

# Fanwood Railroad Station Marks 125th Year As Cherished and Enduring Symbol of a Bygone Era

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Specially Written for Our Towns

In its 104-year history, Fanwood's image has been represented by its venerable 300-year-old oak tree – now cherished in memory — and its vintage railroad station building.

The oak tree fell victim to its advanced age in 1996, but the railroad station continues on as it marks its 125th birthday this year.

In 1839, the Elizabeth and Somerville Railroad's course followed what today is Midway Avenue, and the local station stop was at the intersection of Martine, Midway and Woodland Avenues.

The private residence on the site today is the result of several renovations that were made to the original structure after the railroad changed to its present route in 1874 – 21 years before Fanwood Borough was officially incorporated.

At that time, there were only a handful of houses and fewer than 100 people who lived in the 1.3-square-mile area that would become the Borough of Fanwood.

A large guest house on Martine Avenue known as the Homestead, currently the site of Fanwood Borough Hall, had been attracting passengers to the area even before the railroad changed its course.

In 1874, widespread use of the automobile was still decades into the future. Without the railroad, land travel took the form of horse-drawn wagons and or stage coaches.

Kerosene fueled lamps were probably the source of light for the building because electricity would not come into being until almost the end of the century. Long-range communication was by telegraph because the telephone had not yet been invented.

It would be almost half a century before a sanitary sewer system serviced the building. Coal transported by the railroad from the mines of Pennsylvania provided the fuel to warm the building until as late as the 1940s.

In the 1870s, the railroad industry was undergoing great expansion to support the growth of industry and the ever-increasing passenger traffic. Research indicates that the railroad

used a modular concept to construct the many station houses along its routes, including the one in Fanwood.

Its 20-foot-by-41-foot dimensions conform to the basic module. Some stations did not have two stories as did the one in Fanwood, and some that did have a second floor had variations in the roof contours and in the placement of gables and dormers.

The Fanwood station was almost identical to ones that were

located in Perth Amboy, Dunellen, Glen Gardner, Bound Brook, Matawan, Elizabeth and Clinton Avenue in Plainfield.

Among these, the Fanwood station is now the only survivor, making it an attraction for the cameras of railroad buffs from all sections of the Eastern Seaboard.

The structure is representative of Victorian Gothic architecture. The exterior of the attic level is distinguished by a hipped roof, slate shingles, and Gothic arched windows.

The siding is clapboard, and the lower level has a bracket-supported canopy which extends 10 feet from the building, providing shade and cover from rain and snow. It owns the distinction of being on both the official state and federal registry of historic buildings.

Generally, the lower level of the building served the business of the station, including ticket selling, telegraph communi-

cations, record keeping and a passenger waiting room. The upper level sometimes provided a residence for the station agent and his family.

In 1964, the station was retired from railroad service when it was donated by the railroad to the Borough of Fanwood, which later spent \$275,000 in a major restoration effort.

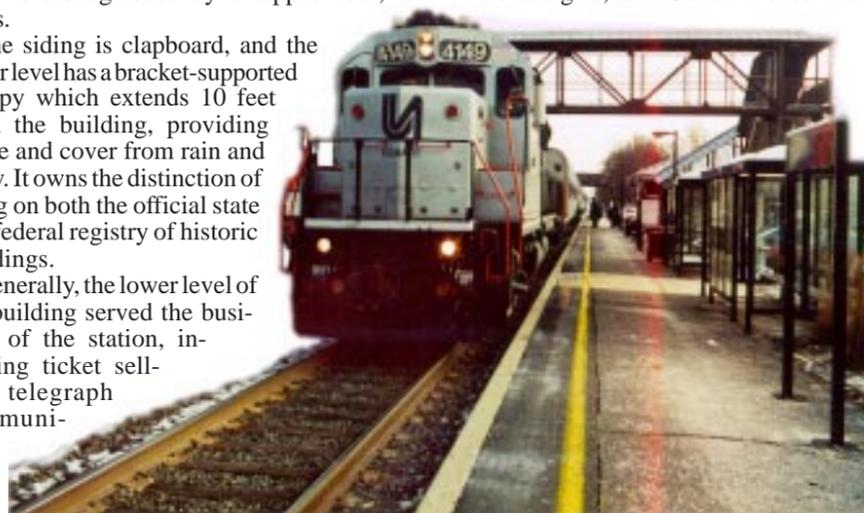
While the exterior retains its original features, the interior has been renovated to accommodate the modern facilities of a community meeting place. There are two spacious meeting rooms, rest rooms and a kitchen.

Each day, hundreds of commuters pass by, perhaps, to be reminded of past generations of Fanwoodians who were served by the landmark structure. Today, it has another role to play in the service of Fanwood – by retaining its same look from the 19th century, it stands as the proud symbol of a vanished era.

Happy Birthday, old friend!



The Fanwood Train Station as it appeared in the 19th Century



ALL ABOARD...A commuter train of today pulls into the Fanwood Train Station, which marks its 125th anniversary this year.

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