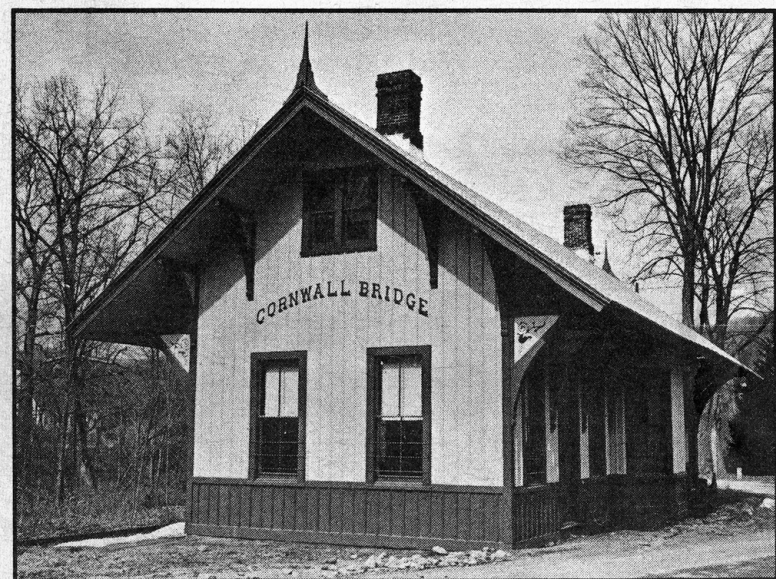


New Lives For Old RR Stations



Bradley L. Peters

The Conway Scenic Railroad station in North Conway, N.H.



Jane McWhorter

New Lives For Old Stations

New England's surviving railroad stations have become architectural and historical rarities that ought to be preserved.

The author tells of some that have been saved by recycling them into new roles.

BY NANCY FRAZIER

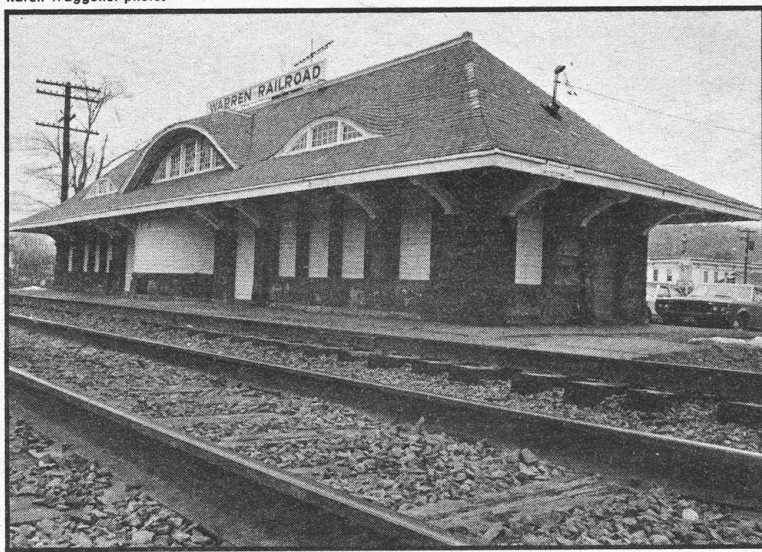
AMHERST, Mass.

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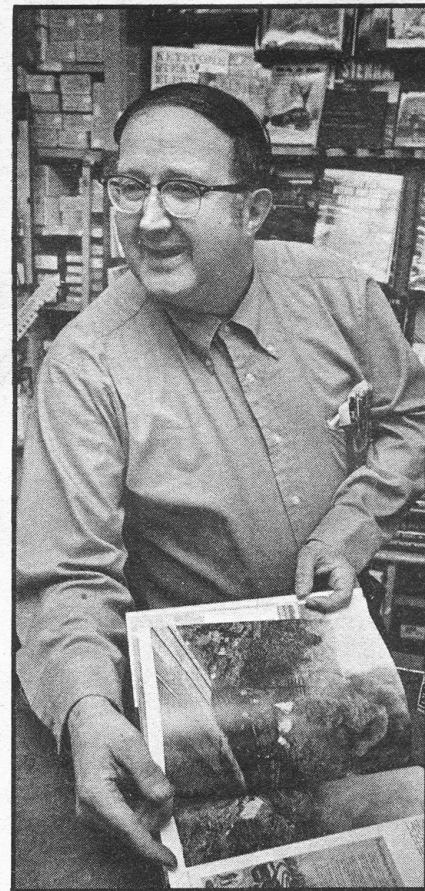
Henry Hobson Richardson was a large man whose massive stone buildings seem to echo their designer's dimensions. Though less known to the public, scholars include him with American greats like Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan. And, out of Richardson's "atelier" came other important architects — Stanford White and Charles McKim to mention two — as well as magnificent buildings. Of the 12 stations Richardson designed, only four still stand. One, in New London, Conn., is threatened with demolition, and one in Massachusetts is being reopened to the public. In North Easton, Mass., the local historical society has undertaken a major restoration of the 1881 stone station embellished with wood carvings, and converted it into a



Karen Waggoner photos



Left: doorway of the West Brookfield, Mass., station, one of New England's oldest, now an oil company warehouse. Above: Richardson-style station in Warren, Mass., now an insurance company office. Right: railway enthusiast Bob Buck, whose hardware store has a view of the Warren station.



UpCountry

museum. The women's waiting room was restored to the period of 1920, and the men's to its appearance and furnishings of the 1880s.

After Richardson's death, in 1886, the firm that succeeded his, Shepley, Ruten & Coolidge, built a number of stations in Massachusetts. They bear a stylistic resemblance to the master's designs, and several are still standing. In Warren, a fine stone depot is now the office of an insurance company. And, it's right across the common from Tucker's which is not just a busy hardware store, but also headquarters for railway fans. Proprietor Bob Buck is an enthusiast of the first order. He's been hooked from the time he was old enough to pull himself by on the window sill and watch the trains go by. As he looks over at the Warren depot's elegant roof line that smoothly embraces its half-moon windows he only wishes that whoever put the huge sign on the roof ridge, announcing that that is a railroad station, would take it down. The authentic signs would have followed the Boston & Albany tradition of gold lettering on a black background, and would have been placed at either end and on the track side of the station. Those signs are long gone, although rumor has it that at least one of them is in somebody's basement. "Unfortunately not mine," says Buck.

At the drop of the name station, Bob Buck will send or take a visitor to nearby West Brookfield where one of the oldest stations in New England can still be seen. Built around 1839, it is now owned by the Sherman Oil Co. and is used as their warehouse. It was in bad repair when Mark Sherman took it over six years ago, and it was suggested to him that he just cover it with metal siding. That would have been quick and would have served the purpose. Why didn't he?

"I just thought it would look pretty bad," is Sherman's simple answer.

Instead he's done his best to replace the strips on the vertical board and batten siding, to repair the decorative molding on the windows, and he's painted the building grey with white trim. The overhanging roof on one end is gone, but the other end is intact and braced with wrought iron, curved and fashioned to a flower design. Around the turn of the century, when a new one went up, the old station was moved down the tracks a way by a couple of teams of horses and some 15 men. Today, unhappily, there is no evidence inside that it was ever a two-story building with a good restaurant and beautiful interior. It had enormous cornices put up, according to Sherman's information, by a master plasterer working on staging with a mold strapped to his arm. But, at least it isn't sheathed with corrugated metal, and it's still a splendid thing to see.



Waggoner

Versatility distinguishes the Palmer, Mass., station where you can now feast on broasted chicken, play pool and then take a judo lesson. Below: under the arches a quiet game of eight ball is in progress.