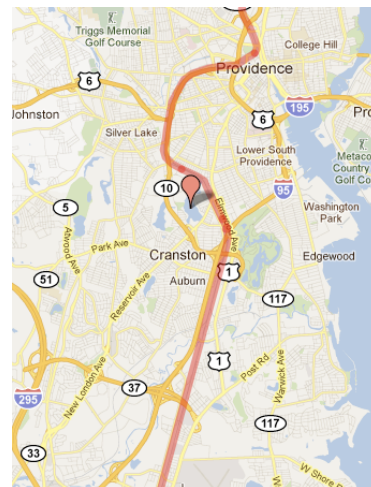
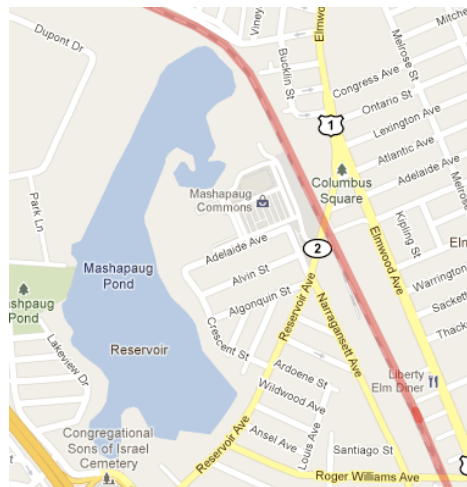


**Research Question: What is the history of the railroad line that winds along the north and east side of the pond?**



*The tracks in question, both close up and as part of today's Northeast Regional Amtrak Service, with Mashapaug Pond "pushpinned"*

These railroad tracks skirting Mashapaug Pond were built in 1848 and, unlike many tracks in the region, continue to be heavily used today as part of Amtrak's Northeast Regional line. Prior to the construction of these tracks, rail service in Providence was limited to the Boston and Providence Railroad. That line began (and ended) at a terminal in Fox Point and then ran east to East Providence and Seekonk before heading north to Boston.<sup>1</sup> Transportation to New York was only available by taking a steam ferry around Port Judith, RI up the Providence River to the Fox Point/India Point terminal. In 1837, the Stonington Line opened on the Providence River's opposite bank, connecting New York and Boston by rail with only one short break: the ferry crossing of the Providence River from a pier near Roger Williams Park to India Point.

In 1844, the Providence and Worcester Railroad Company was incorporated with the goal of bringing railroad tracks and a station to downtown Providence. Union Station was completed in 1847 (although it burned down in 1896, replaced by a new Union Station

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<sup>1</sup> RIDOT, p. 16

which still stands next to Kennedy Plaza), and new lines were needed to service the new station. The tracks near Mashapaug Pond were part of this effort to complete a continuous line of rail service from New York to Boston. Construction completed in 1848, building off a fork from the existing Stonington Line and heading north around the pond to Providence's city center.<sup>2</sup> In 1893, the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad, or NYNH&H, incorporated the tracks.<sup>3</sup> Freight and passenger service continued regularly as the line provided a convenient bridge between existing track networks in the Northeast.

Meanwhile, the Gorham Silver Company was outgrowing its facility in downtown Providence. On May 18, 1888, the board decided to build a new plant, at the time the world's largest fine silver factory.<sup>4</sup> Known as the Elmwood Plant, the Gorham Manufacturing Company constructed their factory on Mashapaug Pond in 1889, complete with one rail line running between buildings. This connected the plant to the main NYNH&H line, and an 1895 atlas seems to show Gorham as the only factory connected to the railroad. Perhaps the location between Mashapaug Pond and the busy railroad line was especially desirable. By the 1937 atlas's printing, Goff Building Material and F.D. McKendall Lumber Company both show similar rail connections further south.

The NYNH&H was absorbed by Penn Central in 1969, and in 1976 these tracks connecting major Northeast cities were bought by Amtrak and the State of Rhode Island for passenger use.<sup>5</sup> Freight use is managed by the Providence and Worcester Railroad. A 1994 RIDOT study reports the track in excellent condition, weighing in at 140 lbs./yd. with a crushed stone bed and concrete ties.

### **Opportunities for Further Research**

Although the history of the physical railroad tracks is fairly complete, I was unable to find information about the actual freight carried on the line, both in general and more interestingly the specifics of Gorham's rail shipping. I couldn't find any receipts or records of day-to-day activity, only larger-scale tax documents and planning notes. I visited the Hay

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<sup>2</sup> Cady, p. 115

<sup>3</sup> DOT report p. 53

<sup>4</sup> Carpenter, p. 138

<sup>5</sup> RIDOT, p. 15

and the City Archives, both of which were very helpful with the overall history but still lacking in Gorham shipping specifics. Potential leads to follow-up include:

*Items listed in the finding aid for the Hay's Gorham Collection:*

- i. Vol. 1, p. 19-20: appraisal from 1922 with map of plant
- ii. Vol. 1, p. 69: "Plant" subcategory – maintenance report (electric, water, steam), 1950 reorganization of space and space-cost analysis
- iii. Vol. 2, p. 85: "Photographs" – diagram of plant layout when new in 1892
- iv. other histories of Gorham Silver mentioned in the aid

a fun extra tidbit about the acquisition of the Hay's Gorham papers:

[http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/University\\_Library/publications/AF/AFSpring96/DrillWay.html](http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/University_Library/publications/AF/AFSpring96/DrillWay.html)

*From the Providence City Archives:*

- i. lots of Railroad Commission Reports from various years, mostly business dealings
- ii. Rhode Island Legislature minutes from big decisions, such as the establishment of new stations, lines, or factories?

## **Bibliography**

*Biographical history of the manufacturers and business men of Rhode Island, at the opening of the twentieth century.* Providence: J.D. Hall, 1901. Print.

Cady, John Hutchins. *The civic and architectural development of Providence, 1636-1950.* San Diego : Book Shop, 1957. Print.

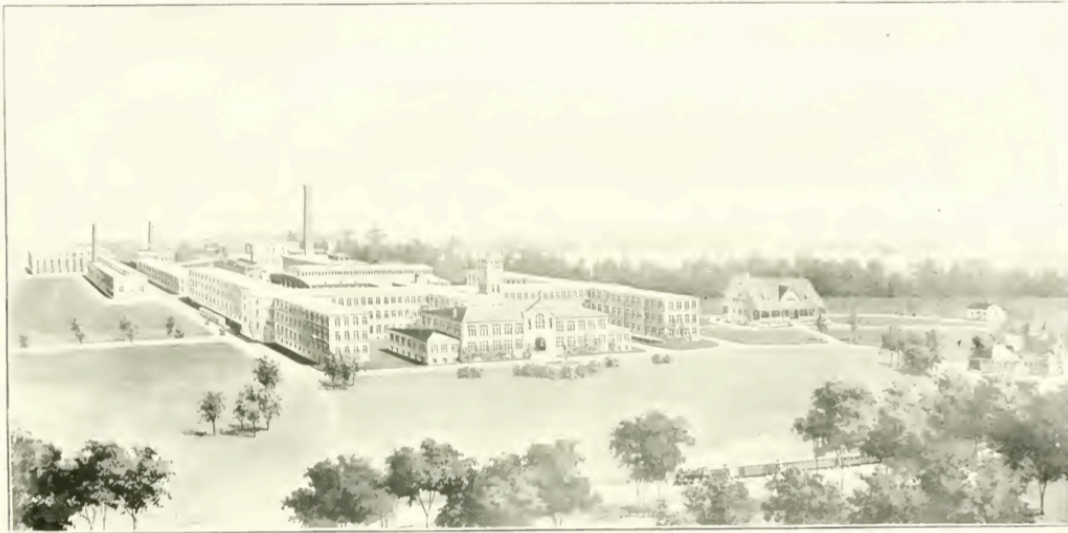
Carpenter, Charles Hope. *Gorham silver, 1831-1981.* New York: Dodd, Mead, 1982. Print.

Finding Aid to the Gorham Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University

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<http://www.dot.state.ri.us/engineering/intermod/index.asp>

## Images



Plant of the Gorham Manufacturing Company, Providence, January 1, 1901.

“Plant of the Gorham Manufacturing Company, Providence, January 1, 1901”  
from *Biographical history of the manufacturers and business men of Rhode Island, at the opening of the twentieth century*, p. 8

