River valley. Maybrook Trailway property owner MTA Metro-North Railroad and its consultants designed and built the trail. HRVG retained Alta Planning & Design to help plan the trail. Alta hired the historical documentation and interpretation firm Milestone Heritage Consulting of Marlboro, New York to create public history interpretation panels for two Empire State Trail segments: the “Albany-Hudson Electric Trail” on the route of a 37-mile-long former interurban trolley line in Columbia and Rensselaer counties, and the Maybrook Trailway.

## MAYBROOK TRAILS

The Empire State Trail incorporates four connected rail trail segments that follow the Maybrook Line across Ulster, Dutchess and Putnam counties. The first three, built prior to the Empire State Trail, are the 7.1-mile-long “Hudson Valley Rail Trail” in Lloyd, the 1.3-mile-long “Walkway Over the Hudson” on the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge over the Hudson River, and the 13-mile-long William R. Steinhaus Dutchess Rail Trail between Poughkeepsie and Hopewell Junction. These three linked trails were collectively placed in the Rails-to-Trails Conser-



A New Haven C-425 locomotive pulling a freight train across the Towners bridge in the 1960s. *T. J. Donahue photo, John Garofalo collection.*

vancy’s “Rail Trail Hall of Fame” in 2016. The newest Maybrook Line-hosted rail trail segment addition, the 23-mile-long “Maybrook Trailway,” opened in December 2020, bringing over



44 miles of “The Maybrook” into use as public trails. Putnam County is currently working on constructing a 4.4-mile-long connecting spur trail on the section of Maybrook Line extending from Brewster east to the Danbury, Connecticut line. This trail, which will partially open in June 2021, will bring Maybrook Line-hosted rail trail mileage up to almost 50 total miles. All of the Empire State Trail’s Maybrook Line trail segments except the Hudson Valley Rail Trail have permanent trailside public history interpretation, created by different parties as the trail sections were completed.

## MAYBROOK TRAILWAY

Hudson River Valley Greenway recognized the Maybrook Line’s historical importance in their Empire State Trail planning vision and boosted the Maybrook Trailway’s potential as a heritage tourism destination as well as a recreational asset through installation of interpretive history signage at notable locations along the trail. HRVG and Alta gave Milestone Heritage Consulting free reign to develop the concept and content for the Maybrook Trailway interpretation scheme, which encompasses cultural, natural and



**Above:** The Empire State Trail “Maybrook Trailway” passes scenic Whaley Lake in Pawling, New York, once a popular summer vacation destination and the location of this 1953 view of a handsome set of New Haven Alco FA streamlined diesels pulling an eastbound freight train. *T. J. McNamara photo.*

**Next Two Pages:** One of the eight different trailside interpretive history panels that were installed along the “Maybrook Trailway” between Brewster and Hopewell Junction, New York. This panel encapsulating the history of the New Haven Railroad’s Maybrook Line appears at multiple locations along the 23-mile-long trail, and includes the painting *Maybrook Bound* by William G. Dulmaine, Jr. To see and download the full set of eight “Maybrook Trailway” history panels, readers may visit: <https://www.milestoneheritage.com>. *Panel content by Milestone Heritage Consulting, graphic design by Alta Planning & Design, Inc., with diagrams by Alta, Emily Moser, Milestone and Ron Toelke Associates.*

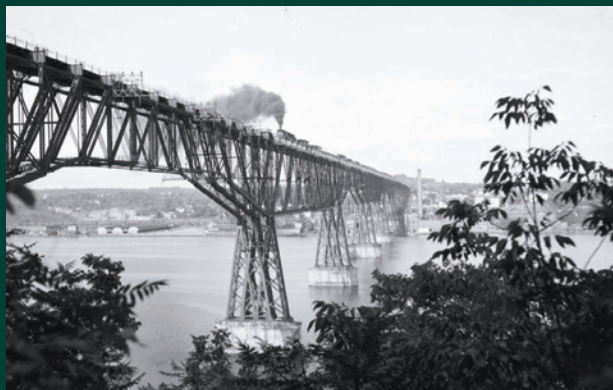


**A view looking north on the Empire State Trail “Maybrook Trailway” at Ice Pond at the Great Swamp in Patterson, New York.** Trail property owner MTA Metro-North Railroad left the track structure intact, resulting in a more historically authentic, “rail-with-trail” user experience. *Hudson River Valley Greenway photo.*



# The Maybrook Line

*Welcome to the Empire State Trail's Maybrook Trailway, which follows the Brewster-to-Hopewell Junction portion of the former New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad*



*“Maybrook Line,” once an important New England freight rail gateway.*

## ◀ POUGHKEEPSIE BRIDGE

*Completed in 1889, this 6,768-foot-long cantilever truss bridge carried Maybrook Line trains 212 feet above the Hudson River. It burned in 1974, impacting regional freight rail routes. It is now the Walkway Over the Hudson State Park. Source: Kent Cochrane.*

## The Maybrook

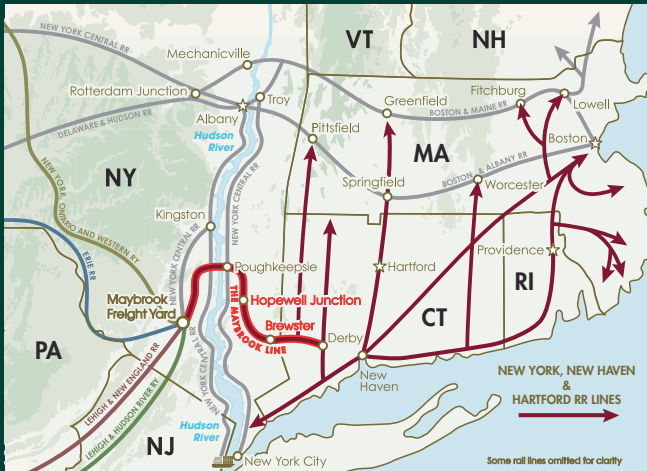
East-west rail traffic south of Albany crossed the Hudson River on freight car ferries between Beacon and Newburgh until 1889, when the railroad bridge across the river was completed at Poughkeepsie. The “New Haven,” then southern New England’s dominant railroad, consolidated several existing end-to-end rail lines by 1904 to create the 125-mile-long Maybrook Line. The Maybrook moved freight gathered from five railroads converging at a large freight yard west of the Hudson in Maybrook, Orange County. From there, the freight was carried east across the river at Poughkeepsie, over the mountains of Dutchess and Putnam Counties, and ultimately to the Cedar Hill freight yard outside New Haven, Connecticut.

## Rise and Fall

Like its hilly route, the Maybrook had its ups and downs. It was busy during World War I but lost traffic during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Maybrook’s finest hour was during World War II, when powerful New Haven steam locomotives moved record freight tonnage over the line. After the war, traffic declined again, and diesel locomotives replaced steam in 1947. Parallel competition from Penn Central rail lines after 1968 and Interstate 84 after 1971 further eroded service. A 1974 fire resulted in the permanent closure of the Poughkeepsie bridge, ending Maybrook Line long-distance freight trains and altering regional freight rail patterns. The last freight train ran on the Brewster-to-Hopewell Junction portion of the line in 1992.

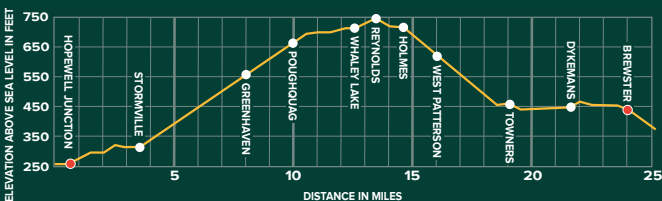


**Metro-North  
Railroad**



#### ▲ MAYBROOK LINE

The Maybrook Line was a key rail freight connection across the Hudson River. The Maybrook Trailway follows the section between Brewster and Hopewell Junction. Source: Milestone Heritage Consulting.



#### ▲ STEEP GRADES

The Maybrook Line crossed the Appalachian Mountains in Dutchess and Putnam Counties, climbing grades as steep as 1.22 percent eastbound and over 1.3 percent westbound. Source: Milestone Heritage Consulting.

#### ▲ “MAYBROOK BOUND”

This painting of New Haven Railroad diesel-locomotive-powered freight trains passing at Poughquag, New York, captures the spirit of mountain railroading on the Maybrook Line. Source: William G. Dulmaine Jr.

### Rail to Trail

Today, the Empire State Trail follows the route of the former Maybrook Line for forty-four miles from Brewster to Highland, New York, along the Maybrook Trailway, the William R. Steinhaus Dutchess Rail Trail, the Walkway Over the Hudson, and the Hudson Valley Rail Trail.



#### ▲ MOUNTAIN RAILROADING

The New Haven Railroad's powerful steam locomotives pulled—and pushed—heavy Maybrook Line trains like this eastbound freight on Depot Hill at Poughquag in 1950. Source: Kent Cochrane / Thomas J. McNamara Collection.



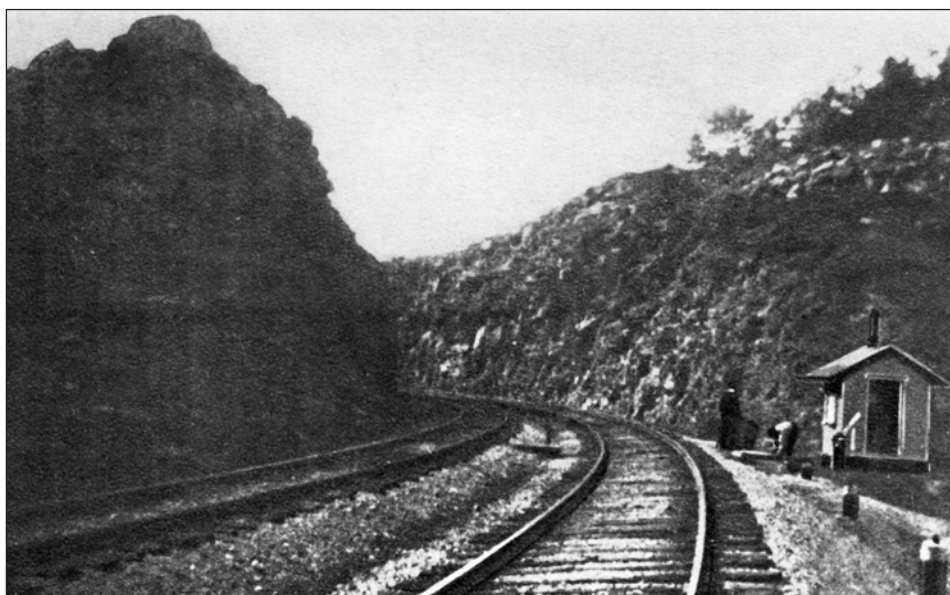


**A view looking north on the Empire State Trail “Maybrook Trailway” where the trail enters the east end of the 75-foot-deep Depot Hill rock cut at Poughquag in Beekman, New York. The interpretive history panel is mounted next to the foundation of the railroad watchman’s shanty shown in the photo below. *Matt Kierstead photo.***

technological aspects of this historic linear transportation landscape that hosted a railroad that negotiated mountain topography and impacted community growth and development. The interpretive panels present trail users with the overall Maybrook Line history, aspects of human and natural history at several important locations along the line, and the technological history of mountain railroad operations.

## PANEL TOPICS

The Empire State Trail Maybrook Trailway interpretive panels include “The Maybrook Line” panel which is installed at four locations along the trail: Pumphouse Road in Southeast, Holmes Road at Holmes in Pawling, Depot Hill Road at Poughquag in Beekman, and Martin Road at Hopewell Junction in East Fishkill. This panel captures the line’s history from pre-railroad times to modern trail construction, explains that the trail is part of a much longer rail line that was once a key New England rail freight gateway, and introduces the story of rail operations



**The New York & New England Railroad blasted the Depot Hill rock cut in 1881 and the New Haven Railroad widened it for a second track in 1905. The cut was built on a 7-degree curve, the sharpest on the Maybrook Line rail route. The shanty pictured here sheltered a watchman who patrolled the cut’s tracks for fallen rock and ice. *Roger Liller photo.***





Empire State Trail “Maybrook Trailway” users reading a trailside interpretive history panel at Towners, New York. This panel tells the story of the small hamlet that grew around the crossing of the New Haven Railroad’s Maybrook Line and New York Central Railroad’s Harlem Division lines here. Information about the 750-mile Empire State Trail, including narrative descriptions of trail segments and an on-line map depicting the trail route, designated parking areas, and nearby attractions, is available on the project website: <https://empiretrail.ny.gov>. *Matt Kierstead photo.*

on the line’s steep grades via an exaggerated grade profile diagram. The site-specific “Tonetta Lake” and “Whaley Lake” panels at Southeast and Pawling present the history of agriculture

and recreation around these bodies of water along the Maybrook Line. “The Great Swamp” panel conveys the natural history of this important migratory waterfowl stopover that was im-

pacted by rail embankment construction. The “Mountain Railroad” panel at Beekman’s Poughquag rock cut conveys the drama of steam locomotive pusher operations in a way that helps trail users relate to the physical experience of bicycling up and down the long eastbound and westbound grades that dominate much of the trail’s length. The “Towners Station” panel at Patterson and “Stormville” panel at East Fishkill present the stories of life before and after the coming of the railroad to these rural hamlets. East Fishkill’s “Hopewell Junction” panel explains how that hamlet grew up around the crossing of rail lines and freight and steam locomotive facilities, and complements the historical displays in the Hopewell Junction Depot Museum at the west end of the Maybrook Trailway.

## CONCLUSION

The 750-mile-long Empire State Trail will soon become a popular New York State recreational and heritage tourism destination. The “Maybrook Trailway” provides trail users with multiple trailside interpretation opportunities to learn about the New Haven Railroad, the drama of steam-era railroading and the natural and human history along this 23-mile-long stretch of “The Maybrook.” 𐄂



New Haven FA-1 diesel locomotives pass over a steam locomotive-powered New York Central Railroad Harlem Division passenger train at Towners in April 1948. *James D. Bennett photo, NHRHTA, Inc. collection.*