

A NEW PATH TO OUR PAST

The **West Shore Trail** now extends from Howard Avenue to Buffalo Road along what was once the path of the New York West Shore & Buffalo Railroad Company, or simply, the **West Shore Railroad**. The West Shore tracks were constructed parallel to the tracks of the great and mighty New York Central Railroad from Buffalo to New York City with the first train arriving in the village on January 1, 1884. The Batavia Times newspaper covered the event and detailed the following: “In accordance with the announcement long since made by the management, but doubted by many, the West Shore Railroad was yesterday opened throughout its entire length for passenger and freight traffic. The first westward bound train on this division left Syracuse at a quarter after seven o'clock yesterday morning in charge of conductor B. J. Fuller. At Churchville a brass band awaited the train and Mr. Knickerbocker of the Utica Herald acted as orator. The first ticket out of Churchville over the West Shore yesterday was purchased by Henry Richmond. The Churchville brass band under the leadership of Henry Davis played excellently on the occasion of the arrival of the first train at noon.”

Hoping to create competition, the West Shore ran for about four short years before it was forced into bankruptcy and then acquired by William Vanderbilt, owner of the New York Central Railroad.

Trains continued along these tracks until 1959 when the line was officially discontinued and the rails in the area were removed sometime in the early 1960's.

Surrounding the site of the West Shore Trail and just south of Richmond Avenue was once the location of a community park known as **Richmond Park**. Built around the late 1870's, this park served as a recreational area for the community. There was a baseball diamond, soccer field (which was also used for football games) and even a race track designated for horse racing. For many years, teams came from all over the county and challenged our local High School teams and organizations such as the Churchville Fire Department. The Fire Department also held their Fireman's Field Days at Richmond Field. Games such as baseball, horse races, boys 100 yard dash, girls 50 yard dash, umbrella race, wheelbarrow race, hitch up race, fat man's race, bicycle race, three legged race, tug-of war, and sack races were played. In 1906, the Batavia Times newspaper reported the Churchville Fireman's

Field Day and Inspection as having a “greased pig and greased pole contest, races of all description, in addition to the usual contest between the fire companies. There will be a game of football between the Thistles of Churchville and a visiting team of professional Association football players and a baseball game between the strong Caledonia team and the Churchville Stars.”

However, the most favorite local challenge, hosted annually, was a game of “nines” (baseball) played between the married and single men of the village of which it seems that the single men won more games than not.

The following Batavia Times newspaper article, dated November, 1907, provides us with a brief look at the history of Richmond Park just as the “wrecking ball” was clearing the grounds forever: “The residents, and especially the sporting element of Churchville, are looking with regret upon, the passing of Richmond Park, which for many years has been the playground, of the village. The tract has been acquired by the New York Central Railroad, and a great steam shovel is now despoiling race-course and baseball diamond and obliterating the sequestered spots where in days gone by the village fathers were wont to play marbles, croquet and mumble the-peg. Sentiment is swept aside by the iron monster and dinky engines, and trains of dump cars are now gliding in and out among the spruces and pines.

Years ago the park was the property of Major Henry Richmond (Civil War Veteran), who was then sheriff of Monroe County. It has been utilized for various purposes, and was once a part of a nursery, which accounts for the presence of so many fine trees. In the early nineties a fine racetrack was laid out upon it, and since that time it has been a popular rendezvous for old and young alike. It was here the original Churchville Stars won victory after victory, and here they were recently vanquished by the Victors, a team of the twentieth century, also of this Village, which grew up under the tutelage of their older brothers, the Stars. It was here, also that the Thistles, the peerless Scotch Association football team of Churchville, won the title of the champions of Western New York.

All these treasured memories, which made the old park famous and inspired the young athlete to doughty deeds, will remain with the present generation while those to come will see only an iron-bound trail over which a great amount of coal, iron and miscellaneous freight is transported. Churchville is to

become an important junction point-between the main line of the New York Central and the West Shore Division. Much of the heavy freight will be diverted from the main line to t h e West Shore at this point, and the influence upon conditions of transportation on the New York Central west of Chili Junction will be very general.”

So as you stroll down the West Shore Trail and if the wind is just right, you may still hear the roar of the crowds that once cheered at the many games played at Richmond Park and the occasional thunder of steam locomotives as they carried their passengers and freight to all parts of the United States, along the tracks of the West Shore Railroad.

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